

Science versus Religion or Pantheism versus Christianity?

In an interview with Diane Sawyer of ABC News in 2010,¹ famous cosmologist Stephen Hawking stated, "There is a fundamental difference between religion, which is based on authority, and science, which is based on observation and reason. Science will win, because it works."

Hawking is correct that religion is based on authority. For example, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount we read that people were astonished at Jesus' teaching, "for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:29). After His resurrection, He told His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth" (Matthew 28:18). If we are willing to do God's will, then we will know if Jesus was speaking from God (John 7:17).

Hawking is also correct in the sense that ordinary science is based on observation. That is, scientists make conclusions from observations of repeatable events in the physical world. However, events in the past cannot be observed. Any evidence left over from the past must be interpreted. In particular, mainstream conclusions about the past rest on unproven assumptions (presuppositions).

These presuppositions are not based on reason but on a bias against any theistic explanations. For example, similarity in the features of living beings is supposed to be due to common descent; common design is arbitrarily ruled out, because it implies a Designer. The fossils and rock strata are supposed to be the result of slow processes over long ages; explanations consistent with a Global Flood are arbitrarily ruled out because they imply judgment on sin by a Creator. Modern cosmology assumes that we

live in a universe that is unbounded and has no center. Stephen Hawking and Edwin Hubble before him arbitrarily ruled out a universe with a center,² because that could mean there is a special place of God's attention like the Earth.

When people like Hawking proceed to speak as if they were the authority, we should wonder if they are not expressing a religion of their own. After all, Hawking said that religion is based on authority. What could be his religion?

Robert Brow graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary. As mentioned in the little book he wrote called *Religion Origins and Ideas*,³ he also lived in India for 20 years as an army officer, student and teacher, with opportunities to study Hinduism and other eastern religions at first hand. He discovered that some "modern theologies are 2500 years old." For example, any theology that denies a God outside of nature is a kind of monism, an anti-theistic religion. One form of monism is modified pantheism, which holds that god is the principle behind nature." In this case, the way of salvation is ... to discover the principle behind nature, and to ally oneself with that." Most intellectuals in the Western world have consciously or unconsciously bought into this religion. They live out their pantheism by denying a God outside of nature and by identifying evolutionary progress as the principle behind nature. And they do so with a religious fervor.

Pantheism was introduced into Western intellectual thought mainly by Baruch Spinoza⁴ in the 17th century. It became the main source of Enlightenment thinking opposed to ecclesiastical authority. Beyond that, it inspired the rejection of Biblical authority that became rampant among 19th century scientists and

theologians. Today's pantheism is just the culmination of those trends.

Many Christians have observed the religious fervor involved in current efforts to remove Biblical Christianity from the public square. Some have mistakenly labeled atheism as the religion opposing Christianity in this way. Atheism by itself is not religious; it is a denial that cannot provide any meaning. But atheists cannot live without meaning. (See, for example, Marvin Olasky's review of Michael Ruse's book *A Meaning to Life*.⁵) To the extent that they also believe in evolutionary progress, their atheism is just pantheism in disguise.

What about secularism? In a recent speech at Notre Dame,⁶ former Attorney General William Barr observed that "Secularists, and their allies among the 'progressives,' have marshaled all the force of mass communications, popular culture, the entertainment industry, and academia in an unremitting assault on religion and traditional values." He went on to note "the secular project has itself become a religion, pursued with religious fervor." True enough, but again the underlying religion is pantheism. Not only do secularists deny the supernatural, most tenaciously hold to a belief in evolutionary progress.

Barr's main solution to secularism is "a resurgence of Catholic education – and more generally religiously-affiliated schools." However, Catholic schools in the United States teach evolution⁷ as part of their science curriculum. They teach evolution as a fact. How are we going to combat pantheism if we ourselves teach this sacred myth of pantheism?

As long as we allow our opposition to frame the conflict as "science versus religion," we will always be on the defensive. We need to understand that this conflict in our culture is basically the religion of pantheism versus Biblical Christianity.

Hawking had no way to be sure that his presuppositions were correct. We Christians can be sure of our salvation, because it does not rest in our works but in the grace of God and the finished work of His Son, which God revealed to His prophets beforehand.

¹ <https://abcnews.go.com/WN/Technology/stephen-hawking-religion-science-win/story?id=10830164>

² <https://kgov.com/cosmological-principle>

³ <http://www.brow.on.ca/Books/Religion/Religion9.html>; Inter-Varsity Press, 1966.

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheism>

⁵ https://world.wng.org/2019/12/eternity_of_oblivion

⁶ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-william-p-barr-delivers-remarks-law-school-and-de-nicola-center-ethics>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution_and_the_Catholic_Church