Dedicated to learning.
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Part I

My Thoughts
1 Understanding God

Raani. Hi Pramod!
Pramod. Hallo Beautiful!!

Raani. How are you?
Pramod. I am doing awesome! Thanks. How about you?

Raani. I am fine, Pramod. So, what’s up?
Pramod. Recently, I have been thinking.

Raani. Thinking about what?
Pramod. Thinking about life, the world, and the cosmos.

Raani. You are like a weird guy almost always thinking about something. Pramod, I am curious. Would you like to share with me your thoughts and experiences?
Pramod. Ha ha.. I love thinking. Definitely, sweety. It would be my pleasure to share with you my thoughts and experiences.

Where do you want me to start?

Raani. Would you like to discuss about God?
Pramod. Sure. But, I must warn you that it is one of the most arguable, debatable, contentious, controversial, disputable, and polemical topics out there. Hundreds of movies, thousands of lectures, millions of books, billions of articles, and trillions of thoughts have been poured on this unsolved and possibly unsolvable enigma. Many great people have spent their entire lives trying to understand this mystery. Though there can never be a full stop to this quest, we can certainly move forward by at least a step through a solid scientific analysis.

Raani. Do you believe in God?
Pramod. Which God?

Raani. What do you mean which God? The God that people believe or disbelieve in.
Pramod. My belief or disbelief in God depends on the definition of God. So, which definition of God are you referring to?

Raani. Don’t we have a single universal definition of God?
Pramod. Definitely not. There are thousands of definitions or interpretations of God.

Raani. Fine. Then what would be the ideal question?
Pramod. There is no ideal question. There is always a better question.

Raani. Which would be a better question in this scenario?
Pramod. One of the good questions can be: According to you, what is God?

Raani. Fine. According to you, what is God?
Pramod. I would strongly recommend you to ask this question after knowing at least some of the many interpretations of God.

Raani. Why do you think knowing the different interpretations of God is important?
Pramod. For many reasons. The main reason is that when we know different interpretations of a concept, we can select the best interpretations and if possible try to make use of it in our lives.
Raani. Cool. What are the different interpretations of God?
Pramod. There are an uncountable number of interpretations of God. A small set of them are:

★ Creator of everything is God
★ High qualities is God
★ Ganapathi, Lakshmi, Shiva, Vishnu, etc are Gods
★ Rama, Krishna, Jesus Christ, Allah, etc are Gods
★ God is something whom you cannot see, hear, touch, feel, or even think about
★ Soul is God
★ I am God
★ Passion is God
★ Everything is God
★ Consciousness is God
★ Nation is God
★ Faith is God
★ Service to mankind is God
★ Love is God
★ Work is God
★ Dharma is God
★ Nature is God
★ The highest state of happiness is God
★ Mind/thoughts is God
★ People are Gods
★ Humanity is God
★ God is just a placeholder for a concept for which any beautiful interpretation can be attached that makes us happy and good
★ God is just a concept to fool people

Figure 1: Personal God

Raani. Oh! So many interpretations. I didn’t know. How come are there so many different interpretations?
Pramod. The interpretations come as a result of variegated thinking of billions of minds. As people are different, so their thinking. Hence, there are a multitude of interpretations of abstract concepts like life, mind, God, death, morality, happiness etc.

Raani. Fine. According to you, which is the best interpretation of God?

Pramod. I like all these thousands of interpretations of God. There is a community of people believing or disbelieving in each of these interpretations. Some interpretations are scientifically and logically sound. A few others are philosophically beautiful. A couple more are psychologically useful. Yet others are good choices for bad fights.

The first two interpretations are my personal favorites.

Raani. Cool. Due to time constraints let’s stick to the first two interpretations of God i.e., (1) creator of cosmos and (2) God of high qualities.

Consider the first interpretation. Do you believe in a God, who created everything?

Pramod. Let me clarify the meaning of creator concept. According to the creator interpretation, it is assumed that God created and creates everything, literally everything, from people, trees, non-living things around us, Earth, Sun, the universe, and all of cosmos. People also extend the definition to include the controller concept, where it is assumed that God is also the controller of everything, including the lives of humans, trees, and past, present, and future of the world.

Do you believe in a God, who is the creator of cosmos? Both yes and no, because I don’t know if such a God exists.

Figure 2: Who created cosmos?

Raani. Why are you taking a neutral position? Why don’t you either completely believe or completely disbelieve in it?

Pramod. I partly believe in the concept of a creator of cosmos because there is no rational evidence or proof that a creator doesn’t exist. Similarly, I partly disbelieve in a creator because there is no rational evidence or proof that a creator exists. Hence, I am taking a neutral position and I believe it is the most scientific and logical decision to stand by. I don’t know if there is a creator for our cosmos.

Most people never in their lifetime use the phrase “I don’t know” as they think it is some kind of shame to accept not knowing something. But, they miss the point that it requires guts to say “I don’t know” and of course it is most scientific to say “I don’t know” when they
really don’t know something. The beauty in science is that scientists need not pretend that they know the answers to everything. Hence, my answer to this question is: I don’t know if there is a creator for our cosmos.

Raani. You are mainly focusing on evidence or proofs. Do you think that the evidence or proofs method is the only way of understanding the universe or cosmos?

Pramod. I don’t know if asking for evidence or proofs is the only way to understand the universe. But, that is certainly the mindset we have followed for thousands of years to advance our understanding about the universe. A bit strict definition of science relates to the disciplined way or method to study the natural world. A method or process is called **scientific** if it has been observed naturally or through experiments, or if it is tested or verified, or if it has been proven formally through the existing observations or theory. Hence, a claim only becomes a good theory or law or theorem or fact with solid observations or evidences or proofs. Else, it remains a claim only and it does not get accepted by the scientific community.

For example, long long ago, many cultures believed that the Earth was flat. People through reasoning realized that the Earth was a sphere and not an infinite flatland. They also believed in a geocentric model, where Sun, Moon, and stars revolved around the stationary Earth. When people tried to identify flaws in their reasoning and developed more scientific tools to untangle the mysteries of mother nature they came up with better theories about the universe. The great scientists such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler showed that people were wrong about the geocentric model and led the way to the heliocentric model, in which Sun was the center of the universe.

The greatest scientist of all times, Sir Isaac Newton, not only proved the elliptical orbits of the planets but also invented the scientific (mathematical) tool for proving it, namely calculus. With the observations of Hershel and Bessel, we only realized that Sun was not the center of the universe. It was simply an ordinary star among billions of stars that were revolving around the center of the Milky Way galaxy. Going on, we got to know about several galaxies, our observable universe, parallel universes, white dwarf, neutron stars, black holes, wormholes, time travel, and so on.

The only tool we have used till now for our understanding of the universe is the **scientific method** and it has given awesome results each time. The scientific method is time tested magical wand for our advancement of knowledge about the universe and by far the only way we know to discover God, if God exists.

Raani. Nice. But, why do some people disbelieve in a creator?

Pramod. There are many reasons. A few major reasons are:

*No evidence.* People have never seen a rational evidence or proof that a creator exists. Hence, they disbelieve in it. But, it is quite illogical to say that an object does not exist simply because one has not seen a proof that it exists. For example, because we have never seen a thing that can transform from living state to non-living state and then again back to living state an unlimited number of times, it does not mean that the thing doesn’t exist. Just that we do not know if it exists.
Darwin's theory of evolution. Another common reason why people disbelieve in a creator is because of their belief in the ground-breaking theory of evolution developed by the British naturalist Charles Darwin in 1859. The theory is based on a process called natural selection, in which biological features become significant due to the interaction of the species with its environment. Certain species with sustainable features or traits survive than others. As per the theory, we thriving in this world is a matter of luck and probability.

Another idea that arises out of the theory of evolution is the artificial selection. It is the intentional breeding of animals and plants to retain certain desirable characteristics. For example, dogs and cattle. We can selectively breed dogs and cattle that are healthier and more helpful to us. In a way, humans are controlling the way which animals should reproduce and live and which animals die. Because of this reason, many reject the concept of creator and controller. But again, the universe might be so complicated that the entire evolution might be a simulated experiment. We never know.

Creator paradox. Let's assume that God created the cosmos. If God created the cosmos, then who created God? One might say that probably God created itself. Or that God always existed. In that case, why not save a step and say that cosmos created itself or that cosmos always existed. This is the concept of creator paradox.

Big Bang theory. The galaxies are moving away from each other. The universe is expanding. This observational evidence leads to a theory that 13.8 billion years ago, the entire universe was concentrated in a high-density high-temperature single point. Then, a big explosion took place and thus our entire universe, including matter, energy, and time were formed. In 1920s, Alexander Friedmann and Georges Lemaitre laid the foundations for this theory, famously called the Big Bang theory. It implies that the universe was created through a cosmic evolution. Currently, there are several observational evidences confirming this theory. Hence, several scientists disbelieve in the creator concept.

Free will. There is a famous debate called determinism versus free will. People who support the determinism philosophy believe that everything in the world has been planned before and gets executed according to the determined plan. People who support the free will philosophy believe that they do have free will to choose what they want and decide what they want and finally change the world according to their free will. Hence, they disbelieve in a creator of everything.

God of the gaps. Long long ago, people believed that Sun was a God. Later it was realized that Sun was just a star i.e., a fire ball where a process called nuclear fusion takes place. During fusion, hydrogen atoms combine to form helium atoms releasing massive amounts of energy, majorly in the form of heat. People believed that comets are like demons or the anger of God. Later it was realized that they were just cosmic bodies orbiting Sun in highly elliptical orbits. They consist of dust, ice, carbon dioxide, and other chemicals. When they are far from the Sun, they are dirty snowballs and when they are near the Sun, they have long tails of gas and dust caused from melting due to Sun’s heat.

Claudius Ptolemy believed that God was behind the difficult-to-understand windings and to-and-fro motion of the heavenly bodies. Later it was realized that the retrograde motion of the planets was caused due to the geocentric model which was incorrect assumption. With the progress of science, mysteries have been tackled one-by-one. People believed, whatever they could not comprehend or science could not answer, was due to the handy work of God. This is famously called the God of the gaps. Hence, some people do not
believe in such a God hoping that some day, science will answer the ultimate question of “who created cosmos?”.

Artificial life form. Craig Venter and his team created the first living self-replicating cell on the planet by designing a chromosome with 485 genes on a computer, creating it in a laboratory, and transplanting it into a recipient bacterium cell. The results were published in a paper entitled “Creation of a Bacterial Cell Controlled by a Chemically Synthesized Genome”. Self-replication or reproduction is considered as the most basic definition of life. It was the first time that an artificial living cell was created, whose genetic code was made chemically and whose genetic ancestor was a computer. For this reason, many researchers believe that science has the capability to create many things that do not exist in the universe.

Raani. Hmm.. Why do some people believe in a creator?

Pramod. A majority of people believe in a creator. Again, there are several reasons. Some of the common reasons are:

[No Evidence.] People have never seen a rational evidence or proof that a creator does not exist. Hence, they believe in it. Again, it is illogical to say that an object exists simply because there is no way to prove the non-existence of it.

[Parents’ and environment’s influence.] Quite often, parents’ thoughts and their ways of living gets inherited by their children. Whatever the children learn till the age of 20 mostly retains through their entire lives unless they start to question heavily, think deeply, and have solid exposure to others’ perspectives. Most parents knowingly or unknowingly force their children in believing what they believe, not giving an opportunity for the children to contemplate, analyze, and understand the world as it is.

Consider the teapot example of British mathematician and logician Bertrand Russel. If the ancient books said that there is a giant cosmological teapot surrounding the Earth and Sun and it is taught to the kids every Sunday, a majority would automatically believe in it as everyone around them would be believing in it. It would seem weird not to believe in such a teapot.

[Creator argument.] Many times, the following argument called creator argument is given to prove the existence of a creator: “A potter makes pots, a carpenter makes furniture, and a shoemaker makes shoes. If everything around us has a maker or creator, then there should be someone or something that created our universe or cosmos.” The argument is flawed. This is because it tries to come up with a theory generalizing from a few examples, which cannot be done as per mathematical logic. Maybe the cosmos is so complicated that it got created on its own.

The creator argument is similar to the white chicken egg argument. A majority of people see only white chicken eggs in their lives. Just because they have seen only white chicken eggs, it does not mean that chickens lay only white eggs. There are brown and blue colored chicken eggs, depending on the breed of the chickens. Hence, just because we have seen mostly things that have a creator does not imply that everything in the cosmos must have a creator. That is a flawed argument.

The creator argument only gives a possibility for the existence of a creator, not a certainty. There is yet another problem with the creator argument. The analysis of the argument leads to a paradox: If everything is created by the creator, then who created the creator? If that creator came into existence on its own, why can’t the universe exist on its
Projection of childhood. Here is yet another beautiful observation by Osho, an Indian philosopher. These are his statements that wonderfully depict a reasoning for believing in a creator: “Man feels so helpless, so afraid of death, so burdened with life’s problems, and because he has been raised by a father and a mother. Those were the beautiful days with no responsibility and no worry. Somebody was taking care of him. That psychological childhood is projected into all the religions. God becomes the father. And there are a few religions in which the God becomes the mother. It is a simple psychological projection of a child. Whenever you are afraid, whenever you are in trouble, you start seeking help.”

Raani. Oops! A lot of information to digest and it is very confusing.
Pramod. Yes, it is. But, all these reasons are severely flawed in one way or the other and they are not technically sound to be the good proofs for the existence or non-existence of a creator. As we have not yet seen a technically sound or convincing reason, it is quite difficult to either totally believe or disbelieve in a creator. Because we do not have a rational evidence or proof about the existence or non-existence of a creator, I would like to be on the neutral position that a creator may or may not exist.

Raani. Wow! That is exciting. What about the second interpretation of God, the high qualities?
Pramod. High qualities is a general phrase that can be used for perfection, infinite goodness, infinite intelligence, infinite power, omnipotence, and so on. Often, God is attached with such high qualities rather than considering the creator interpretation alone. Sometimes, both these interpretations are combined that results in a combination.

Raani. Do you believe in a God with high qualities?
Pramod.

Do you believe in a God of high qualities? Scientifically speaking, both yes and no, because I don’t know if such a God exists. Psychologically speaking, unequivocally yes.

Figure 3: God of high qualities
Raani. Why is your answer so different in different perspectives?
Pramod. Here is the short answer. Scientifically and factually, I do not know if such a God exists because of no evidence or proof on the existence or non-existence of such a God. But, philosophically and psychologically, believing in it I believe improves one's mental personality. Hence, I like to believe that such a God exists irrespective of whether that kind of God exists or not.

Raani. How can you believe in something psychologically when you do not know whether it exists or not scientifically?
Pramod. Consider a very simple example, my favorite movie Titanic. The characters Jack and Rose do not exist in reality. They are simply the characters enacted by the great actors Leonardo and Kate, respectively. Still, I would like to believe and I strongly believe that Jack and Rose existed. Each and every time I think of the two lovers, I automatically think about their eternal love. They are the great teachers who have taught me and still teaching me how to love. This is the psychological benefit of believing in something irrespective of its existence.

Often, it is psychologically beneficial or advantageous of believing in things irrespective of their existence in reality.

Raani. That sounds interesting. So, how exactly do you apply this technique to God?
Pramod. The concept is similar to having role models. If we simply listen to the stories of the passion of the greatest scientist Sir Isaac Newton towards his research and one of the greatest humanitarians Mother Teresa towards her service to the mankind, the feeling of research and service floods in our veins and we feel motivated to do great things to change the world for the better. In mythology, different Gods are identified for different types of qualities such as knowledge, love, courage, prosperity, food, helping nature, and so on. When we think deeply on the Gods who are supposed to be the personifications of high qualities and not the forms themselves, we start cultivating the qualities they represent.

The psychological idea described above uses the concept of the law of attraction, which says “You become what you believe”. For an extraordinary exposition on this life-changing concept, please refer to the ground-breaking book “The Power of Your Subconscious Mind” by Joseph Murphy. In simple words, when we think deeply on a God with high qualities, we are actually thinking on the high qualities which over time we develop ourselves.

Raani. Wow! Very beautiful concept. We have covered only two interpretations of God as of now. Could you please give a general strategy how you analyze several other interpretations?
Pramod. Sure. We covered two interpretations but, those were the two most important interpretations. We can analyze the other interpretations similarly through critical thinking and unbiased analysis of the arguments. We should not be too superstitious or unquestioning as some theists are and at at the same time we should not be too ignorant and arrogant as some atheists are. An excellent book that gives strong foundations for critical thinking is “An Introduction to Critical Thinking and Creativity” by Joe Y. F. Lau, who is a PhD from MIT in Philosophy. I believe critical thinking should solve the problem.

Raani. Hmmm.. What are spirituality, religion, and culture?
Pramod. Good question. Spirituality in recent years is more related to the psychological feeling and experience of blissful transformation. It might be related to prayer, meditation,
yoga, and so on. One might be non-religious, disbelieve in God, and still be spiritual.

Religion is a collection of beliefs and duties. It is a collection of principles and practices. The primary purpose of a religion is to teach man how to live a good life following morals, values, and ethics. The other main purpose of it is to express certain beliefs that does not belong to the physical world (physical world is the world that we perceive through our five senses). In many religions, the highest emphasis is given to the omnipotent God(s). One might be non-spiritual, disbelieve in God, and still be religious. There are more than 4,000 religions in the world. The best unbiased exposition on religion can be found in an excellent book “Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions” by Encyclopedia Britannica and Wendy Doniger.

Culture is the set of beliefs, customs, values, attitudes, behaviors, arts, and ways of living of a particular society, group, organization at a particular place or time. Culture influences a religion and the religion influences the culture. One can be non-religious and still follow a culture. The other way cannot be true, I believe.

Raani. At this point I have a controversial question. Is religion good or bad?
Pramod. Again, a very good question. I believe the question is similar to questions such as “Is television good or bad?”, “Is Internet good or bad?”, “Is knife good or bad?”, and so on. I believe these things or concepts themselves do not have a goodness or badness factor. The people who use them for different intentions and purposes can be tagged good or bad. Similarly, religion is neither good nor bad. Good, bad, and worst are the people who follow it for different intentions.

Raani. If people really think on a God with high qualities why do they kill each other? Is it because of religion?
Pramod. People who think on God with high qualities can never kill or harm or even hurt others. Instead, they themselves become godly people with all good qualities. If they really hurt others, it means they are not at all thinking on a God with high qualities. In fact, they are constantly thinking on a devil with high-level of low qualities.

Personally, I do not believe any religion wants its followers to harm or hurt or kill others. It is the people who see what they want to see, listen what they want to listen, understand what they want to understand, think what they want to think, and finally do what they want to do in the name of religions, Gods, and so on.

Raani. Should religions be banned from Earth?
Pramod. If a religion really has a bad portion then the government has to ban that portion or at least overrule those statements. If any person does something bad with any bad intention, then he should be punished severely. The worst people should be permanently deleted from Earth. Good people should be rewarded to the fullest. Only then can a society thrive and go forward and everyone can be happy.

If there is one thing we should know before knowing God, it is ourselves, our mind, and our psychology. The best book I would recommend to know about psychology is “Psychology” by David G. Myers. It is an excellent book.

Raani. Last question. What are your final thoughts on God?
Pramod. God is a philosophically deep topic. In deep philosophy, we have only opinions and perspectives. We do not have access to a universal fact. Hence, different interpretations of God exist. One can believe in any concept of God as long as it helps the person in personality development and does not harm or hurt any other person. If the person is
harming other people or the society in the name of God or religion, then, either the person has to rethink or others have to teach the person how to think in a way that the person understands.

We are here to be happy and make others happy. We are here to help the less fortunate. Be happy and do good should be the motto of life. So, let’s live a meaningful happy life and contribute as much as we can for the development of the society.

Be happy and do good should be the motto of life.

Raani. Oh my God!!! It would so nice if all people live together happily, irrespective of their variegated beliefs.

Pramod. Very true. By the way, when you exclaimed “Oh my God!!!”, which concept of God did you mean?

Raani. Ha ha ha. . .