

do not believe in a personal god whereas Christians, Jews, and Muslims do.

Do you want to impress others with your profundity? Check out the “Pseudo-profundity” chapter. Learn to state the obvious and to contradict yourself so as to come across as profound. Use jargon. Make up words that appear to have meanings similar to those of well-known terms but differ from them in some way that is never fully explained. For example: “Don’t talk about people being sad or happy; talk about them having ‘negative or positive attitudinal orientations’” (164). Use scientific terms or references. References to quantum mechanics are particularly popular with those peddling pseudoscience. The postmodernists’ writings are prime examples of pseudoprofundity.

The other intellectual black holes Law describes are: “Going Nuclear,” “Moving the Semantic Goalposts,” “Piling Up the Anecdotes,” and “Pressing Your Buttons.”

Law’s final chapter includes a table listing the eight strategies and nine kinds of belief (for example, homeopathy and psychic powers) and indicating which beliefs tend to result from which strategies.

The book concludes with “The Tape-screw Letters: Letters from a Senior to a Junior Guru,” a parody of C.S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*.

I suspect that Law would agree with my hypothesis that belief in God and a blissful afterlife is based on emotion, which provides comfort in an often brutal and unfair world. And emotion is often immune to reason.

Conventional wisdom among many book reviewers seems to be that reviewers should have at least some, even if minor, negative comments about books that they otherwise positively review. If this is a bullshit belief I have avoided it with this review. ■

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A Flawed Attempt to Reconcile Religion and Science

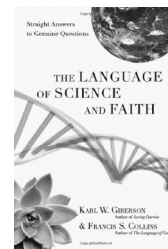
JIM CLARK

In *The Language of Science and Faith: Straight Answers to Genuine Questions*, two Christian scientists, Karl W. Giberson and Francis S. Collins, attempt to bridge the oft-trumpeted chasm between religion and science. Neither their religiousness (albeit broadly defined) nor their scientific credentials can be challenged, and the latter in particular is often a problem in other such works. Collins, for example, headed the group that first mapped the human genome and is currently director of the National Institutes of Health.

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The scientific community will certainly respect the sections of this book that quite rightly refute many religious fundamentalist criticisms of evolution and related science. The authors point out that these criticisms are generally based on outdated science or profound misunderstandings of science. As an example of the former, some early criticisms of evolution were based on incorrect estimates of the age of Earth. It was argued, in essence, that Earth was not old enough to permit the gradual emergence of new species that is called for by evolutionary theory. Subsequent and more accurate estimates overcame this difficulty as accepted figures for Earth’s true age increased markedly.

With respect to misunderstandings about science, Giberson and Collins point out that some criticize evolution



The Language of Science and Faith: Straight Answers to Genuine Questions

By Karl W. Giberson and Francis S. Collins.

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224 pp. Hardcover, \$20.

as being incompatible with the second law of thermodynamics. But this criticism makes the incorrect assumption that the second law, which applies only to closed systems without external influences, is relevant to open systems like nature.

The authors are therefore on firm ground with the scientific community when they endorse widely accepted scientific theories, although some believers may be reluctant to acknowledge the primacy of science as a source of knowledge about the world. And many scientists may part ways with the authors as well when they insinuate a Christian God into these natural processes.

The book identifies two mechanisms for God’s intervention via putatively scientific means. First, God set events in motion at the time scientists label “the big bang” in such a way that the universe and world would unfold in the way that it did, including the ultimate emergence of humans through evolutionary processes. Second, God can tweak evolutionary processes at the level of genetic mutations to steer evolution in directions that God deems desirable.

Not only will these notions be questioned by many scientists as unnecessary, but they are also unlikely to resonate with traditionally religious people’s views about how God acts. Many people of faith will be reluctant to give up the idea of an active God who works

through miracles, responds to their prayers, and otherwise exerts influence on the world in mystical ways rather than by the quasi-naturalistic processes emphasized by Giberson and Collins.

Indeed, traditionally religious people will have to forsake much that they hold sacred if they are to adopt the reconciliation proposed in this book. Other sections of the book, for example, address supposed incompatibilities between religion and science, arguing that these can arise from misinterpretations of the Bible, which the authors view as a complex text requiring a hermeneutical approach to its understanding—that is, the Bible must be read analytically with careful consideration to the context in which it was written and its intended audience. To illustrate, the fact that Genesis contains two differing accounts of creation is taken by Giberson and Collins to indicate that the writer intended a figurative or theological interpretation rather than a literal description of creation. The degree to which traditional Christians will find such liberties intolerable is suggested by one Christian website that refers to the book as “throwing the Bible under the bus.”

In addition to these efforts to demonstrate the compatibility of science and religion, the authors argue further that contemporary science actually supports a belief in God. Their case rests primarily on the fine-tuning argument, which is distinct from the better-known notions of intelligent design and irreducible complexity, which the authors dismiss—in the process likely alienating yet another religious community.

The fine-tuning argument holds that some numerical quantities describing certain aspects of the physical world are extraordinarily well-suited to the emergence of life, that even the slightest deviation would prevent the development of life, and that this fit is so improbable as to suggest some intelligence (i.e., God) is behind the universe.

In addition to the lack of correspondence between this notion of God's influence and traditional religious views, the argument falters on scientific grounds.

Physicist Victor Stenger recently published a book titled *The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning: Why the Universe is Not Designed for Us*. To illustrate one counterargument, some constants are finely tuned for the emergence of life only at this particular point in time; a considerable range of values could actually produce life billions of years in the past or in the future. And the supposed fine-tuning of other constants is shown to follow naturally from a scientific account of our expanding universe.

Finally, the book expounds a support for Christianity in particular that obviously is derived from the authors' personal religious beliefs rather than from any evidence. Many arguments in this book are not specific to Christianity, despite repeated and often gratuitous allusions in the book to the Bible and Christian beliefs. Even if the universe was fine-tuned, for exam-

ple, it could be taken as evidence for any deity with intelligence—not necessarily the Christian God.

In conclusion, the attempted reconciliation of religion and science involves a highly idiosyncratic view of both science and Christian religion, especially the latter. I therefore doubt that this book will persuade or satisfy many people, except perhaps a small minority whose idiosyncratic Christianity and theistic views of science already correspond closely to those of the authors. ■

Jim Clark is professor of psychology at the University of Winnipeg. As a cognitive psychologist and teacher of research methods, he has had a long-standing interest in understanding the human processes entailed in science and in addressing putative challenges to the efficacy of these processes for furthering understanding of our physical, societal, and psychological worlds. Religion constitutes the basis for a number of such challenges.

A Modern Fable about Science and Religion

JOE SZIMHART

The *Monkey Bible* is a modern fable for those who find themselves on a path of conflict between religion and science, which covers much of the human race throughout its history. In other words, there is a lot to chew on here for the reader, especially one with limited familiarity with evolutionary biology and its opposition in fundamentalist religion. The fable is a cry for resolution before it is too late, before the naked ape's closest animal relatives, the great apes, disappear in the wild. *The Monkey Bible* also launches a manifesto, a project, and a mission that is accompanied by music on a compact disc included with the book and an interactive website complete with videos. Mark Laxer takes the reader for an educational ride through



The Monkey Bible: A Modern Allegory

By Mark Laxer. Outer Rim Press, Burlington, Vermont, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-0-9638108-0-9. 243 pp. Hardcover, \$25.

the ongoing arguments about missing links, creationism, evolution, the Christian Bible, the biological tree of life, genes, heredity, God, and the god-of-the-gaps for what science has not yet proved about biological evolution. Fear not; the ride is not too complex or dizzying. It remains prudently parsed and energetically entertaining throughout as we follow the mostly young-adult characters in their quest.

Through its main characters, Em-