

The last two articles have been an introduction to the spiritual combat of our times, namely a struggle for the basic truths of life, of ourselves, of God, and the world around us. In short, a correct understanding of reality. These basic, general, core beliefs shape who and what we are, how and what we think, say, and do. While these beliefs most certainly affect everyday life in the here and now, what is most at stake is nothing less than eternal life itself – man’s happiness, his never-ending fate. At stake is the fulfillment of man’s greatest desire – the desire for happiness. The “philosophies” that came out of the so-called enlightenment period of history (say roughly 1700-1900 AD) were largely materialistic philosophies which, through a concerted, aggressive, and intentional campaign, are now popular beliefs – things that “everybody knows are true.”

This article will take up one of these beliefs, namely what’s called scientism, perhaps the easiest to explain, see, and grasp. Given the name of this popular belief, it has to be said from the outset that opposition to scientism is *not* opposition to the physical sciences. Such a claim is blatantly false. There have been a number of occasions when I was personally very grateful for the physical sciences – when I had a severe hernia and the pain was such that I couldn’t stand up straight and could barely walk. I can tell you that I was very thankful for the surgeon who fixed it, or more generally for the medical science that enabled him to do so; likewise for the dentist who fixed the toothache I had that was so bad I couldn’t sleep.

We can, however, go well beyond personal experience and appreciation for “science.” As has been mentioned before, God is the creator/author of the material world. As such, the material world can be considered “Natural Revelation.” Thus, a true study of the material world (the physical sciences) is a study of the mind of God. This also brings out that there can be no real contradiction between real truths of the physical world and “direct” Revelation – what God has told us through the prophets and, ultimately, through the Son of God (Jesus), that which is in Scripture & Tradition – simply because God is the author of both. None other than the great St Augustine himself made this very point. So opposition to *scientism* is *not* opposition to study of the natural world – to the physical sciences.

Now of course the application of knowledge gained through the physical sciences can be immoral, even grossly immoral. Abortion is an obvious example. But even immoral use of the physical sciences, which is a serious topic in its own right, is not what scientism refers to. Scientism is a “*dogmatic*” claim, not a moral one. As such, it is a deeper, more fundamental corruption than even moral issues, which *are* prevalent in “science.” Corruption at the “dogmatic level” (factual belief) opens the gate completely to moral corruption because morality rests on dogma. If man, for example, truly believes in God he then takes seriously the moral teachings revealed by God. To overthrow morality, it is far more effective to remove the (dogmatic) belief in God rather than bicker about morals. Once that is done, anything goes. Scientism is a dogmatic claim.

The claim of scientism is that the physical sciences, or the “scientific method,” which explores only questions of the material world, is the only – ONLY – source of knowledge. The physical sciences *alone* provide man with answers to any relevant questions. The (obviously false) claim of scientism is that anything that “science” cannot touch does not exist, is irrelevant. Dr Lawrence Principe, a chemist and historian, defined scientism, in a 2013 presentation available online (<https://catholicscientists.org/video-themes/recommended/>) in pretty much the same terms, as the belief that: “Science and its methods provide the only valid route to gaining knowledge for answering questions, *to the exclusion of* other methods and disciplines.” Scientism, he went on to say, says that “any questions it cannot answer are either meaningless or not worth asking.” Scientism is not just claiming that the physical sciences are good and useful for man. It goes well beyond that. It is also not just claiming *the* position of supremacy. Although it does do that as well, it goes even further saying that it is *exclusive*, there is no other reality to be explored or thought about. Since the physical sciences only deal with material reality, scientism is obviously intrinsically materialistic – it abides with the “philosophy” of materialism.

If you search the internet – Youtube, for example – you will find numerous scientists and philosophers who have written or spoken against scientism. As one scientist put it: **Science Yes, Scientism No.**

Does this sound irrelevant to you? It might be tempting to think that there's just a few oddballs somewhere who believe in scientism but nobody is really buying into it, certainly not on any widespread scale, and nobody is actively promoting this belief; it's not something you hear or see or affects everyday life or beliefs. Is this really being aggressively promoted in the world today? Well take just one simple example. How many times have you heard the phrase: trust the science? It is blatant scientism. I've heard it repeated over and over again, especially during all of the covid business. Repetition of a short phrase is one means of indoctrination. We will analyze or dissect that phrase later on. Right now the point is simply that the indoctrination of the false belief of scientism is active and widespread.

Continuing with the question of whether scientism is really "out there" in everyday life, ask yourself how often people are willing to question "science." Are people not often frozen, silenced, with "scientific" claims? You can't argue with this, it's "science." Such a mentality is scientism at work. Take the topic of evolution, for example; it must be accepted because...it's scientific of course. The point here is not whether "evolution" is true (reflects reality) or not but rather that you dare not question it.

Scientists themselves are often afraid to speak in terms of anything except materialism. How often do people put stock in what "scientists" say about God – a topic the scientist has no expertise in whatsoever except for their own biases. This is your local, "friendly," neighborhood scientism at work. Scientism means that science is God. It is "alive and well." As an adult, you *might* be a little more impervious to such things, especially if you didn't grow up with it. But what about teenagers who are still very much in their formative years, teenagers who are constantly receiving these kind of subtle messages through the internet and social media? It's part of the "culture," it has an effect.

Dr Principe brings out the prevalence of scientism as well. He said that if scientism just stayed within academic circles, if it was just some topic of conversation over coffee among a few intellectuals, we wouldn't be talking about it, it would be largely if not completely irrelevant in everyday life. But the fact is that it has not remained as some idle musing or question bantered about by a few intellectuals in universities. It has been intentionally and aggressively promoted to the public, it has become one of those popular beliefs. It is distinctively materialistic (i.e., the only thing that exists is material reality). Is it any wonder that young people whose families are faithful and getting to Mass every week are wondering if God exists, much less if He has any relevance? One cannot hold to both scientism and belief in God, they are mutually exclusive. For the young person, scientism must be true precisely because...everybody says so, it's what everybody knows.

Before moving on, let us keep reminding ourselves of what we are talking about: Science yes, scientism no.

There are 2 major questions that we want to take up in regard to scientism: 1) is it true, shouldn't we believe in it? After all, how can "science" be wrong? and 2) how did scientism come about? We will start the first question here and then next week's article will continue on these 2 questions.

To begin to take up the question of: shouldn't we abide with scientism, isn't it true, how can science be wrong – notice first of all the great irony of the claim of scientism. Scientism makes a claim that the physical sciences cannot prove! "Only science can provide answers about reality" is a claim that science cannot prove so how can you make the claim?! Scientism is self-contradictory and thus an absurdity. *Scientism* is a *philosophical* claim not a scientific one, and a rather (if not completely) arbitrary claim at that, with little if any evidence or clear arguments. Those who abide with scientism in effect are saying: it's true because I say so, shut up and accept it, I'm the smart one after all. Wow! The so-called enlightenment claims to be the "age of reason" but the very first ism that we have taken up is not based on reason but rather an arbitrary claim! Can this possibly be true of something that is so widely accepted? Well use your own mind. Ask how is it possible for science to prove scientism? Part of selling these beliefs is to simply leave aside such questions. Unless they are brought out explicitly, it's very easy to just go along with it, which is part of the how these isms become popular beliefs. Even if a person believes that "science can't be wrong," scientism is still an absurd claim simply because it's not a scientific statement. Next week we will start with the issue of: science can't be wrong.

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*