

The Greatest Debate.

When I was a boy, I went to a Catholic Church. Several years later, I became an altar boy. After another five years, I got into trouble and was told I could no longer be an altar boy.

Several years after that, an all-boys Catholic High School offered me a chance at a scholarship. The school gave out twenty per year, which meant passing an entrance exam. I took the exam, passed it with an excellent score, and was offered a scholarship to the school. That was important because my parents could not afford the tuition.

At fifteen and sixteen, my rebellious nature demolished the guard rails that had been in place, and I was asked to leave the school after my sophomore year. I didn't care.

I had been reading many exciting books that challenged my parochial upbringing and the notion that certain societal behaviors were existential.

I couldn't shake my belief that there was a God. Whether I spelled it with a lowercase g to differentiate my god from the religious and personified God, there was still a God in my mind. When I refer to God as the Creator, I use the pronoun it rather than he so as not to personify the Creator. Personification seems to imply equality and understanding.

It's difficult not to personify God after so many decades of doing just that. It seems to roll off the tongue and out my lips so easily.

As my years rolled along, I read more and wrote more. The progress science made resolved some of my confusion, and the six days the Bible told of God creating everything, including man and woman, were replaced by the billions of light years it took. And rather than a father figure in heaven creating man in his likeness, we learn from science that it didn't happen that way.

But something started something that started all of this. Whether aliens in a science lab created dark matter and dark space that began our universe seems irrelevant now. Because how did the aliens become what they became, and how did they create everything they did? They didn't create themselves.

It is frustrating to have traveled so far along the road of religion over so many decades and come to a dead end. Of course, there is no blame because when people are doing their very best, I cannot find fault with them. That others might do a better job is also true; in that case, I must switch over to them. Progress is wonderful; humanity would not be where it is today without progress.

Some people believe that religion was created to help man develop a set of rules that would help Mankind evolve to be different from animals. A conscience would surely help, too. Also, man's fear of death could be assuaged by writing in the Bible that there is a heaven for those who lead a good life and there is hell for those who don't.

So, I can see why people chose and continue to choose religion. All religions, or so I believe, have a heaven and a hell. Some use other names for heaven and hell: Elysium, Hades, Valhalla, Otherworld, and Paradise, to name a few. Books written about the places above detail the benefits of leading a good life rather than a bad one. For Elysium and Hades, it is written that they are, in fact, part of the same whole, so while Elysium is better, Hades is not evil at all.

Humanity has progressed, but not all religions or humanity have progressed equally. That is a different topic for a different time. For now, I find myself at a dead end. My first question is, is there such a thing as a mental or a spiritual dead end? My immediate answer is no, without a

nanosecond going by. This dead end is not physical in any way, and yet there are implications for both existential and transactional consequences.

The fictional existence of heaven has long remedied humanity's existential fear of death. The transactional methodology for paying our way to heaven has been prayer and living a good life. Humanity also gets great relief in knowing that bad people go to hell.

I mention the above because part of feeling at a dead end is that those two questions, where we go after we die and how we get there, are now left unanswered. As I circle back to when I was introduced to religion, everything seemed perfect and easy to understand. Of course, being with like-minded adults all nodding in agreement made it easier to believe. Peer pressure is genuine, especially for children, because what child doesn't want to be accepted?

Once heaven and hell are gone, the options available are not easy to accept. Do we die and become energy that then fuels future growth? Are there future lives for us to live? Abandoning the religion I partly trusted for decades of my life leaves me confused.

Until I ask myself, who is asking the question of what comes after life? I never thought of asking that question until after I heard it being asked. I have always been too busy living.

I'm a person who is primarily interested in the journey rather than the destination, and I think my life proves that. I also believe that the death of my body will be part of my journey, as it is part of everyone's journey. If there is more life after death, I will see that; if not, I won't. Either way, it will be fine.

Written by Peter Skeels © 9-27-2024