

## THE MANY FACES OF UNBELIEF [PART II]

**Bert Thompson, Ph.D.**

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Part I of this two-part series appeared in the March issue. Part II follows below and continues, without introductory comments, where the first article ended.]

### Skepticism

The **skeptic** is the person who doubts there is a God. The standard dictionary definition is quite revealing when it describes a skeptic as one who holds to "the doctrine that true knowledge or knowledge in a particular area is uncertain and who has doubts concerning basic religious principles." Notice that the skeptic does not claim knowledge of God's existence is **unattainable** (as in agnosticism), but only "uncertain." However, the skeptic does not stop at mere "uncertainty." In fact, skepticism "...confidently challenges not merely religious or metaphysical knowledge but **all** knowledge claims that venture beyond immediate experience" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1997, 26:569, emp. added). The key words here are "**immediate experience**."

Translated into common parlance, this simply means that the skeptic is not prepared to accept **anything** that cannot be verified empirically (viz., via the scientific method). Corliss Lamont, famous twentieth-century skeptic and humanist, wrote:

The development, over the past four centuries, of a universally reliable method for attaining knowledge is a far more important achievement on the part of science than its discovery

of any single truth. For once men acquire a thoroughly dependable **method** of truth-seeking, a method that can be applied to every sphere of human life and by anyone who faithfully conforms to certain directives, then they have as a permanent possession an instrument of infinite power that will serve them as long as mankind endures. Scientific method is such an instrument (1949, pp. 236-237, emp. in orig.)

Paul Kurtz, another well-known skeptic and former editor of *The Humanist* (official organ of the American Humanist Association), put it like this:

To adopt such a scientific approach unreservedly is to accept as **ultimate in all matters of fact and real existence the appeal to the evidence of experience alone; a court subordinate to no higher authority**, to be overridden by no prejudice however comfortable (1973, p. 109, emp. added).

Chet Raymo, in his book, *Skeptics and True Believers*, explained the dichotomy that exists between "Skeptics" and "True Believers" (capital letters are used throughout his book). Raymo, professor of physics and astronomy at Stonehill College in Massachusetts, has written a weekly column on science for the *Boston Globe* for more than a dozen years and was reared as a Roman Catholic. He began his book by suggesting that Skeptics and True Believers operate by different "made-up maps of the world." In chapter one he stated:

We cannot live without some sorts of make-believe in our lives. Without made-up maps of the world, life is a blooming, buzzing confusion. Some elements of our mental maps (Santa Claus...) satisfy emotional or aesthetic **inner needs**; other elements of our mental maps (hot stove, nuclear-powered stars) satisfy intellectual curiosity about the world **out there**. We get in trouble when the two kinds of maps are confused, when we objectify elements of make-believe solely on the basis of inner need.

The True Believer retains in adulthood an absolute faith in some forms of empirically unverifiable make-believe (such as astrology or the existence of immortal souls), whereas the Skeptic keeps a wary eye on firmly established facts (such as atoms). Both Skeptic and True Believer use made-up maps of the world... (1998, pp. 13-14, emp. in orig.).

Raymo then went on to ask:

Is one map as good as any other? Since all knowledge is constructed, can the choice between two contradictory maps...be a matter of personal or political expediency? Not unless we are willing to erect partitions between what we **know to be true on the basis of unambiguous, reproducible evidence** and what we merely **wish to be true**. Apparently, many of us are willing to do just that (1998, p. 14, emp. added).

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**Annual Subscription Rates:**  
\$6.00 Domestic  
\$11.00 Canada & Overseas Airmail

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**Orders:**  
Phone: (800) 234-8558  
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With his strict dichotomy between the Skeptic (a person who **knows** about such things as atoms and nuclear-powered stars —“on the basis of unambiguous, reproducible evidence”) and the True Believer (a person who **believes** in such things as Santa Claus, astrology, and an immortal soul—in spite of the evidence) firmly in place, Raymo then spent the remainder of his book laying out the Skeptic’s case against: (a) the existence of God; (b) the Genesis account of creation; (c) the occurrence of biblical miracles; (d) etc. Eventually, however, he was forced to admit:

The forces that nudge us toward True Belief are pervasive and well-nigh irresistible. Supernatural faith systems provide a degree of emotional security that skepticism cannot provide. Who among us would **not** prefer that there exists a divine parent who has our best interest at heart? Who among us would **not** prefer to believe that we will live forever? Skepticism, on the other hand, offers only uncertainty and doubt.... Science cannot rule out heaven and hell because they are beyond the reach of empirical investigation (1998, p. 5,77, emp. in orig.).

Thus, in the end the skeptic does not say he **cannot** know that God exists. Rather, he says he **doubts** that God exists because He cannot be seen, felt, measured, weighed, or probed by the scientific method. Thirty-four years before Chet Raymo wrote about “Skeptics and True Believers,” George G. Simpson, the late evolutionist of Harvard, wrote: “It is inherent in any definition of science that statements that cannot be checked by observation are not really saying anything...” (1964, p. 769). Simply put, the point is this: If science cannot deal with something, that “something” either does not exist (worst-case scenario) or is completely unimportant (best-case scenario). Welcome to the make-believe world of the skeptic in which science reigns supreme, and a cavalier attitude toward all things non-empirical rules the day.

But what about those concepts that, although non-empirical and therefore unobservable via the scientific method, nevertheless are recognized to exist, and are admitted to be of critical importance to the entire human race—concepts like love, sorrow, joy, altruism, etc.? Arlie Hoover accu-

rately assessed the situation in which the skeptic finds himself in regard to the existence of such items when he wrote:

Why does the scientific method reject subjective factors, emotions, feelings? Simply because it is not convenient! Because the method will not allow you to deal with the immense complexity of reality. The scientist, therefore, selects from the whole of experience only those elements that can be weighed, measured, numbered, or which lend themselves to mathematical treatment....

This is a fallacy we call **Reductionism**. You commit the Reductive Fallacy when you select a portion of a complex entity and say the whole is merely that portion. You do this when you say things like: love is nothing but sex, man is just an animal, music is nothing but sound waves, art is nothing but color.... When it gets down to the real serious questions of life—origin, purpose, destiny, meaning, morality—science is silent....

If science can’t handle morality, aesthetics, and religion that only proves that the scientific method was reductive in the first place. Sir Arthur Eddington once used a famous analogy to illustrate this reductionism. He told of a fisherman who concluded from his fishing experiences with a certain net that “no creature of the sea is less than two inches long.” Now this disturbed many of his colleagues and they demurred, pointing out that many sea creatures are under two inches and they just slipped through the two-inch holes in the net. But the ichthyologist was unmoved: “What my net can’t catch ain’t fish,” he pontificated, and then he scornfully accused his critics of having pre-scientific, medieval, metaphysical prejudices.

Scientific reductionism or “Scientism”—as it is often called—is similar to this fisherman with the special net. Since the strict empirical scientist can’t “catch” or “grasp” such qualitative things like freedom, morality, aesthetics, mind, and God, he concludes that they don’t exist. But they have just slipped through his net. They have been slipping through his net all the way from Democritus to B.F. Skinner to Carl Sagan (1981, p. 6, emp. in orig.).

In speaking of skepticism and its offspring of humanism, Sir Julian Huxley wrote: "It will have **nothing to do with absolutes**, including absolute truth, absolute morality, absolute perfection and absolute authority" (1964, pp. 73-74, emp. added). To that list, one might add absolute joy, absolute love, absolute freedom, absolute peace, etc. The skeptic has paid a high price for his scientism—the rejection and abandonment of some of the human race's most important, valuable, worthwhile, and cherished, concepts. Why? In order to be able to say: I **doubt** that God exists!

### Infidelity

The **infidel** is the person who not only refuses to believe in God himself, but also is intolerant of, and actively opposed to, those who do. A study of human history provides a veritable plethora of men and women who made quite a name for themselves via their public display of infidelity. In the third century A.D., for example, Porphyry wrote a fifteen-volume series titled *Against Christians*, in which he sought to lay bare alleged contradictions between the Old and New Testaments, and to document how the apostles had contradicted themselves. He excoriated the book of Daniel, and charged Jesus with equivocation and inconsistency. He was recognized widely as one of the most celebrated enemies of God the world ever has known. McClintock and Strong have suggested that he "...became the most determined of heathen polemics the world ever beheld or Christianity ever encountered" (1879, 8:422).

Another infidel of the ancient past whose name is associated with vitriolic opposition to God was the Frenchman Voltaire. Beginning in 1765, he attacked Christianity with viciousness and vigor. He began with what today would be styled "higher criticism," by which he brought into question the authenticity and reliability of the Bible. He then alleged chronological contradictions in the narratives of the Old Testament. He challenged as incorrect many of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, and he stoutly denied any such things as miracles and the efficacy of prayer. He once boasted: "It took 12 men to originate the Christian religion, but it will take but one to eliminate it. Within

fifty years from now the only Bible will be in museums" (as quoted in Key, 1982, p. 2). [Interestingly, not long after his death, the Geneva Bible Society purchased Voltaire's house and used his printing presses to print French New Testaments.]

David Hume, born in 1711 in Scotland, attacked the idea of the immortality of the soul and placed the origin of religion on par with elves and fairies. But he is most famous for his essay, "Of Miracles," which was tucked away in his work, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1748. The essay itself consisted of scarcely more than 20 pages, but concluded that from what we know about the laws of nature a miracle simply cannot occur. The treatise went on to suggest that historical testimony regarding miracles is specious, and never could be strong enough to override scientific considerations. For Hume, there was **no** evidence strong enough to prove that miracles actually had taken place. His attack upon biblical miracles had serious consequences upon religion generally, and Christianity specifically. Even today many refuse to believe in God because of Hume's arguments.

In more recent times, one of the most vicious attacks upon God, Christ, and the Bible was spearheaded by Robert Ingersoll. Born in Dresden, New York in 1833, he set up his law practice in Peoria, Illinois in 1858, and eventually was appointed as that state's Attorney General. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, while still director of American Atheists in Austin, Texas, once characterized Ingersoll as "...a superb egotist. And, he engaged in more than one drunken public brawl.... Notwithstanding all of the anomalies of his character, he was magnificent when he did get going on either religion or the church..." (1983, p. vi). In *The Atheist Syndrome*, John Koster has suggested that "what he hated was organized religion" (1989, p. 123). Shortly after Ingersoll went on the lecture circuit around 1877, he began to include in his repertoire such topics as "Heretics and Heresies" and "Ghosts"—both of which were undisguised attacks upon religion generally, and Christianity specifically. By 1878, he had expanded his lectures to include "Hell" and "Some Mistakes of Moses," both of which were favorites of atheists of his day. He died in 1899,

having established his reputation both as an atheist and an influential infidel.

John Dewey was born in Vermont in 1859. He completed a doctorate at Johns Hopkins, and in 1884 began teaching at the University of Michigan. In 1894, he was appointed chairman of the department of philosophy, psychology, and education at the University of Chicago. In 1904, he left Chicago and moved to Columbia University, where he remained until his retirement in 1930. More than any other individual before or since, Dewey's views have altered American educational processes. Durant wrote: "...there is hardly a school in America that has not felt his influence" (1961, p. 390). Why did he have such an impact? Durant went on to explain:

What separates Dewey is the undisguised completeness with which he accepts the evolution theory. Mind as well as body is to him an organ evolved, in the struggle for existence, from lower forms. His starting point in every field is Darwinian.... Things are to be explained, then, not by supernatural causation, but by their place and function in the environment. Dewey is frankly naturalistic... (1961, p. 391).

Dewey was a prolific writer, and eventually authored *A Common Faith* in which he discussed religion (and in which his infidelity was brought into full view). He made it clear that "he wished at all costs to be scientific; for him the processes of science are the most obvious and the most successful methods of knowing. Therefore if science neglects something, the something is nothing" (Clark, 1957, p. 519). Because he viewed religion as "unscientific," he therefore considered it to be "nothing," which was why he vehemently opposed religion of any kind and insisted upon the teaching of organic evolution as fact, not theory. In his writings he stressed that "moral laws" were neither absolute nor inviolate and unabashedly advocated situation ethics. Dewey died in 1952, having altered forever the landscape of American education and having ensured his reputation as one of the chief infidels of the twentieth century. Had he lived a few years longer, he would have seen his ideas on the naturalistic origin and basis of all things take hold in a way that perhaps even he never dreamed.

Madalyn Murray O’Hair probably has been the most famous atheist/infidel in America for the past three-and-a-half decades. Her public saga began in 1963 when a suit to remove prayer from public schools was presented before the United States Supreme Court. Although the suit (in which Mrs. O’Hair was only a secondary litigant) originally had been filed in the name of Philadelphia Unitarian, Ed Schempp, she took over the battle and ultimately was victorious in the landmark decision of *Murray v. Curlett*. A writer in *Time* magazine has described her as:

...a heavy woman with a strong voice and a jaw who even in repose resembled, as author Lawrence Wright once observed, “a bowling ball looking for new pins to scatter.” She was an Army veteran and a law-school graduate and a big talker. Most important, she was an atheist.... “I love a good fight,” she said. “I guess fighting God and God’s spokesmen is sort of the ultimate, isn’t it?” (Van Biema, 1997, pp. 56,57).

She was the star of the first episode of Phil Donahue’s television talk show. She filed lawsuits at what one journalist called “a near pathological level of pugnacity” for 32 years (Van Biema, 1997, p. 57). And once, while watching a female orangutan on television, she quipped, “The Virgin just made another appearance” (as quoted in Van Biema, p. 57).

In 1965, having worn out her welcome with state and local authorities in Maryland and Hawaii, she settled in Austin, Texas and formed the Society of Separationists, later adding the Atheist Centre in America and several other satellite groups. In the 1980s, she enjoyed a heyday as she ruled over her pet project that came to be known simply as “American Atheists,” from which she published her pratings against God via books, posters, and bumper stickers (e.g., “Apes Evolved From Creationists”). She would debate anyone, anywhere, anytime on the existence of God and the “atrocities” of organized religion.

In fact, in the late 1970s, while serving as a professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University, I attended a debate she conducted with Bob Harrington, a denominational preacher from New Orleans referred to as “the chap-

lain of Bourbon Street.” Mrs. O’Hair was (and I say this only from observation as a member of the audience, and not in any derogatory sense) unkempt, haggard, slovenly, and bitter. During the course of the debate, she cursed wildly (frequently taking God’s name in vain), belittled the audience for its “obvious” lack of intelligence, and mocked her opponent. She looked

*The price humans  
have paid for  
being intellectually  
learned but  
spiritually  
ignorant has been  
higher than we  
could have  
imagined.*

for, and seized, every possible opportunity to berate God and anyone who was, in her considered opinion, “stupid enough” to believe in Him. Little wonder that in 1964 *Life* magazine had headlined her as “the most hated woman in America.” Bruce Lockerbie wrote regarding Mrs. O’Hair:

When we begin to speak of O’Hair and others like her, we turn directly into the face of aggressively militant **disbelief**. Here is no lady-like apologist, no grandmotherly disputant; for O’Hair, the cause is nothing short of all-out war (1998, p. 231).

But suddenly, without warning, she disappeared—vanished without a trace. On August 28, 1995 workers at the American Atheists building came to work, only to find a note taped to the front door that read: “We’ve been called out on an emergency basis, and we’ll call you when we get back.” But she (along with her son Jon and his daughter Robin who disappeared with her) has not called, and she has not been back. Curiously, about the same time over

\$600,000 turned up missing from the treasury of American Atheists. In 1995, tax forms submitted by the United Secularists of America (one of American Atheists’ satellite groups) documented a \$612,000 decrease in net assets and admitted:

The \$612,000...represents the value of the United Secularists of America’s assets believed to be in the possession of Jon Murray, former Secretary. The whereabouts of Jon Murray and these assets have not been known since September 1995 and is not known to the organization at this time (as quoted in Van Biema, 1997, p. 59).

[In April 1999, Ron Barrier, national spokesman for American Atheists, announced that the group was moving its headquarters from Austin, Texas to Cranford, New Jersey, stating that “the Northeast is much more progressive than the South...” (*Montgomery Advertiser*, 1999, D-3). On Sunday, April 4, 1999 a dedication ceremony was held for the new offices in Cranford.]

It can be said without fear of contradiction that “the most hated woman in America”—who had made it her life’s goal to oppose God—did not live **up** to anyone’s expectations, but undeniably lived **down** to the level of her self-professed atheism. The history of infidelity, only a brief overview of which I have examined, documents all too well that she has not been alone. In his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky had one of his characters, Ivan, comment that if there is no God, everything is permitted. French atheist and existential philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, opined:

Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself.... Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior (1961, p. 485).

As essayist G.K. Chesterton once observed: “When men cease to believe in God, they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything” (as quoted in Bales, 1967, p. 133).

## Deism

The concept of deism (from the Latin *deus*, god) had its beginnings among writers in seventeenth-century England, beginning with Edward Herbert (1581-1648) who later became the first Baron Herbert of Cherbury and often is recognized as the “father of deism.” In his 1624 book, *De Veritate (On Truth)*, Lord Herbert laid out five basic principles of deism: “(1) The being of God; (2) that he is to be worshipped; (3) that piety and moral virtue are the chief parts of worship; (4) that God will pardon our faults on repentance; and, (5) that there is a future state of rewards and punishment” (see McClintock and Strong, 1879, 2:730). In the second edition of that work (1645), Herbert expanded his ideas as he dealt with the foundations of religion and critiqued the idea of direct revelation from God. That same year, he further elaborated his views in *De Causis Errorum (Concerning the Causes of Errors)*. An additional work, *De Religione Gentilium (The Religion of the Gentiles)* was published posthumously in 1663. He urged a quick and permanent abandonment of the idea that God supernaturally intervened in man’s world in any way.

Herbert’s views were propagated by a number of influential British writers such as his chief disciple, Charles Blount (1654-1693), Anthony Collins (1676-1729), Thomas Woolston (1670-1731), Matthew Tindal (1655-1733), and Peter Annet (1693-1769), who was the last of the old-line British deists. In the eighteenth century, deism flourished in France. In fact, “English deism strongly influenced later French deism and skepticism, of which Diderot and Voltaire are notable examples” (Geisler, 1976, p. 165). Shortly thereafter, deism spread to Germany and held sway in Europe for a hundred years. Norman Geisler has added:

Along the way there were many philosophical figures who may not technically qualify as deists but who nonetheless gave impetus to and provided arguments for the movement. Bacon’s scientific approach, John Locke’s empiricism, and David Hume’s skepticism about miracles definitely aided the deistic cause (1976, p. 152).

Eventually deism spread to early colonial America as well. The editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* noted:

By the end of the 18th century, Deism had become a dominant religious attitude among intellectual and upper class Americans.... The first three presidents of the United States also held deistic convictions, as is amply evidenced in their correspondence (1997, 26:569).

The evidence sustains such an assessment.

In America deism flourished after it had declined in England. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine are classed as deists.... Perhaps more than anywhere else in the United States, deistic tendencies of naturalism and Biblical criticism have lived on in modernistic or liberal Protestantism... (Geisler, 1976, pp. 165-166).

But why was such a system necessary? Basically deism came into existence as men attempted to work around the contradictions and internal inconsistencies posed by atheism and agnosticism. The atheist was unable to disprove God’s existence, and the agnostic was forced to admit that while **he** might not be able to **know** that God exists, someone else certainly might possess such knowledge. Enter deism.

The best way out of the dilemmas posed by atheism and agnosticism would appear to be the following: let us say that there is a God. This God

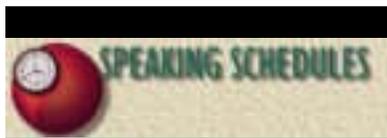
created the world. He issued to the world a moral law, a code of behavior which all of His creatures are supposed to follow. God will someday judge His creatures on how well they obeyed His commandments. In the meantime He does not interfere with His creation. He made it the way He wanted it to be, and He will not contradict His own will. For the moment, we worship God and try to live by His law, but we must not expect Him to do supernatural things for us (Corduan, 1993, p. 90).

What, then, are the exact tenets of deism? Truth be told, at times those tenets are not at all easy to decipher.

In the late seventeenth and in the eighteenth century more than a few thinkers came to be called deists or called themselves deists. These men held a number of related views, but not all held every doctrine in common. John Locke, for example, did not reject the idea of revelation, but he did insist that human reason was to be used to judge it. Some deists, like Voltaire, were hostile to Christianity; some, like Locke, were not. Some believed in the immortality of the soul; some did not. Some believed God left his creation to function on its own; some believed in providence. Some believed in a personal God; others did not. So deists were much less united on basic issues than were theists (Sire, 1988, p. 50).

By way of summary, however, it may be said that the **deist** begrudgingly acknowledges that God exists, and even grants that God created the Universe and its inhabitants. But deism insists that since His initial miraculous act of creation, God has had nothing whatsoever to do with either the Universe or mankind. As the editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* have observed:

At times in the 19th and 20th centuries, the word Deism was used theologically in contradistinction to theism, the belief in an immanent God who actively intervenes in the affairs of men. In this sense Deism was represented as the view of those who reduced the role of God to a mere act of creation in accordance with rational laws discovered by man and held that, after the original act, God virtually withdrew and refrained from interfering in the processes of nature and the ways of man (1997, 26:567).



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The idea behind deism often is clarified and discussed via the analogy of a clock, the idea being that God created the clock, wound it up, and then walked away to leave it operating on its own. In his book, *The Universe Next Door*, James W. Sire titled his chapter on deism, “The Clockwork Universe,” and commented that according to the deist “God is thus not immanent, not fully personal, not sovereign over human affairs, not providential.... God is not interested in individual men and women or even whole peoples” (1988, pp. 50,56). The God of deism therefore has been called a “hermit God” (Dickson, 1979, 121 [8]:118), an “absentee landlord” (Brown, 1984, p. 47), and a “God in absentia” (Coats, 1989, p. 61). The deist’s position is not that God **cannot** perform miracles; rather it is that God **will not** perform miracles because “according to deism, it is contrary to God’s nature to do miracles.... In deism God and the supernatural are considered to be incompatible” (Corduan, 1993, p. 91).

Such a position inevitably leads to the following. First, deism rejects both the trine nature of the Godhead and the deity of Christ. Geisler and Brooks assessed the matter by suggesting that deists

...believe that God never specially intervenes in the world to help mankind. Since this also means that Jesus was not God (that would be a miracle), there is no reason for them to believe that God is a Trinity. The idea of three Persons in one nature (the Trinity) is to them just bad math (1990, p. 40).

Or, as Hoover has noted: “Deists believed in a Supreme Being, but he was only one in number. They denied the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation. Jesus Christ was merely a great moral teacher” (1976, p. 12). Thus, the deist denies “any supernatural redemptive act in history” (Harrison, 1966, p. 162).

Second, deism rejects the idea that God has given a special revelation of Himself in the Bible. For God to reveal Himself by speaking directly to man would be a miracle—an intervention into man’s world. This is something the deist is not prepared to accept. Observation of the general revelation that God has left of Himself in nature, says the deist, is sufficient for understanding the Creator and His desires for mankind.

What did a typical deist deny? In one word: **intervention**.... God didn’t need to reveal anything about himself in a holy book like the Bible or the Koran. Nature itself is the only revelation God needs. A rational man could find out all that he needed to know about God from nature... (Hoover, 1976, p. 13, emp. in orig.).

In summarizing the aversion of the deist to the miraculous, Roger Dickson noted that “the principle point of concern here is the deist’s denial of the inspiration of the Bible and miracles. If God does not intervene in the natural world, then both are impossible” (1979, p. 118).

Third, deism advocates that human reason alone is all man needs to understand God and His laws for humankind.

Deism...refers to what can be called natural religion, the acceptance of a certain body of religious knowledge that is inborn in every person or that can be acquired by the use of reason, as opposed to knowledge acquired through either revelation or the teaching of any church... (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1997, 26: 567).

Sir Peter Medawar put it this way: “The 17th-century doctrine of the **necessity** of reason was slowly giving way to a belief in the **sufficiency** of reason” (1969, p. 438). Without special revelation from God (a miracle), deism had no choice but to advocate that **reason alone was sufficient**.

Fourth, deism rejects the notions of a prayer-hearing/prayer-answering God and a God Who works in men’s lives through divine providence. As Hoover observed: “If you deny revelation you must also sweep out miracle, prayer, and providence. **Any** tampering with nature and her perfect laws would imply that nature had a defect” (1976, p. 13, emp. in orig.). Coats lamented:

With his concept of God, there is no possible way for the deist to believe in the providence of God. Since God has taken a long journey and is “**at rest**,” He leaves the affairs of men and nations to tick alone, as would the pendulum of a clock. There is no reason to pray to a deistic god for the system is completely fatalistic (1989, p. 61, emp. in orig.).

What response may be offered to deism? First, deism’s flawed view of God’s inability to work miracles must be addressed. Corduan has reasoned as follows:

Now we can see that deism is actually irrational.... If God can perform the miracle of creation, there is no good reason why He cannot do other miracles. Thus deism has an inconsistency at its core. Two affirmations are at the heart of deism: (1) God performed the miracle of creation; and (2) God does not perform miracles. If you are a deist, you must believe both of them, and yet these affirmations cannot both be true. Therefore deism is not a believable worldview. It founders on the criterion of consistency (1993, pp. 91-92).

Second, if the deist believes supernatural Creation occurred, he cannot deny the only divine source of knowledge concerning that Creation—special revelation.

The deistic arguments intended to eliminate the basis for belief in a supernatural revelation apply equally as well to elimination of the deistic belief in creation.... If the Bible cannot be trusted to teach one doctrine then there is no grounds for believing the other one is true.... Hence, the deist defeats his own case against revelation when he accepts from revelation the doctrine of creation (Geisler, 1976, p. 170).

Third, since God created the laws of the Universe, and since those laws are contingent upon God for their very existence, there is no good reason why an omnipotent God could not set aside those laws for the benefit of mankind. Furthermore, would not a God concerned enough to create humans likewise be concerned enough to intervene on their behalf on occasion—especially if they had fallen into grave (spiritual) danger? Geisler has suggested:

“You have made your own bed, lie in it” is something less than the attitude a good Creator ought to have. If he had enough love and concern for man to create him, then it would seem to be most compatible with such a nature to believe that God would miraculously intervene to help him if he were in need. And surely a God strong enough to create the world is strong enough to help it. The laws of creation are not inviolable; they are created and contingent.

And what is created and contingent can be laid aside if need be for the moral good of man. Hence, the nature of God, even as conceived by deists, would be compatible with miraculous intervention into the natural world when the situation calls for it (1976, p. 170).

God is not just a “Master Universe Mechanic.” He also is personal—a concept even deists accept. Is it not reasonable, then, to suggest that this personal Creator would desire communication between Himself and His creation—especially if the creation had been made “in His image”?

Fourth, the idea that human reason alone is an adequate guide for mankind, and that the “natural world” can provide him with all that he needs to know in regards to behavior, ethics, response to God, etc., is severely flawed. As Hoover wrote:

Especially puerile was the deistic belief that you could establish an ethical code by mere reason based only on nature. Which part of nature do we consult for this moral standard? What animal gives us the norm? Some spiders eat their mate after sexual intercourse—should we humans imitate this example? If not, which animal shall we follow? (1976, p. 14).

Fifth, deism became the easily-crossed bridge from theism to out-and-out naturalism—the view that there is no God and that “nature” is all that exists. Sire summed up this fact when he wrote:

Deism did not prove to be a very stable world view. Historically it held sway over the intellectual world of France and England briefly from the late seventeenth into the first half of the eighteenth century. **Preceded by theism, it was followed by naturalism** (1988, pp. 56-57, emp. added).

Roger Dickson has pointed out that for many of its adherents, “deism was the first step toward naturalism” (1979, 121[8]: 118). In his monumental work, *Does God Exist?*, Hans Kung summarized the situation.

This Deism, not accepted by theology, which still needed God in the physical world...now developed consistently into a **scientific atheism**, which did not need God either physically for the explanation of the world or even morally for the conduct of life (1980, p. 91, emp. in orig.).

Today, it is rare to find a genuine deist. I mention it here, however, not merely from a historical perspective, but also to document the end result of accepting it. As Kung poignantly noted, deism “developed consistently into a **scientific atheism**, which did not need God.”

## CONCLUSION

Every person familiar with the Bible is aware of one of its central themes—the evil results of unbelief. Throughout the Bible, Heaven’s warning was that belief (and its accompanying faithfulness) would bring spiritual life and God’s blessings, while unbelief (and its accompanying unfaithfulness) would bring God’s wrath and spiritual death. The prophet Ezekiel spoke of the man who “turneth away from righteousness and comitteth iniquity, and dieth therein” as being one who “in his iniquity...shall die” (18:26). The apostle Paul observed that the Old Testament had been penned “for our learning” (Romans 15:4), and was to be our “schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:24). It should come as no surprise, then, to see Paul catalog in 1 Corinthians 10 a number of instances of apostasy—as a warning to those who might be thinking about following in their unbelieving predecessors’ footsteps.

All too often man’s “wisdom” has replaced God’s (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-25), causing many to lose their way in what has become one of the most horrible, and yet one of the most common, tragedies of our day. The price humans have paid for being intellectually learned but spiritually ignorant—the loss of their own souls—has been far higher than we ever could have imagined.

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## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

### DID YOU KNOW THAT WE CAN...?

When we began the work of Apologetics Press in 1979, we had in mind several important goals that we hoped to achieve—firm objectives that were so critical we considered them “non-negotiable.” Chief among them was our intent that Apologetics Press become a “clearinghouse” of useful, accurate information that could: (a) assist people in their efforts to document for others the validity of New Testament Christianity; and (b) help them strengthen their own faith.

While many things **have** changed at Apologetics Press during the past twenty years, our goals and objectives most definitely **have not**. To this very hour, it still is our intention to “be here when you need us.” And that is what I’d like to discuss with you in this month’s “Note from the Editor.”

It is important to us that you know you can call on us when you need help in areas relating to Christian apologetics and Christian evidences. We receive literally hundreds of phone calls and letters (both regular mail and e-mail) during the course of a year, many of which are from people who diligently are searching for materials or soliciting answers to questions—either on their own behalf or on someone else’s. Their request may be for assistance in helping them establish God’s existence, answer an alleged Bible contradiction, prove the deity of Christ, respond to a hostile challenge to their faith, or refute one or more portions of the theory of evolution. They may have questions about such things as the ethics of genetic engineering (e.g., cloning, artificial insemination, *in vitro* fertilization, etc.). They may need to know how to answer a difficult question raised by a friend, relative, colleague, or teacher. Or they may need help locating material for a young person’s school term paper, debate topic, or science project. Whatever their need, we are happy to offer our assistance, and will do everything within our power to accommodate their request(s).

To be quite honest, two decades ago that was a lot more difficult than it is today. Almost every request or question that arrived had to be researched anew, and a written response prepared. Twenty years later, however, we are able to draw on a vast in-house cache of information that is the result of thousands of hours of painstaking research and archiving procedures—things that not only make our task easier, but allow us to increase our output as well. In the end, all of this helps us help you—which is our chief objective.

For example, **did you know that we can:** (a) provide article reprints on a vast array of topics from past issues of *Reason & Revelation*; (b) offer almost two decades’ worth of articles on timely subjects relating to apologetics and evidences in an attractive, two-color tract format; (c) make available scientific and/or biblical monographs on various challenging areas of study; (d) offer for purchase entire volumes of *R&R* from past years (e.g., 1985-1998 in various formats); or (e) research difficult questions (at no cost to you) and produce in written form the results of that research—with complete bibliographic documentation; (f) and much more? **Much more!** We remain firmly committed to our goal of being a “clearinghouse” for useful and accurate information. If we can assist you, call on us. We are here to serve.

— Bert Thompson

#### ERRATA

1. In the February 1999 issue of *Reason & Revelation* (page 15, column two), we mentioned the Spencer, Indiana newspaper, *Evening Star*. The name of the paper actually is *Evening World*.
2. In the March 1999 issue (page 20, column one), the following sentence was included in a quote from G.H. Smith: “If others wish for him to accept the existence of a god, it is their responsibility to argue for the truth of atheism....” The word **atheism** in the quote should be **theism**.
3. In the March 1999 issue, the following reference was omitted: Huxley, Thomas Henry (1896), *Darwiniana* (New York: Appleton).