

Journal Entry 4

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Question 1: Which is the more honorable aim—the general one of fighting in and for the whole or the precise one of helping one particular person? Provide your answer, supporting it with a thorough rationale.

I believe the more honorable aim is in helping one particular person. In the case of the Sartre's student, he had to choose between staying with his mother and avenging his brother's death by leaving to fight in the war. In choosing to stay with his mother, the young man has a specific, certain, and measurable purpose. He has a personal purpose and he is accountable for his actions.

Should he choose to avenge his brother's death, there is no certainty and it is not personal. By volunteering to fight, there are known detours on the path to where he wants to go. He does not even know if he can make it to his destination. But what happens should he eventually arrive? How can he truly avenge his brother's death? He has no way of knowing the specific German who killed his brother. In my opinion, even if it is a time of war, he cannot logically justify taking the life of any ol' German to avenge his brother. It is not specific and it is not personal. In choosing the path for the good of the general, he loses the need to be personally accountable.

I believe the specific, personal choice is the right thing to do; however, I realize that this is not what society in general will do. That includes me. For example, we Americans are good at collective relief opportunities: Katrina, the homeless shelter, the nursing home, and now Typhoon Haiyan. We are willing to pull out our wallets and credit cards to donate to the collective effort, but we don't get our own hands dirty. We join the "water cooler" discussion at the office to express our collective discontent over

the latest public policy, but the majority of Americans are too lazy to go to the voting polls to cast an individual, countable vote.

We participate in the canned food drive at the office or provide school supplies for childrens' backpacks. But there are too few of us who make it personal. I am guilty. I convince myself that I feel good about bringing six cans of soup and four cans of Spaghettios for the children's food pantry, but have I taken the time to reach out to a specific child in need? I have not. Doing so requires too much of a commitment and makes me accountable for my actions. Too often, we are not willing to take that risk, especially when the intangible need is greater than the tangible.

Question 2: What do you think is the likelihood that such a transformation could occur? Atheists, after all, have been making that claim for literally centuries to little avail. Is there anything in the current environment that suggests the "new atheists" may be more successful than their predecessors in convincing people that a humanly-developed moral code would be preferable to attempting to reconcile the competing codes of different religions? Moreover, do you agree that would be a desirable outcome? What grounds your position?

I do not think there will be a transformation to a peaceful coexistence this world. As noted in the question, atheists have claimed for centuries that a peaceful coexistence can occur without dependence on a deity. While the new atheists may have updated their approaches with the 21st-century advantage of world-wide telecommunication, for the most part, it seems they still have the same basic arguments. Russell summarizes those arguments in his article. He discusses the first cause argument (that God must have a cause), the natural law argument, intelligent design, that God can't be God if there is a hell, and the argument that Christ is really not the perfect person we were taught he was,

if he existed at all. While there might be some new scientific beliefs based on advanced technologies, I believe the foundation of the arguments are the same. Christians are combatting those atheistic beliefs with the same arguments they have used for centuries. They likewise have the same access to world-wide telecommunication and the opportunity to join together across a vast earth.

If we had a society where everyone's needs and desires were met (Brave New World?) and everyone had the opportunity for self-actualization (I don't think this was possible in the Brave New World), one might think it would be possible to no longer "need" to believe in a deity. I would argue that a utopian society will never exist. As long as we have a society where wants and needs are not met and tragedy exists, a portion of society will always look to a "greater power" for strength, comfort, and hope. They want hope that there is an afterlife that is better than what they are currently experiencing.

I think a humanly-developed moral code would be desirable in a peaceful coexistence with religion, but I don't think it is possible. As we say, we are human and humans are not perfect. Even the fictitious Brave New World fails to bring the opportunity for self-actualization to her citizens. Russell claimed that fear was the foundation of religion. If self-actualization does not occur, there will always be the desire for "something more" and "something to hope for." I believe that religion is built on the foundation of hope. Even those who may believe they have achieved self-actualization still need hope.

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