

Intellectual Morons

By Daniel J. Flynn

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Daniel J. Flynn's new book, *Intellectual Morons*, is available for \$25.95 from the FrontPage Magazine Bookstore.

“There is no baby universe branching off, as I once thought,” Stephen Hawking told a group of shocked scientists this summer in Dublin. Hawking’s theory of parallel universes and energy-destroying black holes, the wheelchair-bound scientist concluded, was wrong.

When Stephen Hawking’s theories came under attack, he rethought rather than retrenched. Hawking’s goal, after all, is not the promotion of Stephen Hawking or the idea of parallel universes, but the pursuit of truth.

The act of abandoning an idea when contrary evidence disproves it is hardly unusual in the hard sciences. Contrary evidence in the social sciences and the humanities often has the opposite effect: devotees tighten their embrace of the theory. As a result, their grip on reality loosens. When you tether yourself to ideology, you necessarily liberate yourself from facts. You become an intellectual moron.

Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich predicted environmental apocalypse in *The Population Bomb*. He maintained that “hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death” in the 1970s. When it didn’t happen, he merely delayed the day of reckoning—numerous times. So long as Ehrlich’s prognostications furthered the right agenda, wealthy and influential admirers celebrated him. Foundations awarded him millions of dollars in prizes and grants (including a quarter-million dollar prize from the Heinz ketchup fortune). The *Today* show invited him to conduct a twelve-part series on the environment. And college professors have pushed the number of his books sold well into seven figures.

Noam Chomsky is Michael Moore with his brain on steroids. In the late ’70s, he deemed stories of Pol Pot’s killing fields capitalist propaganda. Later, he fantasized a conspiracy between ex-Nazis and U.S. government officials to shape the post-World War II world. Prior to the war on terrorism, Chomsky maintained that the U.S. was “in the midst of apparently trying to murder 3 or 4 million people” in Afghanistan, predicting mass starvation and death. Despite Chomsky’s disastrous track record as historian and prophet, at least one study found him to be cited in scholarly journals in the social sciences and the humanities more than any living person.

Famous sex researcher Alfred Kinsey stacked the sample groups of his surveys with pimps, prostitutes, imprisoned sex offenders, and homosexuals. The late Indiana University professor took pedophiles at their word that their “partners” enjoyed sex. Rather than getting shunned by his peers, Kinsey remains the most cited sex researcher in scholarly journals. His work may have been bad science, but it remains good propaganda.

Dishonesty, at least when it serves the “right” cause, doesn’t relegate intellectuals to the fringe. It often elevates the status of men of letters among their like-minded peers. As evidenced by the popularity within such circles of attackumentary filmmaker Michael Moore, Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, and Soviet spy Alger Hiss, the intelligentsia rewards ideological conformity instead of intellectual honesty.

Chomsky, Kinsey, and Ehrlich may be *factually incorrect*, but because they are *politically correct* they are superstars within academia. Their inaccuracies, falsehoods, and frauds serve the right causes, so other scholars excuse, overlook, or deny them. If the intellectual morons were few in number or scant in influence, the rest of us could ignore them. Since they frequently find their names on course reading lists, within the endnotes in scholarly articles, and next to “pay to the order” on foundation bequests, our culture ignores them at its own peril.

Reflexive adherence to ideology negates critical thinking. It is the conceit of the intellectual, who believes himself so smart that he doesn't need to think. Ideology provides for him a catchall response to ideas, individuals, and events. Ideology thus makes smart people stupid, creating the intellectual moron.

As illustrated by the mottoes of Harvard (*veritas*) and Yale (*lex et veritas*), the search for truth is the essential element of scholarly life. Stephen Hawking's abandonment of his own theory in favor of truth exemplifies the scholar's commitment to his professional creed. Chomsky, Ehrlich, and other intellectual morons' commitment to bad ideas at the expense of truth demonstrates their abandonment of it.

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