

## Philosophy in Review



# Joseph Hinman. "God Science Ideology: Examining the Role of Ideology in the Religious-Scientific Dialogue"

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Volume 42, Number 2, May 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1089701ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1089701ar>

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### Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

### ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Miller, L. (2022). Review of [Joseph Hinman. "God Science Ideology: Examining the Role of Ideology in the Religious-Scientific Dialogue"]. *Philosophy in Review*, 42(2), 22–24. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1089701ar>

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**Joseph Hinman.** *God Science Ideology: Examining the Role of Ideology in the Religious-Scientific Dialogue.* Grand Viaduct 2022. 647 pp. \$59.99 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780982408766).

If any area of current philosophy is so incendiary as to teeter on violence, it is argument about an omnipotent divine being's existence. The 'debate'—too gentle a term here—becomes so vehement it echoes the doctrinal tree-shaking that led to so many religious wars. Certainly, professional philosophers tend toward protocols of respect and charitability among one another. But the internet has provided history perhaps the most immense battlefield for doctrinal dispute. Hinman's lengthy, vehement, if generally sober offering to this battle is almost definitive of the field. It is likely one of the most thorough religious apologetics in contemporary times. It merits a serious consideration and is certain to draw some rabid fire.

A quick thumbing through blogs, blog comments, message boards, and chat rooms reveals an astonishing, if not unsettling, anger, and even hatred. After centuries of highly Christianized Western philosophy, upon the advent of Darwin/Wallace theory, sides quickly started forming. While ancient Greece tolerated few atheists, such outlook had only shaky grounds until 1859: a magnificently cogent theory of life's origins and development required no ultimate mover. It seems the religious have since then taken up arms, both metaphorically and, in the case of World Trade Center and its imitators, literally. In turn, growing atheist movements reacted against such defensive measures. For reasons beyond this review's scope, this upsurge in side-taking and regrouping, like so many buffalo facing predators, evidences a powerful human need for settling the issue, *pace* the few agnostics gazing on bewildered. A peek at the arguments reveals a mess. One of the advantages of Hinman's new work is that it attempts, among other goals, to order the mess somehow.

While he is professedly theistic, the work exudes care and some respect for the various perspectives. Its sheer breadth and depth of scholarship and capacity in articulating it attests the generally due respect of the many sides, which often exhibit the rational and irrational in one commentator. The central theme, which ties the various sub-arguments together, is that ideologies outside of the sciences themselves are informing science-based, evidential arguments about divine existence. Many sides of the debate, including the monotheistic, are equally guilty.

Hinman's ideology-scoring approach, in the end, exerts notable force and a new voice in the controversy. His book has brought together many positions in the debate. Hinman's most persistent targets are the contemporary theories maintaining that a divine's existence can be decided solely by scientific theories. Most thinkers, except possibly extreme agnostics, seem to harbor ideologies. Perhaps ideologies have their place somewhere in the life of the mind. That caveat, and whatever place ideologies may hold, are not the point here. Rather, it is that too many researchers in this area either do not admit their own ideology or deny its importance to the discussion of divine existence. Hinman details how many a contribution to the discussion is steeped in ideology, without their authors' acknowledging—or even seeing—it. Only by bringing these ideologies explicitly into the discussion can it gain significant traction to get the discussion out of the mud.



The chief culprit in ideological negligence to Hinman appears to be assuming the sciences offer the sole route to knowledge. Disciplines outside the sciences, such as philosophy, do not produce knowledge. Some commentators may add that therefore these other disciplines have no legitimate place in learning. Of course, there is no global, unanimous agreement as to what ‘science’ consists of. Most important, for this alleged scientific approach to increasing knowledge, is how this theory is itself philosophical, not scientific. What this theory assumes is, in fact, an ideology (Hinman does speak explicitly to the matter of what an ideology consists of). Being covertly motivated by such ideologies without admitting as much, the author suggests, precludes the contestants from playing on a level field, or in the same field at all.

Hinman enters the fray over the ‘new atheist’ and related outlooks primarily through controversies over the nature of the sciences. I adhere to Philip Kitcher’s contention that, due to the significant differences among the sciences, it is more apt to speak of them in the plural rather than with the monolithic and presumably unified ‘science.’ While conceding that Kuhn’s and Popper’s views differ notably, Hinman observes how their philosophies of science show that scientific disciplines are much richer than mere amassers of facts. But Hinman maintains that the amasser-of-facts view is often wielded as a weapon against religions for not generating facts. Rather, Hinman holds, neither religions nor sciences merely gather facts. Religions form a major source for such matters as why the universe is here, what humans are to accomplish here, how and why one should live. Sciences may explain how the universe came about but not why it did so. Sciences may state what humans do accomplish but not why anyone should bother accomplishing anything. Sciences explain how humans stay alive but not why they should, as religions may do. As these contrasts between religions and sciences evidence, the sciences are more than fact-amassers but, as is commonly recognized, offer explanations of natural phenomena. One may then safely say: Religions offer explanations of natural phenomena and perhaps other kinds of phenomena but do not merely accumulate facts. Sciences offer the best currently possible theories of natural phenomena, deriving facts as a side-effect, but not explaining any reputed *unnatural* phenomena.

Hinman points out that such distinctions between religions and sciences may be agreeable to many people across the disciplines, but not to other groups, such as the New Atheists. That latter view would, rather, contend that there are no non-natural phenomena or non-natural facts, because these fall outside the domain of sciences. Only the sciences are the sources of knowledge, and attempting to attain knowledge otherwise fails by definition. The problem here, Hinman describes, is not only begging the question, but also lacking admittance of the underlying ideology. Such admittance could at least clarify the playing field. The argument Hinman targets defines knowledge as the outcome solely of the sciences—as the sciences’ exclusive domain. Any pursuit outside the sciences is not the sciences’ and so is not knowledge. Knowledge, among other traits, is true and factual. Since religions are not part of the sciences, they cannot render knowledge or truth. They are simply exercises in noise and futility. Certainly, Hinman concurs, there may be a scientific study of religions as phenomena of human society. But religion itself is not a science, no more than a bird is a science in the way that ornithology is. Besides the begging of the question of what knowledge is, the ‘scientistic’ argument is based on ideology—which may explain why it begs the

question. That ideology attempts, circularly, to explain ideology. Moreover, ideology may so hold these belief-groups in thrall that they do not see the ideology.

What may that ideology consist in? The study of ideology per se would be useful here but far too complex for this brief review. Enlightenment philosopher Antoine Destutt coined ‘ideology’ in 1796 as a positive concept—a science of ideas, to aid in our making rational decisions. Since then, the term often has a negative, even derogatory sense, perhaps part of the increasing distrust of enlightenment thought. Generally, the term refers to adamant, overarching beliefs in political philosophies, economics, sociology, psychology. These beliefs operate as bases for building theories about how society should operate—yet, the ‘should’ here may not be normative, but *presumed* empirical. Reputed ideologies have included free-market liberalism, socialism, behaviorism, and religious-based ideology such as Mormonism or Shiism. A problem in studying ideology is the readiness to identify any belief as ideology. The distinction between mere belief and ideology is difficult and may itself feed an ideology. Certainly, thinkers such as Feyerabend and Kuhn assert science, too, is influenced by practitioners’ ideologies. One of Hinman’s refreshing points in this line of thought is that new instances or applications of ideology, in delineating what knowledge consists in, are used as if they themselves are scientific and thus ideology-free ‘workable theory.’ Say the sciences are merely what works best. Then not only is Ptolemy’s earth-centered universe correct, working well for navigation, but so would be the Holocaust, which accomplished its perpetrators’ needs.

The nuance here, contrasted with Kuhn/Feyerabend, is not merely that sciences are as biased as any belief. Rather, religion need not be a science to be rational and viable: Religion is not competing with the sciences to develop facts about the natural world (Hinman confesses to being evolutionist). Harris, Churchland, Krauss, Hitchens and others have accused religion of lacking such fact-making capacity, which renders it non-knowledge and untruth. Only an ideology of science would make such a claim, non-viably.

The book could serve as one text in an undergraduate or graduate seminar in religion and science. Many readers interested in the torrid contemporary debate should find it either laudable or nerve-wracking. In any case, it is highly stimulating, brilliant in places, sometimes violating good debate protocol by grouping thinkers too facilely. It could use a good trimming of its many long quotations from other authors. It is rare to find a book so exuberant yet still rational in its intricate, often difficult argumentation.

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