"Plant X"
by

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Plant X is a rare and unique species, of exceptional scientific wonder, and, due to its unusual proclivities, provides crucial information for understanding all living organisms. Based on extensive field and laboratory research, Plant X only grows in serpentine seeps in poorly-drained clay soils under deep shade on north slopes of one mountain range, called Habitat A. Plant X has distinct morphological and physiological characteristics that explain its complete endemism to Habitat A. According to Theory 1, it would be impossible for Plant X to survive anywhere else.

Adjacent to the known distribution of Plant X is a rugged, isolated mountain range that has never been surveyed because it's located on inaccessible private land. One day, in a surprise move after a few beers, the landowner grants access to the scientific community. Biological studies are conducted, and more populations of Plant X are discovered in Habitat A, as expected, but populations are also observed on well-drained, xeric sandstone and granitic outcrops in full sunlight on south aspects, Habitat B. Weird. Researchers are completely baffled. No known biological mechanism exists that would allow Plant X to grow and thrive in Habitat B.

The entire mountain range is surveyed, and 98 percent of all populations occur in Habitat A, with the remaining populations in Habitat B. Theory 1 appears to be incorrect, or at least incomplete. But prominent experts stick to the theory. They are ubiquitous on television, the toast of cerebral cocktail parties, and light up for the cameras, reassuring everyone with their genteel sanctimony. Nothing to see here, they claim, populations in Habitat B are another species, Plant Z. Theory 1 is doing just fine. All riddles have been solved. Move along.

But new genetic and laboratory research confirms that Habitat B populations are indeed Plant X. A small group of renegade scientists propose Theory 2, incorporating *all* available data to explain the distribution and propensities of Plant X. The theory is groundbreaking and somewhat counterintuitive, with implications for all of biology. Theory 2 proponents insist that Theory 1 needn't be scrapped because it works 98 percent of the time, but it needs serious, fundamental revision to account for all the evidence. Lattes are spilled in academia, which is not a very open-minded place.

Threatened, the intelligentsia digs in, snickering at Theory 2. It's inconceivable, they say, and would destroy everything known about biology, though much of what is "known" is not really known at all. It's just assumed. Papers are published in prestigious journals supporting Theory 1, though the editors and reviewers are all Theory 1

proponents. Curiously, these papers cite only evidence in support of Theory 1, while dismissing or ignoring evidence to the contrary. Papers in support of Theory 2 are relegated to fringe journals and obscure conferences in uncouth locales.

New studies on Plant X are conducted. The results overwhelmingly support Theory 2. Theory 1 proponents explain away the data via obscure methodological critiques, or more frequently, simply ignore the unsavory data. Ridicule and ad hominem attacks are employed to silence dissidents. When pressed, Theory 1 proponents get downright conspiratorial, even hinting the data is fabricated, the specter of fraud raised and whispered darkly in the halls of academia. Theory 2 supporters are ostracized and accused of engaging in "pseudoscience" for daring to question the prevailing paradigm. They are hounded out of polite society and relegated to scientific backwaters. Many talented and open-minded investigators interested in Plant X pick a different research focus, not wanting their reputations trashed and careers ruined. They have bills to pay.

Theory 1 proponents seemingly win the game. They control the funding, journals, hiring, and media narrative. They sneer and ridicule Theory 2 supporters, though the actual evidence is rarely examined. It *has* to be wrong, so there's no point giving it a serious look. They wouldn't believe it even if it were true. For years, the status quo dominates, and Theory 2 remains in disrepute with little funding or prominent adherents, yet the evidence in support of it quietly amasses.

Then, slowly, the staunch defenders of Theory 1 retire or die of old age. A critical mass is reached. Theory 2 is self-evident to the next generation, and is accepted as completely obvious.

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What's the point of the saga of mythical Plant X? It's representative of the current debate over consciousness. The prevailing paradigm in science is materialism. It forms the entire underpinning of western science and culture. The logical deduction from materialism is that the brain produces consciousness, with humans merely biological machines in a deterministic, meaningless universe.

But what if this assumption—and it *is* an assumption—is wrong? What if consciousness, rather than some trivial byproduct of brain function, is the fundamental fabric of reality? If you examine the evidence—such as the numerous variations of the double-slit experiment in quantum mechanics, a century of experiments in psi phenomena, verified veridical perceptions in near-death experiences, and many other independent lines of evidence, not to mention several millennia of eastern thought—rather than dismissing it out of hand, it's highly suggestive of a larger reality. This doesn't mean that $F = ma$ no longer works, it just means that materialism is a subset of a larger reality, just as Newtonian mechanics is a subset of a larger reality that includes relativity and quantum mechanics.

A true scientist is open to *any* credible data regardless of the prevailing paradigm, which is often spectacularly wrong. History is replete with scientists thinking they had it

nailed, then getting their asses handed to them. It's called hubris. In the late 19th century, prominent physicists thought they'd pretty much had it figured out, only needing to tweak some things. Then a few years later came relativity and quantum mechanics. Oops.

The consciousness debate seems unnecessarily acrimonious, personal, and downright bizarre. Plugging your ears and ridiculing those challenging the dominant paradigm isn't scientific. It's dogmatic. And dogma thrives on unexamined assumptions by those claiming fealty to facts but in reality only accept *certain* facts consistent with their dogma. Don't confuse data with the interpretation of data, and don't think data come in only one form. What works in a physics lab may not work in the messy reality of field biology, yet they're both equally valid ways of understanding the complexities of the natural world. Assumptions aren't evidence, they're beliefs. Challenge them. To make serious advances, what's needed is not more tweaking of an existing flawed paradigm, but an entirely new paradigm.

Think anything countering materialism is "pseudoscience"? I sure used to. Then I put aside my preconceived notions and actually examined the data with an open and skeptical mind. Some of it was crap. Some of it was ambiguous. Some of it was irrefutable. But don't believe a word I say. Go see for yourself and make your own judgments.

I do not claim to know the right answer to the consciousness question. But I do know one thing: Theory 1 is wrong.