

sters had their way, societies might develop in which adults have little tolerance for aggression, territoriality, ritual and social hierarchy (although in the course of growing up the children might well experience these reptilian behaviors). If Prescott is right, in an age of nuclear weapons and effective contraceptives, child abuse and severe sexual repression are crimes against humanity. More work on this provocative thesis is clearly needed. Meanwhile, we can each make a personal and noncontroversial contribution to the future of the world by hugging our infants tenderly.

If the inclinations toward slavery and racism, misogyny and violence are connected—as individual character and human history, as well as cross-cultural studies, suggest—then there is room for some optimism. We are surrounded by recent fundamental changes in society. In the last two centuries, abject slavery, with us for thousands of years or more, has been almost eliminated in a stirring planet-wide revolution. Women, patronized for millennia, traditionally denied real political and economic power, are gradually becoming, even in the most backward societies, equal partners with men. For the first time in modern history, major wars of aggression were stopped partly because of the revulsion felt by the citizens of the aggressor nations. The old exhortations to nationalist fervor and jingoist pride have begun to lose their appeal. Perhaps because of rising standards of living, children are being treated better worldwide. In only a few decades, sweeping global changes have begun to move in precisely the directions needed for human survival. A new consciousness is developing which recognizes that we are one species.

“Superstition [is] cowardice in the face of the Divine,” wrote Theophrastus, who lived during the founding of the Library of Alexandria. We inhabit a universe where atoms are made in the centers of stars; where each second a thousand suns are born; where life is sparked by sunlight and lightning in the airs and waters of youthful planets; where the raw material for biological evolution is sometimes made by the explosion of a star halfway across the Milky Way; where a thing as beautiful as a galaxy is formed a hundred billion times—a Cosmos of quasars and quarks, snowflakes and fireflies, where there may be black holes and other universes and extraterrestrial civilizations whose radio messages are at this moment reaching the Earth. How pallid by comparison are the pretensions of superstition and pseudoscience; how important it is for us to pursue and understand science, that characteristically human endeavor.

Every aspect of Nature reveals a deep mystery and touches our sense of wonder and awe. Theophrastus was right. Those afraid of the universe as it really is, those who pretend to nonexistent knowledge and envision a Cosmos centered on human beings will prefer the fleeting comforts of superstition. They avoid