

Atheism: From the University to Society

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Relevant Quotes

Back cover of: Victor J. Stenger, *Has Science Found God? The Latest Results in the Search for Purpose in the Universe*, Prometheus Books, 2003.

Has science, indeed, found God? Vic Stenger serves no god but the truth of the matter in showing that, at the start of the twenty-first century, science and most scientists find the theistic hypothesis even less necessary than it ever was. Responding with meticulous thoroughness to the hype of journalists, the hucksterism of theocratic spin-doctors, and the wishful thinking of a few atypical scientists desperate to salvage a remnant of traditional theology, Stenger courageously reminds us that science endorses no other option than to come to terms with a universe that owes us no favors and refuses to let us cheat reality.

Norman Levitt, Professor of Mathematics, Rutgers University, and author of *Prometheus Bedeviled: Science and the Contradictions of Contemporary Culture*.

[William Lane Craig, <http://www.apologeticsnetwork.org/william-craig.htm>]

... the Gospel is never heard in isolation. It is always heard against the background of the cultural milieu in which one lives. A person raised in a cultural milieu in which Christianity is still seen as an intellectually viable option will display an openness to the Gospel which a person who is secularized will not. For the secular person you may as well tell him to believe in fairies or leprechauns as in Jesus Christ! Or, to give a more realistic illustration, it is like a devotee of the Hare Krishna movement approaching you on the street and inviting you to believe in Krishna. Such an invitation strikes us as bizarre, freakish, even amusing. But to a person on the streets of Bombay, such an invitation would, I assume, appear quite reasonable and cause for reflection. I fear that evangelicals appear almost as weird to persons on the streets of Bonn, Stockholm, or Paris as do the devotees of Krishna.

Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism" *Philo* 4/2(2001)

By the second half of the twentieth century, universities ... had been become in the main secularized. The standard ... position in each field...assumed or involved arguments for a naturalist world-view; departments of theology or religion aimed to understand the meaning and origins of religious writings, not to develop arguments against naturalism. Analytic philosophers ... treated theism as an anti-realist or non-cognitivist world-view, requiring the reality, not of a deity, but merely of emotive expressions or certain "forms of life"....

This is not to say that none of the scholars in the various academic fields were [sic] realist theists in their “private lives”; but realist theists, for the most part, excluded their theism from their publications and teaching, in large part because theism ...was mainly considered to have such a low epistemic status that it did not meet the standards of an “academically respectable” position to hold. *** The secularization of mainstream academia began to quickly unravel upon the publication of Plantinga’s influential book, *God and Other Minds*, in 1967. It became apparent to the philosophical profession that this book displayed that realist theists were not outmatched by naturalists in terms of the most valued standards of analytic philosophy: conceptual precision, rigor of argumentation, technical erudition, and an in-depth defense of an original world-view. This book, followed seven years later by Plantinga’s even more impressive book, *The Nature of Necessity*, made it manifest that a realist theist was writing at the highest qualitative level of analytic philosophy, on the same playing field as Carnap, Russell, Moore, Grünbaum, and other naturalists. ...

Naturalists passively watched as realist versions of theism, most influenced by Plantinga’s writings, began to sweep through the philosophical community, until today perhaps one-quarter or one-third of philosophy professors are theists, with most being orthodox Christians. Although many theists do not work in the area of the philosophy of religion, so many of them do work in this area that there are now over five philosophy journals devoted to theism or the philosophy of religion, such as *Faith and Philosophy*, *Religious Studies*, *International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion*, *Sophia*, *Philosophia Christi*, etc. *Philosophia Christi* began in the late 1990s and already is overflowing with submissions from leading philosophers.

...theists in other fields tend to compartmentalize their theistic beliefs from their scholarly work; they rarely assume and never argue for theism in their scholarly work. If they did, they would be committing academic suicide or, more exactly, their articles would quickly be rejected.... But in philosophy, it became, almost overnight, “academically respectable” to argue for theism, making philosophy a favored field of entry for the most intelligent and talented theists entering academia today. A count would show that in Oxford University Press’ 2000-2001 catalogue, there are 96 recently published books on the philosophy of religion By contrast, there are 28 books ...on the philosophy of language, 23 on epistemology (including religious epistemology, such as Plantinga’s *Warranted Christian Belief*), 14 on metaphysics, [etc.]....

God is not “dead” in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments.

J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 7.

False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root.

[The scholarly method of procedure] ... is based simply upon a profound belief in the pervasiveness of ideas. What is to-day matter of academic speculation begins to-morrow to move armies and pull down empires. In that second stage, it has gone too far to be combated; the time to stop it was when it was still a matter of impassionate debate. So as Christians we should try to mould the thought of the world in such a way as to make the acceptance of Christianity something more than a logical absurdity.

Victor J. Stenger, *Has Science Found God? The Latest Results in the Search for Purpose in the Universe*, Prometheus Books, 2003.

End of preface:

Finally, I hope the reader will not come away thinking that I am just a cold, bitter materialist nihilist who sees no meaning in life. In fact, I am a happy man who has found much meaning in my life, in work and family, in art and music, in sports and travel, and, indeed, in almost everything the world has to offer, except fantasy and mythology. Science is a big part of my life, but not the only part. Someday I may write about some of the other parts, but here I will stick to the science.

Bertrand Russell, *Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Random House, 1927, p. 3.

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins---all these things, are so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.