

# The Emptiness of Theology

Richard Dawkins

A dismally unctuous editorial in the British newspaper the *Independent* recently asked for a reconciliation between science and “theology.” It remarked that “People want to know as much as possible about their origins.” I certainly hope they do, but what on earth makes one think that theology has anything useful to say on the subject?

Science is responsible for the following knowledge about our origins. We know approximately when the universe began and why it is largely hydrogen. We know why stars form and what happens in their interiors to convert hydrogen to the other elements and hence give birth to chemistry in a world of physics. We know the fundamental principles of how a world of chemistry can become biology through the arising of self-replicating molecules. We know how the principle of self-replication gives rise, through Darwinian selection, to all life, including humans.

It is science and science alone that has given us this knowledge and given it, moreover, in fascinating, over-

whelming, mutually confirming detail. On every one of these questions theology has held a view that has been conclusively proved wrong. Science has eradicated smallpox, can immunize against most previously deadly viruses, can kill most previously deadly bacteria. Theology has done nothing but talk of pestilence as the wages of sin. Science can predict when a particular comet will reappear and, to the second, when the next eclipse will appear. Science has put men on the moon and hurtled reconnaissance rockets around Saturn and Jupiter. Science can tell you the age of a particular fossil and that the Turin Shroud is a medieval fake. Science knows the precise DNA instructions of

several viruses and will, in the lifetime of many present readers, do the same for the human genome.

What has theology ever said that is of the smallest use to anybody? When has theology ever said anything that is demonstrably true and is not obvious? I have listened to theologians, read them, debated against them. I have never heard any of them ever say anything of the smallest use, anything that was not either platitudinously obvious or downright false. If all the achievements of scientists were wiped out tomorrow, there would be no doctors but witch doctors, no transport faster than horses, no computers, no printed books, no agriculture beyond subsistence peasant farming. If all the achievements of theologians were wiped out tomorrow, would anyone notice the smallest difference? Even the bad achievements of scientists, the bombs, and sonar-guided whaling vessels *work!* The achievements of theologians don't do anything, don't affect anything, don't mean anything. What makes anyone think that “theology” is a subject at all? **FI**

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