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Science vs. Religion: A False Dichotomy
 by David Klinghoffer -- 11/17/2003

Article

Eight centuries ago Rabbinic sage and physician Maimonides called on his fellow Jews to strive to become educated in the sciences of his day in order to answer the challenges of religious skeptics. So the perception that secular learning and religious faith are in conflict goes back a long way—as does the countervailing opinion, held by Maimonides, that with the actual scientific facts in hand, a religious person can rebut the opponents of his faith.

The very same issue is taken up in a surge of new or forthcoming books, with the Maimonidean perspective gaining ground. Whereas in the last century many scholars considered science the very refutation of religion, the two disciplines are now attempting détente.

Did the Church Invent Science?

As Rodney Stark writes in *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformation, Science, Witch-Hunts and the End of Slavery* (Princeton University Press, June), "the claim of an inevitable and bitter warfare between religion and science has, for more than three centuries, been the primary polemical device used in the atheist attack on faith." In contrast, Stark, who's on the sociology faculty of the University of Washington, more or less credits the invention of modern science to the Catholic Church. His book argues that if you want to know how far and fast a civilization will develop, the main thing to look at is what kind of god or gods it worships. In the case of Western culture, Stark shows the advantages and disadvantages flowing from belief in the God of the Bible.

Ten years ago that would have been a most unlikely view for an academic press like Princeton to publish, the kind of view that could put a scholar's reputation at risk. But asked if he had received any flak from professorial colleagues, Stark says no. Then again, he adds, "I wouldn't get it at the university because when you out-publish your department, they tend to leave you alone."

Similarly radical is Stephen D. Unwin's *The Probability of God: A Simple Calculation that Proves the Ultimate Truth* (Crown Forum, September). With a Ph.D. in theoretical physics from the University of Manchester, Unwin, president of an Ohio consulting firm, argues that the probability of God's existence can be shown from a 200-year-old mathematical equation. He tells *PW* he sees a "pendulum effect" at work in the culture. "At one point there was a dominant perspective that scientific and religious perspectives are in competition, but then the pendulum swings."

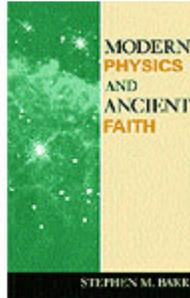
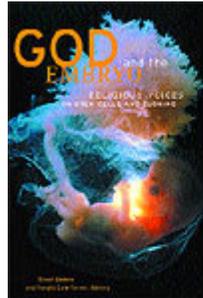


How science intersects with faith: books from Princeton, IVP and Crown Forum.

New books that reflect this intellectual evolution are appearing from academic, religion and other presses. Titles include: *The Sacred Cosmos: Christian Faith and the Challenge of Naturalism* by Terrence Nichols (Brazos, Dec.); *Creative Tension: Essays on Science and Religion* by Michael Heller (Templeton Foundation Press, Oct.); *Science and Spirituality: The Volatile Connection* by David Knight (Routledge, Nov.); *Science and the Study of God* by Alan G. Padgett (Eerdmans,); *Science and Faith* by C. John Collins (Crossway, Oct.); *Creation Out of Nothing: Its Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig. (Baker Academic, Feb. 2004); *Creation and Complexity*, edited by Christina Ledger and Stephen Pickard (Australian Theological Forum Press, Nov.); and *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos Is Designed for Discovery* by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards (Regnery, Jan. 2004).

An Intelligent Designer

At the frontier of the seeming paradigm shift is a scholarly movement grouped around the concept of "Intelligent Design," arguing that the complexity of the universe points to an origin in the purposeful design of an intelligent being—"God," for short. A leading spokesman of the movement is William A. Dembski of Baylor University. With Ph.D.s in math and philosophy from the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois, respectively, Dembski speaks with equal ease to scientific colleagues and to his fellow evangelical Christians. His new book, *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions About Intelligent Design* (InterVarsity Press, Feb. 2004), follows up on a densely argued monograph from Cambridge University Press, *The Design Inference* (1998).



Bioethics is a key focus: titles from Georgetown and Notre Dame.

Asked what forces lie behind the cultural wave that his and similar books are riding, he has a simple explanation: money, specifically from the John Templeton Foundation, established in 1987 and lavishly funded by the philanthropist Sir John Templeton. Says Dembski, "Science and religion is a field that you can make a living in today, which you couldn't do five or 10 years ago. That has a lot to do with the Templeton Foundation, which has put millions of dollars into the dialogue between religion and science, sponsoring seminars, conferences, prizes"—not least the \$1.1 million Templeton Prize.

The latter has gone in recent years to scientists such as John C. Polkinghorne, Rev. Canon Dr. Arthur Peacocke and Professor Paul Davies, who argue for the compatibility of faith and science. Polkinghorne's backlist from Yale University Press includes his 1998 book *Belief in God in an Age of Science*.

In a related category are new books reflecting the increasing attention in the scientific-academic world given to religious perspectives on ethical, especially bioethical, issues. This year Barbara Hanrahan, director of Notre Dame University Press, published books in both categories: *Human Nature and the Freedom of Public Religious Expression* by Stephen G. Post (Sept.) and *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith* by Stephen M. Barr (Mar.). Hanrahan notes that "cloning technology" in particular "has created a lot of anxiety, and the fear is that the technology will progress without values attached to it."

Other new books on religion and bioethics include: *Hindu Bioethics for the Twenty-First Century* by S. Cromwell Crawford (SUNY, Sept.); *The Jewish Ethicist* by Asher Meir; and *Mind, Body, and Judaism: The Interaction of Jewish Law with Psychology and Biology*, edited by David Shatz and Joel B. Wolowelsky (both October from Ktav Publishing).

Richard Brown, director of Georgetown University Press, says he's trying to nail down an agreement with an author for a book on Islam and bioethics. He notes that concerns about stem cell research were the instigating factor behind one of his new books, which came out in July. The book is *God and the Embryo: Religious Voices on Stem Cells and Cloning*, edited by Brent Waters and Ronald Cole-Turner—a complement to another new title from Georgetown, Aaron L. Mackler's *Introduction to Jewish and Catholic Bioethics* (Oct.). Brown comments, "I think that the idea that there's a war between religion and science is a myth."

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