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The Meaning of Atheism



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by

E. Haldeman-Julius

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Introduction

The name of Emanuel Haldeman-Julius is little known to modern readers, but in his day he was the most important publisher of radical materials in the United States. In fact, a good case can be made that E. Haldeman-Julius was the most important progressive publisher ever to print a book in this country. From the founding of the Haldeman-Julius Company in 1919 until E. H.-J.'s death in 1951, he was responsible for publishing more than 1500 titles comprising a total of over 500 million books and pamphlets.

In addition to radical literature, the Haldeman-Julius Company published a wide variety of other materials. Works by Shakespeare, Poe, Shelley, and Twain shared space in the Haldeman-Julius catalog with those by Peter Kropotkin, Leo Tolstoy, Clarence Darrow, Robert Ingersoll, and Bertrand Russell. And all at astoundingly low prices.

Haldeman-Julius managed to print his 500 million volumes by perfecting a formula under which he was able to sell 20 of his little books for a dollar—and make a profit in doing so. What he called his “Little Blue Books” were 3¼” X 4¾” pamphlets printed on cheap paper set in 8-point type. (This is 8-point type.) Even so, they were still an incredible bargain.

He also printed larger pamphlets and full-length books which were better produced, but still very cheaply priced.

In addition to being a publisher, E. Haldeman-Julius was also a talented writer whose works often dealt with questions of religion and Atheism. This pamphlet which shows the great publisher at his amusing, slashing, logical best, was probably written late in his life. It was originally published as a Little Blue Book.

For this edition I have reproduced the type from the Haldeman-Julius little book, but I've blown it up to 120% of its original size to increase its readability. I hope that this pamphlet will in its small way help to rescue the name of E. Haldeman-Julius from obscurity. And I also hope that it's a worthy continuance of E. H.-J.'s important work.

— Chaz Bufe, February 1987

NOTE: Original Haldeman-Julius publications are still available from two sources that I know of. One is Michael E. Coughlin, 1985 Selby Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104. He will send upon request an extensive catalog listing over 300 titles. American Atheists, P.O. Box 2117, Austin, TX 78768 have a small stock of original copies and have also reprinted a number of titles originally published by Haldeman-Julius. Write to them for a copy of their catalog.

THE MEANING OF ATHEISM

Atheism is accurately defined as the denial of the assumptions of theism. The theist affirms that there is a God running the universe; he declares that the idea of such a God is necessary to an understanding of life; he offers various arguments or, as he rather presumptuously calls them, evidences for his God idea.

What is the position, logically, of the atheist? He will not say in a mild, uncertain fashion that he doesn't know whether the idea is true or that it is an open question. He has studied carefully the case for and against theism. He finds that case utterly insupportable, lacking any real or positive evidence, defended by arguments which are easily discovered to be casuistic and fallacious, and linking itself with other supplementary ideas which are incredible.

The atheist perceives that in history, in every branch of science, in the plainly observable realities of life and in the processes of common sense there is no place for the picture of a God; the idea doesn't fit in with a calmly reasoned and realistic view of life. The atheist, therefore, denies the assumptions of theism because *they are mere assumptions and are not proved*; whereas the contrary evidences, against the idea of theism, are overwhelming. He takes a clear-cut position. To proclaim himself an agnostic, while to some it might appear more respectable and cautious, would be to say in effect that he hadn't decided what to believe.

We can understand, of course, why many prefer to call themselves agnostics. They don't wish to appear bigoted. Or they are honestly in doubt and feel that the idea of God may or may not be true; yet with scarcely an exception the attitude of the agnostic is the same as that of the atheist—he denies the assumptions of theism—his disbelief in God, as an agnostic, is quite as strong really as the atheist's disbelief.

But atheism is not in the least bigoted. It is a conclusion reached by the most reasonable methods and one which is not asserted dogmatically but is explained in its every feature by the light of reason. The atheist does not boast of knowing in a vainglorious, empty sense. He understands by knowledge the most reasonable and clear and sound position one can take on the basis of all the evidence at hand. This

evidence convinces him that theism is not true and his logical position, then, is that of atheism.

We repeat that the atheist is ~~one who denies~~ the assumptions of theism. He asserts, in other words, that he doesn't believe in a God because he sees no good reason for believing in a God. That's atheism—and that's good sense.

ATHEISM IS THE REALISTIC ANSWER TO THE GOD IDEA

We are not fanatics on the subject of religion. If it were merely a matter of abstract argument, we should not be so interested. Ideas, if they could be quite separated from actual influence in living issues, might be regarded with an air of detachment. They might in such case be discussed mildly and dismissively. One might be indifferent to such ideas or only amused by them.

But religion has always asserted and it does yet assert a very direct and commanding interest in the conduct of men. It is true that, fortunately, there are old terrors and powers that religion no longer can exercise so effectively as it did only a few score years ago. But the atmosphere and the attitude of bigotry remain. If religion cannot ordinarily invoke the armed force of law to punish heretics, it still plays upon the psychology of fear and predominantly its influence is to frighten men and distort their views and poison every process of their reasoning.

The remnant of religion that is cherished by a few educated and urbane men—the philosophical or poetic religion that one observes here and there—does not concern us so acutely. Such a provisional or partial belief in religion is baseless logically and it is confusing; but we may grant that it is relatively harmless; we can point out its fallacy and continue cheerfully on our way about other things. But this philosophical or poetic religion is not, after all, the religion of the masses.

There are many cultured people who do not realize that among the masses—among millions of honest but deluded people—the most extravagant, fanatical and obviously dangerous notions about religion are prevalent. One of the malign emotional and prejudicial influences that helped to lend menacing strength to the late Ku Klux Klan, for example, was the spirit of

religious prejudice. We all know how that vicious organization was strengthened by a Protestant tone of creedal fanaticism. On the other hand, the Catholics have their own extreme tone of fanaticism; and they still assert, moreover, that the Catholic religion should be and rightfully is supreme in belief and power—Catholicism, that is to say, is definitely opposed to the modern principles of political liberty and intellectual freedom.

Protestantism is not, in its definite official statements, so brazenly intolerant. Probably this is because Protestantism includes so many creeds—and these religious people feel that they must be protected against one another. They are not so kindly toward atheists.

In a number of American states atheists cannot testify in a court of law. Blasphemy laws are still on the statute books; and occasionally they are enforced. Our laws regarding marriage and sex are sadly distorted by religious prejudice; and a few of these distortions and absurdities are ably summarized by Anthony M. Turano. Bible reading (which means Bible teaching) in the public schools is compulsory in Pennsylvania, Arkansas and other states. In Tennessee and Mississippi a medieval law bans the teaching of evolution—the teaching, in a word, of the most serious principle of truth in modern science—in the public schools. The circulation of a responsible, scholarly, important sex questionnaire at the University of Missouri was followed by a ridiculous campaign of prejudice in which the chief element, plainly enough, was a religious attitude of obscurantism on the sex question.

Our laws and customs are still deplorably handicapped and corrupted by the ideas of religion. These ideas are no longer of valid currency in the intellectual world. They are centuries behind the times. They are not insisted upon with such vicious and perilous persistency as was the case a few centuries ago. But they remain—these terribly wrong and menacing ideas—and it is the part of a civilized program of enlightenment to combat these ideas with all the force possible.

We, of course, believe in the force of reason and argument and persuasion; yes, and the force of ridicule and denunciation, all legitimate and free weapons which we can employ

against religion; in short, we believe in the steady and clarifying conflict of ideas, and as religion cannot be defended intelligently we know that in the long run it must be conquered. It remains yet, however, as a serious and major issue in the thoughts and actions of men. Granting, as we naturally do, the fullest right of every man to believe in any theory of religion or politics or social conduct which is preferred by him, we do not forget that we have an equal right to promote our own ideas and to attack, relentlessly and clearly, ideas which we recognize as vicious in theory and inevitably vicious also in practice.

We are well aware that religion is not as bad an influence as it was a short time ago, as history is counted. But it is a sufficiently bad influence even in modern times; and its reduced viciousness (in practice) is due plainly enough to its reduced power. We want to reduce that power to an absolute nullity. We want religion to be entirely outgrown by the advancing intelligence of mankind. Universal education is our ideal; and this means, in our convinced opinion, that the philosophy of atheism (which is also the philosophy of realism) will displace with complete sanity and wholesomeness the dark and morbid and unintelligently fanciful ideas of religion.

We advocate the atheistic philosophy because it is the only clear, consistent position which seems possible to us. As atheists, we simply deny the assumptions of theism; we declare that the God idea, in all its features, is unreasonable and unprovable; we add, more vitally, that the God idea is an interference with the interests of human happiness and progress. We oppose religion not merely as a set of theological ideas; but we must also oppose religion as a political, social and moral influence detrimental to the welfare of humanity.

We attack religion because religion is not true—because religion is an obstacle (or a set of obstacles) in the way of progress—because religion fomented strife and prejudice—because religion is the breeding ground of intolerance—because, in short, religion is essentially hostile to mankind.

Religion glorifies the dogma of a despotic, mythical God. Atheism ennoble the interests of free and progressive Man. Religion is superstition. Atheism is sanity. Religion is medieval. Atheism is modern.

PREACHER URGES THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGIOUS DESPOTISM

That religious fanaticism is a modern menace and not merely a medieval memory, that steady propaganda on behalf of freedom of thought is a most serious necessity, we have proved again for our warning in the sermon of Rev. W. D. Lewis, pastor of the Second Presbyterian church of Wheeling, W. Va. This preacher, who occupies the pulpit of an important city church, declares that religious liberty must be ended in America and that a system of compulsory religion must be established. "I shall never be in full sympathy with our system of compulsory education," he said, "until there is set up side by side with it a system of compulsory religion."

In suggesting a course of despotic religious procedure for modern times, Rev. Lewis goes away back to the days of ancient Israel. He turns to the Bible and its Old Testament code of theocratic laws. Modern Americans, he says, must be compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of a personal, autocratic, all-ruling God even as did the ancient Israelites—and, according to the scheme of this preacher, this God of Bunk must be worshipped by all and no argument permitted.

"The whole scheme of things in Israel," says Rev. Lewis, "revolved around the idea of a personal God. The first leaders of the Jews saw that it would never do to attempt to create a national solidarity without the establishment of a fixed authority. . . . So, those first leaders of Israel did the wisest thing ever done by any group of men aspiring to bring forth a nation: They invested all authority in God. They took neither responsibility nor credit for themselves. . . . They were simply his mouthpieces and his agents."

That the priests and rulers of Israel "took neither responsibility nor credit for themselves" is of course a ridiculous bit of sophistry. They had a very imposing prestige and very profitable revenues in their role as the "mouthpieces and agents" of their mythical God. Clearly it was a great stroke of clever exploitation (clever enough to deceive primitive tribes and clever enough to fool many moderns who nevertheless do not live intellectually in the modern age) for the priests to put over the fiction that a big, strong, mysterious and fearsome God was

behind their words and actions; that piece of fiction made the priests seem far greater than mere men, greater than merely human rulers, and they have fought and schemed jealously through the centuries to retain that advantage.

It is the prestige and power of clericalism that Rev. Lewis is eager to have restored fully in America. This is clear in what he says about the specific command to worship (i. e., to patronize the clerical shops of superstition). "One day in seven, the Sabbath," he says, "was made holy unto God and set aside solely for his worship [in ancient Israel]. There was no choice about it. In those first days there was no such thing as religious liberty in Israel. A man had to go to worship whether he liked it or not. The fact that he didn't like the priests didn't matter. . . . The excuse that he was intellectually superior to the congregation of Israel didn't work. . . . Religious liberty was given no thought in Israel. I sometimes wonder if it isn't given too much thought in our own America."

We might indeed remind Rev. Lewis that in modern America we have many features of life which were unknown in ancient Israel. We have not only religious liberty but also political liberty, and the two are inseparable. The Old Testament Jews, that primitive and superstitious tribe, had no conception of modern democracy. They had no glimmering of the materials of modern education. For instance, those old Jews whom Rev. Lewis would have us follow in their system of religious despotism had the most ridiculous notions of life—they believed in creation by a God and in all the farrago of legends which are sprawlingly conspicuous in the Old Testament. They believed that the earth was the center of a very small universe (they had really no conception of a universe) and that the sun, moon and stars were merely conveniences to illuminate the earth. They had the most absurd, strangely twisted, cruelly barbaric and superstitious ideas of morality—the conception of moral law as social law, while it was necessarily followed by them to some extent, was not fully understood by them. Crude indeed were the ideas prevalent in ancient Israel about religion and about government and about morality and about the earth and man. If we were really compelled to follow the ways of ancient Israel, as this West Virginia preacher insists we should, we should

have to scrap our system of education and embrace the system of despotic religion in its stead.

It may be doubted if Rev. Lewis has much concern for education, save as it can be used spuriously as a support for religion. His fixed idea seems to be the importance of compulsory religion. "I shall never be in full sympathy with our system of irreligious education. Why should we be compelled to attend and support our schools if there is nothing that can be done to compel us to attend and support our churches? . . . If education is absolutely necessary for our community life so is religion. Or yet, why should we be compelled to support the idea of government if we are at liberty to treat the idea of God with contempt? . . . You will never make a full success of a compulsory government or a compulsory education until you give the same dignity to religion and make it compulsory; at any rate compulsory enough to make it respected throughout the land. The nation that plays fast and loose with its idea of God will soon or late play fast and loose with its idea of education and its idea of government. . . . If God doesn't matter, then nothing else matters, and all the compulsions of life might just as well be set aside."

What Rev. Lewis does not understand (and presumably does not care about) is the truth, well illustrated in history, that no system of education can survive as educationally free and genuine if it is loaded with the chains of a compulsory religion. A religious despotism is utterly incompatible with the freedom and dignity and progressive achievements of social life. As a matter of fact, religion is an eccentric survival from ignorant earlier periods in the life of mankind. It is not in sympathy with modernism (of course not) and it cannot be reconciled with modernism. The right to believe in religion and practice its forms of worship as an individual affair is one that, on modern principles, we must grant. Religion, however, must be kept in its place as a private matter. It is too dangerous when it goes beyond that and presumes to command or threaten the state. Rev. Lewis is an exponent, bold yet typical, of a sentiment of religious bigotry which we cannot afford lightly to dismiss nor to ignore. We must expose these bigots and

fight them with a sternness that is uncompromising and a sweep of propaganda that is irresistible.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The problem of evil has always been a mischievous, difficult trap of tormented logic for theologians. They have affirmed dogmatically the existence of an all-powerful and omniscient and benevolent God—but in explaining the evil things in the world they have been not at all deft but rather desperate.

We have been told that God created only the good and not the evil—but that doesn't jibe with the theory of a God who has complete power. If he can't prevent evil, then he is a limited God with a grave element of weakness.

Others have argued that God permitted the evil for purposes of his own, which were really good purposes but beyond man's finite comprehension. But that is a harassed recourse of a man who is in a corner and can think of nothing better to say. It is an argument that admits of no demonstration. It assumes something that can't be proved. It isn't satisfactory.

Again, we are told that there is no evil in the world—that when we regard certain phenomena as evil it is only because we have a distorted view—that all things are good if we could only understand them truly. And that again is wild assertion without even the appearance of logic.

Yes, the problem of evil is too much for theologians. It can't be reconciled with the God idea. It is understandable only in a naturalistic, atheistic view of things.

After all, the principal objection which a thinking man has to religion is that religion is not true—and is not even sane.

The fear of gods and devils is never anything but a pitiable degradation of the human mind.

CAN GOD LIE?

This question is put to Christians who believe that the Bible unerringly describes God

and reports the commands and the characteristics of God. If there is a God, it is natural that we should wish to be quite correct in our understanding of that God's nature. So we ask: Can and does God lie?

Looking this point up in the mazes of Holy Writ, we discover confusion. In Numbers xxiii, 19, we are told: "God is not a man, that he should lie." This is put even more strongly in Hebrews vi, 18, where we read: "It was impossible for God to lie."

But do these citations settle the matter? Ah, no, we are upset in our calculations the moment we turn to 2 Thessalonians ii, 11, where we read: "For this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie." And in 1 Kings xxii, 23, God is thus reported: "Now, therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee."

Can God lie? Can the Bible lie? Anyway, there is a mistake somewhere. The big mistake is in entertaining the idea of a God.

When we read that some minor scientist (usually a skilled technical worker but not a thinker in science) has "found God" somewhere, we are not excited. We know this is only a form of words, meaning only that the scientific worker, turning away from science, has rediscovered the stale old assumption of theology, "There is a God." We find invariably (as we should expect) that there is no satisfactory definition or description or identification or location or proof of a God. "God" is merely a word, whether it is used by a preacher or a mystic in a laboratory.

The fact that millions of people still believe in a hell of eternal punishment for sinners and unbelievers is a drastic reminder of the need for persistent, progressive education of the masses. We have as yet only begun to realize the possibilities of progress. But science, rationalism and humanism have pointed the way, they have taken the first great steps, and we must keep right ahead on the highway of modernism.

Don't take our word for it. Read the Bible itself. Read the statements of preachers. And you will understand that God is the most desperate character, the worst villain in all fiction.

Commonly, those who have professed the strongest motives of love of a God have demonstrated the deepest hatred toward human joy and liberty.

Theism tells men that they are the slaves of a God. Atheism assures men that they are the investigators and users of nature.

Belief in gods and belief in ghosts is identical. God is taken as a more respectable word than ghost, but it means no more.

Religion, throughout the greater part of its history, has been a form of "holy" terrorism. It still aims its terrors at men, but modern realism and the spread of popular enlightenment has progressively robbed those terrors of their old-fashioned effectiveness. Wherever men take religion very seriously—wherever there is devout belief—there is also the inseparable feeling of fear.

Christian theology has taught men that they should submit with unintelligent resignation to the worst real evils of life and waste their time in consideration of imaginary evils in "the life to come."

Priests and preachers have tricked, terrified and exploited mankind. They have lied for "the glory of God." They have collected immense financial tribute for "the glory of God." Whatever may be said about the character of individuals among the clergy, the character of the profession as a whole has been distinctly and drastically anti-human. And of course the most sincere among the clergy have been the most dangerous, for they have been willing to go to the most extreme lengths of intolerance for "the glory of God."

Perhaps religion might be dismissed as unimportant if it were merely theoretical. It is difficult, however, if not impossible to separate

theory and practice. Religion, to be sure, is full of inconsistencies between theory and practice; but there is and has always been sternly and largely a disposition of religion to enforce its theory in the conduct of life; religion has meant not simply dogmatism in abstract thinking but intolerance in legal and social action. Religion interferes with life and, being false, it necessarily interferes very much to the detriment of the sound human interests of life.

For centuries men have sought in the most unusual and devious ways to prove the existence of a God. But evidently a God, if there were a God, has been hiding out. He has never been discovered or proved. One would think a God, if any, should have revealed himself unmistakably. Isn't this non-appearance of a God (the non-appearance of a God in the shape of a single bit of evidence for his existence) a pretty strong, sufficient proof of non-existence?

A God of love, a God of wrath, a God of jealousy, a God of bigotry, a God of vulgar tirading, a God of cheating and lying—yes, the Christian God is given all of these characteristics, and isn't it a wretched mess to be offered to men in this twentieth century? The beginning of wisdom, the beginning of humanism, the beginning of progress is the rejection of this absurd, extravagantly impossible myth of a God.

HIDDEN GODS

Look at the God idea from any angle, and it is foolish, it doesn't make sense, but extravagantly proposes more mysteries than it assumes to explain. For instance, is it sensible that a real God would leave mankind in such confusion and debate about his character and his laws?

There have been many alleged revelations of God. There have, indeed, been many Gods as there have been many Bibles. And in different ages and different lands an endless game of guessing and disputing has gone on. Men have argued blindly about God. They still argue—just as blindly.

And if there is a God, we must conclude that he has willfully left men in the dark. He has not wanted men to know about him. Assuming his existence, then it would follow that he

would have perfect ability to give a complete and universal explanation of himself, so that all men could see and know without further uncertainty. A real God could exhibit himself clearly to all men and have all men following his will to the last letter without a doubt or a slip.

But when we examine even cursorily the many contradictory revelations of God, the many theories and arguments, the many and diverse principles of piety, we perceive that all this talk about God has been merely the natural floundering of human ignorance.

There has been no reality in the God idea which men could discover and agree upon. The spectacle has been exactly what we should expect when men deal with theories of something which does not exist.

Hidden Gods—no Gods—all we see is man's poor guesswork.

TAKE YOUR CHOICE

If the Bible, which Christians believe is the word of God, is inspired and infallible, why does it have two distinctly opposite versions of many things? God's nature and God's opinions and God's wishes are contradictorily reported in Holy Writ.

It is stated, for example, in Genesis i, 31, as follows: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." But in Genesis vi, 6, it is stated: "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Does the good Christian believe both statements?

In Chronicles vii, 12, 16, we read: And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him: I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for a house of sacrifice. . . . For now have I chosen and sanctified this house that my name may be there forever; and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually." Then in Acts vii, 48, we read: "Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

Whether God preferred the darkness or the light seemed to be uncertain to the Hebrew prophets of the Most High; but if the Bible were thoroughly inspired there should have been perfect agreement. But in 1 Timothy vi, 16, God is referred to in this manner: "Dwelling in the light which no man can approach."

On the other hand, in 1 Kings viii, 12 this reference is contradictorily made: "The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." And in Psalm xviii we are told about God: "He made darkness his secret place." And in Psalm xcvi, 2 we are told: "Clouds and darkness are round about him."

Such contradictions are common in the Bible. Naturally this happened, as the Bible was a collection of books written at different times by different men—a strange mixture of diverse human documents—and a tissue of irreconcilable notions. Inspired? The Bible is not even intelligent. It is not even good craftsmanship, but is full of absurdities and contradictions.

"GOD'S WILL"

Thoughtful men have always observed that "God's will," as that amusing expression has been employed by theologians and by lay commentators, has been nothing more nor less than a reflection of human impulses and desires and fears and whimsicalities. Whoever interprets this so-called will of God always presents a picture of his own, the interpreter's, way of looking at things.

A sober, devout man will interpret "God's will" soberly and devoutly. A fanatic, with bloodshot mind, will interpret "God's will" fanatically. Men of extreme, illogical views will interpret "God's will" in eccentric fashion. Kindly, charitable, generous men will interpret "God's will" according to their character.

And of course this means that whatever happens in life and in the world of nature, entirely independent of the will of any supposed God, such happenings (of the most immensely variant and complex kind) are ascribed to the will of God—a blanket phrase, and a bombastic one too, which explains absolutely nothing. Back of the phrase "God's will"—and back of the idea, such as it is, which is reflected by this phrase—there is the old, sound, and really (to the thinking man) obvious truth that gods and all that appertains to them are fashioned by man in his own image or, that is to say, by men in the images cast by their fancies and fears. What we have under observation, always, are human impulses and schemes of action: to say that "God's will" is behind them is to say exactly nothing.

INCREDIBLE INSTANCES

As the Bible is regarded as a holy and inspired book by practically all Christians, a book absolutely without errors by many Christians, and the most important proof (through alleged revelation) of the existence of a God by many Christians, it is very important to point out incredible instances recorded in the Bible which no man can sensibly believe.

Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll did a very useful work in exposing the folly of believing that the Bible was inspired. "One can scarcely be blamed," he said, "for hesitating to believe that God met Moses at a hotel and tried to kill him [Exodus iv, 24]; that afterward he made this Moses a god to Pharaoh, and gave him his brother Aaron for a prophet [Exodus vii, 1]; that he turned all the ponds and pools and streams and all the rivers into blood [Exodus vii, 19] and all the water in vessels of wood and stone; that the rivers thereupon brought forth frogs [Exodus viii, 3]; that the frogs covered the whole land of Egypt; that he changed dust into lice, so that all the men, women, children and animals were covered with them [Exodus viii, 16, 17]; that he sent swarms of flies upon the Egyptians [Exodus viii, 21]; that he destroyed the innocent cattle with painful diseases; that he covered man and beast with blains and boils [Exodus ix, 9]; that he so covered the magicians of Egypt with boils that they could not stand before Moses for the purpose of performing the same feat [Exodus ix, 11]; that he destroyed every beast and every man that was in the fields, and every herb, and broke every tree with storm of hail and fire [Exodus ix, 25]; that he sent locusts that devoured every herb that escaped the hail, and devoured every tree that grew [Exodus x, 15]; that he caused thick darkness over the land and put lights in the houses of the Jews [Exodus x, 22, 23]; that he destroyed all of the firstborn of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh upon the throne to the firstborn of the maidservant that sat behind the mill [Exodus xi, 5], together with the firstborn of all beasts, so that there was not a house in which the dead were not [Exodus xii, 29, 30]."

Do these marvels read like inspiration? Or do they read like superstition? Remember that millions of Christians still base their belief in a God upon the words of the Bible, which is a

collection of the most flabbergasting fictions ever imagined—by men, too, who had lawless but very poor and crude imagination. Ingersoll and numerous other critics have shot the Christian holy book full of holes. It is worthless and proves nothing concerning the existence of a God. The idea of a God is worthless and unprovable.

BLIND ALLEYS

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint and heard great argument
About it and about; but evermore
Came out by the same door as in I went.

This well-known stanza by Omar, the agnostic Persian poet, expresses the simple truth that he learned nothing from all the arguments about God—nothing, that is to say, except that the arguments were aimless and meaningless. The doctors and the saints were floundering amid unrealistic abstractions. God was merely a name. It had scarcely the solid dignity and comprehensibility of an idea—even a false idea.

This argumentation which taught nothing to Omar—which left him with as little evidence for a God as before he heard a word of the argumentation—was a vain, wordy repetition of fears, fancies, assumptions, dogmas and whimsically elaborated nonsense. And so it has always been. The efforts of theism, intellectually speaking, have been a chasing up blind alleys. They have arrived nowhere—but on the contrary the more argument there has been about the idea of God, the more steadily have men grown in the conviction that the idea is obviously untrue and unrealistic.

Talk of God leads by a direct road to the conclusion of atheism. The only sensible attitude is to dismiss the idea of God—to get it out of the way of more important ideas. The wide dissemination of this intelligent atheistic attitude is one of the leading features of any program of popular education which is completely worthy of the name.

With its fears and superstitions and prejudices, religion poisons the mind of any one who believes in it—and even the best man, under the influence of religion, cannot reason whole-

somely. Atheism, on the contrary, opens the mind to the clean winds of truth and establishes a fresh-air sanity.

Nobody has ever taken notable pains to locate the legendary heaven; but probably that is because nobody ever thought seriously of going to a heaven.

IS GOD A JOKER?

A few weeks ago a hurricane struck the little religious community of Bethany, Okla. A number of pious citizens of the little town were killed. Houses were destroyed—homes in which prayer and devotion reigned. A church was demolished.

Only a few miles away is the large, wicked city of Oklahoma City—at least we can certainly assume that, from the religious viewpoint, many sinners live in Oklahoma City. Assuming also (which is a great deal riskier assumption) that there is a God, why should he perpetrate this grim and sardonic joke? The sinners in the big city were left untouched. The godly folk in the little nearby village were punished by the evidences of God's wrath. How do the religious people interpret this calamity? Often and often they explain such calamities as flood, fire, and storm by saying that God is angry at the sinful people and is warning them or destroying them for their sins. Was the hurricane in Bethany a sign of the love of God for his faithful worshipers?

And God missed an even better chance, if there were a God who wished to punish rebels against his majesty and inscrutability. Just a few hundred miles north and east of Bethany, Okla., is Girard—the home of The American Freeman and The Debunker and The Joseph McCabe Magazine and the Little Blue Books—the center of American free thought where an enormous stream of atheistic literature and godless modern knowledge pours forth to enlighten the masses. If there were a God directing hurricanes and he wanted really to "get" an uncompromising foe, whom he has no chance of persuading in the ordinary way, it would have been a devastating stroke for him to send his howling punitive blasts through the town of Girard. It would be a more remarkable suggestion of the avenging act of a God if only the Haldeman-Julius plant were de-

stroyed and the rest of the town left unhurt—and, as good neighbors, we *shouldn't* wish the Christian and respectable people of Girard nor those who are respectable and not so Christian nor those who are Christian and not exactly respectable to suffer from our proximity and our propaganda of atheism.

Is God a joker? No—let us whisper it—the joke is that there is no God. Hurricanes come upon the just and the unjust, the pious and the impious.

To be true to the mythical conception of a God is to be false to the interests of mankind.

GOD AS A GAMBLE

One of the most amusing arguments, frequently offered in defense of belief in the idea of a God, is that such a belief is a way of playing safe. It is said that even though a man is not sure of the existence of a God and a future life beyond the grave, it is the part of caution for him to believe; then, as the argument goes, the man believing is safe whether there is or is not a God and a future existence; if there is no God, the believer will be no more dead than the unbeliever; while if there is a God, the believer will have preferential treatment in the judgments of the celestial tribunal.

This queer argument makes the matter of belief in a God an intellectual gamble. It is of course an utter denial of intellectual integrity. Proceeding on this basis, the appeal to belief is not made on the score of truth. One is urged to consider the God idea not from the standpoint of its reasonableness; but rather from the standpoint of blind faith and a chance bet on an idea.

Doesn't the religious person who uses this argument realize that he is appealing to a particularly low form of intellectual cowardice? What men need is courage in their thinking. They need to be trained in facing facts frankly. They need to learn that all ideas should be judged with strict regard for the evidence. Instead religion harps on the emotion of fear and tells men that they should treat ideas merely as gambling chances and that it is *safer* (nor intellectually the *better* but the more *craven* part) to believe in a God.

This argument has other fallacious aspects.

It assumes, for instance, that the evidence for and against the idea of a God is equal; whereas the vast preponderance of evidence is against the idea, there being in fact no genuine evidence for the idea. It is overlooked, too, that belief is *genuine* or it is *not*; and that a belief which is frankly grounded on a gamble—a belief affirmed for safety's sake—cannot be a real belief. One believes or one does not; and belief, real belief, can only assert the *truth* of an idea. In short, the man who bases his belief on such a principle is bordering close to hypocrisy and is certainly revealing a striking lack of mental integrity.

Such weak arguments exemplify the decline of religion and show its utter intellectual bankruptcy. It has all the air of a desperate and last plea for a set of ideas which, ordinarily and reasonably, cannot be defended. It is, after all, a virtual admission of the charge of the atheist that the idea of a God is merely an assumption and has no ground of truth upon which firmly to plant itself.

CREDULITY—A CRIME

Credulity is not a crime for the individual—but it is clearly a crime as regards the race. Just look at the actual consequences of credulity. For years men believed in the foul superstition of witchcraft and many poor people suffered for this foolish belief. There was a general belief in angels and demons, flying familiarly yet skittishly through the air, and that belief caused untold distress and pain and tragedy. The most holy Catholic church (and, after it, the various Protestant sects) enforced the dogma that heresy was terribly sinful and punishable by death. Imagine—but all you need do is to recount—the suffering entailed by that belief.

When one surveys the causes and consequences of credulity, it is apparent that this easy belief in the impossible, this readiness toward false and fanatical notions, has been indeed a most serious and major crime against humanity. The social life in any age, it may be said, is about what its extent of credulity guarantees. In an extremely credulous age, social life will be cruel and dark and treacherous. In a skeptical age, social life will be more humane. We assert that the philosophy

of humanity—that the best interests of the human race—demand a strong statement and a repeated, enlightening statement of atheism.

"SPIRITUAL REALITIES"

When preachers talk about "spiritual realities," what do they mean? They do not mean the emotions of men. At least they do not mean these emotions as realistically observed and interpreted *human* emotions. Love, hate, fear, greed, malice, envy, ambition, dreams and desires—these are human emotions which the rational, scientific mind takes as themes for analysis. They are understood, not in any "spiritual" sense, but in terms of heredity and environment and constitutional (physical and mental) makeup. Their causes and their expressions are, so far as science has been able to trace them, essentially material.

All of mankind's art, mankind's morality, mankind's experiments with and yearning for beauty, can be and are explained in terms of human cause and effect and are placed in the evolutionary pattern worked out by science. They are not mysterious in the theistic sense; they are not, that is to say, *mystic*. An emotion in human nature is as realistic a fact as an object in nature: and science deals with both emotions and objects materialistically, experimentally, analytically.

"Spiritual realities" mean nothing to science. This is the special and unrealistic lingo of the clerical bunk-shooters, who depend upon sweeping (but empty) phrases and pious dogmas and a large spooky and spoofy atmosphere of aimless mystery for the maintenance of their prestige. That their belief is often sincere does not affect the case.

By "spiritual realities," if you probe the phrase, you will discover that the preachers mean some mystic working of the mind of a God in the minds and motives of men. They intend us to believe that human emotions are something more than human—that back of them is the shadowed and obscure and awesomely immense loom on which is woven a divine pattern.

"Spiritual realities," according to the preachers, are the reflections of the most unreal of all myths, namely, the myth of a God. These so-called "realities," said to be the highest conceivable, are seen to be the most unreal and the most inconceivable.

IS GOD FAIR?

That's a funny question. But still we ask it: Is God fair? The Christians say that God damns forever anyone who is skeptical about the truth of bunkistic religion as revealed unto the holy haranguers. What this means is that a God, if any, punishes a man for using his reason.

If there is a God in existence, reasons should be available for his existence. Assuming that such a precious thing as a man's eternal future depends on his belief in a God, then the materials for that belief should be overwhelming and not at all doubtful.

Yet here is a man whose reason makes it impossible for him to believe in a God. He sees no evidence of such an entity. He finds all the arguments weak and worthless. He doubts and he denies.

Then is a God fair in visiting upon such a skeptic the penalty for his inevitable intellectual attitude? The intelligent man refuses to believe fairy tales. Can a God blame him? If so, then a God is not as fair as an ordinarily decent man. And fairness, we think, is more important than piety.

"Faith," said St. Paul, "is the evidence of things not seen." We should elaborate this definition by adding that faith is the assertion of things for which there is not a particle of evidence and of things which are incredible.

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