

Do we still need God?

God was very convenient for pre-scientific humans. There was a lot that they did not understand, so the supernatural helped to make sense of things.

They did not know whence came the stars, so they became the twinkling lights of God.

But today, the Big Bang theory provides a purely mechanistic explanation of the origin of the universe that is consistent with the laws of physics.

They did not know whence came the Earth, so religion served the function of explaining its origin.

But today, astrophysics explain how basic forces of matter resulted in the formation of planets from clouds of matter in space.

They did not know whence came humanity, so they imagined themselves as the special creation and care of God. In Genesis, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and in Greek mythology, the Olympian deities frequently descended from that mountain and mingled with humans.

But today, the theory of evolution provides a naturalistic explanation of how species change to adapt to the environment.

They did not understand whence came frightening things in the world. So thunder became the flashing anger of Zeus, and storms at sea became the result of Neptune's shaking his trident.

But today, we have purely scientific explanations for earthquakes, storms, tornadoes, and hurricanes.

They did not understand whence came the rise and fall of nations. For ancient Israel, winning in war was the result of God's showing his favor, and losing was the result of God's becoming wroth at their sins and smiting them.

But today, the story of the rise and fall of Israel looks like one of thousands of civilizations that have risen and fallen due to a combination of political changes, economic factors, and population shifts.

What about the questions that science can't answer?

Humans seem to have a need to feel special and important.

Thus, being made in the image of God can be a comforting idea. It's a lot more satisfying than the reality that the Earth is a speck of dust orbiting around a yellow dwarf star in an obscure corner of the Milky Way, which is just one of thousands of galaxies in the vastness of space.

Humans seem to have a need for art, for music, for beauty -- for some kind of transcendence over just surviving.

Thus, being the special creation of God can be a comforting idea. But there are other ways to look for meaning: the world of ideas in philosophy, the rapture of a Mozart piano concerto, looking up in awe at the towering redwoods, and getting lost in the world of poetry. These can all be ways of find satisfaction without God.

Humans seem to feel a need for a sense of justice in the world.

Thus, being in the hands of God can be a comforting idea. But then there's the nasty question of theodicy: if the universe is governed by a just, omnipotent, and omniscient God, why do the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper? Even God doesn't always help here. In the Book of Job, Job complained to God about his innocent sufferings and God replied thus: I'm God, and you're not, so I can do anything I want to you, little man. In Job, God seems a lot like Mr. Hands from the Mr. Bill Show on Saturday Night Live.