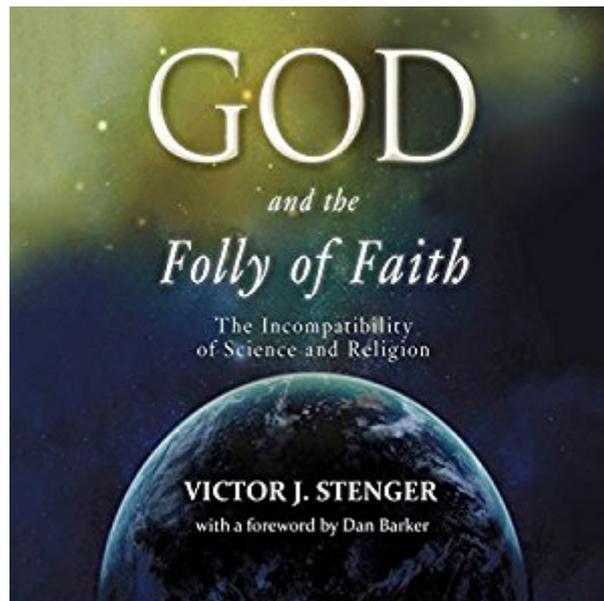


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God And The Folly Of Faith: The Incompatibility Of Science And Religion



Synopsis

A thorough and hard-hitting critique that is a must-hear for anyone interested in the interaction between religion and science. It has become the prevalent view among sociologists, historians, and some theistic scientists that religion and science have never been in serious conflict. Some even claim that Christianity was responsible for the development of science. In a sweeping historical survey that begins with ancient Greek science and proceeds through the Renaissance and Enlightenment to contemporary advances in physics and cosmology, Stenger makes a convincing case that not only is this conclusion false, but Christianity actually held back the progress of science for 1,000 years. It is significant, he notes, that the scientific revolution of the 17th century occurred only after the revolts against established ecclesiastic authorities in the Renaissance and Reformation opened up new avenues of thought. The author goes on to detail how religion and science are fundamentally incompatible in several areas: the origin of the universe and its physical parameters, the origin of complexity, holism versus reductionism, the nature of mind and consciousness, and the source of morality. In the end, Stenger is most troubled by the negative influence that organized religion often exerts on politics and society. He points out antiscientific attitudes embedded in popular religion that are being used to suppress scientific results on issues of global importance, such as overpopulation and environmental degradation. When religion fosters disrespect for science, it threatens the generations of humanity that will follow ours.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Quotes by the author: "Science flies us to the moon....religion flies us into buildings"...."The problem is that people think faith is something to be admired. In fact, faith means you believe in something for which you have no evidence"...."From the very beginning, religion has been a tool used by those in power to retain that power and keep the masses in line."Stenger takes us on a quick and lively ride. Each chapter briefly covers data that volumes have been written about. Those familiar with the history of science and familiar with the perennial conflicts between science and religion will see familiar names and will have read many of the books in his bibliography.Preface: From the beginning, all religions have been concerned with keeping the status quo. Science, on the other hand, is continuously being fine-tuned, as new evidence is found and studied. Religion is based on things supernatural that have proven to be undetectable by scientific methods. Science is based on things observable and testable. Although many have tried to demonstrate otherwise, science and religion are incompatible. Scientists who are religious, when they enter their churches, usually check their scientific hats at the door.Chapter 1 Introduction: Despite efforts to rewrite history, science was effectively squelched by religion from the last days of the Roman Empire until shortly before the Enlightenment. "All the great pioneers of science - Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton - were believers, although they hardly had a choice in the matter. Open nonbelief was nonexistent in the West at that time.

This is the 2nd book I've read by Dr. Stenger, the first being "Has Science Found God?". This book is generally very concise with its arguments and conclusions, and it gives you a lot of subject matter in a fairly short period (the text is done at page 322). It is well documented with extensive end-notes and contains a very useful bibliography and index. It gives a nice overview of the history of the origins of religion and the major developments in science and scientific thinking and knowledge. And the point is to contrast how science has simply been the most successful system of human thought ever devised, in stark contrast to the "folly" of all kinds of religions and religious thinking. In short, science works, and has demonstrated time and again, and in remarkable fashion, that it works whereas religious thinking has never demonstrated that it is any kind of reliable system for understanding how the world actually works. Stenger guides us through a history and discussion of this contrast in very clear and easy to understand language - for the most part. Those of us who are not practicing scientists will always struggle to comprehend some of the more difficult concepts, especially when one starts to get into areas of relativity, quantum mechanics, discussions of certain theories, and so on. I'm not talking about the math, which obviously nobody but practicing experts can understand (and which Stenger stays away from), but rather, even conceptual discussions in

layman's language can end up being mind-twisters. Admirably, Stenger does as good a job as anybody in making these topics understandable to the normal (but hopefully intelligent) reader.

Two hundred years ago Tom Paine defined theology as "the study of nothing." Baron d'Holbach defined it as "ignorance of the laws of nature reduced to system." Ludwig Feuerbach thought that Christianity was the "anthropomorphic projection of the ideal of the human species as the divinity." Voltaire wanted to "crush the infamous thing." Bertrand Russell thought that mysticism was "muddleheadedness brought on by spiritual intoxication." To Freud religion was an "illusion"; to Richard Dawkins a "delusion"; and to Victor Stenger a "Failed Hypothesis." Sam Harris wants to "Bring an End to Faith"; Daniel C. Dennet wants to "Break the Spell"; Christopher Hitchens tells us that "God is Not Great"; and Michael Onfray has issued an "Atheist Manifesto" Yes, the subject of God and Religion has been treated before from just about any angle you could imagine. In "God and the Folly of Faith," physicist Victor Stenger deals with the incompatibility of science and religion, which subject has itself been covered a number of times. In his Introduction he tells us that "the notion that science and religion have long been at war with each other is widespread but, as we shall see, is somewhat of an oversimplification. The warfare model is largely the consequence of two influential nineteenth century books: A History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science, by English-born American chemist John William Draper (died 1882) and, A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom, by co-founder and first president of Cornell University, Andrew Dickson White" (see my review of this book).

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