

“There is More Than Science”

Teesside Skeptics in the Pub
Ian Glendinning - 9th May 2024

With a long career as a systems engineer in industry, Ian has been an active member of the sceptical, rationalist, humanist, secularist, free-thought movement for over two decades. As well as being a member of Teesside Skeptics in the Pub he has been a Trustee of the Rationalist Association, publishers of the New Humanist magazine. In that same period Ian has been researching and writing about epistemology.

“What, Why and How do we Know?” at www.psybertron.org

“I Identify as ... ?” at www.psybertron.org/archives/16498

Personal Dedications & Inspirations (post 9/11)

Brian Josephson (Cambridge Cavendish Lab)

- Quantum Tunnelling - Nobel Prize in Physics (1972)
- His explicit suggestion in 2001 that *some forms of thought* are more fundamental than physics itself!?!

Robert Pirsig (RIP 2017)

- Author of “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” (1974)
- My first introduction to philosophy as a discipline in 2001.

Dan Dennett (RIP 2024)

- Author of “From Bacteria to Bach and Back” (2017)
newhumanist.org.uk/articles/5243/book-review-from-bacteria-to-bach-and-back
- How to think and how to engage in *careful* discourse since 2002.

The basic assertion: **There is more than science?**

- There are limits to science, in the sense that some aspects of the world are beyond science?
- There is more to the real world than science?
- Some kinds of (*real / natural / valuable*) knowledge – truths – of the world are more than science? Not necessarily helpful or valid to seek or use scientific explanations for these?

Not suggesting anything “supernatural” or “anti-science” here.

True in a trivial, broadly defined, sense

– we don’t *worry* that our taste & appreciation in art & music & poetry & prose-fiction is non-scientific – do we?

(Irony – there’s a lot about our topic in such artistic endeavours.)

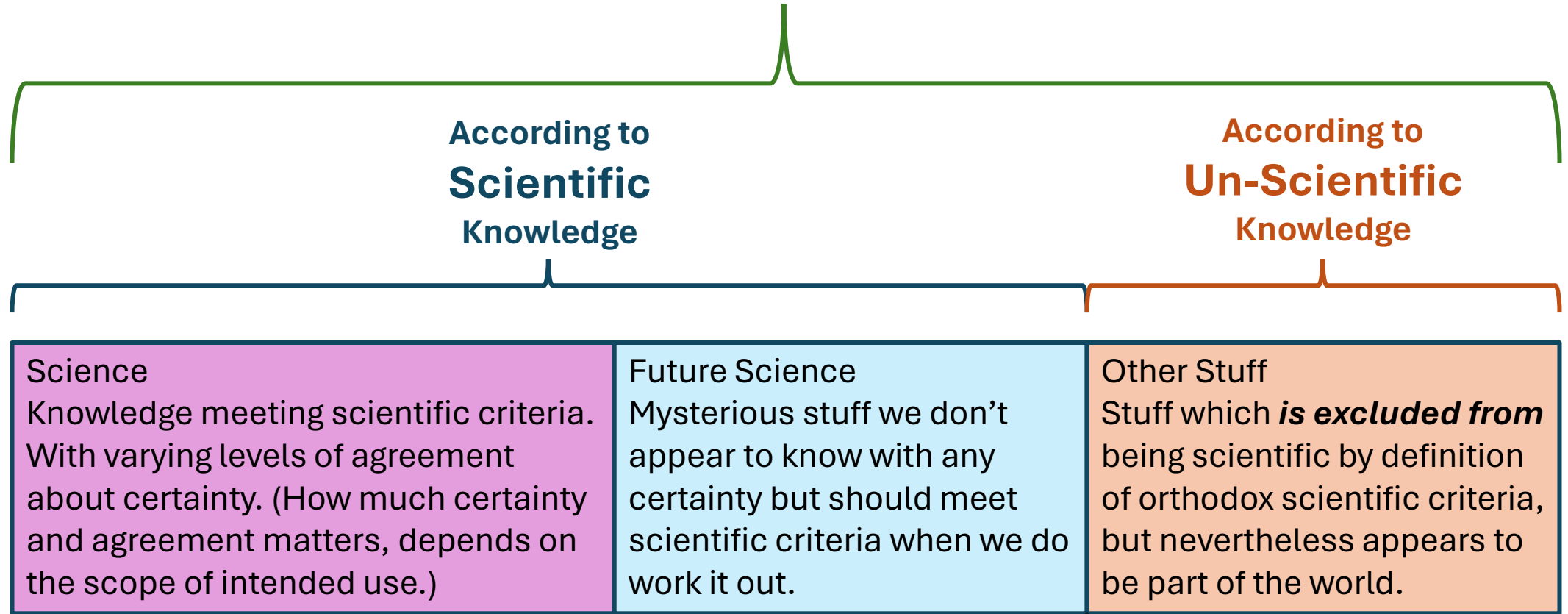
So – beyond the trivial - why is this a problem for “skeptics” when *debating* what is *true and good* in practical issues of the day? Why should *we care*?

That’s a topic as large as millennia of natural philosophy (and theology) and science.

My limited aim today is to get us to agree / believe / understand that:

“There really is more than science that matters, when it comes to everyday skeptical discourse.”

The Whole (Natural) World



This dividing line is the focus of this discussion.

(And the fact that however we shift it through (say) Kuhnian and other (r)evolutions the set to the right can never be zero.)

“There really is – always will be – more than science that matters, when it comes to everyday discourse.”

I slipped in “orthodox” for scientific criteria.

I dropped skeptical, as a given here.

Obvious questions now about “definitions and examples” ?

Some Examples?

Latest “woke” example?

University students pro-Palestine / anti-Israel “encampments” and authorities “dealing” with them. Not wrong (ie right) to show “woke” concern (for persecution of innocents). But rather than choosing woke / anti-woke sides, a better response is surely more like “*It’s complicated*”?

Recent long-running big “woke / anti-woke” example?

Transgender wars now post-Cass – Telling that Alice Dreger is now pilloried by both sides. The canary in the coal-mine back pre-2015, but *still caring* for transgender / neuro-atypical individuals in 2024. “*It’s complicated*”?

Definitions?

Science / orthodox science?

The lines on my picture are effectively my “definitions” – moveable ones – good fences for our purpose here. (*Empirically verifiable, objectively repeatable according to explanatory thesis? Science involves a lot more, but what makes it “scientific”? Real “ontological” commitment?*)

What about “discourse” itself? What makes for a good “argument”? When is a “dialogue” not a “debate”? (Rules of Engagement & Good Fences)

But - Hold your definition / definition as a coffin / definitions are not definitive – *if you may argue only on your opponent’s terms, you’ve already lost.* (Dennett, Levenchuk and many more)

It's Complicated?

Complexity as part of managing / governing / making-collective-decisions-for-the-best in human situations.

Pre-WWII

– Henry Ford & Taylorism vs Mary-Parker Follett

Post-WWII

– Management consulting – Peter Drucker

– Tom Peters “Management is more than a science”

– Systems / Operations Research / Cybernetics
(Theories, sciences(?), methods ... too many to name

21st Century

– Dave Snowden (Cynefin) current favourite ...

Consequences of Complexity?

Orthodox science needs to recognise not just many moving parts, connected by cause and effect, but many layers where “*magic happens*”. Synergies that cause emergence of objects not causally determined by (knowledge of) objects in other layers – historicity (ergodicity) too.

Sticking to a *too simplistic* interpretation of where scientific objective facts fit any given situation inevitably leads to war-like polarisation pro / anti – exaggerated in our days of “anti-social” media attention diversion. (Žizek’s “Empty Wheelbarrow”)

Yep - it's (too) complicated ...

Let's have a simple example:

Wisdom?

Ian: (A long dialogue with “friend” based on the above.)

Friend: “My real strength is my experience of relating to and working with people of diverse cultures and mindsets.”

Ian: “And would you call that science?”

Friend: “Absolutely not (*laughs*).”

Ian: “So in fact there is real, valuable *humanistic stuff* beyond science, some might call it wisdom?”

“There really is – always will be – more than science that matters, when it comes to everyday discourse.” QED?