

Book Review

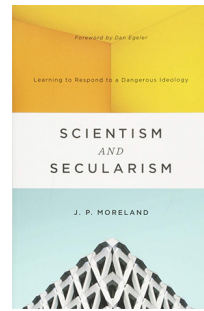
J. P. Moreland.

Scientism and Secularism:

Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology

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Dr. Moreland is a distinguished professor of Philosophy at Biola University. His research has been primarily focused on the mind and how religion/ philosophy and science interact. Having studied science as an undergraduate and philosophy at the graduate level, Moreland has a unique perspective of relating these difficult concepts in an easy and understandable way.

Dr. Moreland opens with a brief history of how his personal interest in science formed and his life path up to his conversion to Christianity. What is interesting is how the book topic flows necessarily from the combination of his love for science and his newfound Lord. The book seeks to answer whether scientism can hold its weight when critiqued. Moreland contends, “scientism is not a doctrine of science; rather, it is a doctrine of philosophy (p. 23).”

In chapter one, Moreland defines scientism as the belief that only science provides genuine knowledge of reality. Moreland distinguishes between weak scientism, which allows for knowledge from other disciplines, and strong scientism which only accepts knowledge from science as legitimate. Chapter two brings the subject to a more pragmatic side where the layperson is focused on the intellectual impact of this philosophical system within the laity (non-science persons). Moreland argues that scientism places religious faith outside of society’s “plausibility structure.” His contention

is a sharp one because as can be seen within the structure of society lies the idea that science can and will answer all things. The remainder of the chapter discusses several effects scientism has had on religious belief in general, and Christian belief specifically, with which this reviewer agrees. For example, scientism has led to more hostility towards Christianity which can be seen in how religious knowledge is regarded as personal and not objective.

Chapter three covers how this philosophical system altered the arbiter of our intellectual communities, the universities. Moreland notes there is a “fact/ value distinction” that has revised what our view of knowledge is (p. 45). Moreland bases this distinction on the view that only the hard sciences contain knowledge and all others, especially religious and ethical claims, are matters of personal feelings. The shift in our epistemological understanding has drastically affected the bounds of what mankind can truly know.

Chapter four reveals how scientism is self-refuting. Moreland points out the belief that science is the only producer of knowledge does not fulfill its own criteria of validation. There is no empirical test that can demonstrate the truthfulness of science as the only way to know. In keeping with this train of thought Moreland, in chapter five, goes over how scientism is an enemy of science. Scientism has several presuppositions that it takes as brute fact however, in order for science to

show the plausibility of these presuppositions, it needs philosophy. The previous statement is something missed in the current empirically centric culture which is so pervasive today.

As mentioned previously, Moreland distinguishes between strong and weak scientism. Moreland circles back around (chapter six) to showcase why the weaker version is no better than the strong version. The main argument for this conclusion is the weak version causes the observer to only look to the authority of science (a presupposition) rather than looking at its arguments. His point is valid; however, the section could have dealt more extensively with other reasons to disregard the weak version. With that said, the few details falling under this main point do provide ample reasons for not giving the weak version much weight. Chapter seven addresses what we can know outside of science and to know with a great deal of certainty. Logic and mathematics are both forms of knowledge we can know, and Moreland properly showcases why we can know this with a great deal of certainty. Probably the most convincing points made in chapter seven are personal conscious states and moral knowledge (p. 78-80). Scientism has a difficult time showing why certain brain states do not match with conscious states. It also has a difficult time understanding ethical knowledge which cannot be known via empirical testing. The distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* truth claims are made which help show the validity of the points.

Chapter eight covers a case study which involves looking at mental and brain states. Moreland points out science has no answer for the existence of mental states. Neuroscience seeks to correlate mental and brain states, but it cannot do so without a personal observer informing about the current mental state being

experienced; an interesting fact underpinning this epistemic endeavor. In chapter nine Moreland seeks to show how science is not based on first philosophy. Essentially, it is first philosophy which grounds all other knowledge pursuits in basic and fundamental knowledge. Without a strong first philosophy, science cannot even begin. Part of the problem for scientism is it has rejected first philosophy and has sought out a different path which is part of the reason there is such a disconnect between what counts as knowledge and what does not.

Moreland, in chapter ten, provides a brief examination of the kalam cosmological argument and provides scientific evidence to support his argument. The chapter is brief but is sufficient for an introduction to the argument. Chapter eleven seeks to show how we explain things. Moreland gives a succinct presentation of how science seeks to know things and how old theories are replaced with new ones. After perusing how science seeks to know things, Moreland exposes five things science cannot in principle explain. Briefly, those things are: the origin of the universe, the origin of the fundamental laws of nature, the fine-tuning of the universe, the origin of consciousness, and the existence of moral/ rational/ or aesthetic objective laws and intrinsically valuable properties (p. 135-155). Under each of these subheadings, Moreland provides reasons for the inability of science to be able to adequately explain these things. At a basic level, these things either go beyond our ken to know through empirical investigation alone or they are things we cannot know outrightly through empirical investigation.

Chapter thirteen brings about a slight change of pace. Here, Moreland discusses naturalism, theistic evolution, and intelligent design. During the discussion, he concludes naturalism

and theistic evolution fall short in being able to adequately explain how everything exists or how it fails to adequately adhere to a biblical worldview. One point made is the former two accuse the latter of the God-of-the-gaps fallacy. Moreland shows the appeal to this fallacy is false and only applies when there is something that is not known however, for the intelligent design case, it is rather what better explains what we do know.

The final two chapters (fourteen and fifteen) go over the importance of integrating science and Christian belief and a plan on how to do so. There needs to be a conceptual and personal integration of science and Christian faith into a coherent whole. Moreland suggests a direct interaction model is best. In this model, everything about personal Christian faith (e.g. theology, philosophy, etc.) must meet science and its claims head-on and exchange information to form a coherent and cognitively acceptable position and view of reality. The direct interaction model suggested by Moreland is a good model to follow for it allows the Christian to see scientific knowledge as a useful tool provided by God.

Overall, the book is intended for college-aged adults to show the conflict scientism raises in the current culture. Moreland remains fully committed to the biblical worldview and provides the layperson with valuable information which can help defend against solely empirical claims. It would be a valuable asset for the current cultural climate to have a more in-depth study done on this topic so all Christians may be adequately and fully equipped to defend Christian belief and to make evangelism more effective.

