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Title: The Sources of Secularism: Science

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7/26/2007--The scientific account of the world has been proved to be true. Physical forces, not God's hand, keep the stars and planets moving in their orderly paths. The earth is very old. Life has evolved according to Darwinian theory. Even the Big Bang can be explained scientifically, sort of. As Pierre Laplace reportedly suggested to Napoleon, we have no need of God to explain anything in nature.

Why is the success of science a threat to Our Religions? Why can't religion be in charge of morality, on the one hand, and science be in charge of material life, on the other? Even many atheists admit that moral values can be real and enduring. In a Newsweek debate about the realness of God, Sam Harris, representing the atheist side, said: "I'm not at all a moral relativist. ...I think there is an absolute right and wrong." So why not divide the spheres of life: material life on the science side, morality on the religious side, with history split between them? This sort of division is what liberals in America have been suggesting for years—that religion is a private matter and that it should have no role to play in public life.

The problem is that this limit on religion is absolutely not the way the Bible sees things. God must be Lord of morality, history and nature. This is why God begins as creator in Genesis 1:1. God is Lord of history in Exodus, the book in which the slaves are freed from Egypt. And God is Lord of morality in the Prophets, for example in Amos' condemnation of the rich merchants: "Hear this, O you who swallow up the needy, so as to destroy the poor of the land." This is a very crude division--actually God is Lord of all three aspects of reality everywhere in the Bible. But you get the idea.

The God of the Bible is in charge of everything. And this God is not remote. He did not just start things at the Big Bang and then let everything unfold. In Christian dogma, God sends his son to bring salvation to all human beings. In the Jewish view, God enters into a covenant with Abraham so that the Jewish people will bring a blessing the world. These are plans by an all-powerful, and loving, being.

There have been suggestions that other religions might be less resistant to the claims of science than are the Biblical religions. The Dalai Lama, for example, certainly is more open to the claims of science than are most representatives of the religions of the Book: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. In his book, *The Universe in a Single Atom*, the Dalai Lama is careful to concede that scientific findings that have been verified are simply true and trump any religious dogma to the contrary. But this admission turns out to have its limits. This is how George Johnson put it in his review of the book in the *New York Times*, speaking of the Dalai Lama:

"But when it comes to questions about life and its origins, this would-be man of science begins to waver. Though he professes to accept evolutionary theory, he recoils at one of its most basic tenets: that the mutations that provide the raw material for natural selection occur at random. Look deeply enough, he suggests, and the randomness will turn out to be complexity in disguise - "hidden causality," the Buddha's smile. There you have it, Eastern religion's version of intelligent design. He also opposes physical explanations for consciousness, invoking instead the existence of some kind of irreducible mind stuff, an idea rejected long ago by mainstream science."

So it is fair to say that the scientific revolution is a challenge to all of Our Religions to a greater or lesser extent.