

GRATITUDE AND GOD, THE ARGUMENT, "WE ALL NEED A BEING GREATER THAN US TO BE GRATEFUL TO"

WE FEEL GRATEFUL TO THE WORKINGS OF CHANCE -

When something nice happens by chance you feel grateful.

When you fall off a cliff and survive you are grateful.

Richard Dawkins thinks this feeling is behind the popularity of God. Religion says that the atheist when he feels grateful has no God to thank. They say its natural to want to thank a higher power.

Religion cannot just simply settle for feeling grateful. It has to think of a God to be grateful to. It argues, "Why be grateful if there is no God?"

They accuse grateful atheists of believing in God and denying it.

They say they should not feel grateful if they really believe there is no God.

Those implications are quite nasty. They prove there is something wrong with religion's argument.

What the believers are trying to do is condition your feeling of gratitude so that you want to be grateful to God instead of just being grateful. There is something ungrateful about not wanting to be just grateful instead of looking for a religious reason to be grateful.

WHAT IF WE CANNOT REALLY THINK GRATITUDE FOR A BEING WHO IS MORE A POWER THAN A PERSON IS POSSIBLE?

God does not have feelings or passions for feelings and passions are what happen to you so you are passive in a real sense. But God as creator, maker of all from nothing, is self-sufficient and is always active. Nothing can happen to him but only because of him. Would you thank a robot that has no feelings even if it simulates them or pretends it has them? You would be damaged or crazy if you did. The idea of thanking a being who has no feelings and who cannot understand or experience feelings shows that believers are not thanking him at all but an idol version of God in their heads.

God is not like people - he does not have to wonder what the future will bring. He already knows. He cannot be surprised. When we say God loves, we mean that something acts as if it cares about us. But God does not have emotions. How can you really be grateful to a being that is so unlike you? God is not even a moral agent for heaven's sake. God cannot be a moral agent because he needs nothing but himself and morality is about needs and rights. If atheism stops you being grateful, then so does faith!

Gratitude to God then may feel like gratitude to a something that is like a proper person but that is only in our heads. It is akin to falling in love with your dog when it is only a human you should fall for!

GRATITUDE ALWAYS IMPLIES THAT THERE IS A DANGEROUS SIDE TO THE HELPER

Gratitude is a two-way street. It implies the one you are grateful to could do harm to you and neglect you and hate you but does not. That is why you are grateful for being helped. Gratitude thrives on being potentially judgmental.

God being the perfect being cannot be judged so we must think we are better than him if we judge. Gratitude to God is blasphemous because it judges God and it is selfish.

Grateful people love getting things from X regardless of how many other people X just hates or refuses to help even if they deserve to be helped. God is clearly like X. It may be a subconscious judgement or subliminal one. It may be directed at God or others. But subconscious ones are the worst. They are subtle and for that reason are the most powerful.

Gratitude sees the good deeds you receive as random and so the person doing them for you is not being seen as good but as lucky for you. Then because it is a kind of surprise that is why you feel the joy we call gratitude.

People who give thanks and praise to God are typically congratulating him for managing to be so good. But in fact there is no managing with God. He is good and his good is not good by his choice but is just his nature that he cannot choose or change. Thus there is no real thanking and praising for this entity is not like a good human being who has to win a high standard of moral goodness. It is as impersonal as thinking somebody's maths question was answered well instead of looking at their characteristics and quality as a person.

PERSONAL GRATITUDE AND MERE GRATITUDE

What about the argument:

We might be grateful for the lottery balls falling in our favour though we see it as random and mechanical, but why not say that there is such a thing as personal gratitude? What is that? The gratitude for the lotto win is different to what you feel for a person who does good to you. You can only be grateful to a person if that person does something good for you when they might not because you deserve something bad or because they might not for they are indifferent towards you or hate you. That is personal gratitude. Such gratitude can only happen if the good deed is wholly unnecessary and if the benefactor could have done something terrible to you instead. Even if you deserve the good deed for you have been very good to the person you can be grateful to them if you feel they would be bad enough to give nothing back to you. You can feel grateful to things and coincidences as well. Human nature easily treats non-things as if they had the characteristics of people. The thing to remember gratitude has another side - it is judgemental and says, "I am happy you did this and in a sense it is surprising you have this good in you. You would easily do something bad or do nothing instead."

The argument shows that gratitude to things is more important than gratitude to people for you don't need help all the time - you need good luck all the time.

It shows that believers in God who are grateful to him are in fact saying he could and might do complete evil to you and you are grateful that he does not and in fact does good for you instead. Gratitude is incompatible with belief in a God who cannot do wrong or who has no power to do or become great evil beyond any horror we can imagine.

GOD DOES NOT NEED OUR THANKS OR GRATITUDE

God is eternal and timeless and perfectly happy. He made us from nothing so thanking him does him no good. We cannot really give him anything. Religion says we should thank him anyway. If we should thank this God when it does him no good then it is okay for atheists to be grateful when things go well for them. The atheists intend their gratitude not for a supernatural god but just for the forces of chance.

To say, "Thank God for it is good for you even if it does him no good" is to talk silly. The whole point of thanking another is to do them some good and to thank a God like that is as impossible as thanking a stone that you were born into great wealth. To thank somebody mainly or just to better yourself and to feel good is manipulative.

They will reply, "God does not need our thanks and we cannot really give him anything for he owns all things. But we thank him for ourselves not him. It is good for us so we should do it anyway."

Feelings are not under the complete control of reason. The atheist and believer both experience that. Thus it is wrong to say, "If you are grateful for your blessings you should believe in God and thank him." That is assuming the feelings have logic to them. Both atheists and believers feel gratitude towards their cars for starting up spontaneously when they seem to have broken down.

Feeling grateful has nothing to do with belief in God. If the two things are put together they are just two separable things put together. It is not true that the atheist suffers from having no God to thank. That claim misses the point.

So we cannot be grateful to God just because we need to feel grateful. That is manufactured gratitude. It is using God to feel better.

USING GOD AS A CRUTCH FOR GRATITUDE

The argument that you need a God to be grateful to is nonsense and dangerous nonsense. It is dangerous in itself to tell people they need what they do not need. A need is not like a want. A need is an important thing. And if you believe in God for the sake of having something to be grateful to then there is something wrong in your life. You need a crutch and end up with a broken crutch. Too many crutches are enabled by people as good things when they are in fact wobbly. You do not really care about God as God if you are using the God idea in order to feel grateful.

Because of the problems with establishing that God exists gratitude then is a step too far. The problems with being grateful

to God are too serious for believing in God lightly.

DEISTS SAY WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL FOR THE GOOD THOUGH THE GOOD MAY NOT BE ABOUT US

Some believers, especially Deists, think that you should never ask God for anything for he never tampers with nature but you should simply give thanks to him for all the good things that come your way. He has created all things and does not fiddle with the creation but it is still his gift - it is the gift that is a set of infinite gifts.

So we should just be grateful for good though it is not necessarily given for us.

Believers in God are Deists a lot of the time for nobody expects a new miracle every five minutes.

GRATITUDE AND RAPPORT

Rapport in relation to gratitude means that you cannot give gratitude unless you receive it and vice versa. Rapport helps the grateful learn their gratitude from those who are grateful to them. That cannot happen with a God who cannot be grateful to us.

God does not benefit from our thanks, love or goodness. So if we are grateful and feel grateful for how he has helped us to be good and given us the chance to be then the gratitude is irrational and happening in spite of faith and not because of it.

RANDOM

Even believers and unbelievers who feel that God is not influenced by prayers can and do feel grateful and their feeling grateful for feeling grateful increases their joy more and more. To be able to be grateful you need a firm belief that good and bad come around more or less randomly most of the time. The good that isn't random in itself comes from good that is random.

If there is a God then nothing is genuinely random. Even when we sin we do it because of him not in spite of him for he creates all things. So if there is a God feeling grateful to him makes no rational sense. Any version of God that is not creator and in control of all things is not a God.

And as he is the origin of people who are good to you you cannot feel grateful to them either!

The gratitude we feel when we are lucky is actually consistent with atheism and inconsistent with belief in God. Religion says that God has a purpose. If he saves your life, it is not for you it is for the purpose. So if you thank him you think you know better than him what his purpose is and that it is about you!

If you get something nice from God, you don't care if it is given as part of a purpose or not. Gratitude to God would actually depend on opposition to his plan.

GENEROSITY

Thanks and gratitude are only possible if generosity is possible. Generous means giving people and God what you do not owe them so the good done is over and above what is necessary.

With God no good you do is necessary. So no good is generous.

The Church likes to appear as generous and to have a generous God to warm people to its doctrine and to get their money and their children in baptism. But when God was generous to us and we owe him alone all the good things we have and he has generously given us the gift of eternal life in Heaven which we cannot deserve something very unattractive follows. It follows that we cannot be generous because we owe God all the good we do and are meant to do all we do chiefly and solely for him. Whatever is done for us or others is really for him. So there is no such thing as generosity.

If all we have is from God then all you are giving to others is his not yours so you are not really giving. No good done for others is generous or unnecessary. All the good we do for others is necessary for we must see only the God in them and do it for him.

Generosity then is a scam for getting people into the Church. It is a very serious contradiction in Church dogma and exposes how unattractive the religion really is. Even if there is a God, the God people worship is just a fantasy playmate version.

THANK PEOPLE NOT GOD

The huge majority of the good things that happen to us, virtually all, are down to how somebody used their free will. The rest is down to benefiting from the indirect results of how others used their free will. When you thank God you are thanking him for how others decided. The things that others do for us freely are the things that are most significant to us. Even if God gives you the faculty of free will that does not mean he can take the credit for what you do with it. Thanking God not people is ingratitude and superstition. It is failing to see that most of the good that happens to you is an unintended result of actions. You don't want to see that for you want to feel blessed and more blessed than others.

It is churlish when somebody does you a kindness and you are more interested in thanking God for it than the person. Do not degrade a person by putting a faith hypothesis first.

GRATITUDE AS ACTION

You may not be able to feel grateful for what somebody does for you but if you would return the favour that counts as being grateful in the sense that you recognise the good they have done.

GRATITUDE AND COMPLAINING - GRATITUDE BEING A DEFAULT

You have to do something. Either complain or be grateful. Complaining recognises that you feel you should have something to be grateful for. Gratitude is a default. You do not need or anything else in order to feel it or practice it. It is a faculty.

FINALLY

Be grateful for being able to feel grateful. You don't need faith in a God for any of that. The natural response when somebody thanks you for helping them to become happier is to say, "You did this yourself. It was not really me." God cannot say that so we cannot really relate to God.

APPENDIX - "Grant me the gratitude".

Think of a serenity prayer like this, "Grant me the gratitude to accept what I can't improve, the ingratitude to try to improve what I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

I'd change it to, "I can and will grow the gratitude to accept what I can't improve, the ingratitude to try to improve what I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

Instead of thinking there is a God and that we should be grateful all the time for when evil happens we should be grateful like we would be to the poor woman who can only give us a dreadful and burnt crust to eat we should cultivate a virtue of ingratitude. Serenity would be inappropriate then. And stupid!