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The World is Enough

A pantheism without god



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Inhoud

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1. A SHORT NEW HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Before the beginning of Times, there reigned a Supreme Serenity, a Total Harmony, A Sleep as deep and heavy as a thousand Layers of Clouds filled with Down, a Nirvana beyond Disturbance, a Positive Nothingness, an Equilibrium exhaling a Frosty Calmness, a Deadly Inertia, a robust Prison full of Solidified Energy.

But then, still at the moment when neither time nor space existed, for an unknown cause or reason, an infinitely small shiver took place and the Positive Nothingness started to tremble. First, slightly, nearly unnoticeable. Later on, cracks started to show and became bigger, more vigorous, aggressive, and untamed. And in that same Inexistence of Time the Supreme Serenity was torn apart, the Equilibrium collapsed, and the Total Harmony exploded.

Once the Sleeping Beauty was kissed to Life, a ruthless descent into complexity, an orgy of ever more differentiation, set in. From Pandora's Box an army of angels and demons was released, along with other species that would or would not survive these turbulent times. Like genies escaping from teapots, rusty oil lamps, or coffee cans; like devils diving out of Holy Water, an immense variety of Life lit up the darkness. Energy escaped like prisoners from a jail and like rivers from mountain tops. Life emerged, sometimes wild and impetuous, sometimes careful and searching.

A special kind of creature, mankind, discovered the power of reason. Mankind learned to look into nature and to unravel the interdependencies through time and space between things, plants, and animals. Man learned to transform nature to make it a more comfortable place.

But mankind became confused by the power of reason. Like a spider caught in its own web, mankind weaved theories of Essences and Immortality and Infinity and Souls and God and Good and Evil, Meaning and Purpose, to find out, much too late, that he was lost in a

forest of Nonsense and had lost track of his Inner sparkling Fountain of Creativity and Freedom.

And reason appeared so powerful that it not only learned to dominate and domesticate nature, its plants and animals, its fire, and its water, but man also learned to develop weapons able to destroy whole cities in a flash of a second and woke up suddenly understanding that he was destroying his own atmosphere. Man was reminded that if he did not care about himself, Nature would certainly care even less. Man realized he had become the greatest threat to his own existence.

2. INTRODUCTION

Atheism is the rejection of the belief that God exists. It is a statement of fact, a cognitive matter. Some people will link this conviction to a moral dimension. They conclude that the absence of God implies the absence of a Larger Meaning, Purpose, or Plan and conclude that therefore life is absurd and the road is open for decadents, perverts, and nihilists. Others agree that there is a moral consequence but see a positive side: they see human freedom, opportunities to explore and responsibilities to take. Life for them is full of promises and dreams to pursue. The link between the cognitive and moral axes of atheism is thus generally acknowledged but elaborated in opposite directions.

This book believes that the concept of atheism should be enriched with a third axis: a *sentimental* one¹. Atheists, like all human beings, have a basic experience of their human condition. They look at the universe with a fascination that is not eroded by science but rather brought to a higher level. And they marvel with awe at the continuous process of creation and destruction. These core human experiences are not washed away by science but are mostly underdeveloped and, to a certain degree, monopolized by religious thinking. This book wants to help with the development of such sentimental layer as a third dimension of atheism.



Some people claim that religiosity is part of human nature and that all humans are therefore religious. They are wrong.

All people experience reality as a creative life-giving process: when the sun rises, in spring, when nature comes to life, when the rain kisses the dry land to life, and when a child is born. People feel that they originate from nature, fit into it and belong to it.

¹ Take note that we chose the word 'sentimental' instead of 'spiritual' because 'spiritual' is already tainted too much by religious thinking.

At the same time all people experience reality as a life-destroying force: when night falls, when winter comes, when someone dies, or when a storm ravages the land. People feel that, although they originate in nature, nature in the end does not really care about their well-being.

And all people experience the universe or some individual events as fascinating, mysterious, or miraculous.

The combination of the three feelings - the experience of the creative process, of the destructive process and of fascination with the mystery - we call awe. And this feeling is human, not religious.

The feeling of awe only became religious when reason extracted and invented the Creative and the Destructive as a separate entity from reality and bestowed this Entity both with person-like and abstract characteristics. The entity is thought to have a will of its own, which is the source of a moral order and of a sense of purpose in the universe. At the same time, the Entity is thought of as Absolute, Infinite and Eternal, all constructs from a derailed reason. And when the feeling of awe is replaced by a belief in an absolute person, the believers try to communicate with that person via prayers and rituals and to seduce it with sacrifices.

Religious people rejoice in their transformation from free people into creatures of duty. They become hollow people without attention to their internal compass and submit themselves to presumed sacred codes imposed by the Absolute Person – God. They give up freedom and opportunity and start searching for meaning or purpose imposed by God.

Religion holds back nature and man and it does so in four important ways:

- At a conceptual level, it extracts the dynamic forces from nature and represents nature as dumb matter.
- It claims to explain the mystery of the world by introducing a word of three letters: “God.”
- At a moral level, it preaches submission to God and thereby robs man of his freedom.
- Life on Earth is devalued, and submission in this life is rewarded with a life after death.

In this book, we lay the foundations to break away from this religious negativity. The following steps are essential:

- 1) We have to restate our key feelings versus the universe in their authentic form. We should be aware that such recognition and this sensitivity for the awe-full do not in any way contradict our science-mindedness. It complements it.
- 2) In parallel, we have to understand how reason has created the Concept of a God or a Spirit by emptying nature, by robbing the cosmos, and by immobilizing matter. And we have to de-substantiate, de-reify, de-essentialize, and de-hypostasize concepts like gods and souls, the good and the bad and thereby return all powers to the heart of nature itself.
- 3) We have to recognize that processes of reductionism in early Newtonian mechanistic science had the same effect as reductionist processes in religion. We have to learn that modern science, that replaced Newtonian science, no longer destroys the mystery but enriches it by describing events at a deeper level. Modern science moves away from the mechanistic early starter and becomes a science of the ever-changing, the complex, and the varied.

- 4) The struggle between the reductionist approach and the life-friendly naturalistic approach can also be seen in the arts, starting with the romantic movement, which resisted both the hierarchical structures of the past and the mechanistic and hyper-rational paradigm of the Enlightenment.
- 5) The deconstruction of religion restores the authentic position of man as a free person and stresses life as an opportunity rather than as a servitude or an absurdity. After centuries of submission, some people still need time to find an inner compass. They experience absurdity and do not yet see opportunity. They are afraid to lose their religion because they do not immediately find an inner compass.
- 6) The “pagan” view unmaskes the ideas of eternal life and immortality as derailments of reason. We have to accept mortality and finitude as key elements of life. This world is the only one. There is no afterlife. “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”, is the deepest truth to be found in the Bible.



This book has been written in the first place for religious people who struggle with their faith but hesitate to jump to disbelief because they do not want to lose all spirituality and because they experience a kind of allergic reaction to a cold, sterile, and reductionist science that sits at the center of disbelief. An important focus of this book lies on demonstrating how modern science opens a view of the world that is much richer and more promising than the old, arid views offered by religion and by mechanistic Newtonian science. And that to embrace the view of the world as offered by modern science can be perfectly

combined with a profound fascination for the combination of destructive and constructive forces in nature. Our ambition is to make disbelief attractive rather than demonstrate the weaknesses of belief.

Of course, these points might also help already-convinced atheists to deepen the roots of their disbelief by adding or strengthening the sentimental dimension of their experience of the universe. We can ask ourselves if such a raw experience of the universe, an experience not polluted by religious terms, can even be the foundation of disbelief and not just a branch of it. Maybe some atheists will have an immediate negative reaction to our proposal because some generations of atheists have stressed specifically the rationality of atheism against the irrationality of the different religions. Defending a sentimental branch for atheism breaches that clear dividing line. I hope that this book is able to convince them that atheism can become stronger and more appealing by embracing such a sentimental dimension.

The second audience for whom the book is written are people who are religious and consider themselves rational. With them, a rational discussion should be possible. And it should be possible to convince them that 'the hypothesis God' does not add any value in a world approached with a scientific method. They are right that atheists cannot prove that God does not exist, but neither can atheists (or believers) prove that Dwanasagar, Rheiskar, Valtiker, Smartikan, Vurabitin, or Semurafidim do not exist. They are all, God included, irrelevant for our understanding and feeling of the world.

A third category has to decide for themselves whether this book can be useful or not: the ones who believe that there exists a rationality next to the empirical approach, the approach that builds on the stubborn and hard facts delivered to us by the senses. I consider this category to be irrational: they have no epistemology that explains how you can

gather facts outside of an empirical approach. A theologian might claim that there is a core of truth in the emotions we experience, but these cannot be shared intersubjectively; such experiences cannot be a solid basis for another kind of knowledge. I am looking forward to a theologian who develops a sound methodology to build and validate knowledge next to, and independent of the scientific approach.

The book is not written for believers who do not have the ambition to be rational, or worse, who demonstrate some pride in their lack of rationalism. We cannot have meaningful discussions with adepts of the “Credo quia absurdum” (I believe because it is absurd) nor with those modern theologians who realize that religion and science cannot be reconciled, that science can never be the proper foundation of a religion, and therefore put forward “courage” as the basis for their belief.

