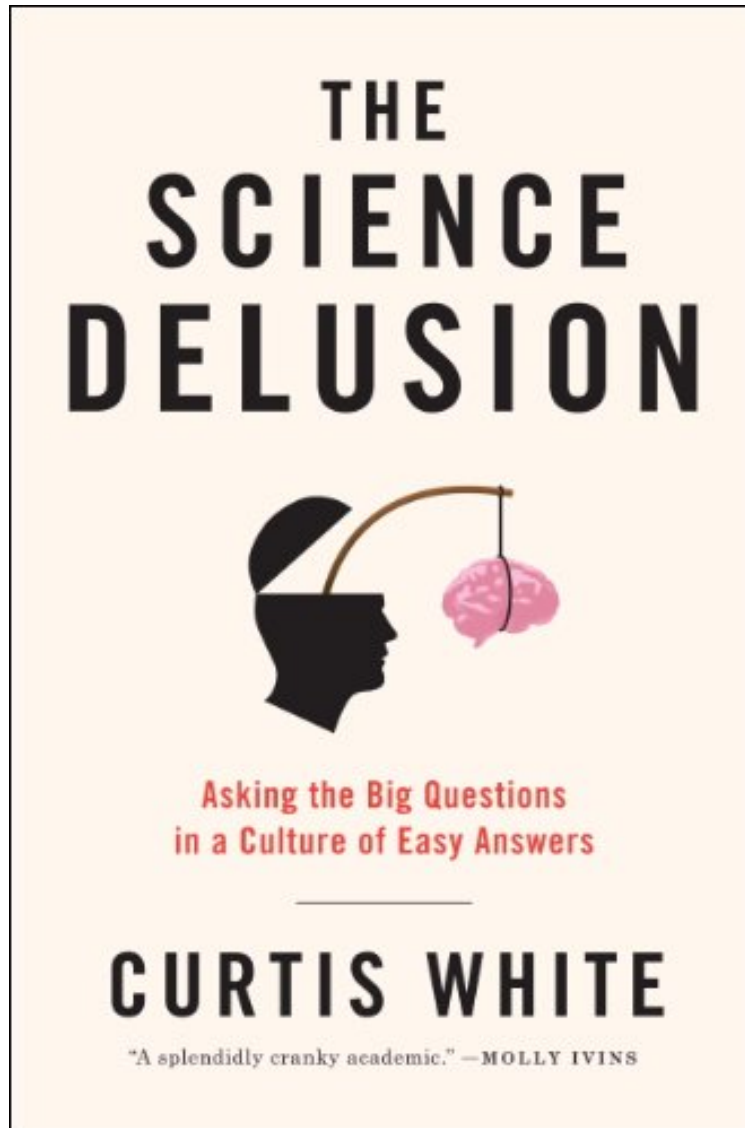


The Science Delusion: Asking the Big Questions in a Culture of Easy Answers

Curtis White

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Curtis White : The Science Delusion: Asking the Big Questions in a Culture of Easy Answers before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Science Delusion: Asking the Big Questions in a Culture of Easy Answers:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but not quite compelling By P. Seltz It's ok. Makes some interesting points and the "romantic" perspective is unique and keeps the atheist attackers at bay. It would have been better if he had taken time to flush out his argument and go a little deeper. 3 of 3 people found the following review

helpful. A great book to read, but difficult to summarize. A relief to read when life seemed a bit too mechanistic. By C. Good_The Science Delusion_ by Curtis White is a bit of a rant. But it's a good rant, and the topic is contained in the subtitle, "Asking the Big Questions in a Culture of Easy Answers"; "Easy Answers"; he is referring to are the answers provided by scientists and popular science writers, who talk as though all the questions of life can be solved by scientific research and scientific theories. Points in the book's favor: - Many interesting and funny comments and footnotes. The footnotes in particular were always interesting. - Lots of quotes, lots of different sources, good arguments. Even at times I didn't agree, following the arguments and logic was worth my time and gave me a lot to think about regarding to my own views. - Fascinating discussion about Romanticism and its historical roots. - Visually a pleasure to read, nice line spacing, paragraph spacing, font, and font size. This is something that isn't always true of all books. - Table of Contents, footnotes, and a good index. All are present in this book, and again this is not true of all books. Things I didn't like: - I wish it was longer and went into more detail. _The Science Delusion_ often reads like a long letter from White to a good friend of his who's been having a hard time grasping why White has become so irritable. - White is a bit more enamored with 1960s hippy culture and the recent Occupy movement than I am. - I think there is a beauty to physical objects things which are well designed. I think the beauty seen by myself and others doesn't depend on whether the thing we're admiring is lethal or not. I can admire a nicely designed knife or sword or firearm, but that doesn't mean I think it's great for people to be stabbed, cut or shot with it. People can go to airshows and enjoy the displays of current fighter jets and other older military planes, but that doesn't mean they think it's great when someone gets bombed or shot. I don't think White would agree. - Summary and comments about each chapter: - Introduction, where White explains why he is writing this book. White writes "So I'd like to ask, 'In whose interest do these science popularizers and provocateurs write? And to what end?' They would like us to think that their only interest is the establishment of knowledge. What I will suggest is that their claims are based upon assumptions many of which are dubious if not outright deluded, and that the kind of political culture their delusions support is lamentable." White spends the rest of the book doing exactly that. - I. "What's a Good Lunch?", where White talks about a discussion between Richard Dawkins, author of _The God Delusion_, and Francis Crick, who discovered DNA along with James Watson. Dawkins tells Crick some people don't see a conflict between science and religion. Crick replies there is no "higher purposer" in life, we're all just products of evolution, and viewing life that way isn't bleak because he and Dawkins are "having a good lunch". Over the course of _The God Delusion_, White repeatedly alludes to scientists glossing over a lot of questions about life and philosophy and purpose and aspirations and dreams by saying "science explains it all" or "science answers it all" and then saying "it's okay, science gives us a good lunch." - II. "Romanticism as Counterculture", where White discusses the historical, social and psychological roots of Romanticism as a reaction against a very rigid system of social class and intellectual endeavor. White also discusses how Romantics can make great changes in the world and in their own lives, but often do so out of a pain which comes from always feeling like a misfit, and a desire to become more than they are. If _The Science Delusion_ was nothing but this chapter, I'd still recommend it. - III. "DNA: A Parasite That Builds Its Own Host", where White further discusses the bleak, meaningless, mechanistic, predetermined world described by many scientists and science writers. White argues that a society of scientists is still a society of humans, yet far too many scientists want to believe they as a group have risen above regular human weaknesses and believe they as scientists have special insights most non-scientists do not. White opposes this with arguments that all humans are symbolic creatures who live in a world of symbols and metaphor, and much of the pain and threat we feel from others is the threat to our own symbolic systems. White comes back to Romanticism as the rebellion against various symbolic systems. - IV. "This Bit of Neural Matter", where White laments how the mind and thoughts and emotions have been reduced to neurological connections that are good if a commercial use can be found for them, and that's all there is to life. Science argues emotion comes out of brain chemical interactions and neuron interaction, not out of language; art and creativity and weirdness are great for developing new advertisement campaigns and new products, but not questioning authority or proposing new ideas or pondering the big questions. - V. "We Insiders", where White gets pretty deep into philosophy. He found a book by a science writer, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, who had also become disillusioned by science's tendency to claim science explains all of reality. However, White is disappointed because even Goldstein's writing describes the world as "science explains all with math, except the things science can't explain with math". White argues that for anything to be experienced, there has to be someone doing the experiencing, but science writing and theories don't like to think too much about that requirement. There's a long discussion of German Idealism and how it has a European Continental outlook which thoroughly considers and critiques empiricism and mechanical materialism, which is different from the preference for logical positivism and analytic philosophy shown by Anglo-American schools of thought since the early 1900s. - VI. "In Praise of Play, Dissonance, and Freaking Out", where White writes a short final chapter about the wonders and beauty of both science and art, and warns that each destroy themselves and the culture around them when they decide they have The Answers and there is no room for change or dissent. White also argues that it is mostly Romantics who

realize humans are storytellers first and foremost. White argues that new ideas in art and science become beautiful because they are part of a story about overcoming uncertainty or breaking taboos or resolving old conflicts, but the story is part of what makes the new idea important to other humans.³ 9 people found the following review helpful. Nearly got it. By Mr. Arthur J. Robey I was hoping for ammunition to blow up the foundations of science as it floats on a cushion of belief. What I got was a howl of indignation from a Romantastist. He skirted the truth, which is that we have two physically separate brains that are alien to each other.

One of our most brilliant social critics—author of the bestselling *The Middle Mind*—presents a scathing critique of the “delusions” of science alongside a rousing defense of the tradition of Romanticism and the “big” questions. With the rise of religion critics such as Richard Dawkins, and of pseudo-science advocates such as Malcolm Gladwell and Jonah Lehrer, yours truly is likely to become a subject of ridicule if you wonder “Why is there something instead of nothing?” or “What is our purpose on earth?” Instead, at universities around the world, and in the general cultural milieu, we’re all being taught that science can resolve all questions without the help of philosophy, politics, or the humanities. In short, the rich philosophical debates of the 19th century have been nearly totally abandoned, argues critic Curtis White. An atheist himself, White nonetheless calls this new turn “scientism”—and fears what it will do to our culture if allowed to flourish without challenge. In fact, in “scientism,” White sees a new religion with many unexamined assumptions. In this brilliant multi-part critique, he aims at a TED talk by a distinguished neuroscientist in which we are told that human thought is merely the product of our “connectome,” a map of neural connections in the brain that is yet to be fully understood. . . . He whips a widely respected physicist who argues that our new understanding of the origins of the universe obviates any philosophical inquiry . . . and ends with a learned defense of the tradition of Romanticism, which White believes our technology and science-obsessed world desperately needs to rediscover. It’s the only way, he argues, that we can see our world clearly. . . and change it.

“A symptomatic tour of the real sense of anxiety about the disenchantment of all those qualities that make us feel most alive and unique in the world.”—*New York Times Book Review* [White’s] brisk takedowns of Hitchens, Hawking, Krauss, Lehrer and others are sharp and necessary, wielding elementary logic against figures who should know better. [White shows] just how easily good science can shade into the self-aggrandizing ideology of scientism.—*Mark Kingwell, Globe and Mail* “There’s certainly a very real need to march on that citadel, because the idea that there can be only one kind of truth has to be deeply damaging to the intellectual development of a culture.”—*Mark Orsco, Connell, Slate* “An important and necessary book.”—*Philadelphia of Books* “Thoroughly well researched and astutely puthellip; An essential read.”—*PopMatters* “Whitersquo;s prose is fluid and often enjoyablehellip; White clearly knows his stuff when it comes to classic literature, and offers an interesting sidebar on the development of Romanticism.”—*Willamette Week* “A bracing and necessary critique by an able arguer.”—*Toronto Star*, “Books of Note” “A highly readable yet powerful defense of the importance of the humanities against those who believe science to be the last interpretative framework standing. It is destined to become a classic among artists, dreamers, revolutionaries, and anyone who, like Kierkegaard, believes asking questions to be as important a quest as finding answers.”—*Tottenville* “An enjoyable and worthwhile read.”—*Christian Research Journal* “A witty critique of scientific overreach that celebrates the totality of human achievement.”—*Kirkus* “Praise for Curtis White and *The Middle Mind*” “Cogent, acute, beautiful, merciless, and true.”—*David Foster Wallace* “Re-visioning the world takes brawling muscle and a sneer. Curtis White gets that.”—*Andrei Codrescu* “The most inspiringly wicked social critic of the moment . . . White exalts the subversive pleasures of the imagination, not simply as a tactic for individual psychic survival, but also as a spark for collective engagement.”—*Will Blyth* “Curtis White writes out of an admirable intellectual sophistication combined with viscerality, pain, and humor.”—*John Barth* “A master of bewitchments, parodies, and dazzling tropes.”—*Paul Auster* “Not the least pleasure in reading the book resides in the refreshing malevolent irony that transpires from every page. Absolutely indispensable.”—*Slavoj Žižek* About the Author CURTIS WHITE is the author of the novels *Memories of My Father Watching TV* and *Requiem*. A widely acclaimed essayist, he has had work appear in *Harpers*’s *Magazine*, *Context*, *Lapham*’s *Quarterly*, *Orion*, and *Playboy*. His book *The Middle Mind: Why Americans Don*’t Think for Themselves was an international bestseller in 2003.