

Ten Arguments for Scientism

A view that is widely popular in the academy and in popular science writing these days is *scientism*, roughly, the view that only science provides true knowledge. In one of the stronger versions, advocated by Alex Rosenberg and Richard Dawkins, natural science reliably delivers knowledge, whereas common sense sources of belief, such as moral intuition, memory, religious experience, and introspection, do not. In this lecture, we will discuss ten reasons that scientists and philosophers have put forward in defence of scientism. The aim is to show that many reasons that are often considered as good reasons to embrace scientism do not count in favour of scientism at all. The workshop will conclude by stating what such a significantly weaker version of scientism would amount to and provide some suggestions as to how Christians can deal with scientism when they encounter it in their own field.

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Introduction

- Defining scientism
 - A thesis
 - Neutrally
 - As a claim about knowledge or rational belief

- Defining common sense
 - (i) *not* based on scientific research
 - (ii) *not* the product of elaborate lines of reasoning
 - (iii) *not* based on one or more of the five senses
 - (iv) the kinds of beliefs that many people have

Argument 1. Science Is Highly Successful

- Why this argument is not convincing

Argument 2. The Applications of Science Are Everywhere

- Two reasons this argument isn't convincing

Argument 3. Beliefs Based on Science Can be Tested or Corroborated

- My twofold reply

Argument 4. Many Scientific Results Are Counter-Intuitive

- Some examples
- Why this argument fails

Argument 5. Science Has Safety Mechanisms

- Experimental set-up, methods, anonymous peer review, double blindness in Randomized Controlled Trials for new drugs
- Some problems with this argument

Argument 6. We Understand the Origin of Scientific Knowledge

- What the idea is and what it is not
- Why this is not even close to convincing

Argument 7. Common Sense Beliefs Display Vast Disagreement

- The basic idea
- My threefold reply

Argument 8. Science Provides Evolutionary Debunking Explanations of Common Sense Beliefs

- Evolutionary debunking of moral and religious beliefs
- Three conditions that need to be met if this argument is to work

Argument 9. Science Shows Common Sense to Be Permeated with Biases

- Examples: denomination effect, false consensus effect
- Three caveats

Argument 10. Science Demonstrates that Many Common Sense Beliefs Are Illusory

- Examples: (i) beliefs about our reasons for our actions; (ii) beliefs about acting freely.
- What needs to be done to make this argument convincing

Conclusion

- Only a fairly modest version of scientism could be convincing

Suggested Readings:

- Atkins, Peter W. (1995). "Science as Truth", *History of the Human Sciences* 8.2, 97-102.
- Bering, Jesse. (2011). *The God Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny, and the Meaning of Life* (London: Nicholas Brealey).
- De Ridder, Jeroen. (2014). "Science and Scientism in Popular Science Writing", *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 3.12, 23-39.
- Rosenberg, Alex. (2011). *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (New York: W.W. Norton).
- Street, Sharon. (2006). "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value", *Philosophical Studies* 127.1, 109-166.
- Wolpert, Lewis. (1992). *The Unnatural Nature of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).