



Picasso's Left Ear

Issue 13



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On Atheism - "Life is a mystery which never gives in to its questioner"

In any reasonable discussion he who speaks of 'us' and 'them' is compromised, and must be thrown out. He who speaks of 'we' and 'they' is not welcome at the table of the rational man. His place is to bicker in the alleyways with the other belligerents of his taste and temperament. For a man of reason is unconcerned as to groupings or allegiances to groupings, he is concerned only with the truth, or rather with finding a legitimate ground for his opinions. If we allow ourselves to polarise discussions so, with these dichotomies of us and them, then we sabotage the possibility of progress in our opinions. In doing so we create illusory factions which in the heat of debate adopt the appearance of the concrete. To associate oneself thus with any 'we' in a discussion is most often to tie one's wrists and blot out one's eyes, it actively inhibits one's search and makes one blind to alternative manners of thought. This 'we and them' is without a doubt the language of the dogmatic, and must, however painful the task of scrutiny, be weaned out of our language, most importantly where serious discussion is concerned. In the sciences appeal to evidence all but decides a matter conclusively, in the blistering world of opinion however, it is our own duty to guard against the evils of bias and assumption, which so often creep into our speech, and snake their thick ivy inveterately about our beliefs. He who comes to a discussion already decided in his beliefs, unwilling to budge or bend before reason, is as he who comes to the table full, a distraction and a nuisance to the hungry.

What has this to do with atheism? Quite simply an obfuscation of language has arisen in these our modern times, by which atheism masquerades as some sort of belief structure. It has become apparent to me, that there are many who view atheism, quite unconsciously, as a cohesive structure, as an expression of a particular set of beliefs or a certain way of viewing the world. Men such as Mr Dennet, Mr Hitchens, and Mr Dawkins it appears to me, have indeed presented atheism as one such structure, chiefly by extolling it as the rational alternative to religious belief. In my opinion this is a dangerous delusion created chiefly by an inherent inability in man to examine the content of his argument. Too often, as a result of not defining the various views contained within a discussion, we are dragged down into a malicious brawl, a clash of ego, and when we allow ourselves to become caught up in this, we forget what it is we are actually trying to resolve. So it is in this case. Atheism is quite simply a negative statement, a rejection of one set of beliefs and values which have been inherited culturally, but it is in no way a confirmation. By this I mean that the sentence 'I am an atheist' does not denote any set of beliefs or any particular way of viewing the world, rather it denotes a rejection of one such set of beliefs. In other words it describes only what a person is not, it negates, rather than making reference to what a person is. Atheism then, is a negation of traditional, western, religious belief structures, not a way of life and certainly not a 'philosophy' of life. Thus it can never stand as an *alternative* to religious belief. It tears down one belief structure but has not the energy nor the depth to replace it. Atheism thus stands as a *negative delusion*, in other words its ability to appear as whole and cohesive is rooted in its negative opposition to traditional, religious belief. It appears solid only as long as it can be contrasted with a dominant, dogmatic religious structure. Its existence is purely that of negation, it posits nothing. Atheism pulls apart a structure of belief, it does not resolve the fundamental problems which are the foundation of that structure. A rejection of religion is not a resolution of the problems religion represents. Quite the opposite, to reject the traditional religious beliefs left to one in society is a declaration of one's intent to go out and form new beliefs, to seek and search out what is, in one's opinion, the truth. As a note of advice, it is far better to use the religious structures present in our society as rough paths in the wilderness, as a point of departure along the road of the self-discovery of one's beliefs and values. As the Qur'an says "To every one of you have we given a rule and a beaten a track" although in the case of Islam is far too often the former as opposed to the latter. A rejection of an entire religious belief structure as meaningless or malicious is to me, sheer folly, and explained as a violent reaction against religious authority, and the constrictive terrors of dogma.

To conclude atheism is no alternative to religion, one must still strike out on the path of discovering just what one believes, one is left still the task of making sense of life, of contemplating it. Atheism cannot stand as some 'get out of jail free card' for the essential problems of existence. One is left still the mammoth task of self-forging. Above all else, in our attempts to understand this existence, we must avoid wars of ignorance and ego, such as are currently waged between 'Atheist and Christian', let the reasonable man have nothing to do with them.

By Peter Kiernan

Poetry

This page, reserved for the absurdities of poetry, permits no play of reason or logic.

The infallible are not welcome here, the absolute should stay away.

The poet is not born of logos, it is emotion which holds his sway.

Stare not so deeply he spoke,
*Nor weather that mind to
Rough-rock, not so hungrily look,
Where flame is famished –*

*And reaches up,
Reaches up
Voracious.*

*A heat which would melt
The face of God, leave
The wax of being about bone
Dripping, dripping, and the
Bone soft bending like rubber.*

*So the moments slip,
And each whips its
Molten tongue at skin.*

*Fires low and fires high
Which wrestle life from
The bone dry leaves,
And the bones slippery
And steaming, bending
To the sing-song of
Hammers in the forge.*

*Though I am an accident
Of stars and suns and galaxies
Spun out on the spindle of
A creator's thumb –*

*There dwells within,
And whelms my being,
This heat which is
Down the deep, and churns
And churns all things
To meaning.*

By Peter Kiernan

Inversnaid

*This darksome burn, horseback brown,
His rollrock highroad roaring down,
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.*

*A windpuff-bonnet of fawn-froth
Turns and twindles over the broth
Of a pool so pitchblack, fell-frowning,
It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning.*

*Degged with dew, dappled with dew,
Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through,
Wiry heathpacks, fitches of fern,
And the beadbony ash that sits over the burn.*

*What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.*

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

A Psychological Analysis of our friends

Do we pick our friends, or do we make friends on the basis that they are similar to ourselves? Why are our friends, our friends in the first place? When studying a group of friends (study group A) I noticed that they are not just similar in how they act but also share a similar opinion on many subjects such as school work, fellow class members and so on. But not all groups of friends are formed because they are similar. I also studied a group of friends (study group B) who, I believe, became friends on the basis that they did not fit into the groups of those who formed because of similarity. Study group B, formed as each member did not fall into a group that shared similar interests and opinions. From what I have studied, study group B, started to share views as they continued to be friends, what I mean by this is that study group B are now similar to study A, in that they have conformed their interests/opinions to suit their friends. Though this may sound strange, there is no doubt in my mind that your friends play a huge part in your development as an individual, as does anyone that you are constantly around.

I also studied two people, subject A, and subject B. Subject A was a sporty, outgoing, confident person but did not exceed in his studies as he was quite lazy with his school work. Subject B is not very confident or sporty but exceeds in his studies. Subject A and subject B are both friends. Recently subject B, became more confident and outgoing but slowly started to act in a similar manner concerning his studies as his friend. Subject A however did not change. Subject B became slightly similar to subject A before subject B could influence subject A. What needs to be done here is as follows; subject B is aware that he isn't as he used to be concerning his studies, if subject B decides to focus more on his studies, then there is a small chance that subject A might follow. But if he doesn't, there can still be a perfectly healthy relationship. When around friends it is natural for a person to change, but we need to remember to still be an individual.

As we all know, we act differently around friends. One of the main reasons we do so, is so that our friends think of us in a way we want them to. For example, one might say a sentence with a lot of complicated and long words thrown in and then when are friend acts surprised, we might pretend that it is normal and ask such a question similar to "Why are you confused?" One might do this to fool a friend into thinking that you have a superior knowledge compared to them. The same can be done with sport, dress sense etc.

While studying another group of friends I have noticed a situation which was quite interesting. This group were insulting one of their friends, though this is not usual for them they happened to be insulting him because of a certain incident early that week which involved this person. It was quite interesting as one person happened to throw an insult about this incident, and from this one insult, a number of insults on different subjects started to flow from the friends. But what I was not surprised to find was the subject insulting someone else at the first chance he got. His friends noticed this and turned this insult the subject had said, into an insult against the subject. So, let's recap. His friends thought it was okay to insult the subject as a result of an incident which happened involving the subject (the subject did not bring this incident on himself) earlier this week. Once the subject found a chance to insult someone else, he did in the exact same manner as they were insulting him. But his friends turned this insult against him, even though if someone else had said this the group would have reacted as if it was extremely funny. Another notable point was the fact that the subject reacted the same way to every insult thrown at him; he laughed at it, as if it was a joke. This happens a lot with groups of friends; one person from the group is selected (not randomly. i.e. something similar to the above incident) and are turned into a clown.

By Alex Kiernan.

In which Niall Brehon tries his hand at writing “Chick Lit.”

I never believed in love at first sight. That was, until I fell in love at first sight. His name was Steve. There had been many like Steve in my life before now, but I was never in love with any of them. None ever seemed to last long, definitely none longer than a week. I would get bored of them and just discard them, like, throw them away from me, in a bin or something. Things just tended to get stale between us quickly- I’m known as a bit of a “man-eater,” in that I tend to chew ‘em up and spit ‘em out, so to speak. Anyway, back to Steve. Stevie-Steve Steve.

Steve was different to all the others. He was just so... *different*. It’s like he wasn’t the same. I could tell that beneath his hard crust was a beautiful soul just crying to get out. “Aaaahhh!” I could hear it cry. “Get me outta here!”

The first time I met him I instantly recognised the tender, buttery softness within his tough, nutty exterior and as soon as we were alone for the first time, I promised myself, I would remove his crust and discard it forever.

I first laid my two brown, muddy eyes, like pools of mud, on Steve in my sister’s kitchen. I was visiting my sister’s house for the weekend down in the countryside. It was rustic, the countryside was. There were lots of sheep, which I like because they’re fluffy and cute, and lots of pigs, which I don’t like because they’re smelly and ugly. My sister’s rustic house was very small and rusty, like the countryside, except the countryside is big.

So there I was, with my chocolate eyes, like pools of... chocolate, looking at Steve. My sister, Cecelia, didn’t introduce us, which was very rude. It was not nice also. I looked at Steve, and I knew it there and then that he was the One. He exuded a meaty magnetism that Cecelia either did not notice or pretended not to notice.

“I’m nipping down to the shops for a minute,” Cecelia said, “Do you want anything?”

“No, I’m grand, thanks,” I said back to her in a reply of sorts, “I have all I want here.” My chestnut brown eyes, like pools of... chestnuts, stared at Steve. “Take your time!”

I didn’t know how to begin a conversation with Steve. It was like I couldn’t talk to him. How do you start a conversation with such an attractive object? “Hi, I’m Samantha,” I put as a kind of interjection of sorts to put something into the silence because it was empty. I took him by my hand. “And you are...?”

There was no response. The palpable tension was almost palpable. The strong, silent type obviously. I noticed my hand was still in contact with Steve’s, and I left it there.

A dolorous, tenebrous, lachrymose enveloped me, amorphously enshrouding me with a lethargic, languorous lassitude. In my nebulous neurasthenia I- (Editor: I thought this was meant to be “Chick Lit.”)- I couldn’t think properly. It was as if a misty hazy fog had surrounded me. Why he no respond? It makes me feel double-plus-ungood.

“Let’s get out of here,” I said femininely. “I want to be with you for the rest of my life- you’re the finest specimen I’ve ever seen. You look like a Steve. I’ll call you Steve.” Receiving no objection, I elucidated (sorry, couldn’t resist) with a lot of emotion and stuff. “I want to marry you!” I cried. I led him out to the car and we drove off into the sunset, which was strange because it was the afternoon.

I felt my phone buzzing in my pocket. I pressed answer. It was Cecelia.

“Where are you gone with my lunch? Now I’ll have to make *another* sandwich!”

- Extracted from “My Sister’s Sandwich” by Niall Brehon.

Many brain cells were lost in the writing of this article.