

Scientism and the Need to Acknowledge the Limits of Science

Scientism is the view that science can answer all our questions, including our religious and moral questions. In this session, we will look at a number of different ways in which science is limited. To that effect we will first consider what 'science' is supposed to be. Then, we will examine the limitations. Science is limited in that we seem to be capable of knowing things without science in any way involved in its acquisition. It is also limited in that science cannot scientifically establish its own presuppositions. It is moreover limited in that a number of brute facts are scientifically inexplicable. In addition, science is unable to answer the most pressing moral questions. Finally science cannot answer the question "What makes for a good scientific explanation?"

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(0) Science: what is it?

(i) A Limit from Extra-Scientific Knowledge

- a. What is knowledge? True belief that is warranted.
- b. Warrant through scientific inquiry is one form (or manner) of warrant
- c. Is there irreducibly extra-scientific knowledge?

(ii) A Limit from Knowledge by Acquaintance

- a. Mary reared and educated in a black and white room
- b. There is more to know than propositional truths

(iii) A Limit from Presuppositions that Cannot be Proved to be True

- a. Principles of Logic, e.g. Modus Ponens

- b. That our basic faculties are reliable
- c. That nature behaves uniform

(iv) A Limit from Ultimate Questions

- a. Questions about meaning cannot be proved by science
- b. Verification Principle: only those questions are meaningful that can be answered by scientific inquiry

(v) A Limit from Inexplicable Brute Facts

- a. explanations by reference to general laws and initial conditions
- b. inexplicable laws?
- c. two types of explanation: scientific explanations and personal explanations
- d. personal explanations as such not irrational

(vi) A Limit from Norms for Theory Choice

- a. Norms for theory choice, e.g. simplicity
- b. Cannot be scientifically proved

(vii) How is this relevant for thinking about the Christian faith? As follows: it throws cold water on the following two claims:

- a. science lends no warrant to Christian faith, and
- b. science provides defeaters for the Christian faith.

Suggested Readings:

- c. Nicholas Rescher, *The Limits of Science*. Pittsburg: The University of Pittsburg Press, 1999.
- d. Del Ratzsch, *Science and its Limits*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2000.
- e. Rene van Woudenberg, “Limits of Science and the Christian Faith”, in *Science and Christian Belief* 24 (2012), pp. 129-148.