



# ORACLES OF THE COSMOS

BETWEEN PANTHEISM  
AND SECULARISM

PAUL RICHARD BLUM

SCHWABE VERLAG

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**Paul Richard Blum**

# **Oracles of the Cosmos**

**Between Pantheism and Secularism**

**Schwabe Verlag**

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God made the petreous rocks, the arboreal trees,  
tellurian earth, and stellar stars, and these  
homuncular men, who walk upon the ground  
with nerves that tingle touched by light and sound.

J. R. R. Tolkien, *Mythopoeia*





## Preface

The present book is an extended version of two presentations delivered at the annual Cosmos & Creation conference at Loyola University Maryland in June 2021. This conference series was founded by Jesuits Thomas King and James Salmon in 1982. “The founders’ original intention was to bring scientists together to share their experiences as scientists working in God’s world.”<sup>1</sup> As Father Salmon used to explain, the title of the series was intended as a response to Carl Sagan’s book and film *Cosmos*, so I found it appropriate to take a look at and comment on it in part two of this book. Unlike most previous speakers, I will argue primarily from a historical perspective, when I present the relationship between science and religion. I will work with history, and in this case, I will commence by moving back in history to the Renaissance and the Middle Ages and then chronologically move the discussion forward to the present. This method is rooted in the structure of history: the state of affairs at one time goes back to its origin, and in order to make that plausible, one has to recount the development from the past into the present. Every tenet can be interpreted as an answer to a question raised in the past.<sup>2</sup> This also holds true for my topic in this book, which is secularism and pantheism and how this pair of patterns shapes the understanding of science.

Since I will move through various epochs and disciplines, the use of my terminology has to be flexible. Religion, science, secularism, pantheism, etc. will not have one clearly delineated meaning and will converge with related ideas and synonyms. By secularism I mean any approach that denies the need for religion or reference to a divine realm; therefore, it is also covered by concepts like materialism or scientism (which claim science can explain everything), and naturalism (which claims nature is all we need to know). As with most terms that end in ‘-ism’, these words do not only describe a certain state of affairs (in this case, the

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1 See website <https://www.loyola.edu/join-us/cosmos-creation/about/mission>. Accessed June 6, 2021. I am especially grateful to Father Salmon for introducing me to the conference series and for appointing me as co-director (2008–2019). – The text of this book has been improved thanks to advice from Andrew Olesh, Jr., and Phillip Arvanitis.

2 Paul Richard Blum, “How to Think with the Head of Another? The Historical Dimension of Philosophical Problems,” *Intellectual History Review* 26, no. 1 (2016): 153–61; an extended version of this: Paul Richard Blum, “Antworten und Fragen. Die Historizität philosophischen Denkens,” in *Braucht die Philosophie ihre Geschichte? Does Philosophy Need its History?*, ed. Ivana Skuhala Karasman and Petar Šegedin (Zagreb: Institute of Philosophy, 2019), 9–32.