

*James Lindsay's book, Everybody is Wrong about God*

This book stresses that any reason or excuse to believe in God is invalid and false. He wants the word atheist to go. He wants living without thinking of a God to be so normalised that the atheist label will be redundant.

Lindsay would do well to think about tackling mathematics rather than philosophy for though the book is creative and makes original points, it is philosophically thin at times.

Let us quote from him and then assess!

Lindsay calls those religionists who deny that faith and doubt are against each other by trying to make out that faith requires doubt because it is putting faith in something that you cannot know to be true crafty. He is right about that. If faith is believing a testimony that came from God then doubting any part of it is not faith for it is calling him unreliable or a liar.

Lindsay argues that atheism needs to stop being seen as a thing or a belief for not believing in God does not amount to another kind of believing - that is believing that there is no God.

Comment: Atheism is the absence of belief in God according to Lindsay. True but it, by default, implies rejection of God for you are saying God by definition is that which has supreme importance as creator and friend.

Lindsay "Atheism is a non-position, or more accurately a pseudo-position, a position that pretends to exist, a word that pretends to mean something, only because so many people insist on embracing a belief in God that isn't there."

And

"People who do not believe in God are people, just like people who do not play golf." Calling them nongolfers is "both awkward and pointless."

Comment: But they are nongolfers! The non-position argument is untenable! Atheist is a legitimate word! Even if atheism were a pseudo-position it needs a name. It makes no sense to say there is no alternative to belief in God. There is something atheistic about not treating God as God.

Lindsay "Atheism paradoxically maintains theism. This surprising effect is strongest with philosophical (strong) atheism, but it is true simply by the fact that atheism only really exists as a counterpoint to theism. In order for atheism, as the kind of thing one can hold or be good at, to have meaning, theism must have something going for it. That is, just as theism implicitly defines atheism by negation, this kind of atheism defines theism by negation too. Atheism, by asserting, 'God does not exist', immediately causes us to seek meaning in theism. This invariably leads to trying to understand 'God' as a kind of being."

Comment: Atheism can only indirectly lead people to belief in God or the supernatural. It says you must consider if they are real and decide and it decides that there are no grounds to think they are true. Not all atheists or atheistic systems think that the idea of God is so important that it needs a lot of vigorous refutation. It may just happen that some atheists spend a lot of energy attacking faith in God but that is not because they think God is a good or plausible idea. People do battle bad rubbish ideas. One reason for their zeal is that they see God as an undermining of science or as something that does not deserve the prevalence it gets.

Lindsay says that "atheism is, technically, the rejection or denial of theism, and so it is the default position regarding the matter of the existence of gods. That means anyone who doesn't believe in god is automatically an 'atheist' by default."

And,

"Atheism is a nonposition, or more accurately a pseudo-position, a position that pretends to exist. a world that pretends to mean something, only because so many people insist on embracing a belief in God that isn't there. And this is the best that can be said for atheism."

He suggests that it may be a good idea to avoid the words theist and atheist as descriptions of people and he says that believer and non believer is better but still not good.

The view that if you simply lack belief in God that is atheism is correct.

Lindsay should be clear on why it is correct. I suggest that the key is that God is such a big claim that to simply not accept it is to reject it in a sense. If you simply lack belief that the dog ate his dinner that is not rejection of the idea that the dog ate his dinner. But if in a magical world the dog had to eat the dinner to magically save the world it would be different. Walking past somebody dressed up as the Queen is not the same as ignoring the Queen. It amounts to denying you accept her as the Queen.

Lindsay "Agnosticism - is a kind of nonbelief. By saying, 'I don't know' entails a certain kind of open-minded non-belief." He mentions ignosticism which is the doctrine that nobody can know what is meant by God.

Comment: God is described by the rather intelligent religionists as unknowable. They say that God is not literally love. They use univocal language which says that God should be referred to indirectly. So he is not fair or loving. He is just not unfair or unloving. He is described in reverse. Ignostics are more common than they realise.

Lindsay: It seems that 'God' is an abstract mental construction that people employ to help them meet or ignore various psychological and social needs." So he concludes that "contrary to the title of Dawkins' famous book [The God Delusion], believers aren't exactly delusional when talking about and believing in 'God'. Every time someone says that he believes in God, he's saying that he has physiological or social needs that he doesn't know how to meet."

Comment: It is patronising to tell people who say they believe in God as a real being and person that they do not. Only they can or might know if they do.

Believers will find it insulting to be told that they only believe in God because they think they are helpless!

Many within a religion encourage this "religion is a painkiller for getting through something - a crutch" thinking despite it clearly leading to religious people being treated as weaklings by those who consider themselves strong and crutch-free. Leaders in the religion then end up seeing their "inferiors" as mere sheep. They are the shepherds. And tyrants outside the religion start demeaning those "sheep" too! That is how fascism can start off! Liberal societies may present themselves as "respecting" people of faith but is that patronising outlook really respect? No!

A real God has nothing to do with how people interpret that God to suit themselves. Don't husband and wives make assumptions up to a point about each other? So people inventing God does not prove there is no God. It only proves they intend to invent. It only proves that even if there is a God their faith might not be worthy of respect.

If you mistake real things such as the need for comfort and guidance for God then you are in fact deluded. To have a deep relationship with somebody who is not there or not real is rank delusion. And the link between God and comfort is a common one but a very strange one for nothing guarantees having an easy life. The comfort has a bad side. The believer risks feeling far worse. Feeling good when you are in danger is bad if the warning is drowned out. If nothing is looking after you and you think it should or is and are wrong then that is self-abuse. The comfort only works in so far as you think the bad things will not be so bad. But when they are happening it is a different story. It could be that believers want not comfort but false comfort. And that is what is happening!

If too many believers are in fact believing in God to meet certain needs what if that God is a spiteful entity who

loves punishing and sending people to Hell? All who promote the Christian God must take responsibility if some hearers respond to their teaching that way. They can't order people what interpretation to take.

Lindsay: Forensic psychiatrist J Anderson Thomson JR is approvingly quoted, "Religion, while not an adaption in itself, derives from the same mind-brain social adaptations that we use to navigate the sea of people who surround us."

Comment: So if religion is just another way of social contact is religion really religion? If superstition were just a placebo it would not be really superstition.

Lindsay mentions Daniel Dennett's observation that many believers in religion are in fact believers in belief first and foremost. They think it is somehow helpful or virtuous to believe. To say it is a virtue to believe say in God is a way of saying you believe in belief.

Comment: That implies some things and none of them good.

It is possible that all believers are really believers in belief. It is possible that even if they are not everybody is a lot of the time.

It implies condemnation of those who do not believe or cannot believe or know they should not believe.

It is arrogant to turn an opinion or belief into a virtue. Virtue is not about what you think about anything other than virtue. It degrades virtue.

It is bigoted to argue that belief in belief in God is good . Why? Because it suggests that as God alone matters and is important that no belief can match him in importance. Then the belief overrides what it says about God and presents itself the most important thing. It is the most important belief in belief of all. Belief in God is what is upheld not God. It is done in the name of God but is not about God.

Nothing but religion or belief in God insists on belief in belief. Science and medicine could not function if they operated on a belief in belief basis for each person would be getting in the way with their divergent and sometimes mutually exclusive beliefs.

Belief in belief is then based on cherry-picking and dishonesty and is not a virtue but a vice.

Lindsay writes, "Believers across all faith traditions are united by believing the tenets of their religions". He says then as it is too hard to decide if a Christian or Muslim really is one for "it makes very little sense to say so without qualifying it with what they believe". So, "if Bill isn't a Christian, we can simply say that he isn't".

Comment: You need the person to go into detail before you can know. This is not very practical. It shows that only God really knows if the person is the religious identity they claim. Religious labels should be only provisional. They are only social constructs.

Lindsay points out that those who tell you that God is responsible for giving your life purpose and meaning are fuzzy for they never tell you how this works.

Comment: True - they are trying to hide how useless their faith is. They try to get you into a system of religious society and belief and faith to keep you occupied so that you do not see that. They empty the word evidence of all meaning by saying that both good and bad show there is a God. They say everything is evidence for God which amounts to saying nothing is evidence! They say God makes good but evil is not evil if there is no God so even evil shows there is a God. This attitude does not respect evidence. Or people's right not to be gaslighted in relation to assessing evidence.

Lindsay says, "It seems that the method of asking for forgiveness for one's sins is a successful way of resetting someone to a commitment to one's framework-moral attitudes. The mechanism seems to be that once someone believes himself bad enough, he will be more willing to give into that and act that way, but receiving forgiveness,

he is able to reset himself to a perceived net-positive state of moral purity and will work to maintain it."

Comment: A reset is a very big thing. A real reset is based on respect for truth and evidence. God belief has no real respect for evidence. The reset is mocked and made trivial if it is not solid in respect for evidence and truth. You cannot learn from the past and step into the future without truth.

Lindsay mentions passive control. The idea is that you feel in control for you feel God is looking after you anyway. You are not in control but you control what really matters - your response to what he does. In fact your response is a form of active control. Not controlling the universe but stopping it from affecting you is controlling it but in a different but real way. You are more privileged in doing this than you are in actually having complete active hand's on control for control is not everything.

I would remind people that even if you have active control of the universe, you can still be engaging in passive control if there is a God. You can be resigned to how things work and still be taking control. Resignation is an attitude. There is nothing necessarily humble about passive control.