

Harris Responds to Ian Hutchinson

Ian Hutchinson and I both reject “scientism,” the view that natural and/or physical science is the only source of real knowledge. But his response to my recent *PSCF* article (Joshua Lee Harris, “Against Restricted Methodological Naturalism,” *PSCF* 78, no. 1 (2026): 27–37)—along with his excellent book, *Monopolizing Knowledge*¹—adopts a rather different strategy from my own.

Hutchinson argues that the proper subject matter of science ought to be restricted to (a Boylean conception of) “nature,” namely, those aspects of the world that happen to be reproducible and therefore amenable to experiment or repeated observation. On this view, the term “nature” takes its meaning not in opposition to “supernatural,” but rather to those aspects of our world that are not reproducible in the same way.

So, the concerns motivating Hutchinson’s view are orthogonal to the sort of naturalism I criticize in my article. Still, I’m not sure why we should restrict the remit of science to a Boylean conception of nature. In fact, I think there are several reasons not to.

First, as Hutchinson himself points out, there are many enterprises of inquiry that we are (1) accustomed to calling “scientific,” but also (2) whose subject matter is not reproducible in the Boylean sense (e.g., certain explanatory inquiries characteristic of evolutionary biology and various social sciences).² Adopting such a criterion would therefore commit us to a revisionism about which I’m not enthusiastic.

Second, I’m not confident that Boyle’s definition of nature can be said to “undergird” the Scientific Revolution *as a whole* when it comes to the proper subject matter of science/natural philosophy—at least not if this is supposed to be a claim about the self-understanding of major luminaries. Newton thought that God could be among the explanatory posits of natural philosophy, for example.³

Finally, if what we want is the *integration* of knowledge,⁴ wouldn’t it be better to take an inclusive attitude toward the considerable diversity of methods, theories, and subject matter that are—and have been—of use to practitioners of science, contemporary and historical? Unlike Hutchinson, I see no reason to reject the (broad, generous) traditional understanding of *scientia/epistēmē* as the enterprise of seeking explanations or (better) “reasons why” in accordance with widely attested virtues such as empirical adequacy, consistency, unification, and so on.⁵ We are told that this tradition “feeds scientism,” but I’m not sure why, absent further argument. There is certainly no strictly logical reason to infer from it that science is the only source of knowledge.

Indeed, it seems to me that this venerable sense of *scientia* emboldens the very integrative project that Hutchinson (rightly, in my view) encourages us to adopt. But admittedly that would require a more expansive positive argument on my part.

Notes

¹Ian Hutchinson, *Monopolizing Knowledge: A Scientist Refutes Religion-Denying, Reason-Destroying Scientism* (Fias Publishing, 2011).

²See Hutchinson, *Monopolizing Knowledge*, 58, 74–76, 78–80.


³See Andrew Janiak, *Newton as Philosopher* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 165.

⁴See Hutchinson, *Monopolizing Knowledge*, 185–93.

⁵See Joshua Lee Harris, “Against Restricted Methodological Naturalism,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 78, no. 1 (2026): 30, <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF3-26Harris>.

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GOD & NATURE



— MAGAZINE —

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SCIENTIFIC AFFILIATION

<https://godandnature.asa3.org>
2026 #1

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