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## **POP GOES THE “PEAS”**

### **The Coming Collapse of Angry Atheism as the Dominant Belief System of the Western Intelligentsia**

By

Jay B. Gaskill

#### **Constructive Doubt, Heuristic Faith**

We humans are right and reasonable when we entertain periodic doubts about the validity and comprehensive reliability of our beliefs. We have generated and lived into our individual GRMs (Grand Reality Models) over time by a process of assertion, testing and revision.

There was and is no other way to attain the measure of stable belief that life requires of us. And there is no way really to extinguish all our doubts except at the price of permanent ignorance. Every act we perform in the world as individuals involves a test of our personal GRM. There is a measure of “heuristic faith” in our every step into the future. We are not paralyzed by doubt because, as heuristic believers, we actually need doubt as a corrective. To reject the role of doubt would deny the reality and utility of the heuristic processes that have brought us to know each other as fellow conscious moral beings. In our human-to-human relationships we accept *on faith* the reality and relevance of both the outer and inner reality of those we love and who love us. Yet, at the same time, we accept the ongoing uncertainties that attend the human condition. It cannot be otherwise.

Get used to it. All human faith is both necessary and provisional. Do not despair.

A number of highly intelligent people have navigated the gulf between atheism and reasonable belief, among them C. S Lewis.



C. S Lewis

### **On Thin Ice**

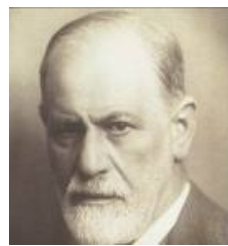
There is a particular brand of cynical - even angry - atheism that fills the ranks of academy (particularly in the social sciences) and the “sophisticated” intelligentsia. This mindset is the legacy of several angry and disillusioned minds of the last century, among them Marx, Sartre and Freud. But it rests on the thinnest and most unstable of foundations.



Marx



Sartre



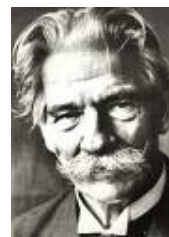
Freud

I am now persuaded that the generation just coming of age will live to see this frosty form of atheism fade away. Intelligent people are being drawn to a new mindset, one more receptive to the reality of the realm of noetic experience and the realization that the numinous is not just a psychological state but our species’ window to deep being.

We can expect the human encounter with deep being - however named or unnamed - once again to be respected and acknowledged in the academy. A number of celebrated humanists, notably Martin Buber and Albert Schweitzer, have integrated rational humanism with great spiritual depth.



Buber



Schweitzer

I predict that theology, once the illegitimate stepchild of philosophy, will rejoin the secular curriculum as “natural theology” before the end of the current century. It will regain its status as a subject worthy of serious academic attention.

The “thin ice” foundations of this century’s arid and intellectual atheism are the “Emperor’s New Clothes”. The fragile foundations of 20<sup>th</sup> century atheism are two errors. They will be fully discredited within the lifetimes of our children and grandchildren.

## **Two Fallacies**

**The first** is the “arch-materialist” fallacy. This is the bleak notion that all that “actually” exists in the universe, including our inner sense of being, our thoughts, feelings, creative inspirations, art, music, morality, goodness and hope, all of it, everywhere and for every temporal state, can be fully and completely explained as configurations of matter and energy within space-time. Anything beyond that level of physical description is illusion. This is an archaic, pre-quantum physics, pre-information age construct once described by Dostoevsky’s character in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Mitya Karamazov is in jail awaiting trial for killing his father. He’s speaking to his brother, Alyosha, the novice. Mitya is “sorry for God” because, “Your Reverence, you must move over a little, chemistry is coming!” *The Brothers Karamazov*, 1880, Book X, Chapter 4, page 753, 2003 Penguin Edition.

The credibility of arch-materialism is undergoing rapid collapse. G-d need not be named. G-d survives all our names, as well as the insights generated by chemistry, physics and the processes of natural selection.

**The second** is the fallacy that authoritarian religion incarnates G-d so that when we reject the former, the latter is irredeemably discredited. If that could remain forever true, even on a psychological level, then the ancient Aztecs and the Inquisition Catholics will have destroyed belief in deity, spiritual reality and any innate or ‘given’ morality for all people for all time. Fads fade. Angry atheism is a fad founded in unreasonable resentment. All institutions tend to abuse their authority. That is the social axiom gleaned from the bloody experience of our species’ last three centuries of turmoil.

Militant atheism is rooted in anger born of abuse. At its deep taproot, this atheism is a psychological disturbance I call **PEAS** (for Post Ecclesial Abuse Syndrome). The new generations will not “give PEAS a chance” to block our sustaining connections with deep being, deep morality and deep hope.

But, in spite of PEAS, authentic, sincere religious belief and deep spiritual understanding have taken root in scientific minds, among them Teilhard de Chardin, the Catholic biologist who found evidence of deity in biological evolution and the physicist turned Anglican theologian, Dr. John Polkinghorne who has written about the relationship between quantum physics and G-d in the world.



Teilhard



Polkinghorne

And we have the examples of religiously inspired moral courage, of extraordinary integrity in the face of great evil, such as that of the Lutheran Minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer who died in a Nazi prison camp, while less morally inspired secular scientists like Werner Heisenberg worked on the German atomic bomb project.



Bonhoeffer



Heisenberg

As I have argued elsewhere, if our species didn't have religion in some useful form, we have to reinvent it.

[See my two essays on this, "Why Religion" at <http://jaygaskill.com/Religion.htm> & "Religions Universal or Parochial" at <http://jaygaskill.com/ReligiousFreeMarket.htm> .]

But, surely religion is far too important to our species to be left under the control of religious institutions.

G-d forbid that!

**JBG**

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