



Science, scientism, and never-ending myths about the scientistic stance

Jeroen de Ridder, Rik Peels and René van Woudenberg (Eds.):
Scientism: prospects and problems. Oxford: Oxford University Press,
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Serdal Tümkaya¹

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Surprisingly, in recent years, the topic of scientism has become very popular. Jeroen de Ridder, Rik Peels, and René van Woudenberg's book is a new contribution. In this book, fifteen authors address the issue of scientism from a philosophical perspective. Their approaches and views and how they are defended differ widely.

The editors' introduction and the first chapter characterize scientism as exclusivity claims about science (1). In this line of reasoning, scientism is about knowledge, and only science can provide us rational knowledge. Moreover, morality, educational policy, and political decisions can be effectively addressed only by science, particularly the natural sciences. Scientism is a too uncritical deferential attitude toward sciences, which will leave no space for philosophy or other avenues to knowledge.

The editors start by thanking the Templeton World Charity Foundation for their generous support for the research project Science Beyond Scientism, of which this book is a major result. It becomes clear that the book primarily will have an anti-scientistic stance in its generality. However, we see James Ladyman, Hilary Kornblith, and Alex Rosenberg as minority authors.

The book is a collection of essays, and its papers are highly varied in quality but uniform in the subject matter. Most of the scientism denial authors repeat the classical objections to scientism in a too tedious, tenuous, and superficial manner. Had it not been for the chapters written by Ladyman and Kornblith, this edited book would not be worth buying. In general, it is shallow and repetitive. I am not saying that each chapter of the book is useless; at least four chapters are acceptable to different degrees.

Five out of the twelve essays advocate scientism to varying degrees. Some of the defenders of scientism are top philosophers such as James Ladyman, Hilary

✉ Serdal Tümkaya
serdal82@gmail.com

¹ Ardahan University, Ardahan, Turkey

Kornblith, and Alex Rosenberg. The other defenses of scientism by William FitzPatrick, and Wesley Buckwalter and John Turri, advocate for a minimal scientism. Conversely, the authors of the other seven chapters are opponents of scientism. The introduction to the volume also leans toward anti-scientism.

Before I comment on the advocates of scientism, I would like to mention some general remarks about the book's topic. Scientism is the fundamental notion, which is interpreted in quite diverse ways. Occasionally, scientism means that science provides the best knowledge we have. More radically, it is the only legitimate source of knowledge. This last attitude denies legitimate knowledge to non-scientific avenues, such as religion, common sense, intuition, memory, perception, or faith. In this pejorative sense, science is typically limited to the natural sciences, as many authors do in the book. The claim is extended to imply that scientific people deny legitimacy to the soft sciences.

Conversely, in many countries, including mine, all disciplines studied in the universities are called scientific. Interestingly, as with most of the other collections on the scientism debate, the anti-scientistic authors in this book restrict the range of science to the physical and life sciences. Even the champion of radical empiricism and thoroughgoing naturalism, Quine, would diametrically oppose this conception of science. This is a classic straw man argument from the anti-scientistic camp. First, commit a homonymy fallacy, and then, use your extremely limited notion of science against scientific philosophy.

There are five major problems with this collection apart from being boring, repetitive, superficial, being full of fallacies, and dismissing the fundamental concerns with the notions of knowledge, nature, science, and rationality:

1. The passages examining the relationship between naturalism and scientism are minimal and fragmented.
2. Scientism's relations to the demarcation problem, irrational doctrines, and marginal sciences are virtually nonexistent. Such discussions would have been so exciting and concrete if they were included.
3. Quine, the true champion of scientific philosophy in the second part of the last century, is absent from the book. Is it not Quine himself who had been attacked for being scientistic?
4. A chapter-length examination of some actual historical cases could have given us a taste of the big picture.
5. Finally, the true meaning of the continuity thesis, which says philosophy is continuous with the rest of science, should have been explored. By doing so, the assumed dichotomy between philosophy and science can be abandoned to explore more empirical forms of philosophy.

Three authors escape from the last problem: James Ladyman, Hilary Kornblith, and William Fitzpatrick did a good job. Their chapters are worth reading. All three of them wrote concretely and informatively. Unfortunately, Rosenberg's paper is a terrible representative of the scientistic position. If scientism is what Rosenberg defends, then it is an untenable position. A standout paper is one

written by James Ladyman. Ladyman's brand new humane scientism is just a better expression of many alleged scientific philosophers' real views.

James Ladyman surprisingly gives a moderate picture of scientism compared to his book in 2007. The title of his chapter is unexpected, "Scientism with a Humane Face." He gives a clear and fair picture of the core of scientism. Ladyman argues that "limits should not be placed on what science can study and we cannot say in advance what the limits of future science will be" (106). That is the core of scientism, which is frequently seen as a bogeyman.

Ladyman asserts that where science conflicts with religion, common sense, or tradition, we should consider science authoritative. Interestingly, Ladyman thinks that this consideration is primarily valid for public policy and education. He also adds that science is authoritative for objective inquiry. For him, moral and political deliberation is not free from science. For Ladyman, "the core positive commitment of scientism is that there are no domains of inquiry that are in principle off limits for science" (113). He does not argue that science is the last word for moral or political issues. There is no naturalistic fallacy in his approach. However, knowing the consequences of each moral or political decision is necessary to make rational choices.

The serious problem is with the concept of the limits of science. Since being scientific is a matter of degree, the idea of the limits of science becomes quite problematic. The point is that scientism is a function of your notion of science. Then the definition of scientism becomes problematic. In fact, when talking about scientism, one cannot entirely avoid what science is and its scope. None of the authors' notion of science is far-reaching, at least not as comprehensive as Quine's, who believes that all the so-called soft disciplines are science, and common sense is continuous with science.

Another standout essay of the collection is by Hilary Kornblith. In his "Philosophy, Science, and Common Sense," Kornblith gives many examples from behavioral and cognitive sciences. He bases his arguments on psychological and cognitive science literature, which makes the chapter concrete and convincing. Experimental philosophy is his prime example. Kornblith explicitly argues that "we should endorse features of the manifest image only to the extent that they are part of the scientific image" (127). He argues that there is a conflict between the manifest and the scientific image. We should deal with this conflict, and the only reasonable way is to see the manifest image of doxastic deliberation as an illusion (128).

Interestingly, Kornblith does deny that epistemology will die. Here we see a complicated issue regarding doxastic deliberation. Are the first-person perspective on doxastic deliberation and its third-person treatment of it compatible? Kornblith believes that they are incompatible, and we should choose the third-person perspective over the first-person perspective. This heavily bears upon philosophical methodology and epistemology. He uses some cognitive scientific studies of human cognition to demonstrate his opinions. This approach is an excellent instance of a naturalized epistemology based upon current cognitive scientific findings. Kornblith argues that human beings, contrary to appearances, do not have a reliable knowledge of their own decisions. Doxastic deliberation is no more than an illusion.

One of the critics of scientism is Ian Kidd. Kidd argues that the scientistic stance tends to lead its defenders to serious epistemic vices such as narrow-mindedness. Put this way, his objection may not seem so repellant. After some pages, he starts to equate religious beliefs with scientific knowledge. He also extends his attack against the so-called ideological priority given to science to the level that all ways of knowing are the same. Perhaps this is not his intended message, but this impression forces itself upon me.

Overall, this book is not worse than the other collections on the problem of scientism. The real issue is that the other books are already highly disappointing. The scientism debate is meaningless unless it includes an analysis of the actual practices of scientistic people or philosophers. Kidd might seem to do precisely that. He observes that a scientistic stance frequently brings about narrow-mindedness. However, this problem associated with holding a scientistic stance might just as well emerge from having a religious attitude or relying on our forefathers' lore. Having any stance could result in the same danger of narrow-mindedness. Thus, I believe that this problem is not a reason to be against scientism.

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