

Lindsay's book, Everybody is Wrong about God, regarding God as a delusion

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

To disprove God, one way to do it would be to show that the idea of a supernatural being is a contradiction. If it is a contradiction then it is an impossibility. You need to be precise. The terms need to be defined clearly. You cannot disprove the square if you don't know what a square means.

Supernatural is such a wide term it can refer to anything. Something that is able to act on nature and rule it tells us only what it does but NOTHING about what it is like or is.

So if we cannot know what supernatural is we cannot know what God is. What can be disproved if not God is our claim that he is in a relationship with us!

Philosophers and scientists and psychologists never cease wondering exactly what a human being is and what it means. They keep debating and never agree. We do not grasp the meaning clearly enough. When they can't how much worse it is for us! If we are the image of God that does not mean anything. It means we are more in the dark about God than ourselves. If God were human we would not understand well and since he is not then it is going to be worse.

Lindsay says that believers are accused of being delusional but this cannot be exactly true for "I take seriously the idea that people mean something when they say the word 'God', and not only that, they also have some idea of what they mean by it." He says they do not have a clear idea so they can't be called deluded. That argument is not applicable to say Mormons who clearly see God as a man.

Christians get around the clarity problem by thinking of Jesus as God. Instead of thinking of the unclear God they think Jesus being God is clarity enough.

I would insist then that Christians are still deluded for using Jesus to deal with the lack of clarity about God solving nothing. It adds more delusion to a delusion.

If God is not a delusion for it is too vague, what is a delusion is how people think there is something acting to help them and promise them that they will never be alone. So God being not a delusion means that the things he supposedly does could be. The idea that you are never alone is cruel for you cannot have it and take anybody seriously if they say they are alone. You blame them for feeling that way and not seeing poor God who is beside them. Be careful not to appear as if the idea of God as explanation or theory is where the delusion necessarily lies - the delusion undeniably lies in people thinking God is acting for them.

Another issue is that mad people have no concrete idea of what the tooth fairy is like or what she does and yet their belief in her is deluded. The solution is that the problem is not her but their thinking that she acts.

Lindsay accepts delusion as meaning "belief held with strong conviction despite superior evidence to the contrary". Interestingly if you turn everything into evidence for God that is a strong delusion and is worse than believing in something when you must see evidence that it is probably wrong in front of you. For believers, sickness and health and life and death and good and evil are evidence for God! Jesus went as far as to say that God letting him die on a cross and planning it shows God's plan! Evidence to be evidence has to mean something. It cannot if everything is evidence for something.

Think of how extreme that is. If everything is evidence that your wife is cheating that does not compare to all things in the universe being evidence for God. It is so big and also you are claiming God matters and you matter not in comparison. Its huge.

The gist of Lindsay's thinking is that God is an idol pretending it is not an idol. Believers are idolaters and pretending they are not.

If belief in God has its risks and can turn so much as one person out of a million into a terrorist then believers have an indirect but real link with the crimes. The risk will be worse if belief in God is a form of idolatry. Even if God could exist, faith in God could still be an idol. It is a case of you being God over God - that is telling yourself God agrees with you. It is really about you.

Lindsay leaves himself open to being accused of saying God is clear enough after all.

Lindsay lists the attributes of God as,

moral as in an effort to explain moral values

teleological to try and understand the purpose of our lives

phenomenological - trying to explain things that happen as being down to the action of God

abstract - God

spiritual as in feeling supported so that you transcend the troubles of life

psychosocial - how religion takes you feel about others and your place in society and leads to formation of a community

Comment: These are really things that you want God for. Believers want God to be abstract in order to protect the idea from refutation. Apart from that the rest tie in with morality. The talk about teleological purpose assumes the purpose relates to love and as a result you feel spiritual and protected and another result is that communities are formed with people who feel the same.

The idea of God grounding morality is explained as saying, "God gives us the dignity of being like him and in his image so that is why we should be moral." This is not moral itself for it argues, "I have dignity therefore I should be moral and I should be moral for I have dignity."

The points are not really about God but why you might want to believe. They show that believers are in fact thinking of a representation of themselves and their aspirations when they tell you they are thinking of God.

The book says that to make sense of God without understanding God to mean a real being we must think about active control and passive control and how they relate to the God idea.

Active control is about the actions we take to manage what happens to us. When believers are faced with something unthinkable bad and seemingly unavoidable they may pray to God to do something and that counts as an attempt at feeling they are in active control. Belief and religion help people feel safer and comforted which is why religion is so powerful in the world even today. Prayer shows the person wants to control what they cannot control and wants supernatural help to effect that control. Dangerously they feel control they do not have. If you cannot control the world but prayer gives you the feeling this does not matter and you will go along with it then you end up with the benefit you seek in control. You are controlling by proxy. God controlling for you is you controlling for you are making a choice.

Passive control is when we do nothing for we think of the world as controlling itself or being controlled for us. It is a form of control in the sense that you gain control by resignation. Letting something be is a form of control. It is the foolproof method and the only real one. It is so much cleverer than active control. It however is active control of the thing that truly matters - your attitude. If control can be about being selfish, control through resignation is worse.

The book mentions self-control as well and argues that God deals with that for God is a symbol of what we should do and should refrain from. The book argues that control is really what the interest in God is mainly about. And sociality and morality are so close together and one cannot be had without the other so unless you are part of

society you cannot really be called moral in any sense. It is really people you need before you can be moral. It is not God. When talking about God, believers "are talking about how they resist feelings of powerlessness".

Lindsay makes an excellent argument and shows that God is not about God but about you wanting control. Doing good to others when it is about feeling in control is using them and shows you are a self-deceiving fake and hypocrite no matter how charming you seem to be. Atheists want control too but believers take it to a new level - a higher one. They divinise it.

People think of God as that which makes every event no matter how small go smooth or as planned in some way. Passive control is what we have in the back of our minds when we actively try to gain control.

Lindsay: "The sense of control many people derive from their religious beliefs relies upon both sociality and the various attempts people make to attribute causes and effects in the world. Specifically, attributing an earthquake to an angry God in the hope that its propitiation will prevent future tremors utilises attribution (the God who can be propitiated and his wrath as the cause of earthquakes) and sociality (community rituals, actions of propitiation, and ethical standards that prohibit behaviors believed to likely anger the deity) to enable the sense of control (prevention of future calamity)."

Comment: Correct.

Lindsay "Religious fundamentalism - is a preference for religious attributions over natural ones when naturalistic ones are available. It specifically manifests as adhering to a set of false beliefs about the world with such tenacity that established and available countervailing attributions are denied or rejected in an attempt to prevent revision of the beliefs. That these beliefs are maintained in order to meet or ignore psychosocial needs that certainly are met in other ways should qualify it as a kind of pathological mental state, fundamentalism as a subtype of delusion."

He should tell us that the control motivation for faith in God is the fundamental behind fundamentalism. It sums up what it is all about.

I would suggest that a liberal who thinks God wrote the Bible then is a deluded fundamentalist at least in that belief about the Bible. Fundamentalism is a spectrum not a black or white matter.

Also, "On the claim that fundamentalism - qualifies as delusional, note that it satisfies Karl Jasper's three criteria for that state: falsity of belief, conviction, and incorrigibility. The existence of non fundamentalists, in fact the majority, proves that the needs can be met in other ways. Incidentally, quasi-religious beliefs held with similar tenacity would be grounds for an identical psychopathology."

Comment: Good! But notice how all believers in God are fundamentalist in the sense that they want to think God gives them what they have and not down to nature at all for nature is not nature but a mere instrument of God. Fundamentalism starts with God and ends with God.

Lindsay claims that "atheism only really exists as a counterpart to theism." So "atheism maintains theism." "Just as theism implicitly defines atheism by negation, - atheism implicitly defines theism by negation too." The reason is that you need a clear idea of what theism says and what atheism says. They have to mean something in order to be against each other. You need to force enough meaning into each word. He needs to say that theism is unclear but atheism is clear so that would make theism a negation of atheism and dependent on it. Theism would be a crutch. Atheism is clear that there is no power going to give you things. That is all the clarity we need. That is how it is able to challenge all gods both vague and clear.

He talks about agnosticism which means for him that the meaning of God is too unclear to come up with any intelligible case for or against God. I would say it makes sure there is no good case to be made for God but that does not mean it can make a good case against God. It is not likely there is a relationship type God if we are left that much in the dark about what he is like.

God is a hidden way of having belief in belief.

Belief in belief is a refusal to let evidence and reason help you decide what to believe. It is a commitment to

refusing to let the evidence speak to you and let it help you revise wrong beliefs or even discard them. Even in weak believers they are at risk of being too invested, emotionally or otherwise, in belief to change their minds and care about the truth and those who serve the truth.

Even if belief in God does not have to be a superstition or a delusion, belief in belief turns it into both. Lindsay reminds us that delusion is a belief that is immune to all strong evidence or proof that it is wrong. Psychiatrist Karl Jaspers wrote in *General Psychopathology* that delusions are present when there is "certainty, incorrigibility, and the impossibility of falsity of content".

Lindsay thinks that believers, because there is so much talk about God in the world, easily think they believe so they are not deluded but are mistaken. That might seem to be true but it is certainly not true for those who pursue religious vocations such as priests and evangelists and prophets. They are not just mistaken. They are downright insane for their religiosity surpasses the average. Mistakes get fixed but if believers make mistakes with faith matters they still persist in those beliefs and faith-related matters and that is where the problem is.

If the leaders impress the flock with their seemingly sincere deluded faith, that leads to them going down and taking the flock with them. It is not just a matter that pertains to the leader. It has a wider impact.

To sum up, believers are messing with words when they talk about God and are being manipulative perhaps by habit more than intent but manipulative all the same.