

ATHEISM

“Life’s greatest tragedy is to lose God and not to miss him.”

--F.W. Norwood

Atheists might assert that they don’t acknowledge the existence of God, but the view of some Christians and all Muslims is that at some level even the confirmed Atheist affirms God’s presence. The innate but neglected awareness of God typically surfaces in Atheist consciousness only in times of severe stress, as exemplified by the World War II quote “There are no Atheists in a fox-hole.”¹

Undeniably there are times -- whether during the agonizing days of a lingering illness, the seemingly eternal moments of a violent and humiliating mugging, or the split second of anticipating the impact of an imminent car crash -- when all mankind recognize the reality of human fragility and the lack of human control over destiny. Who does a person beseech for help in such circumstances other than The Creator? Such moments of desperation should remind every person, from the religious scholar to the professed Atheist, of the dependence of mankind upon a reality far greater than our own meager human selves. A reality far greater in knowledge, power, will, majesty and glory.

In such moments of distress, when all human efforts have failed and no element of material existence can be foreseen to provide comfort or rescue, Whom else will a person instinctively call upon? In such moments of trial, how many stress-induced

¹ *N.Y. Times*. 13 Apr 1944. Cummings: Sermon on Bataan, The Philippines.

appeals are made to God, complete with promises of lifelong fidelity? Yet, how few are kept?

No doubt, the day of greatest affliction will be the Day of Judgement, and a person would be unfortunate to be in the position of acknowledging the existence of God for the first time on *that* day. The English poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, spoke of the irony of the distressed human appeal in *The Cry of the Human*:

“And lips say “God be pitiful,”
Who ne’er said, “God be praised.”

The thoughtful Atheist, full of skepticism but fearful of the possibility of the existence of God and a Day of Judgement, may wish to consider the ‘prayer of the skeptic,’ as follows:

“O Lord--if there is a Lord,
Save my soul--if I have a soul.”²

In the face of skepticism blocking belief, how can a person go wrong with the above prayer? Should Atheists remain upon disbelief, they will be no worse off than before; should belief follow a sincere appeal, Thomas Jefferson had the following to say:

² Renan, Joseph E. *Prayer of a Skeptic*.

“If you find reason to believe there is a God, a consciousness that you are acting under His eye, and that He approves you, will be a vast additional incitement; if that there be a future state, the hope of a happy existence in that increases the appetite to deserve it...”³

The suggestion can be made that if an individual doesn't see the evidence of God in the magnificence of His creation, they would be well advised to take another look. As Francis Bacon is noted to have commented, “I had rather believe all the fables in the legend, and the Talmud, and the alcoran (i.e. the Qur'an), than that this universal frame is without a mind.”⁴ He went on to comment, “God never wrought miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it.”⁵ Worthy of contemplation is the fact that even the lowest elements of God's creation, though perhaps ordinary works in His terms, are miracles in ours. Take the example of as tiny an animal as a spider. Does anybody really believe that such an extraordinarily intricate creature evolved from primordial soup? Just one of these little miracles can produce up to seven different kinds of silk, some as thin as the wavelength of visible light, but stronger than steel. Silks range from the elastic, sticky strands for entrapment to the non-adhesive drag-lines and frame threads, to the silk for wrapping prey, making the egg sac, etc. The spider can, on demand, not only manufacture its personal choice of the seven silks, but reabsorb, breakdown and remanufacture--self-recycling from the component elements. And this is only one small facet of the miracle of the spider.

³ Parke, David B. 1957. *The Epic of Unitarianism*. Boston: Starr King Press. p. 67.

⁴ Bacon, Francis. *Atheism*. p. 16.

⁵ Bacon, Francis. *Atheism*. p. 16.

And yet, mankind elevates itself to the heights of arrogance. A moment's reflection should incline human hearts to humility. Look at a building and a person thinks of the architect, at a sculpture and a person instantly comprehends an artist. But examine the elegant intricacies of creation, from the complexity and balance of nuclear particle physics to the uncharted vastness of space, and a person conceives of...nothing? Surrounded by a world of synchronous complexities, we as mankind cannot even assemble the wing of a gnat. And yet the entire World and all the Universe exists in a state of perfect orchestration as a product of random accidents which molded cosmic chaos into balanced perfection? Some vote chance, others, creation.

Most Atheist arguments challenge the compatibility of an all-loving God with the perceived injustices of life. The religious identify such challenges as reflecting an arrogance of intellect -- being the assumption that we as mankind, an element of creation ourselves, know better than God how His creation should be ordered -- coupled with the failure to appreciate a larger design.

The fact that many of mankind fail to make sense of certain aspects of this life should not dissuade from belief in God. The duty of man is not to question or deny the attributes or presence of God, and not to incline to arrogance through professing to be able to do a better job, but rather to accept human station in this life and do the best that can be done with what we've been given. By analogy, the fact that a person does not like the way the boss does things at work, and fails to understand the decisions he makes, does not negate his existence. Rather, each person's duty is to fulfill a job description in

order to be paid and promoted. Similarly, failure to grasp or approve of the way God orders creation does not negate His existence. Rather, humankind should recognize with humility that, unlike the workplace boss, who *may* be wrong, God by definition is of absolute perfection, *always* right and *never* wrong. Humankind should bow down to Him in willing submission and in recognition that failure to understand His design on our part does not reflect error on His part. Rather, He is The Lord and Master of Creation and we are not, He knows all and we do not, He orders all affairs according to His perfect attributes, and we simply remain His subjects, along for the ride of our lives.

The confused and sensitive souls who encounter difficulty reconciling God's existence with a harsh and often painful life deserve sympathy and explanation. If a person accepts the fact that God knows what He is doing and we don't, he or she should rest comfortable with the understanding that deep down things may not be what they at first seem. Perhaps the wretched amongst humankind deserve their lot in life for reasons unforeseen, and perhaps they suffer only a short worldly existence to receive an eternal reward in the next life. Lest a person forget, God granted the favorites of His creation (i.e. the prophets) the greatest worldly gift of certainty, guidance and revelation; however, they suffered greatly in worldly terms. In fact, the trials and tribulations of most people pale in comparison to those of the prophets. So although many people do suffer terribly, the message of hope is that the archetypes of God's favorites, namely the prophets, were deprived of the pleasures of this world in exchange for the rewards of the hereafter. A person might well expect a comparable reward for those who endure the trials and hardships of this life, while remaining steadfast upon true belief.

Similarly, a person cannot be faulted for expecting the disbelieving tyrants and oppressors to have all the enjoyments of this world, but none of the hereafter. Some of the known inmates of Hell spring to mind. Pharaoh, for example, lived a life of posh magnificence to the point that he proclaimed himself to be the supreme god. Most likely opinions changed when he broke wind. In any case, a person can reasonably expect him to be somewhat dissatisfied with his toasty abode of the moment, and the memories of his plush carpets, fine foods and scented handmaidens to have lost their charm of consolation given the heat of the moment.

Most people have had the experience of ending a *great* day in a *bad* mood due to some sour event at the conclusion of events. Nobody values a fine meal that ends in divorce, a romantic interlude rewarded with AIDS, or a night of revelry capped off by a brutal mugging or crippling car crash. How good could it have been? Similarly, there is no joy in this life, no matter how great the ecstasy or how long the duration, which is not instantly erased from memory by a 100% full body burn. One side of one hand represents 1% of the total body surface area of a human being, making a kitchen burn of a fraction of a fingertip count for less than a thousandth of the total body surface area. Nonetheless, who doesn't forget absolutely every little, every big, *everything* during that moment of painful thermal affliction? The agony of a whole-body burn, especially if there is no relief -- no jumping back, no pulling away -- is beyond the capacity of human imagination. The few who have survived such burns agree. Not only does the torture of a total burn exceed the boundaries of human imagination, but the agony of the experience

surpasses the limits of language. The horror can neither be adequately conveyed by the unfortunate of experience, nor fully understood by those blessed to have escaped initiation. Certainly one loooooong, eternal, full-body bath in fire can be expected to erase any pleasant memories of the past, consistent with the conclusion that “the life of this world is but little comfort in the Hereafter.” (TMQ, 13:26)

With regard to the subject of the present appendix, two elements of guiding consciousness deserve consideration, the first being that deep down all people have an innate knowledge of the presence of the Creator. Humankind may intellectualize this awareness away in search of the conveniences and pleasures of this world, but deep down, all mankind know the truth. What is more, God *knows* that we know, and He alone can calculate the level of individual rebellion and/or submission to Him.

The second element of dawning spiritual awareness is simply to understand that there is seldom a free lunch. Rarely does anybody get something for nothing. Should a man work for a boss whom he does not understand or with whom he does not agree, in the end he still has to do his job in order to get paid. Nobody goes to work (for long, anyway) and does nothing more than saying, “I’m at work,” expecting a paycheck to follow based on nothing more than unproductive attendance. Similarly, humankind must satisfy a duty of servitude and worship to God if hoping to receive His reward. After all, that is not only the purpose of life, it is our job description. For that matter, Muslims claim that such is the job description for both men and Jinn (plural for ‘spirits;’ singular ‘Jinn’ee,’ from which the Western word ‘genie’ is derived), for God conveys in the Holy

Qur'an, "And I have not created Jinns and men, except that they should serve (worship) Me." (TMQ 51:56).

Many people question the purpose of life, but the position of the faithful of many religions is exactly that stated above – mankind exists for no other reason than to serve and worship God. The proposal is that each and every element of creation exists to either support or test mankind in the fulfillment of that duty. Unlike worldly employment, a person can duck his or her responsibilities to God and be granted a grace period. However, at the end of this probationary period called life, accounts become due and payable, and such is certainly not the best time to find one's account 'in the red.'

Francis Bacon provided a wonderful closure to the topic of this appendix, stating, "They that deny a God destroy man's nobility; for certainly man is of kin to the beasts by his body; and, if he be not of kin to God by his spirit, he is a base and ignoble creature."⁶ Should a person believe that after a few million years something worthy of the barbecue will emerge from the froth of Stanley Miller and Harold Urey's primordial bouillabaisse, humankind still has to account for that which we all feel within us—the soul or spirit. Each and every element of mankind has one, and here is the metaphysical keystone which separates man from animal.

Again, those who doubt that which cannot be directly experienced may find excuse for denial of the soul, but they will most likely find themselves to have scant

⁶ Bacon, Francis. *Atheism*. p. 16.

company. Furthermore, the discussion then moves into one of the nature of truth, knowledge, and proof, which logically springboards into the next section, on agnosticism.