

## Reg Saner

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an excerpt of

### *My Fall into Knowledge*

DAILY, and in apparently causeless moments, I'm aware of being—though ever so briefly—alive in a place called “the world.” Whereupon the oddness in simultaneously feeling hyperordinary yet cosmic throws me into interrogative mode.

Recently, during just such a moment, and because I'm incorrigibly religious, I found myself wondering, “Throughout history, just how many creeds have there been? And the god population—how many deities, now or ever?” An accurate inventory would of course be impossible. Not only do eternal truths come and go, some gods take early retirement. Moreover, ancient tribes, whether of prehistoric Greece or North America's Hopi mesas, occasionally adopted supernatural beings from neighboring peoples into their own cultures. That ecumenical outlook, plus the polytheism factor, means no census could be as simple as one religion, one god. *Impossible* seemed the right word.

Then, as if with a life of its own, the question kept widening: “How many gods are currently in service throughout this galaxy-rich universe?” And suddenly it dawned on me that I'd just invented a new field of study: astrotheology. We already have astrobiology, in case some life-harboring, extraterrestrial planet should be discovered. Sooner or later, where there's life there will be divinities, a natural offshoot.

However, natural is as natural does. All it takes is a planet whose thinking species, upon looking around at the various life forms, concludes, instead of the usual “Someone has done this,” that “Something has done this.” The ultimate principle of causation on that planet would be considered natural instead of supernatural.

My logic felt rock solid, but hairsplitters may quibble. In any case, future astrotheologists will surely pursue the quasi-infinite possibilities of this new

field. Perhaps they will even conjecture a religious war on certain planets, with devotees of Someone-ism righteously deploying fire and sword to destroy forever the infidel Something-ists.



... a few years ago I accepted an invitation to debate an anti-Darwinian. My friend Jane Bock, a biologist, had been the initial recipient of that invitation. She and other biologists often receive such challenges but routinely ignore them as a waste of time. Then, looking at me, Jane's mischievous streak kicked in. "How about you?" she said, knowing of my intense admiration for Darwin. "Do you want to take them on?" Never in my adult life had I encountered a creationist. Now here was an opportunity to practice my favorite occupation: going forth to see for myself. I said, "Okay, I'll do it." Why? Well, fools do rush in.

Alas, my eagerness to trade verities with a proponent of biblical inerrancy before the breed went extinct led me to forget I had been a creationist for years and years, and would be again, though in a very different way.