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# Scientism, Debunking Arguments and the Integrity of the Manifest Image

Filip Buekens\*<sup>†1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte, KU Leuven (HIW) – Belgium

## Abstract

Scientism sometimes manifests itself as an *objectifying* attitude towards ourselves, or actions, beliefs, intentions and moral attitudes. In the first part of the paper I discuss some revisionistic proposals derived from evolutionary explanations of cognitive and moral attitudes: psychological revisionism, explanatory revisionism, meta-ethical revisionism and justificatory revisionism. In the second part I defend principled limits to evolutionary revisionism and evolutionary debunking arguments. The argument is based on an argument which follows a dialectic explored by P.F. Strawson explored in ‘Freedom and Resentment’, and broadly based on Carnap’s distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ questions. Strawson argued that the internal point of view, in which we appear as persons, objects of reactive attitudes and creatures for whom moral interactions (including assigning responsibilities, blaming practices and desert) cannot be substituted by a conceptual scheme that abstracts away from the reactive attitudes and sees us as creatures subject only to social, biological and ultimately physical processes. A somewhat similar train of thought was developed by Donald Davidson in ‘Mental Events’ and numerous other papers: cooperation requires mutual understanding and mutual understanding requires that we see each other as more or less rational creatures. It was less noticed that both Strawson and Davidson appealed to a fundamental asymmetry: mistakes, errors, inapt judgments, and even moral failures are to be identified against a background of successful actions, correct judgments and apt reactions. (‘The abnormal cannot be the universal condition’, as Strawson put it.) On the other hand, Strawson also identified cases where it *is* legitimate to abandon the involved point of view: when persons are clearly incapacitated, we shift to a more objectifying attitude which looks at faults and breakdowns at the level of the enabling conditions of our manifest reactions. I argue that Strawson’s *model* (the two points of view, the global integrity of our moral scheme, conditions under which an investigation of neural, social or evolutionary enabling conditions of our moral scheme become relevant) can be generalized into a more global picture of how we can reconcile the manifest moral image with insights in their evolutionary enabling conditions. Science can explain patterns of abnormal or deviant attitudes relative to ecological variables, but neither *justifies nor rationally undermines* adequate manifestations of our mental economy (relative to ecological variables). Our manifest scheme is therefore compatible with scientific explanations of its enabling conditions. The upshot of the argument is that, since the normal/abnormal distinction finds its origin in the manifest image and science must rely on that distinction in order to study the underlying mechanisms that ground its manifestations, global debunking arguments must ultimately fail.

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\*Speaker

<sup>†</sup>Corresponding author: [flip.buekens@hiw.kuleuven.be](mailto:flip.buekens@hiw.kuleuven.be)