

Scientism and Religious Knowledge

Is science the only way to know reality? Are there specifically religious ways of knowing? Philosopher Peter S. Williams will critically examine the popular theory of knowledge known as 'scientism' before defending the existence of specifically religious ways of knowing reality.

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I. Defining our Terms

A. Science

Science is a first-order discipline the primary aim of which is to know (understand, explain and/or predict) as much as we can about physical reality.

B. Spirituality & Christian Spirituality

A spirituality is *a way of relating to reality* - to ourselves, to each other, to the world around us and (most importantly) to ultimate reality – *via worldview beliefs, attitudes and behaviour*.

A Christian is *someone dedicated to a Jesus-centred and directed spirituality*.

C. Philosophy

A philosopher is *someone dedicated to the wise pursuit and dissemination of true answers to significant questions through the practice of good intellectual habits*.

D. Scientism

Strong scientism is a second-order philosophical theory attributing exclusive competency over knowledge to scientific methods.

E. Faith

David Marshall & Timothy McGrew: 'By faith... we mean *trusting, holding to, and acting on what one has good reason to believe is true, in the face of difficulties.*' – 'Faith and Reason in Historical Perspective' in *True Reason* (ed.'s Tom Gilson & Carson Weitnauer: Kregel, 2013), p. 125.

II. Scientism is False & Philosophy is Not Dead

A. Scientism is Self-Contradictory

B. Scientism Entails an Unfulfillable Demand

C. Counter Examples to Scientism

- The physical world has objective existence
- The physical world didn't pop into existence five minutes ago with misleading apparent age
- Memory is generally reliable
- The law of non-contradiction is true
- Moral truths – e.g. It is objectively wrong to torture small children for fun
- Aesthetic truths – e.g. rainbows are beautiful

III. Philosophy can warrant a religious spirituality

Atheist Bradley Monton: ‘an argument that starts from the fine-tuning of the fundamental constants, an argument based on the fact that the universe began to exist, and an argument based on the improbability of the naturalistic origin of life from non-life [are all] somewhat plausible.’ - *Seeking God in Science* (Broadview, 2009), p. 28.

IV. Specifically religious knowledge

J.P. Moreland, ‘On the gift of prophecy’, www.jpmoreland.com/media/on-the-gift-of-prophecy

Ian Wilson: ‘it is a straight fact of history that Herod’s seemingly so-permanent Temple, which Jesus had predicted would be destroyed within a generation of his time (Matthew 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7), did indeed suffer this very fate.’ - *The Bible Is History* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), p. 238.

William E. Carroll: ‘Aquinas... thought that it was a matter of biblical revelation that the world is not eternal. He also thought that reason alone could not conclude whether the world had a temporal beginning.’ – ‘Creation, Evolution and Thomas Aquinas’, www.catholiceducation.org/articles/sc0035.html

Suggested Readings:

www.peterswilliams.com

J.P. Moreland, 'On the gift of prophecy', www.jpmoreland.com/media/on-the-gift-of-prophecy

Video

William Lane Craig vs. Peter Atkins Clip, <http://youtu.be/cJrMFv6QoX0>

'The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism'
<http://youtu.be/FPeyJvXU68k>

Peter S. Williams, 'Can Science Solve Every Mystery?' <http://youtu.be/1SaOYVZLatk>

Peter S. Williams, 'Is Christianity Unscientific?' http://youtu.be/mWiU2p_PIE8

Books

Rodney Holder, *Big Bang, Big God: A Universe Designed For Life?* (Lion, 2013)

John Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* Updated edition (Lion, 2009)

John Lennox, *God And Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?* (Lion, 2010)

Bradley Monton, *Seeking God in Science: An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design* (Broadview, 2009)

J.P. Moreland, *Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation* (Baker, 1989)

Del Ratzsch, *Science & Its Limits: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective* (Apollos, 2000)

John G. West (ed.), *The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society* (Discovery Institute Press, 2012)

Peter S. Williams, *A Sceptic's Guide to Atheism* (Paternoster, 2009)

Peter S. Williams, *Understanding Jesus: Five Ways to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Paternoster, 2011)

Peter S. Williams, *C.S. Lewis vs. the New Atheism* (Paternoster, 2013)

Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy: A Christian Introduction to the Love of Wisdom* (Paternoster, 2013)