

ESSAY

## The Fight for the Truth

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?1 Our times are witness to a massive conflict between reductionist scientism and  
?2 a resurgence of irrational religious fanaticisms. In the resulting smoke and  
?3 flames the quest for truth falters. By scientism I mean the claim made by  
scientists, such as Richard Dawkins (2006), to know things they cannot possibly  
know—in particular, that God does not exist and that the mind is identical with  
the brain. Avrum Stroll (2006) has demonstrated that it is logically impossible  
for humans to know whether God exists or not. As for the mind-brain Identity  
Theory, this is most certainly untrue, as it violates Leibniz’s Law of the Identity  
of Indiscernibles (see Smythies, 1994a, 1994b, for details). Scientism is also  
picky about which scientific facts it accepts. Its adherents pour scorn on para-  
psychologists as pseudo-scientists. However, these people have very rarely  
studied the work of parapsychologists and base their opinions purely on dogma.  
Their own metaphysical theory of mind-brain Identity does not allow for any  
such facts as the parapsychologists report, and so, like Galileo’s Pope, the  
skeptics deny the experimental facts on a purely *a priori* basis. Likewise, neuro-  
science is currently infected with scientism. Almost all contemporary neuro-  
scientists believe, as an article of faith, that neuroscience has demonstrated the  
truth of the mind-brain Identity Theory. But, of course, it has done no such thing  
(Smythies, 1994a). As Ayer (1951) pointed out many years ago, the information  
about all and every detail of how the brain works as an electro-chemical machine  
is irrelevant to the quite separate question of how ALL this activity is related to  
the phenomenal events that we experience in conscious awareness. As he put it,  
if one is trying to build a bridge across a river, it does not do merely to raise one  
of its banks.

Fortunately, if we reject Identity Theory, we are no longer left with Cartesian  
Dualism (with its many defects) as the only alternative explanatory theory of  
mind-brain, or consciousness-brain, relations. A rival theory—extended

materialism—has been developed over the years by C. D. Broad (1923), Bertrand Russell (1946: 45, 581–593), H. H. Price (1953), Lord Brain (1960), and myself (Smythies, 1994b). This theory allows for the existence of the facts reported by parapsychologists. It also allows that humans may have immortal souls after all, along the lines suggested by Hindu and Buddhist psychology. Included amongst these alleged facts are the reports of reincarnation that Ian Stevenson devoted much of his life to studying. His meticulous work accumulated a wealth of evidence that supports the reality of this phenomenon. Ian's work was rejected by the Establishment of the practitioners of scientism (masquerading, in this respect, as scientists). They *knew* for *a priori* reasons that reincarnation was impossible, so they did not bother to read Ian's books. In doing this, they overlooked the fact that Identity Theory is riddled with errors and cannot, as detailed above, be true. This scientism represents not only an example of the resistance to paradigm change at any cost that has afflicted science throughout its existence (*vide* the ferocious fight against the germ theory of disease, tectonic plates, *Helicobacter pylori* as the cause of stomach ulcers, and many others), but is also an example of ideological imperialism (“How could ancient [and pathetic] Hindu psychology be right and our own glittering science be wrong!”).

Scientism leads to nihilism, with which Western culture, in its politics, art and literature, philosophy and everyday life, is currently awash. The main hatred of fundamentalist Islam for things Western is directed, not at the Christian religion, which Islam respects, but towards our sickly, and to them evil and disgusting, culture. In their eyes, humans in the West have turned themselves into things without any purpose in the world other than mere biological activity. Scientism, without any evidence, denies the role for individual humans as travelers in eternity that is central to Islamic belief. Certainly one can make a case that many Western intellectuals, such as Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Derrida, were merely so many termites gnawing at the foundations of civilization. It is up to us to do what we can to stop the rot.

Ian Stevenson has, for over half a century, been a leader in the uphill struggle to establish real science in the area of the mind and mind-brain relations in the face of bitter, and often envenomed, resistance by the Establishment. Richard Dawkins (2006) makes great play in his recent book *The God Delusion* of what he calls the appalling propensity of religious people to base their ideas on dogma rather than on the evidence. Well, many do, but this reads strange in a book bursting at the seams with its own dogmas, its uncritical acceptance of metaphysical theories such as Identity Theory, its refusal to take note of the relevant evidence from parapsychology, and its special pleading with regard to the views of Darwin and Wallace on genocide (see Smythies, in preparation, for details). For example, Dawkins states that he knows that this life is the only life we have. How could he possibly *know* that? In these discussions I am reminded of some tadpoles in a muddy pond complaining that they cannot understand the special theory of relativity.

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