

Must We Seek the Divine?



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“One Improved Unit” is an original column appearing sporadically on Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OIU-only RSS feed available [here](#).

The last time I wrote about my religious beliefs, I said that I was starting over, “rebuilding” my foundation. I intended to get to the bottom of whether or not God exists, and journey forward from there. Two interesting forks occurred along the way. I thought I’d take a moment to share them.

Spiritual Obligations

At some point after I began thinking about the divine and how I should go about discovering it, an important question popped into my head, which was, “What obligation am I under to look for God?” This was immediately followed by questions like, “How can God take away the opportunity of living with him if I don’t follow rules in this life that I never knew I was bound by?” And “How can simply hearing ‘the word’ bind me to rules that must be followed if I am to ever live with God?” And “There are a thousand disparate religions with their own religious texts and rules, any of which I may hear at some point in my life, so, how should I know which are genuinely ‘the word’ of God?”

It was questions like these that made me realize that a rational God would not take away an opportunity to live with him if I didn’t follow the rules that I never knew I was bound to follow. Which necessarily includes any rule that I must discover the rules, or even so much as care to. In other words, if God is irrational, I don’t care to know him because he sounds like a moron, but if God is rational, then he will give me the same opportunity to earn “admission” into his house in the next life as he does now. The same goes for every other divine privilege, too.

Unconscious Mind

My podcast co-host Philip Eger has been working on a theory over the course of a year now on where the idea of God comes from. We discussed it early on in Episode 033 of the EVC podcast. Let me start with an analogy (written by me) that Phil related to my wife and I about a month ago:

Our minds are like a library. Our conscious is sitting inside the library at a table. Our subconscious is the helpful librarian. Our unconscious is the rest of the library, all the knowledge we were born with and obtained over our lifetimes. It's always expanding, and always concerned with both our conscious focus and the rest of the body. The librarian brings us the books we need, but also pays attention to our conscious focus, which is represented by a computer connected to the Internet (everything outside ourselves). The librarian sometimes tries to get us to notice things she believes will help us, the entirety of us, mind and body, in some way.

She must use language with which we are familiar. For many, this is religion. What they perceive as a manifestation of some sort from God, is actually just the librarian using familiar language to present us with something helpful, something we need for our own maintenance. Our unconscious doing what it can to ensure its survival.

People learn religious language early in their lives, and afterward their unconscious uses it to help them meet their needs. In other words, "God" is just our word for our own subconscious and unconscious minds. After all, what do all versions of God have in common? They originated in human thought. With this insight, Phil can take any creation of the human mind, including myth and scripture, and pull out significant information to help one better themselves. He calls this the "Allegorical Imperative". I'll let him elaborate:

Stories motivate humans to action. Sometimes these actions are beneficial for the individual and others around him. Other times the actions have monstrous consequences.

It seems that emotionally compelling stories applied literally to the tribe result in rulers, war, death and suffering. Whereas, it appears that emotionally compelling stories, compared and applied allegorically to the individual and his internal systems, result in improved mental health, physical health, independence, and empathy for the individual.

With this in mind, the Allegorical Imperative is an approach to take when you find yourself emotionally drawn to anything. A hobby, a political ideology, a movie series, a mate. May your first response to this attraction be “What does this thing I like have to say about my relationship with my mind and body?”

Check that first. That is where the value of any emotionally powerful idea lies. After you extract the allegorical value, now you are free to compare it to reality. Remember, your emotional mechanisms evolved way before your piddly neocortex. They are much stronger and much more compelling to you than facts.

Feed your emotions through allegory first. Then approach with a scientific rational eye, while the emotional beasts sleep off their metaphorical meal.

This will prevent a lot of humiliation later in life when you realize the thing to which you committed literally was only compelling to you because of its allegorical value, being based on a story rather than objective reality.

Applying this to people's sincerity in religious matters means that yes, their religious activity actually does help them in some way, and so its perceived as good and true. Now, with me, this only goes so far. It's a reasonable explanation for people's subjective experiences in religion and spirituality, but what about the experiences shared with others? That's a greater challenge I think, and a very interesting, scientific question.

Final Thoughts

I no longer feel compelled to seek the divine, nor do I need to approach religion antagonistically. Both forks as described above have given me, so far, all I've needed to move forward in my life. I'm not under any obligation to seek God, nor must I disparage those who do. (Plus, I'll gladly play along – to an extent – if it means maintaining a valued relationship. Who knows how my role might help them?) Theirs is an honest attempt at meeting their own needs, as is mine. So there you have it, a slightly different foundation than what I was intending when I began this rebuilding process.

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