

BOOK REVIEW
of
Victor J. Stenger,
The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason,
Prometheus Books, 2009.

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This review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

In writing book reviews, I usually attempt to find the best in a given book, and minimize areas where I may disagree. I do this for two reasons. First, I want to be as generous as I can and acknowledge the good work of the author. Secondly, and more importantly, I am usually recommending a book for others to read. If I take strong exception to a book, I usually don't review it, however, the current book is an exception.

I have reviewed a few books critical of New Atheism, and it would be proper for me to occasionally review a book in favor of New Atheism. My initial intention was to write a positive review, attempting to give credit where Dr. Stenger may have made a good point; however, because he has made so many offensive and uninformed statements, a negative review is more appropriate. I don't like doing this. It is not my nature. I wish atheists and theists could have rational discourses (in many cases I think it is possible), but it is impossible with Stenger and the New Atheists.

I take exception starting with the title of the book. In fact, the title is a red flag indicating that a rational discourse is not possible. Apparently, Dr. Stenger assumes that being an adherent of New Atheism is the equivalent of "Taking a Stand for Science and Reason." Question: What if I were an Old Atheist? Would that imply that I would not be taking a stand for science and reason? Has he not read John Haught in *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), and others, who find New Atheists do not measure up to the Old Atheists in either scholarship or commitment? Is it true that being an agnostic or a theist means that you're opposed to science and reason? Dr. Stenger's background is physics, but is he ignorant of the history of science, where many, if not most, of the founders of specific scientific disciplines were Christian?

Victor J. Stenger is now adjunct professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado. He spent many years prior to his current appointment as

professor of physics at the University of Hawaii. He is a committed atheist and popularly known for his atheistic writings, including *Not By Design: The Origin of the Universe*, Prometheus Books, 1988, and *God: The Failed Hypothesis – How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*, Prometheus Books, 2007.

The book being reviewed contains Ingersoll's Vow, a Preface, a Bibliography, Acknowledgments, an Index, and ten chapters:

Chapter 1 is titled *Atheism on the Offensive*.

Chapter 2 is titled *The Folly of Faith*.

Chapter 3 is titled *The Sword of Science*.

Chapter 4 is *The Design Delusion*.

Chapter 5 is *Holy Smoke*.

Chapter 6 is *Suffering and Morality*.

Chapter 7 is *The Nature of Nature*.

Chapter 8 is *The Nature of Mind*.

Chapter 9 is *The Way of Nature*.

Chapter 10 is *The Future of Atheism*.

Ingersoll's Vow, in part, is as follows: "When I became convinced that the Universe is natural – that all of the ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell, the dungeon was flooded with light, and all the bolts, and bars, and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world – not even in infinite space. I was free – free to think, to express my thoughts – free to live to my own ideal – free to live for myself and those I loved – free to use all my faculties, all my senses – free to spread imagination's wings – free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope – free to judge and determine for myself – free to reject all ignorant and cruel creeds, all the 'inspired' books that savages have produced, and all the barbarous legends of the past – free from popes and priests – free from all the 'called' and 'set apart' – free from sanctified mistakes and holy lies – free from the fear of eternal pain . . ." Stenger makes no mention of the purpose of this lengthy quotation, and he never

refers to it again. He gives no reference for this quotation (see below where he criticizes New Atheists critics for not providing full references), and Ingersoll is not listed in Stenger's Bibliography, nor in his Acknowledgments, nor in his Index. Granted, the quotation has a certain flowery flare, but it begs the question. We could, of course, quote from the New Testament to dispute the misguided notion set forth about freedom. We could also ask Stenger, and Ingersoll if he were still alive, whether they had read Jonathan Edwards' famous book *Freedom of the Will*, for a very different perspective on freedom. We could also ask Stenger whether he had read John Haught's book, mentioned above, about the high cost of true atheism as acknowledged by Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Alas, we are left in the dark about just what purpose this lengthy quotation is supposed to serve.

In Chapter 1, in reference to the sudden appearance of several New Atheist books and how well they have been received, Stenger writes as follows on page 26: "As you might expect, this phenomenon has driven Christian apologists to distraction. A whole raft of books has been published in response to the atheist best sellers, largely from Christian publishing houses, of which, as I said, there are many. Most of these anti-atheist screeds are marked by shoddy scholarship such as incomplete references, inaccurate quotations, and misrepresentations of atheist views."

How can there be so many things wrong in just three sentences? First, as I have mentioned several times before in reviews of other books about the New Atheists, this phenomenon has given Christians an open door to present the case for Christianity to a new generation. Christian apologists are not driven to distraction! They have welcomed this opportunity with open arms. Secondly, while it is true that there are many good Christian publishing houses, and thankfully many Christian responses have been published by them, there are some notable examples of responses published by non-Christian publishing houses. Here are a few from those that I have reviewed:

- David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and its Scientific Pretensions*, Crown Forum, 2008.
 - David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*, Yale University Press, 2009.
 - Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, Doubleday, 2004.
 - Eric Reitan, *Is God a Delusion?: A Reply to Religion's Cultured Despisers*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Here is another I have read but have not reviewed:

John Cornwell, *Darwin's Angel: An Angelic Riposte to The God Delusion*, Profile Books, 2008. Thirdly, one of the most often stated complaints about the New Atheists' books is their shoddy scholarship, and I am in the process of pointing this out concerning Stenger's book! Keep reading for more illustrations of it! I've already made note of his complaint about incomplete references. At the very least, incomplete references are better than no references! There is no reference anywhere in this book for the long quotation by Ingersoll! This quotation is never referred to again, and no explanation is given as to why it is there.

On page 31, Stenger discusses Richard Dawkins' scholarship in the area of evolution, and writes: "No dispute among experts in the field can be found on the basic correctness of the Darwin-Wallace scheme of evolution by natural selection. Arguing over detailed mechanisms is the everyday *modus vivendi* of science." Although I can't speak for everyone, I don't know of any author, or any creationist, who has a dispute over natural selection. It works pretty much like artificial selection, but without human intervention. But I don't think that is what Dr. Stenger wants us to get from what he has written! The title of Darwin's book is *Origin of Species*. There is a good deal of dispute about how far natural selection can go, and we are quite ignorant about any means of natural origin of species. Professor Stenger knows this. No scientific evidence exists about one species evolving into another, period!

I am assuming Stenger is aware of Michael Behe's work (Professor of Biochemistry at Lehigh University), and his book *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, Free Press, 1996. Behe's more recent book, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism*, Free Press, 2007, takes his study even further. He doesn't dispute natural selection! But he is seriously studying just what it can and cannot do. Another biologist, Michael Denton, raises many questions concerning evolution as well. Denton was a molecular biologist at the University of Otago, New Zealand, for many years. His book, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, Adler & Adler, 1986, should not be ignored.

In response to the question, "Does Darwinian theory adequately explain the pervasive patterns of natural history?", Denton responded as follows: "Well, the basic pattern it fails to explain is the apparent uniqueness and isolation of major types of organisms. My fundamental problem with the theory is that there are so many highly complicated organs, systems and structures, from the nature of the lung of a bird, to the eye of the rock lobster, for which I cannot conceive of how these things have come about in terms of a gradual

accumulation of random changes. It strikes me as being a flagrant denial of common sense to swallow that all these things were built up by accumulative small random changes. This is simply a nonsensical claim, especially for the great majority of cases, where nobody can think of any credible explanation of how it came about. And this is a very profound question which everybody skirts, everybody brushes over, everybody tries to sweep under the carpet. The fact is that the majority of these complex adaptations in nature cannot be adequately explained by a series of intermediate forms. And this is a fundamental problem. Common sense tells me there must be something wrong.” This quotation is in “An Interview with Michael Denton,” *Origins Research*, vol. 15, no. 2, July 1995, available online at <http://www.arn.org/docs/orpages/or152/dent.htm>.

Others also dispute evolution:

- Lee Spetner, biophysicist (Ph.D. in physics from MIT), questions the basics of evolutionary theory in his book *Not By Chance! Shattering the Modern Theory of Evolution*, Judaica Press, 1998.

- Franklin Harold, professor emeritus of cell biology at Colorado State University, in his book *The Way of the Cell*, Oxford University Press, 2001, writes as follows: “we must concede that there are presently no detailed Darwinian accounts of the evolution of any biochemical or cellular system, only a variety of wishful speculations”, as quoted in Denyse O’Leary, *By Design or by Chance?*, Castle Quay Books, 2004, p. 197.

- A summary of scientific and other leaders who dispute evolution may be found in the book edited by William Dempski, *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing*, ISI Books, 2004.

So, based on the above quotations, does it seem reasonable to state that there is “No dispute among experts”? The answer is that there is indeed dispute!

In Chapter 2, Stenger seems confused about the purpose of his book. In the Preface he explains how the New Atheists write mainly from a scientific perspective, and that he will expand upon the principles of the New Atheists. However, in Chapter 2, Stenger expounds mostly on politics. An atheist is someone who believes that God doesn’t exist. But now are we to confuse this relatively simple definition with politics? Stenger’s view is that to be a New Atheist in good standing, one must embracing far-left liberal politics! I thought we were talking about religion and the existence of God!

Before getting into his politics, he makes an astounding statement – a definition of faith (page 45): “faith is belief in the absence of supportive evidence

and even in light of contrary evidence.” Now, it is true that there have been debates about just what constitutes the true essence of faith, but I don’t think anyone has come close to such a juvenile definition as the one given by Stenger. In Protestant circles the main debate has been between proponents of cognitive or propositional faith such as Herman Bavinck, Carl Henry, Charles Hodge, and Old Princeton theologians in general, and proponents of noncognitive, subjective, belief-as-expressing theologians, most notably championed by Schleiermacher and his liberal followers. The proponents of cognitive faith no doubt put a higher premium on the truthfulness and accuracy of propositional statements, and the proponents of noncognitive faith place a higher premium on experiencing the absolute dependence of one upon a transcendent God, but neither places a high value on believing things otherwise known to be untrue. One may laugh at the old joke about a small child in a Sunday School class who supposedly said that faith is believing in what you know isn’t true, but does it have any place in a book written by an adjunct professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado who is supposedly making a serious case for adherence to the New Atheism? In my opinion, faith is not a complicated concept, but rather one that virtually everyone has experienced. I may have faith that a good friend will perform an important task that he has assured me he will do. That faith, hopefully, is not based upon nothing. Similarly, I have faith that God will keep His promises, and has, through Jesus Christ, secured my salvation and, as such, I will be with Him at the consummation of all things. Of course, it is possible that my faith in my friend has been misplaced. And the way to undermine my faith in Jesus Christ is to attack Him and His Church, not by accusing me of some infantile notion of what faith is.

On page 46 Stenger writes: “We have just lived through a disastrous eight-year period where decision after decision in the most important office in the world, the Oval Office of the White House, was made on the basis of an irrational mode of thought founded on faith and suspicious of any reasoned argument that contradicted that faith.” On the next page, page 47, he tells us of his *faith* for the future: “An African American born in Hawaii with the unlikely name of Barack Hussein Obama has been dramatically elected president of the United States. Most of the world, myself included, have high hopes that they and we, working together with Obama, will be up to the task of solving the many problems we face.” Earlier on the same page he identified some of those problems that he hopes Obama will solve: global warming, pollution,

overpopulation, flooded coastal areas, severe climatic changes, epidemics, overcrowding, and starvation. Some time has passed since Stenger wrote those words. I wonder how that hope and change is going for him. But what does it have to do with atheism?

In Chapter 3, Stenger makes another rather astounding statement (page 77): “The universe and life do not look at all designed; they look just as they would be expected to look if they were not designed at all.” Now, of course, he is entitled, at least by man-made law if not by God’s law, to his opinion, no matter how wrong it may be. But this statement flies in the face of the common experience of virtually all humanity across the centuries. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 – 43 BC) wrote in *De Natura Deorum* as follows (as quoted in William Paley, *Natural Theology*, edited by Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. ix): “But can there be any person . . . who can consider the regular movements of the heavenly bodies, the prescribed courses of the stars, and see how all is linked and bound into a single system, and then deny that there is any conscious purpose in this and say that it is the work of chance?” Or consider the psalmist (Psalm 8:3–4): “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” To profess to be unable to recognize the obvious, is no cause to be proud. I would not expect a mule to be concerned with recognizing design in nature; but man, according to Christian theology, was designed in the image of God. He has that image within him. To deny that image, to set aside that image, to intentionally quench that image, is a horrible thing to contemplate.

In his letter to the Romans (1:18–21), the Apostle Paul’s declaration should be taken in all seriousness: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” In this same chapter, Paul goes on to write one of the most devastating statements in all of Scripture: “God gave them up”. It is stated three times in Romans chapter 1, and nowhere else in Scripture. Paul writes that “God gave them up” because “Claiming to be wise,

they became fools”, “because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie”, and “since they did not see fit to acknowledge God”. We must be generous when discussing things with people who simply may be misinformed, but when people make statements that fly in the face of common sense, what can we do? We must hold to the truth, and hope that a person who has willingly embraced error, who has intentionally attempted to quench the image of God within, may be jolted into reality and helped to turn from his erroneous ways, and pray that God has not yet given him up.

As a final example of those who see design in nature, let me turn to an unlikely source – Richard Dawkins. I probably have less in common with Richard Dawkins than I do with Stenger. The organization and content of Stenger’s book has led me to write a review, while, other than a very minor review of Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*, I haven’t attempted any reviews of his books. However, on page 1 of Dawkins’ *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design*, Norton, 1996, he writes very simply and briefly, “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.” As the title of the book suggests, he believes that biological things only have the *appearance* of having been designed for a purpose. That is far better, from my viewpoint, than denying even the appearance of design, as Stenger has done. Such a claim as Stenger has made makes me, and I assume many others, almost all others, want to rub our eyes in disbelief! If Stenger wants to make the argument, as Dawkins has done, that our immediate impression of design is misinformed and that a careful analysis will lead us to see that the appearance of design is just that, only an appearance, then fine, let’s give him the opportunity to make his case. But he makes no such case. He wants us to believe that our perception of design is wrong and that we should take his word that “The universe and life do not look at all designed; they look just as they would be expected to look if they were not designed at all.” This statement is absurd!

In Chapter 4 the absurdities continue. Stenger writes (page 89), “We have no reason to assume there aren’t many universes. Even if our particular universe is highly unlikely, the chance that we are one of many could be as high as 100 percent.” The subtitle of his book is *Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*. Does this sound like science and reason? Do we have any reasons for assuming that space aliens have abducted your neighbors? Do we have any reasons for assuming that the Abominable Snowman exists? Shouldn’t science and reason guide us to propose that those who advocate space aliens, or other unlikely things, have

the burden of providing evidence to support such things? Show us evidence.

Stenger returns to his confident myth of multiple universes (Chapter 7, page 171), thinking that even if true it would solve something. He writes: “There is no reason why the universe had to have a beginning. It can just as easily stretch back in time without limit, so there never was a beginning. . . . Basically, in this scenario our particular universe appeared by a process called *quantum tunneling* from an earlier universe that, from our point of view, existed limitlessly in the past.” I assume we are to take this on faith! Apparently he does! We need to keep reminding ourselves, this is *Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*. Actually, in spite of the fact that Stenger considers his ideas about an eternal universe cutting edge science, they are not new, and really more philosophy than science. Consider the following quotation: “the universe [is] an ongoing cosmic event – a never-ending binding and unbinding of atoms resulting in the gradual emergence of entire new worlds and the gradual disintegration of old ones. Our world, our bodies, our minds are but atoms in motion. They did not occur because of some purpose or final cause. Nor were they created by some god for our special use and benefit. They simply happened, more or less randomly and entirely naturally, through the effective operation of immutable and eternal physical laws.” To whom, may I ask, are these ideas attributed? The ancient philosophers Epicurus (341 – 271 BC) and Lucretius (99 – 55 BC), according to David Simpson, DePaul University, in his article on Lucretius in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/lucretiu/> Recall that there was no experimental science, as we know it today, during the times of Epicurus and Lucretius. Stenger’s ideas are a throwback to a pre-scientific period.

In Chapter 8, on page 177, Stenger writes: “the intuition that design is evident in the cosmos and in earthly life has been seen to have no basis and is no candidate for an irreducible gap that must be filled with God.” This is just a review, but his idea that the universe shows no evidence of design has been vindicated by what he has written falls far short of reality. As far as his “gap that must be filled by God” is concerned, this is nothing that serious philosophers and theologians are concerned with. Was Aquinas concerned with a God of the gaps? No, he was concerned with reasonable and logical implications. But for those who think “There is no reason why the universe had to have a beginning”, Aquinas escapes them.

Henry F. Schaefer, III, is the Graham Perdue Professor of Chemistry and director of the Center for Computational Quantum Chemistry at the University of

Georgia. He has been nominated for the Nobel Prize and has been cited as the third most quoted chemist in the world. In U.S. News & World Report for December 23, 1991, Dr. Schaefer is quoted as follows: “The significance and joy in my science comes in the occasional moments of discovering something new and saying to myself, ‘So that’s how God did it!’ My goal is to understand a little corner of God’s plan.” (As quoted in a public lecture “Stephen Hawking, the Big Bang, and God,” 2001, available online at http://www.origins.org/articles/schaefer_bigbandandgod.html.) In this lecture, Schaefer quotes Arno Penzias, Nobel Prize winner in physics for 1978, who helped uncover evidence of the Big Bang, from the March 12, 1978 issue of the New York Times, as follows: “The best data we have (concerning the big bang) are exactly what I would have predicted, had I nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole.” Schaefer continues in his lecture with “When more recently (in Denis Brian’s 1995 book *Genius Talk*) why some cosmologists were so affectionate in their embrace of the steady state theory (the idea that the universe is infinitely old) of the origin of the universe, Penzias responded: ‘Well, some people are uncomfortable with the purposefully created world. To come up with things that contradict purpose, they tend to speculate about things they haven’t seen.’” Penzias further explains the situation as follows: “Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe that was created out of nothing and delicately balanced to provide exactly the conditions required to support life. In the absence of an absurdly-improbable accident, the observations of modern science seem to suggest an underlying, one might say, supernatural plan”, as quoted in Denyse O’Leary, *By Design or by Chance?*, Castle Quay Books, 2004, p. 23.

Though for some it may not seem appropriate to quote extensively from a single source, permit me to do that from Schaefer’s lecture. Doing so will help offset the very erroneous impression that Stenger attempts to convey: that being an atheist, specifically a New Atheist, is somehow taking a stand for science and reason, and that faith in God and Jesus Christ disqualifies one from science and reason. Schaefer writes as follows:

“It is relatively unusual that a physical scientist is truly an atheist. Why is this true? Some point to the anthropic constraints, the remarkable fine tuning of the universe. For example, Freeman Dyson, a Princeton faculty member, has said, ‘Nature has been kinder to us than we had any right to expect.’ Martin Rees, one of Hawking’s colleagues at Cambridge, notes the same facts. Rees recently stated ‘The possibility of life as we

know it depends on the values of a few basic, physical constants and is in some respects remarkably sensitive to their numerical values. Nature does exhibit remarkable coincidences.’ Science writer extraordinaire Paul Davies adds ‘There is for me powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all . . . It seems as though somebody has fine tuned nature’s numbers to make the Universe. . . . The impression of design is overwhelming.’ Some scientists express surprise at what they view as so many ‘accidental occurrences.’ However, that astonishment quickly disappears when one sees purpose instead of arbitrariness in the laws of nature. Against powerful logic, some atheists continue to claim, irrespective of the anthropic constraints, that the universe and human life were created by chance. The main argument seems to be ‘Since we human beings are here, it must have happened in a purely reductionist manner.’ This argument strikes me a bit like the apocryphal response of a person waking up in the morning to find an elephant in his or her bedroom. The individual in question concludes that this is no surprise, since the probability of the elephant being in the bedroom is a perfect 100%. Obviously this is a philosophical rather than scientific response to the situation.

“A reply to this argument has been developed by the philosopher/historian William Lane Craig. The atheist’s argument states that since we’re here, we know every element of the creation must have happened by strictly material forces. Craig’s philosophical counterargument, as reported by Hugh Ross, goes like this: Suppose a dozen sharpshooters are sent to execute a prisoner by firing squad. They all shoot a number of rounds in just the right direction, but the prisoner escapes unharmed. The prisoner could conclude, since he is alive, that all the sharpshooters missed by some extremely unlikely chance. He may wish to attribute his survival to some remarkable piece of good luck. But he would be far more rational to conclude that the guns were loaded with blanks or that the sharpshooters had all deliberately missed. . . .

“Townes [Charles Townes] won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1964 for discovering the maser, which led quickly to the laser, surely one of the most important scientific advances of the twentieth century. In a statement from his recent book *Making Waves* (American Physical Society, 1995) Professor Townes takes dead aim on Hawking. Charles Townes states ‘In my view, the question of origin seems to be left unanswered if we explore from a scientific view alone. Thus, I believe there is a need for some religious or metaphysical explanation. I believe in the concept of God and in His existence.’

“Arthur Schawlow (1921-1999) was another Physics Nobel Prize winner (1981), honored for his work in laser spectroscopy. Schawlow was a professor at Stanford until his recent death and did not hesitate to identify himself as a protestant Christian. He stated, ‘We are fortunate to have the Bible and especially the New Testament, which tells us so much about God in widely accessible human terms.’ I view this statement as uniquely scientific, knowing that Professor Schawlow was convinced that his discoveries in laser spectroscopy were telling him something about God’s handiwork. However, unlike the New Testament, Schawlow’s research was difficult to express in ‘widely accessible human terms.’

“The other chaired Professor of Theoretical Physics at Cambridge (Cambridge is very stingy about handing out Professor titles; most tenured faculty members retire at the rank of Senior Lecturer) for much of Hawking’s career was John Polkinghorne, a nuclear physicist. He left the chair of mathematical physics at Cambridge in 1979 in order to train for the ordained ministry of the Church of England. Upon ordination, Polkinghorne became a parish priest for five years. He returned to Cambridge in 1986 as Dean of Trinity Hall and subsequently President of Queens’ College. I am very familiar with the grounds of Queens’ College, as it is immediately adjacent to St. Catherine’s College, where I stay in Cambridge courtesy of my longtime collaborator, Professor Nicholas Handy. John Polkinghorne’s statement of belief is straightforward: ‘I am a Christian believer and believe that God exists and has made Himself known in human terms in Jesus Christ.’

“Probably the world’s greatest living observational cosmologist is Allan Sandage. Sandage works in Pasadena, California at the Carnegie Observatories. In 1991 he received the Crafoord Prize, given by the Royal Swedish Academy every six years for cosmology and worth the same amount of money as the Nobel prize (there is no Nobel prize given for cosmology). Sandage has been called ‘the grand old man of cosmology’ by the New York Times and is viewed as the successor to his mentor, Edwin Hubble (1889-1953), who is considered the father of modern cosmology. At the age of 50, Sandage became a Christian. In Alan Lightman’s book, *Origins: The Lives and Worlds of Modern Cosmologists*, Sandage states ‘The nature of God is not to be found within any part of the findings of science. For that, one must turn to the Scriptures.’ When asked the famous question regarding whether it is possible to be a scientist and a Christian, Sandage replied, ‘Yes. The world is too complicated in all its parts and interconnections to be due to chance alone. I am convinced

that the existence of life with all its order in each of its organisms is simply too well put together.' . . .

"George Ellis is a Christian. Ellis is Professor of Applied Mathematics at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. In the book *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature*, Ellis states his position with respect to ultimate questions:

- God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and of humankind, transcending the universe but immanent in it;
- God's nature embodies justice and holiness, but is also a personal and loving God who cares for each creature (so the name 'father' is indeed appropriate);
- God's nature is revealed most perfectly in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, as recorded in the New Testament of the Bible, who was sent by God to reveal the divine nature, summarized in 'God is Love;'
- God has an active presence in the world that still touches the lives of the faithful today. . . .

"My final example is Chris Isham, Professor of Theoretical Physics at Imperial College of Science and Technology, University of London. The superb popular writer and former research physicist Paul Davies has described Isham as 'Britain's greatest quantum gravity expert.' This is high praise indeed when one considers that Stephen Hawking's research area is quantum gravity. I had the pleasure of chatting with Professor Isham for a while when I gave this lecture at Imperial College in May 2000. Alluding to the philosopher Paul Tillich, Chris Isham states 'The God of Christianity is not only "the ground of being." He is also Incarnate.' Essential therein 'is the vision of the Resurrection (of Jesus Christ) as "the new creation out of the old order" and . . . the profound notion of the "redemption of time" through the life and death of Jesus Christ. I think it will be rather a long time before theoretical physics has anything useful to add to that.' Let me be quick to extinguish one possible interpretation of Professor Isham's last sentence. By no means is Chris Isham belittling the importance of theoretical physics. Isham has committed his entire professional life to the pursuit of theoretical physics. Isham is passionate about theoretical physics. Isham is rather saying that what he has found in Jesus Christ surpasses anything that physics could hope to provide in terms of ultimate meaning."

I'm not sure how readers of these quotations from Schaefer's lecture will respond. Perhaps the overall quotation is too long. But it goes a long way, in my opinion, to put Stenger's arrogance in perspective. Remember, these quotations are given to provide evidence contrary to Stenger's statement that "the intuition that design is evident in the cosmos and in

earthly life has been seen to have no basis and is no candidate for an irreducible gap that must be filled with God."

On page 186, Stenger writes what he apparently thinks is an almost obvious observation: "With the discovery in 1953 of the structure of DNA and the great success of the theory of evolution by natural selection, science saw no need for, and indeed no evidence for, a special force of life." And, no doubt, no evidence for design either. It is perhaps disappointing to Stenger that not everyone seems ready to adopt his faith that there is no God and that Darwinian evolution explains everything! No matter how many books are written explaining what appear to be insurmountable problems for evolution, especially in the light of modern discoveries such as DNA, it seems that it isn't going to make any difference to Stenger and others like him. He will persist in his "belief in the absence of supportive evidence and even in light of contrary evidence." Behe and Denton make no impression on him. Probably John Sanford, a geneticist at Cornell University for more than 25 years and author of *Genetic Entropy & the Mystery of the Genome*, 3rd edition, FMS Publications, 2008, doesn't either. Probably Fazale Rana, author of *The Cell's Design: How Chemistry Reveals the Creator's Artistry*, BakerBooks, 2008, doesn't either. Dr. Rana received his Ph.D. in biochemistry from Ohio University and conducted post-doctoral research at the University of Virginia and also at the University of Georgia. Probably Werner Gitt, author of *In the Beginning was Information: A Scientist Explains the Incredible Design in Nature*, Master Books, 2006 won't impress Stenger either. Dr. Gitt was Director of Information Technology at the German Federal Institute of Physics and Technology from 1978 until his retirement in 2002. Maybe Werner Arber, microbiologist who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology in 1978 will impress Stenger, but I doubt it. Arber received the Nobel Prize for his work on cell differentiation and control, and for cell repair mechanisms. Arber has written that "Although a biologist, I must confess I do not understand how life came about . . . The possibility of the existence of a Creator, of God, represents to me a satisfactory solution to this problem." (Arber, W., *The Existence of a Creator Represents a Satisfactory Solution*, in Margenau, H. and R. A. Varghese (editors), *Cosmos, Bios, Theos: Scientists Reflect on Science, God, and the Origins of the Universe, Life, and Homo sapiens*, Open Court, 1992, pp. 141-143). The process of DNA duplication, necessary to all of life, involves complexities far beyond anything that Darwin dreamed of, and bears a closer relationship to modern

communications, computers, and control than it does to biology. Four-symbol codes, feedback, error-correction coding, etc., but Stenger wants us to believe that he sees nothing of design in it. According to Paul Davies, former physicist at Arizona State University, and a popular and prolific science writer, “the living cell is best thought of as a supercomputer – an information processing and replicating system of astonishing complexity. DNA is not a special life-giving molecule, but a genetic databank that transmits its information using a mathematical code. Most of the workings of the cell are best described, not in terms of material stuff – hardware – but as information, or software. Trying to make life by mixing chemicals in a test tube is like soldering switches and wires in an attempt to produce Windows 98. It won’t work because it addresses the problem at the wrong conceptual level” (“How we could create life,” *The Guardian*, December 11, 2002, and available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2002/dec/11/highereducation.uk>)

It would perhaps be useful for theists and atheists to dialogue. Perhaps each side could sharpen their own understanding of the other through useful discussion. However, as long as New Atheists such as Stenger persist in the nonsense that they put in print, that useful dialogue does not seem possible.

This is the longest review that I have written since my 1993 review of Howard J. Van Till, Robert E. Snow,

John H. Stek, and Davis A. Young, *Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World's Formation*, Eerdmans, 1990. I have written many other book reviews during the years in between. I have difficulty with two types of authors. One is a New Atheist, such as Victor Stenger, who is completely out of touch with reality as I understand it. Stenger is highly educated, no doubt intelligent, and highly accomplished in his field of expertise. But when it comes to the really important things of life, he is ignorant. One of the marks of an accomplished scientist is his power of observation, especially in the physical, natural sciences – Stenger’s specialty. The ability to make keen observations, and to make connections that many others may miss, is of critical importance in the physical sciences. We expect this of scientists. My guess is that within his area of expertise, Stenger is very good. But when it comes to the really important things concerning life and purpose, he is seriously lacking. This, perhaps, gives some insight as to why science has flourished in the Christian West as nowhere else. Stenger, and others like him, are likely operating on borrowed capital. The other type of author with which I have difficulty is a professing Christian whose writings undermine the very faith he professes to uphold. For either type of author, if I am to attempt a review, it must be long. Dear reader, if you have read this review all the way through, I truly appreciate your patience.