Dr. Steven Weinberg
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Dear Dr. Weinberg:

My views on physicists, biologists, and religion are based only on casual observations. I like your idea that most physicists don't qualify as practising atheists because they don't care enough about religion to think about it. Doubtless the same thing is true for many biologists. It is different, I think, with biologists who deal with evolution and its mechanisms in their research or teaching. These people deal constantly with ideas that are obviously incompatible with religious dogmas, so in a sense they are thinking about religion much of the time. This is most obvious where the evolution of man is concerned. After all, the Bible tells us that God created man in his own image. To maintain that man evolved from non-human creatures--starting from something probably like a bacterium--via mechanisms that can be understood, is as strong a denial of Judeo-Christian religion as I can imagine. Such biologists don't have to think twice if asked whether they accept the biblical God.

Beyond evolution is the question of the origin of life. I think that this question--along with that of the origin of man--is at the root of the religion I was taught as a child. Yet even this question is now being investigated vigorously and will probably receive a plausible explanation before very long. Biologists--or perhaps I should say educated people--know that life is a chemical phenomenon and don't doubt that its origin did not require supernatural intervention.

Another biological question--how the brain works--is in a sense fundamental to everything. To me, it seems more difficult than any of the other problems. It will not be solved in my lifetime, and I sometimes wonder whether, in the end, it will be possible for the brain to understand itself. I am betting it will be.

Thanks for your letter.

Yours sincerely,

Norman Horowitz