

John Paul II to protest at what she saw as his overweening power, even the most secular humanists were outraged by her iconoclasm, and her career has never really recovered.

When conspicuous true believers such as Lieberman make the claim that religion and ethical behaviour are inextricably linked, the corollary premise is that atheists are, if not immoral, then amoral, or nihilistic misanthropes, or, worst of all, moral relativists. Believers and doubters will always be with us—and it's just possible that they need each other.

From my godless perspective, the devout remind me that it is human nature to thirst after

meaning and to desire an expansion of purpose beyond the cramped Manhattan studio of self and its immediate relations.

In her brief and beautiful book *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, Ursula Goodenough, a cell biologist, articulates a sensibility that she calls "religious naturalism," a profound appreciation of the genuine workings of nature, conjoined with a commitment to preserving that natural world in all its staggering, interdependent splendour. Call it transcendent atheism: I may not believe in life after death, but what a gift it is to be alive now.



JOHN WISDOM

Gods

JOHN WISDOM (1904–1993) was professor of philosophy at Cambridge University in England. He was both appreciative and skeptical of metaphysical arguments, which he interpreted in an often metaphorical, sometimes psychoanalytical way. In "Gods," he asks us to imagine an invisible gardener. The question is: How could the belief in such a gardener ever be confirmed?

TWO people return to their long neglected garden and find among the weeds a few of the old plants surprisingly vigorous. One says to the other "It must be that a gardener has been coming and doing something about these plants." Upon inquiry they find that no neighbor has ever seen anyone at work in their garden. The first man says to the other "He must have worked while people slept." The other says "No, someone would have heard him and besides, anybody who cared

about the plants would have kept down these weeds." The first man says "Look at the way these are arranged. There is purpose and a feeling for beauty here. I believe that someone comes, someone invisible to mortal eyes. I believe that the more carefully we look the more we shall find confirmation of this." They examine the garden ever so carefully and sometimes they come on new things suggesting the contrary and even that a malicious person has been at work. Besides examining the garden

carefully they also study what happens to gardens left without attention. Each learns all the other learns about this and about the garden. Consequently, when after all this, one says "I still believe a gardener comes" while the other says "I don't" their different words now reflect no difference as to what they have found in the garden, no difference as to what they would find in the garden if they looked further, and no difference about how fast untended gardens fall into disorder. At this stage, in this context, the gardener hypothesis has ceased to be experimental; the difference between one who accepts and one who rejects it is now not a matter of the one expecting something the other does not expect. What is the difference between them? The one

says: "A gardener comes unseen and unheard. He is manifested only in his works with which we are all familiar." The other says "There is no gardener." And with this difference in what they say about the gardener goes a difference in how they feel toward the garden, in spite of the fact that neither expects anything of it which the other does not expect.

But is this the whole difference between them—that the one calls the garden by one name and feels one way toward it, while the other calls it by another name and feels in another way toward it? And if this is what the difference has become, then is it any longer appropriate to ask "Which is right?" or "Which is reasonable?"

RG VEDA

Hymn of Creation

The Rg Veda is the earliest book of Hindu scripture and one of the oldest religious texts in the world. It was written about 1500 B.C.E. and introduces the concept of Brahman, or ultimate reality, who is also introduced as a sort of "person" (purusha).

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-being then existed not nor being:
There was no air, nor sky that is beyond it.
What was concealed? Wherein? In whose
protection?
And was there deep unfathomable water? 2. Death then existed not nor life immortal:
Of neither night nor day was any token.
By its inherent force the One breathed windless
No other thing than that beyond existed. 3. Darkness there was at first by darkness hidden.
Without distinctive marks, this all was water. | <p>That which, becoming, by the void was covered.
That One by force of heat came into being.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Desire entered the One in the beginning:
It was the earliest seed, of thought the product.
The sages searching in their hearts with wisdom,
Found out the bond of being in non-being. 5. Their ray extended light across the darkness:
But was the One above or was it under?
Creative force was there, and fertile power:
Below was energy, above was impulse. |
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Rg Veda, "Hymn of Creation" from *Hymns from Rg Veda* (Oxford University Press, 1911).

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