

IS MAN HIS OWN GOD?*

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Currently making the rounds on American college campuses is the question, "How are you going to recognize God when you get to heaven?" Answer: "By the big 'G' on his sweatshirt." This litany has more metaphysical profundity than meets the eye, for it reflects the contemporary philosophical dilemma as to the meaningfulness of God-language—a dilemma to which we shall be addressing ourselves shortly. But it is essential to make one basic point at the very outset: in the philosophy of life of every person without exception, someone or something is invested with the sweatshirt lettered "G." There are no atheists; everyone has his god. In the language of Paul Tillich (who was ironically called an atheist by some of his less perceptive critics), all of us have our "ultimate concerns," and the sad thing is that so few of them are truly ultimate or worthy of worship. As one of William James' "twice-born" (having come to Christian belief as an adult), I am especially concerned that idols be properly identified and the true owner of the cosmic sweatshirt wear it. As a modest contribution to that end, we shall first consider how much ultimacy ought to be attributed to three prominent alternatives to biblical theism, and then devote ourselves to the crucial arguments in behalf of the Christian view of God.

THE UNREALITY OF MAJOR NON-THEISTIC POSITIONS

Pantheism a la Spinoza

I recall but one occasion when my old Greek professor at Cornell was drawn into a religious discussion, and—in a state of obvious discomfort—he defended his unorthodoxy somewhat as follows: "But do not conclude that I am an atheist. Far from it. For me the universe as a whole, with all its mystery, is God, and I reverence it." This viewpoint (which can, of course, be stated in many different ways) has perhaps best been set forth and defended by Spinoza. In Part One of his *Ethics*, the philosopher endeavors to show that the universe is a single, all-embracing unity and that that unity is God. This is proved by the fact that the universe obviously consists of some thing—Spinoza calls it Substance—and this Substance "is in itself and is conceived through itself"; now since God is properly defined as "a being absolutely infinite" and Substance is infinite and unique, it follows that Substance is God.

The fallacy in this piece of geometrically-modeled legerdemain has been well stated by C. E. M. Joad in his *Guide to Philosophy*: "If we

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assume that Substance in the original definition means simply 'all that there is,' then the initial definition contains within itself the conclusion. Such a conclusion is not worth proving. It is, indeed, merely a tautology—that is to say, an asserting of the same thing in two different ways." Pantheism, in other words (and this applies equally to all forms of it, whether derived from Spinoza or not), is neither true nor false; it is something much worse, viz., entirely trivial. We had little doubt that the universe was here anyway; by giving it a new name ("God") we explain nothing. We actually commit the venerable intellectual sin of Word Magic, wherein the naming of something is supposed to give added power either to the thing named or to the semantic magician himself.

Humanism

If the universe cannot be meaningfully deified, why not man himself? Can we not regard as strictly literal the question posed in the title of this presentation, "Is Man His Own God?" and answer it affirmatively? For the humanist, man is himself the proper "ultimate concern," and human values are the only eternal verities.

But which "human values" do we mean? Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict have discovered a most bewildering variety of human value systems, styles of life, and ethical norms. And what is worse, these morals and mores are often entirely incompatible. Some people reverence their parents and others eat them. Among cannibals it is doubtless both good ethics and good table manners to clean your plate.

How is the humanist going to decide among these competing value systems? He has no absolute vantage point from which to view the ethical battle in the human arena. He is in the arena himself; or, to use beatnik poet Kerouac's expression, he is "on the road"—not in a house by the side of the road where he can watch the world go by and arbitrate it. All value systems that arise from within the human context are necessarily conditioned by it and are therefore relative. Out of flux, nothing but flux. As Wittgenstein correctly observed in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. . . . Ethics is transcendental."

Yet a transcendental perspective is exactly what the humanist does not have. He is therefore left to *consensus gentium* (majority values), cultural totalitarianism (the values of one's own society) or sheer authoritarianism (*my* values, not yours). But, sad to say, fifty million Frenchmen *can* be wrong; the ethical perspective of an entire society can be cruelly *immoral*; and the individual who considers himself the true barometer to moral worth may simply be suffering from overactive glands or an advanced stage of messianic complex.

To establish absolute ethical values for human action is both logically and practically impossible apart from transcendence. To move the world

Achimedes rightly noted that he would need a fulcrum outside the world. The assassination of biblical revelation in the 18th century left man without a clear conception of or confidence in God, and God's resultant death in the 19th century (in the work of Nietzsche and others) set the stage for the dehumanization of man in the 20th. Nietzsche recognized full well that apart from God only man remains to establish his own value; and the stronger has every right under such conditions to impose his self-centered value system on the weaker—and eliminate him if he does not learn his lessons well. The anti-Semitism of the deists of the 18th century Enlightenment (as definitely researched by Arthur Hertzberg in his 1968 publication, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*), the Nietzschean transvaluation of values, will-to-power, and antichristic treatment of the weak, and the National Socialist extermination of racial and political minorities demonstrate only too clearly what happens when man becomes the measure of all things. It is curious that humanists presently (and commendably) striving for racial equality in this country do not ask themselves why, in any absolute sense, their goals are more justifiable than the genocide practiced by an equally passionate and idealistic generation of young people in the Germany of the 1930's and 1940's. As for me, I'm for absolute racial justice, and I'm unwilling to see it—or any comparable value—left at the mercy of relativistic humanism. If man is his own god, then religion is *really* in trouble. Personally, I'd be willing to join a Man-is-dead movement!

Agnosticism

High on the popularity poll of non-theistic ultimate concerns today is agnosticism. What is seldom recognized, however, by either its advocates or its opponents, is that the term agnosticism embraces two very different positions. The first might be called "hard-boiled" agnosticism: "I know that I am unable to know that there is a God"; the second, "soft-boiled" agnosticism: "I am not sure whether knowledge of God is possible."

Little time should be spent on hard-boiled agnosticism, since it is tantamount to traditional atheism, and suffers from its basic fallacy: it presumes that one can (apart from any revelation of God, to be sure!) know the universe so well that one can assert the non-existence of God or the non-existence of compelling evidence for his existence. But such comprehensive knowledge of the universe would require either (a) revelation, which is excluded on principle, or (b) divine powers of observation on the part of the atheist or hard-boiled agnostic. In the latter case, atheism and the extreme agnostic position become self-defeating, since the unbeliever perforce creates a god by deifying himself.

As for soft-boiled agnosticism, it is highly commendable *if actually practiced* (which is very seldom). A genuine agnostic of this school will of course bend every effort to see whether in fact evidence does exist in behalf of theistic claims. His view of the universe is open-ended; he is a

passionate seeker for truth; and he recognizes that his best energies must be put to this quest, since one's happiness in this world, to say nothing about one's eternal destiny in the next, is directly at stake if God in fact exists and makes demands on his creatures. The true agnostic, then, might be thought of as a person in this room who was not sure whether or not to believe a report that a bomb was planted in the building and would go off in two hours. Because of the cruciality of the *possibility*, he would not sit here in blase indifference (the usual agnostic posture), but would clear the room and engage in a most diligent search of the premises to determine whether concrete evidence supported the claim or not.

It is now our task to perform a brief, but hopefully constructive, check of the universal premises to see if divine power is there revealed.

THE REALITY OF THE BIBLICAL GOD

Where to look for the footprints of Deity? Virtually anywhere but in the arguments of some modern theologians, clerics, and mystics, of whom it might well be said: "With friends like that God doesn't need any enemies." I refer, for example, to those Anglican canons who parachuted from the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, to "bring the young people back to the church" (eliciting the remark in *Esquire* magazine: "If God isn't dead, maybe he wishes he were"); or the Protestant-Roman Catholic-Jewish death-of-God school; or Aldous Huxley's World Controller, who declared in *Brave New World* that God now "manifests himself as an absence; as though he weren't there at all." Once having stated this small *caveat*, however, not even the sky is the evidential limit. As Jacques Maritain so well expressed it in *Approaches to God*: "There is not just one way to God, as there is to an oasis across the desert or to a new mathematical idea across the breadth of the science of number. For man there are as many ways of approach to God as there are wanderings on the earth or paths to his own heart." We shall consider four such pathways.

God and the World

In his famous 1948 BBC debate with Bertrand Russell, the great historian of philosophy F. C. Copleston succinctly stated the fundamental "argument from contingency" for God's existence:

First of all, I should say, we know that there are at least some beings in the world which do not contain in themselves the reason for their existence. For example, I depend on my parents, and now on the air, and on food, and so on. Now, secondly, the world is simply the real or imagined totality or aggregate of individual objects, none of which contain in themselves alone the reason for their existence. There isn't any world distinct from the objects which form it, any more than the human race is something apart from the members. Therefore, I should say, since objects or events exist, and since no object of experience

contains within itself the reason of its existence, this reason, the totality of objects, must have a reason external to itself. That reason must be an existent being. Well, this being is either itself the reason for its own existence, or it is not. If it is, well and good. If it is not, then we must proceed farther. But if we proceed to infinity in that sense, then there's no explanation of existence at all. So, I should say, in order to explain existence, we must come to a being which contains within itself the reason for its own existence, that is to say, which cannot not-exist.

This argument is not only regarded by most philosophical advocates of theism as the keystone of the so-called "classic proofs" of God's existence; it is today reinforced by a most impressive battery of evidence from the physical sciences. For example (one may on the point consult the engineering publications of University of Michigan professor Gordon J. Van Wylen), the second law of thermodynamics states that for irreversible processes in any closed system left to itself, the entropy (loss of available heat energy) will increase with time; thus the universe, viewed as such a system, is moving to the condition of maximum entropy (heat death); *but* (and this is the significant aspect of the matter for our purposes) if the irreversible process had begun an infinite time ago—if, in other words, the universe were uncreated and eternal—the earth would *already* have reached maximum entropy; and since this is not the case, we are driven to the conclusion that the universe is indeed contingent and finite, and requires a creative force from the outside to have brought it into existence.

It should be carefully noted that this *a posteriori* argument from contingency is empirically grounded in testable experience; it is neither a disguised form of the highly questionable ontological argument, which asserts *a priori* that God's essence establishes his existence, nor an attempt at allegedly "synthetic *a priori*" reasoning. And unlike the "casual argument," it does not gratuitously presuppose an unalterable cause-and-effect structure in the universe (a very doubtful assumption in light of Einsteinian physics and the Heisenberg uncertainty principle which requires us to give serious consideration to all event-claims, even those "miraculously uncaused").

But what about the standard rebuttal: "You just beg the question; now tell us why God exists"? Though this question evidently started Bertrand Russell on the downhill slide into intellectual anticlericalism at an early age, it is not especially profound. We have just seen some of the evidence for the contingency of the universe we live in; to regard this world as eternal is out of the question. But to regard its creator as likewise contingent ("Who created *him*?") *would* beg the question, for it would force us to pose the very same query again—and again. Only by stopping with a God who is the final answer to the series do we *avoid* begging the question—and only then do we offer any adequate account for the contingent universe with which we began. Moreover, the "why

God?" question suffers an acute case both of artificiality and of absurdity, as philosopher Plantinga has shown in his essay on "Necessary Being" (in his *Faith and Philosophy* [1964]):

We should note that the question "Why does God exist?" never does, in fact, arise. Those who do not believe that God exists will not, of course, ask *why* He exists. But neither do believers ask that question. Outside of theism, so to speak, the question is nonsensical, and inside of theism, the question is never asked. . . .

Now it becomes clear that it is absurd to ask why God exists. To ask that question is to presuppose that God does exist; but it is a necessary truth that if He does, He has no cause. And it is also a necessary truth that if He has no cause, then there is no answer to a question asking for His causal conditions. The question "Why does God exist?" is, therefore, an absurdity.

God and Personhood

Robert Benchley tells of the disastrous college biology course in which he spent the term meticulously drawing in his lab manual the image of his own eyelash as it fell across the microscopic field. The catastrophe occurred because he lost track of the necessary distinction between himself as subject (his subjectivity) and the external object to be observed (the objectivity of the outside world). Such results and others no less dire are inevitable when one engages in what Whitehead well termed "extreme objectivism"—an objectivism which even objectifies the subject. A person is an "irreducible I": he can never be fully comprehended as an object. No matter how complete a list you make of your own characteristics—or of the characteristics of that stunning coed you are dating—you and the coed *transcend* the list. Persons are grounded in the clay of the contingent world we discussed above, but at the same time they transcend it; human personhood warrants the designation "semi-transcendent." This semi-transcendent, irreducible character of the human person is the quality that has escaped (and logically must escape) the behaviorist who always treats his subjects as objects; it is to the credit of contemporary psychological (especially psychoanalytic) thought that efforts are now made to get beyond such hyper-objectivism. Indeed, in those cases where human subjectivity and freewill are consistently denied, the deterministic objectivist loses all right to claim volitional action and purpose as an experimenter. His refusal to recognize the "semi-transcendent "I" finally results in his own epistemological evaporation.

Now, as philosophical theologians such as Ian Ramsey have shown in considerable detail in recent years, the partial transcendence of the human subject establishes both the possibility of metaphysical assertions and the legitimacy of God-language. We cannot meaningfully talk about the universe around us without presupposing our own subjectivity, and

the partial transcendence we possess demands an unqualifiedly transcendent integrating subjectivity to make it meaningful. As Ramsey puts it in an essay in his *Prospect for Metaphysics* (1961): "Just as 'I' acts as an integrator word for all kinds of scientific and other descriptive assertions about myself, 'I exist' being a sort of conceptual presupposition for them all, so also may 'God' be regarded as a contextual presupposition for the Universe."

This perspective sheds considerable light on two fundamental problems raised by theistic belief: the existence of evil and the question of meaningful God-talk (the problem of the "sweatshirt," as alluded to at the outset of this presentation). Opponents of theism have perennially argued that the natural and moral evils in the universe make the idea of an omnipotent and perfectly good God irrational. But if subjectivity (and its correlative, freewill) must be presupposed on the level of human action, and if God's character as fully transcendent divine Subject serves to make human volition meaningful, then the existence of freewill in itself provides a legitimate explanation of evil. To create personalities without genuine freewill would not have been to create persons at all; and freewill means the genuine possibility of wrong decision, i.e., the creation of evil by God's creatures (whether wide-ranging natural and moral evil by fallen angels or limited chaos on earth by fallen mankind). As for the argument that a good God should have created only those things he would foresee as choosing the right—or that he could certainly eliminate the effects of his creatures' evil decisions, the obvious answer is (as Plantinga develops it with great logical rigor in his *God and Other Minds* [1967]) that this would be tantamount to not giving freewill at all. To create only those who "must" (in any sense) choose good is to create automata; and to whisk away evil effects as they are produced is to whisk away evil itself, for an act and its consequences are bound together. C. S. Lewis has noted that God's love enters into this issue as well, since the biblical God created man out of love, and genuine human love is impossible without freewill—without the free possibility of accepting love or rejecting it. Just as a boy who offers himself and his love to a girl must count on the real possibility of rejection, so when God originated a creative work that made genuine love possible, it by definition entailed the concomitant possibility of the evil rejection of his love by his creatures.

By the "sweatshirt" problem we refer to an objection to theism posed by such analytical philosophers as Kai Nielsen and Antony Flew, who claim that God's very uniqueness makes it irrational to say anything about him: since, in the absence of any perfect analogy, he must always be described in negativities, God-talk becomes totally meaningless. The sweatshirt with the big "G," we are told, is necessarily empty. But again note how the understanding of God as a transcendent integrating Subject in relation to semi-transcendent human subjects clears the air. Human persons are *likewise* unique—no person is just like another, and the very

meaning of "subject" and individual "freewill" entails this irreducible uniqueness. To call God-talk meaningless, then, is at the same time to render man-talk nonsensical! Conversely, if we once accept what is involved in the concept of human subjective existence (and how can we avoid it?) then we simultaneously open the gate to meaningful God-talk. As Ramsey neatly suggests, "We might perhaps then say that we are as certain of God as we are of ourselves."

However, it would be conceding far too much if we were to allow that talk about God involves only negatives—the so-called "death by a thousand qualifications." Here we find ourselves immediately drawn into discussion of

God in Christ

The following parable, formulated by philosophers Flew and Wisdom, is a good statement of the view that God-claims are too vague to be sensible and offer no adequate empirical evidence in their behalf:

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, "Some gardener must tend this plot." The other disagrees, "There is no gardener." So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. "But perhaps he is an invisible gardener." So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. "But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." At last the Sceptic despairs, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?"

This parable may echo the religious claims of many sincere people, but it has little to do with the Christian affirmation of God. Why? Because central to the Christian position is the historically grounded assertion that *the Gardener entered the garden*: God actually appeared in the empirical world in Jesus Christ and fully manifested his deity through miraculous acts in general and his resurrection from the dead in particular. Christian talk about God therefore becomes in the most rigorous sense affirmative, for when asked to "define God" or "tell us what he looks like," the Christian simply points to Christ. Dr. Jowett was supposed to have been asked by an effusive young lady, "Do tell me—what do you think about God?" and his reply was: "That, my dear young lady,

is a very unimportant question; the only thing that signifies is what he thinks about me." The Christian knows that God thinks about him—and the human race; he knows what God's eternal value system is (and how desperately the human race needs that knowledge, as we saw in our discussion of humanism!); and he knows that in spite of man's self-centered trampling of God's values, God's love has reached down to earth. How does he know this? Because God tells him this in Christ.

Now it cannot be stressed too strongly that this claim to divine intervention in history is solidly grounded in historical evidence. The textual case for the New Testament documents which record Christ's divine utterances and acts is so excellent that Sir Fredric C. Kenyon, director and principal librarian of the British Museum, could write in 1940 in *The Bible and Archaeology*: "Both the *authenticity* and the *general integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established" (Kenyon's italics). The world's foremost living biblical archeologist, W. F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University, has identified the New Testament materials as primary source documents for the life of Jesus, dating all of them (including John's Gospel) "between the forties and the eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between about 50 and 75 A.D.)" (interview in *Christianity Today*, January 18, 1963). The New Testament writers claim eyewitness contact with the events of Jesus' career, and describe his death and post-resurrection appearances in minute detail. In A.D. 56, for example, Paul wrote (I Cor. 15) that over five hundred people had seen the risen Jesus and that most were still alive. The New Testament writers explicitly affirm that they are presenting historical facts, not religious fables; writes Peter (II Peter 1:16): "We have not followed cunningly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." And if deception and fabrication were here involved, why didn't the numerous religious enemies of the early Christians blast the whole business? F. F. Bruce of the University of Manchester has shrewdly observed in his book, *The New Testament Documents* (5th ed., 1960), that if the early proclaimers of Christ's deity had had any tendency to depart from the facts, the presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a most powerful corrective.

The central attestation for Jesus' deity is his resurrection, and to deny its facticity isn't easy. To oppose it on historical grounds is so difficult that, if one succeeds, the victory is entirely Pyrrhic: any argument that will impugn the New Testament documents will at the same time remove confidence from virtually all other ancient, and numerous modern, historical sources; the result, then, is a general (and entirely unacceptable) historiographical solipsism. To oppose the resurrection on the ground that miracles do not occur is, as we have noted earlier, both philosophically and scientifically irresponsible: philosophically, because no one below the status of a god could know the universe so well as to

eliminate miracles *a priori*; and scientifically, because in the age of Einsteinian physics (so different from the world of Newtonian absolutes in which Hume formulated his classic anti-miraculous argument) the universe has opened up to all possibilities, "any attempt to state a 'universal law of causation' must prove futile" (logician Max Black), and only a careful consideration of the empirical testimony for a miraculous event can determine whether in fact it has or has not occurred.

Success in opposing the evidence for Christ's resurrection is so hard to come by that some objectors to Christian theism (e.g., humanist Corliss Lamont) are reduced to arguing that the event is trivial. "Even if Christ rose from the dead, would that prove his claims? And would it necessarily mean anything for us?" In a recent public discussion following a lecture I delivered at Roosevelt University, I was informed by a philosophy professor that Christ's conquest of death was no more significant qualitatively than a medical victory over pattern baldness. To which I offered the inevitable reply: "A knock comes at the door. It's the faculty secretary with the message that your wife and children have just been killed in a traffic accident. Your comment would of course be: 'Oh well, what's death? Just like pattern baldness.'" In point of fact, we all recognize the overarching significance of death, and a very large proportion of our individual and societal energies are expended in trying to postpone it (medicine), indirectly overcome it (familial, vocational, and artistic achievement), ignore it (escapist entertainment), or kid ourselves about it (funeral practices). Whether we look to anthropological evidence, psychoanalytic studies (E. Herzog's *Psyche and Death* [1967]), philosophical treatments (Jacques Choron's *Death and Western Thought* [1963]), or literary expressions of the human dilemma (Camus' *La Peste*), the reality of the problem of death for all mankind is displayed with appalling clarity. If Christ did in fact conquer this most basic of all human enemies and claimed on the basis of it to be God incarnate, able to give eternal life to those who believe in him, it would be sheer madness not to take with full seriousness the biblical affirmation that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

God and Human Experience

Contemplation of the centrality of death and man's quest for immortality vis-a-vis the God question leads us quite naturally to a striking new book which treats the existence of God from the standpoint of man's sociological experience. I refer to *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (1969) by Peter Berger, a professor of sociology at the New School for Social Research. Berger argues that such human experiences as hope in the face of death and the conviction that there must be a retribution transcending inadequate human justice for the commission of monstrous evil in this life are most sensibly explained in terms of God's existence. Other analogous empirical pointers to the existence of the transcendent are man's affirmation of societal

ordering (cf. Voegelin's *Order and History*) and unshakeable conviction that such ordering extends to the universe as a whole (cf. the reassurance given mothers to their frightened children since the world began, "Everything is all right"); man's humor, reflecting his basic awareness that a radical discrepancy exists between life as he lives it (in finitude) and life as it ought to be (in transcendent rightness); and man's play experiences—his brief transmigrations out of time into realms where finitude is momentarily transcended:

Some little girls are playing hopscotch in the park. They are completely intent on their game, closed to the world outside it, happy in their concentration. Time has stood still for them—or, more accurately, it has been collapsed into the moments of the game. The outside world has, for the duration of the game, ceased to exist. And, by implication (since the little girls may not be very conscious of this), pain and death, which are the law of that world, have also ceased to exist. Even the adult observer of this scene, who is perhaps all too conscious of pain and death, is momentarily drawn into the beatific immunity.

In the playing of adults, at least on certain occasions, the suspension of time and of the "serious" world in which people suffer and die becomes explicit. Just before the Soviet troops occupied Vienna in 1945, the Vienna Philharmonic gave one of its scheduled concerts. There was fighting in the immediate proximity of the city, and the concertgoers could hear the rumbling of the guns in the distance. . . . It was. . . an affirmation of the ultimate triumph of all human gestures of creative beauty over the gestures of destruction, and even over the ugliness of war and death. . . .

All men have experienced the deathlessness of childhood and we may assume that, even if only once or twice, all men have experienced transcendent joy in adulthood. Under the aspect of inductive faith, religion is the final vindication of childhood and of joy, and of all gestures that replicate these.

Professor Berger's arguments carry us from the lowlands of sociology to the heights of philosophical ontology, for they conjoin with a very important passage in Norman Malcolm's classic essay on Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence (*Philosophical Review*, January, 1960). Asks Malcolm: Why have human beings formed the concept of "a being a greater than which cannot be conceived"? This is his suggested answer, based, as are Berger's arguments, on "an understanding of the phenomena of human life":

There is the phenomenon of feeling guilt for something that one has done or thought or felt or for a disposition that one has. One wants to be free of this guilt. But sometimes the guilt is

felt to be so great that one is sure that nothing one could do oneself, nor any forgiveness by another human being, would remove it. One feels a guilt that is beyond all measure, a guilt "a greater than which cannot be conceived." Paradoxically, it would seem, one nevertheless has an intense desire to have this incomparable guilt removed. One requires a forgiveness that is beyond all measure, a forgiveness "a greater than which cannot be conceived." Out of such a storm in the soul, I am suggesting, there arises the conception of a forgiving mercy that is limitless, beyond all measure.

The experiences of death, judgment, order, humor, play, and guilt point beyond themselves—as does the very "I" who is conscious of them—and the direction of the signpost is to a Cross where the transcendent God offered "forgiving mercy that is limitless, beyond all measure." In the words of the Apostle (Rom. 4:25), he was "delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." Is man his own God? No, for man could never attain such limitless mercy. But God became man to offer that mercy, which no one could buy at any price, as a free gift. The evidence of God's existence and of his gift is more than compelling, but those who insist that they have no need of him or it will always find ways to discount the offer. As Pascal tranchantly observed (*Pensees*, No. 430): "Il y a assez de lumiere pour ceux qui ne desirent que de voir, et assez d'obscurite pour ceux qui ont une disposition contraire." This statement is, of course, but a corollary of Jesus' words (Mt. 9:13; 18:3): "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."



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