

Q&A: I find that people always want more. Even when it comes to death, they want more. It's like money – people always want more. They think there should be more. But why? Why after you die people expect there will be more to come after death?

An interesting thought. And thinking about it I can see how some people's yearning for the afterlife is a variant of materialism.

But I generally tend to associate thoughts (or expectations) about the things after this life with the human passion not for "more things" but for "more knowledge" or "more understanding." In other words it wells up from the human trait of enquiry – to find pattern in chaos, meaning in mystery, to understand where things are not understood.

We have looked to the miniscule and the astronomic, the visible and the invisible – why would we stop that enquiry when it comes to the shape, purpose and finitude of human life?

In that sense I do not think it is wrong to want "more." While there is value in a sense of being content with "what is" – without the passion to look further, look beyond, a key driver of human activism for good grinds to a halt.

Q&A: When you say: “I don’t doubt God’s existence. when I do doubt, I am not being sensible.” do you mean this as a purely personal position or do you think that anyone, eg atheists or other religions, are not being sensible when they doubt the Christian God

The answer you are quoting from was very much a personal reflection. It also was an answer that highlights the degree of internal lack of logic that that exists within me when I doubt.

If there is an other-than-me reflection in it at all it would be towards those that profess Christian belief but fail to live like it. To the extent of my failings, I consider myself in that number.

I’m not sure if I would use the phrase “not being sensible” to describe those who doubt the Christian God in a way that is

entirely in accord with their worldview and philosophical framework.

I'm not sure that there is one phrase that would demarcate those of a Christian worldview from those of atheistic worldview. For instance, I know of some atheists who have come to faith through the path of logic (i.e. they have applied "sense" within their own framework and reframed their conclusions about God), others along the path of moral conviction, others along the path of grappling with some form of revelation that rendered their previous worldview untenable. "Becoming sensible" certainly would not adequately or consistently describe these transitions.

I know some current atheists / holders of other religion who are quite "sensible" (in the sense of coherent internal framework). And there are others who are less sensible – in that they espouse one thing and live like another.

In other words, it's a mixed bag all round, and I don't know if the internal sensibleness of a worldview is a useful tool for demarcating the debate.

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Q&A: Have you ever had any doubts about God's existence? No offense. Some people take

that question in offense.

Not offended. Not offended at all.

I remember when I was five telling my mother I didn't believe in God. I'm not sure why. It was probably precociousness. It's the last time I remember doubting the existence of God.

I remember toying with the idea in my teens. What would it be like if God wasn't real and I could live as a non-Christian? As a hormone-ravaged young lad the initial preoccupation were about the rampant amounts of premarital sex I could (hypothetically) then have. But even then I realised that even that preoccupation would become meaningless if there was nothing else "under the sun" except what I could experience. And emotionally speaking I teetered on the edge of having nothing to hold on to, nothing to refer to, nothing to guide, uphold, support, correct, or shape me. To be defined by and limited to... me, my own thoughts, my own experiences, my own stratagems and philosophies. It literally scared me.

The doubts I have now, when I have them, are usually associated with moments of depression – when my emotions have moved away from what is actually True (arguably a good definition for depression). But these doubts would not be about the existence of God, or his goodness – but of his ability to love me, save me, care for me, nurture me, to not turn his back on me or forget me. In other words, in times of depression, I have a tendency to forget the reality and extent of God's grace and embrace the self-centered notion that the love of God revealed in Christ is big enough for everybody except me.

As with all doubts of depression these doubts are irrational and somewhat nonsensical. These doubts are undermined by the truths of the Christian gospel.

So no, I don't doubt God's existence.

And when I do doubt, I am not being sensible.

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Q&A: If you could be either God's worst enemy or nothing, which would you choose?

I have been God's enemy. Without Jesus I would still be God's enemy. And I would, of myself, choose to be that still.

Thank God for Jesus. He has made me his friend. And now I would be nothing else.

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Q&A: Why do we need a "Marriage Act" at all?

Thanks for the question, which I assume derives from an article on my blog (<http://god-s-will.blogspot.com/2010/09/asking-right-question-in-marriage.html>). Caveat: These are initial thoughts only.

The fundamental question to ask is whether or not we want

marriage law to be passive or active. The passive sense of law is to reflect society – to enact or provide a legal model that encapsulates societal reality and allows for legally guided (and bound) interactions between members of society according to those reflected norms. The active sense of law is to guide, shape or even control society – to provide rights, assert responsibilities, and enable punitive measures in order to modify behaviour or shape cultural norms.

FLOW OF THOUGHT #1 – We need something in the passive sense, to reflect society.

The problem is that if we look at society I don't think this "something" is the Marriage Act. In particular, it is not the concept encapsulated in the Marriage Act that is the "solemnisation" of a marriage.

Solemnisation is not just about something being solemn or heartfelt. Legally speaking we can consider it to be a "formality necessary to validate a deed, act, contract." I guess its much like the settlement on a house – something happens when the keys are exchanged. It is not wrong to think of a solemnified marriage as an enacted contract then, in two senses:

a) A contract between the parties. Entering into marriage implies (as is recognised in law) a whole bunch of rights and responsibilities. These only usually come into play when a marriage ends (e.g. inheritance rights) or breaks down and where some form of reparation for obligations-not-met are required – alimony, custody of children, separation of assets etc.

b) A contract with society. Entering into marriage implies a legal state that is recognised and taken into account when it comes to affairs external to the couple – everything from taxation, social welfare, interaction with the education

system, issues relating to privacy, issues relating to next-of-kin, and (topically for NSW at the moment) the adoption of children etc. – all take into account (to a greater or lesser extent) the existence, or not, of a marriage contract.

But solemnisation, legally speaking, is becoming more and more meaningless. For instance, the “common law” or “de facto” marriage, is now pretty much taken as an implied contract even though it has never been “solemnified.” This is true in both sense of the contract. As a contract between the parties the implications of a relationship breakdown financially and in terms of children etc. is now pretty much identical to that of “real” marriages. Similarly, as a contract with society, there is very little distinction made between solemnified and registered marriages, and de facto situations.

To a lesser extent, the advent of “civil unions” or the ability in some jurisdictions to register a same-sex relationship, also provides the rights of the contract without the solemnisation of a marriage. This is particularly the case in the sense of the contract between the partners (shared property rights etc.), yet increasingly so in the sense of the contract with society (availability of the privilege to adopt etc.)

As the distinctiveness of solemnised marriage is reduced, so is its value.

Solemnisation alone, therefore, provides very few things, legally, that are not provided for by other means. Perhaps this is simplistic, but the only thing you can get via legally solemnised marriage that you can't get anywhere else is:

a) Convenience. Sign four or five pieces of paper and you have the legal recognition of your relationship in a few easy steps. More importantly: your relationship can be enacted by proclamation (we are now married) rather than by demonstration (we are cohabiting, so consider us married).

b) Cross-recognition. Generally speaking (and less uniquely now that there is provision for cross-recognition of civil unions), a legal marriage in one jurisdiction is recognised in another.

c) Symbolism – you get to refer to your relationship, unquestioningly, as a “marriage” and have the certificate to prove it.

And none of these things are inherent to any deeper concept of “marriage.”

Personally, I would, for instance, and for some good theological reasons (for another time), define a marriage relationship as: a faithful, sexual, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman in a covenant freely entered before God, each other and the community. If any of those characteristics were not present a relationship would not easily be classified as a marriage in my thinking.

Legal solemnisation is not needed for any of these characteristics to exist. It is not even needed for a relationship with these characteristics to be legally recognised (although it is a possible way in which that legal recognition can occur).

So why have legal solemnisation at all? Let relationships be formed either by behaviour or voiced intention or religious rite and then them recognised as legal by registering them. Let the legal reality be a _recognition_ of relationship rather than the creation of the relationship. Let marriage (defined by man-and-woman) be, legally, simply one form of recognised civil union (defined more broadly as the case may be – including non-sexual relationships).

After all, that is, in practice, what we have now. And if we are looking at representing reality, let us represent it.

Freedom can still be exercised. Ministers of Religion would, just like now, be able to lead people through religious rites

– to solemnify spiritually – and exercise their conscience and religious freedom as to who they would do this for and who they wouldn't do it for. Relationships covenanted within those rites would be able to be registered and recognised legally. All is well.

The debate about what gets to be called “marriage” therefore becomes what it actually is – a cultural debate about definitions and nomenclature.

However,

FLOW OF THOUGHT #2 – Do we need something in the active sense, to shape society?

Starting with my definition of the characteristics of marriage – a faithful, sexual, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman in a covenant freely entered before God, each other and the community. Is it possible to ensure that the legal representation of marriage reflects that definition?

Only partially, but substantially. Solemnisation, with any effect, can only insist on the objective characteristics of a relationship – that it is a covenant freely entered before the civic community, and that it is between a “man and a woman.”

The debate is about whether to reduce the restriction of this latter characteristic to “between two people.” Some would even like to see the characteristic further liberalise to recognise polyamory – i.e. more than two people.

The fact that the law is resistant to change in this characterisation of marriage is itself a “shaping of society.” The law is active. And there is value to that.

The problem is that it is only active in a shallow sense. If the legal affirmation of marriage will only extend to the depths to which solemnisation under the marriage act extends

then this is not very far because the activity of solemnisation is of lessening practical effect (see previous flow of thought). It confers fewer and fewer particular rights and the choice to not seek legal solemnisation of a relationship carries less and less penalty.

Those who are intent on marriage law maintaining a particular objective definition of marriage need to not only argue for the retention of that definition but also consider the extent of its enforceability. Their needs to be an increased discussion of how the law can actively assert that definition. The argument needs to not just be about what legal marriage is but what legal marriage does – what unique rights does it bestow? What things are unavailable to those who do not avail themselves of legal marriage? What penalties apply where a marriage covenant is broken?

The question becomes: where do we draw the line as to what the law should do?

Which is where I'll leave it – unanswered for now.

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Q&A: If you could have and use any super power what would it be?

Flying. That'd be cool.

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