

Epistemological Igtheism

The following passage was inadvertently omitted from Marvin Kohl's "Humanism and the Justification of Belief" (Point/Counterpoint, FI, Winter 1991/92).—EDS.

It is possible to have a soft theory of belief and a hard theory of knowledge, a theory we may call "epistemological igtheism." This rough and rudimentary theory has no specific ready-made epistemological panaceas—no pills, no "quick fixes," no Cliffordian-like principle purporting to meet all the criteria of an adequate theory of rational belief. Necessary conditions of this theory may include: (1) distinguishing between belief and knowledge, where belief signifies (not full or certain assent but) merely mental acceptance of something offered as true or as being reasonable to believe; (2) having the intellectual integrity of not confusing belief with knowledge claims, understanding that *S* appears to know *p*, when *S* believes *p*, *p* is true, and when *S* can defend his or her claim that *p* is true by presenting evidence for *p* and by defending that claim against any objection that would be raised by someone sufficiently well informed to hold all beliefs relevant to *p*; (3) admitting that it is possible to be mistaken in believing that *p*; (4) recognizing that we know we have no knowledge about certain things, e.g., about the God of traditional theism; and (5) unwilling to give assent to what Shelley Taylor calls "negative illusions," yet willing, if or when reason warrants, to believe without knowing; for example, to have positive illusions about ourselves, the world, and the future. That the yoke of the igtheist is often galling cannot be denied, but he does not have a monopoly of the worries and trials in meeting the demands of an adequate theory both of knowing and of believing.