

FEATURE: "Science and Only" – Richard H. Bube

PROF.: "How *simple* things would be, if only they weren't so *complicated!*"

VOICE: What do you mean by that remark?

PROF.: It's Dr. Richard Bube's way of warning us not to believe over-simplified ideas. Those statements are usually only **half**-truths or less.

Let's hear how he elaborates his point – in a paper called "Science and Only."

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

PROF.: Dr. Richard H. Bube researched and taught at one of America's best-known universities. He was Professor of Materials Science and Electrical Engineering at Stanford University in California.

For 14 years he edited the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*.

VOICE: Dr. Bube has the ability to state his points in striking phrases. For example, he entitled one of his lectures, "How Simple Things Would Be, If Only They Weren't So Complicated." Dr. Bube began by saying...

PROF.: Often we hear the expression that our increase in scientific understanding has shown us that some aspect of our experience is "only this" or "only that."

VOICE: In other words, it is one thing – and *nothing more?*

PROF.: Yes. Some people claim that science has shown that **man is only a complex machine**.

Dr. Bube continues, "We hear that science has shown that life is only a biochemical reaction, that personal choice and responsibility are only illusions. Another person claims that Christian conversion is only a psychological experience."

He evaluates, "All of these 'only' statements are false!"

VOICE: Why does he say these ideas are false?

PROF.: Simply because it is not possible for science to know that anything is "only." To claim to show *what is*, is the business of science. But how is it possible to claim that *this is the only reality*, the only description worth having, or the only possible interpretation of an event?

It's not possible to make this sort of claim, on any kind of scientific basis. If this claim is made, it must be on the basis of some kind of subjective, philosophical, political or religious basis – which enables one to make an interpretation of scientific results over and beyond any information derived from science itself.

VOICE: For example?

PROF.: “Man is a complex machine.” That’s a scientific statement. “Man is *only* a complex machine.” That’s a subjective philosophical speculation – an opinion not derived from science. It is simply another repetition of the old fallacy: If science shows us that man is a complex machine, and if we can know nothing except what science tells us, then man is only a complex machine.

VOICE: So he's implying that we can know things beyond what science tells us. In other words, scientific facts are not the only facts.

PROF.: No. The facts that science can verify, are not the only truths. Medical science may observe that my heartbeat increases when I kiss my wife hello, but it can't verify that I love her.

VOICE: Some facts are beyond the ability of natural science to prove or disprove.

PROF.: Dr. Bube continues by talking about another “only” claim that some people make. Is a decision to follow Jesus Christ “only a psychological experience”?
Christian conversion is a psychological experience. But it is also an action that God performs. God remakes our lives so completely that our minds, souls and wills experience a deep change.

VOICE: Do you mean our entire mental and psychological natures are transformed?

PROF.: Yes. Every “only” is a subjective judgment by men. Dr. Bube explores the idea of *levels of understanding*. He says every event in which a human being participates, can be described on many different kinds of levels.

It can be analyzed on levels of **physical** mechanisms, suitable for description by chemistry and physics. That same event can be described on levels of **biological** mechanisms, suitable for description by the life sciences. Often that same event can be described on levels of **psychology** and **sociology**, suitable for description by the social sciences.

But we would be quite mistaken to suppose that a human experience could be described *only in terms of the motions or interactions of atoms and molecules*.

VOICE: So “Science knows no ‘onlys’.”

PROF.: Dr. Bube says the real world includes human qualities such as insight, rational thought, courage, duty, faith, love, conscience, appreciation for beauty, and desire for understanding.

He adds that we would also be mistaken if we thought the totality of a human event could be described only in terms of some kind of scientific description, without an appreciation of *the relation of man to God*.

VOICE: What does he say about man's relation to God?

PROF.: In his words, “When we neglect the level that relates man to God, we neglect what makes man and his experience *truly human*. When we neglect the level which sees the event in its total context of personal interaction with God, we reduce man to an animal or a machine. When we do this, we miss part of the total picture, part of the total description of all that man is.”

VOICE: For example?

PROF.: Would you describe a beautiful painting as **only a series of brushstrokes**? You would miss the beauty and meaning of the whole painting.”

VOICE: But a painting really is a series of brushstrokes. But it’s not **only** a series of brushstrokes. An artist uses it to convey information and emotion to other human beings who can see beauty in the total composition.

PROF.: We don’t describe a musical composition as only a series of notes. Music is a series of notes. But once again human beings present are able to hear beauty in the total composition.

Shall we then make the same mistake and describe man as only a series of scientifically describable reactions? If we do, we miss all the ingredients that make man truly human.

VOICE: Are humans like a musical composition?

PROF.: In a sense, yes. Dr. Bube answers, “Man is a series of scientifically-describable reactions. But he is *not only* that – not only an animal or a machine. Man is more than an animal because he and God can have a personal relationship, in which God gives man the dignity and value which he has no right to claim on any other basis.”

He concludes, “Science knows no only’s. To adopt such a restricted view of life is to miss the meaning and purpose of human life.”

VOICE: This week I was reading opposing opinions from two different astronomers. Dr. Steven Weinberg concludes one of his books with the comment, “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless. But...there is at least some consolation in the research itself. ...The effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it the grace of tragedy.”

That contrasted with a comment by astronomer Dr. Charles Misner. He said, “I don’t see the universe as pointless. ...I’m impressed with the beauty and intelligibility of the universe. ...I think...the majesty of the universe is meaningful, and we do owe honor and awe to its Creator.”

PROF.: Yes, Harvard [HAR-vurd] University Press has published a whole book of interviews with astronomers. Most of the interviewees include some statement about whether they think the universe has a purpose, or whether it “just is.”

Interestingly, those who think the universe has a purpose are the ones who think God made it. If we believe a wise God created the universe, we’re more likely to see its purpose.

VOICE: What can I tell a friend who says life seems to be out of control? He says life is spinning in circles to nowhere.

PROF.: Prof. Frank Glenn Lankard [LAN-kard] has an interesting statement. He has never met a person who at some time has not asked, “Does the universe care whether or not I succeed in life. The Bible declares with certainty that the universe is not a runaway train with the engineer dead at the throttle.”

VOICE: That's an interesting figure of speech: The universe is not a runaway train with an engineer dead at the throttle. He seems to imply that the creator-God is alive.

PROF.: Yes. He's alive and involved in our lives. Dr. Lankard continues, “...The universe is guided by a Great Intelligence interested in the men and women whom He has created. ...The Bible is the most vital book...in meeting the needs of bewildered men and women today. ...The Bible says...that men and women can master life and overcome their difficulties through the help of God.”

He closes with another analogy: “Human history is not a blind alley, but a march – with God leading the column of progress.”

FORMAT: THEME AND CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT

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