



March 28, 2010

Belief & Reality

This past week a segment of Nightline started out with a quote from a 19th century philosopher who stated, “God is dead.” The narrator went on to summarize the advances of technology and the sciences pointing out that in spite of that, eighty-two percent of individuals surveyed claimed a religious “affiliation”. The unspoken why was obvious. I thought about the Arthurian legends and similar tales originating from the British Isles and the United States as well. Stories of mythological creatures that were viewed as real but have long since passed into the realm of fantasy because no one believes in them. A famous scene from Peter Pan has the fairy Tinkerbell dying until there is enough belief in fairies generated to save her. Another program I sometimes watch went to Ireland to locate a real leprechaun. In spite of the absence of proof for these creatures there are many who believe they are real. I think that is how a lot of people look at believing in God. We have been able to advance the sciences to the point that we know what the building blocks of life are. The secrets of DNA and genetic codes have shown us there are influences in the physical realm that have provided the ability to control disease and understand other things. Physics has provided us with the ability to manipulate elements at a subatomic level and do things that were inconceivable just a short time ago. The LHC, Large Hadron Collider, in Europe is an example of this. The ability accelerate particles and read the results of the collisions gives us a view that we never had before. Medicine has been able to do many things and is responsible for people surviving and avoiding diseases that half a century ago were feared. While other conditions, such as cancer, still take their toll there is hope that medical insights will provide a cure in the future. The space program and astronomy has given us the international space station and there are plans on visiting the moon and possibly Mars. The sky really does appear to be the limit. While all of these advances appear remarkable and provide us with new capabilities, do they really advance our understanding of the universe and the way things work. I am reminded of the prophets of Baal who believed in their god so much they were willing to face Elijah at Mount Carmel in a duel of belief to show who was the true God. These pagan devotees were so fervent they resorted to extreme measures to achieve their ends. ***“And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.” (1 Kng 18.27-28).*** Eventually, after they had failed to call upon their god to send fire from heaven, Elijah called on the Lord and he answered by doing what the prophets of Baal could not. We can believe something so fervently that we are convinced of its reality but that does not mean that it is so. There must be evidence supporting the belief. The evidence that humans see as pointing to the absence of God does not prove anything. There are ample proofs in the Bible to show that the scriptures have revealed things about mankind and the Earth that other cultures never knew. The ability to understand how some physical process works, or to unravel a process and think that we understand why it occurs does not rule out nor establish ultimate origins and that is where the question ends up. It takes more faith to believe in an inanimate process that has produced and supports life. It takes more faith to believe in an explanation of origins that defies the known properties of the physical universe. If faeries and dragons vanished because no one believed in them does that not also hold true for believing in God? God’s existence is not dependent on what we think. If that was the case I don’t see how we would know about God at all. I don’t think we can make up that good of a story.

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