

# Scientism is NOT Science!

*"We must follow the argument and see where it leads." – Socrates<sup>1</sup>*

When it is suggested that science and faith are contradictory notions, it is often<sup>2</sup> the case that this charge entails a confusion between the two incongruent concepts, "science" and "scien/tism." The primary definition of "science" is the study of both the material entities of nature (atoms, rocks, stars, etc.) and the interactions (gravity, electromagnetism, inertia, etc.) that occur between them in light of the laws of physics and mathematics. "Scientism"<sup>3</sup> on the other hand, while it employs scientific data, further assumes philosophically that matter is the *entirety* of existence<sup>4</sup> to the exclusion of non-physical entities and concepts. *Scientism* dominates academia in the philosophical arenas of our culture today even though its proponents rarely explicate that stance. Its rise to prominence is surely due in part to their employment of the bait-and-switch tactics of appealing to their own professional standing as the so-called "*scientifically-trained*" so as to elevate their *philosophical* opinions to the status of "fact."<sup>5</sup>

Notice again that while science limits its study to **just one of two** potential realms, *scientism* holds the belief that *factual* knowledge entails **only** of physical things. So the former limits its inquiry to the *material* order and its interactions which can be observed (directly or indirectly) by scientific means, while the latter pronounces verdicts on the **non**-existence of another realm which, if it were to exist, wouldn't be detectable scientifically anyway. Indeed, under the only criteria materialism deems to be legitimate,<sup>6</sup> *scientism* has no conceptual tools by which to adjudicate metaphysical claims. Consequently, its insistence that the spiritual realm is illusory is itself a dogmatic belief for the reason that the grounds for its denial aren't scientifically falsifiable. It is true that *scientistic* Darwinism does not attack God's existence *directly* anyway. Yet it does claim that, granting that random mutations which accumulate over time are retained through survival of the fittest, unguided process *all alone* are sufficient to account for the present complexity of the biological order. Therefore, its proponents insist, appeals to a creator (God) are unnecessary. Nevertheless, despite their bold assertions, the question remains as to whether Darwinism is successful, in *actuality*, in confirming its ability to explain life's development from the empirical facts and logical inference alone, that is, apart from the stacking of evidence by means of dismissing such data as it deems to be problematic because it challenges their materialistic world-view.

It must be acknowledged that in our time it is "scientists" who are esteemed as the highest authoritative voices for identifying and arbitrating matters of truth. It is also true that Christianity in particular continues to decline in status with respect to its own truth-claims in the eyes of the public. At the same time, in light of the rampant confusion between scientifically-established facts on the one hand, and sheer suppositions ("scientism") on the other, the grounds upon which our culture is placing its "trust in science" must be judged to be incoherent. Please notice that I am not attacking scientific data that is properly vetted by scientific means, but instead pleading for critical thinking on the part of

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<sup>1</sup> Plato. The Republic, H.D.P. Lee, tr. (Penguin Classics, 1955), no. 394, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Other misperceptions on this matter can be sourced either to a failure to appreciate either the distinction between phenomenological language (the Hebrew text of Genesis) and analytical language, or the profound challenge entailed in correctly interpreting its grammar.

<sup>3</sup> Scientism shares in common with physicalism and materialism the first principle that science is the sole purveyor of truth and reality (Thomas Sorrel. Scientism: Philosophy and Infatuation with Science, (Routledge, 1994), pp. 1f. \*\* Stephen J. Gould. Rocks of Ages. (Ballantine, 1999)). As such it functions, not as a conclusion, but as a premise through which (as with the Bible for young-earth-creationists) evidence must be filtered.

<sup>4</sup> David Hume wrote, "*The only objects of abstract science or of demonstration is quantity and number, and that all attempts to extend this more perfect species of knowledge beyond these bounds are mere sophistry and illusion.*" (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. <https://ebooks.-adelaide.edu.au/h/hume/david/h92e/>. – **boldface mine**).

<sup>5</sup> Antony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese. There is a God. (Harper One, 2007), pp. 96f.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. (4).

the public in discriminating between *facts* and *mere speculations* which are *illegitimately* proffered under the guise of scientific truth.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it is not the purpose of this essay to challenge the existence of certain types of “evidence” which are consistent with Darwinian evolution (DE), but rather to insist that DE be substantiated **only** upon the scientifically-*validated* criteria which it claims to embrace.

My distinction is a highly consequential one. I wish to sharpen our discernment when evaluating disparate claims concerning the beginning (existence) of both the cosmos and its present state of complexity. These concerns can't be resolved through *repeating* scientific experiments in a lab for the reason that they pertain to historical (categorically-singular) events which aren't repeatable. For this reason, Intelligent Design (ID) proponent Stephen Meyer urges scientists to employ *inference to the best explanation* (IBE) among a pool of **multiple competing hypotheses** in order to determine which one **best** accounts for the evidence.<sup>8</sup> *Actual* proof exists only in mathematics and logic, and so is not attainable in the *scientific* investigation of nature.<sup>9</sup> It is odd then, that while ID is habitually dismissed for its inability to *prove* its case, DEs, by contrast, get a pass for assuring critics that the necessary “pathways” will be discovered in the future. It is only IBE that has the capacity to level the playing field in this contest of ideas by insisting that every side substantiate their cases according to the same standards of evidence.<sup>10</sup>

Darwinism is broadly declared to be the only valid account of the history of life's development on earth. How is that claim to be assessed? Is it for example true that DE has been vindicated by the facts of nature after having withstood challenge under researchers who impartially commit themselves to following the evidence wherever it leads? The answer is No! Instead, despite its broad acclaim among academics, DE remains impotent to account for either the beginning of the universe out of nothing in the Big Bang, or the increasingly-plain complexity of the biological world in terms of, for example, the multi-faceted inter-workings of DNA both in terms of the information it bears, and the processes which channel its instructions into the protein building blocks that are needed to construct the vast array of living organisms.<sup>11</sup> How then is it possible for DE retain its appeal with the academic community while at the same time ID is so roundly derided by the same? The reason in part entails the neglect of a critical distinction between the two concepts highlighted in the title of this essay. Under the philosophical strictures which attend *scientism*, evolution is granted default status NOT because the scientific evidence demands it, but because these parameters categorically<sup>12</sup> disallow evidence of any kind which infers the creative activity of an *intelligent* agent. While ID is commonly derided on the allegation that it negatively prejudices scientific inquiry, in truth theism is able to accommodate an array of scientifically-derived conclusions. Ironically, it is *scientism* which refuses to concede ID insights of any sort. Indeed, their entrenched bias all by itself shows that their epistemic grounds are religious and not scientific.<sup>13</sup> Consequently the so-called “scientific” grounds upon which it claims to have “proven” DE,<sup>14</sup> is undermined. Insofar as *scientistic* prejudices are unchecked, legitimate science is thereby impeded!

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<sup>7</sup> Op.cit. (5).

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Meyer. *Signature in the Cell*. (Harper One, 2009), pp. 408f.

<sup>9</sup> psychologytoday.com/blog/the-scientific-fundamentalist/200811/common-misconceptions-about-science-i-scientific-proof.

<sup>10</sup> William Dembski lecture to the American Museum of Natural History, “Does Evolution Even Have a Mechanism?” [discovery.org/a/1154](http://discovery.org/a/1154).

<sup>11</sup> See my essay, “Who’s Doing the Real Science?” at my website (at conclusion).

<sup>12</sup> Richard Lewontin writes, “*Materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.*” (John A. Bloom. *The Natural Sciences*. (Crossway, 2015), p.58).

<sup>13</sup> Op.cit. (3).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Dawkins. *The Greatest Show on Earth*. (Free Press, 2009), p.16.