

Issue 1:

Discussion of Omar Khayyam and Thomas Hobbes on atheism.

January 14, 2010

- What follows is a synopsis of the author's philosophy on the existence of God. My comments are in bold.

Omar Khayyam (1048 - 1131), a writer, astronomer, and mathematician.

From Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

He clearly doubted that God had revealed himself to some men and not to others, especially in light of the very obvious fact that those who claimed to interpret the revelation were fond of using their claim in order to acquire and wield power over others in this world.

"To all of us the thought of heaven is dear - why not be sure of it and make it here...Men talk of heaven, there is no heaven but here...No agony of any mortal brain shall wrest the secret of the life of man; the search has taught me that the search is vain."

"If Allah be, He keeps His secret well...Shall I not piously believe that I am kept in darkness by the heavenly will?..."

The Koran: "And do you think that unto such as you, a maggot-minded, starved, fanatic crew, God save the Secret, and denied it to me?"

"Did God set grapes a-growing, do you think, And at the same time make it sin to drink?"

There is no reference in the Bible indicating it is a sin to drink. Gluttony is a sin, so overindulgence is what is not permitted. Addiction should be avoided. Even Jesus said to drink wine as a symbol of his blood.

Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679), an English philosopher, particularly concerned with politics.

"Of Religion" From *Leviathan*

"Seeing there are no signs, for fruit of religion, but in man only...the seed of religion is also only in man...not to be found in any other living creatures."

How would we know about other living creatures? We can't communicate with them!

"And first, it is peculiar to the nature of man, to be inquisitive into the causes of the events they see, some more, some less; but all men so much, as to be curious in the search of the causes of their own good and evil fortune."

He is implying that man is looking to a supernatural source for their lot in life.

"When he cannot assure himself of the true cause of things (for the causes of good and evil fortune for the most part are invisible), he supposes causes of them, either such as his own fancy suggesteth; or trusteth the authority of other men."

But atheists believe they are in charge of their fortune by their actions, so someone's lot in life is not from an "invisible" source, according to them.

Some of the old poets said that the gods were at first created by human fear...the acknowledgement of one God, from the desire men have to know the causes of natural bodies..."

"...therefore from the like things past, they expect like things to come; and hope for good or evil luck, superstitiously, from things that have no part at all in the causing of it...In like manner they attribute their fortune to a stander by, to a lucky or unlucky place, to words spoken, especially if the name of God be amongst them..."

Someone believing in divine intervention does not believe it to be a cause of luck or lack of luck. They believe that right acts will lead them to a better life, but that as human beings that have free will are subject to the acts of others.

"And in these four things, opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics, consisteth the natural seed of religion..."

Again, as believers in faith but also believers in free will, the faithful are not ignorant of second causes.

"...with a purpose to make those men that relied on them, the more apt to obedience, laws, peace, charity, and civil society."

Some in power may have used God to exert authority or fear over others, but their misuse of power does not mean that God does not exist.

Hobbes mentions instances of other gods who have been worshipped who were "silly" (not his word, but his implication), so therefore God is equally implausible.

Mentions practices such as witches who claimed to confer with the dead, etc. and lumps them in with worshipping gods. Makes fun of them. That people believed such things "...because they thought them to portend, or foreshow some great calamity to come...So easy are men to be drawn to believe anything...Gentiles, whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience, and peace..."

He is lumping God in with every practice of "worship", or the claim of individuals that they had a connection to god(s) that the majority of people would believe to be silly, and again mentions that people refer to this worship to control others.

"...the Romans, that had conquered the greatest part of the then known world, made no scruple of tolerating any religion whatsoever in the city of Rome itself; unless it had something in it, that could not consist with their civil government.

He is saying that belief in any god was permissible if it instilled fear and reliance on government unless their beliefs were not consistent with the will of the government.

"For seeing all formed religion, is founded at first, upon the faith which a multitude hath in some one person, whom they believe not only to be a wise man, and to labor to procure their happiness, but also to be a holy man, to whom God himself vouchsafeth to declare his will supernaturally...when they shall be unable to show any probable token

of divine revelation; that the religion which they desire to uphold, must be suspected likewise..."

First, God does not appoint those in positions of power in the church. He allows the will of the people to select the Pope, for example. Because a person with faith is not able to show a "token of divine revelation", it does not mean that divine revelation does not exist for others.

If you do not understand God, then how can you speak of Him?

Do scientists really understand science? They may have theories as to why things occur, and have corresponding names for those theories, but the Big Bang Theory cannot be understood, let alone whether it really happened, and by nature alone. So, they also speak of things they do not "understand".

"For as in natural things, men of judgment require natural signs, and arguments; so in supernatural things, they require signs supernatural, which are miracles, before they consent inwardly, and from their hearts."

So, in essence, Hobbes is claiming to believe in miracles, just that someone has to witness one himself or herself rather than be told about it. Also, who is to say that "natural things" do not come from God? What makes them natural? Because scientists have come up with a theory as to what has caused the particular thing in "nature"? It is still conjecture and there is no clear delineation between what is purely natural and what is naturally created by a divine being.

Hobbes uses a couple of examples from the Bible where those who were led by God turned their backs on Him and once again either worshipped a false idol or wanted a new King. One example is about the children of Israel, who were led out of Egypt by Moses, and after he had been gone a little over a month they created a golden calf to worship. Second, he uses the example of the sons of Samuel who caused the people of Israel "to refuse any more to have God to be their king."

First, just because someone turns their back on God, even after having been a part of a miracle, does not mean that God does not exist or is not all-powerful. He gave us free will to decide whom to worship. He permitted Satan to be ruler of the Earth, basically telling him to "have at it", because he wanted his followers to believe in Him on their own accord.

Second, the examples he cites in the Bible are referenced without context. In the example of Moses, the cause of the Israelites' turn to false idols could have been caused by many factors: 1) Idols were physical objects that could be seen, 2) Idols could be carried and controlled and confined, 3) Foreign gods were thought to have power over crops, a prime concern to the Israelites, 4) Some foreign gods were believed to give fertility to the womb. The worship of these gods would permit sexually immoral behaviors, and 5) Idol worship was a cultural norm.

Third, in the case of the sons of Samuel, the reason that the people of Israel "wrote off God" is because the sons of Samuel ruled unjustly and were unruly. God was blamed for their sins. Since the dawn of time, people have rebelled against their kings.

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