

Books relevant to the UUCV discussion on science and religion

The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World Paul Davies (1992)

“Probably impossible for poor old homo sapiens to ‘get to the bottom of it all’.”
“I belong to a group of scientists who do not subscribe to a conventional religion but nevertheless deny that the universe is a purposeless accident.” “Science suggests that the existence of conscious organisms is a fundamental feature of the universe.” “A universe as smooth as ours requires some extraordinarily delicate fine-tuning at the outset.” “Not everybody is happy with the many-universes theory... It is simpler to postulate one unseen God.”

The Goldilocks Enigma: Why is the Universe Just Right for Life? Paul Davies (2006)

In this work Davies goes into greater details about the themes from his previous book. Themes include: the origin of the universe; what is the universe made of; what are the forces and parameters of the universe; intelligent and not so intelligent design; is life written into the laws of the universe.

The World View of Contemporary Physics: Does it Need a New Metaphysics? Edited by Richard Kitchener (1988)

This book is a compilation of ten articles that came from presentations at a conference on the topic of physics and metaphysics. In Kitchener's article he says, “the once popular view of logical empiricists that ‘metaphysics is meaningless’ is no longer tenable; indeed, in retrospect it seems clear that the logical empiricists had a metaphysics and that what they were opposed to was a metaphysics that was *transcendent*, one that made claims about a supernatural reality that in no way could be checked empirically.” And, “What must reality be like in order for quantum phenomena to be possible? This includes the possibility that there is no reality, that the physicist ‘creates’ the reality, that there are ‘many realities’, that the reality is ‘spiritual’, and so forth.” Main points of the book include replacing elementarism with holism and a substance with a process. Other key issues include whether there is an ultimate reality independent of human ideas and theories and the connection between metaphysics and science.

Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon Daniel Dennett (2006)

A key point - chapter 3.3 - he asks what pays for religion, i.e., what benefit do humans get from religion. He believes that there must exist some biological explanation. (I believe this is his love of Darwin speaking.) He comes pretty close to his book's purpose on page 262-63 when he mockingly describes himself as “a white heterosexual privileged Protestant (?) male who uses knowledge for power.” At best his book is an attempt to persuade the reader to become an atheist and to provide arguments for the reader to drop illogical reasoning tied to religious beliefs. He doesn't really establish the natural aspect of religion.

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The Book of Universes: Exploring the Limits of the Cosmos John Barrow (2011)

The author, a mathematician, presents various theories about our universe and possible other universes, including fractal universes, Dirac's universe, perturbed universes, Schrodinger's universe, table-top universes, electric universes, hot universes, turbulent universes, chaotic universes, mixmaster universes, magnetic universes, and at least two dozen others.

The Science of God: The Convergence of Scientific & Biblical Wisdom Gerald Schroeder (1997)

The author (Jewish faith) believes that the Bible and Science are two different perspectives on a single whole. He discusses topics, including free will, origin of the universe, origin of life and says a scientific look at them are what the Bible (and Talmud and Nahmanides) says about them are compatible and interdependent. For example, he says the Bible puts the heavens before earth and the early church missed this by insisting that the earth was the center of the universe. Also creation in the Bible is in sync with the Big Bang where Aristotle's steady state is not. He points to contradictions in the bible and wants the reader to see that they are not by chance but are beacons urging us to see a deeper meaning.

Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness are the Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe Robert Lanza and Bob Berman (2009)

A "theory of everything" cannot happen because its underlying world view is wrong. "Once [you know] that there is no independent external universe outside of biological existence, the rest more or less falls into place." "When quantum theory implies that consciousness must exist, it tacitly shows that the content of the mind is the ultimate reality, and that only an act of observation can confer shape and form to reality."

Seven principles of Biocentrism: 1) What we perceive as reality is a process that involves our consciousness. 2) Our external and internal perceptions are inextricably intertwined. They are different sides of the same coin and cannot be separated. 3) The behavior of subatomic particles - indeed all particles and objects - is inextricably linked to the presence of an observer. Without the presence of a conscious observer, they at best exist in an undetermined state of probability waves. 4) Without consciousness, 'matter' dwells in an undetermined state of probability. Any universe that could have preceded consciousness only existed in a probability state. 5) The very structure of the universe is explainable only through biocentrism. The universe is fine-tuned for life, which makes perfect sense as life creates the universe, not the other way around. The universe is simply the complete spatio-temporal logic of the self. 6) Time does not have a real existence outside of animal-sense perception. It is the process by which we perceive changes in the universe. 7) Space, like time, is not an object or a thing. Space is another form of our animal understanding and does not have an independent reality. We carry space and time around with us like turtles with shells. Thus, there is no absolute self-existing matrix in which physical events occur independent of life.