

AGNOSTICISM (PART 3 OF 4): A FRUIT OF FALSE RELIGIONS

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Description: How the concept of agnosticism was formed due to the lack of logical defense of modern day Judaism and Christianity.

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So why the contemporary return to heresy-slash-Gnosticism, with the official sanction of so many religious institutions? Well, it is understandable. Since no logical defense of modern day Judaism or Christianity withstands the pressure of present day scriptural analysis, this 'mystical exclusivity' is a last ditch defense of a rapidly crumbling doctrinal status quo. Significant attrition has occurred in numerous Judeo-Christian sects already. The remaining faithful are largely forced into 'believing agnosticism,' holding personal faith in the existence of God and a specific doctrine as the approach to Him, while at the same time recognizing that such beliefs cannot be objectively proven.

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Sir William Hamilton's *Philosophy of the Unconditioned* (1829), and Herbert Spencer's *Principles* (1862) laid the cellulose foundation of the concept, and T.H. Huxley packaged and popularized it.

So, does the concept of Agnosticism have value? Returning to the rock, which only has value to those in need of one, Agnosticism has practicality for those who feel the need of a theological defense system. Those who are satisfied with such theology end religious discussions by deflecting the threat of rational argument off the shield of Agnostic defenses. To all others, it is just a rock. It doesn't change anything, it doesn't do anything. It just sits there like the impotent and self-evident lump it is, occupying metaphysical space.

Examination of the Islamic religion fosters an interesting thought, in this regard. The teachings of Islam were not available in the English language until Andre du Ryer's French translation of the meaning of the Holy Quran was rendered into English by Alexander Ross in 1649 CE. This first translation into the English language being notably of hostile intent and filled with inaccuracies, it fell hugely shy of inviting objective analysis of the Islamic religion. As the translator stated in his address 'to the Christian Reader,'

"There being so many sects and heresies banded together against the truth (by which the author refers to Christianity), finding that of *Mahomet* wanting to the muster, I thought good to bring it to their colours, that so viewing thine enemies in their full body, thou maist

the better prepare to encounter, and I hope overcome them....Thou shalt find it of so rude, and incongruous a composure, so farced with contradictions, blasphemies, obscene speeches, and ridiculous fables...Such as it is, I present to thee, having taken the pains only to translate it out of French, not doubting, though it hath been a poyson (poison), that hath infected a very great, but most unsound part of the universe, it may prove an antidote, to confirme in thee the health of Christianity”

The translator’s prejudice clearly evident, a person should hardly be surprised to find the translation fraught with error, and inclined to exert little positive impact on Western consciousness. George Sale, having been unimpressed, picked up the torch and attempted a new translation of meaning, criticizing Ross as follows:

“The English version is no other than a translation of Du Ryer’s, and that a very bad one; for Alexander Ross, who did it, being utterly unacquainted with the Arabic, and no great master of the French, has added a number of fresh mistakes of his own to those of Du Ryer; not to mention the meanness of his language, which would make a better book ridiculous.”^[1]

Not until George Sale’s translation of meaning into the English language in 1734 did the Western world begin to receive teachings of the Holy Quran in an accurate, though all the same ill-intentioned, exposure.

George Sale’s perspective is evident in the first few pages of his address to the reader, with such statements as,

“They must have a mean opinion of the Christian religion, or be but ill grounded therein, who can apprehend any danger from so manifest a forgery....But whatever use an impartial version of the Koran may be of in other respects, it is absolutely necessary to undeceive those who, from the ignorant or unfair translations which have appeared, have entertained too favourable an opinion of the original, and also to enable us effectually to expose the imposture...”

and,

“The Protestants alone are able to attack the Koran with success; and for them, I trust, Providence has reserved the glory of its overthrow.”

The translation of Reverend J. M. Rodwell, first published in 1861, coincided with the nineteenth century rise of oriental studies in the scientific meaning of the term. And it was during this period of dawning Islamic consciousness in Western Europe that Huxley presented his proposal of Agnosticism.

Many Muslims might wonder, had Huxley lived in the present 'information' age of ease of travel, broad cosmopolitan exposure to people, cultures and religions, complete with accurate and objective information on the Islamic religion, would his choice have been any different? It is an interesting thought. What would a man have done who, as previously quoted, stated, "I protest that if some great Power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning before I got out of bed, I should instantly close with the offer."^[2] To such a man, the comprehensive canon of Islam may have been not only appealing, but welcome.

This section began with the assertion that Agnosticism coexists with most religions of established doctrine. Doctrinal adherents can be divided into functional sub-categories on this basis. For example, the Theistic (Orthodox) Christians who conceive the reality of God to be provable, the Gnostic Christians who conceive knowledge of the truth of God to be reserved for the spiritual elite, and the Agnostic Christians, who maintain faith while admitting inability to prove the reality of God. The distinguishing difference between these various subgroups exists not in the presence, but in attempts at justification, of faith.

Similarly, most religions can be sub-divided by the manner in which individual adherents attempt to justify faith within the confines of doctrine. At the end of the day, however, these divisions are of academic interest only, for the how or why of belief does not alter the presence of belief any more than the how or why of God alters His existence.

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The above excerpt is taken from Dr. Brown's forthcoming book, MisGod'ed, which is expected to be published along with its sequel, God'ed. Both books can be viewed on Dr. Brown's website, www.Leveltruth.com. Dr. Brown can be contacted at BrownL38@yahoo.com

Footnotes:

[1] Sale, George.

[2] Huxley, Thomas H. *Discourse Touching The Method of Using One's Reason Rightly and of Seeking Scientific Truth.*

The web address of this article:

<https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/645/agnosticism-part-3>

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