

GOD, SCIENCE, AND SOCIETY

The Origin of the Universe,
Intelligent Life,
and Free Societies

by

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Series in Philosophy of Religion



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Table of contents

List of Figures	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Preface	ix
CHAPTER ONE Christianity, Rationality, and the New Atheists	1
CHAPTER TWO Science Declares the Glory of God	13
CHAPTER THREE The Anthropic Principle and Scientific Explanation	23
CHAPTER FOUR The Big Bang: The Event that Traumatized Physics	33
CHAPTER FIVE Fine-Tuning and Stellar Alchemy	45
CHAPTER SIX The Universe Engineered “Just Right” for Us	55
CHAPTER SEVEN The “Just Right” Galaxy and Solar System	65
CHAPTER EIGHT Earth: Our Privileged and Improbable Home I	77
CHAPTER NINE Earth: Our Privileged and Improbable Home II	87
CHAPTER TEN Losing God in the Multiverse	97
CHAPTER ELEVEN Finding God in the Multiverse	107
CHAPTER TWELVE DNA: God’s Book of Life	117
CHAPTER THIRTEEN Abiogenesis: The Mother of all Scientific Puzzles	129

CHAPTER FOURTEEN	
Molecules, Membranes, and Information	141
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	
Cracks in Neo-Darwinism: Micro is not Macro	153
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	
The Problems of Information, Devolution, and Time	165
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	
God of the Gaps, Intelligent Design, and Theistic Evolution	177
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN	
The Human Body: The Temple of God I	189
CHAPTER NINETEEN	
The Human Body: The Temple of God II	199
CHAPTER TWENTY	
The Brain: The Little Universe Within	209
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE	
Mind/Soul, Consciousness, and Love	219
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO	
Free Will and Determinism	231
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE	
The Problem of Evil: Atheism's Best Argument	241
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR	
Christianity, Atheism, and Morality	251
CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE	
Christianity and the Healthy, Happy, Loving Life	261
CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX	
Christianity, Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights	273
CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN	
The Modern American Assault on Christianity	283
References	293
Index	325

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Percentage of Nobel Laureates who were/are “Atheists, Agnostics, and Freethinkers” Between 1901 and 2000	8
Figure 4.1: The Timeline for the Expansion of Space from the Big Bang	40
Figure 5.1: Matter and the Carriers of the Fundamental Forces	46
Figure 5.2: The Triple-Alpha Process	53
Figure 6.1: Curved, Hyperbolic, and Flat Geographies of the Universe	60
Figure 8.1: Illustrating the Process of Plate tectonics and Volcanic Activity	82
Figure 9.1: The Nitrogen Cycle	92
Figure 12.1: The Making of a Protein	120
Figure 12.2: Protein Folding	122
Figure 12.3: The Human Cell and its Major Parts	125
Figure 13.1: Illustrating Chirality	136
Figure 14.1: Part of a Human Cell Membrane	146
Figure 15.1: Methylation and Acetylation (Histone Modification)	161
Figure 18.1: Mitosis and Meiosis	197
Figure 19.1: Organs of the Immune System	203
Figure 20.1: Major Areas of the Brain	211
Figure 20.2: Neurons, Axons, Dendrites and Synapses	213
Figure 20.3: Major Pathways of the “Stop-Go” Neurotransmitters	215

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Preface

Two quotes from eminent physicists provide a good summary of this book. The first is from Lord William Kelvin, who devised the absolute temperature scale (the Kelvin scale) and formulated the second law of thermodynamics. Kelvin wrote: "Do not be afraid of being free thinkers! If you think strongly enough, you will be forced by science to the belief in God, which is the foundation of all religion. You will find science not antagonistic but helpful to religion."¹ The second quote is from astrophysicist Paul Davies. Davies has won many awards, including the Kelvin Medal, Faraday Prize, and the Templeton Prize. He writes: "It may seem bizarre, but in my opinion science offers a surer path to God than religion... science has actually advanced to the point where what were formerly religious questions can be seriously tackled."²

These quotes are the springboard from which I dive in to answer the atheist claim that God does not exist, and Christopher Hitchens' assertion that "religion poisons everything." I counter these claims with evidence from the physical, natural, and social sciences, and from philosophy, history, and theology, highlighting signposts to God and the many benefits of Christianity to society. Such breadth comes with the problem of how to limit discussion of the details to allow for the appreciation of the whole. My goal is to provide enough detail for the reader to stand in awe at the many thousands of seemingly impossible conditions that must exist for life on this planet, while at the same time realizing that too much detail detracts from this goal. I want to provide Christians with scientific "ammunition" to battle claims against God made by a militant breed of atheists dubbed the "New Atheists." Arguments from theology will not cut it with these folks, who insist that science is on their side. The only theology that a committed atheist may grant a hearing is natural theology. Natural theology offers indirect proof of God's existence and divine purpose through the scientific observation of nature and the use of human reason.

Good natural theology requires knowledge of many different areas of science, which also poses problems. My academic disciplines are biosocial science and statistics, and my research involves exploring the genetic and neurobiological bases of behavior, particularly criminal behavior. Outside these areas, I claim no expertise. Because scientific knowledge increases exponentially, one can only claim to be an expert in specific areas of one's discipline. As science expands, the pressure for specialization in one tiny area of a discipline grows ever stronger. Every science spawns subfields that then may become separate disciplines, which in turn spawns further specialized areas of research. This increases the efficiency and speed with which new knowledge is produced, but

it carries with it the danger of intellectual isolation as fewer and fewer scientists are able to critically evaluate work done outside of their own narrow area of specialization.

The kind of extreme specialization demanded today can lead to a kind of general scientific illiteracy among scientists whose work does not overlap with adjacent sciences. For instance, to assess the degree of literacy outside their own disciplines, Hazen and Trefil asked a sample of physicists and geologists if they could explain the difference between DNA and RNA and found that only 12.5 percent could do so.³ Physicists are arguably the brightest folks on the planet, yet only 1 in 8 were able to explain this basic piece of biological information. This is obviously not due to any lack of intelligence or inquisitiveness, but rather to their strict concentration on one or two problems in their subfield. There is just not enough available time to think about non-related scientific areas, let alone the arts, humanities, and the social sciences.

Universities encourage expertise in limited areas of a scientific discipline because that's where the grant funding, promotions, and salary increases are, but it comes at a cost. Former editor of the journal *Nature*, Philip Ball, mourns the fact that there is no space for the emergence of young Einsteins today, noting that: "The gravitational waves theorist saw physics as no one else did, but if he was around today his time would be spent chasing grants or tenures."⁴ I shudder at the thought of being called an expert in anything. That would mean that I had spent my career boring holes into the minutia; sub-problems of sub-problems of sub-problems. It is great that most scientists do this because it is how science advances; I just don't care for it myself. I would rather be a jack of all trades than master of one. If I am puzzled about something I can easily go to experts at my university who have done the heavy lifting for me to get answers.

Having said all that about specialization being the norm, to write this book I have poked around in every science from physics to sociology, as well as philosophy, history, and theology. It has been a grand journey, and to undertake it I had to set aside my own research agenda (the privilege of a tenured full professor) and had two years free of teaching. I have reviewed high stacks of peer-reviewed articles and books written by top-notch scientists and philosophers, and have pestered scientists from many fields to keep myself on track. Scientific writings are highly technical; full of strange words and mathematical equations. I make every effort to explain their content in terms understandable to readers without formal scientific training, making no assumptions about prior knowledge. The nuances present in many topics were new to me when I began writing, and I have had to seek expert correction and verification of my own understanding of them.

I am not a theologian with an intimate acquaintance with the Bible. I do know enough about science and religion, however, to know that science points the

way to understanding God's creation and to how Christianity had led to a free, moral, and prosperous society, and even to science itself. This runs against the grain of radical atheist claims that science and religion are in conflict, but the great Albert Einstein disagrees, stating that "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."⁵ As we shall see, science itself (particularly physics) has forced many brilliant scientists—including Nobel Laureates—who have taken the time to think deeply about the ultimate meaning of their work, to accept God as the Creator.

It is my belief, formed from years of respectful debates with knowledgeable atheists, that Christians should acquaint themselves with a basic understanding of science, since atheists claim that it is science that has buried God. Christianity is retreating in the Western world in the face of secular attacks, and if we are to halt this retreat we must make robust arguments for our faith from science. The new Atheists view science as "God's undertaker," to steal a phrase from the brilliant, witty, and inspirational Oxford mathematician, philosopher, and theologian Dr. John Lennox, but they are egregiously wrong.

I have written with the strong conviction that anyone espousing a position on any matter be it scientific, political, or religious, should be able to stoutly defend it. I do not say this in the spirit of one-upmanship, but rather in the hope that an informed defense may convince your atheist friends to examine their position with an open mind and come to know God. Most atheists never give much thought to their position, simply believing it to be a reasonable position that puts them on the side of science. If a believer can show how reasoning to the best explanation *from science* leads to theism and not atheism, perhaps some atheists will be led to abandon their empty, hopeless, and nihilistic worldview for the love of God.

Endnotes

1. In Smith, W. 1981, pp. 307-308.
2. Davies, P. 1983, p. ix.
3. Ball, P. 2016, np.
4. Hazen, R. and Trefil, J. 2009.
5. Einstein, A. 1994, p. 49.

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Figures

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Index

A

- abduction 26-28
- Abel, David 144
- abiogenesis 129-131
- Acton, John 279
- Aczel, Amir 166
- ad infinitum* 30
- Adamantius, Origen 246
- adenine (A) 118-120, 141
- adenosine triphosphate (ATP) 82, 125, 212
- Advances in Biological Chemistry* 147
- aerosols 84
- agape* 200, 228
- agency 35, 232
- agreeableness 263
- Aldrin, Buzz 269
- Alexander, Eban 221
- alleles 119, 158, 165
- Alliance Defending Religious Freedom 2
- America's Blessings: How Religion Benefits Everyone, Including Atheists* 258
- American Atheists 4, 20
- American Family Association 2
- American Grace* 268
- American Humanist Association 279
- American Journal of Psychiatry* 262
- American Sexual Health Association 283
- amino acids 121-122
 - to proteins 132-135
- Ammar, Salem Ben 276
- amygdale 211, 215
- Anfinsen, Christian 8
- anisotropy 58
- annihilation 245, 247
- Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics* 53
- Anthropic principle 23-25, 113
- apobetics* 149
- Appolloni, Simon 34
- Aquinas, St. Thomas 241
- Aristotle 33, 110
- aseity* 30
- Association of American Physicians and Surgeons 192
- astronomical units (AUs) 68
- atheism
 - and China 256-257
 - and Darwin 155
 - and free will 231
 - and Marxism 257
 - and morality 251-254, 285
 - fundamentalist 4
 - Flew on 127
 - Gettysburg Address of 36
 - militant 4
 - Nagel on 6
 - new 2-4
 - of materialism/naturalism 20
 - rationality of 8-9
 - rock of 241
 - soft 253
 - versus Christianity 252, 261-263
- atomic theory 17, 104, 155, 231
- Australopithecus* 173
- autonomic nervous system (ANS) 215, 235

Aviezer, Nathan 179
 axon 210, 212-213, 217
 Ayala, Francisco 95

B

Bacon, Francis 9
 Bacon, Roger 17
 Barnes, Luke 24
 Bates, Elizabeth 226
 Batygin, Konstantin 73
 Bauchau, Vincent 166
 Bechly, Gunter 182
 behavioral approach system (BAS)
 214
 behavioral inhibition system (BIS)
 214
 Behe, Michael
 on blood clotting 205
 on E.coli 170
 on ID 178
 on immune system 204
 Benner, Steven 136
 Benz Müller, Christoph 110
 Bernhardt, Harold 142
 beryllium 52
 beta decay 49
 Bible
 and Luther 276
 in school 285, 287, 301
 on human life 192
 Big Bang theory 17, 36, 38
 big whack 72, 81
Biochemical Predestination 131-
 132
*Biochemistry and Molecular
 Biology Education* 143
BIO-Complexity 170
Biological Reviews 171
 BioLogos Foundation 184
 biota 93, 172
 Birney, Ewan 158

blastocyst 190-191
 blood 203-206
 clotting 214, 216
 blood-brain barrier 203
Bloomberg Businessweek 204
 B-lymphocytes (B-cells) 202
 Boettner, Loraine 238
 Bohr, Niels 113, 237
 Bonaparte, Napoleon 13
 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 177
 Boone, Pat 284
Born Atheist 4
 Boscovich, Roger 17
 bosons 49, 61
 Bragg, William 7
 brain 209-213
 and love 228-229
 and mind 219-223
 neurotransmitters 214-215
 social 216
 structures 216-217
 Bray, Gerald 246
 Brown, Arthur 78
 Bruno, Giordano 113
 Bruteau, Beatrice 7
 Bryson, Bill 124
 Buber, Martin 6
 Burger, Warren 288

C

Calvin, John 238
 Calvin, Melvin 17
 Calvinism 238, 277
 Cambrian explosion 171-173
 Campbell, David 268
 Canadian Community Health
 Survey 262
 carbon 50-53
 carbon dioxide 82-84
 carbon 12 50-52
 carbonates 133

- cardiovascular system 204, 206
Carey, Nessa 159
Carnoy, Jean- Baptiste 17
Carr, Bernard 97, 114
Carroll, Lewis 194
Carter, Brandon 23
Catholic Church
 and Galileo 16
 and health care 268
 and TE 184
 and University of Bologna 18
Cell Biology International 130
cell-soul pathway 225
cerebellum 212, 216
cerebral cortex 195, 211, 216
Chain, Ernst 149
Chalmers, David 219
Chan, Jun Yaun 183
chance and necessity 131-132, 174
chaperones 123
chemical reactivity 135
Chesterton, G.K. 10, 280
Child Trends 256
China 256
Chinese Cultural Revolution 256
chiral 134-135
chlorophyll 84, 85, 168
chloroplasts 84
Choroser, Michael 182
Christ, Jesus 238, 243, 246
Christian Legal Society (CLS) 290
Christian Legal Society v. Martinez
 290
Christian Science Church 242
Christianity
 and antisocial behavior 263
 and family 265
 and freedom 279-281
 and giving 267
 and happiness 261
 and health 266
 and higher education 29
 and human rights 273-276
 and modern assault on 283-286
 and morality 251-254
 and Nazi Germany 256-257
 and science 15-18, 21
 and societal benefits 258-259
Circumstellar Habitable Zone
 (CHZ) 68
Cleaver, Gerald 114
Cliff, Harry 62
Clinton, Bill 117
codons 121
Coke, Edward 279
Collins, Francis
 and BioLogos Foundation 184
 and Human Genome Project
 117
 and TE 186
 on DNA 126
 on God and science 18
Collins, Robin 46, 113
colostrum 201
communism 255, 257
compartmentalization 145
compatibilism 236-267
complementarity 237
Compton, Robert 118
Congressional Prayer Caucus
 Foundation 291
Congressional Record 285
conscience 252
consciousness 219-222, 225
consciousness 219-223
conservatives 9-10, 270
Constantine 275
Constantinople 276
convection 81
Copernican principle 23, 25, 94
Copernicus, Nicolaus 16
Corey, Michael 24
corotation circle 67
corpus callosum 211

Cory, Michael 51, 88
 cosmic microwave background
 (CMB)
 radiation 39, 58
 cosmological constant 34, 46, 59-
 60
 cosmology 8, 28, 31, 115
 cosyntics 148
 Couenhoven, Jesse 237
 Coyne, Jerry 199
 Craig, William Lane 30, 36-37, 61,
 257
creatio ex nihilo 33, 38
 Cremonini, Cesare 16
 Crick, Francis 20, 130
 critical value (pcrit) 58-59
 crusades 278
 Cuomo, Eddie 225
 cytokines 202
 cytoplasm 120, 125
 cytosine (C) 118, 141, 162
 cytoskeleton 125

D

D (dextro) 134
 daily spiritual experiences (DSE)
 267
 dark energy 34, 46-47
 Darwin, Charles 155, 275
Darwin's Black Box 205
 Darwin's finches 171
 Darwinism 153-154, 182-183
 Davies, Paul
 on Big Bang 35, 58
 on electromagnetism, 47, 49
 on Newton 18
 on OoL130
 Dawkins, Richard 3
 and The God Delusion 181
 on child abuse 265
 on eyes 207

 on Grand Design 113, 13
 on religion 26
 on religious wars 277
 on Replicator 131
 de Duve, Christian 131
De Genesi ad Literam 156
De Luce 35
 de Tocqueville, Alexis 280
 decay 49
 Declaration of Independence 273,
 288
 deduction 26-27
 Dembski, William 42, 77, 160, 179-
 180
 Demiurge 33
 democracy 273-276
 and Christianity 279
Democracy in America 280
 dendrites 210, 212-213, 217
 Dennett, Daniel 3, 222
 Descartes, Rene 219
 design 179-180
 Design-Centered Anthropic
 Principle
 (DCAP) 24
 determinism 231
 and free will 236-237
 soft 232-233, 238
 strict 232
 deuterium 41, 49
 deuteron 41
 dextro (D) 134
 dike 241
 Dingle, Herbert 109
 diploids 193
 Dirac, Paul 107
 DNA 117
 and RNA 142, 145
 as a language 126
 as information 221
 helicase 119
 junk 158-159, 181

methylation 161
 methyltransferase 162
 Dobzhansky, Theodosius 154
 Donoghue, John 60
 Donovan, William 256
 dopamine 214
 Doppler Effect 35
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor 243
 double helix ladder 118
 Drummond, Henry 178
 Durant, Ariel 281
 Durant, Will 281
 Dyson, Freeman 56

E

Eccles, John 22
 Eddington, Arthur 21, 38, 108
 efficient cause 25
 Einstein, Albert
 on free will and determinism
 237
 on math 109
 on science and God 15, 17, 26
 Ekstrom, Sylvia 52
 electromagnetism 47, 49
 electro-volts 51
Elk Grove Unified School District et al v. Newdow et al. 183
 elliptical galaxies 66
 Ellis, George 109
 emotion 15-16
 Encyclopedia of DNA Elements (ENCODE) 158-159
Encyclopedia of Wars 277
 endoplasmic reticulum 125
 energy density (p) 58
Engel v. Vitale 286
 English Petition of Rights 279
 enzyme 168-170
 Epicurean chaos 271
 Epicurus 231

epigenetics 160-161
 epinephrine 215
 epistasis 161
 equality 274
 ergodic 99
 eros 228
 erythropoietin 206
 establishment clause 183, 286-290
 eternal damnation 245-247
 eukaryotes 193, 196
 evil 241-242
 and free will 243
 and salvation 245-247
 and soul-making 244-245
 moral 248-249
 natural 248-249
Evolution from Space 137
 Evolution 153-154
 and language 227
 by natural selection 15
 common sense 157
 icons of 158-159
 of gaps 154, 181
 queen of problems 193-195
 theistic 177, 184-186
 versus ID 181-182
ex cathedra 98
 exon 119

F

falsifiability 105
 family 263, 265
 Farrer, T.H. 156
Father Brown 10
 fermions 61
 Fernandez, Jorge 118
 Feynman, Richard 111
 fibrin 205-206
 fight/flee/freeze system (FFFS)
 215
 Final Anthropic Principle (FAP) 25

Final Cause 25, 156
 First Amendment 2-3, 193, 273, 280
First Amendment Defense Act 2
 first cause 29-30, 37
 First Liberty Institute 2
 fitness 157, 223
 fixation 157-158
 flagellum 180
 Flew, Antony 127
 Fordyce, John 155
 Forget, Francois 78
 Four Horsemen 3
 Frankl, Viktor 247
 Free Exercise Clause 183, 286, 288
 free will 231-233
 absolute 233
 and determinism 231-232, 237-238 and evil 243
 and free mind 233-236
 and omniscience 238-239
Freedom in the World Index 273
 Freeland, Stephen 156
 freethinkers 4, 8
 Freud, Sigmund 266
 frontal lobe 216
 Fu, Bob 256
 Fudge, Edward 247
 functional magnetic resonance (fMRI) 220

G

gaia hypothesis 93
 galactic habitable zone (GHZ) 66-67
 galaxy 65-68
 Galileo 16, 117
 gametes 194, 196
 gamma rays 47, 70
 gamma-amino butyric acid 201
 general relativity theory 34, 45, 101, 108
 genes 118-119
 hox 191
 jumping 159
 junk 158, 202
 overlapping 166
 Genesis 33, 81, 91, 195, 225
 genetic mutations 157, 194
 genome 117, 159-160
 geocentric model 16
Geospiza 171
 Gervias, Will 252
 Gilbert, Scott 153
 Gillen, Alan 207
 Gitt, Werner 118, 149
 Glashow, Sheldon 111
 Glen, John 269
 glial cells 210, 217
 globular clusters 66
 gluons 48, 61
 God
 and anthropic principle 25
 and Darwinism 153-156
 and free will 283-239
 and human body 189-192, 210, 227
 and mathematics 107, 110-111
 and multiverse 113-115
 and natural evil 248-249
 and NDEs 214
 and ozone layer 78
 and problem of evil 241-245
 and science 17-19
 and TE 184-186
 and the soil 91
 as cause 29-33
 as creator of DNA 117-119, 126
 existence of 5-9, 28
 Flew on 127
 hypothesis 13-14, 27
 in government 280-281

in schools 183, 285-287, 291
 losing 97
 love 228, 246-247
 morality from 251-253
 opposition to 37
 particle 61-62
 Russell on 1
*God is not Great: Religion Poisons
 Everything* 4, 263
 Godel, Kurt 110
 God-of-the-gaps 177-180
 golgi 125
 Gonzales, Guillermo 33, 77
 Gorelick, Root 194
 Goswami, Amit 185
 Gould, Stephen Jay 171, 184, 223
 Graebner, Norman 275
 grand design 115
 Grand Inquisitor 243-244, 249
 Grassé, Pierre-Paul 183
 Graur, Dan 158
 gravity 45-47
 and big crunch 59-60
 and matter & spacetime 102-
 103, 108
 and Milky Way 65-66
 just right 78
 of moon 72
 gray matter 212
 Gray, Asa 155
 Greenstein, George 35, 53
 Greyson, Bruce 225
 Grib, Andrei 257
 Gribbin, John 50, 95
 Griffiths, Robert 8
 Grim, Brian 258
 Grim, Melissa 258
 Grosseteste, Robert 35
 Grossman, Lisa 90
 guanine (G) 118, 141
 Gutenberg, Johannes 276

H

Habermas, Jurgen 274
 Haidt, Jonathan 254
 Haldane, J.B.S. 74, 132
Hall of Shame Report 2
 Hall, Daniel 267
 Hall, Stephen 158
 Hamilton, Alexander 273, 279
 Hamilton, W.D. 195
 haploids 193
 Harris, Sam 3
 on morality 252-253, 285
 on religion and violence 277
 Harrub, Brad 206
 Hartsfield, Tom 112
 hate groups 2
 Haught, John 94, 168, 249
 Hawking, Stephen
 and eternity 37
 on Anthropic principle 24
 on free will 234
 on fundamental forces 45
 on God 29
 on imaginary time 108
 on odds of suitability for life 74
 Hayes, Carlton 267
 Heile, Frank 105
 Heisenberg uncertainty principle
 90
 heliocentric model 16
 heliosphere 79
 helium 41
 and stars 65-66, 71
 and sun 69-70
 in triple-alpha process 52
 helper T-cell 202
 Henderson, Lawrence 88
 Heng, Henry 194
 Hera 65
 Heracles 65
 Hertog, Thomas 112

Hick, John 185, 245-246
 Higgs boson 61-63
 Higgs field 61
 Higgs, Peter 61
 Higher-order automated theorem provers 110
 Hilbert, David 30
 hippocampus 211, 215
 histone 118
 acetylation 161
 acetyltransferases (HATs) 162
 deacetylases (HDACs) 162
 Hitchens, Christopher 3, 5, 254, 255, 263
 Hitchens, Peter 255
 Hitler, Adolf 257
 homeobox 191
Homo erectus 173
Homo rudolfensis 173
Homo sapiens 173, 223
 Hox genes 191
 Hoyle state 51-52
 Hoyle, Fred
 and Big Bang 38, 105
 on carbon 50, 53
 on Darwinism 153
 on ID 137
 on the beginning 36
 Hsp90 (heat shock protein 90) 172
 hubble volume 99
 Hubble, Edwin 34
 Human Genome Project 117, 160
 Human Proteome Project (HPP) 144
 human rights 273-274, 279
 Hummer, Robert 266
 Huxley, Thomas 16
 hydrogen 41
 and plants 84
 and soil 91-92
 and the galaxy 65
 and the sun 69-71

 and water 87-90
 in the forces 48
 hydrologic cycle 90
 hydrothermal vents 143
 hypothalamus 211, 214
 hypotheses 27-28
 in science 103-104

I

illegitimacy 255, 264
 imaginary time 108-110
 immune system: 200-204
 induction 26-27
 Infeld, Leopold 237
 information 147-149
 and mind 221
 and neurons 212-214
 problems 165-167
 information first hypothesis 141, 149
 Institute of Physics 79
 intelligent design (ID) 178-182
 International Christian Concern (ICC) 2
 International Conference of the Origins of Life 149
International Journal of Quantum Chemistry 131
 intron 119
 internal space 101-102
 Irenaeus 245, 247
 isotropy 58
 Irenaeus 245, 247
 irregular galaxies 66, 68,
 irreducible complexity 144, 180, 184, 186
 Islam 19, 269, 275-278

J

Jastrow, Robert 38, 94

Jeans, James 21
 Jesuits 16
 Jenkins, Alejandro 59
 Johnson, Philip 171, 183
 Jones, John 183
Journal of Family Practice 266
Journal of High Energy Physics 57
Journal of Theoretical Biology 121
 Jupiter 73-74

K

Kaku, Michio 114
 kalam cosmological argument 36
 Karamazov, Ivan 243
 Kenny, Mary 261-262
Kenosis 185
 Kenyon, Dean 131
 Kepler, Johann 16
 KKK 2, 290
Kitzmilller v. Dover Area School District 183
 Klyce, Brig 169
 Kondrashov, Alexey 194
 Koonin, Eugene 137, 146
 Korthof, Gert 138
 Krauss, Lawrence 63
 Krebs cycle 148
 Krebs, Robert 46
 Kristeva, Julia 262
 Kuhn, Joseph 181, 210
 Kurland, Charles 142

L

L (levo) 134
 Lagrange, Joseph-Louis 13
 language
 and mind 225-228
 of DNA 126, 149
 Laplace, Pierre-Simon 13

Last Universal Common Ancestor (LUCA) 132
 Laughlin, Greg 73
 Laughlin, Robert 154
Lee v. Weisman 289
 Leiter, Brian 3
 Lemaitre, Georges 34
 Lennox, John 14
 on information first hypothesis 149
 on fruit flies 170
 on law and agency 103
 on meaning of universe 63
 Leonard Award 95
 Leslie, John 24
 Levo (L) 134
 Liberals 10, 270
 Levinton, Jeffrey 172, 195
 Lewis, Bernard 278
 Lewis, C.S. 244, 251-252
 Lewontin, Richard 5, 14, 98, 154
 Libet, Benjamin 234
 light year 66-67, 106, 132
 light elements 40-41, 77
 Lightman, Alan 98
 lightning 93, 132
 limbic system 200, 211, 215
 Lincoln, Abe 285
 Linde, Andrei 24, 97
 lithium 41, 70
 Lipton, Peter 27
 lithosphere 80-81
 Loeb, Abraham 58
 Long, Kenneth 224
 love
 agape 200, 220
 as top-down causation 20, 220
 mother 228-229
 of God 246, 275
 Lovelock, James 93
 LUCA (Last Universal Common Ancestor) 132

- Lucretius 231
 luminosity 71-72
 Luther, Martin 276
 Lutheranism 277
 lymphocytes 202-203
 lysosomes 125
- ## M
- Ma, Zeyang 159
 macroevolution
 and speciation 171-173
 and the problem of time 168
 defined 157
 in curriculum 182-183
 Laughlin on 154
 magnetic field 78-79, 81
 macrophages 124, 202-203
 Maddox, John 37
 Madison, James 286
 Magnus, Albertus 18, 186
 Malo, Antonio 244
 Manson, Neil 114
 Margulis, Lynn 145
 Markham, Ian 4
 Marks, Joel 253
 Marx, Karl 254, 266, 291
 Mars 73-74
 mass (m) 62
 and forces 48-49
 and gravity 45-46, 59
 bare 62
 mountain 80
 of Jupiter 73
 of stars 71
 of Sun 70
 planetary 78
 material 104, 148
 material cause 19, 25
 matter 21, 31
 and anti-matter 40
 and Big Bang 40
 atomic theory of 104
 density 57-59
 origin of 129-130
 materialism 19
 and abiogenesis 129
 and Earth-Moon 73
 and mind 219, 222
 Bechly on 182
 methodological 20
 Politizer on 37
 mathematics certainty of 26-27
 and imagination 109
 as ultimate reality 10
 in science 107-108
Mathematics of Evolution 153
 Mercury 69
 Mayr, Ernst 173
 McCombs, Charles 136
 McGilchrist, Iain 235
 McIntosh, Andrew 144
 McLean, Euan 62
 McNichol, Jesse 143
 meiosis 195-198
 Meitner, Lise 63
 Mendel, Gregor 17, 117
 Mendeleev, Dmitri 104
 messenger RNA (mRNA) 119
 metabolism first hypothesis 144-146
 metabolism 130
 methane 93, 132
 Meyer, Stephen 28, 166, 180
 microevolution 154, 157, 195
 Milky Way Galaxy 65-66
 Miller, Kenneth 184
 Miller, Stanley 132, 145
 Millikan, Robert 222
Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False 181
 mind/brain dualism 219

miracle 249
 mitochondria 125
 mitosis 195-197
 Mlodinow, Leonard 45
 modal realism theory 101
 model-dependent realism 101
 molecular systematic 174
 monomers 133-135
 Montague, Ashley 200
 Monton, Bradley 180
 moon 72-73
 morality
 and Christianity 251-253
 atheist 254
 decline in 264
 in form of love 267
 in schools 285
 mentalism 21
 Morrison, Philip 38
 mountains 80-81
 M-theory 101-102
 and math 107, 109, 111-113
 as a true theory 105-106
 Mua, Kelly 258
 Muhammad 269, 278
 Muller, Gerd 168
 multiverse 30
 and cosmological constant 60
 and M theory 101-102
 and panspermia 136-137
 critics 107-111
 losing God in 97-98
 models 99-101
 possibility of existence 113-115
 Murphy's Law 56-57
 Murray O'Hair, Madalyn 20
 mutation 121, 170-172
 and evolution 194, 218
 myelin 210
 myelin sheath 212
 myelination 217

N

Nagel, Thomas 6, 181
 National Academy of Sciences
 (NAS) 171
 National Aeronautics and Space
 Administration (NASA) 39
 National Socialist Worker's Party
 (NAZI) 257
 natural laws 19, 249
 nebular cloud 69
 natural selection 154-156
 evolution by 157-158
 natural theology 7, 177
 naturalism 19-21
 Nazi Germany 256
 near-death experiences (NDEs)
 224
 nebular cloud 69
 necessity 165, 179
 Nernst, Walter 38
 neural plate 210
 neutrons 40-41, 48-49
 Neuronal network simulator
 software (NEST) 213
 neurons 210, 212-214
New York Times 5, 39, 123
 Newton, Sir Isaac 18
 Nicolelis, Miguel 214
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 253
 nihilism 252, 262
 Nilsson, N. Heribert 171
 Ninety-Five Theses 276
 NIODA (non-interventionist
 objective divine action) 185
 nitrates 92-93
 nitrogen 91-93
 nucleotides 118, 120-121, 142, 166
 norepinephrine 215, 233
 nuclear pore complex 120
 nuclear force 40, 48-49
 nucleosynthesis 36, 41

nucleus 119, 125
 nucleus accumbens 201, 214
 Nuland, Sherwin 204
 null hypothesis 27-28

O

oogonia 196
 omega 59, 154
 Oparin, Alexander 132
 orbital eccentricity 68
 orbital resonance 74
 O-region (observable region of the universe) 137
 Orgel, Leslie 146
 origin of life (OoL) 15, 129-130
 Hoyle on 137-138
 premise of 144
 and information 147-148
 Orion Arm 67
 oxytocin 201
 oxidation 93
 ozone 78, 133

P

Page, Don 108, 249
 Pagels, Heinz 25
 Paleo, Bruno 110
 panspermia 136-137
 pantheism 178
 Pascal, Blaise 262
 Patriarch Kirill I 255
 Patterson, Collin 171
 Peace of Augsburg 277
 Peace of Westphalia 277
 Penrose, Roger
 on brain 209
 on mathematical truth 107
 on M-theory 111
 on phase-space 57, 99
Pensees 262

Penzias, Arno 39
 Pereira, Contzen 225
 Perez, Gilad 59
 Perfect accident 143
 Period of heavy bombardment 74
 periodic table 50, 104
 Perseus 67
 Petroski, Henry 199
 Pew Research Center 1, 9, 262, 269
 phase space 56-57
 phenotypes 157
 phosphorus 83
 photons 41
 and light 206, 242
 of the sun 70
 virtual 47
 photosynthesis 70, 83-86
 Pilate, Pontius 278
 planck time 40, 42
 Planinić, Josip 25
 Plank, Max 19
 plasmin 206
 plate tectonics 80-81
 platelets 205
 Platonism 101
 plurality of worlds 113
 Politizer, Georges 37
 Polkinghorne, John 115, 185, 223
 polymerization 133-134
 polymers 141, 133
 polymorphisms 119, 161
 Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers 268
 positron 40
 pragmatics 149
 Pratt, Wallace 81
 predictive accuracy 105
 predictive scope 105
 prefrontal cortex (PFC) 215-217
 presynaptic knob 212-213
Primer 285

primeval atom 34
 primordial soup 132
 principle of complementarity 237
 principle of entropy 57
 principle of mediocrity 23
 principle of uncertainty 232
 probability 42-43; 231
 boundary 42-43, 137
 problem of evil 241-243
 prokaryotes 193
 Prost, Addy 145
 protein folding 121-123
 proteome 144
 Protestant Reformation 276-277
 protons 40-41, 48-49, 104
 Putin, Vladimir 255
 Putnam, Robert 268

Q

quantum entanglement 225
 quantum mechanics 21, 84, 101,
 185
 quantum theory 61, 237
 Quaternary Triplet Code 121
 queen of problems 193, 219
 Qur'an 278

R

R group 134
 racemic 134
 Radford, Tim 103
 radiation 39-41
 deadly 66-68
 particle 78
 ultraviolet (UV) 134
 rationalism 26
 Raymo, Chet 199
 reason 15, 18
 Red Queen hypothesis 194-195
 Reddy, Shashi 225

Rees, Martin 48, 50
 Reeves, Colin 154
 registered student organization
 (RSO) 290
 Rehnquist, William 288
 relational virtues 266
Religion and Natural Science 19
 Religious Landscape Study 1
 religious pluralism 277
 Renaissance 276
 replication 137
 DNA 157, 162
 reproductive capacity 130
Republic 291
 Republicans 9-10, 269-270
 resonance 51-53
 ribosomal RNA (rRNA) 121
 ribosomes 121, 125
 ribozyme replicase 142
 Richards, Jay 33, 77
 Ridley, Mark 197
 RNA polymerase (RNAP) 119-120,
 162
 RNA- world hypothesis 141-143
 rods 207
 Ross, Hugh
 on exponential numbers 42
 on galaxies 66, 68
 on water 88
 Rovelli, Carlo 112
 Russell, Bertrand 1, 263
 Russell, Colin 17
 Russell, Robert 185
 Russia 255-257

S

Sagan, Carl 5, 50, 77
 Sagittarius 67
Salon 62
 Sandage, Alan 208
 Sanford, John 169

- Santa Fe Independent School District v. Jane Doe* 289
- Sartre, J.P. 231
- Saturn 73-74
- Sayers, Dorothy 242
- Schmidt, Alvin 267
- Schopenhauer, Arthur 233
- Schroeder, Gerald 193
- Schulzke, Marcus 3-4
- Schumacher, Robin 277
- science 5, 7
 and atheism 8
 and Christianity 15-16, 21-22
 and mathematics 107, 111
 Christian origin of 17-19
 explanation in 26-28
 hypotheses in 103-105, 177-178
 settled 153
 supporting God 13-15
- Science* 149
- Scientific American* 101, 158
- scientific method 15, 17, 112
- Scott, Mark 247
- secondary causes 115, 156
- secularism 287
- Seiberg, Nathan 74
- semantics 149
- serotonin 214-215
- Serrate 159
- sexual reproduction 190, 193-5
- sexually transmitted disease (STD)
 283-285
- Shalev, Baruch 8
- Shapiro, Robert 142
- sharia law 274
- Sherrington, Charles 191, 193
- Shostak, Seth 103
- Signature in the Cell* 180
- silicon 50
- Silva, Ignacio 185
- Silver, Christopher 263
- simplicity 105
- singularity 34
- Skinner, B.F. 231
- slavery 275
- Slick, Matt 269
- Smalley, Richard 114
- Smith, Quentin 36
- socialism 243, 254, 257, 274
- soil 91-93
- Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr 255
- Southern Poverty Law Center
 (SPLC) 2
- SOX9 159
- special providence 185
- speciation 171
- sperm 190, 196
- Sperry, Roger 209
- SRY gene (sex-determining region
 of the Y) 191
- St. Augustine 156, 189, 237
- stagnant lid 81
- standard Model 61-62
- Stark, Rodney 19, 258
- Steinman, Gary 131
- stellar nucleosynthesis 41, 53, 138
- Stenger, Victor 269
- Steno, Nicolas 17
- Stephan, Alfred 276
- Stevens, John 207
- stomata 83
- Stone v. Graham* 287
- Strauss, Michael 62
- string theory 101-102, 111-112
- strings 101
- Strong Anthropic Principle (SAP)
 24
- strong force 48, 52
- structures (primary, secondary,
 tertiary, quaternary) 122-123
- subduction 80
- subjectivism 15
- Substance Abuse and Mental
 Health Services 283

substantia nigra (SN) 214
 sun 69-71, 79
 Supernova Cosmology Project 59
 supernovae explosions 49, 66, 79
 superposition 84, 100
 Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) 285
 survival of the fittest 153
 Swinburne, Richard 113, 248
 Swindell, Rick 85
 synaptic gap 212-213
 synaptogenesis 216-217, 228

T

Taylor, Jeffrey 62
 Taylor, D.J. 268
 Tegmark, Max 99, 108
 Tegmark's multiverse levels 99-101, 112
 teleologist 156
 Ten Commandments 284, 287
 tertiary stage 122-123
 Tertullian, Quintus 18
 thalamus 211
The Astonishing Hypothesis 20
The Brothers Karamazov 243
The Closing of the Modern Mind 254
The Core 78-79
The Demon-Haunted World 5
The Gavel and Sickle 183
The God Delusion 181
The Grand Design 102
The Guardian 103, 113
The Intelligent Universe 138
 The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) 61
The Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People are Proving the Afterlife 224
The Origin of Species 155-156, 172
The Rage Against God 255
The Scientific Dissent from Darwinism 154
The Star-Spangled Banner 286
 Theia 72
 theism
 and information first hypothesis 41
 vs science 17, 19
 theistic evolution (TE) 184
 theodicy 241
 Augustinian 245
 Hick 247
 Irenean 245, 248
 Theorem 28 149
Theoretical Biology and Medical Modelling 169
 theories 103-105
theos 241
 thermodynamic equilibrium 37, 100, 134
 thermodynamics
 1st law 31
 2nd law 37, 57, 99; 134, 135, 144-145, 147
 Thirty Years War 277
 Thomson, George P. 15
 Thomson, Joseph J. 178
 thymine (T) 118-119, 162
 tidal lock 69
 tides 73
 Tipler, Frank 24, 115
 T-lymphocytes (T-cells) 202
 Todd, Scott 183
 top-down causation 20, 147, 221
 Townes, Charles 182
 transcription 119, 121, 162
 Transfer RNA (tRNA) 121
 translation 12, 121, 126, 137
 transposons 159
Treatise on Celestial Mechanics 13
 Treaty of Augsburg 277

tree of life 173-174
 triple-alpha process 52-53
 Tzu, Sun 4

U

Übermensch 253
UCBerkley News 182
 ultimate cause 156
 United Nations Declaration of
 Human Rights 274
 universal information (UI) 148
 universal salvation 245-247
 University of California Hastings
 College 290
 uracil (U) 120, 162
 Urey, Harold 132
 US Department of Health and
 Human Services 291

V

vacuoles 125
 vacuum energy 46-47
 ventral tegmental area (VTA) 214
 Venus 68-69
 vesicles 212
 Viilenkin, Alexander 36
 virtual photons 47
 volcanoes 83-85
 Voltaire 251
 Voyager I 77

W

Wald, George 131
 Walker, Sara Imari 147
Wall Street Journal 9
Wallace v. Jaffree 287
 Walton, Ernest 63
 Ward, Keith 115
 Washington, George 280-281, 288

water 87-90
 Weak Anthropic Principle (WAP)
 23-24
 weak force 49
 Weber, Max 232
 Webster, Noah 285
 Wei-Hass, Maya 83
 Weinberg, Steven 60, 113
 Weiqun, Zhu 256
 Weisman, Deborah 289
 Wells, Jonathan 159
What Americans Really Believe? 9
 white matter 212
 Whittaker, Sir Edmund 31
Why Tolerate Religion? 3
 Wickramasinghe, Chandra 137-
 138
 Wigner, Eugene 222
 Wiker, Benjamin 127
 Wilberforce, Samuel 16
 Wilcox, Bradford 266
 Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy
 Probe (WMAP) 58
 Williams, George 165
 Williams, Mark 90
 wind 71-72
 Winthrop, Robert 279
 Woit, Peter 111
 Wood, Bernard 153

X

Xu, Qingbo 256

Y

Yang, Fenggang 256
 yellow dwarf 71
 Yockey, Hubert 126, 148, 166

Z

Zalasiewicz, Jan 90

Zedong, Mao 256

Zeus 29, 65, 177

Ziegler Hemingway, Mollie 9

zircon 133

zygote 190-193

