

I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH FAITH TO BE AN ATHEIST

No God, No Morals

John 18:28-38

Week 8 of 9

Fresh from a debate on whether or not humans can be moral without God, author and apologist Dinesh D'Souza offers a few reflections on his sparring partner, Princeton University's Peter Singer, a bioethicist:

Singer is a mild-mannered fellow who speaks calmly and lucidly. Yet you wouldn't have to read his work too long to find his extreme positions. He cheerfully advocates infanticide and euthanasia and, in almost the same breath, favors animal rights. Even most liberals would have qualms about third-trimester abortions; Singer does not hesitate to advocate what may be termed fourth-trimester abortions, i.e., the killing of infants after they are born.

Singer writes, "My colleague Helga Kuhse and I suggest that a period of 28 days after birth might be allowed before an infant is accepted as having the same right to life as others." Singer argues that even pigs, chickens, and fish have more signs of consciousness and rationality—and, consequently, a greater claim to rights—than do fetuses, newborn infants, and people with mental disabilities. "Rats are indisputably more aware of their surroundings, and more able to respond in purposeful and complex ways to things they like or dislike, than a fetus at 10- or even 32-weeks gestation. ... The calf, the pig, and the much-derided chicken come out well ahead of the fetus at any stage of pregnancy."

Some people consider Singer a provocateur who says outrageous things just to get attention. But Singer is deadly serious about his views and—as emerged in our debate—has a consistent rational basis for his controversial positions. To understand Singer, it's helpful to contrast him with "New Atheists" like Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Richard Dawkins. The New Atheists say we can get rid of God but preserve morality. They insist that no one needs God in order to be good; atheists can act no less virtuously than Christians. (And indeed, some atheists do put Christians to shame.) Even while repudiating the Christian God, Dawkins has publicly called himself a "cultural Christian."



northeast daily reading

November 6-7, 2010

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But this position creates a problem outlined more than a century ago by the atheist philosopher Nietzsche. The death of God, Nietzsche argued, means that all the Christian values that have shaped the West rest on a mythical foundation. One may, out of habit, continue to live according to these values for a while. Over time, however, the values will decay, and if they are not replaced by new values, man will truly have to face the prospect of nihilism, what Nietzsche termed "the abyss."

Nietzsche's argument is illustrated in considering two of the central principles of Western civilization: "All men are created equal" and "Human life is precious." Nietzsche attributes both ideas to Christianity. It is because we are created equal and in the image of God that our lives have moral worth and that we share the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Nietzsche's warning was that none of these values make sense without the background moral framework against which they were formulated. A post-Christian West, he argued, must go back to the ethical drawing board and reconsider its most cherished values, which include its traditional belief in the equal dignity of every human life. [Dinesh D'Souza, *Staring into the Abyss*, www.christianitytoday.com (3-17-09)]

This week's daily reading will cover some scriptures that shed light on the subject of morality. Consider what each passage teaches us about this subject.

- DAY ONE – Genesis 1:26-27
- DAY TWO – Exodus 34:4-7, Luke 18:18-19
- DAY THREE – Genesis 2:15-17
- DAY FOUR – Ephesians 4:31-5:3
- DAY FIVE – Colossians 3:1-17

Memory Verse:

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people." (Hebrews 8:10)

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