

The Suicide of Thought

It is a year since the event. To be specific, it was in the early hours of the 26th July, 2014 that my son Greg took his own life. It was such a shock to all who knew him, that it would seem crass and insensitive to attempt to draw any conclusions, especially given the fact that we have little concrete evidence of anything to work from. The inquest held in November 2014 was similarly inconclusive.

The suicide of someone as loved as Greg consigns everyone close to him to a kind of perpetual spiral of doubt and self-recrimination. There is never any release from the 'what if?' questions, or the ever-present fear that one of us said something, or did something – or, perhaps, *omitted* to do or say something, which led to his fateful decision. That's not an altogether healthy mindset, but it is a natural by-product of the way our minds work.

Darwin may have done his best to divest the universe of teleology, but he could not change essential human nature: we are meaning-seeking beings. We understand cause and effect. Fundamentally, our lives are about purpose and significance, despite what modern atheism tells us, and our tragedies, frustrations and sadnesses are inevitably related to that quest for meaning. So, we ask our questions about Greg, hoping for answers but suspecting that we will not receive them, at least not now.

To us, Greg is unique and special. But, outside of family and friends, he is a statistic. As one grapples with loss, one slowly becomes aware that one is not alone. Greg is part of a growing trend for young men to end their lives in this way, a trend which has been increasing since the Millennium kicked off. Given that backdrop, it is reasonable to reframe our 'why?' questions in a more *general* way, which leads me to highlight the following three themes:

(1) Self-worth

The dominant worldview within our educational system teaches our kids that the physical (natural) world is all there is. Naturalism may be nothing more than presuppositions, but it is taught explicitly and implicitly as if it were somehow 'scientific', and the prevailing mantra is that 'scientific' knowledge somehow trumps all other views of the world. Children are not taught to be skeptical about such views: indeed, all skepticism is focused solely and relentlessly on those other sources of truth which atheists disavow.

According to this view, there is no 'soul', which means that there is no *essential* difference between a human being and a [Purple Sea Urchin](#). The consequent evisceration of *value* from a person means that we may only discover a sense of self-worth through what we *do* or what we *acquire* – and if those things are lacking, then any residual basis for our self-image has evaporated. We are soulless meat-bags with access to designer clothes, but that's it.

(2) Powerlessness

Naturalism may have killed off the soul, but it has also destroyed our sense of *mind*. If all the mind is, is the function of the physical brain, then our profoundest thoughts and most creative insights are merely the product of the chemical stew and electrical activity of synapses and nerve fibres. We may *act* as if we are free agents, but actually what we *think* is going on in our mind is a mere chimera, an illusion foisted upon us by organic stuff which is doing whatever organic stuff does. And if everything is determined by physics, then there's no libertarian free will, no personal choice, and no *real* "I". We are plugged into the Matrix with only one way of escape.

Interestingly, most atheistic naturalists that I have met seem to have little to say about the consequences of these views

for the much-vaunted claims of empiricism within the context of scientific endeavour. They proceed on the basis of faith.

(3) Future

[Post-modernism](#) has already robbed us of the past. The past is merely a subjective gloss which we may paint over half-remembered events that someone else has already edited. Indeed, from a naturalistic perspective, we may never have any confidence that we have ever known the past: there is a sense, a memory left in our brain which may actually not correlate with any facet of reality. How could we know?

That is nihilistic enough, but modern atheism denies us hope for the future too. You don't need to take my word for it, [Bertrand Russell](#) was most eloquent about the matter:

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

So, what, really, is the purpose of all this teeming life, commerce and activity? All of it is destined for the junk-heap, and in a little while our best efforts will disintegrate in the blast of the solar wind. So runs the prevailing

naturalistic polemic.

A conclusion

We do not know what led Greg to his fateful action, but the philosophical underpinnings of our secular culture are evident to any thinking person, and the implications are bleak. Only by the most profound act of self-will can one dismiss those implications, and carry on carrying on. Bertrand Russell may trot out aphorisms such as “*the firm foundation of unyielding despair*”, but it takes a peculiarly resilient and leathery individual to live by such a mantra.

Naturalism may be insupportable as a worldview, but when generations now have had it beaten into them from the earliest age, is it really a surprise when there are those who take it seriously and act accordingly?

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