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## David bentley hart the experience of

The Experience of God, the book of the prolific philosopher/theologian David Bentley Hart, is surprisingly worth reading. Let me be clear, this is definitely not a book I would have ever entertained the idea of reading if a friend hadn't suggested it. Having read one of Hart's previous books, *Atheist Misconceptions*, about which I have virtually nothing positive to say, seeing as it was little more than a string of apologetics for Christianity, I had very low expectations going in despite this initial skepticism however, I am pleased (and more than a little surprised) to report that, although I had to keep my nose periodically to go through certain passages, the experience of God opened up no minor points of contact between me. In this article I will outline what I take to be the main months of the book and highlight the areas in which we agree, as well as those where we do not. The Definition of God is the central theme of the book. Hart argues that the God of deismists, creationists and atheists is a greatly diminished caricature of the present God. God has become just another being in a universe full of beings. Admittedly, He is an outstanding being, the first necessary creator-being, but still, just a being. God Hart, on the other hand, ... it is unity as such, one act of being and unity through which there is any ultimate thing and in which all things exist together. (p.31) God, it turns out, is not just the creator of all beings. He himself is the source of being. Hart sees God in three ways; being, consciousness and bliss. Being, as mentioned, refers to the source of everything that exists (or existence itself), or as Hart quotes the Muslim philosopher Mullah Sadr; God should not be found in the realm of beings because he is the being of all worlds. (p.107-8) Another way to say that this is what God is an relevance that all individual beings share in, in different ways and degrees. All this is obviously very reminiscent of the neoplatonic concept of Togo, conceived as a source that radiates smaller beings; comparison that Hart would happily endorse, I suspect. The second aspect of God is consciousness, which Hart defines as our ability to know the world, to possess a continuous subjective awareness of reality (p.152). He associates this with God, completely and shamelessly embracing idealism in a way that is not very clear nor particularly convincing, but seems to be going something like this. It begins by confirming that existence is not only palpable or known, but actually manifested in consciousness. Imagine a universe that was either incomprehensible or unknown. In what sense can we say that such a universe exists? Certainly not in any meaningful way or with any meaningful structure. How then does the meaning come about? definitely but consciousness alone be insufficient. The universe itself (and everything in it) must also be gravitated to consciousness; i.e. this (they) should be clear. Hart calls this inner intelligibility an idea and argues that it is not only the property of the existence of a thing; it is, in fact, identical to it (to be explored/known, remember). There can be no idea of a madman, so a perfect idea (the highest form of discerning, a perfect understanding of things) requires a perfect mind (according to Hart, pure discerning requires, and just like pure intelligence) - the mind of God. As Hart says; An absolute being, therefore, must be an absolute mind. (p.236) The path to the third aspect of God, bliss, leads us through what Hart calls transcendent. Despite the somewhat grandiose name, it's basically just abstract concepts. Hart holds this chapter talking about only three transcendentals, but it wasn't clear to me whether he thinks it's only three, or most importantly, or just a representative sample. The basic idea here is that we do not desire and cannot wish for the final things as the ultimate goals. Instead, we wish them as a means of achieving transcendental, end-ended goals or, as Hart put it; ... the unforeseen circumstances of our desires point to unconditional definitive reasons. (p.244) These final reasons are truth, morality of goodness and beauty (I will look at each of them in more detail in the next section). The key point is that each of these transcendentals causes us a kind of delight; pleasure that entails a conscious existence, and which Hart calls bliss. All of this ends with a neat definition of God, which Hart delivers on page 248; ... in God, the fullness of being is also a perfect act of infinite consciousness, which, fully possessing the truth of being in itself, forever finds its absorption in boundless pleasure. Definition of God - Analysis of the Abstract God Perhaps the only, the biggest objection to the definition of the Hart of God is that he in an attempt to raise it to high heights, heights really befitting the splendor of God, Hart has reduced Him to empty concepts as utterly meaningless and as boring as mathematical axioms. What does it mean to say that God is existence, or consciousness, or bliss, or any other abstract concept that believers often hear: love, truth, alpha and omega, and so on? It can also be argued that God is electricity, gravity and strong and weak nuclear forces. Of course, that would be ridiculous. Who will seek an enthusiastic alliance with a weak nuclear force, or pray for electricity, or find solace in the presence of gravity? But the slap in the face is a poetic, inspiring-sounding abstraction on God (to be true, beauty, etc.) and suddenly it all gets a veneer of trust doesn't deserve it. Teh Teh God Hart concludes with his assertion that God must be simple, incapable of owning individual parts or even individual properties (p.128), and, as eternal, He cannot be subject to change either (time is a measure of change – not to mention that change indicates a movement

from potential to reality, while God is pure relevance (another meaningless concept). What can be left after individual parts/properties have been removed and the ability to change? Hart defends all this, arguing that any other way of thinking about God is guilty of anthropomorphism; the tendency to re-make God in his own image. The charge of anthropomorphism is undoubtedly valid when people try to convince us that the creature is even the smallest bit, as Hart describes God cares about what you do in the privacy of your own bedroom, or desires human worship, or takes sides in favor of one equally petty, narrow tribe over the other (curiously, He is always on my side), but it is far from obvious that the assertion that God is not the subject of Hart's problem here is to explain how His God can be as transcendent as he claims, and yet not to dissolve in senseless abstractions. Unfortunately, to the extent that he is trying to fulfill this impossible task, all he does is appeal to even more pointless proposals. If God cannot change, He must be insensitive and unable to be aware of the conventional truths you claim? Hart: Simply his knowledge, bliss or love is not associated with any metaphysical changes in him (p.137). So God cannot act in peace, and he cannot be free, you say? Hart: God's creative intention ... can be understood as an eternal act that does not involve any temporary changes within it. His freedom ... It is the infinite freedom with which he manifests himself in the creation he is edified from the eternal. (p.139) As far as I can tell, these are all mystical, pseudo-philosophical gibberish. None of these explanations means anything. What is an eternal act, or a knowledge that does not produce metaphysical changes in knowledge, or something we out of the eternal? Yes, Hart's God is immune to most atheistic attacks, but in securing this victory, it hollows out the definition of so much that not only is there no trace left of the loving father we may have a personal relationship with (not such a serious problem for religions like Buddhism, but a fatal blow to traditional Christianity), but God, defined as nothing more than a line of abstract concepts, is (like all abstractions) absolutely being despite the fact that I do not agree with the empty identification of God's empty identity with the existence of the is valid and interesting. Fortunately, one philosopher in particular has done much more thorough (if not more accessible) work on his investigation; namely, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger agrees with Hart that the question of being is to find the way by which beings appear as beings, but where Heidegger gives a complex phenomenological analysis of being that resists dubious references to transcendental, giving non-essences; Hart, on the other hand, identifies the source of being as the answer to a metaphysical question that goes to that foot from the beginning and never recovers. The creature, correctly conceived, is focused on the man heidegger calls Dasain. Asking how a thing looks like a thing before Dasein is something we should explore, not some mysterious, transcendental area, but Dasein him or himself. It turns out that we do not perceive individual things, hammer, for example, the way science imagines; i.e. as discrete, material objects. Instead, things appear in reference aggregate (hammers with wood, nails, other woodworking equipment, field carpentry, etc.) and are revealed (have value for) individual Dasein differently. For example, tools in a carpentry workshop reveal themselves to a carpenter in a completely different way than an insurance agent who estimates their cost for insurance purposes. This is a very cursory first step towards heidegger's analysis of being, but hopefully illustrates my point of view that the time when approached with clarity is an important concept. What about Hart's analysis? In fact, Hart notes that creatures exist. He then wonders about this mysterious quality, the existence that belongs to these beings; in particular, how they came to possess it. Since each stage in the physical explanation will contain material that already exists, such reasoning will mean the very thing he investigates. Nor does he seek an explanation for the question itself. It will simply give the Creator-God, the demiurge from whom Hart causes great effort to distance himself from him. The only possible conclusion is that the source of existence should be transcendent, not the existing one itself (as we usually understand the term, at least) be. The problem with this line of reasoning is how Hart thinks about existence or everyday life. For him it is a real metaphysical quality that will somehow quench the creatures and therefore have something beyond their mere physical being-thereness. Yes, this bottle of water is there on my desk as a physical thing, Hart agrees, but as a physical thing, it also has this extra quality of existence that appeals to an explanation. In other words, The God of Hart is not the source of which is my water bottle (demiurge); rather, it is the source of being an issue that represents my water bottle. As Hart says, God is the source and fullness of all existence, an relevance in which all finite things live, move and have their being, or in which all things are held together; and so it is also a reality that is present in everything, as the very action of their existence ... It is not just something real, but also the very relevance, untrained source and basis on which both the ultimate relevance and the ultimate potential are created and maintained... It is at this point that we must realize that Hart is pulling abstract wool over our eyes. He took an abstract concept (being or existence), pretended that it had some specific reality, and then led us down the garden path looking for a metaphysical source for it. None of this is legal; or rather, starting with the erroneous and totally unjustified notion that existence is some kind of active force or presence, surrounding and pro-claiming existence, we have lost our way from the very beginning. To say that my water bottle exists does not put a bottle of water along with some ethereal quality called existence, the relevance in which my water bottle supposedly withstands. The way Hart uses the term to be was reduced to an imaginary property, a metaphysical secret made for the sole purpose of offering a thematic solution. If I'm right that Hart confused an abstract concept for a particular reality, one would expect to find the conversation pretty quickly to immerse yourself in (literally) meaningless ones such as... The relevance of all the evidence... (p.107), the ultimate source of existence... God is... transcendental source of relevance of all substances and forces... Needless to say, this is exactly what we find. Consciousness As with being, Hart's idealistic (by which I mean the philosophical position that reality is fundamentally mental) the identification of God as consciousness contains the germ of truth. The problem is that Hart takes this germ and leads us down another garden path with him. He is absolutely right to point out that a universe that is not known (or unknown) lacks any meaningful existence. This contradicts the current scientific, materialistic paradigm in which we live, which claims that there are things, regardless of whether there is someone around to observe them. Will my water bottle continue to exist if I disappear? Of course. What if all the conscious beings on Earth had to disappear? Of course. How could it be otherwise? A scientist can answer only in this way, because the modern understanding of existence is poor, which nothing more than particles. When the scientist hears the question I asked my bottle of water that they actually hear: Will the atoms that make up my water bottle continue to exist if all the conscious beings disappeared? From this point of view, their answer is certainly correct. The disappearance of all conscious beings does not entail the disappearance of all matter. But is the water bottle seeded for the atoms that make it up? The water bottle is a water vessel for holding water and only makes sense in the broader context of the referendum, which includes, among other things, creatures that have to drink water, the desire to carry it with them, have appendages suitable for grabbing bottles, and so on. Before we had smartphones and televisions, kids were playing with round metal hoops, rolling them across the ground with sticks. Do we still have these toys? No, because no one else uses them. And yet, we can still see metal hoops everywhere (you can even wear a couple of them in your ears). How can we figure this out? The wider frames in which these hoops belonged have disappeared. Physical, metal atoms arranged in the shape of a hoop are still as evidence throughout the place, but these toys (literally) do not exist anymore. The toy, like my water bottle (and every thing), doesn't merge with the physical atoms that make up it. The assertion that a universe that was incomprehensible or unknown did not exist was merely an extension of that principle. So, how does Hart go astray? Just as we've seen with be, he's trying to reorient abstraction; this time, the idea is a thing. Instead of an idea thing, i.e. that thing emerging as part of the structural body, which we call the world, (shove, and, importantly, related to) the person based on that person's culture, personal experience, desires, opportunities, etc., Hart wants to argue that this is actually the real property of the thing, it is the so-called inner intelligibility. With the idea now belonging entirely to a thing like what it really is, some suspected metaphysics is happening here, by the way), Hart then tries to convince us that the ideal understanding of the thing (capturing the idea in its totality) will require a perfect mind - hence God. This argument contains some striking similarities with one 18th-century philosopher George Berkeley advanced with his proverbial esse est percipi, or to be perceived. Just as Berkeley has come to the conclusion that God must exist as a permanent perceiver in order for things not to disappear when we stop looking at them, Hart seems to be coming to the conclusion that God must exist as the Mind for which ideas embedded in things ultimately correlate. Unfortunately, given that (1) there is no reason to believe in Hart's idea, and (2) all of his metaphysical building relies on him, there is no reason to believe anything that including the existence of God God some type of universal consciousness. In fact, when broke as it is, it seems that Hart just pulled out the same trick that we saw him try with everyday life. With his idea of the idea, he simply created a metaphysical problem that he can then summon God to solve. It would be much more stingy to simply abandon his highly speculative, metaphysical idea, and connect what happened to the individual consciousness by perceiving it. It won't explain consciousness, but of course Hart's artificial design doesn't do it either. Hart spends much of the chapter on consciousness, emphasizing the inability of materialism, or naturalism, to explain consciousness. It is here that we find a common cause against materialists. Materialism is a fully third-party tale of reality and, as such, by definition, has no hope of ever satisfactorily taking into account consciousness, which is inherently a first-person experience. This is an important point to understand. It's not just that we are currently short of technology, but may one day expect all the answers here. Even knowing everything you need to know about the brain will not make consciousness materialistic. This in itself does not mean that we should refer to some even more mysterious soul, spirit, or divine spark, nor does that mean that the psychic is not dependent on the physical in a way that the opposite cannot be true. This means that the full description of the universe should be more than just an inventory of the location and pulse of each particle. Hart identifies the six problems that consciousness creates for materialism, all of which I fully agree with and will simply outline below without much discussion: a qualitative dimension of experience. It's often referred to as a qualia, or a feeling that it's somehow to have an experience. Abstract concepts. Reason. Transcendental experience conditions. By this, Hart refers to Kant's understanding that the mind, not just a passive viewer, must actively impose reality on structural frameworks (categories) before anything can appear in us. Premeditation. This is sometimes referred to as an oness, and refers to the way the mind is somehow directed at things external to itself, i.e. the way the mind can be about things. Unity of consciousness. It is a phenomenological understanding that is therefore independent of neuroanatomized modular accounts of consciousness or curious cases of subjects who have had connections between the left and right hemispheres of their brains torn apart by behavior that suggests the two separated hemispheres operate independently of each other. Conscious experience is always singular and indivisible when it is tested. There are a few more I would like to mention from this chapter before bringing this section on consciousness to the close. Hart criticizes Benjamin Liber's famous experiment, which is often (incorrectly) cited as refuted by free will. I've written a few articles about this already, so I won't repeat myself here. It rejects epiphenomenism, the notion that the mind is essentially a side effect of processes occurring in the brain, which is therefore completely lacking in any causal effectiveness. Hart's criticism is mainly to point out that beliefs, desires and other mental states clearly play a causal role in our behavior. While this may not be the best argument against epiphenomenism, I agree with Hart that this is wrong. In my opinion, the slightest tug on the strands of this theory quickly highlights its flaws and inconsistencies, and leaves you with a mess of string on the floor now altogether. Interestingly, Hart expresses support for some versions of pansychism - a position that I have also addressed over the past couple of years. There are still some big problems that need to be solved with pansychism, perhaps primarily a combination of problems (how picking together small bits of consciousness, or conscious bits, can produce a single conscious whole), but it seems to me less difficult to explain than how consciousness can arise in a purely materialistic universe in the first place. Finally, Hart defies the idea that the mind is a computer, another topic about which I have probably written more than my fair share. It is an idea that, although justified as a metaphor, is not usually intended as such by those who use it. Brain hardware, mind software is another form of this misunderstanding often takes. This equivalence so often drawn between minds and computers these days is a strange attempt to lower consciousness while raising computers at the same time. It's relatively easy to see how it happened though. If brains are just computers, then a) since we understand how computers work, there is no fundamental mystery of consciousness anymore, it's all just the processing of information entirely understandable within a materialistic framework, and b) this means that the current hype around AI is not inappropriate. We can expect our digital gods to bloom from their transistors and microchips any day. I totally agree with Hart when he points out that the difference between minds and computers is so vast that what computers do is not even an elementary version of what the mind does. Philosopher Hubert Dreyfus, expressing skepticism about the inevitable arrival of general artificial intelligence (i.e. not only narrowly intelligent programs that can play chess or drive a car), compared the situation to an attempt to get there Moon climbing on a really high high and believing that you have made progress by doing so. You feel that you are closer to your goal than the person standing on earth, but, in fact, none of you get to the moon anytime soon. Bliss Recall that bliss turned out to be what Hart called transcendent. These turned out to be abstract concepts, which precisely because they were abstract concepts, made them completely inadequate as a description of the real (as opposed to abstract) God. In addition to this, though, Hart argued that there was a kind of delight associated with them; hence the connection to bliss. Presumably, the search for truth, the fulfillment of morally virtuous actions and the evaluation of beauty - all this produces bliss. This, I would suggest, being very poetic and perhaps even uplifting, is more fiction than fact. In the end, what Hart talks about with bliss, I suppose, those moments when we find ourselves suddenly filled with joy and serenity, when we feel that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, Kant feeling Achtung, which sublime causes in us. The problem is that that, while the experience of bliss is a perfectly legitimate human experience, Hart captures it and bestows it on a transcendental, religious subtext that he doesn't really have on his own. This becomes apparent when we de-poetize Hart and bring him back to Earth from the abstract, rarefied conceptualizations he writes about. What can mean that the pursuit of truth produces bliss? When a physicist is absorbed in mathematical equations, trying to understand how gravity and quantum mechanics combine, does it feel bliss? When I read Kant or Heidegger, is it bliss? Funny, it's more like confusion, or even disappointment. Or is it later when I reflect on what I've read that I should feel bliss? What about moral kindness? Is it that doing the right thing produces bliss? Of course, that can't be true. If that were the case, morality would be easy. Who would do the wrong thing if he got bliss from it the other way around? Or is it that meditation on the form of Plato Good produces bliss? And beauty. Is bliss really possible in museums and art exhibitions? How about watching a movie with a beautiful or beautiful actress/actor? Does it produce bliss? You could argue that I'm cheapening Hart's ideas. Let me stop you right there because I freely admit that this is exactly what I do. Hart's abstract, intellectual reflections sound gloriously deep (and even believable) until you think of them too closely. Contemplating the wonder of the universe in an attempt to understand the Truth of all this, becoming the embodiment of compassion, embracing transcendental moral kindness, allowing the majesty of nature or an obsessive melody to raise one to catch a glimpse of God. It's easy to see how everyone things can easily create moments of bliss that might tempt one to conclude there, there just must be something more to life, more, a divine plan being fulfilled. Hart argues that bliss stems from abstract concepts (transcendent) involved in each of these experiences, but it is illegal to reuse them; as if truth, moral kindness and beauty had some absolute, concrete platonic existence somewhere, completely independent of the beings that conjure them up. There is a more sensible way to think about a sense of bliss. To find it, we only need to look at what all these experiences have in common; namely, conscious objects. If you have a conscious agent capable of self-reflection and abstract thought, able to consider its existence and perspective in space infinitely greater than himself and full of mystery and wonder, then you have all the necessary conditions for bliss. Implying that something more than this is happening, while tempting and seductive with its promise, is more wishful thinking than clear thinking. Having said that, the specific abstract concepts Hart has chosen as his carriers of bliss are interesting, and there are still a few comments I want to make about each one. First of all, it's true. The way Hart uses that word as something of a synonym for God makes it essentially meaningless, so I want to take a different course. In a scientific sense, the truth is simply the correspondence of my thoughts about the reality of reality itself. This is relatively undeniable at a certain level of description. If I think it's raining and it's actually raining, then my faith is true. But as we've seen with my water bottle, it's less simple if we look a little more closely at actually. The world, or reality, is not just a cluster of particles; rather, it is a reference set, imbued with meaning and perceived from a built-in, embodied point of view. Of course, there is nothing wrong with correspondence of the theory of truth. A scientist can quite correctly claim that her thoughts on reality are true if she thinks that everything is made up of tiny strings vibrating in ten dimensions, and things actually consist of strings vibrating in ten dimensions. She might even say that she has uncovered the truth about reality, as long as we qualify it, deputy that the meaning of reality here is limited to the physical thing the universe is filled with/composed of. As I argued, it's a pretty poor view of reality though. If instead we accept reality as a meaningful set of interconnected objects with which we live, then truth takes on a deeper meaning. Now it makes sense to see the truth, not as a correspondence between thought and the outside world, but as what allows, or the grounds, that correspondence in the first in this case, the truth can be seen as an inconsistency that allows things to appear before us, and which in turn requires us to interact openly with the things we are surrounded by. It also means that we have gone beyond the superficial assertions that statements or beliefs are true or false, because they correspond to the external reality from which we are necessarily at a distance, to a deeper awareness that when a person engages in this non-ending openly and reliably, he or she is in the truth. It is, for my time, much more profound and illuminating than either a scientist with their physical, meaningless truths or Hart with his abstract, empty. The second transcendent is moral kindness. Here I want to focus on one particularly controversial assertion of Hart, namely, that it is impossible to believe in ethical imperatives without reference to some absolute kindness per se. (p.251) As should be clear now, Good as such, as an abstract concept, exists anywhere but in the consciousness of a conscious subject and therefore can hardly be considered absolute without referring to some rather suspect metaphysics. However, even if you resist this common sense and insist on the actual existence of some platonic moral kindness (existing, who knows where and consists of who knows what), how could it help in moral dilemmas? Abortion? Stem cell research? Euthanasia? I would like someone to address these moral issues by calling for an abstract concept as absolute kindness as such. Fortunately, even in the absence of Hart's fictional absolute kindness, ethical imperatives are possible, they just don't have over-human power. I really find it strange that Christians are so resistant to the fact that morality (something concerning our own behavior, after all) may be what we ourselves are ultimately responsible for. We think about morality, we build ethical theories, we affirm and justify our principles, and we build cultures based on values on which we all agree. Of course we do all this because we have to. If we are honest, there is no absolute kindness, we can consult to get the right answer. Would it be easier if we could just light incense, sit alone in a room, and communicate with absolute kindness for moral guidance? Absolutely. Unfortunately, this is not the world we live in. Does this mean ethical imperatives are impossible, as Hart argues? Hardly. Buy an ethics book if you don't believe me. Even better, go outside and start a fight. Society (through the police and the judiciary) will very quickly remind you of the ethical imperatives that we have collectively decided on. What all this means, however, is that our imperatives are not based on some perpetual, fixed fixed Wisdom is greater than our own collective will, a transcendent parent with all the answers. Rather, they are based on our own informed assessment of how we choose to live. This certainly makes our morale contingent inherent and fickle (something homosexuals, women and racial minorities are undoubtedly grateful for), but all this makes it arbitrary, powerless or pointless. This means that there will be no moral disagreement and no higher party to ask for an answer (as if it were). Very good, so be it. This is what it means to be a responsible adult living in a community with other adults. It also means that we sometimes make the wrong decision (although wrong is not really the right word - it's best to say that we'll sometimes make decisions we regret later), and these decisions can lead to great suffering over a long period of time (again, see homosexuals, women and racial minorities). But that's no reason to throw in a moral towel. Rather, it makes it even more important that we make sure we fulfill our moral obligations responsibly and wisely without passing the buck, looking at the rules in the Iron Age text or murky water, referring to some absolute goodness that (somehow) knows better how we should live. Honestly, it all seems so obvious that I feel a bit like I'm wasting my time making you read, but I have no choice because people like Hart continue to insist on this notion that ethics without religion is impossible. Hart also disagrees with what he calls evolutionary utilitarianism - the idea that our ethical sense was implanted in us by natural selection - and describes the naturalist's assertion that although morality is a conditional product of a gross immoral nature... However, it is obligatory for the conscience of any rational man or woman (p.253) as charming hopelessness and clear absurdity. My answer to this is to point out that first, not only is evolutionary utilitarianism actually a pretty firm explanation of how ethical behavior originated, at least in the early stages of our evolutionary origins, but given Hart's emptiness of absolute kindness, this is the only game in town to explain how our ethical meaning first appeared. Secondly, I agree with Hart, against the naturalist, that morality is not an exclusively conditional product of a gross immoral nature. It almost certainly started like this (as evidenced by the fact that we sometimes see moral behavior in other animals that have no idea of God or any absolute kindness), but once we have reached a certain level of self-awareness/other awareness and developed a higher level of cognitive abilities, morality will no longer depend on the blind driving force of natural selection. Third, it seems to me how little that Hart thinks that secular morality is not binding on anyone, but for some reason believes that his absolute kindness. Thinking here seems to be that without something independent and transcendent to point out, the best thing a person can hope for is that other people will happen to share their values and moral judgments. If they won't, there is no remedy because they will always be able to reject any arguments with one word: No, but there are some gimmicks going on here. First, a secular moralist can do much better than this argument suggests, because they can turn to things like reason and compassion. Of course, the other side may continue to disagree, using its own arguments (or simply appealing to indifference to indifference to self-interest), but, and here is the second paragraph of the play, the same interlocutor can reject Hart's own absolute morality with the same no. Trying to promote his own morality, a Christian is reduced to arguing for it in the same way as a secularist. If they do not, it is they who have no choice but to hope that their interlocutor will accept their religious/supernatural view of the world. Hart's final transcendent is beauty. The main thing I want to say here is that I agree with Hart's view that evolutionary explanations of how and why we value beauty are deeply unsatisfactory. First of all, it is difficult to convey that beauty, as opposed to morality, has any usefulness for which one could choose. As an example of this, the notion that we find certain lush and watery landscapes attractive, because our ancestors would prefer them seems patently false in light of the predominance of non-lush and non-water landscapes that we consider beautiful. Other suggested qualities, such as harmony, symmetry, sossance, etc., seem equally unlikely, given the fact that we often find beauty in the exact opposite. Of course, none of this justifies Hart's assertion that beauty should therefore actually have some magical, transcendental existence. As with any other abstract concept, we need nothing more than consciousness capable of abstract thought to explain beauty. Re generalizing abstract concepts the way Hart does through his book creates far more problems than he solves, and only muddies already obscure waters. There is one last bone I have to choose on the topic of transcendent, and this concerns this quote: ... faith in God is not something that can ever be completely and consistently rejected... Desires caused by the transcendent horizon of rational consciousness... underpin the entire movement of thought towards the world. Here Hart suggests when we set ourselves towards goals that are not physical in nature (what he calls transcendental, and which he identifies with God), we are, at the same time, tacitly acknowledging the existence of God. When an atheist seeks the truth, or seeks moral kindness, or takes time to enjoy something beautiful, she actually turns to the divine, even when she denies that she exists. If Hart's transcendental actually existed, this argument would have more weight. As I have argued ad nauseum by now, transcendental are nothing more than abstract concepts that have no reality outside the mind of the person thinking about them. I wonder if Hart also thinks that other abstract concepts like deception, moral depravity, and ugliness also qualify as transcendental, which therefore must also exist in the same numenal realm as truth, moral kindness and beauty, and presumably must also somehow form part of the divine. Or, in a beautifully circular fashion, only good abstract notions of transcendent? Admittedly, there is simply no reason to believe that Hart is claimed here, and I think even a nominally impartial review of the situation will find his allegations implausible at best and intellectually reckless at worst. Materialism The second theme in the Experience of God is that materialism is inconsistent. Materialism is actually a metaphysical principle; i.e. a principle that goes beyond the physical, in the sense that instead of physical matter itself (which is the work of science), it is a matter of reality. Specifically, it is a principle that states that everything that exists consists of physical matter, and the material description of the universe, hence also a complete description of it. This means, as Hart rightly argues, that materialism cannot be proven according to scientific; i.e. evidence-based empirical methods, since these methods are already mired in physical. Nor is there a deductive argument that can confirm the truth of materialism. Hart also notes, again quite rightly, that materialism cannot find support in the successes of science; Empiricism in science is a method; naturalism in philosophy is metaphysics; and the latter does not derive from the first and is not at the heart of it. (p.296) The science of success has been solely in adopting the materialistic principle, suggesting that nothing more than the (quantum) mechanical interactions of tiny particles is no guarantee of its truth. As explained above, physical observation is not enough to prove metaphysical claims. Now everything is fine, but Hart argues that atheism (based on materialism) is therefore the quintessential expression of heroic irrationalism; and ecstatic absurd enterprise of faith ... (p.19) as if the belief of theist and and were equal. In fact, Hart is likely to say an atheist has more faith than theist. This would be because he imagines that his account can at least accommodate Genesis himself, consciousness, and his transcendent. What can we say about this? Well, first, as we've seen, there's no reason to assume abstract notions of how being yourself or transcendent actually exist beyond our thoughts about them, and as for consciousness, the religious response doesn't explain it at all; or rather, in addition to the inability to explain it, it conjures up an even greater mystery that we have no hope of ever explaining. This is important because it is tempting to think that God's postulate solves the problem of consciousness; science cannot explain consciousness, but religion can. Well, it's true that science can't explain consciousness, but let's be crystal clear on this subject, religion can't explain it either. Saying something like God is reason, or Consciousness comes from God, is absolutely, unequivocally (and obviously!) does not explain consciousness. Such statements do not even turn to consciousness, let alone begin to explain it; they simply bury it in pseudo-philosophical non-sequiturs. So materialism definitely doesn't require more faith than religion, but what about Hart's basic charge that materialism requires faith? I've been resistant to this idea in the past, but the more I thought about it, the more sympathetic I became to it. First, what do we mean by faith? One can only believe in something that cannot be demonstrated or proven. If the existence of God recognized the obvious evidence, faith would be unnecessary. No one has faith that the sun will rise east tomorrow and set in the west, or that gravity will drag my cup to the floor if I drop it. We could say that we believe these things will happen because it is conceivable (though unlikely) that they cannot, but we have pretty good (inductive) reasons for believing as we do (or as effective, there is no good reason to believe otherwise) and so it would be inappropriate to use the word faith in these contexts. With this definition of faith on the table, then, it is inevitable that materialism is a form of faith. How? Well, it's obviously not a belief in scientific, or even common sense, observation/experience. They are as real as anything can be if the word real is to have any meaning at all. However, this is a belief in the sense we have discussed before; namely, that, being a metaphysical postulate, it can never be confirmed by physical observation/experiment. In other words, it's an assumption before any observation/experiment we do, or even can do. It's all logically undeniable and forces us to believe, but I'd like to go even further and agree with Hart once again that (in in some of its more extreme, even dogmatic, versions) materialism is indeed irrational and absurd. This is because it is an assumption that fails to explain the basic facts of human existence as we irrefutably know them. There is simply no conceivable material, mechanical, determinant explanation of subjective experience or thought. It seems so obvious to me that he barely needs a statement. The full description of each neuron, atom, subatomic particle or even quantum string in the brain, including what they all did, still does not explain how conscious experience arises in the purely physical world (at least not without a significant revision of what we mean by physical). This is where the irrationality and absurdity kick in. We have people like Sam Harris denying that we are ourselves (not, by the way, a fictional intangible soul or spirit for which we have no evidence and a simple concept that presents a significant, even insurmountable, problem, of carte daughtal dualism) because there is no physical correlation. We even have people like Dan Dennett claiming to have explained consciousness while actually explaining it away. While I think Dennett denies the charges, I don't see how he can be understood as anything other than a liquidator (someone who denies the existence of various mental states and phenomena). Not to mention dozens of people who believe that all our actions are fully defined by the laws of physics, effectively reducing us to robots marching to the clock our atoms (but somehow paradoxically aware of this fact). You think your thoughts are about the things that you are behaving in, that you are conscious, and that you are actually making real decisions, but it is all illusions; illusions for consciousness that doesn't even exist. Irrational? Absurd? This is probably some of the more pleasant adjectives Hart may have considered for these types of claims. (I want to emphasize, however, that all this makes religious faith more consistent; in fact, in the context of a previous debate, religious faith, without even offering a plausible explanation, is not even absurd!) Thus, the very existence of conscious experiences and non-physical thoughts means that materialism is a comprehensive description of our universe. Hart further concludes that, since materialism fails, there is no reason not to assume that the material sphere ultimately depends on the mind, not on the contrary; the fullness of being on which all conditioning beings depend, at the same time being a limitless act of consciousness. (p.227) Although I disagree it's feeling like it is, I definitely want to push the brakes where Hart wants to lead us. Hart believes that materialism is only a fully consistent alternative to believing in God... (p.17), but this is in order to dramatically outplay a religious hand that I have argued is even less consistent than materialism (in addition to not explaining anything, it creates much more than that must be taken for granted). The failure of materialism (not science, remember, which intentionally limits itself in the investigation of the physical) does not necessarily mean that we should abandon the ship, and it would be particularly foolish to turn to the Iron Age, or medieval, or new age beliefs, instead. Perhaps, as Hart suggests in this quote above, consciousness, in one form or another, is fundamental (something like pansychism), or maybe our recent forays into quantum mechanics require re-thinking about what the physical really is (a double slit experiment, although first performed more than a hundred years ago, in 1909, still screams for a coherent explanation- In any case, nothing in this situation supports any religious interpretation involving divinity that cares about the well-being of individuals (whether it is the Creator-God, or Hart somehow of non-existence, diversity), eternal life (in heaven, if you were good, somewhere else, if you were bad), or the independent, actual existence of abstract concepts. Modernity The Last of what I believe the three main themes in Hart's book is the notion of modernity as an objective, scientific decadence that, in many ways, has left us worse off. This whole discussion is framed by the broader idea that thought/belief is always conditioned by the era in which it occurs and undermines the notion of a neutral position, or so-called view out of nowhere. We are no less than in the world, Cartesian Minds shooting the outside world with no value, judgment less, impartial point of view. The world opens to us from the very beginning, and not as a sterile set of scientific particles, which we calmly and rationally examine before deciding what everything means, but in general consisting of the interconnected parts that stand before us, already saturated with meaning and value. That's what it's like to be human. By the time you have the conceptual ability to think and reflect on the world, you've already been immersed in it, you already have it all on you, so to speak. Of course, you can try to separate yourself from the world (that's basically what science is), but you can never really succeed. To some extent, all you end up doing is replace one set of values/values you use to interpret reality with another. Charles Taylor, in his book *The Secular Age*, talks a lot about Atheism seems natural, reasonable reasoned for many of us in the West, Taylor argues, just because the modern world (for a number of reasons he outlines in the book) has come to dominate the instrumental, individualistic, disillusioned perspectives he calls the immanent frame (immanent as opposed to transcendent), which tempers and conditions our understanding of reality without even knowing it. Hart expresses the same feeling when he says that at present, creatures live in the inhabited universe inhabited by their ancestors. In the old model the whole cosmos... was a kind of theophy, a manifestation of the transcendent God in the depths and heights of creation... On the model that replaced the old metaphysical cosmology... there is no proper communication between mind and matter at all. The thoughtless mechanism of nature is an integral part of unrelated parts in which a single force of intellect has no proper or necessary place. Of course, this is not an argument for or against religion or atheism; just a reminder that we need to look past what seems to be obviously true or natural, because the terms like these come to us are already heavily loaded with assumptions and values, and buried in an existing, interpretive framework. So, what is the modern world like? Well, as I said, Hart thinks he's pretty much poor. We have gone from a metaphysically rich world to a mechanistic world; significant, orderly cosmos into an impartial, indifferent universe. First gave us a house, the latter left us in the cold with nothing but a shirt on the back. Hart uses aristotle's four reasons as a good illustration of this situation. Aristotle identified four reasons that explained the thing: material, effective, formal and final. If we are talking about a vase, the material reason is that it is made of (glass), effective is what brought it into being (artisan), the formal is what makes our vase vase (it's a form), and the ultimate cause is its purpose or teleology (sit on the table and look beautiful, or maybe keep the flowers). If the last two of these reasons sound as if they should not be included in this list, it is because, as Hart correctly points out, only the first two have experienced a transition into modernity. Form and purpose, being aspects of what will not be brought down to a neat, objective, material description, have been left by our scientific epoch. This does not mean that we are no longer talking about form and purpose. We have. However, they have no place in the modern scientific description of the universe, which is reduced to particles, strings, fields, anything interacting in accordance with mechanistic laws. Of course, we can talk about a spoon to be a certain shape, and done for a specific purpose, but in reality it's all just particles. This is before that, we're strangers. A sterile, indifferent world that exists independently of us and from which, although we participate in it, we are removed. Religion can resist this (although it certainly isn't always), saying that we belong close to the universe as a co-created thing that belongs here by definition. I would go Hart one better though, and claim that we don't need religion for that. Scientific score... Not quite wrong, but... incomplete, not because God created us or the mysterious ocean of Genesis that grounds our existence (or some other meaningless, poetic analogy), but because there is no world beyond the perspective of consciousness. Think back to what I said earlier about things appearing for Dasein Heidegger within a meaning-infused, referenced aggregate. This reference set (i.e. the world and everything in it) is not the basis that we simply attach to the things that, initially and in fact, are just clusters of meaningless matter. In other words, it is not a secondary or artificial structure that we impose on the physical reality that is primary. The world, from that moment on, we know about it (always already to borrow an apt Heidegger phrase), lively, rich, full of meaning. I have never perceived this book as a collection of atoms arranged in a certain way. From the outset it was a bold feat of speculative fiction (according to the Boston Globe, anyway) that, by its very existence, refers to entire industries of publishing and entertainment, rich in linguistic history, traditions of literacy and storytelling, etc., all ending in being with specific features (figures for capturing and turning pages, the ability to vision to register these squiggles on the page, etc.) just to name some of the hidden aspects in which the book is located. Of course, we can reduce it to atoms later, but that's the point. Originally we are not alienated from the world; on the contrary, we are an integral part of it. Hart goes on to say that science is just one way to look at the world. This is, at the bottom, method, and the method is nothing more than a set of limitations or limitations. This is undoubtedly true, and coincides nicely with my argument above, I think. Where I move away from Hart is in mind that this implementation throws open the floodgates for any old nonsense. Science is one way to look at the world, religion is another... and these two are equally valid. As I said above, the scientific point of view is not wrong, it is incomplete or limited. That's his strength. Science is a method that deliberately ignores individual perspective and subjectivity. This becomes a problem only when we forget about it, and begin to argue that the scientific facts are true with the capital of T. Religion, with its view of the world, which is based on the allegations about realities and supernatural entities (religion without them cannot even be properly called religion), does not have the same legitimacy, because it is real, concrete claims, the truth about which (again, not some high falutin, transcendent, metaphysical, Jordan Peterson-like it will take me two hours to explain the Truth - just a good pr ' fashionable God exists or he can't continue to be. One could argue that these are sentences that are impossible to verify (which is true) and so we are justified in taking a leap of faith. This is not particularly convincing, given that there are many suggestions that we can't verify (that Hinduism is correct, for example, or that there is a pantheon of Greek gods watching us, or that a race of advanced aliens has visited Earth in our distant past and built pyramids, etc.), but for which we don't suddenly common sense throw in the window and proclaim a less plausible, less stingy option by default. Moving on, Hart is also scathing in his critique of evolutionary biology in this section. He does not criticize the theory itself (which is just as good - it is difficult to take seriously those who doubt the evolution after a mountain of evidence that stands in its favor); rather, he directs his anger at his excesses, a phenomenon Raymond Tallis in his book *Aping Humanity* memorably calls Darwinism. Hart argues that; Evolutionary biology, correctly speaking, concerns the development of physical organisms through replication, random mutations, natural selection, and nothing else. (p.73) The last two words are the last two; nothing more. Evolution, given its success in explaining biological complexity without reference to the designer, has been illegally co-opted by many other disciplines to do the same for them, including, but not limited to, psychology, economics, politics, social organization, ethics (as we have seen), religion and aesthetics. Hart is particularly critical, and rightly so, of memes as sociocultural analogues of genes. Evolution of natural selection (mediated by genes) is one of those truly brilliant and elegant scientific discoveries that have revolutionized our understanding of life and the universe. Sociocultural evolution, mediated by imaginary things called memes, on the other hand, is a fiction that serves only to confuse and distort. Yes, ideas that have certain features tend to spread (and live), while others with different functions are unable to take hold (and die out), all in a way that something similar to what we see happens to biological evolution. It makes it tempting to draw an analogy between them, and if we remember that it's all an analogy, that's fine. However, in our Age, full of people, always strive to reduce complex processes to predictable events governed by mechanistic laws, analogies like this usually do not remain analogies for long. We've already seen an example of this with the brain and mind becoming computer hardware and software, respectively. Memes aren't genes. They don't even look like genes in any meaningful way. Genes are physical objects that predispose the body to certain traits. If a random mutation gives a trait that increases the suitability of this organism in a way that allows it to outcompete its rivals and produce more offspring, then the next generation will have the same trait, allowing

them to also outcompete their rivals. This will ensure that the trait spreads throughout the population over time. The genius of this idea is that if the physical details are correct (what they are), evolution must occur, and although it is a completely blind process, it seems teleological in nature. A meme, on the other hand, is any cultural element that is passed from one person to another. This is where the resemblance to the genome starts and ends (and even that is now pretty generous). Memes are not part of a person's like genes. They're not even physical. That means they haven't gone any further in anything like genes. They are produced by conscious beings (not a blind process) and only survive and spread through decisions made by other conscious beings (try to decide to have a certain gene express or not). This means that their survival is not a function of them promoting fitness to anyone or anything. Yet despite all this, the idea of memes take hold. Why? Because it allows us to describe another aspect of reality without reference to pesky consciousness that doesn't seem to make sense in a universe where physical facts are the only facts there are. There's nothing strange about it. Biological evolution goes quite beautifully without a designer, as well as the evolution of ideas. The idea of a selfish gene is another aspect of evolution that succeeds in drawing Hart's wrath. It is a metaphor that, as we have seen by analogy with the meme, has taken on its own life and now effectively hides any clear picture of the genetic definition of organisms... (p.259) by preparing the notion that genes are actually the ones in control and we are simply their carriers. Now of course no one believes genes are actually selfish, so ... where is the harm in a simple figure of speech? But images often shape our concepts much more carefully than dialectical arguments can. (p.263) Again, the scientific, physical and physical narrative is enhanced. There is nothing special about people or consciousness. It's all just thoughtless, mechanical forces. To whom that you decide to do something equivalent to say a gene, or a group of genes induced, that behavior in order to pursue your own agenda (survival and reproduction). One example Hart recounts to illustrate his point that these metaphors and analogies do a disservice to genuine scientific research is Robert Wright's evolutionary explanation for modern altruistic behavior based on the idea that altruism is essentially aimed at acquiring mutual benefits. We all know the story. We are kind to others because we expect them to be kind to us. This strategy would have obvious survival benefits for our distant ancestors, so those who followed it lived longer, had more children and spread the gene of altruism (I obviously simplify here, but that's the core of it). The problem of evolution is explained though by altruistic behavior, even if there is no expectation of mutual benefit, such as donating money to a charity that helps people in a distant country. Wright offers what Hart calls (in an assessment I totally agree with) the almost crazy claim that our discriminatory equipment has been deceived by the media. The media, projecting images into our living room, tricked our stupid brains into thinking that if we help these moving images of people ten feet away, they can help us at a later time. The only context in which this type of nonsense can ever arise is one that believes that genetic codes are programs (which is a bad metaphor) and that organisms are robots (worse metaphor) and that genes are selfish (catastrophically worse metaphor)... (p.266) Another aspect of modernity Hart can't help but put up with the tendency to consider organic life as a kind of mechanism and treat human nature as a kind of technology... (p.307) No doubt this understanding of life, and people in particular, is a completely wrong simplification, and an example of a modern, materialistic, reductive urge has gone awry, but on the same page Hart continues to make more controversial claims. This trend, he said, has given us many of the worst political, legal and social evils... (p.307), some of which he later goes on to list, like including scientific racism, eugenics, Nazism, communist totalitarian, mandatory sterilization, etc. They open up a wide range of ideological, practical and cultural possibilities that other ways of seeing reality exclude. (p.309) Unfortunately, my answer here is that this attitude is as wrong and simplistic as belief that people are machines. It's a narrative that Hart asks you to buy into: the spread of atheism and related declines people (more physical, less spiritual) in the West have led to the horrors we saw unleashed in the 20th century. Beautiful and simple, isn't it? There is a straight line connecting the fall of faith with the rise of atrocities. The case is closed. Let me briefly outline three of the problems with Hart's thesis: how did it happen that the same countries that saw the decline of faith and the rise of secularism were the same countries in which democracy, universal rights and equality also flourished to the point unimaginable at any other time in human history? If you say it's because they had deep Christian roots, why are the same roots nonetheless failing to prevent all of Hart's evil? Many of Hart's evil references occurred in the 20th century, not because people stopped believing in God, but because technological advances, in addition to attracting potential benefits, also have the potential for terrible misuse. eugenics, forced sterilization, massacre of millions, etc., none of these things was possible at any other time in human history. If such technology were available in the Middle Ages to church/state leaders who were more than willing to burn people alive for the crime of believing in something else for them, what do you think would happen? Cue number 3... If Hart was right, history should show that Christians (with their worldview focused on the belief that every human being has inner value as a child of God) did not, or could not do, any of his evil. Unfortunately, even a cursory look at Western (Christian) history shows a shocking predominance of racism, sexism, totalitarianism, mass murder and any number of other sins. This last point is probably the most important. It reminds us that there is no set of beliefs or worldviews that people cannot interpret in a way that justifies the most heinous behaviour. Hitler did not need a worldview that saw in men machines to perform their despicable actions more than the worldview that saw people as children of God, did not prevent Pope Nicholas V mentioning Spain and Portugal to invade, capture, subjugate and bring their people into eternal slavery - any pagans they encountered. In fact, C.S. Lewis makes a point to me in simple Christianity when he, trying to defend the actions of overzealous Christians who eagerly attended witch arson abuses by bullying poor women before they were set on fire, justifies his behavior on the grounds that they really believe that these women were in the fight against the devil. The truth is that a religious/superstitious worldview is as likely to lead to barbaric behavior as atheistic. But then the first item in this list above comes and reminds us that despite the cold, sterile, atheistic worldview that Hitler supposedly created, communism, etc., we we mostly in the West) now live in the most peaceful, most empowered, and most egalitarian period humanity has ever enjoyed. So I agree with Hart when he criticizes a worldview that reduces people to machines (piloted by an army of selfish genes), but disagrees that he is responsible for the evils of the 20th century. Finally, following from my last point, Hart criticizes our modern tendency to think that we are better than previous, primitive centuries. According to him, there is no such thing as general human progress, there is no single history of enlightenment, there is no great comprehensive epic of human appearance from intellectual darkness to the light of reason. (p.326) Instead, he argues that while we succeed in many amazing ways at manipulating the material order... in the spheres of spiritual achievements - art, philosophy, contemplative practices - our era has been unprecedentedly impoverished. What are we going to do about it? First, it is the anti-progress sentiment typical of so many religious thinkers, it seems to me, a slightly knee-jerk reaction to the dominant secular narrative that believes that the discard of the enchanted, supernaturally infused, transcendental worldview of religion and embraces a rational, scientific, immanent worldview, in a general sense, has improved a lot of humanity. Now, while there is a good argument that needs to be made for this knee-jerk reaction; i.e., that the transition from religiosity to secularism was not as simplistic and clear as it is usually portrayed (Taylor makes the case for this in a fairly balanced and compelling way in a secular era), the real problem for the progress denier here (and this goes back to my point (1) earlier) is that life in the modern era has improved. Today, on the whole, life is immeasurably better for more people than ever before. Many of us no longer need to worry about being persecuted or discriminated against on the basis of our religion, gender, race, or almost any other characteristics. When we feel bad, the doctor does not tell us that it is because we have sinned and must pray to this or that Saint. If we have an opinion that differs from that of the Church or the State, we do not risk the death penalty for talking about it. Steven Pinker claims to do so in his extensively researched Best Angels of Our Nature, which is absolutely packed with statistics, graphics, and facts that support this assertion. Pinker claims that every aspect of human life has improved? Of course not. Is it claiming that it is for all countries, or all people in any particular country? No. Does he argue that the positive gains we have made are somehow protected from future change? Or. Is he claiming that there is some great, general trajectory humanity follows that brings us in Future? Absolutely not. However, these arguments can usually be heard from those in the camp against progress, as if any of these points belies the fact that few of us would actually prefer to live at an earlier age. And frankly, I can't think of a better definition of progress than that. Second, Hart argues that art and philosophy have become impoverished in the modern era. I find it hard to believe. Never in history have there been more opportunities, more freedom or more opportunities than we are open to us now. You may disagree with all of this (Hart certainly isn't, and so do I), but to call our age poor in this respect seems more than a little disingenuous. Not to mention that most luminaries of our time will not become luminaries proper until historians in the future work them out in a more narrative of human history (which may or may not be accurate, but it is a completely different can of worms...). That is why every era is full of critics mourning the paucity of greatness in its time. Individuals who will come to define the era rarely appear that way from within that era. Who knows about whom philosophers, artists, authors, poets, scientists, etc., our descendants will read in their books on history? One thing I can guarantee about those future societies though is that they will have their fair share of David Bentley Hart complaining about the impoverishment of his age and what the early 21st century. In truth, what Hart means when he uses the word spiritual is not art or philosophy, but religion. In this, I agree with him; we are really religiously poor age. Fewer of us believe in the supernatural grounding of the universe than at any other time in human history. Whether it's good or bad is another 16-page article though, so let me close this section on that small point of agreement with Hart. Ancient religions The last topic I would like to include as a sub-topic here is how Hart tends to honor early religious traditions; often quoting from a variety of faiths: Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Vedanta, Christianity (obviously), just to name a few. His main argument is that all these early religions had a deep understanding of God that coincided with Hart's own exposition when he presented it in his book, and these profound truths were lost, or at least covered, in their modern incarnations. Accordingly, Hart criticizes atheists and fundamentalists (young earthen creationists, biblical literary scholars, deists, advocates of intellectual design, etc.) because of the diseases of the modern era (although, make no mistake, the former fall under much heavier fire than the last). I must confess I found this thread of the book particularly weak, and depressingly reminiscent of an atheist which Hart argued that Christianity in the Middle Ages did not deserve the bad reputation he got for himself. Using the same strategy he used in Atheistic Misconceptions, Hart Cherry chooses quotes from people in these religions who support his own reading of God as being, consciousness and bliss (as opposed to a demiurge of the creator or a bearded old man in the sky), or which reinforce his subtle, highly intelligent interpretations of religious texts (as opposed to simplistic, literal readings). Now, not all religions are created the same way, so for the sake of simplicity and convenience, plus the fact that Hart goes for it from a Christian point of view, I focus on how believable it is for Christianity. In short, not at all. Does Hart really expect anyone to believe that Christianity pre-modernity never relied on literal readings of the Bible, or that early Christians didn't believe that God was a concrete being responsible for literally creating the world, who was surrounded by (also actual and existing) angels and opposed by a very real Satan, or that the age wasn't rife with superstitious beliefs in a whole host of good and evil forces Spirits and tokens? Hart seeks to cherry-pick the opinions of individuals who say he wants to hear and then uses them to make blanket statements about entire denominations and eras all, ignoring any evidence to the contrary. One example I will cite is Hart's assertion that the resistance to Copernicus's heliocentric theory was not inspired by some desperate attachment to geocentrism caused by the self-aggrandizing belief that humanity is at the center of all reality. p.52) On the contrary, there have been many more cases in which the Earth and its inhabitants have been at the lowest and most inferior level of reality. What lesson should we learn here? Medieval Christianity was modest and unpretentious?! Perhaps between periods when they were burned alive by heretics at the stake? The truth is that both of these statements are true, and the feelings behind them have been emphasized to varying degrees by different Christians and in different eras. If Hart was making it a more balanced moment, you'd be reading my final thoughts right now. The only reason I felt I had to comment on this here is because it supports a less helpful, nostalgic attitude that looks back to some fictional, golden age we subsequently fell away from. These nostalgic fantasies are just that; Fantasy. Of course, this doesn't mean that there's nothing positive about previous ages that we're worse for what's lost, but if you really want a golden era, despite all its flaws, you could do much, much worse than choose the early 21st century to live in. God's little mixed bag for me. Hart Hart Concept (The main purpose of the book), even if I really believed in some Higher Power, it's not just unsatisfactory (and not what many self-respecting Christians actually believe, I suspect), it's literally an empty abstraction. One can sympathize with Kharto, wanting to avoid simplistic, anthropocentric caricatures, but his God just doesn't make sense. As I said, you would be just as well served to pray to electricity or the quantum fields that make up the structure of the universe. On the other hand, I fully agree with some of Hart's critics on modernity, materialism and scientific worldview; worldview, which, I believe, claims to be able to contain everything in its mathematical, deterministic structure, has over-extended itself. The remedy, however, does not accept Hart's abstract God nor does it return to a supernatural, enchanted worldview - a worldview that can never be proven wrong, but more importantly, doesn't have much on the other side of the book either. (This is a bigger problem than you might first think, because one might reasonably expect there to be some irrefutable, personal evidence that God, if he even half of what He cracked up to be (admittedly, not so much God Hart), actually exists.) Rather, as I have tried to show where this is possible in this article, philosophy offers us much richer, more meaningful reflections on human existence and the world in which we live than science or religion has to offer. The first is admittedly more practical, but limited to physical objects and mechanical processes, this usefulness is provided only by the fact that it is able to provide a satisfactory understanding of the conscious, lived life. The latter is more comforting (some version of it anyway) and easier to understand in its basics, but probably complete fiction. If that doesn't bother you, that's fine, but I better not catch you trying to argue for your beliefs or against anyone else on the grounds of plausibility or reasonableness. One might argue that few people understand philosophy, and more than that, they do not want to. Ok. Few people know science, and no one understands quantum mechanics, but that hasn't stopped the scientific worldview from dominating the intellectual landscape and shaping the way we see ourselves and the world. You don't have to be a scientist to be drawn into the framework he's imposed on us. Similarly, you don't need to read Heidegger and Kant directly (really difficult task) to get an idea of another structure that has more to offer than a mechanical, meaningless universe or an abstract, meaningless God. Hayes, Diana. Reflections on slavery. In Curran, Charles E. Change in Official Catholic Moral Teaching (2) I am 90% sure it came from Lewis Christianity, but I couldn't find a specific passage when I wrote this. If you've read the book, you can take issue with me here, noting that Hart actually says the opposite, particularly on page 310; we should not blame materialism for the greatest evil committed under its auspices... The problem I have here is that this apparently balanced position of the ring is a bit hollow in light of the fact that right after that (suggestion) it goes on (a couple of pages) to claim that there is basically a straight line directly connecting the first to the last. Last. david bentley hart the experience of god. david bentley hart the experience of god pdf. david bentley hart the experience of god review

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