

letters

Natural laws for humans

I was intrigued by the letter dealing with analogies between the physical and social sciences by Dan McLachlan (January, page 13)—both for what it affirmed, and for what it implicitly denied.

McLachlan makes the positive suggestion that perhaps there are *natural* laws that govern human relations, that is, perhaps there is an area of objective reality in interpersonal relationships, and all is not subjective and relative after all. He suggests that we search for these laws using the same kind of scientific methodology that has proved so successful in dealing with the physical universe. I heartily second this whole approach, and would simply like to add that perhaps we already know more than we sometimes think we do that our problem is not lack of knowledge, but wrong choices concerning the knowledge we already have.

When McLachlan states, "We haven't broken a law of nature yet," the statement is somewhat misleading. Actually, if we attempt to break a law of nature, we suffer the consequences of its inflexible reality. We cannot break the law of gravity by jumping off a tall building, but we can certainly injure ourselves by trying to. Jumping off a tall building is the equivalent of "sin" in the purely physical context; the consequent injury is the equivalent of "judgment."

Given this perspective, McLachlan may be a bit too hasty in dismissing laws "passed down by our religious leaders" as *another kind of law*. Religious leaders, being human beings, are certainly capable of handing down all kinds of incorrect information about natural laws that govern human relationships; they do this when they pass off human opinion for objective reality. If, on the other hand, the Creator of the universe were pleased to inform us of the essentials of those natural laws governing human relations, we would know a good deal of supreme importance before we could get around to establishing (if ever we could) these kinds of laws scientifically.

The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are examples of such codifications of natural laws governing human beings, which are in agreement, so far as I am aware, with anything that has been established by authentic scientific investigation. Be-

cause these laws deal with human choice and relationships, their outworking is more complex than those laws that deal only with the physical universe. Does anyone debate that we ought to love our neighbor as ourselves? Why do we so often fail to do so?

A person restrains himself from jumping off a tall building because he wants to survive. Why do people not restrain themselves from oppressing other human beings, treating another person as an object, turning their backs on those in suffering to maintain their own self-centered satisfactions and thus survive as whole human beings? The answers to those questions take you right back to religion.

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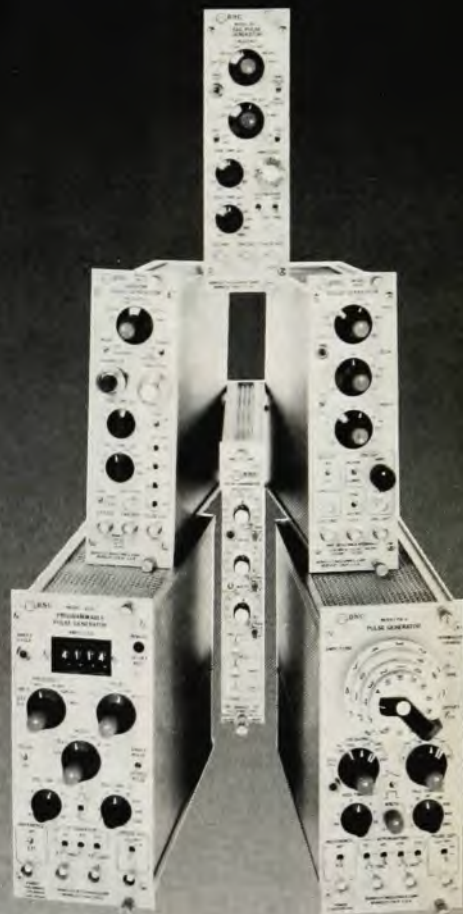
Optional published refereeing

R. A. Gordon's letter on optional published refereeing was quite interesting (October, page 81). While I agree with most of his recommendations, it seems some changes are needed to make his approach more "just."

Entrusting authors with responsibility for publication of a controversial manuscript (with the reviewer's comments printed alongside) is a good idea. As Gordon has stated, authors would truly be "... running a considerable risk to their professional reputations. . ." by publishing low-grade material, especially so when it is accompanied by the reviewer's "thorough, objective. . . criticism." But, what if the review reports are not thorough and objective? (This, too, is not uncommon in the world of science.) In such a case, it serves no purpose to retain the anonymity of the reviewer. If anything, the reviewers should clearly be prepared to put their professional standing on the line if that is to be expected from the authors. As a fallout of such a system, both the quality of publications that are submitted and the quality of refereeing that is done will most likely improve substantially.

It is also not clear why Gordon does not want to give the authors a chance for rebuttal. A meaningful rebuttal not only

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