

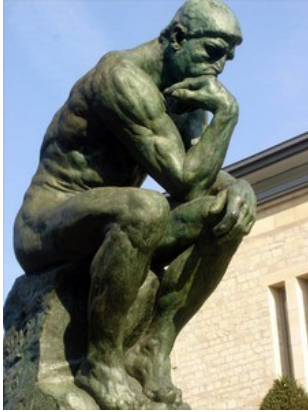


The Apostle

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The Fool in His Heart by Fr. Gregory



"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'

*They are corrupt,
They have done abominable works,
There is none who does good.*

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.

*They have all turned aside,
They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good, No, not one. (Psalm 14)*

Why Atheism is irrational and Agnosticism is not. Why Theism is established both with reason and beyond reason.

My definition of atheism – the categorical denial of the existence of a deity or deities.

My definition of agnosticism – the inability to be able to know one way or the other whether or not a deity or deities exist.

Under these definitions an atheism committed to positivism will regard an agnostic as a cowardly, misguided or delusional atheist. No matter, I am sticking with these definitions as the claim that positivism is a sufficient description of reality and reality talk is a self defeating position bound that is to undermine itself.

So why is atheism (thus defined) irrational?

What is "irrational" though? ... Irrationality is the absence of rationality. What is rationality? Rationality is the conjunction of logical thinking and evidence by the mapping of the former to the latter in a model building process.

Why then is atheism the violation of such conjunctive mapping?

Consider the supposed evidences for theism. One might be the adaptation of life to survival in a given environment. Life has tenacity. To what do we attribute this tenacity? An atheist might simply reply that genes are selfish in their programming for survival. A theist might contend that such apparent selfishness is rather indicative of a grander purpose to life and that this purpose is divinely inscribed in

this tenacity.

Now there is no empirical test available to us which might either verify or falsify such a purpose upon which a Creator divinity might be based. An atheist will respond that this absence effectively renders any evidence for God either ill conceived, foolish or dangerous. On this view nothing can be relied upon which cannot be either verified (conclusively) or falsified (conclusively).

An agnostic however will regard such not-knowing according to empirical testing as simply that – not-knowing. An atheist must go further and demand that not-knowing in the only truth test that counts as effectively false or nonsensical. As such it is a delusion or a lie to be unmasked and exposed. The true atheist will have an evangelical zeal to extirpate religion as an evil meme in human society. Too much is at stake to allow it to go unmolested. I use an emotive word because atheism is impaled on a dilemma that the very rationality with which it seeks to expose by religion is itself denied by the religion with which it must engage. The temptation will always be to persecute or legislate it out of existence. After all, if you cannot use "reason" what is left?

POSITIVISM = truth can only be known by what is proven by the senses **EMPIRICAL** = the evidence of the senses

The American Constitution starts off with a startling piece of Enlightenment epistemology ... "We hold these truths to be self evident." What it goes on to say is that Creator has endowed humans with "inalienable rights." So we have not quite left even deism behind just yet! Now if it religion is patently irrational why is this not a "self evident" truth of reason? Why notwithstanding 70 years of evangelical atheism in the Soviet Union do so many Russians still live such delusional lives of faith? Can self evident reason applied to evidence be so obscure, so ineffective in delivering people from the monstrous lie of religion?

Maybe the agnostics have a stronger case than the atheists because their position is rationally defensible whereas the ideological fundamentalism of those who KNOW that there is no God inflates itself well beyond the reach of reason. For an agnostic to be content with not-knowing accommodates both the lack of evidence (in their perception) and a certain epistemological modesty. It is a position of integrity even if theists will be bound to differ on the significance of any evidence presented.

I recall a recent interview on British TV between Dr. Robert Winston the famous physician and Orthodox Jew and Dr. Richard Dawkins, the Charles Simonyi Chair for the Public Understanding of Science at the University of Oxford and militant anti-theist. Winston professed his surprise at Dawkins' indefatigable certainty

with which professes his atheism. It is this certainty that renders, in my view, the appropriateness of the title "fundamentalist" for Dr. Dawkins and the irrationality that is the handmaiden of all fundamentalisms.

Finally, why is theism both rational and beyond reason? It is rational in the sense that certain evidences COULD be interpreted as indicative of a deity or deities. A theist, however, recognises the ambiguity that keeps an agnostic in a state of unknowing. For example, it is often said by believers that the beauty of creation is a hymn of praise to the Creator. But is the smallpox virus part of that hymn, juvenile leukaemia, the evisceration of a zebra by a lioness? There is rationality both in the denial and acceptance of creative beauty and purposefulness. So we must conclude that is there is anything plausible to be said beyond agnosticism, one must move beyond reason without descending into irrationality.

Is such a transcendent rationality possible? Not of course if an empirically falsifiable rational modelling of reality is as much as CAN be applied to the question of truth. But there may be modes of rationality that move beyond that. Such a reasonable approach would intuit transcendent significance to natural phenomena ... NOT as causal explanations but as an infrastructure of meaning within and beyond the phenomena themselves.

Music, for example can be explained rationally in its emotional impact on human music makers and hearers but a transcendent rationality will look beyond such features to an echo in the Divine Wisdom that connects us to a powerful sense of Ultimate Meaning, if you like, God. This is the source of course of the great power of transforming art. It cannot simply be enough to explain the process. The purpose or the significance of the experience must be accounted for. It is the very height of irrationality to deny even the possibility of a transcendent ground (God) in such meaning. The same argument can be applied to every field of human endeavour and experience that moves beyond itself toward something ineffable and beautiful, whether this concerns the birth of a child or the track of sub atomic particles in the CERN's Large Hadron Collider.

So, I maintain that indeed atheism is irrational and agnosticism not. Further I propose that theism is a plausible option for an honest agnostic who is prepared to reconsider reality from a different and perhaps unaccustomed perspective. For a fundamentalist atheist though such a conversion (short of a miracle of God) is not possible. One's breath should not to be wasted. Irrationality is like that. With God though, all things are possible. So, as much as it must infuriate him, we should pray for Dr. Dawkins. It's the only rational course of action.

FUNDAMENTALISM = beliefs immune from reason and debate **EPISTEMOLOGY** = a theory of knowledge and knowing