

PIERCING THE VEIL of JEWISH SECULARISM: SIX PROMINENT JEWISH ATHEISTS and THEIR DIFFERING WORLDVIEWS

Jim Melnick, International Coordinator, LCJE

LCJE-North America Conference (Boca Raton, Florida), March 2013

Overview

Jewish evangelism has barely scratched the surface of some key aspects of modern-day Jewish secularism in terms of our 21st century apologetics. Jewish atheism – or, rather, atheistic/anti-theistic worldviews widely promoted by Jewish secularized expositors - has in many cases sprinted ahead of our ability to keep current with even the language and sub-cultures of many of those who are promoting these views.

Science in our day is usually erroneously defined in naturalistic terms. Some scientists – using this false but widely accepted modern definition of science - are considered by many to be the new ‘high priests’ of an increasingly more secularized society, while outstanding Jewish intellectuals and theorists often form the core of this new, secular form of *cohanim*. Jewish leaders and thinkers have risen to the top of many fields of science, often making enormous contributions and wielding global influence. However, there are also often huge contradictions between these contributions and inconsistencies their worldviews.

Jewish Geniuses in Math and Physics

When I was a graduate student at Harvard in the late 1970s, I will never forget two young Israelis who lived in my dorm for a short time and were considered geniuses in mathematics. One of them - who was still in his teens, I believe, at the time - was offered either a professorship or tenure at Harvard, an unheard-of development. I don’t know how their stories ended, only that the two had not yet served their time in the Israeli Defense Forces and that that was an issue that was still being worked out.

Jewish brilliance and genius in the areas of math and science (as well as other areas) have been well-documented in modern times - so much so that sometimes various academic departments or admissions officials have even devised ways of trying to limit the number of Jews in their programs or else be overwhelmed. This has often been the case irrespective of culture or political system. One example of this occurred at Harvard in the 1920s during the Lowell Administration, when then President Lowell, according to one account, “was disturbed by the ‘Jewish problem’.” Since 1900, Jewish student enrollment at Harvard had risen dramatically from 7 to 21.5 per cent, and by the 1920s, it was decided that something needed to be done to keep the “problem” under control in the admissions process.¹

¹ Andrew Schlesinger, *Veritas: Harvard College and the American Experience* (2005), pp. 163-165.

It also recently became known what was done in the 1970s to many highly qualified Jewish students during the Communist period who applied to the Math Department of Moscow State University, the most prestigious of its kind in the former Soviet Union. The department, which considered too many Jews to be highly 'undesirable', sought to find creative ways of rejecting the number they accepted by making up what were referred to as especially difficult "Jewish" math problems. One of the persons who was asked to come up with such special "Jewish math problems" published her account of this discriminatory practice in a 2011 paper titled "Jewish Problems," a title that clearly has a double meaning.²

Looking beyond the obvious issues of anti-Semitism and discrimination is the unasked question: why are some Jews so brilliant in math and science that one must devise special exams in order to keep them from advancing? Why indeed?! Put another way, why do some brilliant Jews rise to the top of their fields in both free capitalistic societies and oppressive socialistic ones? Does that phenomenon not invite both our wonder and evaluation of what is at work here?

Not Just Einstein

When allowed to be free to pursue the best that is in them intellectually, Jewish genius in the areas of mathematics and physics has changed the world. Probably the best known example is Albert Einstein, who brought us the theory of relativity and helped usher in the nuclear age. But there are many more examples - Einstein was far from being the exception, even if he is best known. Jewish physicists such as Steven Weinberg and David Deutsch have also made enormous contributions to our knowledge of physics, including some of the most significant scientific discoveries of recent history.

Primary Goal

The goal of this paper is to briefly introduce the reader to the world of Jewish intellectual secularism and to show its enormous variety in atheistic worldviews as well as some of the contradictions in these ideas. Understanding the dimensions of this is a challenge in and of itself, requiring a strong commitment to comprehend what is being said; my hope is to begin to chart a course or direction through which a modern-day apologetics can eventually be built in order to reach a generation already heavily influenced by many of these ideas.

Definitions and Approach

When I use the word 'secularist' in this particular context, I am primarily discussing people who are not merely secular in their attitudes and living habits, such as one might find in much of Reformed Judaism or among many in Israel whom we would call 'secular Israelis' (as opposed to 'the religious'). Some of these may currently be influenced by the Jewish thinkers we examine here. Many may have never thought much about the origin of their own worldviews – only that they do not consider themselves 'religious' and probably would say that they do not believe in an afterlife. They may term themselves agnostics, atheists, or just people who are indifferent to religion.

² Tanya Khovanova and Alexey Radul, "Jewish Problems," arXiv.org, arXiv:1110.1556v2, Oct. 18, 2011
<http://arxiv.org/pdf/1110.1556.pdf>

However, the Jewish thinkers examined here have gone further. Their views of secularism are equated with various forms of militant atheism – they have either publicly and vociferously denounced belief in God as allegedly being ‘anti-rational’ and ‘anti-scientific’ or else simply dismissed all religion as being completely irrelevant to real life.

These persons have constructed alternative Darwinian-based views where God is completely excluded – all variants of the worldview of *evolutionary naturalism*. They are not even what we would call *theistic evolutionists* – people who believe that God used evolution in His construction of the cosmos and of ourselves. For my own part, I totally reject all forms of theistic evolution as being anti-Biblical as well as anti-intellectual, even though this poisonous worldview is a cancer that has already deeply infected some evangelical thinkers. That modern-day compromise could be the subject of another presentation. But that would be for another day.

Ironically, in the midst of some evangelicals' compromise, some atheists are acknowledging a current crisis in evolutionary naturalism. One of them is Thomas Nagel, whose 2012 book titled, *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*, pretty much says it all. Nagel states that “doubts about the reductionist [materialist atheistic] account of life go against the dominant scientific consensus, but that consensus faces problems of probability that I believe are not taken seriously enough...”³ He adds: “...I believe the defenders of intelligent design deserve our gratitude for challenging a scientific world view that owes some of the passion displayed by its adherents precisely to the fact that it is thought to liberate us from religion.”⁴

The purpose of my presentation today is to begin to examine the huge influence of various key Jewish scientists and intellectuals in the area of atheistic worldviews based on evolutionary naturalism. Some of these form their own particular intellectual sub-cultures. How do we begin to try to pierce the veil of these Jewish secular sub-cultures with the Gospel?

For purposes of reaching them with the Gospel, I first take these thinkers and writers at their word: I do *not* take the position that they don't *really* mean what they say. I give them the respect of their publicly stated positions, and, for purposes of constructing our apologetics, we should begin there. While there may be a host of spiritual, psychological and emotional issues that are behind their publicly stated positions, we should begin where they begin – on an intellectual plane that meets them where they are. If we do not, it is highly unlikely that they will hear anything else that we have to say. If we are to reach them – as well as the current generation so deeply influenced by them – we must read their books and other published material and get ‘inside their heads’, as it were. I have begun to do that, but there is one caveat: this is a huge task requiring a great deal of reading across many fields of science and philosophy – mostly books that have been published since 2000. Nevertheless, I believe this process is vital for our Jewish evangelism in reaching this increasingly secular generation with the Gospel, and I have also found it personally rewarding and engaging, as it has given me insights that I don't think I

³ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (2012), p. 9.

⁴ Nagel, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

could have stumbled upon independently of doing the hard work of searching out and finding many of these views expressed in their original contexts.

Impact on Jewish Young People

God has given enormous gifts to the Jewish people, including, for many individuals, brilliance or a natural affinity for excellence and achievement in the arts and sciences. One has only to look at a roster of Nobel Prizes for empirical evidence of this.⁵ The percentages of Jewish Nobel Prize winners is incredibly stunning relative to their percentage of the world's population. In physics alone, there have been some 50 Jewish prize-winners, 26% of the world's total in this field.

Having risen to the heights of many of their fields, a number of these Jewish scientists and intellectuals already wield enormous influence and authority. Some have parleyed their worldly fame and achievement into also promoting their secularistic - and, in the cases examined here, openly and sometimes aggressively atheistic - worldviews, potentially influencing hundreds of thousands or even millions of people around the world. Further, the impact of their views on that segment of the current generation of secular Jewish young people that is striving to be intellectual or to be accepted by the academic community must also be assumed to be enormous.

But while so many Jewish intellectuals are incredibly gifted in many secular fields, their understanding of the purpose of life is completely shrouded in darkness because they remain in unbelief. However, ironically enough, even though some as virulent atheists publicly reject the God of Israel, they remain honored in much of the Jewish community because, in part, the secular world honors them. They also seem free to express or not express their Jewishness at whatever level they find comfortable, while still remaining welcome in the Jewish community despite their often intense rejection of all religion.

Thus, the urgency and relevancy of all of these trends to Jewish evangelism should be obvious. We shall now briefly look at the views and backgrounds of "Six Jewish Atheists."

STEVEN WEINBERG: Searching for "Truth and Beauty" in the Universe

Steven Weinberg shared the 1979 Nobel Prize in physics and is credited with coining the term, "the Standard Model" that defines much of physics today. He remains one of the most respected physicists in the world. He is also an avowed atheist and has regularly declared his intense hostility to religion. One of his most famous quotes is as follows: "Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion."⁶

Despite his hostility toward religion itself, Weinberg is an ardent supporter of Israel and the Jewish people. In 2008 he wrote: "The greatest miracle of our time is the rebirth of Israel in its

⁵ "Jewish Nobel Prize Winners," http://jinfo.org/Nobel_Prizes.html (between 1901-2012)

⁶ Positive Atheism's Big List of Steven Weinberg Quotations
<http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/weinberg.htm>

ancient home." Regarding anti-Semitism, he wrote: "We should acknowledge that hatred of the Jewish state is the functional equivalent of hatred of Jews."⁷

In a BBC interview series on atheism, Weinberg stated: "I don't see religion as inspiring moral behavior... I have a certain amount of hostility to it [religion]... Putting God ahead of humanity is a terrible thing... Another reason is I am offended by the sort of smarmy religiosity that's all around us, perhaps more in America than in Europe..."

But, while he is put off by religion as he understands it, he is in pursuit of truth: "As a physicist," he says, "you have to decide what you think is true... You keep having to make judgments of truth or falsity. And so, truth becomes very important to you."⁸ At a Commencement oration in 2008 for the Harvard chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa society titled "Without God," Weinberg said: "as a physicist I am professionally concerned with finding out what is true, not what makes us happy or good."⁹

Weinberg also seeks beauty in the Universe: "And in any case, we would not accept any theory as final unless it were beautiful." He added: "For us, the beauty of the present theories is an anticipation, a premonition, of the beauty of the final theory."¹⁰ But he still rejects God because of the Holocaust: "Remembrance of the Holocaust leaves me unsympathetic to attempts to justify the ways of God to man... If there is a God that has special plans for humans, then He has taken very great pains to hide His concern for us."¹¹ Despite his belief in the ultimate beauty and truth of the Universe, Weinberg has hardened his heart against God. He also has no hope for any future after this life: "As religious belief weakens," he says, "more and more of us know that after death there is nothing."¹²

STEVEN PINKER – Religion is ‘Irrational’

Steven Pinker is a very well-known experimental psychologist and author. A Harvard professor, he has been described as "a public intellectual, a celebrity on the Harvard campus, the kind of teacher who can draw 400 students into a lecture hall and who elicits star-struck stares in the

⁷ Steven Weinberg, "Israel and the Liberals," *Lake Views: This World and the Universe* (2011 paperback edition), pp. 226, 228; originally published in *Tikkun*, May/June 2008, p. 86.

⁸ Weinberg interview: BBC Atheist Tapes with Jonathan Miller (Youtube interview, Uploaded July 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrjYvJPHUcs>)

⁹ Steven Weinberg, "Without God" Commencement oration, Harvard University Phi Beta Kappa society (June 2008), reprinted in *Lake Views: This World and the Universe* (2011 paperback edition), p. 239.

¹⁰ Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (1992), p. 165.

¹¹ Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory*, pp. 250-251.

¹² Weinberg, "Without God" Commencement oration, Harvard University Phi Beta Kappa society (June 2008), reprinted in *Lake Views: This World and the Universe* (2011 paperback edition), p. 243.

Yard.”¹³ He has been referred to as a polymath – an expert in multiple fields. He is also on a major anti-religious crusade.

According to a 2010 interview in *Newsweek*: “As his wife, the novelist Rebecca Goldstein, put it to him... ‘All forms of irrationality irk you, but [religion] is the form of irrationality that irks you most.’”¹⁴ According to Pinker, magnifying the significance of religion in people's lives and especially in education is “an American anachronism,” at a time when “the rest of the West is moving beyond it.”¹⁵

Pinker and the world's most famous atheist of our day, Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, and a host of other Darwinist books, seem to be joined intellectually (or, rather, pseudo-intellectually) at the hip. Their particular brand of atheism is a sort of mutual admiration society that I refer to as ‘The Pinker and Dawkins Show’ – they can't seem to say enough flattering things about each other nor enough negative things about religion. They remind me very much of the low-brow sloganeering-type Soviet atheistic propagandists that I studied and wrote about for many years. Pinker's blurb to Dawkins' vile anti-religious screed, *The God Delusion*, describes it as “a characteristically elegant book.” (2008 edition). It is anything but that.

Though highly acclaimed by the world – including such publications as the *New York Times*, which goes running to him whenever it needs to, Pinker is not above stooping to the lowest level in lieu of providing answers to arguments that he finds inconvenient. Rather than responding directly to the very serious issues raised by fellow atheist Thomas Nagel in the book previously mentioned (*Mind & Cosmos*), Pinker simply launched an *ad hominem* attack on Nagel, pronounced via his Twitter account, the key part of which was dutifully picked up by the *Times*: “What has gotten into Thomas Nagel? Two philosophers expose the *shoddy reasoning of a once-great thinker*.”¹⁶ (emphasis added)

Pinker is also one atheist who thinks society is getting better and better. He claims that “comprehensive data again paint a shockingly happy picture.” Author David Berlinski counters such an assertion as follows: “If the facts of the twentieth century are an inconvenience for scientific atheism,” referring to Pinker, “suitably informed thought may always find a way to

¹³ Lisa Miller, “Harvard’s Crisis of Faith,” *Newsweek*, Feb. 11, 2010.

¹⁴ Miller, “Harvard’s Crisis of Faith,” *Newsweek*, Feb. 11, 2010.

¹⁵ Steven Pinker, “Less Faith, More Reason,” *The Harvard Crimson*, October 27, 2006
<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=515314>

¹⁶ Steven Pinker tweet (October 16, 2012), found at: <https://twitter.com/sapinker/status/258350644979695616>. The *Times* story is by Jennifer Schuessler, “An Author Attracts Unlikely Allies,” *New York Times* (February 6, 2013) <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/07/books/thomas-nagel-is-praised-by-creationists.html>. For more background on the Nagel book and the *New York Times*, see also David Klinghoffer, “*New York Times* on Thomas Nagel’s ‘Dangerous Sympathy for Intelligent Design,’” *Evolution News and Views* (Discovery Institute, Seattle, WA), Feb. 8, 2013. http://www.evolutionnews.org/2013/02/new_york_times069031.html. David Klinghoffer. As an interesting aside, Klinghoffer, an Orthodox Jew who is also a strong proponent of Intelligent Design movement, is a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute in Seattle and is also author of the book, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus*.

deny them.”¹⁷ Berlinski’s book, *The Devil’s Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions* (2008), is a good introduction to the pretensions of many of these atheistic worldviews and related controversies.

Despite Pinker’s intense hostility to religion per se, he has shown some connection to the Jewish community. An example of this was his 2005 lecture at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York on the theme "Jews, Genes and Intelligence."¹⁸ He has said of himself: "I was never religious in the theological sense... I never outgrew my conversion to atheism at 13, but at various times was a serious cultural Jew."¹⁹

ADOLF GRUNBAUM: The Unastonished "Great Rejectionist"

Most people who think very long about the question of why about there is *Something* in our Universe rather than *Nothing* have a sense of wonder or astonishment – but not Adolf Grünbaum.

Grünbaum is described as “arguably the greatest living philosopher of science,” according to Jim Holt, author of the 2012 book, *Why Does the World Exist?* Holt adds: “What I hadn’t been aware of was Grünbaum’s implacable hostility to religious belief” and theism in general. Grünbaum was born in Cologne, Germany in 1923. He came from a Jewish family and “vividly recalls being beat up in the street by young thugs who announced to him that *die Juden haben unseren Heiland getotet* (“*The Jews killed our Savior*”). According to Holt, “by the time of Grünbaum’s bar mitzvah in 1936...he was a confirmed atheist.” He and his family escaped Nazi Germany the following year to come to Brooklyn, and he was later drafted into the U.S. military. Grünbaum became an intelligence officer and interrogated captured Nazis.²⁰

After the war, Grünbaum became an academic philosopher and settled in Pittsburgh. He is a promoter of the view that "the existence of the world [is] utterly *unastonishing*. And he is utterly convinced that it is *rational* for him to be unastonished... Even today,” according to Grünbaum (paraphrased by Holt), “when we ask why there is something rather than nothing, we are, unwittingly or not, heirs to a way of thinking that is a vestige of early Judeo-Christianity.” Holt calls Grünbaum “the Great Rejectionist,” since he finds no wonder in the existence of the Universe.²¹

¹⁷ David Berlinski, *The Devil’s Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions* (2008), p. 21.

¹⁸ Lecture by Steven Pinker, "Jews, Genes and Intelligence," Dec. 1, 2005, the YIVO Institute for Jewish History <http://www.yivo.org/index.php?tid=117&aid=309> and Center for Jewish History <http://www.cjh.org/p/45>

¹⁹ "Steven Pinker: The Mind Reader," The Guardian, Nov. 5, 1999. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/1999/nov/06/1>

²⁰ Jim Holt, *Why Does the World Exist?: An Existential Detective Story* (2012), pp. 63-66.

²¹ Holt, op. cit., pp. 66-68, 74.

LEONARD SUSSKIND: The "Multiverse Landscape" and the 'Threat' of Intelligent Design

Leonard Susskind, a former plumber, today is one of the world's best-known theoretical physicists. Raised in the Bronx, he has cited Laplace's quip to Napoléon that he has no need of the 'God hypothesis'. He also maintains his "complete rejection of religious faith." Susskind got one of his first jobs at Yeshiva University and later taught in Tel Aviv. He refers to himself as "a son of Abraham" yet says he does not have "a religious bone in my body." He describes his background growing up in New York as "Jewish, left-wing working class." He admits to being "puzzled, even irritated, that so much of Cambridge culture [at the University of Cambridge, UK] has religious roots."²²

Susskind is one of the prime originators of the so-called multiverse Landscape theory. This theory has grown in part as a reaction to the extraordinary fine-tuning 'problem'²³ of our existence. This issue is too involved for me to go into here. Suffice it to say that many scientists are now convinced that our Universe is so incredibly fine-tuned at so many different levels that there must be some other explanation than the obvious one that they completely reject – that God created us and this world. Susskind is one of those people. He and others posit that there must be trillions of quadrillions of universes, and that we just happened to pop into one that was extraordinarily suited for life. This is the so-called 'illusion', in his words, of intelligent design. Hence the title of his well-known book, *The Cosmic Landscape: String Theory and the Illusion of Intelligent Design*.²⁴

Susskind has asserted that "if his theory [of the Landscape multiverse] proves to be inconsistent, physicists will be left without any alternative to intelligent design."²⁵ That is quite an admission.

STEPHEN J. GOULD: "Non-Overlapping Magisteria (NOMA)" and "Contingency"

Stephen Jay Gould was one of the most influential, beloved and well-read natural science writers of our generation. His books and articles on natural science and Americana were legion. Although an ardent disciple of Darwin, Gould did not believe that the fossil record supported gradualistic evolution. In this, he strongly opposed Richard Dawkins and others who have come to be known as "fundamentalist Darwinists." Gould and Niles Eldredge developed an alternative theory to neo-Darwinian gradualism known as *punctuated equilibrium* in order to try to explain

²² Leonard Susskind, *The Black Hole War* (2008), pp. 145, 275-279.

²³ The fine-tuning 'problem' is only a problem for materialists and other Darwinists. It has appeared to some to be so insurmountable that it has helped lead to multiverse theories and what is referred to as 'anthropic reasoning'.

²⁴ Leonard Susskind, *The Cosmic Landscape: String Theory and the Illusion of Intelligent Design* (2006).

²⁵ Susskind quote, cited in Robert J. Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy* (2010), p. 7.

why certain fossils appear 'suddenly' in the fossil record.²⁶ This was and remains a major problem for Darwinism.

Gould liked to quote Scripture – not out of Biblical belief – but rather in misusing it to support some aspect of Darwinism, as well as Darwin himself, whom he referred to as the "patron saint of [my] profession."²⁷ Gould's *magnum opus*, the culmination of his life's work, is titled, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (2002). It is a massive tome that is a sort of Talmudic exposition of his version of Darwinism. A glaring example of Gould's abuse of Scripture and Biblical concepts can be seen at the very end of this work, where he writes of the *Etz Chayim*, the "Tree of Life." But Gould did not mean the Biblical Tree of Life - he meant Darwin's 'tree of life.' And he also quoted Proverbs but in a perverse Darwinian context: "Length of days is in her right hand," for "she is a tree of life to them that lay hold of her, and happy is every one that retaineth her."²⁸ (Proverbs 3: 16, 18)

Of his Jewish upbringing, Gould wrote: "I had no formal religious education – I did not even have a *bar mitzvah*." He said that his parents "retained pride in Jewish history and heritage, while abandoning all theology and religious belief."²⁹ In a 1982 essay Gould wrote of his "Yiddish-speaking peasant grandmother" and said that, with respect to issues of the day, his grandmother would often ask the question, 'Is it good for the Jews?'³⁰

According to an anthology of his writings published some five years after his death by his good friend Oliver Sacks, Sacks said that Gould shared with his mother not only a strong physical resemblance but also a "robust atheism."³¹ But at other times, Gould would describe himself as agnostic, and, unlike many other Jewish atheists, had a grudging respect for some religion – as long as it stayed out of what he viewed as science's own domain (or, "magisterium"): "I believe, with all my heart," he once wrote, "in a respectful, even loving concordat between our magisteria—the NOMA [Nonoverlapping Magisteria] solution" between science and religion. But, he added, "NOMA also cuts both ways. If religion can no longer dictate the nature of factual conclusions properly under the magisterium of science, then scientists cannot claim higher insight into moral truth from any superior knowledge of the world's empirical constitution... But I also know that souls represent a subject outside the magisterium of science. My world cannot

²⁶ My own critique of Gould's evolutionary theory of so-called 'punctuated equilibrium' appeared very early - in the June 1981 issue of the *Creation Research Society Quarterly (CRSQ)*. See A. James Melnick, "'Punctuated Equilibrium' and the Macro-Micromutation Controversy," *CRSQ*, Vol. 18, No. 1. Cited in Abstracts, http://www.creationresearch.org/crsq/abstracts/sum18_1.html

²⁷ Steven J. Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (2002), p. 148.

²⁸ Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*, p. 1343.

²⁹ Gould, *Rocks of Ages* (1999), p. 8.

³⁰ Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*, p. 684. On his "Yiddish-speaking peasant grandmother," see Gould's introductory essay to the 1982 reprint of Richard Goldschmidt's book, *The Material Basis of Evolution*, titled, "The Uses of Heresy."

³¹ In Oliver Sacks' Foreword to the Gould anthology, *The Richness of Life* (2007), p. xii.

prove or disprove such a notion, and the concept of souls cannot threaten or impact my domain."³²

Gould also believed in *contingency*. This was one of the most consistent themes in his very extensive writings:

“And something almost unspeakably holy – I don’t know how else to say this – underlies our discovery and confirmation of the actual details that made our world and also, in the realms of contingency, assured the minutiae of its construction in the manner we know, and not in any one of a trillion other ways, nearly all of which would not have included the evolution of a scribe to record the beauty, the cruelty, the fascination and the mystery.”³³

Again, in this context, when Gould used the phrase "something almost unspeakably holy," he was not writing in a religious sense, and yet, at a different level he was, because he was expressing the extraordinary wonder that the world even exists and that we are here to witness it (just about the complete opposite of Grünbaum in this regard). But he saw it all as monumentally accidental, and this is what he means by *contingent*. One incredible "accident" after another, in his view, made it possible for everything that we see to exist and we are here as "scribes" to see it.

This is his view expressed in *Wonderful Life*, in which he described the famous Burgess Shale fossil site in Canada and compared it to the contingency that is developed in the famous movie "It's a Wonderful Life," with Jimmy Stewart starring as George Bailey, whose life made such a difference by touching so many other lives.³⁴

Gould’s death in 2002 was a heavy blow to an entire wing of Darwinist thought, of which he was the chief champion and promoter. His writings have had a profound influence on many, including the late well-known atheist commentator and writer, Christopher Hitchens, author of *God is Not Great*, who wrote admiringly of what he called Gould’s “cool authentic voice.”³⁵

As an example of how his views remain highly valued by some, five years after his death Harvard University Press published the book, *Punctuated Equilibrium*, which included a posthumous collection of key Gould essays, as well as selected reprinted portions from his massive 2002 book, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*.³⁶

³² The Unofficial Stephen Jay Gould website, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria." http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_noma.html; from Stephen Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," *Natural History* 106 (March 1997): 16-22. Gould dedicated this essay to the memory of his late good friend, Carl Sagan, who produced the well-known "Cosmos" television series.

³³ Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*, p. 1342.

³⁴ Gould, *Wonderful Life* (1988), p. 288.

³⁵ Cited in David Berlinski, *The Devil’s Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions* (2009), p. 160.

³⁶ [Stephen J. Gould], *Punctuated Equilibria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

DAVID DEUTSCH: "Explanation" as a Worldview and Secular "Immortality"

David Deutsch was born in Haifa; he is now a professor at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of the Royal Society. In many ways another Einstein of sorts, he is considered one of the chief founders of the field of quantum computing – an extraordinary achievement that may change the world in ways that we have yet to foresee. Rather than acknowledging the existence of sin or evil or per se, he believes that "All evils are caused by insufficient knowledge."³⁷

Deutsch's mother's name is Tikvah, but, based on what I have seen so far in his writings, Deutsch does not seem to have any particular affinity toward his Jewishness (unless I've missed it). One exception might be the fact that he gave a talk in 2008 on the occasion of the opening of Oxford University Chabad Society's Samson Judaica Library, but this talk did not contain anything related to Judaism or his Jewish roots, only an expression of his worldview.³⁸ His appearance at a Chabad function nevertheless indicates that he is willing to be identified as being Jewish, while Chabad itself is also willing to celebrate Deutsch even though he is a virulent atheist.

Deutsch is perhaps the most 'optimistic' of the Jewish atheists considered in this paper. He is a Dawkinsian – a disciple of Richard Dawkins, but is not as anti-religious as Pinker or Dawkins himself – just *non*-religious. In many respects, he appears to have 'moved beyond' religion, which he holds in very low esteem, but he does not appear intimidated by it the way that atheists such as Pinker, Dawkins and Susskind, for example, seem to be.

Deutsch comments: "We already see that we do not live in a senseless world. The laws of physics make sense: the world is explicable." He adds: "There are higher levels of emergence and higher levels of explanation. Profound abstractions in mathematics, morality and aesthetics are accessible to us."³⁹

According to Deutsch's Principle of Optimism and knowledge-creation, "if...earlier experiments in optimism had succeeded, our species would be exploring the stars by now, and you and I would be immortal."⁴⁰

Our Apologetics in Response

As noted, many of these men and others are or have been incredible influencers in their scientific fields, some at the level of genius. This might seem quite intimidating to us in terms of developing our apologetics, but it is not. Despite their genius or brilliance, their worldviews are full of contradictions and absurdities – which is only to be expected, since they do not know the Lord ("professing themselves to be wise they became fools..." Romans 1:22).

³⁷ Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity* (2011), p. 212. Deutsch describes this as his "Principle of Optimism."

³⁸ David Deutsch, "The Fabric of Reality" speech, OxfordChabad.org, University of Oxford (February 17, 2008) http://www.oxfordchabad.org/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/641840/jewish/Prof.-David-Deutsch.htm

³⁹ Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity* (2011), p. 459.

⁴⁰ Deutsch, op. cit., p. 221.

At the same time, from a secular standpoint, what can the explanation be for such a high percentage of Jewish genius? Is it sociological? Do some Jews excel in their fields – if given half a chance, regardless of the political or economic system – simply because they have to work harder to prove themselves in a Gentile world or is it because of widespread Jewish cultural norms of cherishing education? That may be a partial answer, but it is hardly the whole answer or a satisfactory one. There are many minority groups around the world in many different cultures as well as various majority groups who also work very hard and who deeply value education – none of them hold 50 Nobel Prizes in physics!⁴¹

The whole answer is that God has given incredible gifts to His Jewish people – some of which include amazing intellectual prowess and insights into our physical world. But this has also come with a spiritual blindness and a hardness because of their rejection of Messiah Yeshua (*“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”* Romans 11: 25)

Thus we have the conundrum of Jewish brilliance in intellectual fields and blindness in the spiritual realm. This is a paradox that nearly all of us involved in Jewish evangelism have encountered at times. One of my points in this paper has been to show that this is a paradox that we need not merely acknowledge among ourselves but should actually turn around and use advantageously when we can in our apologetics.

Absurdities and contradictions abound within the worldviews of the six Jewish atheists I have examined here. The main point of this introductory review is that we can and should familiarize ourselves enough with these worldviews to find those contradictions and absurdities in order to use them in our apologetics in witnessing to an unbelieving world, especially to hard-core Jewish secularists – many of whom are immersed in some of these views or who otherwise idolize these scientists and thinkers.

Here is an example of just one absurdity: according to David Deutsch, before too long we can apparently forget about health care and nursing homes. In his 2011 book, *The Beginning of Infinity*, Deutsch informs us that “Illness and old age are going to be cured soon...certainly

⁴¹ This reminds of an experience I had in 2007 in Beijing with a Chinese friend as he and I were walking through the campus of Tsingua University, often considered the top university in China. Tsingua is very difficult to get into – only the “cream” of the “cream of the crop” get in, as my friend related to me. He himself was a graduate of Tsingua and now worked in the West in the computer field. One can only imagine what kind of competition exists for those spots in a country as vast as China. Microsoft’s Bill Gates has a close relationship with the university – he even received an honorary doctorate from Tsingua in 2007. All of this is important as background in order to understand the context and significance of what my friend next shared with me: he talked about the very profound desire within China to have Chinese researchers develop original research and ideas that would lead to Nobel Prizes. Despite the great numbers of highly trained Chinese scientists and researchers, that has not occurred and this apparently has been very frustrating to China. There have been less than half a dozen China-born researchers who have received the Nobel Prize in physics, and when that occurred, they were residing or affiliated with universities such as Princeton, Columbia, or elsewhere in the West. Looking beyond the issues of location and the Chinese system of education and culture, the point remains that, while China has produced a generation of highly-skilled experts at the PhD level or equivalent and despite an enormous effort and a great commitment of resources, it has not yet been able to produce very many original thinkers in scientific fields. This is in very sharp contrast to the Jewish experience.

within the next few lifetimes...”⁴² This is a completely ridiculous, of course, but it is a conclusion that emerges directly from Deutsch's worldview that man's knowledge (and his response to that knowledge) can be limitless. It would be fairly easy to put together tracts or other materials praising Deutsch's genius on the one hand in the area of quantum computing but contrasting it with the foolishness of thinking that mankind by our own efforts will ever defeat disease and death. What better contrast could there be, in fact, than to introduce the Gospel after laying out these sorts of arguments side by side? My thought is that this approach might reach many secular people in general and might also be especially helpful in reaching some secular Jews who would otherwise probably be entirely closed to our message.

In other examples of areas for critique, Gould's view of contingency is also being challenged by other atheists, such as the previously mentioned Thomas Nagel, who recently wrote: "The intelligibility of the world is no accident... these are fundamental features of the universe, not byproducts of contingent developments..."⁴³ Leonard Susskind's proposed Landscape *multiverse* of trillions upon trillions of universes as an explanation for why our own Universe is so incredibly fine-tuned is also ripe for sharp critique. This kind of material could be incorporated into a strong apologetical theme, one that cries out for a Designer. Some of these atheistic worldviews are also in direct opposition to each other in many respects, so one apologetical approach might be to set one against the other in a video or written presentation and then letting readers or viewers contact us for more information if seeing or reading them results in people thinking more deeply about the fundamental questions of existence and eternal destiny.

While I believe this would be a powerful approach, I also have no illusions that simply familiarizing ourselves with the works of these Jewish thinkers and showing the contradictions and absurdities in their worldviews in our apologetics will bring people to faith. Only the Holy Spirit can call men and women to Himself. But a closer familiarity with the publications and concepts of those Jewish thinkers and intellectuals who are so deeply idolized by this current secular generation – combined with prayerful insights and solid apologetical research - will undoubtedly yield spiritual fruit in its time.

Jim Melnick
lcje.int@gmail.com
info@frji.org

⁴² Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity*, p. 455.

⁴³ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (2012), p. 17.