

Against information. The cult of data and the myth of science

Contra la información. El culto al dato y el mito de la ciencia

Contra a informação. O culto dos dados e o mito da ciência

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Abstract

We are living in the age of scientific credulity, of devotion to science. Science with a capital “S” —as if it were One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. No one really knows what the “scientific view of reality” is, yet everyone takes it for granted and accepts it without question. Theoretical frameworks -whose hypotheses are rarely challenged- gradually construct their own empirical base. We are living in the century of laboratories. The laboratory as an agent of mental confusion and a source of psychic epidemics. The laboratory as industry, as business, as a transnational corporation of turbo-capitalism. It does not matter if natural forces are unleashed without ownership or responsibility. The damage is irrelevant. The machinery must keep running.

Keywords: Ethics, philosophy, philosophy of science, political philosophy, information theory.

Resumen

Vivimos la era de la credulidad científica, de la devoción a la ciencia. La Ciencia con mayúscula. Como si fuera Una, Santa, Católica y Apostólica. Nadie sabe qué es la visión científica de la realidad, pero todos la dan por hecha, la aceptan tácitamente. Los marcos teóricos, cuyas hipótesis no se cuestionan, van creando su propia base empírica. Vivimos el siglo de los laboratorios. El laboratorio como agente de confusión mental y como fuente de epidemias psíquicas. El laboratorio como industria, negocio o multinacional del turbocapitalismo. No importa liberar fuerzas naturales de las que no se es dueño. No importan los daños, la maquinaria debe continuar.

Palabras clave: Ética, filosofía, filosofía de la ciencia, filosofía política, teoría de la información.

Resumo

Vivemos numa era de credulidade científica, de devoção à ciência. Ciência com C grande. Ninguém sabe qual é a visão científica da realidade, mas todos a tomam como garantida e aceitam-na

tacitamente. As estruturas teóricas, cujas hipóteses não são questionadas, estão a criar a sua própria base empírica. Vivemos no século dos laboratórios. O laboratório como agente de confusão mental e como fonte de epidemias psíquicas. O laboratório como indústria, negócio ou multinacional do turbocapitalismo. Não importa se são libertadas forças naturais que não são as nossas. O dano não importa, a máquina tem de continuar.

Palavras-chave: Ética, filosofia, filosofia da ciência, filosofia política, teoria da informação.

Introduction

The 19th century elevated the figure of the secular saint —isolated in their laboratory, exalting science while simultaneously displaying a cold indifference towards others. I have encountered some of them recently, both in books and at conferences. The laboratory, far from improving human beings, isolates them socially and dehumanises them.

Latour described life in the laboratory several decades ago (Latour & Woolgar, 2022). The laboratory fosters complete moral anaesthesia —or, when it does not, a kind of naive irresponsibility. The Enlightenment taught us that truth was no longer to be found in monasteries; today, we know it is not located in laboratories either. These spaces are often ignorant of the natural spontaneity of life and excessively obsessed with control. The laboratory is indifferent to good and evil.

Science operates within the domain of the relative —more fleeting, in fact, than literature or art, and even than philosophy; nevertheless, science erects the new temples. Crude hypotheses and pretentious trivialities are no obstacle; all that matters are persuasion —that linguistic skill that opens the doors to funding. The Greek sophists placed great value on persuasion (Sánchez, 2022); it was, in fact, considered a goddess. In their efforts to convince others, the sophists developed the art of rhetoric. So too did thinkers from the Hindu tradition. Plato sought to distance himself from those who prioritised persuasion over genuine demonstration (Redmond & Lopez-Orellana, 2024). Plato eventually came to the conclusion that the art of persuasion could not be discarded altogether. Instead, one had to distinguish between false persuasion and true persuasion (Boeri, 2024).

Vikalpa is a fundamental term in Sanskrit philosophy. It can mean: (1) option or alternative; (2) variety or multiplicity; (3) doubt or indecision; (4) conceptualisation, thought, speculation, or mental construction; (5) imagination. In Vedanta (Deshmukh, 2022), vikalpa is a mental process that has no real correlate and depends on the language we use. It refers to something that does not exist, yet is foundational to all forms of knowledge and every scientific discipline we may enter. It gives rise, in time, to the nature-culture hybrids: the electron, the molecule, the cell. According to Vedanta, time itself is vikalpa, as are space and causality. So too are mathematics and philosophy —two major

sciences devoted to the creation of concepts. Vikalpa generates distinctions where, fundamentally, none exist. It is the magic of language. Every scientific discipline lives off this magic.

I hear in a science outreach video that a quark (Freire, 2023) cannot exist in isolation. Then... what could? Some believe blindly in the literal truth of science. They assume that its products are not nature-culture hybrids —that there is a purely natural correlate to its statements (which are, ultimately, cultural). They find it outrageous to suggest these are “imagination” (vikalpa). Yet that is the myth we live by. Each theory creates its own empirical basis, and this basis, in turn, sustains it. That is the circular magic of science: from imagination to theory, from theory to empirical data (descending), and from empirical data back to theory (ascending). The perfect circle. The hermeneutic circle (Andersen & Bergallo, 2022).

Truth?

There may or may not be a God in the world. There may or may not be quarks, electrons, or freedom. It all depends on the attitude one adopts. Is this scepticism or nihilism? Not at all. The mental stance one takes are everything —both for one’s personal life and for the life of the universe. One can journey from one “truth” to another, experimenting -as a Bengali saint once did- with various practices and states of mind. Materialism and atheism included. All religions are true. The religion of science is, too.

The general idea behind this text, rooted in humanism, is simple. It follows the Platonic example: it seeks a “true persuasion.” Above all, it seeks a human persuasion. The point is not that mind emerges from matter. Our paradigm is different —older, phenomenological. Matter is a mental experience. It is not that the organism possesses a spirit or a mind; rather, it is spirit that possesses the organism, governs it, and, when necessary, can transform it. It makes little sense to claim that thought is located solely in the brain. Thought courses through the entire organism; mind permeates every corner of the universe. The brain is merely a major communications hub.

The issue is not simply that the laboratory amplifies the obsessions and blind spots of the human researcher, developing pride more than discernment. What is decisive in this view is not the battle against brain-centrism. What matters is the place of the human. It is even more misguided to believe that science and the human being are two separate things —that science is a mine from which humanity extracts fragments of wisdom. Much of science originates in the human being and shares in human brevity and fallibility. Humans influence far more than they realise those children of spirit we call the laws of nature.

We still do not fully understand how our organism reacts to a fixed idea prolonged across both waking and sleeping states. It is not reckless to suppose that an idea can leave an imprint on bodily tissues.

Imaginative power has been crucial in the great romance of science. Pasteur's imagination was formidable (Martínez, 2023), as was Einstein's (Rincón, 2021). Both were capable of falling, like sleepwalkers, into imaginative trances. The faculty of imagery -as a development of the phenomenon of moral and physical personality, as a continuum of ancestral and inherited forms, as the gravitational pull of our forebears- remains mysterious. We still do not know whether imagination can cause or cure illness, in oneself or in others. The domain of imagination remains off-limits to dominant science.

Other great scientists were able to exert a persuasive, even mesmerising, force over their students and even over the sick. Charcot is a notable example of those who could shape the will of others: he forged fragile symptoms and syndromes upon which entire psychological systems were later built (Gómez, 2022). In others, such as Goethe, artistic and scientific tendencies converged (Villanueva, 2023).

The tendency -which plays an important role in academic and scientific conceptions- guides minds in the same direction, toward the same hypotheses. They resemble herds of rams changing pastures with astonishing docility. In the past, there were parrots in bonnets and robes, repeating what they had been taught, abandoning personal reflection, and marching -enthusiastically and handsomely paid- towards intellectual slavery. Today's parrots are metallic and consume vast amounts of energy... that is another matter, one that lies beyond the scope of this text. I call error that which kills, and truth that which gives life.

The Cult of Data

A charlatan is someone who is content with words, and by words, we mean signs. The charlatan believes that there is nothing outside the text —that everything is information. We live in charlatan times, and all of us who write are, in a certain sense, charlatans. The dominant text today is no longer ideological, but techno-liberal: profitable, but shallow and somewhat naive. Infantilism has overtaken intelligence. Meanwhile, engineers are constructing a new Babel. Our era presents an inverted image of the myth: we are heading toward a single language —the language of the algorithm (Mir, 2023).

There are those who are ignorant due to a lack of education, and those who are ignorant because of an excess of it. The latter are more dangerous than the former. Nietzsche called them “read to the point of ruin.” The weight of their instruction prevents them from thinking. The expert has dug a hole so deep he has lost sight of the horizon. Against the poison of the specialist, there is an antidote: scepticism, the origin and foundation of philosophy (Arnau, 2023).

Pythagoras was the first to call himself a philosopher (Barrera, 2021). He defined himself in contrast to both the wise man and the sophist. The philosopher is not the *sophos* -the one who possesses wisdom- but the one who aspires to it. The philosopher is the one who knows that he does not know,

who prefers to be a lover of an unattainable truth —hence his condition as a wanderer. Nor is the philosopher like the sophist, who believes that everything can be only signs and symbols. That is precisely what today's digital administrators of the world want us to believe. The technocrats, the owners of algorithms, are the modern-day version of the ancient sophists. Like them, they share a thirst for profit (Arnau, 2023).

Narrative and information are opposing forces. The spirit of storytelling is being drowned by the tide of data. Byung-Chul Han denounces the meaninglessness that reigns in so-called information societies (Rodríguez, 2021). We are in need of a new narrative —one capable of gathering us once again around the fire. Philippe Squarzoni (2023) offers a graphic essay on tech giants and their impact on the climate and on our lives. In *Techgnosis*, a classic of cyber-culture, Erik Davis (2023) sketches the landscape of techno-mysticism, where Kabbalah, alchemy, and LSD alternate with cyberpunk (Maíllo, 2023), post-humanism, and the cybernetic race, unveiling some of the hidden impulses that fuel the dreams (and nightmares) of our age.

It is becoming increasingly clear that humanity is capable of doing without itself. That is both our greatness and our misery. The question is whether such a renunciation leads to greater freedom or to deeper servitude. To this dilemma we must add another: the status of truth. For years, Éric Sadin has argued that *aletheia* in the algorithmic age implies a form of radical anti-humanism (Ramírez, 2021). The issue is not simply that the free exercise of judgment is being replaced by automated protocols that will make decisions on our behalf at life's crossroads, but that "truth" —once the ever-deferred pursuit of the living organism— is now dictated by an automated system. This has been made possible by the great fetish of our time: the belief that information is knowledge. The ancient worship of gods now is the worship of data. Data —something we have created— takes on the status of an external, transcendent god. A god whose commanding power surpasses even the wrath of the most vengeful deities (Arnau, 2023).

What does it mean to say that data is something manufactured? A datum presupposes a measuring instrument. The instrument, a scientific theory. The theory, the exercise of human imagination. If it is truly innovative, then it is an imagination capable of suspending the inherited languages of the scientific discipline, in which it operates. Data is something we have made, something we have cooked —and yet we treat it as if it existed "out there," beyond dispute, as pure objective reality. "I don't speculate, I bring data," says the politician, proudly (Arnau, 2023). Data is a nature-culture hybrid, yet we treat it as though it were purely natural. That is how the digital emerges as the authorised organ for pronouncing truth and accounting for reality.

Freedom has become a nuisance. The techno-scientific delirium aspires to the robotised interpretation of experience. Humans can hold their breath, sigh, feel the throb of longing —yet now all this will be

interpreted through reductive data and axioms. It is curious that the term “artificial intelligence” was coined around the same time (circa 1955; Mendoza, 2021; Nass, 2024) that Huxley, Michaux, and Gordon Wasson began their psychedelic experiments, seeking, in contrast to artificial intelligence, a vegetal intelligence—one that might help us understand who we are (Arnau, 2023).

Techno-liberal utopianism has won the battle of ideas. It follows a certain logic: whoever works with equations sees equations everywhere, and invents devices to isolate the unknown variable. However, there will always be those who refuse to give up doubt or mystery—who do not believe that experience is a sudoku, a crossword puzzle, or something to be solved. Those who refuse to give up using their energy (and their doubts) in creative ways (Weil: Basili, 2023). Meanwhile, those who decline to regulate their lives according to automated protocols will have confinement into the exclusion zone. “AI will eradicate the human race,” said Hawking nearly a decade ago (López-García, 2025). The programmer works tirelessly to impoverish language, aligning sequences of code to execute, automatically, the final solution. A wretched and dangerous form of reductionism (Orwell: Arnau, 2023).

There remains, however, the question of eros. Can intelligence be intelligence without love? Does intelligence make sense, for life, if it has lost the erotic charge that binds all things together? Silicon lacks that magnetism—or possesses it in a dull, slowed-down form, if we are to believe the alchemists. It is a monotonic intelligence, useful for a single end: the will to power. Technology is not neutral. Its aim is to eliminate competition and maximise productivity, without separation from the drive for profit. Behind the cold machine, human passions burn—passions all too human. Its high cost serves to reinforce asymmetric structures of power (Arnau, 2023).

Conclusions and Discussion

When the sceptic is reproached for taking shelter in paradox (“All I know is that I know nothing”; Rodríguez, 2022), they respond that this is the essential condition of the living, desiring body. Total scepticism is as impossible as complete dogmatism. What remains is relationalism (Becerra, 2024). Santayana made it clear: it is not possible to escape animal faith (Arnau, 2023). We are living bodies. Desire and survival impose themselves upon us. All knowledge is “a form of faith mediated by symbols”—all of them false, all of them provisional. In fact, strictly speaking, scepticism and dogmatism cannot be opposed to each other: both move within the same domain, that of life. Dogmatism allows science to advance. Scepticism, if it serves any purpose, does so as the custodian and promoter of human freedom. Then, let us not be mistaken: scepticism is not a doctrine, nor a theory of the world. It is an attitude, a mental culture that resists being bound by the net of words—insubordinate to the imposition of signs. One might say it is less a worldview than an instinct. The suspicion that, in the end, the sceptical attitude lies closer to the heart of what is real than any

symbolic system (Arnau, 2023).

Ancient sceptics amassed arguments to show that the most prudent and reasonable path was the suspension of judgment (Arnau, 2023). Agrippa's trilemma (Vilaró, 2023), or Gödel's incompleteness principle (Fatima, 2022), cast doubt on the possibility of justifying any proposition—even within formal sciences such as mathematics or logic. Yet while ancient scepticism was a posture, modern scepticism demands a position. An excellent and not-so-recent example is Montaigne (Raga, 2023), and in philosophy of science, Popper's rebellious disciples, such as Feyerabend (Villamor, 2024) or Skolimowski (Alcalá, 2024). Niels Bohr (Diéguez, 2022) and Bruno Latour (Antolínez, 2023) could also be added to the list. Scientific knowledge must not only be replicable—it must be falsifiable. We can only know what is false. That is what defines science (not method, since there are as many methods as there are sciences and minds). All knowledge is provisional, always awaiting displacement by something new. We can see that it sometimes moves in sinister directions (Arnau, 2023).

Science must be provisionally dogmatic; there is no other way to proceed. Some foundations cannot be re-examined without triggering a scientific revolution, as Thomas Kuhn explained (Marcum, 2020), and science cannot live in a permanent state of revolution. Some dogmas may last three hundred years, as was the case with Newtonian space-time. After all, how could we measure, if space and time are not still? Against that dogmatism, which demands postulates, axioms, and foundations, the sceptic offers the magic of relationalism: this is like that—a deeply Buddhist principle (Arnau, 2023).

Scepticism does not require one to abandon philosophy or refrain from enjoying it. In fact, one must engage in it—always with the ironic distance taught by Socrates (Souberville, 2021), that readiness to question one's own opinions or laugh at them. We must abandon the excessive seriousness with which we treat answers from ChatGPT or any other chatbot, whose automatisms (based on deep learning) are ultimately just programmed software. This does not imply any kind of irrational stance; in fact, ironic philosophers tend to be the most reasonable. They doubt that it is possible to discover the necessary and sufficient reason for things, or the literal meaning of the world (as opposed to its metaphoric drift), but that doubt does not stop them from believing what they find necessary. What the sceptic does is set limits to logic—sometimes by suggesting another kind of, non-syllogistic, narrative; sometimes by discarding all narratives, even their own (Arnau, 2023).

What does the sceptic aim to do? Either to show that certain knowledge is impossible -that we can only know what is false, as claimed by both Popper and Nisargadatta (Arnau, 2023)- or to show that the available proofs are always insufficient. Then, there is a third possibility, and that is the one that most concerns us today, in this era where thought and storytelling are being crushed by information: an awareness of the limits of the whims of language, and indeed of all symbolic logic. This is the *docta ignorantia*, of which Nicholas of Cusa spoke (González & Pizzi, 2022): a posture that distances itself

from trust in rational-discursive thought. Francisco Sánchez (2021), a Galician of Jewish heritage, wrote a treatise titled *Nothing Can Be Known* (1576). In the first syllogism, the premises are drawn from the conclusion. The particular -Socrates- is needed in order to form the general concepts of man and mortality. The syllogism cannot serve as a foundation for any science; it only serves to derail them. Sciences define the obscure with what is even more obscure, and they only distract us from contemplation of the real. Sánchez -like Nāgārjuna or the Pyrrhonists (Medrano & Rico, 2024)- begins his work by claiming that he does not even know if he knows anything. He distrusts abstractions and generalisations, accusing them of being insufficiently empirical, anticipating the radical empiricism of William James (Villalobos, 2018). Logical demonstration is a dream of Aristotle (Llovet, 2021), no less dreamlike than the utopias of More or Campanella (Nadal, 2024).

In any case, the sceptic's doubts will remain of great value to the sciences. Certainty is either conventional and collective (a common agreement), or personal. In the first case, it is absorbed by gregarious souls shaped by the institutions that feed them. In the second, when internal, it helps us navigate life, resolve difficulties, and make decisions. There is no sense in turning such personal certainty into something external. As Emerson put it (Ferrada, 2021), no one convinces anyone of anything —least of all, a chatbot (Arnau, 2023).

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