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The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Debate Group

Atheism: Is It Rational, and Livable?

by Eric Verhine

What struts and flaunts as contemporary atheism is largely glib and superficial. Though many dolts brag puerilely of their atheism like insecure boys bragging of their sexual experiences, few live and think atheistically, understanding the nature of the first tenet of atheism (that God does not exist), and consistently accepting or facing all that flows from the fount of their first belief; furthermore, atheists often facilitate their atheism by hiding their Jehovah behind the mask of another god, or behind that "benevolent force at the heart of the universe," or behind Fate, the Zodiac, or the "intelligence that antedates the universe." Why? What about atheism or living atheistically is so challenging and strenuous?

Many atheists, probably most in this country, disdain religion. Deriding a faith-based interpretation of the world, these atheists turn full of longing to reason and claim to sleep only in her bed. These are the atheists naïve enough to believe that people embrace religion because they are ignorant and uneducated; these are the atheists foolish enough to maintain that science is the only, or at least the best, way of seeing and experiencing the world, and that science comes

without flaw. Often, they are highly educated, but, like their religious counterparts who fail ever to question a single jot or tittle, these emotionally committed atheists fail to critique the faith which is their own.

You see, the myth that atheists and atheistic scientists propagate so well is that their philosophy is wholly rational, while the philosophies of theists are mere fabrications based upon another fabrication, faith. Atheists often claim that they are rational, and that theists are irrational. Nothing could be falsier. Even the basic tenet of atheism – that no God or gods exist – is a statement impossible to prove, and this because it is a universal negation. No universal negation is ever provable in any way. For example, suppose someone makes the universal negation "there are no white crows." Can she prove this? Suppose she argues that because no one has ever seen a white crow, no white crows exist. Easily one can see the flaws in this argument. The first problem is that she does not know what "everyone" has seen. Is it not possible that someone in Fort Oglethorpe, GA once saw a white crow and did not tell her? Of course. Second, even assuming that she does know what everyone has seen, and she would have to be God to do so, and knows that no one has ever seen a white crow, this still

would not prove her case. Is it not possible that we just have not seen the one white crow yet? Is it not the height of haughtiness to assert that because humans have not seen something, that thing does not exist? These are the perils of universal negations. And this applies to the negation of God, but in the case of God the situation is exponentially more complex. So, even the basic claim of atheism is irrational, merely a belief taken on faith.

That the basic tenet of atheism is taken on faith is only a minor point which many atheists recognize. Of greater significance to the alleged rationality of atheism is the inconsistency that characterizes much atheistic thinking; that is, atheists often fail to consistently trace out the implications of denying the existence of God. Thus they unwittingly hold and defend beliefs that contradict the atheistic worldview. Take, for instance, the notion of human equality. Influenced emotionally by a culture in which the only iniquity is inequity, many atheists would affirm the equality of all people. They forget, however, that the noble document says, "that all men *are created* equal," not that all just are equal. Like these thoughtless atheists, most people fail to discern that the doctrine of human equality presupposes a creator God before whose sight all are equalized. Without this equalizing God, the statement

that all are equal is comical, and effortlessly refuted. And this belief stands as only one among many that logically must fall when one chooses not to believe in God: after much thought one understands that if no God exists, then moral absolutes are lies; then human dignity and human rights lack the creator to "endow" them; then "meaning" and "purpose" are anthropic fabrications proceeding from human vanity; then the foundation of marriage is sunk away; then the "laws of nature" are the products of a faint human mind based originally on a belief in a divine Law-Giver; then all suffering is pointless; then love is an old dream; then grammar and logic too are human, coming not from above with power and authority, but from an animalian brain, and thus knowledge is a faith.

What consistently atheistic thinking does is to humanize all concepts, stripping them of their objectively divine element, which is what most of us find soothing in them. For instance, the atheist must admit that humans created the concept of meaning, and that humans created the concept of religion, and all the others noted above; thus, these concepts are inventions, fibs, and fictions that have come to be emotionally meaningful to the human race, but which have no reality. They are placebos: their reality being wholly an outcome of imaginative labors. Thinking consistently as an atheist, then, makes living atheistically forbidding, if not unrealizable.

Grave and honest atheistic thinking rushes the

heart with blood and spreads nausea throughout the body. Now think not of atheists in general, but of the individual atheist, lying in his bed, all lights put out, and staring at the void between himself and the ceiling, thinking of the void between the ceiling and the stars. Silently, fearfully, he recalls and perhaps repeats his childhood prayer which began "Now I lay me down to sleep." Soon he hears the end of the prayer, "If I should die before I wake," and he thinks of how sweet it might have been to die as a child, with unshaken faith in life continued. But now he, the adult, is an atheist, and "knows" that death transforms one into nothing, that death annihilates all: the smells, tears, thoughts, surges of joy, all that he is. And he "knows," furthermore, that his tears, sensations, thoughts, and hopes ever lacked meaning. Can he everyday hear this sound and face this insignificant fury?

On March 8 at 7:00 p.m., the PDG will have a meeting in which we will discuss these elements of atheism. The meeting will be held in Gamble 201. All faculty and students are invited.

Quotations to consider for discussion:

"The greatest recent event – that 'God is dead,' that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe... But in the main one may say: The event itself is far too great, too distant, too remote from the multitude's capacity for comprehension... much less may one suppose that many people know as yet *what* this event really means – and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality."

***The Gay Science*, Friedrich Nietzsche**

"Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,/ And then is heard no more: it is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing."

***Macbeth*, William Shakespeare**

"The existentialists, on the contrary, think it very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an *a priori* Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it."

***Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Jean Paul Sartre**

"If God didn't exist, everything would be permissible."

***The Brother's Karamazov*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky**

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