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## Lesson 8: Pseudo-Scientific Demagoguery

The materialists claim that the establishment of their school of thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was directly connected to the progress of science and that the dialectical method was a fruit plucked from the fertile tree of science.

They depict every philosophy apart from materialism as a form of idealism, opposed to the scientific method of thought, and insist that their position is a scientific and progressive one. According to them, realism consists in turning away from metaphysical truths; everyone ought to base his worldview on sensory and empirical logic and opt for materialism. But this claim is nothing more than a fanatical illusion based on unproven theories. Views such as these derive directly from a system of thought centered on materialism; within it, everything is defined and delimited with reference to materialism.

Belief in an object of worship is without doubt one of the principal sources of human culture and knowledge. The propounding of belief in God as basis for a correct worldview has brought about profound changes in the foundations of society and thought throughout human history.

Now, too, in the age of science and technology, when man has found his way into space, a considerable number of scientists have a religious outlook as part of the intellectual system; they have come to believe in the existence of a creator, a source for all beings, not only by means of the heart and the conscience, but also through deduction and logic.

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If the materialists' justification for their worldview were true, instead of being based on inadequate knowledge of the history of materialist thought, there ought to be a particular connection between science and an inclination to materialism; only materialist views would be represented in the realm of science.

Has every philosopher and scholar, in every age, held an atheistic worldview and belonged to the materialist camp? A scholarly examination of the lives and works of great thinkers will suffice to show

that not only is the religious camp by no means empty of true scientists, but also that many great scientific thinkers and personalities, including the founders of much of contemporary science, have believed in monotheism.

In addition, materialistic and atheistic beliefs have by no means been confined to the period of the evolution and advancement of science; since ancient times and, indeed, throughout history, materialists have stood in opposition to a united front of believers.

Today it is primarily in a vulgarized form of Marxism that the wares of science have been turned into a tool of deception. Those who supposedly should be mapping out their path in the clear light of knowledge and weighing all matters with profound, logical perception and investigation, in complete freedom from all fanaticism and hasty prejudice—precisely these people have fallen prey to stagnation and blind imitation. They have arrogantly denied all values higher than intellect and reason, and even boast of their ignorant denial.

Their claim that the coming of science has put out the notion of God is purely rhetorical and has nothing to do with logical method, because even thousands of scientific experiments could not possibly suffice to demonstrate that no non-material being or factor exists.

Materialism is a metaphysical belief, and must, therefore, be proven or disproven according to philosophical method. Precisely for this reason, an acceptance of materialism cannot be made a basis for the denial of metaphysics. To interpret materialism in such a sense is in the final analysis strictly meaningless; it would be a superstitious notion involving the perversion of truth, and to regard it as scientific would, in fact, be treason to science.

It is true that until very recently man was largely unaware of the natural causes and factors that give rise to phenomena and that he had little awareness of the occurrences that took place around him. But his belief did not derive from ignorance, for if it did, the foundations of belief in God would have collapsed once certain facts concerning the world were discovered. On the contrary, we see in the present age that with the discovery of a whole mass of mysteries concerning creation, belief in God has taken on added dimensions.

Now science illumines a limited realm; the scientific worldview is a knowledge of the part, not a knowledge of the whole. Science is unable to demonstrate the aspect and form of the whole of creation. But at the same time, since the scientific mode of perception is precise and specific, belief in God acquires a more scientific nature and a new kind of logic through the advancement of science. Man's awareness comes into being through his perception of cause and effect, and one who believes in causality underlying phenomena cannot possibly ignore the role of the most fundamental factor that is at work over and above all other causes.

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Until very recently, man imagined his own being to consist simply of a symmetrical and well-proportioned form; he was unaware of the complex mysteries contained in his creation. Today he has discovered astounding and far-reaching truths concerning the interior of his slight being, realizing that there are tens of millions of billions of cells in the body. This makes possible a particular appreciation of the greatness of the creator responsible for this artifact that was not possible in the past.

Is it logical to say that belief in God is peculiar to those who know nothing about man's composition and creation, and that, by contrast, a scientist who is aware of the natural laws and factors responsible for man's growth and development, who knows that law and precise calculation preside over all stages of man's existence, is bound to believe that matter, lacking all perception and consciousness, is the source of the wondrous laws of nature?

Do scientific discoveries and knowledge cause such a scientist to conclude that matter, unknowing and unperceiving, is his creator and that of all beings? Materialism looks at the world with one eye closed and, as a result, is unable to answer numerous questions.

Science, too, offers no answer to the question of whether the world can be divided into two parts, material and non-material, or to the question of whether the world has an innate purpose. These questions do not belong to the realm of science; scientific knowledge can acquaint us—to a certain degree—with what is, but it is unable to show us a direction in life or inspire us with a path to be followed.

A scientific worldview cannot, then, be the foundation for a human ideology. The value of scientific knowledge is primarily practical, in that it enables man to dominate nature. It is ideal and theoretical values that are required as the foundation of belief.

Furthermore, science is based on experiment and investigation, and laws having experiment for their foundation are bound to be changing and unstable. Faith requires a basis that partakes of eternity, being immune against change, and is able to answer questions such as the nature and shape of the world as a whole in a trustworthy and permanent manner. Only thus can man's need for a comprehensive interpretation and analysis of existence be met.

As he advances toward perfection, man requires spiritual and intellectual equilibrium; lacking an aim, he will stray along false paths and risk disaster. A man who does not find his aim in religion will pursue an aim of his own making, which will be nothing other than a kind of revolt against the will of nature; it will have nothing to do with creativity or intellectual maturity.

## **The Reasons for Denial and Unbelief**

Books on the history of religion try to delineate the factors that have drawn men to religion. But attempts such as they make are in vain and incapable of uncovering the truth of the matter. It is necessary to

focus on man's innate tendency to monotheism, that primary existential characteristic of the human species which gives man—for all his internal contradictions, thoughts, and desires—a special place in creation. It then becomes possible to discover the factors that lead man to trample on his own nature by foreswearing religion.

Man's religious ties are an outgrowth of his nature, and materialism is something opposed to his nature. In accordance with his specific make-up, man will create his own god if he does not discover the true God, and the god he discovers may be nature or historical inevitability. This fake god takes the place of the true God with respect to comprehensiveness of authority, effectiveness of decree, and capacity to guide man on a certain path and propel him forward, unhindered by anyone's desires.

This is the source of the trade in false gods, the adherence to the new idolatry, that would cruelly sacrifice God to history and exchange a pearl for a bead.

Alas that so many people smitten with self-inflicted abjection have bowed down before the idol they themselves have fashioned and deified! They have turned away from the peerless creator and willingly accepted the polluting disgrace of such misdirected worship.

If we examine the matter closely, we see that the appearance of materialism in Europe as a school of thought, the severance of men's links with a sublime principle, their imprisonment in the fetters of matter, the choice of science in place of religion—all this was caused by a series of social and historical factors that emerged in the West.

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One of the factors that aroused a widespread reaction in Europe and caused the emergence of freethinking and anti-religious propaganda, was the crushing pressure exerted by the Christian ecclesiastical authorities at the beginning of the Renaissance on scholars who were propounding new scientific ideas.

In addition to specifically religious doctrines, the Church was also beholden to certain scientific principles concerning man and the world that it had inherited from ancient—primarily Greek—philosophers and that it was placed on the same footing as religious beliefs. Whatever theory appeared to contradict the Bible and these inherited principles was regarded as heretical, and whoever espoused it would be severely punished.

The clear contradiction between science and religion created a mutual hostility in both camps. Intellectuals and scientists saw that the Christian church was enslaving intelligence and thought, preventing the free development of ideas; through its adherence to a petrified system of thought and an anti-intellectual tradition, it was creating a stifling atmosphere for the man of the new age. Thinkers thus retreated into a painful isolation from religion.

These accumulating pressures finally led to violent reactions that engulfed the whole of Europe. Once the power and dominion of the Church declined and its oppressiveness came to an end, Western thought recovered its lost freedom and reacted strongly against the limitations once imposed on it.

The intellectuals removed the chains of ancient ritual from their necks and turned away from religion. All the pain and anger they had felt found expression in a great wave of hostility to religion. An acute spiritual crisis began that culminated in the separation of science from religion. An illogical desire for vengeance on religion led to the denial of heavenly truths and of the existence of God.

It is true that some of the doctrines connected with religion were illogical or even baseless, having no connection with authentic religious knowledge. But to take revenge on the Church is one thing, and to fall into hasty and erroneous prejudice concerning religion, as such, is something else. It is obvious that vengeance, being a purely emotional matter, has nothing to do with scholarly precision.

The spiritual poverty of man thus advanced at a rate commensurate with his scientific and technological wealth. As he progressed in industry, he regressed in ethics and spirituality, to such a degree that he lacked the moral capacity to make proper use of his newly acquired knowledge.

Scientific knowledge is in itself indifferent to values; one cannot determine the duties of a responsible human being by referring to science. However far science advances, it cannot see more than one step ahead of itself. Human knowledge cannot attain to the essence of the world and perceive it in its totality, nor can it foretell the future destiny of man.

It is only the worldview of monotheism that does not attempt to confine man to the material aspects of his existence. On the contrary, through the symbols and signs that have been given to man to guide him on his path, monotheism delineates an exalted origin and destiny for man. Once man places himself on the path of monotheism, he acquires a comprehensive worldview within the framework of which he finds answers to his probing fundamental question. Once he has reached this stage of comprehensive and multidimensional belief, man's life takes on fresh vigor and the values that are the fruit of that worldview come to fruition. The struggle with the church was, then, one factor in the divorce of science from religion.

Another group abandoned religion and took refuge in materialism because the concepts propounded by the Church were improper and inadequate, lacking transcendental value. These concepts were naturally found unacceptable and unconvincing by intelligent people. The church would present God in material and human terms, in a sense that was opposed to the human desire for absolute values and the striving to break through and transcend all limiting frameworks.

There can be no doubt that if an indubitable truth is impressed in someone's mind in the defective form of a legend, that person will react negatively as soon as he reaches intellectual maturity.

Confronted with the anthropomorphic depiction of God made in Christian theology, the exaltation of

belief over reason, and the insistence that faith should precede thought, enlightened people realized that these narrow-minded efforts to imprison wisdom and science in the monopoly held by Christian theology were incompatible with rational criteria and scientific method.

Since they had no authentic source from which they might learn true teachings about God, being wholly dependent on the institutions of the Church and its corrupted books, and since they had no access to a superior system which would satisfy both their spiritual and their material needs and offer them a suitable framework for integrating all the vital elements of life, material and spiritual, emotional and intellectual, the worldview of materialism took root in them, leading to the denial of all transcendental and supra-human values.

They were unaware that although error leads religion astray when it follows the path of ignorance, true religion, free of all illusion, superstition and distortion, can liberate man from bondage to myth and superstition, hold him firm on the axis of true belief, and supply him with a correct understanding of teachings concerning God, one that satisfies the enquiring mind.

Instead, Western intellectuals were aware only of the superstitious aspect of false religion and how the established dogmas of religion lacked all logical basis, so they had no hesitation in condemning religion as such to be baseless. Their judgment was based on their discouraging experiences with their own religion, and it could not fail, then, to be hasty, unrealistic, irrational and illogical.

This is expressed as follows by a scholar of physiology and biochemistry: "The fact that certain scholars have not been led, in the course of their researches, to a perception of the existence of God, has numerous reasons. Here we will mention only two of them.

First, the political circumstances created by despotism, together with the attendant social and administrative conditions, have tended to cause men to deny the existence of the Maker.

Second, human thought has always been influenced by certain fantasies and illusions, and although man may have no fear of spiritual or bodily torment, he is still not completely free to choose the right path.

"In Christian families, most children come to believe early in life in the existence of a God similar to man, as if man had been created in the form of God. When they begin to enter the realm of science and to learn and implement scientific concepts, they can no longer reconcile their feeble, anthropomorphic concept of God with the logical evidence and methods of science. So, after a certain time, when all hope of reconciling belief and science has disappeared, they totally abandon all concept of God and expel it from their minds.

"The main cause for this is that the evidence of logic and the categories of science do not modify their previous feelings and beliefs but, instead, cause them to feel that they were mistaken in their previous belief in God. Under the influence of this feeling, combined with other psychological factors, they are

appalled at the inadequacy of their concepts and turn away from all attempts at the knowledge of God."1

Hence, scientists tried, by propounding all kinds of laws and formulae, to leave no place for God and religion in the solution of questions touching on existence and creation. They tried to sever men's hopes from religion and to depose God from playing any role in the functioning of the world and the ordering of nature.

Whenever they came to a dead end, they tried to solve the problem by means of various hypotheses or postpone its definite solution until more extensive research had taken place. They imagined that in this way they were avoiding surrender to non-scientific formulae and superstitions. Thus, although they did escape the perils of assigning polytheism, they regrettably took up arms for irreligion and atheism.

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Although a faith in God and belief in an originating principle is natural and innate in man, it cannot be compared to the material necessities of life which man constantly strives to obtain. It is quite distinct from material life, and being an inward need, belongs to a totally separate category.

In addition, it is easier to deny an invisible being than it is to affirm it, given our inability to describe it adequately. People who lack mental capacity, therefore, choose the easy and painless path of denial instead of undertaking mental exertion.

The path of denial does not, moreover, involve any apparent harm. By turning away from God, people gradually acquire an attitude of obstinacy and hostility to religion, tainted with fanaticism. The profound effects of such an attitude can easily be seen in the malicious arguments of those who have turned their backs on religion.

It is also easier to deny an invisible being because to affirm it implies various obligations for man; those who wish to shake off those obligations simply deny the existence of an originating principle. The Qur'an says:

***"Does man wish to spend all the remaining days of his life in impiety and vain desire? For he asks, implying denial, 'When will be the day of resurrection and accounting?' Say: 'On a day when the eyes of mankind will be blinded in terror and fear.'" (75:5-7)***

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The teachings of ignorant and illogical professional ascetics also cannot be overlooked as a factor impelling certain groups of people in the direction of materialism.

The instincts that come into being together with the natural life of man that are intertwined with his existence, not only are not vain and purposeless; they are, also, a determining and destiny-shaping force, a factor of development and motion, that drives man forward to the purpose envisaged in his

creation. It is true that man should not be a blindfolded slave to his instincts like a prisoner all of whose being and motions are under the control of the jailer.

But he should also not do battle with the reality of his own being and seek to block all activity and movement on the part of his instincts. A fruitful existence for man is, in fact, dependent on the active presence in his life of his instincts, deployed in proper equilibrium; the suppression of the instincts leads to complexes and the destruction of the personality.

The worldview prevailing in Christianity during the Middle Ages was based on an exclusive orientation to the hereafter that entailed the devaluating of the material world. Now what will be the consequence if one denies all validity to the forces of instinct, in the name of God and religion, and even tries to annihilate them; if one sanctifies celibacy and monasticism and denounces as impure marriage and procreation, the very activity that secures the survival of the species; and if one regards poverty and deprivation as the guarantee of bliss? Will it, then, be possible to expect religion to play an active and creative role?

The true role and mission of religion is to refine, to guide and to control the instincts; to delimit the sphere of their activity; and to purge them of all perversion and excess. It is not to annihilate and abolish them.

Through controlling the instincts and striving always to free himself from the trap they may present, man creates a purposeful destiny for himself. If he fails to do this, the intense clash of instincts within him is so intense that he cannot easily be master of his own being. He, therefore, needs a comprehensive system of moral education.

Man is, on the one hand, subject to the influence of the religious impulse; this tames him inwardly and draws together his scattered energies in the grasp of its power, directing them toward the acquisition of virtue and benefit. On the other hand, he is also subject to the influence of his instincts.

In any society where people are constantly told, in the name of God and religion, that the path to happiness lies in turning one's back on the gifts of this world, an opening is automatically created for the development of materialism and a concentration on material values, so that the lofty concepts of religion, with all their far reaching implications, disappear from the scene.

But this does not represent the true logic of religion. True religions direct man's attention to authentic spiritual values, basing themselves on belief in the creator and presenting man with comprehensive teachings and principles for living. They extend the field of his vision to the frontiers of the heavenly realm, deliver him from the servitude of self-worship and materialism, and, at the same time, permit him to enjoy material pleasures to a reasonable extent.

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Some people imagine that the free enjoyment of certain things religion has prohibited will guarantee them happiness. They think that religion is obstinately fighting against all enjoyment and is in no mood to compromise with the pleasures of this world, as if God were forcing man to choose between happiness in this world and happiness in the hereafter.

This attitude to religion is totally misleading and unrealistic. If religion seeks to play a role in man's efforts, and his choice of direction, it is because unbridled indulgence of desire, unconditional surrender to instinct and appetite, and obedience to the commands of the ego, darken man's life and propel him into a form of unconscious slavery.

Despite his essentially pure nature, he falls from his true rank and strays from his real path. Were the free indulgence of instinctual desire not a cause of eternal misery and painful degradation, it would not have been forbidden.

It is considerations such as these which make it possible to understand why religion has forbidden certain things and how worldly happiness is compatible with happiness in the hereafter.

Similar considerations apply to the imposition on man of certain duties. The attempt to perform obligatory acts of worship, sincerely and without any hypocrisy, brings about an inward change in man; the purpose of these acts is not in any way to diminish man's worldly happiness.

Worship is like a tempest in the stagnant lagoon of the heart, transforming man's inner nature and his criteria of judgment. It is the cornerstone on which the foundation of religion is made firm, a fruitful educative practice that penetrates the depths of the soul. Its sharp sword severs the skein of corruption and lowliness in man, enabling him to take flight for a pure, vast and limitless realm. In short, it makes it possible for man to grow to true maturity.

Not only is there no contradiction between the concerns of life and those of the spirit; spiritual concerns are conducive to a life of greater happiness in this world.

It may be that the unconvincing and illogical teachings of Christianity have influenced the anti-religious tendencies of people like Bertrand Russell. He evidently believed that faith in God leads to unhappiness, as is apparent from the following words: "The teachings of the Church have made man choose between two forms of misery and deprivation: either misery in this world and deprivation of its enjoyments, or misery in the hereafter and deprivation of the joys of paradise.

For the Church, one of these two forms of misery must necessarily be endured. One must either submit to misery in this world and suffer deprivation and isolation in order to enjoy pleasure in the hereafter, or, if one wishes to enjoy the pleasures of this world, he must accept that he will be deprived of pleasure in the hereafter."

The diffusion of opinions such as these, which display an intense and profound ignorance of the religious

worldview, may determine the fate of the prevailing religion in a given society. Their effect on human beliefs and actions is too profound to be adequately measured with a passing, superficial glance.

This mode of thought has caused the attention of man to be directed exclusively to the material sphere consciously or unconsciously. The resulting concentration on pleasure and indulgence has caused the weakening of spiritual and moral concerns.

Religion does not condemn man to enduring one of two forms of misery. It is entirely possible to combine happiness in this world with happiness in the hereafter. Why should God, Whose treasury of mercy and grace is inexhaustible, not wish for His servants a complete happiness that embraces both this world and the hereafter? This is precisely what He does wish.

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Another factor in the spread of materialistic ideas has been indulgence of passion and immersion in the cesspool of lust. Every mental perception and idea forms the base of some external action; man's path of action takes shape under the influence of his beliefs. Conversely, man's actions and morals also bring about qualitative changes in his mental habits and mode of thought.

A man who worships his lusts will gradually lose all exalted ideas about God. Once he chooses an axis for his existence other than God and imagines that whatever exists in this world has simply been cast into it, free of any purpose, so that the very idea of an aim in life becomes meaningless, he begins to devote all his mental energies to the maximizing of pleasure. This humiliating plunge to a lowly plane of existence withers the roots of all aspiration for growth and development.

The idea of belief in God is, by contrast, like a seed that needs suitable soil in which to grow. It can blossom only in a pure environment, an environment in which man can swiftly and easily attain the degree of perfection that is peculiar to him, thanks to a framework in which the principles of his life are set down. Belief in God can never flourish in an unfavorable environment where corruption is rampant.

One of the obstacles to the knowledge of God and the reasons for man denying this existence, despite all the clear signs and decisive proofs that are available, is, then, surrender to sin and indulgence in passion.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, upon whom be peace, said in answer to Mufaddal in the Risalah-yi Ahlija: "I swear by my own soul that God has not failed to make Himself known to the ignorant, for they see clear proofs and decisive indications of the Creator in His creation and behold wondrous phenomena in the kingdom of the heavens and on earth that point to their Creator.

"The ignorant are those who have opened the gates of sin before them and followed the path of indulgence in passion and lust. The desires of their souls have gained dominance over their hearts, and because of their oppression of their own selves, Satan has gained dominance over them. God has

sealed the hearts of the transgressors.”<sup>2</sup>

The desire for comfort, contentiousness, profligacy, the weak logic of certain ignorant believers these, too, are among the factors impelling men to materialism.

The chaos and confusion of life, the abundance of mass produced goods, affluence and power, the dazzling and distracting aspects of modern life, the proliferation of means for enjoyment and pleasure all these completely overwhelm greedy men. They try completely to withdraw themselves from the sphere of religious concern and refuse to accept the authority of any superior power, for not only would this not bring them any material benefit, it would also rein in the tempest of their overweening desires.

In an environment where people are immersed in sin, dissipation and corruption, and refuse to accept any limitation governing their deeds, religion can exist only in name.

Self-indulgent and materialistic people cannot be seekers and worshippers of God. When one of the two opposing principles, pleasure-seeking and belief in God, has occupied the mental space of an individual, the other must necessarily vacate it. Once the spirit of worship prevails in human existence, it casts out all materialistic inclinations by severing the firm fetters of lowly desire and inspiring constant effort in man to ascend in the direction of his goal. Thus, a complete model of human freedom from slavery to nature emerges.

The more elevated and distant the goal man sets himself, the sharper is the incline leading toward it and the greater and more prolonged the effort required to reach it. So, if we choose God as our goal, we have chosen an infinitely elevated goal, and the path leading to attainment of the goal will be similarly infinite, although clear and straight at the same time. It is a goal that will answer many problems and questions, and since it will compel us to negate the tyranny of the ego, it will bestow absolute freedom on us.

If we accept God as our goal, freedom will be harmonized with our growth and development. Our efforts to develop and progress will take on content and meaning, thanks to the divine impulse and the desire for eternal life. In short, the desire for progress and advancement, once regulated by the worship of God, neither contradicts man's freedom nor results in his enslavement.

We can claim to have attained freedom only when we are in step with the universal advancement of the world toward perfection, deliberately, consciously, and in awareness of the benefits this will bring. To act in obedience to nature or historical inevitability is not freedom, for when man ignores his own welfare to follow the dictates of nature, this is nothing other than slavery or blind obedience.

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1. *Isbat-i Vujud-i Khuda*, p.60.

2. *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. III, p. 152.

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