



IS SCIENCE A RELIGION?

A Question of Moral Atheism

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are plenty of scientists who are religious or who believe in the supernatural. Similarly, science makes neither moral nor ethical judgments.

Science is also distinct from religion for two additional, very significant, reasons.

First, science is based on evidence. Sure, there are times when tradition, culture, and personal assumptions get in the way of science, but these are impediments to science, not part of its workings. Religion, on the other hand, may incorporate evidence, but it generally does so in the service of a forgone conclusion. For example, a theist might look for evidence that one religion is true and the other is false, but may not look for evidence that points to religion being false in general.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, science involves the creation and testing of falsifiable hypotheses. Religion generally strives to be unfalsifiable, to be rigorously provable only within its own context, or to dismiss out of hand any evidence that may contradict it.

No decent scientist would do that.

SCIENCE IS A set of beliefs about how the universe works, and religion is a set of beliefs about how the universe works, so science is a religion, right?

Wrong.

Some theists argue that science is as much a faith-based belief system as any other religion, and that those who are science-minded are simply being dogmatic about science instead of dogmatic about God. But this argument doesn't hold water for a number of reasons.

It's true that, in a sense, science accepts certain things on faith. But the things it accepts on faith — that the universe exists, for example — are things that pretty much everyone accepts on faith, whether or not they are religious. To define science as a religion on this basis would be to call any thinking being that believes in reality religious. That is not terribly useful.

It is true that science is materialist and does not require the existence of deities, but scientists are not required to take it on faith that supernatural things don't exist. Rather, science has nothing to say about the supernatural — it's out of science's realm — and there

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QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

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1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on blog.iamanatheist.org. Thanks!
