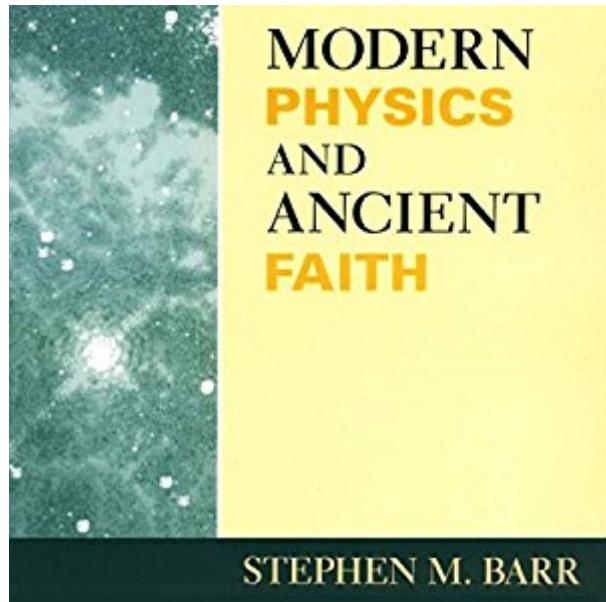


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Modern Physics And Ancient Faith



Synopsis

Modern Physics and Ancient Faith argues that the great discoveries of modern physics are more compatible with the central teachings of Christianity and Judaism about God, the cosmos, and the human soul than with the atheistic viewpoint of scientific materialism. These discoveries led many thoughtful people to the conclusion that the universe has no cause or purpose, that the human race is an accidental byproduct of blind material forces, and that the ultimate reality is matter itself. Barr contends that the revolutionary discoveries of the 20th century run counter to this line of thought. He uses five of these discoveries - the Big Bang theory, unified field theories, anthropic coincidences, Gödel's Theorem in mathematics, and quantum theory - to cast serious doubt on the materialist's view of the world and to give greater credence to Judeo-Christian claims about God and the universe. Written in clear language, Barr's rigorous and fair text explains modern physics to general audiences without oversimplification. Using the insights of modern physics, he reveals that modern scientific discoveries and religious faith are deeply consonant. The book is published by University of Notre Dame Press.

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Customer Reviews

Modern Physics and Ancient Faith

Stephen M. Barr

Many Christians struggle with reconciling what modern scientists say about the origin and nature of the world with what the Scriptures tell us. Should we take the Scriptures as our primary source, or what scientist say? Dr. Barr attempts to provide a "middle ground," that takes both current scientific belief and what the Scriptures say seriously. Modern Physics is arranged around four major discoveries, or rather shifts in the common

beliefs of scientists, that underpin or support theistic belief, specifically Judeo-Christian belief. The author begins his book with a solid overview of materialistic thinking. "This view of dogma as anti-rational is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what religious dogmas are. It is thought that the basis of dogma is emotion. ... To a religious person, however, a dogma is not something that is embraced from mere hidebound habit or feeling or wishful thinking, rather it is understood to be a true proposition for which there is the best of all possible evidence, namely that its truth has been revealed by God. -Page 11" He then moves into the first of the four "big discoveries," the Big Bang. The author defends the Big Bang theory from several angles; this is probably one of the strongest defenses of the theory you'll find in print in layman's terms. He does slip here, though, in a major way --for Dr. Barr's "blending" of the Scriptures and scientific thought leads him to the conclusion that the Scriptures are, after all, not written to express truth in a "scientific way." In other words, the author embraces the view that the Scriptures can be relied on to tell us the truth about our souls, but only science can be relied on to tell us the truth about the world. The second "big discovery," the author dives in to is the connection between order and design. Here Dr. Barr is on solid ground, making solid points in favor of Christian thought. His general line of argument is that all "natural order," is really the result of some underlying design, or "more complete order." For instance, when you arrange marbles in a box, they fall into a certain symmetrical shape --but they only do this because their underlying shape is even more symmetrical than the shape produced in the arrangement. Man's place in the Cosmos is next up. This discussion is primarily about the physical location and relative size of man. The author argues that size and position don't really matter --and if they did, man is neither the smallest nor the largest among the created order, so there is little we can take away from where men and the Earth actually lie. The anthropocentric coincidences are then treated in a long and interesting discussion. The final "big discovery" the author discusses is quantum physics. Dr. Barr spends a good bit of time explaining the concept of quantum physics --this section will be very helpful for the reader who isn't versed in these concepts. He then works into how quantum theory relates to the concept of mind and knowing. Again, the author is on very strong ground when showing how the mind cannot be like a computer. His illustration of the maze and the processing of information within or outside the maze is very useful. Overall, this book makes solid arguments, perhaps providing some of the best arguments I've ever read in relation to the mind of man and the problems of materialistic thinking. The downside is his insistence on blending the Scriptures and modern scientific belief; anytime the Scriptures are blended with anything, the Scriptures always end up taking second place.

The book is very clear and easy to follow, and Professor Barr is very careful to stick to just what the evidence shows and no more or less. The book includes many interesting stories about scientists and the history of science. Debates about whether religion and science are at odds often produce more heat than light, but this calm book is very informative, while telling the story of science and religion in the last century, without any animosity. I recommend it to anyone, whether religious or not! The latest edition has an updated preface explaining a few slight changes he would make to his claims, based on updated science.

Modern Physics and Ancient Faith is one the best books on cosmology and theology without a compromising of the physics. The book is well written, in plain English and with technical appendices as required. Barr does not water down the physics. You cannot just rush through this book and expect to grasp all that's in it. That's partly why it's such an excellent book. Given the many developments in physics and cosmology, I look forward to the revised edition.

Stephen Barr makes excellent points about how nearly impossible the materialistic view of the universe beginning really is. Right from the Big Bang (Let there be light) he shows how the rules of Physics are so tightly set that doing all that by chance requires absurd reasoning.

The author has done a good job clarifying the real conflict between religion and science. The real conflict is not between religion and science. It is rather between religion and materialism disguised as science. Some of the first rate scientific pioneers have seen no conflict between science and religion: Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Volta, Ampere, Maxwell, Mayer, Gauss, Lord Kelvin... And in our times: Lemaitre, Compton, de Broglie, Hess, Penzias, Brockhouse... Neither Planck nor Einstein did side with materialism...

I have to say, well written and easy to read; covers the standard pieces of the cosmological and teleological arguments. When I read this book as a beginner, it inspired me to continue reading on the subject, and certainly inspired a lot of discussions on cosmology and religion.

An excellent book for the intelligent non-scientist (or at least, non-physicist.) The author, a professor of physics, presents the arguments of scientific materialism, while showing that within modern understandings of physics, such unwavering materialism may have to make room for the existence of something beyond the material world. I'm about two-thirds of the way through the book and am

enjoying it immensely.

A fantastic book written by someone who knows both fields from the inside and the outside. Everything is explained very clearly. Many books on this issue are not easy to read, but this book is written by someone who knows how to write.

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