

# The God Trap

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Contemplating the unknown surrounding one's own death can be quite frightening. Dealing with the loss of a beloved family member or dear friend often leads to grief and feelings of abandonment and loneliness. Even the vagaries of everyday life can lead one to desperately wishing for some island of peace and stability on which to cling. And herein lies the enticing attraction of the God trap.

Children brought up believing in Santa Claus are delighted on Christmas morning when their naïve expectations appear to have been justified. The magical appearance of gifts helps reinforce an unquestioning faith not only in Santa Claus, but in flying reindeer, toys manufactured by elves, and everything else promulgated as part of the story.

In similar fashion, but with much less evidence (no gifts under the tree), adults the world over assuage their fear of death by adopting an irrational belief in a supernatural being that offers an otherworldly existence following death. This belief supplies a hoped-for solution to the question "What happens to us when we die?" that is more appealing and less frightening than the more obvious answer "we simply cease to exist." It also helps assuage grief over the death of those close to us by assuring us that they live on in a different plane and that we will be reunited with them in the afterlife. Who wouldn't prefer to believe this myth over reality? And so the God trap snaps shut the inquiring mind that would otherwise see through this nonsense and remain skeptical at any explanation that borders on magic.

Outside of death, life itself poses challenges for which we might wish to seek irrational, supernatural explanations. Our sense of fairness makes us try to find meaning behind random tragedies. To say that something terrible that happens is the result of random, unfortunate circumstance leaves us feeling alone and vulnerable. But if we can convince ourselves that a supernatural being cares for us and is watching over us, why should we then question the logic, let alone the veracity, of that belief. If bad things happen, then it must have been God's will, dictated in order to further his unfathomable purposes. We should "rejoice and be glad" that tens of thousands die each year in floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and typhoons, tornados, wild fires and tsunamis. God must have a reason to allow such terrible carnage. "Praise the Lord and be thankful" he didn't find us to be expendable (this time). And thus the God trap tightens further, killing rational understanding of the true nature of life and its relation to the real world in which we live.

Finally, the true believer may also be found wrapping their mind around the existence of Hell. The believer has already swallowed a belief in sharing an eternity with God in an afterlife, but there are lots of folk that he/she would just as soon not share heaven with. After all, eternity is a long, long time. Since we're making this all up (although we won't admit this to ourselves), why not invent another really undesirable place to send these irritating people we don't want to associate with. Et Voila! Hell becomes another feature of the God trap. And a very useful one at that. If we can be convinced that any serious doubting (a result of logical reasoning about our irrational beliefs) may result in our being condemned to spend eternity in hell, then the God trap becomes a virtual stranglehold on our brain. We eschew rational thought and may even find ourselves proselytizing others into believing as we do.

As comforting as the God trap might make one feel, it has as much substance as the Santa Claus myth. There is no supernatural being or force that violates the physical laws that define our universe. Realizing how incredibly huge this universe is and how infinitesimally insignificant Earth is should be evidence enough for rejecting the God trap out of hand. Furthermore, no reliable, reproducible evidence of an afterlife has ever been observed. So much for eternity, heaven and hell. To accept that these are mere figments of our imagination is to claim victory for rational, enlightened thinking and to project hope for the future of mankind.