

A Sermon on the Difference Between Superstition and Religion
Sermon by Minister Angela Smith of COPE for May 3rd, 2020 (and beyond)

Superstition is ignorance paired often with fear or hope. Religion is the practice of moral and/or ethical principles established through tradition and custom with hopes of exhibiting and inspiring others to exhibit moral and/or ethical social conduct. The goal of all religions of good faith is to show that faith through good works by manifesting in the temporal what individuals of good faith reflect on as perfected in the abstract or abstract archetype often referred to as God and to whom I, Reverend Minister Angela Smith (reverend is proper, but, in league with Priest John Ball I think all religious leaders should identify as Minister or whatever the least title is to show humbleness and further exalt God). For the Church Of Philosophical Exploration, the primary focus at this time is exhibiting and inspiring honesty (including honest reason/intellectual honesty) for the sake of the Absolute and/or Whole Truth which for many seems to be the best place to start developing all the virtues. Truth is the foundation on which all else is built.

So, returning to superstition, here's an example: You are walking down the sidewalk and see money every few feet with no one else around. You pick it up and think "Today's my lucky day". That may be the extent of it. But, that would be an example of ignorance, potentially willful blindness, and hope or belief that money belongs to you since you found it. Now, with that same example, what should you do in the eyes of the law? You should take it to the nearest police station and report found money and where it was found. The police in many jurisdictions will hold that for a period of time (sometimes 30-90 days) and if no one claims it, the finder gets to keep it. This way the "unlucky" person who lost their money for some reason has a chance at being made whole because you were a good citizen/neighbor. What if you just leave the money where found? Then, you are leaving it up to fate what happens to that money. But, in this example you may be looking at willful blindness where not considering how the misfortunate person who lost money might feel or will feel when they realize no one turned it in and it is likely gone forever in their eyes. And, you could consider that ignorance as well from some perspectives. But, that's ignorance paired with hopeful belief that the money is yours at time of discovery while possibly ignoring through willful blindness that technically that would be considered theft if a witness saw the money dropped and who dropped it then saw you take it and could identify both. Ever seen "Trading Places" the film and the scene in the boardroom where the stolen money was planted on an innocent person and they went to jail (Dan Aykroyd)? It could happen, but, arguably unlikely given the example.

Here's where superstition by way of ignorance and fear gets really scary. Are you aware of what happened when Orson Welles did his radio show "War of the Worlds"? NPR reports 12 million Americans were listening to that broadcast and 1 million actually ran out of their homes in a fright. So, that was 1 in 12 Americans or 1 million that believed it could be true and were frightened enough in 1938 to run outside. Source: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/10/30/241797346/75-years-ago-war-of-the-worlds-started-a-panic-or-did-it> As I write this, I can't help but think about nearly all the programming on GAIA, some on Discovery Channel, and Youtube contributors to

publicly available content and some of the modern scares they try to drum up among the less fortunate and poorly educated for the sake of amusing themselves at the misfortune of others or because they actually believe their own bullshit. Which is scarier to you? Orson Welles' show was billed as fiction/drama and calling the station to clarify or just listening a little longer (exercising due diligence and patience which are both virtues) would have resulted in less uproar. And, if anything comforting was sold during such a broadcast, including soothsaying services, likely increased sales on that. But, I for one love Orson Welles and think if anything it sounds like a practical joke people played on themselves without being fully aware of it which likely made God laugh. So, well done.

Other ignorance partnered with fear results in rejection of those with disabilities from social inclusion without warrant. My now deceased Lhasa Apso friend, Crystal, had vision difficulties (aka poor sight). She could see well enough for most of her life but it got worse as she aged. At times a plastic grocery bag (rarely because we keep them bundled for reuse) would fall or pick up a breeze from a door opening and scare her. Her reaction was similar to how humans react to something we find unexplained and therefore disconcerting or discomfoting. This happened once in the bedroom and once in the area between the kitchen and living room at my old apartment. If she was human, I'd say "It looked like she had seen a ghost". She was shaking, her hair on end, and she backed slowly away from the bag and when I walked towards it she ran further away but stayed in the hall and barked a little. I grabbed the bag and put it away so neutralized the "threat". But, she was nervous for the rest of the night and every time anyone had plastic bags around as if now she had traumatic stress related to what for her was yet unexplained or something she didn't understand. When it happened the second time, she charged at the bag barking and it kept moving and she ran out and I grabbed it. Sometimes in Summer fans are on and things get picked up for flight in an unintended manner. I understand that and the mechanics behind how the bags flew. Crystal did not and responded in an instinctual and arguably superstitious manner given for her the phenomenon went unexplained and somehow I was the hero who conquered the plastic bags so reinforced my Alpha position in the pack that is our family and includes dogs. Later, she got into the bundle of bags and tore one up and that seemed to help her overcome her fear and she was less jumpy when any plastic bags were brought home from the store. And, the point here is also that disabled people are not plastic bags and you can learn to understand the cause and symptoms of most things or just accept people as individuals if you'd like the same acceptance and respect regardless of if you find some experiences too fantastic to relate to given your limitations.

So, before assuming anyone has actually seen a ghost, I want to ask if the person who saw it had a fever, was dehydrated, or otherwise intoxicated particularly with any hallucinogens. I'd want to eliminate all possible empirical explanations for seeing something others did not or do not. Where multiple people claim a similar experience, I'd want to know their backgrounds, if they've interacted with each other or influenced each other's recollection, and see if independent sources experience the same. My cousin went to the Amityville house and I did not. I thought it was too creepy and really thought she was brave to go at the time and still to an extent. But, she said there was nothing and it was just a house. Though she and I both believe in our intuition. So, maybe whatever

the priest did to get rid of the spirits finally worked or someone seeking to avoid penalty said the devil made them do it without realizing such a statement suggests incompetence and would likely result in permanent institutionalization where taking responsibility for one's wrongdoing often results in some chance of future release or return to free society. I often think of "Do you want to go to hell?" as the equivalent of "Do you want to go to jail?" Some people's choices suggest they want to go to jail but then they are disappointed when they get what their actions imply is what they want though the recidivism rate suggests maybe they do want that. If you were playing a game and broke the rules or just ended up rolling three doubles in Monopoly, you'd end up in jail or exiled from play most likely because everyone agrees to the rules at the start of play and ex post facto applies with option to change or amend at game start or depending on game rules. In Hockey, you've got the penalty box. In Baseball, you can be benched for fouls. The notion that there are rules that if violated result in penalty couldn't be more reinforced regardless of your favorite pastime. And, the rules are generally aligned with acting in good faith, being honest, and virtuous enough with respect to everyone's freedom in games as well as life. So, it seems really stupid that anyone would want to be incarcerated or exiled which reinforces acting in good faith and all that that implies. But, those who violate rules and laws say to people of good faith, "Aren't you supposed to forgive? Aren't you supposed to treat others as you would be treated? Is this how you would be treated?" And, they make a good point. But, if using that argument suggest they know the Golden Rule and are employing Christian morality to demand mercy or forgiveness without recognizing their own actions in context of the Golden Rule suggests they are being treated now exactly as they wish which is implied by their choices to violate the law or principles of good faith. Kafkaesque.

So, hell is prison and sometimes people discourage misconduct through drama and fictionalization to make a point. Or, that's one perspective. Heaven is when everyone is honest (including intellectually honest) and virtuous so paradise is restored and we fulfill our collective destiny as stewards and heirs of God's creation. And, in the meantime, some people practice and encourage Truth and Virtue and call that religion and I'm among that number. Other people ignorantly explore fear and hope turning to superstition to try to manipulate their destiny rather than manifest it. And, that's sad. But, sometimes even a dog named Crystal will face her fear and tear up a plastic bag not caring it was actually no threat and just a coincidence or phenomenon she didn't understand. Did you know humans are 84% dog according to DNA evidence? Seattle PI says it's true: <https://education.seattlepi.com/animals-share-human-dna-sequences-6693.html> Or, that's one perspective. 84% dog and 60% water (source: <https://www.usgs.gov/special-topic/water-science-school/science/water-you-water-and-human-body>), so maybe 100% dog-water? I'm kidding and not kidding. #TaoFu. If God laughs, then I'm happy enough. I hope you are too.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <http://www.churchofphilosophicalexploration.church/feedback.htm>. For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

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