

IS GOD AN UNDERSTANDABLE

MISUNDERSTANDING?

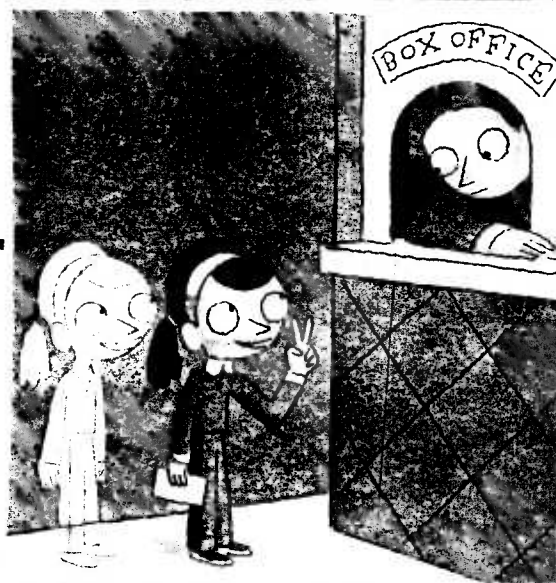
This girl misunderstands her situation. We know that she need buy only one ticket, but she thinks she needs one for her body ("basar" [Ps.842b NRSV: "flesh," herself as visible]) & one for her invisible self ("lev," NRSV "heart"). The ticket-seller isn't giving her two for the price of one; she is only one, & what you see is what (& all) you get--says (deracinated, "secular" Jew) Paul Bloom ("Is God an Accident?"--105ff in next month's THE ATLANTIC). She thinks she has a mind, but "the mind is [only] what the brain does" (109, italics for emphasis).

Here are the center displays on some of the article's seven pages: "Enthusiasm is building among scientists for the view that religion emerged not to serve a purpose--not as an opiate or a social glue--but by accident. It is a by-product of biological adaptations gone awry." "We see the world of objects as separate from the world of minds, allowing us to envision souls and an afterlife; and our system of social understanding infers goals and desires where none exist, making us animists and creationists." "Nobody is born with the idea that humanity started in the Garden of Eden, or that martyrs will be rewarded in heaven; these ideas are learned. But the universal themes of religion are not learned. They are part of human nature." "The theory of natural selection is an empirically supported account of our existence. But almost nobody believes it. We may intellectually grasp it, but it will never feel right. Our gut feeling is that design requires a designer."

1 Bloom--a Yale professor of psychology & linguistics--here has the steady purpose to prove that religion is a purposeless emergent in meaningless evolution; & he seems as earnest about it as does (in reverse!) Rick Warren in his "purpose-driven" books. The adequacy of each man's paradigm is being tested as he tries to bring "all things" (the universe) in captivity to it (as in 2Cor.10.5 ESV Paul aims to "take every thought captive to obey Christ"). Bloom & Warren are triumphalists, each shouting (Bloom for his materialism, Warren for his theism) "See! I TOLDja so!" (the title of my #3260).

2 "Why is there something instead of nothing?" (a philosophical question religion answers & materialistic science declares nonsense) was intensified when science surrendered (to the "Big Bang") its assumption that "It's always been this way." It hasn't always been this way, so "Why did anything come to be out of nothing?" Our only analog-model is our human powers to make things come out of something, so the logical inference is of some Source with these powers + "ex nihilo" power. If we follow this logic, we must accept its insult to our egos: we are only sub-creators, sub-contractors, in sales not in management. A *Punch* cartoon puts the insult well: Lord, "Is there some way you could help me, but make it look like I did it all myself?"

3 The underlining in §2 is the adolescent triumphalist spirit of Bloom's materialism. God is an accident (he says), but it's no accident that Bloom claims to know it--in which sense Bloom himself is (in his own eyes) no accident. Thrice in the 1996 film "Contact" (based on Carl Sagan's 1985 novel of the same title), a character says "If it was just us [as consciousnesses existing in the universe] it would be an awful waste of space." In beginning, 6-year-old Ellie's father says it to her; in the middle; Ellie's lover says it to her; at end, Ellie says it to some children: it's a trisogian (thrice-holy) of the movie, which Sagan oversaw. Said a reviewer, "Sagan left



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no room for any faith that does not embrace the conclusions of scientific materialism." But the Psalms (the hymnbook of the one spirituality of two religions) say God fills all space (so, no waste!), which is too small for all of him to fit in! Sagan died empty his space empty--though (in the novel & film) he fantasized success: Ellie's 18-minute recording proves she'd been out there (where she met someone in the form of her dead father). In astronomer Sagan, materialism took the form of SETI (the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence); in Bloom here, it takes the form of psycho-philosophical dogma. Both, deeply--pathetically--committed to leaving God out.

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4 From E.E. Aubrey (in "Nature and the Supernatural," '41 U. Chicago) I learned the distinction between split experiencing ("epistemological discontinuity in the poetic dimension") & smooth reasoning ("ontological continuity in the prosaic dimension"): as nature abhors a vacuum, logic abhors obstacles to its trajectories. Irony: The West's belief in mind-world consonance (i.e., that we can work-think our way into understanding the world) springs from the Creator-creature ("image of God") paradigm. Unenlightened Enlightenment thinker that he is, Bloom would (to use Aubrey's terms) claim science as prose-FACT & religion as only poetry-FAITH. This prejudice for the commensurable (the language of mathematics) above the affectional (the language of symbolism) has produced a dualistic-fragmented knowledge "gone awry" (to use a Bloomism in another connection). (Huston Smith, in THE SOUL OF CHRISTIANITY [2005], spells out the cultural distortions from this overweighing of the "scientific.")

5 Says Bloom, we're naturally predisposed to belief in the supernatural, but "this predisposition is an incidental by-product of cognitive functioning gone awry." He's "uncomfortable with religion when it makes claims about the natural world, let alone a world beyond nature." And he has company: "a strong majority of atheists and agnostics" among the National Academy of Sciences members. For such, "supernatural beliefs are an anachronism"--so they require "a new theory of why we are religious [italics mine]--one that draws on research in evolutionary biology, cognitive neuroscience, and developmental psychology"--& his article purports to supply just such a theory. The opiate & fraternity theories don't explain religion as "belief in the supernatural."

"Many of the good things in life [as having "no reproductive advantage"] are, from an evolutionary perspective, accidents [as are religion, God]." The new theory sees that "the notion that a distinction between the physical and the psychological is fundamental to human thought.... akin to two distinct computers in a baby's brain," one for physical & the other for "social understanding [which "in some regards might be uniquely human"]." (In autistic children, only the first computer works well.) "Both these systems are biological [!] adaptations...."

6 Adaptations, yes; but "biological" is the materialist's nothing-but fallacy, to bring "the foundations of religion" into captivity to biology: the worlds of objects & minds aren't separate, but they seem so (so we can "envision soulless bodies & bodiless souls"). This helps explain why we believe in gods and an afterlife." And since our minds infer "goals and desires where none exist [? another materialist dogma]," we're "animists and creationists."

Much of what Bloom is announcing as new findings are in the century-old archives of Geo. Herbert Mead, & his explanation of the objects/minds worlds is inferior to the 1925 account in Buber's ICH UND DU (Englished as "I and Thou"), lectures to grade-school teachers. Further, neither Mead nor Buber constricts reality to materiality--a constriction ripping away the foundations for ethical living. But as from biblical religion Sagan smuggles optimism into an indifferent metaphysics, Bloom smuggles ethics into one psycho-computer vis-a-vis another: "a moral difference.... a rock cannot be evil or kind; a person can."

7 Bloom's antisupernatural prejudice appears in his exclusion of God from the category of the "many good things in life" that are, like belief in God, accidents. He accepts the old facts/values distinction (for which he credits Stephen Jay Gould), but "God" as an illusion can't fit into the category of "values." And how can the NT be "notoriously unclear about the afterlife" when it's (Jn. Paul II says) "being in relation to God"? He & I agree that religion is natural, to be refined (I say, by revelation) or (he says) eliminated as illusion. The psycho-computer, by divine design, gives us humans the potential for understanding divine revelation (vision/audition/incarnation/resurrection).