

Review: Dr David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions*, Basic Books, New York, NY, 2009

Pages: 235

Polemic With Class

An enjoyable read which makes enough mention of the major scientific theories and their independence of naturalism to convince the reader of that philosophy's absurdity.

It is also strewn with good humour about the purveyors of atheism and their gods (e.g. a Catechism of Quantum Cosmology, and, if Darwin "had been embedded in the ocean floor, sailors might for centuries unerringly navigate by his lustre").

Preface (pp. xiii-xvii)

The four powerful theories guiding science are Newtonian mechanics, James Clerk Maxwell's theory of the electromagnetic field, special and general relativity, and quantum mechanics.

I) No God's Before Me (pp. 1-10)

The *schwerpunkt* is the place of greatest military force of application.

Oxford Chemistry professor Peter Atkins said scientists, "are at the summit of knowledge, beacons of rationality, and intellectual honesty."

II) Nights of Doubt (pp. 11-41)

Arab philosopher Al Ghazali said that without punishment for sin men and women would give way to "a bestial indulgence of their appetites".

Ivan Kamarov in *The Brothers Karamazov* claims that if God does not exist then everything is permitted.

In 1995, 0.75% of Dutch deaths were involuntary assisted suicides.

David Hume concluded in the eighteenth century that *ought* couldn't be derived from *is*.

III) Horses Do Not Fly (pp. 43-61)

“Naturalism” comes closest to what is called the “spirit of science”.

Ancient Greek anatomists held that nothing other than atoms and the void existed.

In quantum mechanics there are some twenty-four elementary particles.

The basic scientific method is to observe, hypothesise, predict, experiment, then repeat.

Richard Feynman said philosophers were always on the outside making stupid remarks.

IV) The Cause (pp. 63-81)

Thomas Aquinas was born in 1225 southern Italy and died aged fifty in a Cistercian monastery in northern Italy. His *Summa Theologica* has thirty-eight treatises and deals with 612 questions having 3,120 separate sections.

If a series of causes does not start it cannot get going, necessitating a first cause.

Space and time themselves were supposedly created by the Big Bang.

The hypothesised Singularity is where no distance exists between particles and temperature, density and universe curvature are all infinite.

Material objects deform space and time by their geometry and vice versa.

In the 1920s, Freidmann and Lemaitre (FL) cosmology was created.

V) The Reason (pp. 83-108)

Ex nihilo nihil fit.

God must be an infinite and necessary being.

The question of why there is something rather than nothing confounds atheists.

Thomas Young in the nineteenth century demonstrated light behaves as a wave by shining a beam through two slits.

In 1905, Einstein demonstrated the photoelectric effect by sending a beam towards a metal surface and knocking electrons off.

Photons self-interfere.

A quantum particle can flow like a wave through two slits *simultaneously*, enjoying a doubling of its position in space. This is called *superposition*.

The nature of light is an analogy of the Trinity.

The “Many Worlds” hypothesis attempts to solve the Schrodinger’s Cat problem by having multiple diverging universes created (i.e. one with a living cat and one with a dead cat).

Quantum mechanics is not likely to become an observational science.

VI) A Put-Up Job (pp. 109-136)

The Standard Model consists of quantum electrodynamics (Richard Feynman in the 1940s), the electro-weak theory (Steven Weinberg et al.), and quantum chromodynamics or the strong nuclear force (C.N. Yang in 1954).

With the strong nuclear force, interactions seemed counter-intuitively *stronger* as distance increased.

The model does not account for gravitational force.

Some string theories require twenty-six parameters and it operates on a “Landscape” (over a thousand papers have been written on this phenomenon).

Electrons follow its laws because of logic.

VII) A Curious Proof That God Does Not Exist (pp. 137-153)

The infinite regress argument says that behind God who created the universe there must be another God, etc., ad infinitum.

VIII) Our Inner Ape, a Darling and the Human Mind (pp. 155-179)

Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace created the theory of evolution. Wallace ultimately became suspect of his own work.

The sociology behind evolution is “getting food, getting by, and getting laid”.

Freud’s id, ego, and superego were always slippery concepts.

In 1936, Alan Turing wrote of a Turing machine consisting of a tape divided into squares having a reading head mounted over it. His idea and the abacus were foundational for the development of the digital computer.

Promoters of the pseudo-scientific accounts of the human mind are usually the least willing to accept its conclusions (Richard Dawkins is “an implacable opponent of genetic determinism”).

If evolutionary psychology is true, genetic determinism must be also.

IX) Miracles in Our Time (pp. 181-208)

Once all the gaps are filled, the God of the gaps is expected to join Wotan in Valhalla.

Few physicists compare gravity to the ‘fact’ of evolution.

In the 1960s and 70s, Motoo Kimura found that the great majority of changes at the molecular level are caused by random genetic drift which is neutral.

Oligonucleotides are indispensable building blocks of living systems.

In 1948, Kurt Godel argued time does not exist, that the universe might be rotating in a void like a gigantic pinwheel. As galaxies rotate, they drag space and time like propeller blades in their wake as spirals. This may allow one (if travelling fast enough) to “catch his own tail”.

X) The Cardinal and His Cathedral (pp. 209-225)

The Roman Catholic Church put Galileo on trial in 1633, after which he muttered “eppur si muove”.

Francis Bacon argued that the “book of God’s words” and the “book of God’s works” are not in conflict.

Inquisitor Robert Bellarmine had Giordano Bruno burned at the stake.