

THE BOOK, EVERYBODY IS WRONG ABOUT GOD BY LINDSAY, ITS FINDINGS ON GOD AND MORALITY

This book stresses that any reason or excuse to believe in God is invalid and false.

Author James Lindsay wants the word atheist to go for he thinks it makes people defensive the way labels do and the aim should be to simply have people deny God in the sense that they see no need for the idea on any level. The problem is that atheism is associated with making the God idea on every level important and that importance needs to go.

This would be relevant to morality in the sense that it is immoral to say there is a God who loves you and who is entitled your love in return if it is not true. It is evil to assist people in loving what is not there.

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.

Lindsay writes, "It is a bad idea that some claims to truth or knowledge regarding our societies are privileged to a weaker standard of justification than others. Secularism is a rejection of that bad idea. Secularism is therefore a rejection of the notion that sincerity of conviction is sufficient to cover any of the ground toward a belief's verification. It is a demand that all beliefs about society and culture are held to and measured against a common standard that is as objective as it is possible to be. Secularism is the rejection of faith as a political force."

This speaks for itself. Religion and therefore God are no safeguards for morals. Neither is secularism but it is good enough and wise enough to eliminate religion.

One major point for Lindsay is that nobody really knows clearly what God is supposed to mean. We don't know what it means to say a mind like God can exist and have no body. That is just one example. I would add that people's wishes for what God should be like is another reason why nobody has a clear understanding of what they mean. People fuse morality and God but no two people agree exactly on what is just and loving so God if he is morality in some sense is grey to us.

Consciousness and how it happens is another problem yet people define God as being some kind of consciousness. People say God gave us our consciousness. But that is a non-answer as this book says.

Morality is about what conscious self-aware beings like us should be doing but when God cannot help with consciousness and is only a further mystery we cannot pretend that God helps with morality either.

Religion in some way says God and morality are the same and to be treated the same in any case. God is not a ground for morality when God is not clear. If morality is clear God makes it unclear when you fuse the two. If morality is unclear the God when added in makes it worse.

Religion defines evil as an abuse of good or something that latches on to good to look good itself. Evil then by definition is unclear and there is more going on than you can ever see. God is really an attempt to distract from this mess. That is evil.

Lindsay: Lindsay points out that all of us what to have values and purposes for life that they turn into an "immovable core." They want these things to be the place inside that nothing and no one can ever touch. He feels believers externalise this by assuming a God who represents and lives for those values.

Comment: Obviously the danger with that is once you turn your principle in a fixed God you will not revise any of the bad principles. Even a good principle is bad if you have the attitude, "If it were bad or dangerous I'd still stand by it." That is really caring about the rule not what is right. It explains why religious superstition can be very solidified and immune to refutation and criticism. Catholicism being a man-made not God-made system never did it much harm.

Lindsay says of people who talk about God "not only do they mean something that refers to things that are real, those things are very important to them. They are talking about their core values." Core values do not mean that other values are less but that they are the ones the other values come from. Today there is a fallacy that if Christianity condemns homosexuality that is overridden by its core value of love! That makes no sense. If God is vague do people want him to be so they can have moral loopholes or feel permitted to break the rules when nobody is looking? Do they feel good about having values even if they do not live up to them? If so this is about being self-righteous not about being good. The core values are values in their heads not their hearts.

Comment: Religion says God is an explanation for morality but they cannot explain how. The best they can do is turn the premise, "God is morality" into the conclusion, "God is morality". Reasoning like that is a lie - it is not reasoning. A moral argument can't be based on a lie for a lie is immoral. The inability to explain shows again that they don't really know what they mean by God. Not only are they unable but opposing morality in the name of morality.

Lindsay argues that to see God as being essentially morality means that to say morality grounds God and God is the reason morality exists is to say, "Morality is real and obligatory just because it is real and obligatory." To say God makes morality real is just to say that morality makes morality real for morality is just another word for God.

Lindsay: Part of the attraction an all-powerful and all-good real God has is that it makes people hope this is the best possible world or sometime will be. Otherwise like atheists they are just going to have to see many evils as just plain hopeless useless evils that have no meaning.

Comment: Correct but it is not about what the believer wants to think. It is about what evil is.

Lindsay gives us a reason why God has so much appeal. If we make moral mistakes we expect him to reward us by averting too much damage. We expect him to tell us or inspire us what to do. Both these are very destructive if they are based on nonsense. And the disciples of God seem to care about how they do things that cause trouble with the best of intentions. That is just selfish.

If you feel moral about what you do though it is barely moral and is in fact suspect, that reward that comes from being moral could be what you want. It may not be morality.

Lindsay: Talk about a perfect God means that as you want God to be the enforcer and creator of your moral values you want to see them as perfect in principle. "By qualifying one's morals and beliefs as perfect, reality and any hope of effective communication are left completely behind." God is seen as unquestionable - his ways are also seen that way. Thence lies the problem.

Comment: To see God as unquestionable really means, "My view of God that I externalise or pretend to externalise is unquestionable."

Lindsay warns about religious faith, "faith is inherently closed to belief revision, which means that any bad moral guesses it has made are very likely to be slow to change."

Comment: Notice that a liberal believer is closed to belief revision as well for she will not see if in fact there are doctrines and principle that cannot change to suit the times. The liberal is dogmatic about sticking with the current fashion as well, Liberals care more about fads and their secular good standing than truth and that is far more oppressive than anything that is an enthusiast for truth. Liberal religion produces religious careerists and people who are as low and slippery as liberal politicians. Liberals are fundamentalists in their own way and end up turning their causes into substitute gods. Sam Harris is right that moderate religion is not worthy of praise any more than fundamentalist faith is.

Lindsay: "Morality, central as it is to the human experience, is confusing and anyone who has read moral philosophy knows that our seemingly best thinking on the matter only makes it worse. Religion simplifies morality by providing the heuristic of making it the desire of a deity. Attributing moral salience to 'God' makes morality seem real, which makes it more concrete and thus acceptable, and it also makes morality absolute and final, which is to say simpler."

Comment: God is not then for grounding morality but for grounding a moral shortcut.

Lindsay then points out that believers try to turn God into an explanation for why we need morality and why morality is a duty. But the explanation cannot be understood so it is not an explanation. The main reason God is popular is because people think the idea helps them make sense of morality and why right and wrong matter.

Comment: The logic is that if we do not have God's law on the basis that God has not ever given any law perhaps because he does not exist then we have only man's law which we have no duty or obligation to obey though it tells us we do. As it is faith that says such and such a law came from God there is a tacit admission that it might be man's which man lied about or man made a mistake thinking God told him something.

Lindsay: Humanism is the outlook that we can live happy lives and be fulfilled and good to each other without a God or belief in God.

Comment: Explicit belief in God is definitely not needed. Believers say that anybody who does good is implicitly connecting to God and recognising him without realising it. This is just soft intolerance to humanism. It easily hardens into a dangerous weapon.

Lindsay: He discusses the moral foundations theory. It argues that each community has moral foundations that may differ from the moral foundations of another community. It explains how morality arises. The community needs or feels it needs its rules and principles. But Lindsay warns, "The chief weakness of moral foundations theory, however descriptive it is of how people's moral values take shape, is that it lends itself naturally to some degree of moral relativism."

Comment: Good!

Lindsay points out that when God is believed in you tend to see him as working in your religious community or church so the association and your believer friends in fact colour what you think God is. To fit in you will resort to costly sacrifice for God for that makes you look sincere. What you are doing is making a costly sacrifice of yourself for the religious community or Church. This shows people are the architects of their own cruel manipulation and damaging others in the process.

Lindsay: It is interesting how, as Lindsay said, people may see enjoying ice cream as good for the soul but will not see making a budget for the next six months that way.

Comment: How holy are people deep down? How altruistic are they? Ice cream can be good for the soul. In fact, treats lift the heart. Lindsay has just pointed out a mean streak in moralistic people.

Lindsay writes, "People who do believe in God are people who additionally have a belief in God, just like people who play golf are people who additionally play golf."

Comment: This is true of most. But the word God by definition is - the being who alone matters and is the loving source of all. Atheism is a spectrum rather than a belief with such people. They deny belief by putting God on the back shelf.

Lindsay says that being social and being moral are tied together and says that is why a lone person on a lost island can't really have much use for morality. He forgets that religion says he needs to think about his morals towards God.

He says that using God to ground morality is "particularly bad". He says there are secular alternatives to the God moral framework. I would add that if there are then what we are doing with God? It is best to keep things simple and not be trying to mock God by using him as a moral prop. That is not moral. Even if there is no God then the problem is with us being users. The real motive to ground morality is God is based on the notion that God is totally other and unchanging which helps if you want to safeguard morality from changing. But that is evil for what if morality should change with the times? For example, abortion could be wrong if we don't have the technology to do it earlier but if we do then we update our teaching. It is not about turning the rules into fads. It is about taking account of new circumstances.

Lindsay says that the God idea expresses the belief that death is only losing a part of you but you exist so there is strictly speaking no death.

Comment: If so that would explain why believers so cheerily slaughter heretics and others in war.

Lindsay needs to consider how serious it is that some people say God exists for that means saying evil is never intolerable enough for a God to stop it.

Taking evil seriously is admitting that you will merely look at some evils and just slam them as something nothing no hypothetical God or anything has the right to tolerate. Atheists take that approach. Some things should be made simple. It means condemning religionists for saying it is tolerable in the eyes of God.

In fact, religion is mixing up the hypothetical with the real. It says that hypothetically evil might fit God therefore it does. Look at real evil and take seriously the experience of those who say that evil does exclude the existence of God as far as they are concerned, Who are you to challenge their experience?

To expect atheists and religionists to get on well without giving up their integrity is insane. It is better for them to compete but cautiously. No decent atheist can be complicit with religion. The decent atheist tells the religious they have no right to condone evil.