

## THE SUSPECT

Bruce C. Gridley, Grove City College

God is dead. I have been in contact with the theologians conducting the autopsy. They are unable to determine the precise time of death, but they have said it was a slow agonizing one. I am here to find out how it happened. It seems incomprehensible that He could have died so quickly after such a long period of reverent service. It was your society which proclaimed that it was in God you trusted. Less than two centuries ago the first of the Americans said that He was the source of their rights. But somehow those words in the Declaration of Independence didn't seem to apply, and the phrase, "In God We Trust," became no more than an embellishment on a coin. I believe the suspect I want is in this room. We must understand that he is not the type of person to confess, for by in large he doesn't even know that he committed a crime. We must bring him to realization of what he has done, for he may not have intended that to happen. In his ignorance something might have occurred, the results of which he couldn't possibly have known.

Let me reconstruct for you the crime, show you how I think it happened. Then if there are any confessions or some wish to make corrections, we will know the direction to take.

The motive for the crime was formed a long time ago. When that first man, a million years in the past stood up and said, "I can think." That is when the affair began. He started asking questions and forming answers, and as he formed answers, more questions appeared. Finally he came to the question of his existence, "What is this object I call myself?" He thought that he was very pitiful. This man couldn't believe that he was the ultimate creation. With all his misery and short-comings he would not accept that this was the epitome of existence. His mind was very heavy with the burden. And then it came to him that there might be something beyond--something to which he could aspire. A God! Man experimented with many sorts of gods. He made them gold, he made them flesh. He made them cruel, he made them kind. He made the present and he made them distant. Soon he discovered that in his excitement to find God, he had made so many, that he couldn't be certain which one was true. Some went in one direction, some in another. There was no uniformity. Thus the certitude of dogma was demanded. It says, "This is the true God, you shall worship no other." Man was never certain what gave some power to write dogma; it was assumed that they knew the answers. Its truth was accepted through a sacrifice of mind in order to gain the assurances of faith.

With the coming of a new age, man again began to question--Dogma was no longer sufficient, for its source was secular and corrupted. There was an attempt to re-examine and rejustify. As humanity gained new confidence in itself, shackles were thrown off. There was a feeling that with the power of his mind, each could determine the precise character of God. Montaigne, the sixteenth century philosopher believed that the fixed universal truth as preached by Christianity had no existence, for "in another country, other testimonies, equal promises, like menaces would imprint a contrary religion in us."

Was the life of God nothing but the conception of the human mind? The breaching of this question alone was not enough to destroy faith--although man was impressed with the advancement of his own wisdom, the necessity for God was present. There were many areas in which man was deficient. He was still suffering from unsatisfied wants. He was still awed by an unknown universe. He was still depressed by his own decadence. Nowhere could he find solutions for these problems in the promise of God for a better time to come. He believed that all the repugnance of this present world would be eliminated in a future world of divine making.

The lethal attacks upon God have come in this era. Ours is an age of abundance and leisure. This is the twentieth century with all its steel, wheat, nylon, dacron, rayon, coal, the forty-hour work week and Sunday football games. Survival is no longer the question. We can allow ourselves to purchase for pleasure and for status. And as for leisure we are able to spend more money on baseball than anyone ever thought of giving to charity. Our nation does not have to suffer because of unsatisfied wants. Every material thing we need is ours and a good many things we don't need. The promise of God for sweet manna from heaven doesn't seem to have any pertinence. This, the first appeal of God was buried in an avalanche



of goods from our own production.

The second appeal was created by the vast area of unknown. Those things which were not understood were placed in the category of beyond understanding--objects of faith. As knowledge of science grew, a formerly limitless God was constricted to conform with the physical laws. When it was perceived that the world wasn't directed by the whim of God, that there was a predictability which occurred without divine interference, some couldn't see that the world had ever been directed. Order was not created, but innate in the composition of matter. These same people believe that if there was an order they didn't understand, given time the scientists would discover how it happened. The universe lost its mystery and was delineated into chemical formulas and mathematical equations.

Man could at last be announced as master of the material and epistemological world. There was only one source of continual disappointment, himself. He could not declare independence while his mind was captive to self-generated depravity. This was the greatest tyranny possible, disgust with his own person. As long as he believed in imperfection, the perfectness of God was an attraction.

There had been talk for a long time about perfect societies creating perfect men. Plato and his Republic, Sir Thomas More and his Utopia were examples of this type of thought. These imaginative societies seemed too remote from the nature of people to expect that they could ever result.

There was a universal belief in all these Utopian movements that it was possible to alter the nature of men. It wasn't until this century, however, that the idea of environmental psychology gained general acceptance. If there was something despicable about humans, it was only the result of what had been in their life before. By giving them a new insight, we could make them new people. By changing the environment in which people mature, we may look for a day when bigotry will be eliminated, crime will disappear and humanity will move into a new era of perfection. Finally, man was made master of himself. He assumed all the characteristics of gods, and the world in which he lived was like to a heaven.

The migration from God began. His existence simply wasn't relevant. All the things which a divine being could promise were within the capabilities of humans, themselves. Reliance upon God was transferred to reliance upon man. God died for lack of the sustaining force of faith; the authorities revealed the cause of death as starvation of society's soul.

Who killed God? I did, in as much as I rely upon my mind, think that I create wealth, as much as I accept science, and believe that I can be perfected; I am guilty. However, I cannot be accused alone. I learned from what I had observed in others. I am a product of your society and a follower of your ways. My crime was aided and abetted by the world in which I live. If I am guilty, then a share of the guilt is yours also, in as much as you gave me confidence of thought, abundance of wealth, a belief that all things are knowable and a sense of perfection.

Whether right or wrong, I do not know,  
But of this much I am certain  
We must accept the fate, the guilt is ours  
Perhaps in death we will know the answer.