

Everything you Never Wanted to Know about Gregor Richards' Philosophy and Religion

I use the term “agnostic” to describe myself, but it's simply not sufficient to describe my entire philosophy. I am a rationalist, a skeptic, and agnostic; in practice I'm an atheist, as I certainly reject all of the major religions outright. Aside from the fact that most people don't understand what agnosticism is, there is a wide range of philosophical underpinnings to agnosticism, and so as a classification it's incomplete.

Perception and reason are the only tools we have to understand the universe¹. Our ability to perceive is provided by various perceptive organs, and our ability to reason is provided by our brains. As such, these abilities are entirely internal to the universe, and so we cannot understand the universe itself in an objective sense. That is, even if we understood all the rules governing the operation of the universe, we could never understand how the universe itself was (or wasn't) created or destroyed², and nothing we are capable of understanding will ever suffice as evidence.

Let me make this claim more general. We cannot understand how the universe was or wasn't created, not just because our abilities to perceive and reason are limited to the internal structure of the universe, but because no seemingly-obvious laws governing the operation of the universe can be said to apply to the universe itself. Causality, a concept we as humans are all perfectly familiar with, is meaningful within the context of the universe we've observed it in. However, to claim that there must have been a “first cause” (as it's often termed) is to claim that the universe itself, as an object in its own right, is subject to the laws of causality. Not only is this claim undefendable, but no amount of advancement or understanding will ever be able to defend it. We are fundamentally limited in such a way that any statements of this magnitude are rendered meaningless.

At this point, all potential gods can be divided into two categories. First, there are the gods who are believed to have created the universe. I do not deny such gods' existence, nor do I accept it. No amount of argumentation could change my mind on this, as it is impossible to form evidence for this claim, but it is also impossible to form evidence against it. More importantly, it is impossible to even remotely understand the nature of such a being, and ultimately an equation governing the laws of the universe would be identical to a personified “god” being.

1 See my other paper *On the Non-Conflict of Perception and Skepticism* for more information on why I accept these tools.

2 Please note that I do not consider the Big Bang or any ultimate demise that that theory leads to be the creation and destruction of the universe as such, as these events do not create or destroy the laws of physics, they are merely the fate of the matter and energy within this universe.

Second, there are the gods who exist as part of our universe, but are all powerful within it. This god I deny on the grounds of skepticism: To the ignorant mind, any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic, but to the skeptical mind, any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology. Even if it was somehow proved that Jesus disappeared from his grave, it is far more reasonable to attribute that to obnoxious meddling aliens than to an omnipotent being, as it hardly suffices as evidence of infinite power.

I also reject all major religions on several simpler grounds, of which I will only mention one: The concept of a soul is completely ridiculous. We know that our ability to think, our emotional state, and everything else that defines our “mind” is encoded in the brain. It's easy (but irreversible) to prove this: Just poke a knife into your head a tiny bit and watch yourself lose some part of what makes you, you. To believe in a soul, you must believe that all of this data exists in a secondary state, except that destructive changes are not replicated. Occam's razor disagrees.

- Gregor Richards