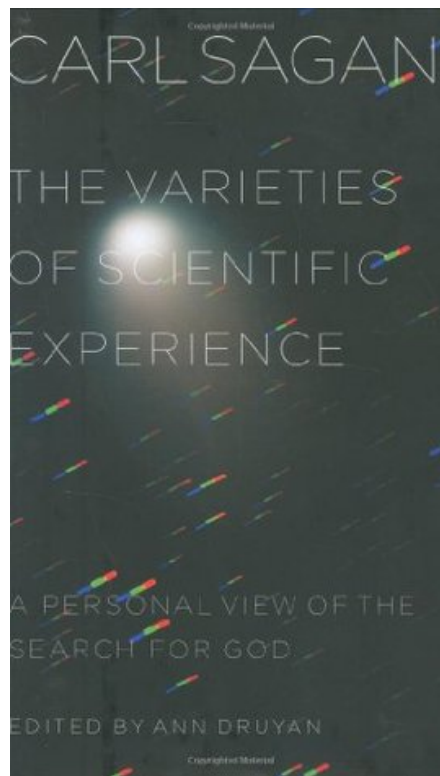




The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God

Carl Sagan , Ann Druyan (Editor)

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On the 10th anniversary of his death, brilliant astrophysicist and Pulitzer Prize winner Carl Sagan's prescient exploration of the relationship between religion and science and his personal search for God.

Carl Sagan is considered one of the greatest scientific minds of our time. His remarkable ability to explain science in terms easily understandable to the layman in bestselling books such as *Cosmos*, *The Dragons of Eden*, and *The Demon-Haunted World* won him a Pulitzer Prize and placed him firmly next to Isaac Asimov, Stephen Jay Gould, and Oliver Sachs as one of the most important and enduring communicators of science. In December 2006 it will be the tenth anniversary of Sagan's death, and Ann Druyan, his widow and longtime collaborator, will mark the occasion by releasing Sagan's famous "Gifford Lectures in Natural Theology," *The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God*.

The chance to give the Gifford Lectures is an honor reserved for the most distinguished scientists and philosophers of our civilization. In 1985, on the grand occasion of the centennial of the lectureship, Carl Sagan was invited to give them. He took the opportunity to set down in detail his thoughts on the relationship between religion and science as well as to describe his own personal search to understand the nature of the sacred in the vastness of the cosmos.

The Varieties of Scientific Experience, edited, updated and with an introduction by Ann Druyan, is a bit like eavesdropping on a delightfully intimate conversation with the late great astronomer and astrophysicist. In his charmingly down-to-earth voice, Sagan easily discusses his views on topics ranging from manic depression and the possibly chemical nature of transcendence to creationism and so-called intelligent design to the likelihood of intelligent life on other planets to the likelihood of nuclear annihilation of our own to a new concept of science as "informed worship." Exhibiting a breadth of intellect nothing short of astounding, he illuminates his explanations with examples from cosmology, physics, philosophy, literature, psychology, cultural anthropology, mythology, theology, and more. Sagan's humorous, wise, and at times stunningly prophetic observations on some of the greatest mysteries of the cosmos have the invigorating effect of stimulating the intellect, exciting the imagination, and reawakening us to the grandeur of life in the cosmos.

The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God Details

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Marita Mazanishvili says

"????????????????????" ?? introduction ????? ????? (:D) ???????, ??????? ???????????????, ???????????????, extra-terrestrial life-??, ????????? ??????????????????????? ?? ?.? ??????????????? ??????????? ?? ??????? ??????????? ?? ??????????? ??????? ????????????. ????????? ?????, ?? ????? ?? ?????????????? ????????????????????? ??????? ???????, ??????? ????? ??????? ?? ????????????? ????? ????????????? ????????????. btw ????????? ????????? ????????????? ????????????? ??????????????? ?? ????????? ????????? ?????????, ??? ??????????? ????????????? ????????? ??????????????. ????????????? "???????????? ????? ?? ??????" ??????????? ?? ??????? ?????, ?? ????? "????????????" ???, ??????????. ????? ??????? ??????? ????????????????????? ??????????????? ?? ??????? ?? ??????????? ?? ?????????, ????????? ??????? ????????? ????????? :D

Jamie says

My copy of this stays loaned out about ten months out of the year, so whenever it falls back into my hands for a week or two I'm practically duty-bound to eat it up as quick as I can.

Verdict: best as ever. If you read this book and don't have some fundamental opinions changed, then we'll probably be friends because you hold them in the first place.

Also, I always forget (though probably no longer, writing something down has a way of solving that problem) that Kurt Vonnegut is the only blurb for the book, right on the back cover. On Carl: "I miss him so."

Don't we all.

June 2009 review:

There's nothing I could say about Carl Sagan (his work, his writing, his imitable open-minded approach to our world and everything beyond it) that hasn't already been said, but I think that if there were one person, living or dead, with whom I could talk for days on end, my pick would be him.

Daniel Villines says

Imagine that at some long ago point in human history, a human first looked at her hand, and knew for certain that that hand was her very own. And from there she would look at things, think about how things worked, and put things together in order to survive and ultimately to thrive.

Now imagine some distant point in the future. Where will we be? It's impossible to say but the possibilities, if made simple enough, are clear. We will either be alive and thriving, or we will not be anywhere at all.

The Varieties of Scientific Experience is a realistic attempt to define where humanity is on the path between that past moment of realization and those two possible futures. Sagan gives this assessment in the most selfless of terms that humans can avail themselves of, which is the scientific method. Everything he puts forth is qualified in terms of its level of understanding and nothing is put forth that does not have Sagan's beliefs as supported by physical and real evidence. It is simply the very best that humans can do to define ourselves, and to define everything around us.

As for our actual location on that path, readers are left to decide for themselves. There are no certainties expressed by Sagan. The book's thickness alone is enough to convey the fact that arm-twisting, complicated mythos, or assertions of opinions based on lengthy stories are not included. And again, the selflessness of science (as well as our very survival) demands that we as individuals make this evaluation for ourselves. Our future depends upon it.

Melda says

Her ?ey harika da, çeviri çok kötü. :(

Bin says

The Varieties of Scientific Experience is a transcript of Carl Sagan's presentation of the Gifford Lectures.

While each lecture is self contained, they come together as a whole - each obliquely addressing questions about man's place in the universe, basic science, the relationship of rational inquiry to religion, and the implications of belief in extraterrestrial life.

Here, Sagan is presented in his typical form. He is at once witty, understandable, profound, and compassionate.

Of particular interest is the transcript of the various Q&A sessions which accompanied the lectures. Sagan displays great charm and humanity in his handling of those who attempt to attack his ideas. It's truly incredible to observe the confident humility of one of science's greatest minds.

Laura says

Well, I do wish everyone would read this book. I know that those with minds that are closed - whether known or not or willingly or not - would still not respond to the arguments that Sagan makes, but it might make a difference for those who are willing to take inquiry seriously. Sagan was a genius, but it was his ability to communicate to the masses that made him historical.

Throughout his lectures, he evokes the wisdom of others --

From the intro: "he insisted with Bertrand Russell that 'what is wanted is not the will to believe, but the desire to find out, which is the exact opposite.'"

On miracles, he quotes Hume and then Thomas Paine: "Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course or that a man should tell a lie?"

On the function of religion, he quotes Pierre-Simon (post-Newtonian scientist and partisan of the French Revolution): "Far from us be the dangerous maxim that it is sometimes useful to mislead, to deceive, and enslave mankind to ensure their happiness."

And finally, in his own words, the final paragraph: "I think if we ever reach the point where we think we thoroughly understand who we are and where we came from, we will have failed. I think this search does not lead to a complacent satisfaction that we know the answer, not an arrogant sense that the answer is before us and we need do only one more experiment to find it out. It goes with a courageous intent to greet the universe as it really is, not to foist our emotional predispositions on it but to courageously accept what our explorations tell us."

Then he goes on to school some common folk in the Q&A (the common folk being those smart enough to brave asking questions - those smarter than me).

Michael says

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Ryan says

It is so refreshing to finally finish a book. Since my life as an adult has begun (post-college), finishing a book is an increasingly rare event. I currently am on a science kick to such a degree that I have found myself wondering if I ought to go back to school and get an undergraduate degree in biology. Why? Just for fun. Anyway, this book is a book of recorded lectures that Sagan gave in Britain--something called the Gifford Lectures, which are probably prestigious. Anyway, they concern science and religion, and, really, for Carl, how religion just doesn't stand up to any sort of scrutiny. One major theme of the book is that no one should ever believe a proposition unless there be evidence to support that proposition. I think this is a basic, fair piece of advice to follow.

When he's not discussing the debate between science and religion, he is discussing what we have learned in

the realm of astrophysics, and he does an excellent job.

Since Sagan has died, I don't think anyone has picked up the mantle for champion of science. Dawkins has tried, but he is rather insolent and argumentative. Although I personally like Dawkins a lot, I don't think his personality suits him to be the champion of science that is needed.

Dustin says

Carl Sagan was one of the best at taking an exceptionally complex issue, often fraught with emotional and intuitional baggage, and rendering it into language that anyone can easily understand. He was also extremely generous in allowing that in any discussion of science or religion, no one, not even he, has all the answers, or maybe ever will.

This book is a transcript of a series of lectures he gave at Glasgow University, dealing with natural religion, which basically deals with the intersection of real science and religion (as opposed to the pseudo-scientific quackery often paraded on tv as "science.") Also included are transcripts of Q&A sessions that were held after each lecture.

A must read. I won't even bother to try to summarize any of his ideas or findings, as there is no way I could do any of them justice.

jeremy says

transcribed from his 1985 gifford lectures in glasgow, carl sagan's *the varieties of scientific experience* is an intrepid, erudite, and remarkably lucid examination of the universe, cosmology, extraterrestrial intelligence, religion, god, nuclear warfare, and humanity's future. sagan's prose is frequently breathtaking and his ability to succinctly convey and richly illustrate ideas is utterly enchanting.

published ten years after his death in 1996 (and edited by his widow, ann druyan), *the varieties of scientific experience* is as compelling and poignant as when the lectures were first delivered nearly three decades ago. although there have been some significant scientific developments and revelations in that span of time, the essence and character of sagan's talks have lost none of their luster.

i think if we ever reach the point where we think we thoroughly understand who we are and where we came from, we will have failed. i think this search does not lead to a complacent satisfaction that we know the answer, not an arrogant sense that the answer is before us and we need do only one more experiment to find it out. it goes with a courageous intent to greet the universe as it really is, not to foist our emotional predispositions on it but to courageously accept what our explorations tell us.

Katherine Parker says

Carl Sagan rules the Universe, kind of literally. I wish I were as smart as CS.

Eric got me this book for Christmas, and I read it straight through, even the Q&A transcripts in the back. If you are interested in spirituality but don't believe in the Big Daddy in the Sky, if our mere existence (not to mention manatees, ferns, toads, the molten core of the earth, and billions and billions of stars) makes you sorta awestruck when you pause to think about it, this book will not fail to delight. I was happy to read that one of my main beefs with monotheistic religion (namely, that most people's view of God is too small - a micromanager who is watching over every aspect of your life, arranging it specially for you) was brought up by CS, who agrees with me. He also makes a beautiful argument that one of the best ways to search for/know/glorify God is to try to understand the natural world, the universe, and the laws that govern its operation. Even if you do believe in the esteemed JC as Your Personal Savior, you should still read this book. No matter who you are, this book will enlarge your idea of how amazing the universe is, shrink your sense about your own importance in it, and maybe spur you to see every moment of consciousness, every animal, plant, drop of water on this planet, as infinitely precious and worthy of esteem and care.

Erik says

This is the first book of Carl Sagan's that I've read, and I think it's probably the perfect bridge for me between my science books and the books on religion (or atheism) that I've read.

I have seen Cosmos and found it remarkably ahead of its time, and the same is true for what Carl had lectured on at the Gifford Lectures, from which this book is transcribed. Always ahead of his time, and always showing amazing grasp of the topic at hand, the book is both funny and astonishing. Even though much of what he has said I've heard before (I'd even go so far as to say that more recent critics of religion, such as Dawkins and Hitchens, have simply rehashed Carl's original ideas) - the way Carl has with words is something you have to read firsthand. He phrases things in a way that, even though they are ideas not new to me, he gave me another way of thinking about them. And that's one of the things I love the most about science.

I almost took a star off because the end chapter focuses a bit too much on our self-immolation at the hands of nuclear weapons (due to the paranoia of Cold War Soviet aggression) but I felt that it serves to keep the book rooted in a point of history that is both important and still quite relevant. Therefore, 5 stars.

Highly recommend this book for fellow atheists, freethinkers, agnostics, and doubters. Even those who are already believers might find it enjoyable, despite being a challenge to their faith.

John says

An absolutely positive mindfuck, built as you know Carl Sagan would build a book of his own essays. I particularly liked the section in the back where he's transcribed the post-lecture questions and well-fielded answers. You'll be entirely entertained and interested, guaranteed.

The book is not solely about God, it's also about (other) extraterrestrial intelligence and many other interrelated fields. Also, Sagan's not one tenth so vehement an atheist as Dawkins, and potential readers afraid of learning the truth about God can rest easy sitting down with this one.

Cat Lennon says

This is quite possibly my favorite book of all time, at least up until this point.

While, of course, almost every page could stand to be expanded upon, this book is a wonderful introduction to the orientation of humanity in the universe and the search for God through the eyes of a scientist- or somebody armed with only scientific truths. It put into words some of the elements of astronomy that caused cognitive dissonance for me when I took my ASTR 101 class in college as a very educated Catholic (in apologetics, no less). The same basic truths revealed in this book caused me to question the years and years of study of (albeit basic) theology and philosophy that I had used to convince myself of truths that now seem so logically incestuous, complex, and comparatively trivial/meaningless that I don't understand how I ever could have thought I was headed in the right direction. Many of the ideas in this book reinforced my initial thoughts on those little dogmatic quirks.

Carl thinks skepticism is the best route in the face of unconvincing or nonexistent evidence, while remaining open to new evidence and appreciating the immense beauty found in even just the natural wonders of physics and astronomy, and humanity as well- evolved as we are.

This book does not cover everything. There is still so much to be explored, but if you are religious, it will demand that you look at your existence from a completely different perspective. You may find yourself questioning the little dogmatic quirks of your religion, or the concept of religion overall.

I highly recommend it. Oh, and the first paragraph of the acknowledgements made me tear up, but I tend to be overly sentimental. The world lost a great man in 1996.

Jay says

Where should I begin? A little over two years ago I watched the entire Cosmos television series on Netflix and - despite the fact I've always been scientifically literate and tried to live my day to day life with a healthy dose of skepticism, logic and reason - this television series rocked me to my core.

I am not exaggerating when I tell people Carl Sagan changed my life. Never before had I experienced such depth of personal character and scientific knowledge. Never before had I witnessed such a candid presentation of the potential perils facing the future of the human species coupled with the level of hope, optimism and wonder often found only within the heart and mind of a child... all of this presented through the lens of human growth and scientific achievement throughout history.

What does all this have to do with this book? The Varieties of Scientific Experience was my first book from Carl Sagan immediately following my exposure to his Cosmos Television series and I was thrilled to find that Sagan remains true to his reputation regardless of medium. I have yet to find anyone else who can present scientific fact in such an engaging way or anyone who can challenge superstition and religious dogma with such grace, patience or genuine compassion.

If you are looking for a book willing to tackle the big questions in life - Why are we here, where did we come from and what is our purpose? - with logic and reason wrapped inside a generous slice of humility then look no further. When venturing through territory where Sagan is well versed he is direct and informative. When stepping into areas where he does not have a definitive answer he is skeptical yet humble.

book is.

Scott says

This is a must-read for Carl Sagan fans. I love his optimism and open-mindedness, as well as his refusal to accept unsupported beliefs just because they might make us feel better. Today's popularizers of science and skepticism (Richard Dawkins, et al) are saying a lot of the same things, but Sagan had a gift for tempering uncompromising skepticism with an empathy for believers that didn't require them to feel like chumps. He personified the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. I wish he were still with us today.

Shaun says

[

These (referring to technological advances and advances in human right's issues etc) *are all things that ha*

Mike says

Sagan quietly states in the middle of a sobering paragraph that "God is the sum of all natural laws in the universe." Yes, Sagan challenges the faithful to provide evidence acceptable to him (which is nothing less than a phenomenon observed and replicated by many), and his demand is contrary to the law of faith. However, Sagan's challenge motivates me to undertake careful inventory of my own knowledge, both secular and religious, to substantiate my personal beliefs. In the near future, I hope to answer in the affirmative the following question: "can I defend my faith as well as Sagan does in undermining it?"

Greg says

Another goodreads.com reviewer made a comment about this book being safe for those types that believe in big G to read, that it wouldn't offend. I think that reviewer may have read a different version of this book. Sagan casually lobs out atheism grenades to dismantle a whole slew of arguments in favor of whatever you'd like to call that omniscient, omnipotent, prime mover in the sky but he does it so politely and without necessarily pointing out that he is pulling apart entire proofs with just a few words. As much as I like the two arch-atheists who blurb the back of this book (Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris) Sagan's demeanor is what is missing in the fight between the believers and the 'new-Atheists', he's as effective as any of the current so-called Four Horsemen but he has a style that is less combative than at least 3/4's of them and slides doubts into his arguments that I imagine settling into someone's mind and then maybe a few months or a year or whenever later will ignite a few thoughts, like maybe when they are unable to fall asleep one night and their mind is just rifling through miscellaneous clutter scattered here and there in the cortex and that little doubt meme Sagan slipped in so innocently will spark something.

This book is a series of nine lectures about 'natural-religion', or religion that can be proved through observation. They were given in 1985 as part of the Gifford Lectures. The Gifford Lectures are apparently a

pretty big deal and a who's who of intellectuals have been invited to give them over the years, and the basic topic is always natural-religion, which is a pretty open ended topic for one to talk about. Sagan begins by placing the Earth and it's inhabitants in a cosmic picture, he makes us realize how small we really are in the picture of the entire cosmos and he then gives a quick history of science lecture that shows how gradually the Aristotelean heliocentric view of the cosmos was decentered and from there begins talking about the painful process of having old cherished beliefs destroyed by new knowledge and the importance of putting our most cherished and emotionally held beliefs and doctrines to the most skeptical questioning.

The lectures are all great. Sagan's excitement and love for what he is discussing comes through in the book and it's inspiring to read someone who seems so genuinely interested in imparting what he finds awesome to others. And he talks about all of the things in this book without ever breaking into jargon, burying the read (or listener, since these are lectures) with scientific details or in seeming to ever talk down the reader.

Originally I thought I'd make this one of my rambling half-confessional half-diatribes reviews, but I think I'll just stick with what I have so far. I don't really like recommending books to people, but this one I will. Sagan does a great job making the world we live in seem great, wondrous, beautiful and full of mystery just as it is without having to resort to or add any myths or superstitious nonsense.

Brooke says

This book is a collection of the lectures Sagan gave during his Gifford Lectures appointment in Glasgow. Although he gave the lectures in 1985, they needed very little updating (done with minimal footnotes) upon their publication in 2006. I think the only thing I noticed that is irrelevant now is Sagan's musings about whether or not the universe is forever expanding, and the implications of a universe that expands and contracts (a footnote helpfully reveals that evidence now shows a rapidly expanding universe).

I've noticed many reviews on Goodreads refer to Sagan as an atheist, which isn't correct (he's been quoted elsewhere that an atheist would have to know a lot more than Sagan does), but I can see how it's easy to come away from the book with that idea - his agnostic stance isn't really demonstrated until the Q&A transcript at the end of the lectures, where he points out that you can't prove something without evidence, but that a lack of evidence is not proof that something doesn't exist.

There's a little bit of an overlap between this and Sagan's *The Demon-Haunted World Science as a Candle in the Dark*, but I think this is the better book; as I noted in my review of *The Demon-Haunted World*, the latter part of that book seems like a tangent that doesn't quite fit with the first part. The lectures in this collection, on the other hand, all go together very well and transition into each other nicely. On the other hand, *The Demon-Haunted World* demonstrates more of the balance between Sagan's wonder and skepticism. The lectures come off as being more on the skeptic side.
