

Beliefs can be complicated but faith doesn't have to be



Highland Views
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Guest columnist

Is it OK to say, "I Believe in Good"?

Beliefs are funny things, because they are rarely funny. Can we have fun with a belief? If we aren't referring to faith or trust in a supernatural power, belief can simply mean an opinion or viewpoint. Not all that simple. Yet it might, in some cases, be enjoyable. The more I think about my own opinions/beliefs, the more they stir curiosity and delight, knowing I don't need all the answers, especially since I don't know all the questions!

In the humanist world of secular freethinkers, we often say "I believe in Good." For those of us who once said, "I Believe in God," it can sound strange to speak of Good in this way. However, aiming for Goodness isn't so bad. In fact, the way many people describe their view of God, it's unclear where the Good part comes in. I'm left wondering, what if we revered Good – what benefits ourselves and others – rather than some-

thing or someone that may not be so beneficial for every believer.

We sometimes hear the phrase: "Good without God," which may sound like a slam on religious faith, but it actually conveys an important message, that just because a person chooses not to believe in a supernatural being, it doesn't mean they can't be a good person. The old equation of Religion and Morality doesn't hold water, even holy water. The bias evident in claiming to be moral because of particular beliefs/opinions leaves out a glaring truth: lots of people live a very moral life without a belief in the Christian God, or in any God. Goodness doesn't depend on a faith because goodness is a free choice like practicing a thoughtful, reasonable, loving life. Naturally, by nature, we either do what we know in our hearts and minds is good for us and for others, or we don't act as we know we should. As with any beliefs, it's our choice.

Goodness, like Godness, isn't a belief anyway, as I understand it. It has to do with how we use our opinions and viewpoints, how we choose to live and what guides our lives. Claiming that "I believe in Good" is equivalent to saying "I believe in God" begs the question: How so? Because both statements mean next to

nothing without some evidence of their truthfulness, how they actually guide a person's life and living. In other words, believing is not acting.

Now, what if a person says "I believe in God, and I believe in Good"? Maybe they view God as Good, while at the same time they view Good as God. Either way, how does it play out in daily interactions with others? Can we observe the truth of what it means to make these statements? "My God is Good, and He demands you believe in Him" isn't very convincing. "My Good God loves you, but wants you to change who you are, or He'll send you to Hell." This is not only unconvincing, it's rather insulting. A warped sense of "goodness" can lead to a twisted sense of "godness." On the other hand, a clear understanding of Good, as a quality of character and practice that makes the world better for all, might lead to a belief in a divinity that truly wants what's best for every person, regardless of belief. In my mind, that would be a mature kind of faith position.

All this "remains in our brains" until we sincerely reflect on "how to be good." Sad to say, there are those who believe their religious opinions require them to insist others hold the same beliefs.

What's the good in that? If everyone believed in the same things, the same religion or anything else, what kind of world would this be? While we're contemplating that image, what if everyone believed in Good? How would that change the world? Sounds pretty good to me.

This thought experiment has one more element. For many of us who either believe in God, Good or a Good God, we get tripped up by a thought that's not so good: "I'm not good enough," we say to ourselves. We can't seem to live up to someone's else's standard of "good," or we don't feel we are pleasing the God we believe in, so we're trapped in dueling beliefs: "God is Good, but I'm not," or "Good is Good, but I'm not Good." What's the solution? Perhaps returning to the heart of the matter: What does it mean to be Good? Being around others who appear, by their actions, to be good people, could shine a light on our own good nature. The more good we do, the more we believe in goodness.

Is Goodness the Religion we most need to practice?

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