

Humble Materialism

I have a friend, well former friend, who de-friended me because he said I was a hypocrite. He said that I spoke of the divine a lot for someone who claimed to be an atheist. I guess it's time to come out of the closet. I am not an atheist.

First, I think it is poor epistemology to define oneself by what one is not or does not believe in. I don't believe in many things.

More importantly, however, my feelings toward the divine are best stated by Teiresias when he was criticized for worshipping Dionysus, one of my favorite gods. At this point, Dionysus was not accepted as a god and there was some danger in choosing to worship him. He says, "We do not trifle with divinity. No, we are the heirs of customs and traditions hallowed by age and handed down to us by our fathers. No quibbling logic can topple them, whatever subtleties this clever age invents. People may say, "Aren't you ashamed? At your age, going dancing, wreathing your head in ivy?" Well, I am not ashamed. Did the god declare that just the young or just the old should dance? No, he desires his honor from all mankind. He wants no one excluded from his worship."

I am a mere mortal, and much in my life is outside my control. My life seems a weird mixture of me paddling a boat in a river; sure, my effort matters, sure knowledge matters, but there's lots I just have to accept. I place a great value in knowledge, even though learning sometimes feels more like being aware one is on a slightly larger island surrounded by a larger ocean of ignorance. Life changes and we can't always know if it's for the better or worse. I speak of the divine to remind me that I am human. Perhaps there are gods, perhaps not. At this point in my life, I've just decided that they can fight their own battles, and I have less patience with those who try and recruit me in their names. If you want a label for this attitude, I am a humble materialist.