

CAUSES OF UNBELIEF [PART II]

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

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

Pride

When the Lord asked in John 5:44, "How can ye believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?" He summed up one of the main reasons why many are unprepared to believe in God. Man is so busy seeking and reveling in his own glory that he has neither the time nor the desire to offer glory to His Maker. An unhealthy lust for power wrapped in a cloak of pride breeds unbelief. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (he of "God is dead" fame) expressed such an attitude when he asked a friend, "If there were gods, how could I endure it to be no god?" In his famous composition, *Invictus*, infidel poet William Ernest Henley wrote: "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." The famed Harvard evolutionist, George Gaylord Simpson, ended one of his books with these words: "Man is his own master. He can and must decide and manage his own destiny" (1953, p. 155).

One of the most famous apologists among Christian theists of the past generation was the renowned biblical scholar Wilbur M. Smith. In 1945 he authored *Therefore Stand*, which was then, and is now, a classic in the fields of Christian apologetics and evidences. In chapter three, under

the heading of "Some Reasons for the Unbelief of Men and Their Antagonism Against God," Dr. Smith listed numerous causes of unbelief, one of which was "The Pride of Man." Included in his discussion of that subject was this observation:

When man says he believes in a Supreme Being...he at the same time, if he is honest, confesses that God is holy, and he himself, unholy, that God is independent and can do according to His own will, while man is dependent. All this is humiliating; it takes away any cause for pride, for if there is one thing that man has always liked to feel it is that he is sufficient for all things, that he is going to bring about a better world by his own ingenuity, that he is the greatest and highest and most important phenomenon in the world, and that beyond him there is nothing worth considering (1974 reprint, p. 151).

In the text they co-authored, *A Survey of European Civilization: 1500-Present*, historians Walter Ferguson and Geoffrey Bruun discussed the "intellectual revolution" that had engulfed mankind. Their assessment of the effects of this phenomenon was: "The new learning offered man a more vain-glorious picture of himself, and rooted itself in his pride; whereas his religious beliefs had been the fruit of his humility" (1937, pp. 9-11). Forty years later, the accuracy of their assessment became clear when two eminent atheists of our generation, Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, wrote:

Unquestionably mankind is special, and in many ways, too.... There is now a critical need for a deep awareness that, no matter how special we are as an animal, we are still part of the greater balance of nature.... During that relatively brief span evolutionary pressures forged a brain capable of profound understanding of matters animate and inanimate: the fruits of intellectual and technological endeavour in this latter quarter of the 20th century give us just an inkling of what the human mind can achieve. The potential is enormous, almost infinite. **We can, if we so choose, do virtually anything...** (1977, p. 256; first emp. in orig., latter emp. added).

Smith's conclusion on "the pride of man" was: "As pride increases, humility decreases, and as man finds himself self-sufficient he will discard his religious convictions, or having none, he will fight those of others" (1974, pp. 152-153).

In America, one of Nietzsche's intellectual offspring was Thomas J.J. Altizer, a professor at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Through two popular books, *Oriental Mysticism and Biblical Eschatology* (1961) and *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1966), he affirmed—like his German counterpart—that "God is dead." His position was not exactly the same as Nietzsche's, however. Altizer had concluded that the God of traditional theism was "dead." A transcendent God was a useless, mythical, powerless figurehead Who has no author-

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ity over mankind. Almost forty years earlier, Walter Lippmann had addressed this same type of problem in his book, *A Preface to Morals*.

This is the first age, I think, in the history of mankind when the circumstances of life have conspired with the intellectual habits of the time to render any fixed and authoritative belief incredible to large masses of men. The irreligion of the modern world is radical to a degree for which there is, I think, no counterpart.... I do not mean that modern men have ceased to believe in God. I do not mean that they no longer believe in Him simply and literally. I mean they have defined and refined their ideas of Him until they can no longer honestly say He exists... (1929, pp. 12,21).

In the mid-1960s, when Altizer's positions were receiving considerable publicity, James D. Bales authored an important volume, *The God-Killer?* (1967), in which he reviewed and refuted Altizer's teachings. Almost a decade later, Dr. Bales still was opposing Altizer's views. In his book, *How Can Ye Believe?*, Bales wrote:

Some have made a declaration of independence from God. They believe they are self-sufficient in knowledge. Through the unaided human mind they can answer all questions that can be answered, and solve all problems that can be solved....

For example, in our day Thomas J.J. Altizer has declared that God is dead. This was decreed by the pride of man. In his pride, Altizer maintained that man must be autonomous. He must be free to create his own nature and to formulate his own moral laws. If God is, and if God created man, man is not autonomous. He is not free to create his own nature, nor can he be left to his own will and whims as to what is right or wrong. He is not free to live his own life without being accountable to God. In his pride, Altizer wanted none of these things, so he decreed that God is dead in order that he might be free to live as it pleases him without being accountable to God. The arrogant heart cannot furnish fertile soil for seeds of truth... (1976, p. 73).

Bales' last statement—that "the arrogant heart cannot furnish fertile soil for seeds of truth"—is thoroughly biblical. Christ Himself warned: "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, **pride**, foolishness" (Mark 7:21-22, emp. added). The apostle John wrote: "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the **pride of life**—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16, NKJV, emp. added).

Somewhere in time, Altizer lost his way. In his pride, **finite** man sought to rid himself of the **infinite** God. He also forgot (if, indeed, he ever knew) that "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of a lowly spirit with the poor, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:18-19). Henry Morris has observed:

The root of all sin...is the twin sin of unbelief and pride—the refusal to submit to God's will as revealed by His own Word and the accompanying assertion of self-sufficiency which enthrones the creature and his own will in the place of God (1971, pp. 214-215).

Imagine the position in which the devout unbeliever finds himself. He may be thinking: "I've been an unbeliever for a long time. If I alter my views now, I will lose face. My reputation is linked to my views. So is my conduct. Were I to change my mind, I would be condemning my whole past existence and altering my entire future life—in both word and deed."

Difficult scenario, to be sure. Not only is pride heavily involved, but personal integrity as well. Perhaps this is the very thing that Jesus had in mind when He said: "Anyone who **resolves** to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God" (John 7:17, NRSV, emp. added). If a person so desires, he or she **can** replace unbelief with belief. As the apostle John brought the Book of Revelation to a close, he wrote: "...he that will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). The operative phrase here, of course, is "he that will." It is one thing to let pride **get** in the way; it is entirely another to let it **remain** there.



Immorality

In his book, *If There's a God, Why Are There Atheists?*, R.C. Sproul titled one of the chapter subheadings “The Threat of Moral Excellence.” In that section, he noted:

It is a common occurrence among social human beings that a person who manifests a superior excellence is resented by his contemporaries. The student who consistently breaks the curve of the academic grading system is frequently treated with quiet hostility by his classmates.... The unusually competent person represents a threat not only to his peers but to his superiors as well, and is frequently treated as *persona non grata*.... **Competency at a moral level is perhaps the most unwelcome kind of competency** (1978, pp. 94,95, emp. added).

Who among us has not endured taunts from associates because we refused to participate in something immoral? Think about the teenager who rebuffs his friends' invitation to “do drugs,” the employee who chooses not to “fudge” his time sheet, or the college student who elects not to cheat on the exam. Those who **are willing** to participate in immoral acts often react in hostile fashion to those who **are not**.

Consider the case of Jesus Christ. When He calmed the storm-tossed seas in Matthew 8, those around Him asked, “What manner of man is this?” (vs. 27). When those sent to spy on Him reported to the chief priests and Pharisees who had commissioned them, they admitted: “Never man so spake” (John 7:47). Christ was **morally** unique. He was the One Who taught:

Ye have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”: but I say unto you, resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two.... I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you (Matthew 5:38-41,44)

Practically everything Christ taught, and did, was in contradistinction to the common practices of His day—and of ours. As Sproul has suggested:

The unique moral excellence of Jesus was a massive threat to His contemporaries, particularly to those who were considered to be the moral elite of His day. It was the Pharisees (those “set apart” to righteousness) who were most hostile to Jesus. Though the popular masses hailed the Pharisees for their moral excellence, Jesus exposed them as hypocrites. He “broke their curve,” providing a new standard under which the old standard of morality dissolved. Jesus disintegrated the firm security of His contemporaries. **When the Holy appeared, the pseudo-holy were exposed** (1978, pp. 95-96, emp. added; parenthetical comment is Sproul's).

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destruction, and a
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(Proverbs 16:18-19)*

Little wonder, then, that “the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might put him to death” (Luke 22:2).

If people reacted with downright disgust to the moral perfection of God's personal representative here on Earth, with what kind of dastardly disdain might they be expected to react to the moral perfection of the God Who inhabits eternity? In his 1910 book, *Man's Need of God*, historian David Smith lamented not only the sorry state in which mankind found itself, but the fact that “[i]t is not intellectual aberration but moral depravity—the blight of uncleanness, the canker of corruption” that has brought humans to the precipice of moral bankruptcy (p. 98). One need not look long or hard to find corroborating

evidence for such an assessment. For example, Aldous Huxley wrote:

I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning; consequently, assumed it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption.... The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do.... For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, **the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation**. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and **liberation from a certain system of morality**. **We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom** (1966, 3:19, emp. added).

Huxley's admission leaves little to the imagination. Why did he, and so many of his contemporaries, abandon belief in God? It was: (a) to avoid the objective moral standards laid down by Heaven; and (b) to provide legitimacy for indiscriminate sexual behavior of a wanton nature. In fact, this is one of the primary planks in the platform of modern-day humanism.

In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered “evil.” Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a **tolerant** one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire (*Humanist Manifestos I & II*, 1973, pp. 18-19, emp. in orig.)

Some might object on the grounds that not **all** unbelievers lapse into moral decay. Bales addressed this objection in his book, *How Can Ye Believe?*

First, men are sometimes glad to get away from the moral authority of the Christian faith not because they want to do some things that it forbids, but **because some of the things which it sanctions and commands they do not want to do**. Second, the sinful attitude of heart may not be of the type that we generally associate with immorality, but such as the pride of individuals who do not want to admit that they are a long way from what they ought to be. Such an individual may welcome unbelief because it removes from his sight the accusing high standard of the faith which passes judgment on his life.... Third, the collapse in moral conduct may not come immediately because...the habits of the individual and his attitudes have been constructed by Christian morality and he finds it difficult to break away from them and to get over the idea of the shamefulness of certain types of conduct.... Fourth, it has not been suggested that this is the **only** cause of unbelief (1976, pp. 99,100, emp. added).

As this section on immorality as a cause of unbelief draws to a close, I believe it is appropriate to conclude with the following quotation from Wilbur M. Smith:

The point I am making is this: one of the reasons why men refuse to accept the Christian Faith is because the very principles of their lives are in every way contradictory to the ethical principles of the Bible, and, **determined to remain in the lawlessness of their own sensuality**, they could not possibly embrace a holy religion nor walk with a holy God, nor look for salvation to His holy Son, nor have any love for His holy Word.... **one of the deepest, profoundest, most powerful causes for unbelief, holding men back from Christ is a life of sin** (1974, p. 170, emp. added).

Scientific Materialism

Let's face it. We are living in an era where science reigns supreme and where we view daily its astonishing accomplishments. Today, citizens of most civilized countries

are better fed, better clothed, and healthier than they ever have been. Science has increased life spans, improved planetary transportation, and altered forever methods of global communication. It has eradicated smallpox and is on the verge of eliminating polio. Scientific research has improved radically such things as educational, medical, and recreational facilities, especially when compared to those of previous generations. It even stands at the brink of decoding the entire human genome.

“One of the reasons why men refuse to accept the Christian Faith is because the very principles of their lives are in every way contradictory to the ethical principles of the Bible.... One of the deepest, profoundest, and most powerful causes for unbelief...is a life of sin.”

Pretty impressive stuff, to say the least. And therein lies the problem. Because of the tremendous strides that have been, and are being, made, science has become somewhat of a sacred cow and the laboratory a sort of “holy of holies.” As Smith put it:

The very word “laboratory” has in it the connotation of certainty, of wonder, of the discovery of secrets. Millions of people are living today because of the development of medicine, and thank God for that! Many are able to walk the streets today because of insulin, who, otherwise, would long ago have been in their graves. One discovery drives men on to another. The eliciting of one secret is only the opening of the door into another realm of mystery and delight. There is a positiveness, definiteness, and promise about mathe-

matical equations, physical laws, and chemical formulae, which make men feel that here their feet are on solid rock, that their minds are grappling with realities (1974, pp. 162-163).

While we should be grateful for the great strides that science has made, we also should acknowledge all that science owes to God. During a seminar on origins held at Murray, Kentucky on November 29, 1980, Russell C. Artist, former chairman of the biology department and professor emeritus at David Lipscomb University, commented: “The statement, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,’ is the very cornerstone of all scientific thinking.” Dr. Artist was doing what far too many scientists are unwilling to do—give “credit where credit is due.” If Genesis 1:1 is the **cornerstone** of science, then surely Genesis 1:28—wherein man is commanded to “subdue and have dominion over” the Earth—is the **charter** of science.

Yet undoubtedly one of the greatest obstacles to belief in God is the attitude that science somehow has made belief in God obsolete. Philosopher A.J. Ayer put it this way: “I believe in science. That is, I believe that a theory about the way the world works is not acceptable unless it is confirmed by the facts, and I believe that **the only way to discover what the facts are is by empirical observation**” (1966, p. 13, emp. added). Or, as humanistic philosopher Paul Kurtz suggested: “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).

At the conclusion of the third annual Conference on Science and Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, a formal statement was framed to summarize the participants' conclusions. In that statement was this amazing declaration:

A world which has gained a unique sense of power through its inventive ability and its scientific knowledge, which has been trained to think in concrete terms and their immediate ends, and which enjoys the thrill of a

continually changing panorama of obtainable knowledge is peculiarly resistant to the teachings of religion with its emphasis on ultimate objectives, and absolute truths (as quoted in Smith, 1974, p. 152).

In commenting on this assessment, Wilbur M. Smith wrote: “The result of such preoccupations is the snuffing out, as it were, of spiritual thoughts, or, a turning away from spiritual values. **Material contentment often makes for spiritual indifference**” (1974, p. 160, emp. added). Edward Watkin, in his book, *Theism, Agnosticism and Atheism*, opined:

Man today is fixing his attention wholly upon a horizontal plane to the exclusion of the vertical. As this movement of exclusive outlook, this naturalism and religious humanism, has grown in power and self-confidence, it has produced an increasing blindness to religious truth. Those whose minds it has formed, and they are the majority of civilized mankind today, have their attention fixed so exclusively upon the phenomena visible along the **horizontal** line of vision that they can no longer see the spiritual realities visible only in the depths by a **vertical** direction... (1936, pp. 23-24, emp. added).

Approximately two decades after Dr. Watkin made that statement, its truthfulness was borne out by a prominent member of the scientific community. While attending the Darwinian Centennial Convocation at the University of Chicago in 1958, Julian Huxley stated that, so far as he was concerned, Darwinian science had “removed the whole idea of God...from the sphere of rational discussion” (1960, p. 45). After almost another four decades had passed, evolutionist Richard Lewontin ex-

pressed even more forcefully the unbeliever’s attitude toward science, and God.

Our willingness to accept scientific claims against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science **in spite** of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, **in spite** of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, **in spite** of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to naturalism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that **we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes** to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, **that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door** (1997, p. 31, emp. in orig. except for last two sentences).

Notice what Lewontin admits. Neither he, nor his scientific cohorts, bases unbelief on “the methods and institutions” of science. Rather they are “forced” by their “a priori adherence to material causes” to accept an absolute materialism. Why? Because they resolutely refuse to “allow a Divine Foot in the door.” Thus, scientific materialism has fostered unbelief.

In his book, *Intellectuals Don’t Need God and Other Modern Myths*, Alister E. McGrath asked: “But what of the idea that science has rendered God unnecessary? As scientific understanding advances, will

not God be squeezed out from the gaps in which Christian apologists have tried to lodge him?” (1993, p. 166). While Dr. McGrath expressed hope that this will not happen, he likewise acknowledged that, in fact, all too often it has. Smith wrote:

But **science is no synonym for spirituality**, and the life of men is made up of more things than can be measured with test tubes and balances. Yet, man is so absorbed in the pursuit of nature’s secrets that he is increasingly ignorant of his inner spiritual life, and this is one of the tragedies of our day. Men engaged in science are themselves partly to blame for this. They devote days and nights, months, and sometimes years, to the discovery of some scientific fact, but they will not give twenty minutes a day to pondering the Word of God, nor five minutes a day to the exercise of their soul in prayer to God.... Of course if men are going to lift such a miserable thing as humanity to a pedestal, then a holy and invisible God must be not only ignored, but despicably rejected and hated, which is why many of our intellectual leaders today who look upon **humanity** as divine, must irritatingly and scornfully declare their conviction that a transcendent, omnipotent, sovereign and eternal Being can, for them, have no meaning (1974, pp. 163,164, emp. added).

Intellectual Intimidation

Not long ago, I received a heart-rending letter from a young Christian who was a graduate student in the applied sciences at a state university. His major professor was a man he termed “a giant in his field... rocket-scientist intelligent...and a devout evolutionist.” In his letter, the student went on to say:

Working this closely with one who thinks as he does is beginning to cause not a small amount of cognitive dissonance in my own mind. Hundreds of thousands of scientists can’t be wrong, can they? Consensual validation cannot be pushed aside in science. How can that many people be following a flag with no carrier, and someone not find out? **I do not want to be a fool!**



Dr. Bert Thompson

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This young writer expressed what many people experience, yet are unable to enunciate so eloquently. It is not an enjoyable experience to be exposed to the slings and barbs of infidelity. Nor is it pleasant to be labeled as dumb, stupid, or ignorant because you hold to a belief different than your opponent's. Yet it is those very labels that have been applied to those of us who are willing to defend the existence of God or the concept of creation. Several years ago, the famous atheist/evolutionist of Oxford University, Richard Dawkins wrote: "It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is **ignorant, stupid, or insane** (or **wicked**, but I'd rather not consider that)" (1989, p. 34, emp. added).

The "cognitive dissonance" mentioned by the young man is the label for the internal struggle one experiences when presented with new information that contradicts what he believes to be true. As the student struggled for consistency, he realized that he had only two choices. He either had to: (1) alter what he previously believed; or (2) disregard the new information being presented to him by "a rocket-scientist intelligent" professor whom he respected. This young Christian—like so many before and after him—once knew what he believed, and why. But by the time his letter arrived in my office, he no longer knew either. He pleaded: "I am a confused young man with some serious questions about my mind, my faith, and my God. Please help me."

That agonizing plea—"please help me"—has been echoed countless times through the centuries by those who languish in the "cognitive dissonance" that results from replacing the wisdom of God with the wisdom of man. The young graduate student asked: "Hundreds of thousands of scientists can't be wrong, can they?" This question may be addressed as follows. First, any argument based on "counting heads" is fallacious. Philosophy professors instruct their students on the various fallacies of human thought, one of which is the "fallacy of consensus." In his book, *Fundamentals of Critical Thinking*, atheistic philosopher Paul Ricci discussed the "argument from consensus," and explained in detail its errors (1986, p. 175). Interestingly,

however, in the pages prior to his discussion, Ricci had offered the following as a "proof" of evolution: "The reliability of evolution not only as a theory but as a principle of understanding is not contested by **the vast majority** of biologists, geologists, astronomers, and other scientists" (1986, p. 172, emp. added).

Mr. Ricci thus fell victim to the very fallacy about which he tried to warn his readers—i.e., **truth is not determined by popular opinion or majority vote**. A thing may be, and often is, true even when accepted only by a small minority. The history of science is replete with such examples. British medical doctor, Edward Jen-

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ner (1749-1823), was scorned when he suggested smallpox could be prevented by infecting people with a less-virulent strain of the disease-causing organism. Yet his vaccine has helped eradicate smallpox. Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis (1818-1865) of Austria is another interesting case study. He noticed the high mortality rate among surgical patients and suggested that the deaths resulted from surgeons washing neither their hands nor their instruments between patients. Dr. Semmelweis asked them to do both, but they ridiculed him and refused to comply (thereby endangering the lives of thousands of patients). Today, the solutions posed by this gentle doctor are the basis of antiseptic techniques in surgery.

Scientific successes often have occurred **because** researchers rebelled against the status quo. Sometimes "consensual validation" must be set aside—**for the sake of truth**. The cases of Jenner and Semmelweis document all too well the fact that "the intellectuals," although in the majority, may be wrong. Just because "hundreds of thousands of scientists" believe something does not make it right. As Darrell Huff observed: "People can be wrong in the mass, just as they can individually" (1959, p. 122). If something is true, stating it a million times does not make it any truer. Similarly, if something is false, stating it a million times does not make it true.

Second, the prestige of a position's advocates has nothing to do with whether that position is true or false. Newspaper magnate William Randolph Hurst, Jr. once wrote about pressures from "fashionable ideas...which are advanced with such force that common sense itself becomes the victim." He observed that a person under such pressure then may act "with an irrationality which is almost beyond belief" (1971, p. A-4). Consider, as proof of his point, the suggestion by renowned scientist and Nobel laureate W.B. Shockley that highly intelligent women be artificially inseminated using spermatozoa from Nobel Prize winners to produce super-intelligent offspring. There can be no doubt that Shockley happened to be "a giant in his field" with "rocket scientist" intelligence. If the intellect or prestige of a person is enough to guarantee the validity of the positions he (or she) espouses, then perhaps humanity should have taken Dr. Shockley up on his suggestion.

But intellectual prowess or prestige does **not** confer veracity on a person's position(s). Shockley's idea, for example, was based on nothing more than the narcissism of an over-inflated ego. As Taylor has commented: "Status in the field of science is no guarantee of the truth" (1984, p. 226). The soundness or strength of a claim is not based on: (a) the number of people supporting the claim; or (b) the intellect or prestige of the one(s) making that claim.

Third, the idea of strict objectivity in intellectual circles is a myth. While most scholars like to think of themselves as broad-minded, unprejudiced paragons of

virtue, the fact is that they, too, on occasion, suffer from bouts of bias, bigotry, and presuppositionalism. Nobel laureate James Watson remarked rather bluntly: "In contrast to the popular conception supported by newspapers and mothers of scientists, a goodly number of scientists are not only narrow-minded and dull, but also just stupid" (1968, p. 14). Phillip Abelson, one-time editor of *Science*, wrote: "One of the most astonishing characteristics of scientists is that some of them are plain, old-fashioned bigots. Their zeal has a fanatical, egocentric quality characterized by disdain and intolerance for anyone or any value not associated with a special area of intellectual activity" (1964, 144:373). No doubt the same could be said of intellectuals in other fields as well (e.g., philosophy, business, the arts, etc.).

Fourth, on occasion it has been the "intellectuals" who have championed what can only be called "crazy" concepts. Bales addressed this fact when he wrote:

There is no unreasonable position, there is no weird idea, which has not been propagated by some brilliant man who has a number of degrees after his name. Some have argued that everything is an illusion, others have maintained that they are nothing but a mess of matter or just a living mass of meat, others maintain that there is no realm of the rational and thus the very concept of an intellectual is an illusion... (1976, p. 91).

Space would fail me were I to try to provide a comprehensive listing of the "weird" ideas proposed by those esteemed as "intellectuals." For example, the eminent astrophysicist of Great Britain, Sir Fred Hoyle, proposed in his book, *Evolution from Space*, that life was planted here by creatures from outer space, and that insects are their representatives here on Earth (1981, p. 127). The celebrated philosopher René Descartes, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), propounded the view that it is impossible to **know** anything (which makes one want to ask, "How does he **know** that it is impossible to **know**?"). And so on.

The majority ultimately will abandon God's wisdom in favor of their own. But the wisdom with which we **are** impressed is not always the wisdom with which we **should be** impressed. Christ, in His Ser-

mon on the Mount, warned that "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:14). Moses commanded the Israelites: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). Guy N. Woods observed that this injunction

...was designed to guard the Lord's people from the corrupting influences of an evil environment, as well as from the powerful appeals of mob psychology to which so many in every generation succumb.... Man, by nature, is a social and gregarious being, tending to flock or gather together with others of his kind.... Man may, and often does, imbibe the evil characteristics of those about him as readily, and often more so, than the good ones (1982, 124 [1]:2).

It should not surprise us that many "intelligent" people view belief in God as the fool's way out. Paul commented that

not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

The most intelligent often are the least spiritual because "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) has blinded their minds.

We must not fall prey to mob psychology which suggests because "everyone is doing it" that somehow makes it right. The graduate student said, "I do not want to be a fool." It was a joy to tell him that he does not have to bear that stigma because "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Psalm 14:1). We need not be intimidated by the pseudo-intellectualism of those who esteem themselves with higher regard than they do their Creator. Lucy, the character in the *Peanuts* cartoon strip, was correct when she told Charlie Brown, "You're not right; you just **sound** right!"

[to be continued]

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

“HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF”

In the March and April issues of *Reason & Revelation*, I authored a two-part series of articles dealing with “The Many Faces of Unbelief.” I am using the May, June, and July issues to discuss “Causes of Unbelief.” Why so much attention to a singular topic—“unbelief”?

In the ninth chapter of Mark’s Gospel, the story is told of a father who came to request help from Jesus on behalf of his demon-possessed son. The youngster, who had endured this situation “from childhood” (vs. 21), was in desperate need of a cure, as is evident from the symptoms described early on in the account (vss. 18,22). Jesus—having compassion on both father and son—said to the man, “All things are possible to him that believeth” (vs. 23). With an abiding love for his son in his heart, and a cry of desperation on his lips, the father pleaded, “I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (vs. 24).

How many people throughout the millennia since then have echoed that same refrain? How many people **today**—with the same cry of desperation—are pleading for help with unbelief? How many are “out there” groping in intellectual and spiritual darkness for answers to questions that hinder

their belief? How many of our friends, relatives, neighbors, loved ones, or acquaintances are experiencing the same mental anguish that the father of that young son experienced almost twenty centuries ago? As you read this, are you not thinking of someone—young, old, male, female, former friend, current friend—who is struggling in their own personal battle against unbelief? And would you not like to be able to help them fight that battle—and win?!

In our work at Apologetics Press, we deal daily with the various aspects of unbelief. One of our main goals always has been, and still is, to be able to assist

those who cry out, as that father did in earnest almost two thousand years ago, “Help thou mine unbelief.” To that end, we work hard to make available a variety of materials that can help people with their own unbelief, or allow them to help others.

One such tool is our *Study Course in Christian Evidences*, which examines the evidence that attends the truthfulness of New Testament Christianity. In today’s secular climate of unbelief, Christianity is under assault. The time has come, therefore, for every Christian to fortify his or her faith with evidence that can weather the attacks of infidelity. And, the time has come for every Christian to equip him/herself with the knowledge that can be used to help those who **would** believe, **if only they had good reason to do so**.

The *Study Course* comes in two complementary formats. The first is a 162-page book dealing with such topics as the reasons for men’s unbelief, the case for God’s existence, the creation/evolution controversy, the inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, and God’s plan of salvation. The second is a 5-tape VHS video set that includes thirteen lessons of approximately 38 minutes each (which makes them perfect for use in Sunday School classes, home Bible study groups, etc.). The videos are professionally produced and are of the highest quality. I discuss in each presentation the same material that is presented in the book’s thirteen chapters.

The book sells for \$5 (\$1.50 p&h for the first copy; 50¢ for each additional copy); the videos sell for \$80/set (\$5 p&h). One copy of the book is included with each video set. These are materials that can help strengthen the faith of a Christian, or convert the non-Christian. Call us if we can help.

— Bert Thompson

