Galileo Goes to Jail is an edited collection of popular myths about the historical relationship between science and religion. Under the editorship of Ronald L. Numbers, the work brings together twenty-four distinguished scholars, each of whom, in the format of a short essay, endeavours to dispel one myth. Numbers explains that readers of this volume are to understand ‘myth’ as it is employed in “everyday conversation – to designate a claim that is false” (7). That said, the work is aimed primarily at a general readership, and thus features well-known myths in its attempt to disseminate their falsity to a wider audience. The most prevalent of these myths include: ‘That Medieval Christians Taught that the Earth was Flat,’ by Lesley B. Cormack; ‘That Copernicanism Demoted Humans from the Center of the Cosmos,’ by Dennis R. Danielson; ‘That Galileo was Imprisoned and Tortured for Advocating Copernicanism,’ by Maurice A. Finocchiaro; ‘That Huxley Defeated Wilberforce in Their Debate over Evolution and Religion,’ by David N. Livingstone; and ‘That Einstein Believed in a Personal God,’ by Matthew Stanley. Nevertheless, this collection is written in an academic style, endnotes and all, which ultimately aids it in its effort to demythologize insomuch as it provides direct links to the evidence, or lack thereof.

The majority of the essays focus on encounters between Christianity and science which have acquired a ‘mythical’ nature, yet some effort at heterodoxy has been made, including an essay on the myth ‘That Medieval Islamic Culture was In hospitable to Science,’ by Syed Nomanul Haq, and an essay on the myth ‘That the Theory of Organic Evolution is Based on Circular Reasoning,’ by Nicolaas A. Rupke. It should be conceded, however, that this selection merely reflects the fact that the dichotomy between ‘science’ and ‘religion’ arose foremost in the Christian West. Indeed, the point of departure for this collection is the ‘warfare model’ advocated by polemicists Andrew Dickson White and John William Draper, for whom Christianity had seemingly always been the thorn in the side of progressive science (1).
Perhaps most ambitious and interesting, though, is the contribution of John Hedley Brooke; ‘That Modern Science Has Secularized Western Culture’. Brooke’s topic is, it must be said, too vast and momentous to occupy only nine pages at the end of this collection. An academic reader will likely be disappointed with the extent to which Brooke is able to explicate this myth, but this simply stems from the collection’s overall format – the allotment of so few pages to each author. While this format works for the majority of myths, for others, like Brooke’s, it is inhibitive. Even so, the inclusion of the science and secularization myth gives the reader pause as to the impact of these mythologies on Western culture in toto. Those of us frustrated with the brevity of this myth may look forward to an extended treatment by Brooke in the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion* (2010).

A considerable number of these myths have contributed to the construction of our identity as a ‘modern,’ Western culture. For example, such myths often form the backbone of our belief that, ever since the Scientific Revolution freed us from superstition and magic – as in Margaret J. Osler's myth – we have become a rational, progressive, and ‘modern’ society. In this way, we identify ourselves as superior, enlightened beings in relation to our ignorant and superstitious ancestors. This divide – that between ‘ancient ignorance’ and ‘modern superiority’ – is perfectly encapsulated in the science and religion dichotomy. In other words, many of these myths play a formative role in how we, as modern persons, shape our identities: that is, in a dialectical relation with our ‘religious’ past. While this analysis is implicit in the deconstruction of these mythologies, it is not stated, and thus may not be clear to all readers of this collection.

For most of the myths included in *Galileo Goes to Jail*, there can be found a more detailed, scholarly counterpart published elsewhere. However, one must typically search a considerable body of monographs to find better analyses, whereas *Galileo Goes to Jail* has brought together a good selection of the more widely held myths, and explicated them with clarity. Thus, the most outstanding feature of *Galileo Goes to Jail* is that it brings together so many well-written attempts to demythologize the often fictional relationship between science and religion in one place, making it much more accessible to a general readership. It should thus be recommended as one
of the best, initial points of contact for those interested in the subject of science and religion.

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