

# TEMPLETON REPORT

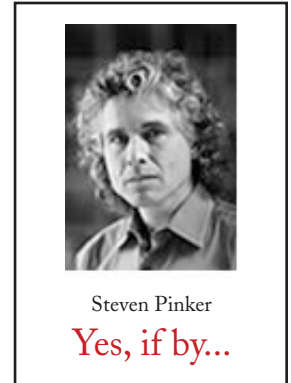
NEWS FROM THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

May 29, 2008

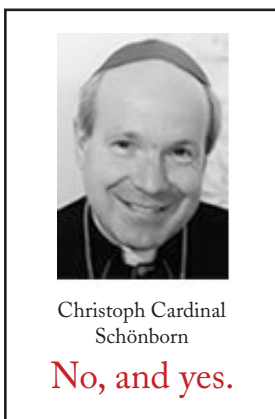
## “Does science make belief in God obsolete?”

That is the Big Question posed in the latest of the Foundation’s advertorials, which has been running this spring in newspapers and magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. The various versions of the advertorial bring together different combinations of the thirteen distinguished scientists, theologians, and commentators who wrote essays responding to the question. Contributors run the gamut from the journalist Christopher Hitchens, a vocal atheist; to Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, the lead editor of the catechism of the Catholic Church; to William D. Phillips, a Nobel Laureate in physics and man of deep personal faith. Michael Shermer, the publisher of *Skeptic* magazine and a columnist for *Scientific American*, coordinated and edited the essays.

The advertorials began appearing in April and will continue through June. Readers have encountered them in the pages of the *Atlantic*, the *Economist*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *New York Times*, the *Financial Times*, *Nature*, *New Scientist*, *Scientific American*, the *New Republic*, *Commentary*, and *Prospect* and online at *Slate*, the *Huffington Post*, and *National Review Online*. The essays are available in their entirety at [www.templeton.org/belief](http://www.templeton.org/belief), where the full texts can be read, downloaded, or requested in a printed booklet. For the design of the advertorial and the booklet, the Foundation was pleased to work again with the famed graphic artist Milton Glaser.



An additional feature of the website is a series of debates between the contributors: Christopher Hitchens versus Brown University biologist Kenneth Miller; Michael Shermer versus Jerome Groopman of Harvard Medical School; and Harvard psychology professor and author Steven Pinker versus William Phillips. The full roster of contributors also includes Pervez Amirali Hoodbhoy, Mary Midgley, Robert Sapolsky, Keith Ward, Victor J. Stenger, and Stuart Kauffman.



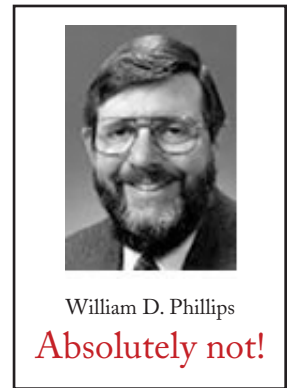
Pamela Thompson, the Foundation’s Vice President for Communications, said that the advertorial series—this is the third one—grew out of founder Sir John Templeton’s gift for asking provocative questions. “He really has one big question after another about science, philosophy, and theology. So we thought: why not get the best answers we can, from scientists and scholars of differing views, and share it all with the public?”

The first advertorial, which ran in the fall of 2007, reflected the Foundation’s philosophical and cosmological interests by asking “Does the universe have a purpose?” The conversation featured responses by such thinkers as Elie Wiesel, the Yale computer scientist David Gelernter, the primatologist Jane Goodall, the astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, and Owen Gingerich, professor emeritus of astronomy and the history of science at Harvard. Last winter a second advertorial, focusing on the Foundation’s interest in enterprise-based solutions to poverty, asked “Will money solve Africa’s development problems?” Respondents included Donald Kaberuka, president of the African Development Bank; Edward Green, director of the AIDS Prevention Research Project at Harvard; and Iqbal Z. Quadir, founder of Grameenphone in Bangladesh.

The current advertorial, on the relationship between science and belief in God, has generated a remarkable response. Readers have posted thus far almost 700 hundred comments to the Big Questions website, and the Foundation has sent out, free

of charge, more than 3,000 requested copies of the booklet. Nor has the conversation been limited to the Foundation’s website. It has rippled outward into the blogosphere, sparking discussions on dozens of sites. The discussion also has received wide coverage in the press, from the *Los Angeles Times* and MSNBC to the *Independent* and the *Times* of London, whose Tim Hames and Libby Purves both devoted columns to the essays.

Several public events have been planned to expand the audience for this Big Question. On May 15th, the Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute cosponsored a discussion between Michael Shermer and William Phillips, with 1994 Templeton Prize winner Michael Novak as the moderator. Other events are being planned for the fall, including a discussion at the California Institute of Technology and a debate in New York to be cosponsored by “On Faith,” the religion blog of the *Washington Post*.

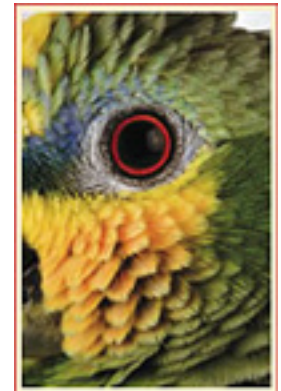


Gary Rosen, the Chief External Affairs Officer of the Foundation, sees the advertorial and accompanying booklet as key tools for involving the public in JTF’s activities. “They’re a terrific bridge between the research we support and the enormous demand out there for informed, open-minded discussion of the Big Questions. We’re thrilled with the response.”

## NOTEBOOK

### *In Central Park with Jonathan Rosen*

Author Jonathan Rosen was the featured speaker at a Templeton Book Forum in New York City in early May. His talk, entitled “A Birder’s Guide to Evolution and Faith,” drew upon his acclaimed new book *The Life of the Skies: Birding at the End of Nature* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). Part memoir and part intellectual history, the book describes not only Rosen’s initiation into the wonders of birding but the deep connection between the “life of the skies” and the 19th-century development of evolutionary theory in the work of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. As a student of Jewish thought and a novelist who has explored the trials of modern faith, Rosen sees birdwatching—an activity that mediates between earth and sky—as a way to shuttle between disparate worlds. “At its heart,” as one reviewer observed, his account is “a consideration of the relationship between spiritual yearning and evolutionary science by a birder who tries to speak highly of both.”



For a video of the Templeton Book Forum event and an original JTF interview with Rosen as he explores Central Park and explains the relationship of birdwatching to his book’s themes, go to [http://www.templeton.org/events/book\\_forums/](http://www.templeton.org/events/book_forums/).

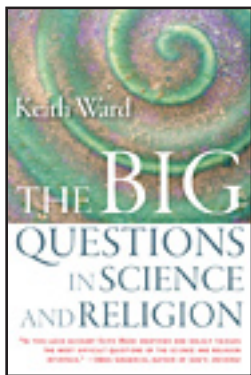
### *New York Times Profiles JTF Advisor*

The headline said it all: “Scientist at Work: Roving Defender of Evolution, and of Room for God.” The subject of this recent piece in the science section of the *New York Times* was John Templeton Foundation advisor Francisco J. Ayala. An evolutionary biologist and geneticist at the University of California, Irvine, Ayala is the author of *Darwin’s Gift to Science and Religion* (2007) and a former Dominican priest. As the *Times* reported, he remains surprised “at how many Americans believe the theory of evolution is contrary to belief in God, or that the theory is erroneous or even fraudulent.”

Ayala does not find evidence of “intelligent design” in nature. Indeed, he recalls that as a theology student in his native Spain, he was taught that evolution provided the grounds for defending God’s goodness and omnipotence. “As floods and drought were a necessary consequence of the fabric of the physical world, predators and parasites, dysfunctions and diseases were a consequence of the evolution of life,” he writes in his book. “They were not a result of a deficient or malevolent design.” Ayala emphatically rejects the notion that creationism or intelligent design deserves equal time in the classroom. “We don’t teach alchemy along with chemistry,” he told the *Times*. “We don’t teach witchcraft along with medicine. We don’t teach astrology with astronomy.”

### *Keith Ward’s Big Questions*

In his new book from the Templeton Foundation Press, Keith Ward displays his characteristic scholarship and intellectual breadth. As *Publishers Weekly* observed in its starred review:



*Ward, an Oxford theologian specializing in the history and philosophy of religion, presents an impressively insightful and well-balanced survey of major questions for science-and-religion dialogue. Ward takes on a wide range of topics, reasoning that if God is “the ultimate cause of absolutely everything—we might think that the existence of God must make some difference to how things are.” The beginning and end of the universe, the origins and nature of consciousness, and human religious experience all become contact points for discussion between scientific and religious perspectives. Writing as a scholar of world religions, Ward discusses multiple traditions at a level of depth and detail that exceeds the normal standards of the science and religion literature. Atheist and agnostic perspectives also receive a fair hearing, recognized as parties to the conversation rather than merely as rhetorical foils. Throughout, Ward shows a keen ability to recognize variations and distinctions within traditions, while still drawing helpful generalizations such as his conclusion that “to believe in God is primarily to believe in the objectivity of value and purpose.”*

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**JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION**

SUPPORTING SCIENCE ~ INVESTING IN THE BIG QUESTIONS