

Author A argues that belief without reason is unjustifiable.

- 1 Should you believe in a God? Not according to most academic philosophers. A comprehensive survey revealed that only about 14 percent of English speaking professional philosophers are theists. As for what little religious belief remains among their colleagues, most professional philosophers regard it as a strange aberration among otherwise intelligent people. Among scientists the situation is much the same. 5
- 2 Why, then, do some highly educated people believe religious claims? First, smart persons are good at defending ideas that they originally believed for non-smart reasons. They want to believe something, say for emotional reasons, and they then become adept at defending those beliefs. Second, the proclamations of educated believers are not always to be taken at face value. Many don't believe religious claims but think them useful. They fear that in their absence others will lose a basis for hope, morality or meaning. These educated believers may believe that ordinary folks can't handle the truth. They may feel it heartless to tell parents of a dying child that their little one doesn't go to a better place. 10
- 3 But we shouldn't be deceived. Although there are many educated religious believers, religious belief declines with educational attainment, particularly with scientific education. Consider this anecdotal evidence. Among the intelligentsia it is common and widespread to find individuals who lost childhood religious beliefs as their education in philosophy and the sciences advanced. By contrast, it is almost unheard of to find disbelievers in youth who came to believe as their education progressed. This asymmetry is significant; advancing education is detrimental to religious belief. This suggests another part of the explanation for religious belief—scientific illiteracy. 15 20
- 4 If we combine reasonable explanations of the origin of religious beliefs and the small amount of belief among the intelligentsia with the problematic nature of beliefs in gods, souls, afterlives or supernatural phenomena generally, we can conclude that (supernatural) religious beliefs are probably false. And we should remember that the burden of proof is not on the disbeliever to demonstrate there are no gods, but on believers to demonstrate that there are. 25
- 5 In response to the difficulties with providing reasons to believe in things unseen, combined with the various explanations of belief, you might turn to faith. It is easy to believe something without good reasons if you are determined to do so. But there are problems with this approach. First, if you defend such beliefs by claiming that you have a right to your opinion, however unsupported by evidence it might be, you are referring to a political or legal right, not an epistemic¹ one. You may have a legal right to say whatever you want, but you have epistemic justification only if there are good reasons and evidence to support your claim. If someone makes a claim without concern for reasons and evidence, we should conclude that they simply don't care about what's true. We shouldn't conclude that their beliefs are true because they are fervently held. 30
- 6 Faith without reason simply doesn't satisfy most of us, hence our willingness to seek reasons to believe. If those reasons are not convincing, if you conclude that religious beliefs are untrue, then religious answers to life's questions are worthless. You might comfort yourself by believing that little green dogs in the sky care for you but this is just nonsense, as are any answers attached to such nonsense. Religion may help us in the way that whisky helps a drunk, but we don't want to go through life drunk. If religious beliefs are just vulgar superstitions, then we are basing our lives on delusions. And who would want to do that? 35 40

Religion's smart-people problem: The shaky intellectual foundations of absolute faith,
John G Messerly

¹ Epistemic: Relating to knowledge or to the degree of its validation.

Author B argues that religion remains relevant to the world today.

- 1 Ever since man, in his early days on earth, first felt the impact of uncontrollable forces around him, he has been pondering over the question of the existence of God. Yet up till today he has no absolute answer to this inevitable question. Every argument he can produce to support His existence is well-balanced by a sensible refutation. But does the fact that this question is not directly answerable mean that it is meaningless and absurd? 5
- 2 Certainly not! It may not reveal to us the ultimate truth but it can enable us to find out much about ourselves, our needs and nature – and what is most important, it should help us to build our religions or agnostic or even atheistic (it does not matter what!) convictions and foundations which are intellectually mature and sound.
- 3 The upholding of religious beliefs in an age of science and technology is not at all futile and meaningless. Most psychologists, if not all, assure us of our innate need for religion. C. G. Jung, after long years of experience with neurotic patients, wrote: “During the past thirty years, people from all the civilised countries of the earth have consulted me Among all my patients, in the second half of life – that is to say, over thirty five – there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that everyone of them fell ill because he had lost what the living religions of every age have given to their followers and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.” 10 15
- 4 To be sure, religions have, throughout the course of human civilisations, helped man to realise that there is more to life than the satisfaction of his physical desires. They have often been the inspiration for him to strive after his image of the ideal, thus giving expression to his noble aspirations in the forms of moral laws, religious art and architecture, hymns and myths. 20
- 5 And the existence of religions with their all-embracing influence on the conduct of man’s life has not been geographically limited. Until the emergence of communism, no human group had been without religion. But communism with its opiate doctrines and charismatic leaders can be regarded as a secular religion. A religion is in essence, a man’s response and devotion to what he is deeply convinced to be the right relationship between himself and his world. So, though they repudiate the traditional religions, the communists, in being totally persuaded to uphold what they believe to be giving meaning to their existence, are much akin to devotees of traditional religions. 25
- 6 The rise of scientific literacy has caused us to ask some questions: should we consider God as existing because He is useful or should we consider Him as useful because He exists? Is the presence of God necessary for existence to be meaningful? Even though religion seems to be facing a decline today, consideration of these questions will continue in some way to help us to develop our understanding of our relationship with the world around us. After all, religion is undeniably part and parcel of man’s existence. 30

***Author Unknown
The Ultimate Mystery***