

Science and Religion: an ongoing misunderstanding

Are they in conflict?

Or are we conflicted?

Exploring the origins  and evolution of a
centuries old debate and what it says about us

Gallup Poll:

May 3-7, 2017

In U.S., Belief in Creationist View of Humans at New Low

i.e. were humans created as they are today in the last several thousand years or did they evolve over much longer periods of time?

- Between 1-20%?
- Between 20-30%?
- Between 30-40%
- 38% say God created man in present form (i.e. no evolution), lowest in 35 years
- Highest was in 1993 and 1999, at 46%

And what
about
scientists?

Gallup poll, 2009

87% accept evolution by natural processes

51% believe in some kind of higher power
or deity of which

33% believe in God, 18% in universal spirit
or higher power

For all Americans: 95% believe in higher
power; 83% in God

One of the problems with these polls is that the terms are rarely defined

- Religion or God means different things to different people
- How would you define Religion or Christianity or Science?
- Science is also not easily defined and definitions have changed somewhat over the course of the last 3 centuries (e.g. Science \neq body of knowledge)
- My definition for Science:
 - A way of perceiving physical reality through hypothesis testing and empirical observation
 - It is humanity's attempt to find order in the physical universe
- My definition for Religion:
 - A way of perceiving a reality that lies underneath or beyond physical reality
 - It is humanity's attempt to find meaning in the physical universe

from the Expositor's Bible Commentary

If anyone is in search of accurate information regarding the age of this Earth, or its relation to the sun, moon, and stars, or regarding the order in which plants and animals have appeared on it, he/she is referred to recent textbooks on astronomy, geology, and paleontology. No one for a moment dreams of referring a serious student of these subjects to the Bible as a source of information. It is not the object of the writers of Scripture to impart physical instruction or to enlarge the bounds of scientific knowledge.

What is the age of the Earth?

- not 6,000 years as determined by Bishop Ussher
- 4.55 billion years, first estimated in 1929 by Lord Rutherford as 3.4 billion years (Ga); most accurately determined by Clair Patterson et al. (1953, 1955, 1956)
game-changer
- Age of the universe?
- 13.8 billion years (1st estimate 1958; latest estimate 2015)
- Life first appeared on Earth?
- ~4 billion years ago
- Explosion of abundant life and big jump in oxygen content of atmosphere?
- ~600 million years, but life was not that easy – there were extinctions
- Permian extinction? (~90% of all life died)
- 250 million years ago
- K-T (Cretaceous-Tertiary) extinction (end of the dinosaurs)?
- 65 million years ago

Why do things
come in
twos?



Night and Day



Good and Bad



Beautiful and Ugly



Yin and Yang



Left-brain and Right-brain



Subjective and Objective



Life and Death



Truth and Lies



Two kinds of people?

Religion and Science is about 2 Greek words

Mythos and Logos

Mythos

fables, allegories, parables, myths, legends, folklore, stories, tales (Aesop)

using metaphors, similes, and analogs to deliver an important message

the truth comes from the subjective message not the literalism or historicity

associated with imagination, creativity, feelings, emotion, and invisible reality

“Not every person seems able to distinguish between the levels of human knowledge. Mythology and folklore are means by which one arrives at a rational understanding of an experience beyond words.”

- John Shelby Spong

Logos

reasoning, logic, empirical observation, pragmatism

the truth comes from the objective and logical aspects of visible reality

So are Religion and Science opposites? Yes and No.

Do we use allegories and analogs in Science? Most definitely.

Do we use reasoning and observation in Religion? Sure.

Gas That Makes a Mountain Breathe Fire Is Turning Up Around the World



A so-called eternal flame flickers between rocks at Turkey's Olympus Beydağları National Park.

“Flames of Chimera”

At the top of a mountain in southwest Turkey, the ground spits fire. Known as the Flames of Chimera, they have burned for millennia.

Local myth long held that these fires were the breath of a monster — part goat, part snake, part lion.

Today we know the fuel for this flaming mountaintop is methane gas escaping from deep within the earth.

But it doesn't come from the decay of ancient plant, algae or animal life, like fossil fuels. Instead, this gas comes from a chemical reaction inside rocks. And a series of studies published by a group of international scientists known as the Deep Carbon Observatory is showing that this source of gas is more common on our planet than previously known.

Arsenic in the Bengal Delta

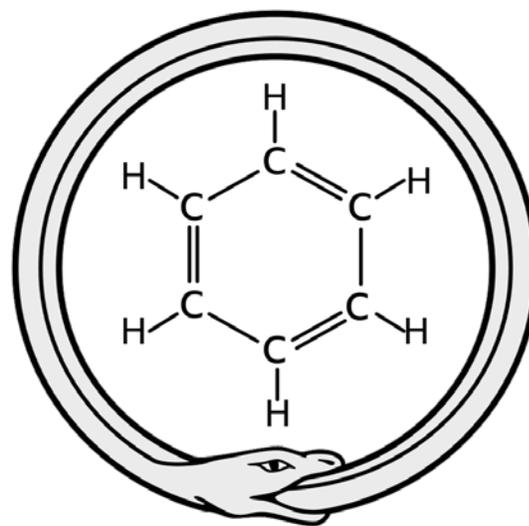
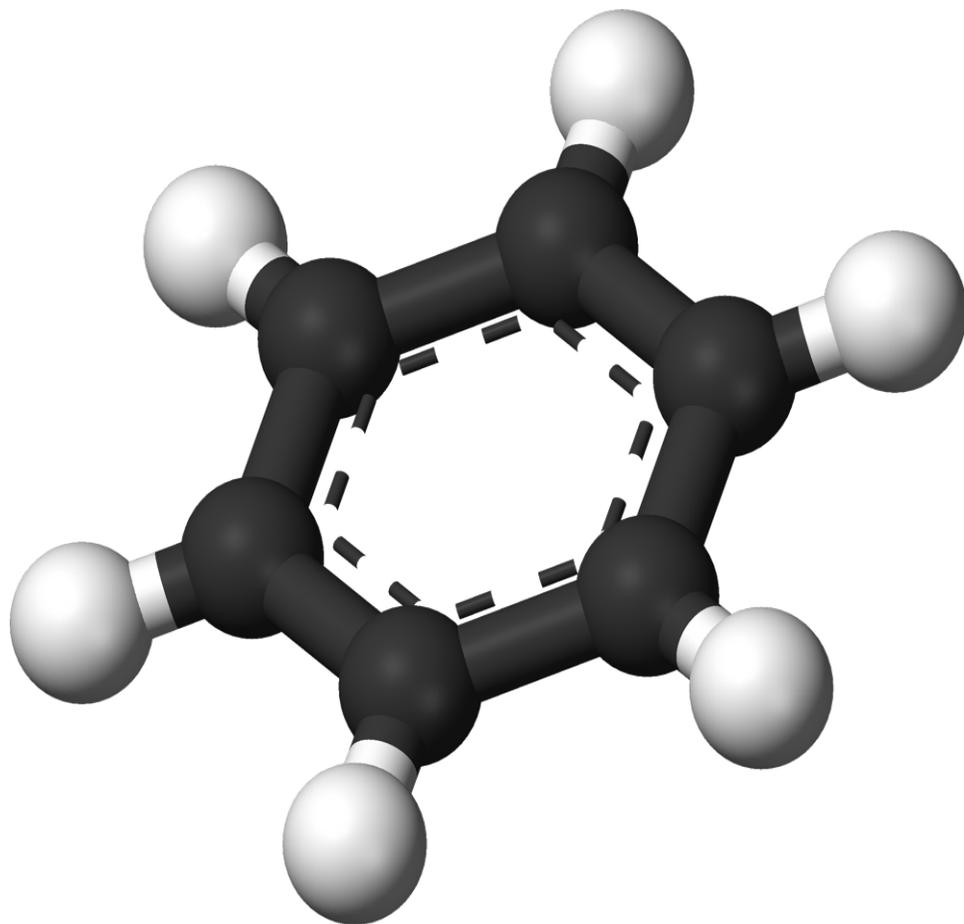
Long held belief among superstitious Bengali that the Devil lives beneath the surface,

Therefore you shouldn't dig into the subsurface for fear of disturbing him and causing misfortune in your life.

There was a devil in the Bengal Delta - arsenic. And it has poisoned and is potentially poisoning millions of people after a major program to pump groundwater for water supply began in the early 1970s.

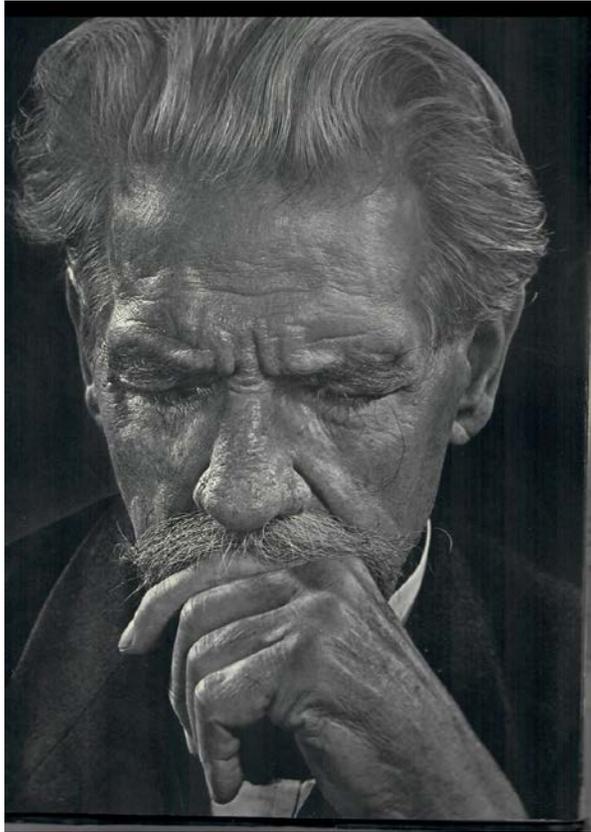
August Kekulé

German organic chemist and the snake story

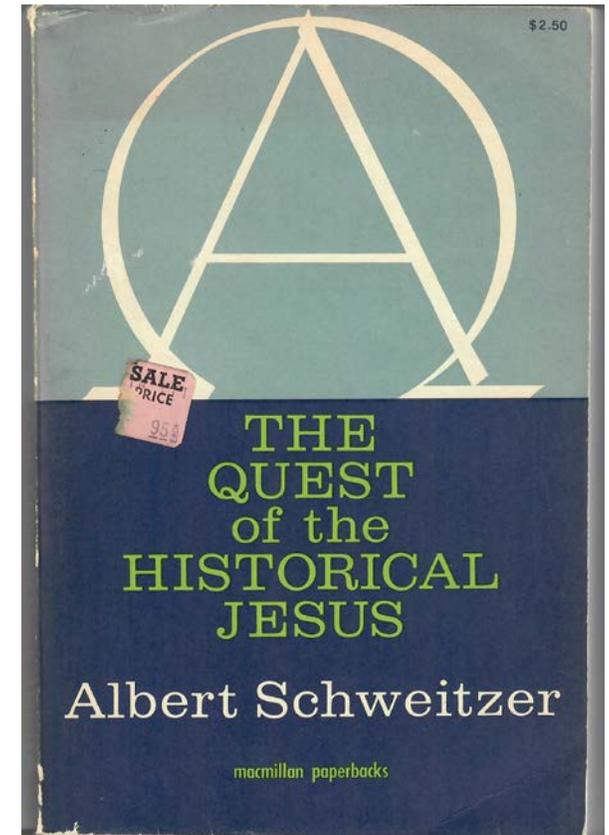
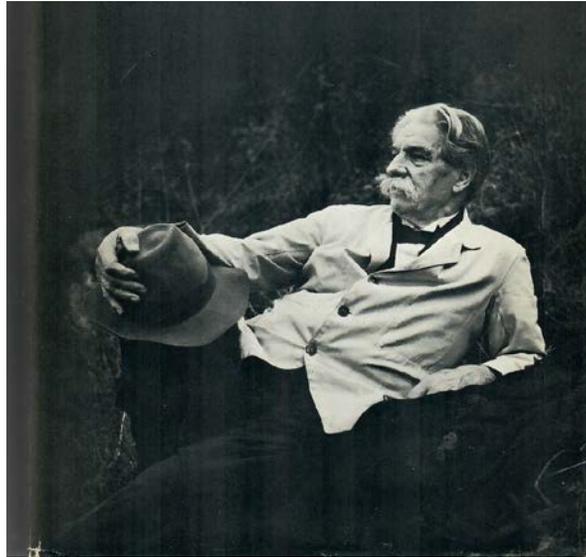


Benzene ring

Refer to notes and chronology
“IMPORTANT LANDMARKS”
[Holocene up to Higher Criticism]



The German “Higher Criticism”
summarized in Schweitzer’s book
which “rocked the theological
world” *game-changer*



The “Higher Criticism”



Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

Danish philosopher

Objective vs. Subjective Truth

Objective truth – what the scientist strives for

Subjective truth – what a person lives for

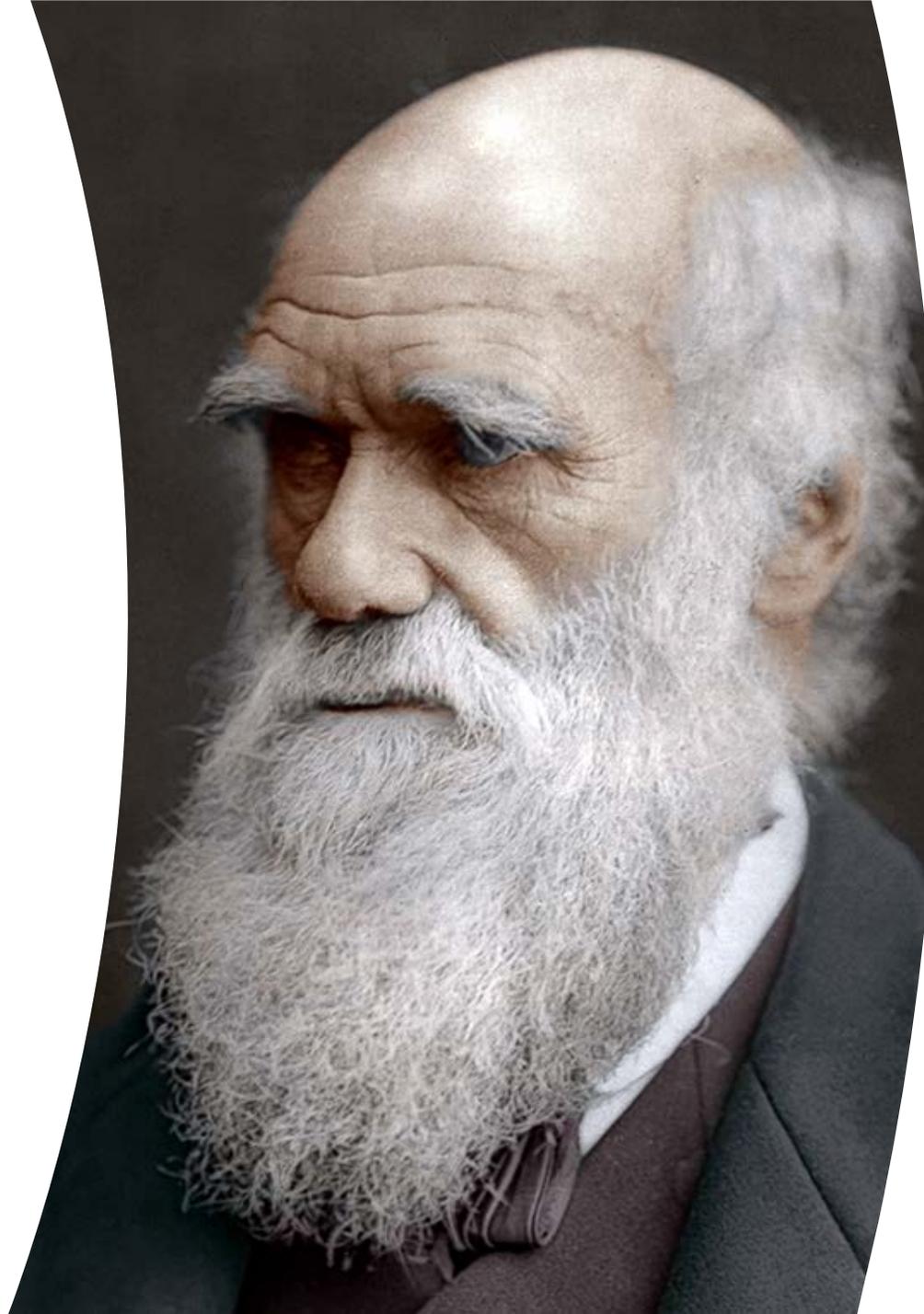
Subjective truth is not a truth of the intellect but of the whole person; strictly speaking it is not a truth that I *have*, but a truth that I *am*.

It is the relationship with reality that is important not the object of knowing.

Game-changer

And then
there was
Darwin . . .

*Serious game-
changer*

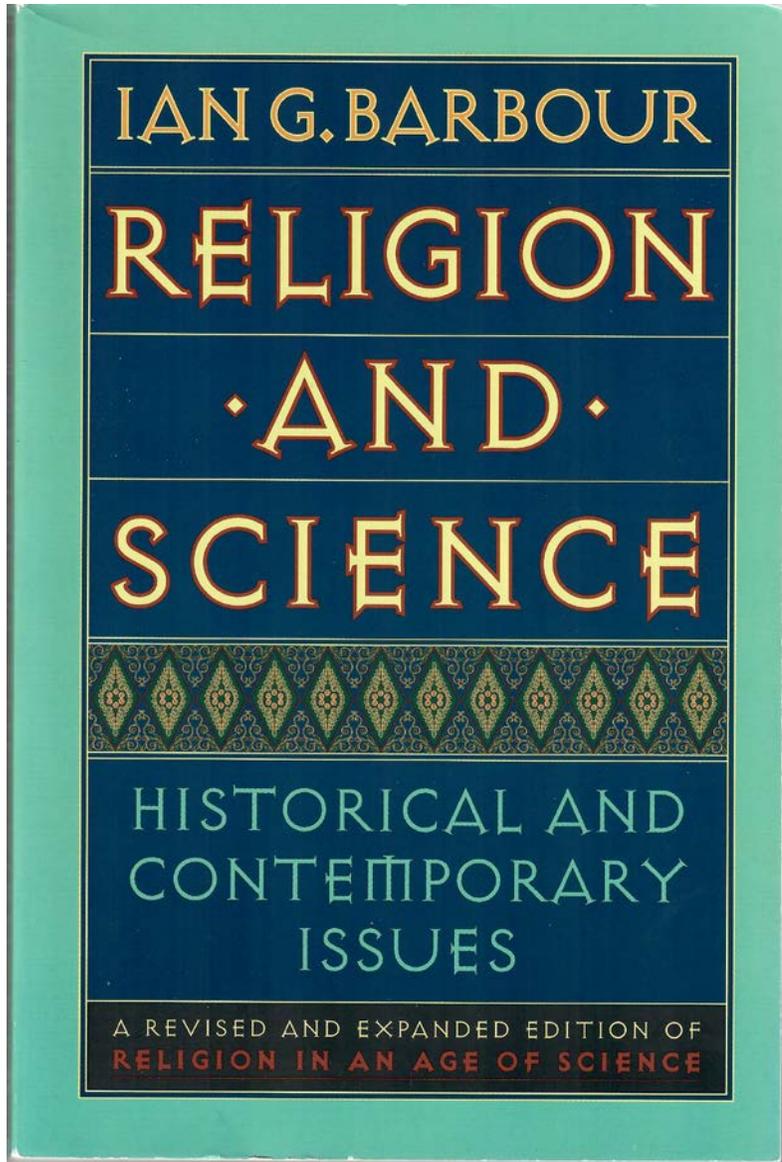


- Origin of Species (1859)
- Species are not constant over time; they evolve
- Organisms descended from common ancestors
- Evolution is gradual
- Multiplication of species leads to diversity
- Natural selection leads to diversity and drives evolution

Back to notes – starting at Darwin

Are there scientific clerics or religious scientists?

- Sure – in our congregation, for example
- Galileo, Newton, Kepler, ...
- In the history of the religion & science
 - Adam Sedgwick (1785-1873), British geologist, evangelical Anglican cleric
 - Had a few run-ins with Christian literalists
 - Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)
 - French RC priest, paleontologist/anthropologist, excommunicated from the RC church because his views were too progressive
 - John Polkinghorne (1930 - present)
 - Mathematical physicist and Anglican priest; published 26 books on science & religion
 - Ian Barbour (1923-2013)
 - Professor of physics and of religion, Carleton College, MN; published 16 books on science and religion; one was published in 14 languages

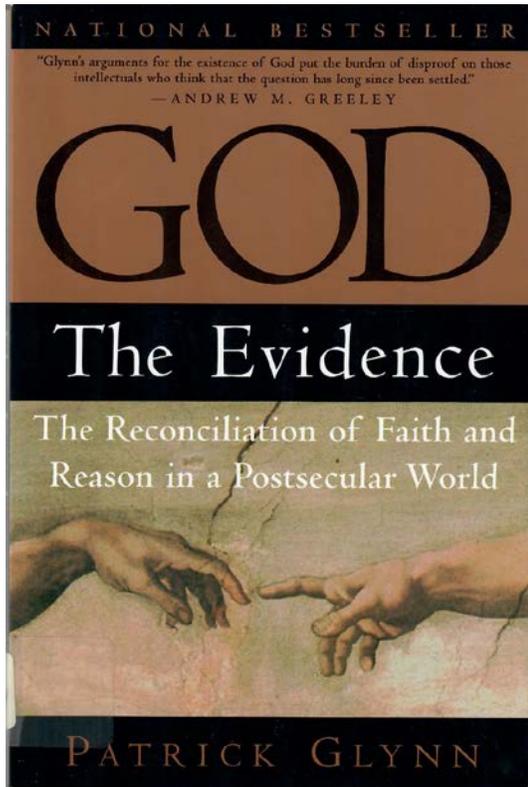


1990, revised 1997
Ian G. Barbour, Carleton College, MN
Professor of physics and religion

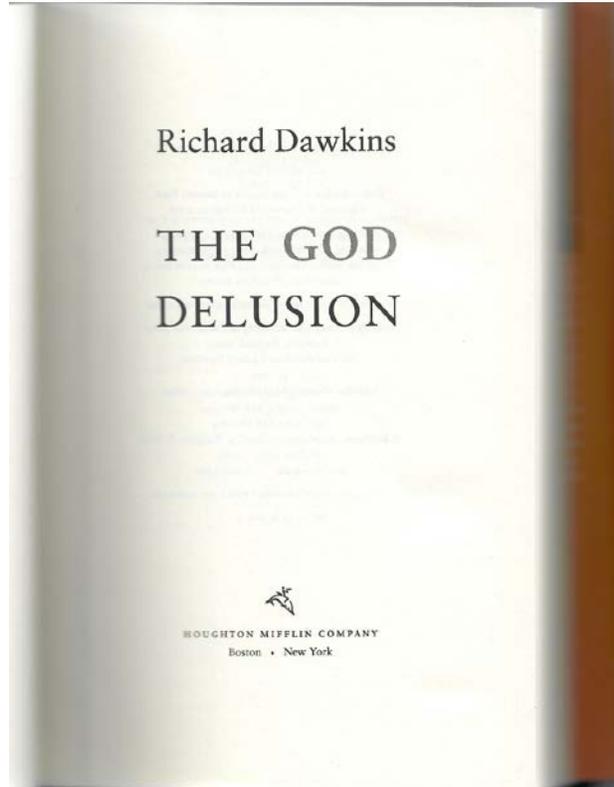
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- Covers medieval through 17th C
 - 18th C (Hume/Kant/deism – Jefferson/Franklin)
 - 19th C (Darwin)
 - Ways of relating science and religion:
 - Scientific materialism vs. Biblical literalism
 - Models and paradigms in science and religion; similarities and differences between science and religion
 - Religion and the theories of science
 - Philosophical and theological reflections

“Both the scientific materialist and the scientific creationist have failed to respect the proper boundaries of science. The former makes statements about religion as if they were part of science. The latter makes statements about science that are dictated by religions beliefs.”

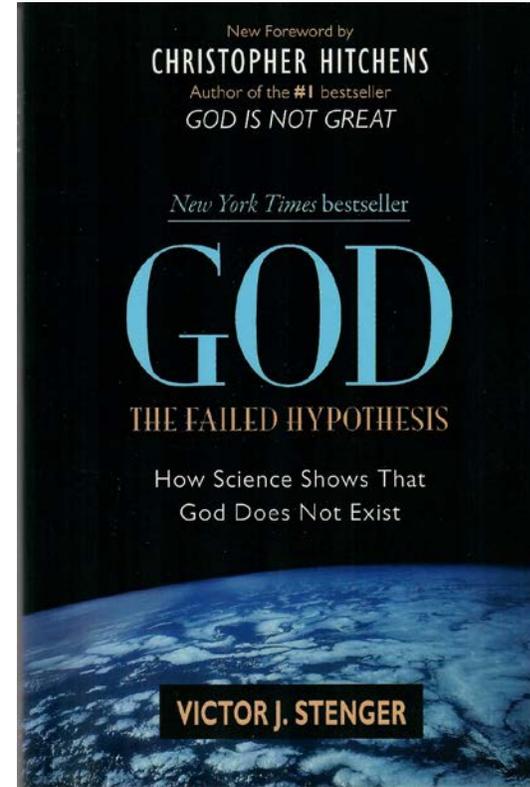
“Models, on this reading, are to be taken seriously, but not literally they are limited and inadequate ways of imagining what is not observable.” Science or religion?



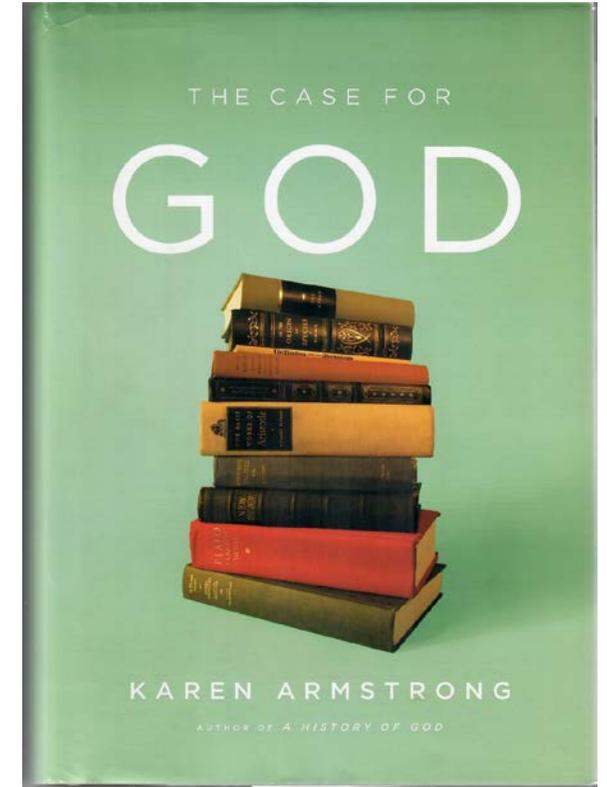
1997



2006



2008



2009

God: for and against

Christianity gets attacked by both Christians and scientists

- By Christians who misunderstand the Bible and take it literally
- By scientists and atheists who think that all Christians are fundamentalists and also misunderstand the Bible
- **CONCLUSION:** most people misunderstand the Bible

If you try to understand religion from a strictly scientific viewpoint, it doesn't work (Dawkins, Stenger, etc.). If you try to understand science from a strictly religious viewpoint, it doesn't work. If you accept the perspective that there is something of the scientist and the religious person in all of us, that we are a combination of mythos and logos, the rational and the irrational, well, there we are.

*"Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."
- Albert Einstein*

*"Life is not a problem to be solved, it is a reality to experience."
- Søren Kierkegaard*

The discussion continues



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ISSR is pleased to announce its new partnership with St Mary-le-Bow church in organising and hosting the prestigious Boyle Lectures on Science and Religion.

First lecture: Science, Religion and Ethics – Michael Reiss: Feb. 18, 2019

For much of human history, religion was presumed to be either the or a principal source of ethics. Over time, two developments challenged this. First was the establishment of the discipline of moral philosophy. Foundational texts, such as Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, and the growth of coherent, non-religious approaches to ethics, notably utilitarianism, served to marginalise the role of religion. And then, secondly, the late twentieth century saw the rapid growth of evolutionary biology with its enthusiastic presumption that biology was the source of ethics. In this lecture I begin by surveying these developments and then examine the extent to which religion is still needed for a coherent account of ethics.