

GOD IS/NOT PERFECTION/ISTIC

Mugger: Your money or your life.

I: That's a choice?

Secular humanist: God, you're perfect, so you're dead.

God: So who's perfect?

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On 'organized intelligence'

Marine Biological Laboratory researcher Gerald Weissmann, (story, "Scientist as Author," Jan. 7), unwittingly demonstrates once again the difficulty some scientists, who are logical in their fields, have in being reasonable outside their fields.

Consider the illogic of this: "Explain Auschwitz or leukemia. That's why I am a rabid secular humanist. I do not believe in an organized intelligence that has shaped the universe."

I do not believe his intelligence is organized. If it were, he would ask himself, for example:

Without God, how am I to explain all the good — as well as the evil — in the world?

If we find both order and chaos both in the world and in ourselves, and we set this alongside the conviction that we are made in the image of God, would we not expect that both order and chaos are in God? And if so, why not Auschwitz and leukemia?

Have I been right to assume that if God is, God must be a perfectly good and perfectly logical "organized intelligence?"

Have I been right to reject God as the exclusive shaper of the universe?

Am I not, as "a rabid secular humanist," making claims for humanity that the evidence cannot sustain?

When scientists and theologians fail to take each other seriously, both talk nonsense.

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Pop religion in ancient Greece held the gods & goddesses to be anything but perfect—to which unpop religion, what Pascal was later to call "the religion of the philosophers," replied that God (Logos, Nous) was perfect, one inference being that ("therefore") planetary orbits are not "planetary" (Greek for "wandering") but perfectly circular. Inference from the modern proof that the orbits are not circular but elliptical: God is not perfect....Now, worry not thyself over the invalidity of these inferences. My point is only to point to the source of our Western traditional notion of God's perfection, & the burden it's modernly become—as you can see in the scientist I address in this here letter & in my playful quatrain to begin this Thinksheet.

1. Before Pearl Harbor, I'd accumulated three degrees without ever being pressed to face squarely (1) the notion of perfection or (2) the implications, for thought & life, of the belief that God is perfect. You might say I'd been perfectly safe from wrinkling my brow over the religious & philosophical problems attendant upon letting the Greek philosophers tell us how to think about the Hebrew prophets' (and Jesus'!) God. In 1941, I was wonderfully, bracingly stimulated to the task by an English theologian (Edwin Euwert Aubrey, in a course titled "Nature & the Supernatural") & an American philosopher of religion (Henry Nelson Wieman, in a course titled "God & Process"). I'm distressed that 47 years later, many American intellectuals are hung up on prescientific notions about God, whom accordingly they reject. (NB "prescientific" = before the modern sciences of semasiology, linguistic philosophy, de/construction, sociology of knowledge, hermeneutic, et al.)

2. You could read this Thinksheet's title a number of ways: (1) God is perfect; (2) God is perfection; (3) God is perfectionistic; (4) God isn't perfect, (5) isn't perfection, and (6) isn't perfectionistic. One thing this variety suggests is that vis-a-vis the biblical God, the very concept of perfection is awkward. Further, it's unnecessary, as—to take an example from comparative eschatology--reincarnation is unnecessary when one holds to resurrection. But most salient, the perfection idea is an alien substitution for the conviction that God is "holy" (with all the reverberations any good dictionary of the Bible will set out). Finally, perfection thinking feeds two sicknesses:

....A social disease, utopianism, especially virulent since the Enlightenment & the French Revolution. To me it's esp. galling when it informs free & cheap (risk-free) advice by America/ns to other people/countries. I try to get at this in #2203.

....A personal disease, perfectionism, an obsessive-compulsive addiction--religious addiction in life (as substitute for spirituality) & in thought (fundamentalism as substitute for honest-critical thinking; one esp. pernicious form is biblical perfectionism, "inerrancy," now come to power among the Southern Baptists)....See "over" for an illuminating article.

over

Religious addiction is not the same as spirituality

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There is a growing interest in religious addiction in the addiction treatment field.

Addiction specialists are realizing more and more that any human behavior can become an unhealthy dependence characterized by craving, compulsion, loss of control, and continuation of the behavior in spite of life-damaging consequences.

Religion, to me, means religious systems and forms of worship of God. I believe spirituality, on the other hand, is a state of being spiritual-minded. Religion is the way we act. Spirituality is the way we are. There can be a big difference between the outer worship and the inner person.

Spirituality cannot become addictive because it is the one form of dependence that is natural and necessary to man's being. And there's no such thing as too much of it. But reli-

On Addiction By Tom O'Connell

gious practice can become addictive to the point of hurting ourselves or others, and perhaps even offending the God we are compulsively claiming to worship.

The Rev. Leo Booth is a spiritual priest and a spirituality consultant for addiction treatment programs. I have seen him in action. He believes in a loving God. But he has seen many recovering addicts "use and abuse God as they have used drugs." He says they "escape from the reality of their situation and look to God for 'a quick fix'." He says a person can become "cross-addicted concerning alcohol, drugs and food — why not God?"

He also emphasizes that not all re-

ligious people are suffering from addiction anymore than it is true that everyone who drinks is an alcoholic. We're talking about some people, not all.

Some of the characteristics of religious addicts described by Rev. Booth are: arrogance; destructive ego; unwillingness to listen to advice; the need to be right at all times; a belief that theirs is the only way; a manipulation of opinions and facts to suit their purposes; and an exaggerated need to control others.

A San Antonio therapist, Philip Orrick, says religious addicts exhibit behavior similar to alcoholics and are "often addicted to images of perfection." While intending to raise their children "right," they emphasize how "wrong" the child is. "The religious addict goes into a rage, gives a beating, recovers from the rage, and becomes kind and loving."

In some family histories he has found generational patterns with chemical dependency in one generation and then in the next a swing to "profoundly religious activity."

Orrick emphasizes that it is not wrong to seek religion. "The abuse of doctrines is the addiction," he says. "Religions, like Alcoholics Anonymous, are value systems — ways of living."

But Orrick stresses the need to question "should," "ought to," "must," and "thou shalt not." He sees religious addiction as "shame-based." He says some people choose alcohol or religious addiction to deal with the shame about their family experience, and to empower themselves.

Religious hierarchies are like dysfunctional addicted families, he says. "You don't disagree." So, what are religious addicts to do? Orrick suggests "modification of values through life experience," "increased empathy in relationships," and "growth of self as a whole person — at their own pace." The key? "Balance and freedom. It's OK to make mistakes." That is, choose love instead of addiction.

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