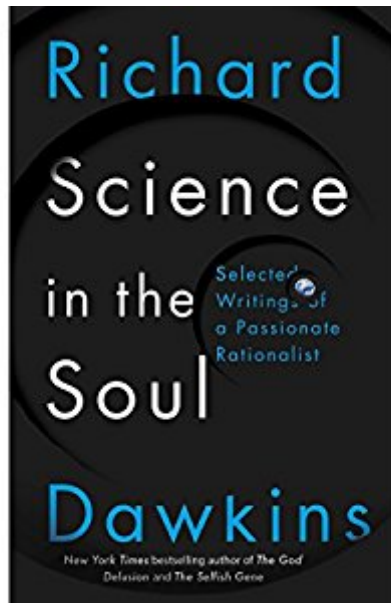




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Science In The Soul: Selected Writings Of A Passionate Rationalist



Synopsis

The legendary biologist, provocateur, and best-selling author mounts a timely and passionate defense of science and clear thinking with this career-spanning collection of essays, including 20 pieces published in the United States for the first time. For decades Richard Dawkins has been the world's most brilliant scientific communicator, consistently illuminating the wonders of nature and attacking faulty logic. *Science in the Soul* brings together 42 essays, polemics, and paeans - culled from personal papers, newspapers, lectures, and online salons - all written with Dawkins' characteristic erudition, remorseless wit, and unjaded awe of the natural world. Though it spans three decades, this book, dedicated to Christopher Hitchens, couldn't be more timely or more urgent. Elected officials have opened the floodgates to prejudices that have, for half a century, been unacceptable or at least undercover. In a passionate introduction, Dawkins calls on us to insist that reason take center stage and that gut feelings, even when they don't represent the stirred dark waters of xenophobia, misogyny, or other blind prejudice, should stay out of the voting booth. And in the essays themselves, newly annotated by the author, he investigates a number of issues, including the importance of empirical evidence, and decries bad science, religion in schools, and climate change deniers. Dawkins has equal ardor for "the sacred truth of nature" and renders here with typical virtuosity the glories and complexities of the natural world. Woven into an exploration of the vastness of geological time is the peculiar history of the giant tortoises and the sea turtles - whose journeys between water and land tell us a deeper story about evolution. At this moment, when so many highly placed people still question the fact of evolution, Dawkins asks what Darwin would make of his own legacy - "[a] mixture of exhilaration and exasperation" - and celebrates science as possessing many of religion's virtues - "explanation, consolation, and uplift" - without its detriments of superstition and prejudice. In a world grown irrational and hostile to facts, *Science in the Soul* is an essential collection by an indispensable author.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Another book by Richard Dawkins is always cause for rejoicing, and this is a good one. As another reviewer has suggested, this is perhaps not the best place to start reading Dawkins if you haven't read his previous books; on the other hand, this could be an easy introduction to his work. There are more than 40 short pieces here. Some are appearing for the first time in print, while others had appeared in some obscure place that you probably haven't seen. A couple of these are quite meaty, especially a discussion of kin selection, which assumes you've read *The Selfish Gene*, but most all of the pieces are perfectly understandable even if you haven't read anything by Dawkins (or if your memory needs refreshing). Quite a few of these show his humorous side, which I hadn't been fully aware of: there are a couple of pastiches of P.G. Wodehouse, and a tongue-in-cheek discussion of the rise of Athorism (disbelief in the god Thor). And the book includes an appreciation of Dr. Doolittle, one of my own childhood favorites (alas, now often banned), including comments on the digestive system of the Pushmi-Pullyu. The book concludes with some memorials, to his father and uncle, and to the redoubtable Christopher Hitchens, to whom the book is dedicated. Dawkins is a master of making science, (ir)-religion, philosophy, and a lot of other fields accessible to anyone, and this book is a worthy addition to his body of published work. Praise is due also to Gillian Somerscales, the editor, who provides brief introductions and background.

If you have never read a book by Dawkins and are thinking about starting this book please stop and reconsider. Start with *God Delusion* (the impact of religion on society), *The Selfish Gene* (for evolution focus) or *Unweaving the Rainbow* (the relationship between science, art and philosophy). Read a few of these finished masterpieces, then come back for this book. I once went to an exhibit of Michelangelo's sketches, they were small glimpses into the masterpieces he created. I particularly remember one of a torso, with a half finished head. Every muscle was delineated. I was awed by how much was conveyed in these small drawings. This book is comprised of Dawkins's verbal sketches. Yes, they stand on their own, but part of the wonder is seeing in some of these short pieces the beginnings of his full fledged books. Other pieces are self contained and give you a glimpse into the wide ranging mind of Dawkins. From an essay on

fireworks, to the ending tribute to Hitchens these short pieces both are fascinating individually, and provide a timeline into which you can see the evolution of Dawkins's thoughts. The range is wide here, the sections begin with a few page introductions from the editor, Gillian Somerscales. For older pieces Hitchens also provides current musings about the topics after the piece. The sections are titled as below (with my summary of topics in parenthesis): The value(s) of science (science and morality) All its merciless glory (Darwin and evolution) Future Conditional (future predictions, some of these are old predictions) Mind control, mischief and muddle (articles on religion and atheism) Living in the real world (random articles on topics like fireworks, suffering of animals, and subtitles) The sacred truth of nature (philosophical musings on evolution and nature) Laughing at live dragons (humor) No man is an island (tributes and eulogies) Bookended by a dedication to Hitchens at the front and an eulogy for Hitchens at the end. As I currently write this (summer 2017) there is a controversy over a talk about this book by Dawkins being canceled by the radio station KPFA. The station states that Dawkins offended and hurt people in tweets about Islam. This book contains truths about Islam. The section which most directly addresses the issue is one written right after 9/11 where Dawkins points out that without the terrorists very sincere religious beliefs that they would have a fantastic afterlife it is much less likely that they would have been willing to die. Thus, religion is to blame. But Dawkins in no way singles out Islam for criticism. He is equally disparaging of the other two Abrahamic religions (Christianity and Judaism). In fact, by sheer volume of writing I would state that he addresses Christianity the most frequently, in this book and certainly in the God Delusion. He has some grudging respect for Greek, Roman and Norse gods, as they do not claim to be omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent, but simply more powerful versions of humans and thus at least logically consistent. So if you worship Zeus, Dawkins will tolerate that belief more so than others. Dawkins is no more dismissive about Islam than any other religion or superstition. He is careful to criticize ideas rather than individuals. I would suggest reading a few of his classics first, and then picking up this book. Like Michelangelo's sketches, you will enjoy the pieces for themselves and for the insight they provide as a group into the overarching work of Dawkins.

Whether one is an atheist, like Richard Dawkins, or not, whether one rejects the idea that a God exists and people lack souls, as Dawkins thinks, and even if one disagrees with him when he contends that a religious faith is a delusion, it is still worth the time spent to read his books. Dawkins (born 1941) was voted the world's top thinker over the past hundred years in a Prospect magazine poll of 10,000 readers. He prompts us to think even if we disagree with his view.

He is a famed English evolutionary biologist. As a youngster, he believed in the existence of a God because of all the wonders he saw around him, but in his early teens he came to think that the evolutionary views of Charles Darwin made more sense to him. He attained fame in 1976 for his book *The Selfish Gene* which was republished in 2016 in an extended version. Much of his writings criticize creationism and intelligent design. He coined the word

“meme,” which rhymes with team. A meme is an element of culture or a behavior or a system of behavior or an idea that is passed on from one person or one group to another, not by the genes, but by imitation. The word comes from the Greek *mimema* which means imitation; a meme is something imitated, often unconsciously. It is the way that cultures are passed on. Although not mentioned by Dawkins, I think of the idea of “original sin,” which did not exist before the fourth century when it was invented by Augustine, which is contrary to Jewish theology, yet this meme is now believed by most Christians and many Jews. This book is made up of short essays that Dawkins published in the past, with a few new ones. Some few are not understandable unless one has read a detailed description of the idea in his earlier books. There are eight chapters that contain more than forty short pieces. Two of the chapters, for example, are titled *The sacred truth of nature* and *Living in the real world*. Dawkins discusses memes, for instance, in nine pages, Darwin multiple times, and atheism in his eulogy of Christopher Hitchens. The editor of the volume tells readers about Dawkins in four pages and Dawkins himself introduces the book in eleven pages.

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