129

<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/10/goodness_is_no_substitute_for_holiness.html>

**Goodness is no substitute for holiness**

*--Is there good without God? Can people be good without God? How can people be good, in the moral and ethical sense, without being grounded in some sort of belief in a being which is greater than they are? Where do concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, come from if not from religion? From where do you get your sense of good and evil, right and wrong?*

1.....Since believers in "God" include in their definition that God is Creator of all there is, the question whether there can good without God is - for us - a hypothetical non-question. Implicit in our faith is also this: People who think they are good without God are under at least one, perhaps two, illusions. And people who don't claim to be good, but who claim that some are good who don't believe in God, add one more illusion.

2.....The question is a statement in interrogative form: it is not really, but only grammatically, a question. Addressed to believers in God, it is NONSENSE: of course there can be no goodness "without God"! Addressed to unbelievers in God, it is SENSE: of course there's goodness "without God"!

3.....We all remember the question of the criminal who, violently resisting arrest, was violently subdued by the police: "Can't we all just get along?" Upon release, he unwittingly answered his question not in words but in action: he was soon back in jail for an additional crime. With or without God, he could be "good," but preferred not to. "Goodness" is *community-approved behavior.*

3.1
So what is "community"? Literally, it's "unity" in "common" with others, unity in community. For us theists, it is, centrally, communion with God, which (in the profound narrative near the Bible's beginning) Adam and Eve had with God before they decided to go off on their own.
3.2
*Humanism*, which teaches that human beings can and should go off on their own without God, is a commitment against the center of community, which is communion with God.
3.3
Since "goodness" is community-defined as behavior supportive of community, and the heart of community is communion with God, humanists cannot be "good."

4.....But humanists, being without divine support, actually tend to be especially "good" because it's all they've got: "*goodness" is their religion*.

5.....The OnFaith questioning assumes, in grandparently fashion, that the point - the point of living - is to be "good": children, be good! But the Bible (Judaism and Christianity) teaches that the point is to be "HOLY": God says, "Be holy, for I am holy." Communion with God and one's fellow-creatures is the point of life. In love, God created all there is; and human beings are to return love to God and participate in God's loving our fellow-creatures.
Jesus put it most radically: one's "neighbor" is anybody in need, and we are to love even our enemies.

6.....Defined in exclusion of God, "goodness" is a degenerate form of holiness. Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (died 1855) admonished his society for letting piety (devotion to God, living for God) slump into ethics and warned that ethics would slump into esthetics. Goodness is a companion of holiness with the potential of becoming a competitor; and when a competitor, *goodness is parasitic on a fading holiness*.

7.....The human mind has the power to separate realities which, in life, ever and again, prove inseparable. Beauty (esthetics, the arts), goodness (ethics), and holiness (religion), are separable in the mind and in human commitments to action; but they are a living continuum: trying to live only one or two of them distorts life and deprives it of its fullness.

8.....The atheist-humanist belief in naturalistic ethics - that an adequate "goodness" is derivable from observation and experiment alone - is *illusional*. Says Plato, Socrates last instruction, after dialogs mentally isolating "the good," was to perform a particular religious ritual on his behalf. Separating ethics and religion is an instance of "It sounded like a good idea at the time."

9.....As *a trinity of mysteries*, God/goodness/beauty are honored together in the Bible's first chapter. After each of creation's six stages, God looks at his work and says "Good!" When he finishes, he looks at the beautiful whole and says "*Very* good!" How tragic either to believe this profound and playful story literally, or not to believe it!

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | OCTOBER 30, 2009; 12:38 AM ET**

**Comments**

**Please report offensive comments below.**

Willis E. Elliott laments,
*"4.....But humanists, being without divine support, actually tend to be especially "good" because it's all they've got: "goodness" is their religion."*

of course he says this like it's a BAD thing?! how sinful that atheists invent a religion where the idea is to be GOOD. imagine if THAT horrible idea were to spread! good god, we might have rampant goodness and world peace.... what's that expression - random acts of kindness?

**POSTED BY: WALTER-IN-FALLSCHURCH | NOVEMBER 1, 2009 3:18 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Fortunately for the world, science has successfully undermined the simpleminded religions - the Abrahamic cults, mainly Christianity and Islam.

Christianity and Islam have had a good 2000 year run preying on ignorance and the ignorant. This ended for Christianity in Europe with the development of science. It is now looking for the ignorant and uneducated in Africa and South America.

Islam - a strange combination of ignorance and intolerance - has been picking the lowest lying fruit for a 1000 years as apparent in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Now is the time for science, logic, and deeper & truer spirituality - not supremacist, intolerant cults like Christianity and Islam that proselytize and force their views on others. This results in conflict, violence, and suffering.

Now is the time for Vedanta & Hinduism. After 1000 years of anti-Hindu propaganda, many are not prepared to hear the wisdom or absorb the deep & complex monistic philosophy which is consistent with science. Now is a good time to start; at least some will benefit.

A new age of rational spirituality is again arriving, and Hinduism and Vedanta will lead the way again.

**POSTED BY: CLEARTHINKING1 | NOVEMBER 1, 2009 1:30 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Hi Reverend Elliot,

Hope you had a happy Halloween! All in fun, this holiday, no? My daughter dressed up as Galileo. She's an interesting child, has ideas of her own, and that, I'm afraid, is that. So off we went, with her telescope in hand. Hope she'll keep gazing at the stars. Hope all our children will!

Farnaz

**POSTED BY: FARNAZ1MANSOURI1 | OCTOBER 31, 2009 10:54 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I'm with compchiro. I may have illusions, but at least I don't have delusions. The tangible here and now is far superior to the pie-in-the-sky. So arrogant, these christians.

**POSTED BY: COPROGIRL | OCTOBER 31, 2009 7:30 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

If a person who believes in God turns his back on goodness, is he more wicked and guilty of sin, and more deserving of the everlasting punishment in the Lake of Fire than a person who does not believe in God, but who otherwise leads a similar life?

**POSTED BY: DANIELINTHELIONSDEN | OCTOBER 30, 2009 6:23 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

But all we have done is replace one word with another. What is holiness? If good and holy are defined by something other than man, does that mean it is correct? If my holy book says it is holy does that prove anything?

hariaum

**POSTED BY: NAVIN1 | OCTOBER 30, 2009 2:26 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Mr. Elliot,

“People who think they are good without God are under at least one, perhaps two, illusions. And people who don't claim to be good, but who claim that some are good who don't believe in God, add one more illusion. “

Actually people who know that there can be good without god are correct. You are the one who is operating under the illusion (delusion) that god is needed (or even exists outside of your own imagination).

“Humanism, which teaches that human beings can and should go off on their own without God, is a commitment against the center of community, which is communion with God.”

Communion with your imagined deity may be the center of YOUR community, but it’s not the center of the greater human community.

“Since "goodness" is community-defined as behavior supportive of community, and the heart of community is communion with God, humanists cannot be "good."

What a load of sanctimonious garbage.

“But humanists, being without divine support, actually tend to be especially "good" because it's all they've got: "goodness" is their religion.”

Actually being human is their religion. And their goodness is not in quotes it is real.

“The OnFaith questioning assumes……… that the point - the point of living - is to be "good"

Actually it asks whether there is goodness without deity or religion It does not presume that the point of living is to be good.

“But the Bible (Judaism and Christianity) teaches that the point is to be "HOLY":”

What some man-made religious text says is of not value or consequence to the world as a whole. It is only of value to those who choose to believe in it.

“Beauty (esthetics, the arts), goodness (ethics), and holiness (religion), are separable in the mind and in human commitments to action; but they are a living continuum: trying to live only one or two of them distorts life and deprives it of its fullness.”

For many, removing religion actually can enrich life and allows one to live it to the fullest.

“The atheist-humanist belief in naturalistic ethics - that an adequate "goodness" is derivable from observation and experiment alone - is illusional.”

It is factual. Religion is illusion/delusional.

“Separating ethics and religion is an instance of "It sounded like a good idea at the time."

Actually it is an instance of realizing that ethics and religion are not inexorably tied together. That ethics existed long before man crated god or religion.

“How tragic either to believe this profound and playful story literally, or not to believe it!”

Since there is no proof of it, to believe in it is what is tragic.

**POSTED BY: COMPCHIRO | OCTOBER 30, 2009 9:12 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

The comments to this entry are closed.