

Believers, Contemplatives, and the Future of Human Civilization

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I. What is to be refuted

- Motto of scientific materialism: “I’m not a believer, I’m a scientist.”
- Four dimensions of the scientific tradition: (1) natural science, (2) metaphysical realism, (3) scientific materialism, and (4) scientism.
- Historian Daniel J. Boorstin (*The Discoverers: A History of Man’s Search to Know His World and Himself*): “The obstacles to discovery—the illusions of knowledge—are also part of our story. Only against the forgotten backdrop of the received common sense and myths of their time can we begin to sense the courage, the rashness, the heroic and imaginative thrusts of the great discoverers. They had to battle against the current ‘facts’ and dogmas of the learned.”
- The cultivation of cognitive intelligence entails dispelling the confusion of belief with knowledge, rumination with intuition, conditioned consciousness with primordial consciousness, and a sentient being’s mind with pristine awareness.
- Confusion regarding the causes of happiness
 - In the United States since 1950, the Gross Domestic Product has increased 50x, whereas increase in well-being has been zero, and rates of depression have increased 10x, and it is the #1 cause of disability worldwide, with the risk of depression 32% higher in wealthy countries. In the U.S. 20% of high school-aged boys have been diagnosed with ADHD.¹
 - Tim Kasser (*The High Price of Materialism*, p. 22): “Existing scientific research on the value of materialism yields clear and consistent findings. People who are highly focused on materialistic values lower personal well-being and psychological health than those who believe that materialistic pursuits are relatively unimportant. These relationships have been documented in samples of people ranging from the wealthy to the poor, from teenagers to the elderly, and from Australians to South Koreans.”
- Confusion regarding the causes of mental distress
 - Eric Kandel, medical doctor, neuroscientist, professor of biochemistry and biophysics at Columbia University and recipient of the 2000 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine: “The brain is a complex biological organ possessing immense computational capability: it constructs our sensory experience, regulates our thoughts and emotions, and controls our actions. It is responsible not only for relatively simple motor behaviors like running and eating, but also for complex acts that we consider quintessentially human, like thinking, speaking and creating works of art. Looked at from this perspective, our mind is a set of operations

¹ <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Easterlin-happinessincomeparadox.pdf>;
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3330161/>

carried out by our brain. The same principle of unity applies to mental disorders.”²

- Thomas Insel, former head of the US National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)—the largest funder for mental health research in the United States—confessed: “I spent 13 years at NIMH really pushing on the neuroscience and genetics of mental disorders, and when I look back on that I realize that while I think I succeeded at getting lots of really cool papers published by cool scientists at fairly large costs—I think \$20 billion—I don’t think we moved the needle in reducing suicide, reducing hospitalizations, improving recovery for the tens of millions of people who have mental illness. I hold myself accountable for that.”³
- The oft-quoted definition of insanity: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. (Attributed to Albert Einstein, but likely apocryphal).
- When asked, “What do you think of Western civilization?” Mahatma Gandhi reportedly quipped, “I think it would be a good idea.”

II. Presentation

Excerpt from the *Kālāma Sutta* ([*Kesamuttiyasutta*](#)) (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* 3.63), trans. by Bhikkhu Bodhi:

The Kālāmas of Kesaputta said to the Blessed One: “Bhante, there are some ascetics and brahmins who come to Kesaputta. They explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, denigrate, deride, and denounce the doctrines of others. But then some other ascetics and brahmins come to Kesaputta, and they too explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, denigrate, deride, and denounce the doctrines of others. We are perplexed and in doubt, Bhante, as to which of these good ascetics speak truth and which speak falsehood.”

“It is fitting for you to be perplexed, Kālāmas, fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about a perplexing matter. Come, Kālāmas, do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think: ‘The ascetic is our guru.’ But when, Kālāmas, you know for yourselves: ‘These things are unwholesome; these things are blameworthy; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to harm and suffering,’ then you should abandon them.”

The Buddha then proceeds to ask them whether the three poisons (Pali, *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha*), when they arise in one, are they for one’s welfare or one’s harm? He comments that a person whose mind is overcome and possessed by them destroys life, takes what is not given, transgresses with another’s wife, and speaks falsehood; and such a person encourages others to do likewise. The Buddha then asks whether that will lead to one’s harm and suffering for a long time. Conversely, he asks, when non-*lobha*, non-*dosa*, and non-*moha* arise in a person, is this for one’s welfare or harm? He then comments that a person without *lobha*, etc., not overcome by

² http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/08/opinion/sunday/the-new-science-of-mind.html?src=rechp&_r=0

³ https://www.wired.com/2017/05/star-neuroscientist-tom-insel-leaves-google-spawned-verily-startup/?mbid=social_twitter_onsiteshare

lobha, etc., and one's mind not obsessed by them, does not destroy life, take what is not given, transgress with another's wife, or speak falsehood; nor does such a person encourage others to do likewise. He then asks whether that will lead to his welfare and happiness for a long time.

- Motto of contemplative science: "Fathom the Mind. Heal the World."