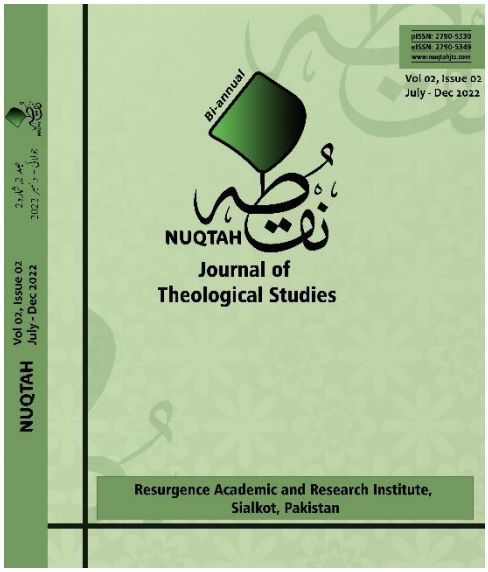

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Scientism and Atheistic Ideology, Challenges and Responses by Christians and Muslims

Waleed Azhar
PhD Scholar, Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Punjab
Email: waleedazhar1984@gmail.com
Dr Usman Ahmad
Assistant Professor, Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Punjab
Email: usmanahmad.is@pu.edu.pk
Dr Don Howard
Professor, Department of Philosophy. University of Notre Dame, USA
Email: dhoward1@nd.edu

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Abstract

This study explores scientism, the belief that science is the primary and most reliable means of understanding scientific concepts and shaping societal norms. Scientism's widespread influence has transformed how people perceive various aspects of life. This article will examine scientism's relation to atheism, particularly in light of theories such as Darwinism. Employing a comparative analytical methodology, this article will investigate the viewpoints of atheist scientists who advocate for scientism's supremacy, contending that it surpasses religious explanations and impedes scientific progress. In contrast, Christian and Muslim scholars believe that faith in God provides purpose and moral guidance. They express concerns about the growing influence of scientism in society and its potential harm. This article aims to investigate how atheists prioritize science above all else, dismissing other ways of understanding the world, including matters related to human destiny. Ultimately, the research seeks to promote better understanding and dialogue between Christians and Muslims in the future, fostering a harmonious relationship between science and religion.

Keywords: Scientism; Atheism; Leading Scientist's Opinions, Christian-Muslim Response

Introduction

In contemporary discourse, atheist scientists have been vocal in their critique of major religions, including Christianity and Islam. They assert that science, history, philosophy, and ethics provide sufficient grounds to reject the idea of God and religious influence. Advocates of scientism argue that scientific knowledge is comprehensive, rendering religious beliefs unnecessary for understanding the world. Some scientists even advocate moving away from religion, emphasizing the study of religion's societal role to diminish its influence. As science has grown

in influence since the 1800s, scientism, the belief in science as the ultimate path to knowledge, has reshaped how people think across various domains. While this perspective can be beneficial, it also risks undervaluing other forms of knowledge that are equally important.

However, some prominent scientists contend that science doesn't offer absolute certainty and that alternative pathways to knowledge exist. They highlight the limitations of science and its evolving nature, often influenced by personal biases and beliefs. Matters such as love, beauty, morality, and values transcend scientific inquiry, relying on individual viewpoints and methods.

In response to scientism, Muslim and Christian scholars have presented academic, theological, and philosophical arguments. Despite their different approaches, these scholars share common concerns. They argue that scientism is more philosophical than scientific and that testimonial knowledge, the information relayed by others, plays a vital role in human understanding. Rejecting or disregarding testimony would undermine our capacity to know and reduce us to mere animals. Scholars emphasize that science alone cannot explain the purpose of the universe, human existence, moral values, or our responsibilities and duties. Thus, they strongly oppose scientism, advocating for a more balanced approach that acknowledges the value of various forms of knowledge.

Muslim scholar, Hamza[1] argues against scientism. He believes that while science helps us understand the physical world, it can't explain everything about life. Science isn't the only way to find truth and it can't answer all questions. It only deals with things we can observe and doesn't explore personal feelings, emotions, or depression. Also, science can't reply to 'why' questions.

Scientism-An Analysis of Atheist’s Perspective

As per the Encyclopedia of Britannica, scientism can be defined as a belief or stance that attributes science as the sole or most dependable source of knowledge and truth pertaining to the world. This philosophical standpoint advocates the

primacy and exclusive legitimacy of scientific methodologies and explanations vis-à-vis other epistemological domains, encompassing religious, philosophical, and humanistic perspectives.[2] Many philosophers have discussed scientism in different ways. In debates between atheists and others, scientism is an important topic. It's based on three main ideas. First, scientism sees science as the best way to think and act. Atheist philosophers think science is better than other ways of thinking, like philosophy, politics, or tradition. Second, these atheists think we should use science in all parts of life, like politics, money, and relationships. This makes people trust in human reasoning and the idea that they can change the world. Third, scientism is often against other religions, especially Islam and Christianity. It tries to replace and get rid of these religions. Scientism believes that science and its theories can give people inner peace. It also thinks science is the best way to understand the parts of the world we can see and study.

Bertrand Russell, a leading atheist, strongly supports scientism. He believes key Christian ideas like God and life after death don't have scientific evidence. He thinks people continue to believe in these because they find comfort in them, just like they believe in their own goodness and others' faults. Russell doesn't outright reject God's existence. He suggests the Christian God might exist, just like the gods of ancient Greek, Egyptian, or Babylonian mythologies. But none of these ideas are more likely than the others because they all go beyond what we can practically prove or disprove.[3]

Alexander Rosenberg, who backs scientism, believes that it's the idea that only scientific methods can give us reliable knowledge about anything. He says being a scientist means we rely on science alone as our source of knowledge and guide to understanding ourselves and everything around us.[4]

Rosenberg employed a specific term to articulate his argument that science should be the prism through which we scrutinize trust, knowledge, reality, and nature. However, in day-to-day life, assigning meanings to particular phrases cannot always be anchored in scientific principles. Similarly, scientific means fall short

when it comes to interpreting the philosophical or theological aspects of trust, knowledge, reality, and nature.

Nature is beautiful and serves many purposes. However, hands-on science can't fully explain the allure of nature, the truth about people who harm others, philosophical studies, and religious beliefs about right and wrong. Ian Barbour believes that the best way to really know something is through science. He mentions efforts to make science more wide-ranging so that it can explain every kind of important knowledge, either directly or indirectly.[5]

Carnap said that life has lots of aspects that science doesn't cover, but within its own sphere, science faces no roadblocks. By saying that science has no limits, we're implying that there's no query that science can't response.[6]

Methodological scientism is the process of using natural science methods in other areas of study. This often overlooks or lessens the use of traditional methods in those areas, which have been considered crucial for a long time. Philip S. Gorski aims to take the ways of natural science and apply them to different fields of study.[7]

Tom Sorrell seems to critique the increasingly popular scientism approach in philosophy, yet his critique does not seek to belittle or disparage science. Instead, Sorrell takes issue with Western philosophy's inclination to place an undue emphasis on science, often undermining the value of arts, humanities, and philosophy itself. He advocates for the propagation of scientific ideas and methodologies, but he equally stresses the importance of maintaining disciplines such as history and ethics in their original, pre-scientific form, capturing the spirit of scientism inherent in scientific empiricism. Roger Trigg posits that scientism is the conviction that "Science is the sole method we have to understand reality."[8]

Ontological scientism asserts that the universe is made up only of atoms or other physical elements. It holds that all entities and causes in the universe are material objects. This view is often associated with Carl Sagan's term "scientific

materialism". [9] Physician Stephen Weinberg argued for a global dismissal of religion, suggesting that scientists should critically analyze its role in society. He stated that we need to do more to help the world move on from its religious past. He advocated for scientists to strive to lessen the influence of religion on society, seeing this as potentially their most significant contribution to civilization.[10]

Biologist and atheist Richard Dawkins emphasizes the need to rely on scientific knowledge, particularly when divine guidance is missing or inconsistent. He states, "If God's absence creates a void, it will be filled differently by various individuals."[11] Sam Harris, an atheist, disagrees with the idea of religious morality and instead supports establishing social moral norms and rules through scientific means. He acknowledges that not all moral issues can be addressed through scientific investigation, but believes that differences in opinion can be better managed by considering scientific realities."[12]

Atheists strive to fill knowledge gaps, regardless of limitations and restrictions. Dawkins argues that atheists can lead a healthy, happy, intellectually satisfying, and moral life. He believes that the notion that science cannot address moral principles is incorrect; science can effectively address moral ideals and responsibilities within the context of understanding the world. According to Dawkins, while religion is seen as the preeminent and definitive source of significance, principles, ethics, and an optimal existence, a scientific investigation provides the best understanding of the physical world. However, I aim to persuade you that this assertion is not only untrue but also unlikely. If faith ever happens to be correct, it is purely coincidental.[13]

According to Daniel Dennett, religion is diminishing in significance in the contemporary world and is assuming a more ceremonial role rather than controlling people in the realms of politics, science, and ethics. In contrast, Dawkins argues that the theory of evolution provides a superior explanation for the origins and functioning of the universe compared to religious explanations. He asserts that "natural selection" serves as the fundamental mechanism driving

everything, increasing the likelihood of humans and science unraveling the most intricate mysteries of the universe.[14]

Harris contends that the assertions made by religious language and their associated implications exhibit a clear lack of rationality and rational basis when it comes to discerning truth and falsehood. For instance, Christians hold beliefs about the potential return of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, which are factually implausible in the twenty-first century when considering physics and biology.[15]

Richard Dawkins believes that the theory of evolution provides the strongest reason for someone to be an atheist. He argues that the more we learn about evolution, the less likely we are to be uncertain about the existence of a higher power and more likely to reject the idea of a god.**[16]**

Harris concludes that scientists cannot find scientific evidence to support religious beliefs. He continues, we should prioritize scientific methods over religious beliefs in determining right and wrong. When scientists propose moral standards, they will replace traditional heavenly moralities."**[17]**

Many people misunderstand the idea that scientism and religions such as Christianity and Islam are fundamentally incompatible alongside both science and religion. According to John F. Haught, scientism is seen as an adversary to both religion and science.'**[18]**

Different academics have varying beliefs regarding scientism and its implications. While confrontational atheists and scientists, particularly those affiliated with the new atheism movement, argue that scientism and science possess the ability to address all inquiries, lead to atheism, provide ultimate truth and certainty, and serve as the sole reliable source of knowledge, their views are not universally shared. These proponents maintain that science offers the superior and exclusive means to comprehend the entirety of the universe. In contrast, non-theistic scientists propose that humans are biochemical compositions comprised of numerous elements such as chemicals, calcium, and water. Some staunch atheists further assert that empirical sciences should supplant religion entirely, rendering

religious guidance unessential.

Scientists' viewpoint of Science Insinuation

i) Science is not a path of every expertise,

Richard P. Feynman posits that discovering universal truths can't be done through a single method but requires exploring different scientific areas. He maintains that our human tendency to divide the universe into areas like physics, biology, or astronomy doesn't hold true for nature, which doesn't recognize these separations. Hence, recognizing the overlap and the underlying aim of these fields is crucial.[19]

ii) Scientific outcomes transform with the change of core chemical effects.

Feynman delved into complex workings of cells, discussing the rapid, internal chemical changes they experience. Within a cell, a multitude of transformations occur, altering compounds. To understand the scope of biochemistry research, we need to examine just a small segment, say one percent, of the vast number of daily reactions within these cellular systems.[20]

iii) Despite being detached, science can be used for individual objectives

Many people think that science is always fair and balanced, but this is not true. Just like any other work, science can be affected by trends, unclear ideas, and personal interests. Science is done by people, and is often guided by their personal choices and what's popular in society.[21]

Science doesn't involve feelings or moral values like love, hate, or beauty. Just because something isn't scientific doesn't make it wrong. Love isn't scientific, but that doesn't mean it's bad. It just means it's not based on science. According to Feynman, even math isn't a science as it's not a natural science.[22]

Science with relevance to atheism

Most people who study science agree that science doesn't always make you an atheist. Hugh Gauch, a known figure, believes saying that atheism is backed by science may sound exciting, but it isn't logical.[23]

Alternative information Resources to science

Lawrence M. Principe[24] discusses how our trust in science has grown to believe it can answer all questions. Modern science has successfully explained a lot about nature. The issue comes when people think only today's science can give all the right answers, and questions it can't answer aren't worth asking. These strong views on science's power and evidence are what cause debate and criticism.[25]

Lawrence M. Principe argues that if we only accept science as the way to gain knowledge, we lose other important forms of understanding. This view can undervalue things like poetry, art, and music. If we dismiss these areas based on science, we risk being seen as uncultured. Principe also believes that religion plays a key role in understanding human emotions and morals. Trouble arises when science tries to take over the role of religion in our lives.[26] It's true that sometimes scientific views and religious beliefs don't agree with each other. But this kind of disagreement is common both in science and religion. These differences in opinions help us to think and grow, so they're not a bad thing or a problem.[27]

Susan Haack,[28] even though she isn't religious, makes strong points about scientism. To back her views, she uses Albert Einstein's idea that science is just a better form of common sense, John Dewey's thoughts on how science grew from regular questioning, and Gustav Bergman's statement that science extends our common sense."[29] Atheist scientists believe that science has evolved into a form of worship. Not all scientists erroneously believe that science is the sole trustworthy provider of information and that all things should be examined through the scientific method. Haack speaks eloquently on the subject.

Scientism-Evaluation of Christian Reactions

Bible's Derivation of Insight

According to the Bible, it says, "Being afraid of God is the first step to being wise, and knowing God is the way to truly understand things."[30]

Another verse from the Holy Bible explains the previous statement in simpler terms, "Having a deep sense of respect and awe is where knowledge comes from.".[31]

The Holy Bible teaches that God is the one and only spring of truth. He guides people through revelations given by His messengers from time to time. It's important to understand that only knowledge from heaven can reveal the ultimate truth, show us what's right and wrong, and give us a purpose in life on Earth. Only God's wisdom can help us to differentiate between true and false.

Erkki,[32] a Christian scholar, explains scientism in a simple way. He says that the issue with scientism isn't that we value science too much. He doesn't want to argue against the importance of science. Instead, he believes that we underestimate the substance of intellectual, belief, and everyday discerning. Actually, being successful in the natural sciences requires a deeper understanding of what it means to be rational. This helps us rely on rational beliefs that come from observations, memories, rational intuitions, and more. For experiments to work, we need to trust everyday things, like when we say "I see this through the microscope." To be part of the scientific community, we must have faith in things like the existence of other minds, our ability to plan carefully, and the reliability of collecting data."[33]

J.P. Moreland asserts that "scientism" is a philosophic idea rather than a set of scientific ideas. Simply said, "scientist" is a philosophical movement and not a branch of science. It's interesting to note that scientism does not involve a scientific axiom like "cats are mammals" or "water is H20." Rather, it is a philosophical conviction that expresses one's viewpoint on science. A

philosophical position known as scientism contends that only scientific assertions may be taken as genuine knowledge and that philosophical ones cannot.[34]

Christian scholar John Lennox argued that the belief that science and religion can't coexist is incorrect. He pointed out that many Nobel Prize winners were Christians. From 1901 to 2000, 60% of Nobel laureates were Christians, according to Baruch Aba Shalev's "100 Years of Nobel Prizes" (2005). He found that Christians won a significant number of Peace (78.3%), Chemistry (72.5%), Physics (65.3%), Medicine (62.5%), Economics (54.5%), and Literature (49.5%) Prizes.[35]

Human knowledge and role of Testimony

C.A Coady discusses the role of testimony in our daily lives. He points out that we often trust in things without scientific or empirical proof, relying instead on the knowledge and accounts shared by others. For instance, many of us believe in childbirth, blood circulation, the distance of celestial bodies, the Earth's geography, and its laws, even if we've never witnessed or verified these phenomena firsthand. We base much of our understanding on the information shared by others.[36]

Scientific and other Sources of Knowledge

Some questions are not related to science. Professor John Polkinghorne provides various reasons why the water in a teapot is boiling. One reason could be that the water is changing from a liquid to a gas at that temperature. Another reason is that I placed the kettle on the burner, which is a non-scientific explanation. It could also be because my friend is coming over for coffee, which is a valid answer. None of these answers are incorrect; they simply offer different perspectives and approaches to the topic. The scientific answer alone cannot fully explain the situation. Science cannot address questions like "Is this poem well-written?" or "Can I trust my international friend?" Our understanding of the physical world is

constantly improving, but that doesn't mean that science can provide explanations for everything.[37]

William Lane Craig[38] argues that scientism, which is the belief that science is the only valid way to gain knowledge, is not a science itself and cannot be proven scientifically. He suggests that there are other foundations of information beyond science. While science focuses mainly on the physical world, there are truths such as mathematics, logic, and moral values that cannot be verified through empirical means or established scientifically. Additionally, concepts like reality, historical facts, and the existence of the external world cannot be proven by science alone. Ironically, these metaphysical assumptions have seeped into science. According to philosophers, this theory of knowledge has been widely abandoned.[39]

Robert Emmet Barron[40]raises valid arguments against scientism. He suggests that scientism diminishes the importance of religion in intellectual discussions. If we claim that all truth is solely scientific, it becomes illogical to support scientism itself. How can we arrive at an empirical conclusion regarding this belief? Ultimately, scientism is a metaphysical or philosophical standpoint. Influential figures like Aristotle, Plato, Immanuel Kant, and Homer were interested in and saw connections between science, philosophy, theology, and religion, but none of them advocated for scientism.[41]

Muslim Response to Scientism

Islam has a long history of being involved with science and learning. Muslim scholars have added a lot to different fields like astronomy, math, medicine, and philosophy. Some famous scholars from the past, like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Farabi, connected science with Islamic ideas. Many Muslims say that Islam and science can work together. They believe that Islamic teachings encourage people to learn about the world. They show how Muslim scholars in history have done important things in science. They think that science can help us understand God's creations and doesn't have to go against religious beliefs. Similarly, Islam rejects the idea of scientism and refers to the belief that the scientific method is the

exclusive and dependable means of acquiring knowledge. This perspective dismisses alternative sources of knowledge, such as divine guidance through revelation, in the process of understanding the natural world. Scientism can be seen as a challenge because it tends to prioritize empirical evidence over metaphysical or religious truths.

Quranic Concept of Knowledge:

Understanding the Quranic notion of knowledge or the concept of knowledge through revelation holds significant importance. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

الٓمّٓ ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ لَا رَيْبَ ۛ فِيْهِ ۛ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ ۙ الَّذِيْنَ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِالْغَيْبِ[42]

"This is the book having no (any sort of deviation) doubt in it. A true mentor for those who believe in unseen"

Dr. Usman Ahmad explains Islamic knowledge based on a verse from the Quran. Here are the key points:

1. Knowledge comes from divine revelation, which is perfect and never wrong.
2. Only revelation can provide true and absolute information, while other sources may contain errors and uncertainties.
3. True reality can only be understood through revelation, not through our senses or reasoning.
4. Since observation and testing cannot prove everything, it is necessary to have faith in things that cannot be seen.
5. Reality is permanent and cannot be changed.
6. Only revelation can help us distinguish between what is false and what is true.[43]

Allah almighty says in the Holy Quran:

هُوَ الَّذِىْ بَعَثَ فِى الْاُمِّيّٖنَ رَسُوْلًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوْا عَلَيْهِمْ اٰيٰتِهٖ وَيُزَكِّيْهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتٰبَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَاِنْ كَانُوْا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِىْ ضَلٰلٍ مُّبِيْنٍۙ

[44]

"He is the One Who sent the illiterate a messenger from among themselves, who recited His revelations to them, purified them, and taught them the Book and knowledge since they had gone manifestly wrong before."

The scripture of divine origin serves as the sole means through which the truest meaning and reason for our existence in the present life and aftermaths is unveiled and delineated. It emphasizes the importance of objective moral values for human stability. Throughout human history, revelation has been the most reliable and authoritative mainspring of knowledge, offering harmony, impartiality, and leadership for all people. The Islamic framework places a strong emphasis on moral integrity, societal benefit, and the integration of faith and knowledge, ultimately presenting a paradigm that holds relevance for contemporary discussions on the role of science in shaping society.

Revelation's Necessity and usefulness:

Our senses and rationality cannot provide us with ultimate truth or certainty, and they should not be considered as sources of knowledge when it comes to understanding the meaning of life, the purpose of human existence, moral values, and duties. That's why we require a reliable and exceptional source of knowledge that can offer certainty, and that source is the revelation from God.[45]

Surveillance Restricted Science

Religion provides certainty, and absolute truth, and serves as a guide for moral values, as well as offering insight into the meaning of life and the purpose of human existence. Conversely, science is limited to studying physical events on Earth and cannot provide information about the nature of both the visible and invisible realms. The observations made by scientists are often limited, as Hamza describes when discussing the constraints of scientific observation. For example, when studying the effects of coffee on young mice, a researcher would be limited by factors such as the number and type of mice used, as well as other variables present during the experiment.[46]

Science is Ethically Independent:

Hamza makes a clear argument that science, despite its usefulness in certain areas, cannot address all facets of a situation, especially its moral judgments and conclusions. While science can demonstrate the physical activities that take place when a knife penetrates the flesh, it cannot determine whether these activities are morally right or wrong. Both acts of murder and life-saving surgeries involve potential physical harm, distress, and bloodshed. The key point is that having a comprehensive understanding of the physical processes involved in cutting and piercing the human body does not automatically lead to a moral judgment.[47]

Empirically science does not authenticate individual emotions

Science, according to Hamza, cannot inform you about your own sentiments, links, or state of mind. In specific, science fails to empirically investigate associations and sentiments, Science is good in how it tests ideas, but similarly, no science occurs without testing it. Nonetheless, the investigation should ultimately lead to assurance. For example, how do we determine the intentions of a person? On what scale can we determine a person's emotions? A lie detector can be used by scientists to detect lies. People may also stress that a variety of behavioral and physical clues are linked to specific emotions, although this is not as simple as they think.[48]

Behavioral Changes in Human

Hamza presents an additional example to highlight the complexity of human emotions, focusing on the detection of depression. While physical data can offer some insights, a significant amount of valuable information for a more accurate prognosis comes from the interaction between the patient and psychologist. This interaction involves asking questions, receiving replies, and sometimes utilizing a complete questionnaire. Ultimately, our understanding relies heavily on the responses provided by the patient. Due to this reliance, Hamza argues that clarifications alone are deficient for explaining numerous facets of life, such as mental health and genuine friendships.

Science cannot answer ‘why?’

Hamza provides a persuasive account that helps us understand how science affects human actions and purposes. Consider a situation where your aunt visits your home and brings you a delicious homemade vanilla cake. Once your aunt leaves, you open the box to take out the cake. Before indulging in its taste, it is worth reflecting on the reasons behind its creation. From a scientific standpoint, you can only deduce one aspect: the cake itself. Through various empirical investigations, it can be inferred that the cake was most likely baked at a temperature of 350 degrees Fahrenheit, with ingredients such as cocoa powder, eggs, sugar, and milk powder. Nevertheless, this information alone does not provide an answer to the question "Why did she give it to you?" In order to acquire that knowledge, the only way is to ask and inquire.[49]

Science can never answer metaphysical questions:

Science has its bounds when it comes to tackling metaphysical questions, yet it wields the power of experimentation to offer insights. Take cosmology, for example, which has enabled scientists to delve into the origins of our universe. However, certain profound inquiries lie beyond the reach of empirical or scientific methods. These encompass the profound significance of drawing inferences from past context, the enigmatic nature of the afterlife, the existence of souls, the subjective perception of consciousness in living beings, and the baffling reason behind the existence of something rather than nothing. These queries dwell in realms that transcend the physical universe, rendering them impervious to scientific scrutiny. [50]

Conclusion

Science, as a relentless pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the natural world, has revolutionized human life and led to remarkable advancements in various fields. It has become an indispensable ally in our quest for progress and comprehension. However, some atheists have embraced a philosophical belief called scientism, asserting that science alone holds all the answers and dismissing

other forms of knowledge, including religious insights. They argue that since science can only investigate the observable, God's existence cannot be proven, and scientific conclusions must be universally valid. This viewpoint overlooks the inherent limitations of science and its inability to address moral, logical, and mathematical truths. In contrast, Christians, Muslims, and numerous scholars concur that scientism is a self-defeating philosophy that disregards vital aspects of human knowledge. They emphasize the importance of a balanced approach that recognizes the value of both science and faith. By fostering cooperation and understanding between Christians and Muslims, we can cultivate peace, prosperity, and fruitful intellectual and social connections. It is crucial to acknowledge that while science has made remarkable contributions, its scope is limited, and it cannot fully explain the complexities of existence. By embracing a comprehensive worldview that integrates science and faith, we can deepen our understanding of the world and live harmoniously in an ever-evolving society.

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[44] Al-Jumu'ah, 2.

[45] Usman Ahmad, Mabahith Ulum al Quran, 178.

[46] Hamza A. Tzortzis, The Divine Reality: God, Islam & The Mirage of Atheism (USA: Paperback Publishers, 2016) 239.

[47] Ibidem

[48] Tzortzis, The Divine Reality: God, Islam & The Mirage of Atheism, 243.

[49] Ibid, 244.

[50] Ibid, 245.