Ecologic

-the green hornet

Redemption & Salvation through Recycling

In many ways, we are a sad species. We have the distinct disadvantage of recognizing our own mortality but we manage this burden and try to figure things out the best that we can. Somewhere, someone said something to the effect of 'sure the cat seems content, what does a cat know of death'? Well maybe a cat knows everything about death and being waited on hand and foot by his human subjects is the best way to deal with it.

Beyond the cat, we humans cope differently; we are incessantly striving to attach meaning to our lives and mostly, the more noble the cause, the better. Some of us find a meaning to our lives on the heels of a significant life event, such as Al Gore. In Al Gore's books 'Earth in the Balance' and 'An Inconvenient Truth', Al recounts the horrible accident his son was in and how the incident took him on a journey of self-discovery ultimately leading him to his passion for the environment.

Although Al Gore didn't invent the environmental movement, he certainly gave some serious legs to it. Al's energy and zeal for his cause is certainly contagious and if nothing else, he has been consistent and relentless with his message regarding the perceived dangers of global warming/climate change. As mentioned in the past, the movement has taken on religious proportions. To some extent, environmental causes seem to have supplanted the role of traditional religions to the point where the movement can serve the purpose of personal salvation and redemption for being human.

Establishing defenses and providing explanations for the climate change cause, as with the actions of our deities, is not so hard; elaborate mechanisms can be construed that will validate most anything. Consequently, right, wrong or indifferent, global warming will be with us forever because it can't be disproven – we have no control planet in this experiment. If the theory is elaborate enough, you can explain nearly everything in terms of global warming.

There once was a guy named Ptolemy who had developed an extremely complicated system that explained how all of the heavenly bodies revolved around the earth through a device he made up called an epicycle. When Ptolemy encountered conflicts with his theory, he just applied more epicycles – and it worked - it was unduly complex and it was wrong, but the system did its job in explaining how the sun and all the planets orbited the earth. This geocentric view of the universe was conventional wisdom for nearly 1,500 years and since the dogma of the early church pushed this, it was taken on faith or you risked being burned at the stake.

Something that I suspect is not widely known is the fact that our current scientific method suffers from a simple logical fallacy known as 'affirming the consequent' or 'affirming the antecedent'. Basically, what this represents is the following:

Suppose that – if A is true, then B is true
But if B is true, it doesn't necessarily follow that A is true;
though this is how our current scientific method is set-up

To apply this reasoning to the scientific method, your hypothesis would be 'A' and the experiment(s) would be 'B' – the fallacy is, just because your experiment supports your hypothesis, it is not absolute that your hypothesis is true because your experiment actually just infers that your hypothesis is correct, which would set you up for a cause and effect error. A practical example would be;

Observation: a member of another tribe died a horrible death and we had a good harvest that year.

Hypothesis: if I were to remove the heart from a member of this neighboring tribe, thereby initiating the horrible death, we will have a good harvest this year.

Experiment: I remove the heart from the poor soul and we have a good harvest

Conclusion: I remove the heart, we have a good harvest and so my hypothesis is supported

Thus was born the modern scientific method and the Aztec form of human sacrifice. Apparently, the subject masses bought off on this because human sacrifices abounded; never mind that the good harvesting most likely had nothing to do with their horrifying little rituals – see 'B' didn't make 'A' true; it probably had more to do with typical weather patterns and the abundance of CO_2 in the atmosphere spewing from vacationing Incas and their RVs.

This certainly doesn't invalidate the modern scientific method and it is assumed that scientists are aware of this quandary and work really hard to overcome it through the rigors of repeated experiments approached from different angles. But it does throw up a cautionary flag when it comes to taking everything 'scientific' on faith.

An acquaintance of mine is in medical school and he had mentioned to me once that one of his instructors admitted at the beginning of course that 30% of what he would be teaching the class would be wrong, not that the class had to figure out which 70% to believe – but the point was that he would be teaching the class things that seem true today but that would be contradicted tomorrow and actually he didn't know which 30% it was – so it's important to be open to new information because new inroads are constantly being made – it's actually kind of exciting.

There was a recent incident at the University of East Anglia, which is a repository for climate data and home to an international Climate Research Unit (CRU). The organizations' email server was hacked and some seemingly unsettling emails were publicized. Most of the emails could be dismissed as benign but others did suggest that

there is an oppressive tone amongst persons in this group regarding openness to new or alternate viewpoints that stray from the conventional ‘climate change’ wisdom. This is not a good thing and could undermine the honest straightforward efforts of this scientific community at large.

So in conclusion, it’s important to be receptive to new discoveries even if the meaning conflicts with notions that you hold sacrosanct. It becomes increasingly difficult to be objective if you are blinded by faith alone and you are in constant defense of your world view. It is tempting to invoke our own epicycles in order to hold conflicting information at bay and to salvage our own personal version of world order. So let’s not do that and instead we’d better do the right thing and keep recycling, you know, if you want to hold onto your heart.