

Whistling By The Graveyard, Genesis 3:1-5

This Roman mosaic is from the ancient city of Pompeii. It was buried in AD 79. This was a common Roman theme called *Memento Mori* - "Remember we all die". There are various themes: a level [plumbline], balance scale, a death's head, symbols of poverty and riches [clothing], symbol of chance or circumstance [wheel] and symbol of the soul [butterfly]. The skull holds down the soul until the wheel moves and the skull falls and the soul escapes.

The Thoughts over these next Few Sundays will be taken from the book "Immortality" by Clay Jones [2020]

Facing Immortality



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Definition of Terms

from Immortal by Clay Jones [2020] pages 16-17

Heaven – “I mean our Future eternal state of supreme enjoyment of the Creator, each other and His creation.”

Mortality Mitigating project – “I mean the naturalist’s attempt to make death into something that isn’t so bad.”

Materialism – “Materialism is the belief that nothing exists beyond matter.”

Naturalism – “Naturalism is the belief that nature is all there is”



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This representation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden is from a display in the Creation Museum



The real problem of death is found in Genesis 3:1-5. We struggle with death and its consequences because of sin that introduced into humanity several great evils as well as physical death. The 1st was a desire to be our own god and determine right and wrong under our own terms. The 2nd was selfishness and self-centeredness. The 3rd was self-righteousness. The 4th was shame and aversion to responsibility. Our aversion to to responsibility is rooted in our shame.

Genesis 3:1-5 [ESV]

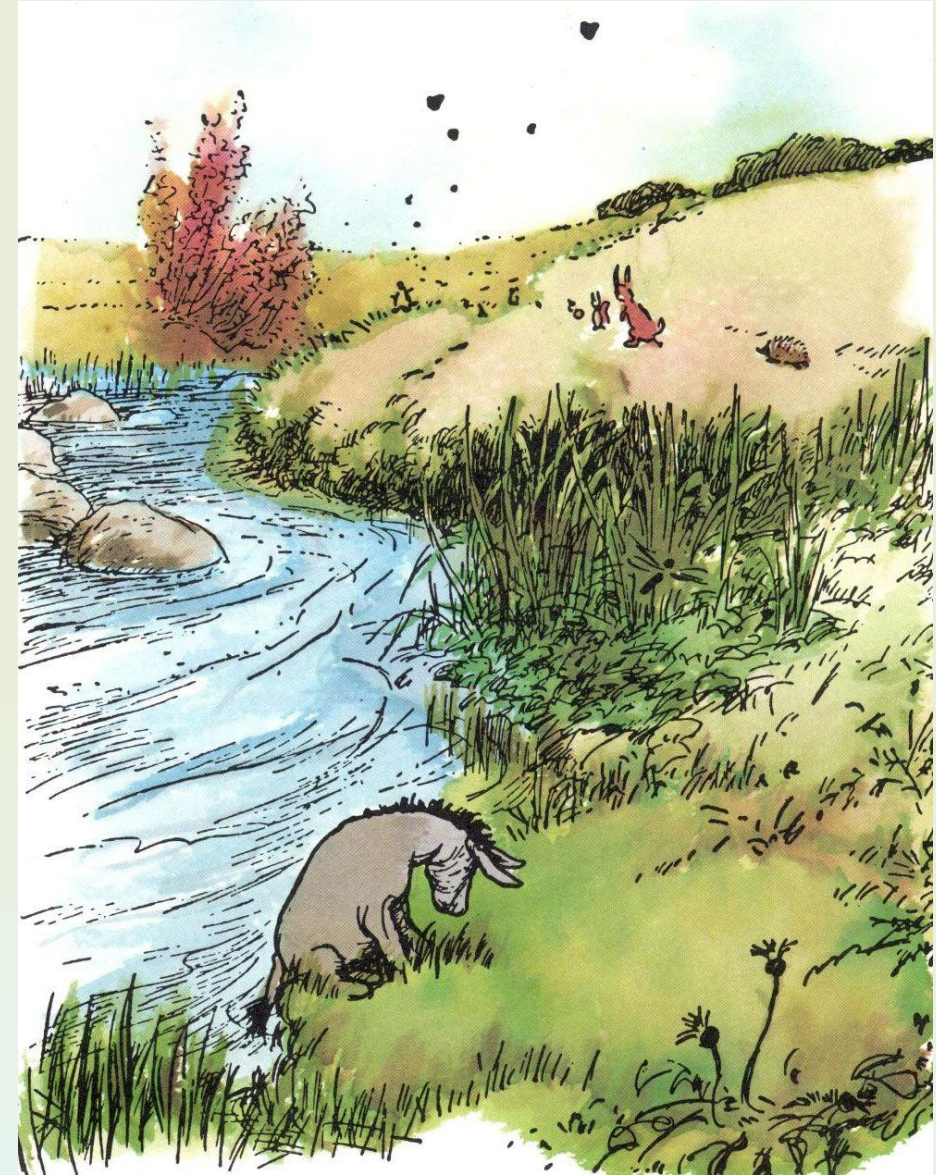
1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

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The idiom “Whistling by the graveyard” is disappearing from American usage. It is one of those strange idioms that while based on the same image can have contrasting meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In the 1st case it can mean “making a false show of bravery or nonchalance in the face of a serious situation.” For the other meaning it can mean “confidence and assurance in a serious situation.” Materialism, Naturalism and Secularism often turn to the 1st use of the idiom. They project a false sense of bravado in the face of death. In a strange way they look like the character Eeyore from the Winnie the Pooh books by A. A. Milne. In the books Eeyore has a sense of despair but covers it with a false sense of superiority to the other animals.



Is a picture of Eeyore from Winnie The Pooh, the original illustration for the book.

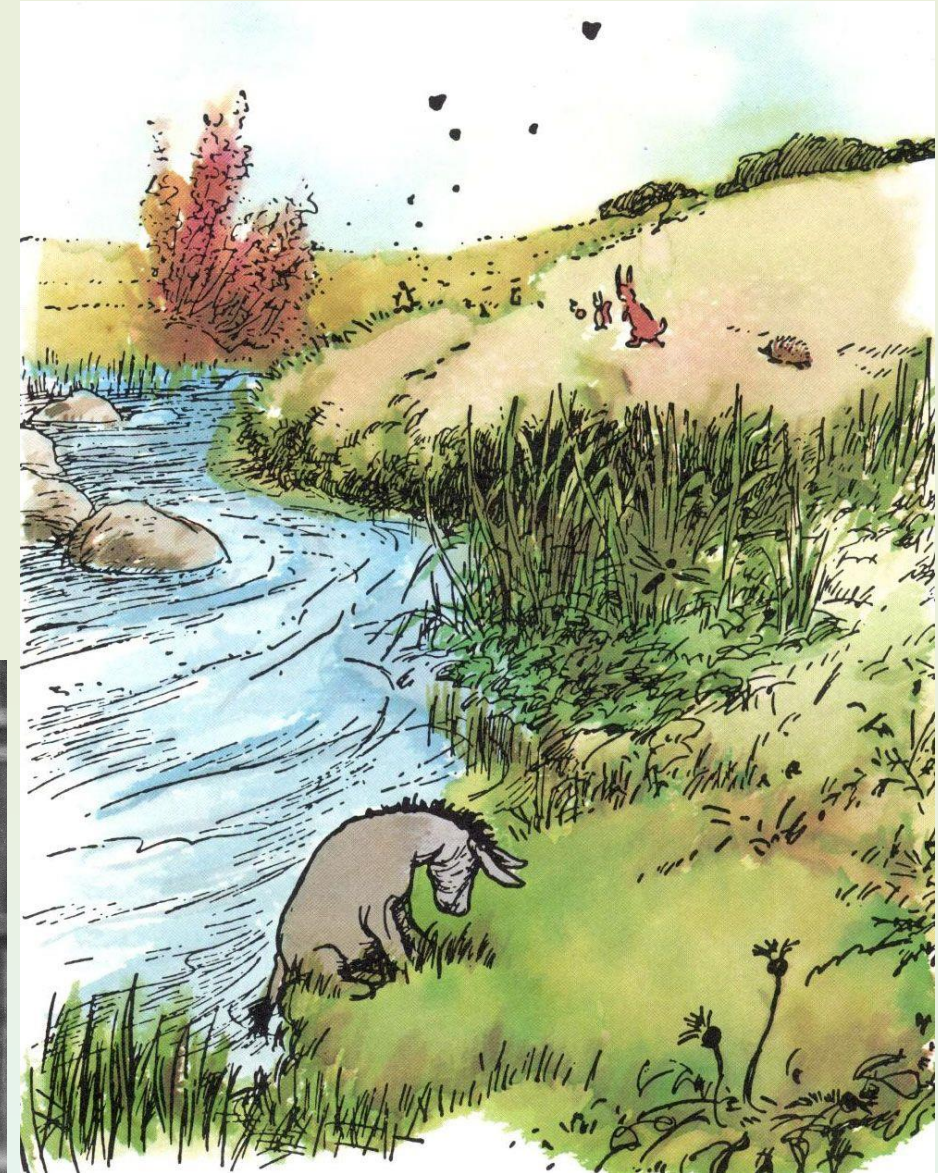
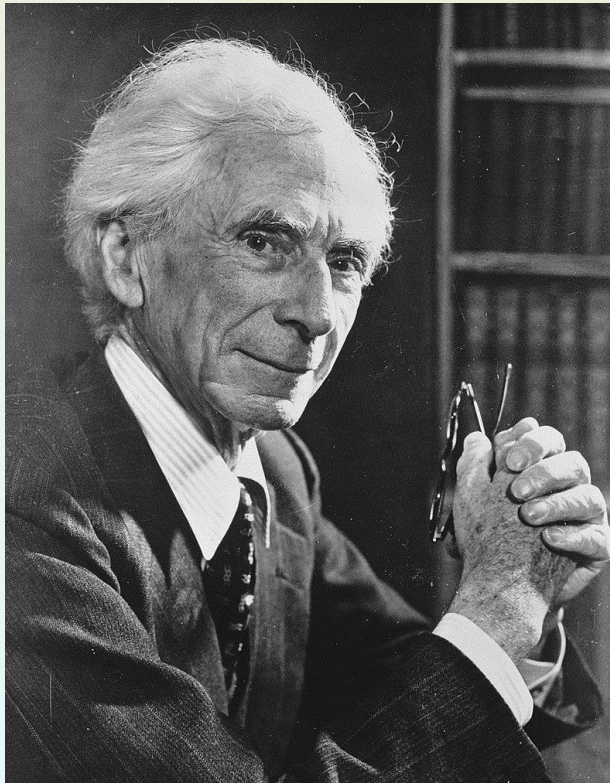
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With self-proclaimed atheists this seems to be a real problem. What lies behind this bravado is a a real sense of fear. We have mentioned the concept of personal immortality projects and their inadequacy. This was pointed out eloquently in the 1950s by Agnostic Philosopher Bertrand Russell [1872-1970].

The 2nd Law of Thermodynamics by that time had made it clear that eventually our universe would burn out in a meaningless disorganized mass of cold matter and random energy.

A giant dissolution of everything.



Is a picture of Eeyore from Winnie The Pooh, the original illustration for the book.

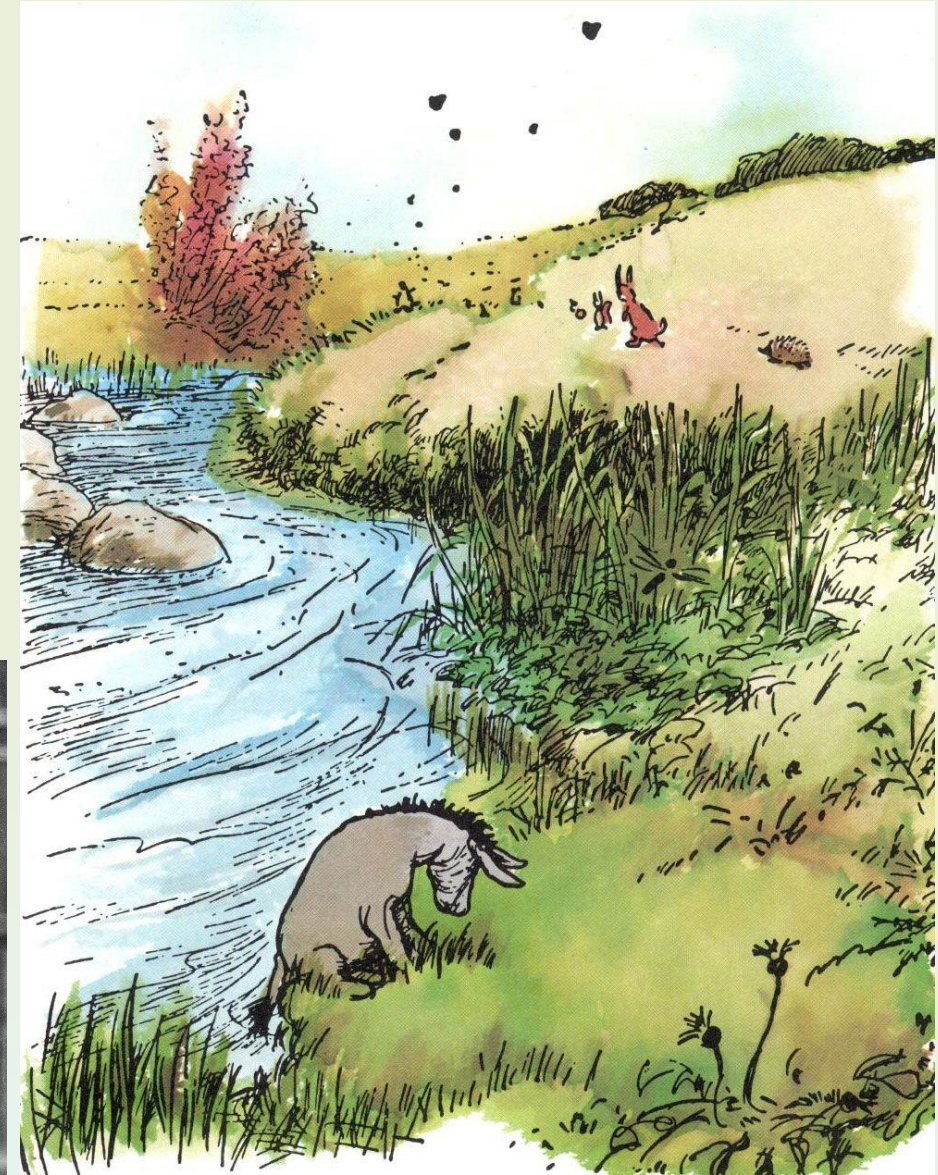
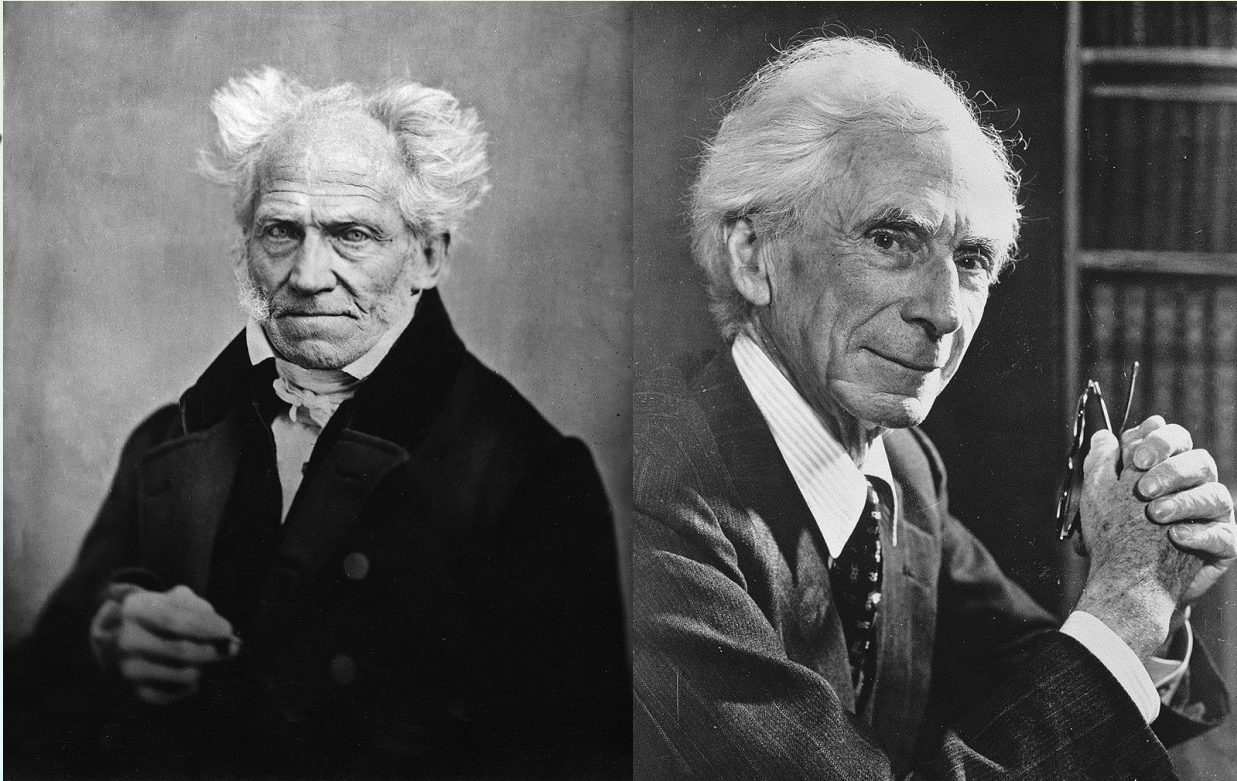
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Genesis 3:1-5

If this was so then all our efforts at trying to establish a legacy or actually live forever were useless and empty. There is no meaning for anything in this world and even less value for human accomplishments. Modern philosophy is built on the shoulders of Arthur Schopenhauer [1788-1860].

He was the first “materialist” philosopher. Meaning there is nothing beyond the natural world.



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Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 [ESV]

18 I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts.

19 For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity.

20 All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.

21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?

22 So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

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How do Materialists, Secularists and Atheists deal with the question of ultimate death? And the seeming meaninglessness of human existence?

In Aesop's fables is the beloved tale of the "Fox and the Grapes". The fable begins with a fox passing by a grape arbor and seeing a luscious looking bunch of grapes that he deeply desires. He tries to climb the trellis only to fall. He jumps frantically his jaws snapping closed just inches below the bunch of grapes. Tired and weary he finally goes away proclaiming, "I didn't really want them anyway, they're sour." We get our idiom for rationalizing disappointment from this fable. "We say someone who proclaims they really don't want something as displaying a sour grapes attitude.



*This is from a Victorian Printing of
Aesop's fables*

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Whistling By The Graveyard, Genesis 3:1-5

There are several methods by which Materialists try to rationalize their fear of death and whistle by the graveyard:

- Immortality would be boring.
- Death makes room for other generations.
- We are the lucky ones we got to live.
- Death is really nothing.
- Detachment from desire and aversion.
- Living just in the present.
- Individual existence is not real – all is one.
- Our particles go on.



This is from a Victorian Printing of Aesop's fables

Ephesians 4: [ESV]

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ,...

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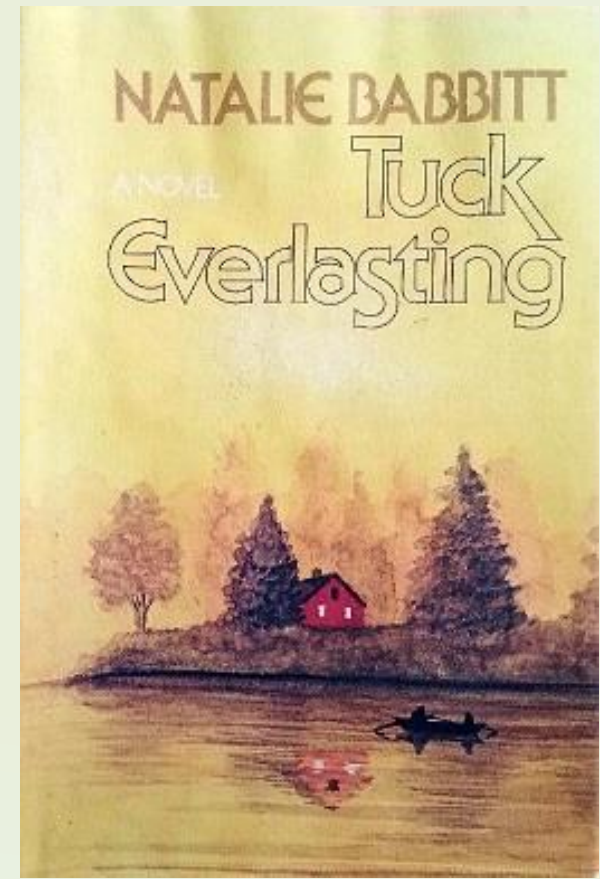
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These 2 rationalizations are pragmatic in nature and based on 2 fallacies. The one is that once we have done everything that it will be boring. But that supposes that relationships and change are boring eventually. It presupposes a decaying universe rather than a universe open exploration, adventure and a God who by nature is a Creator. In God's future opportunity will expand, relationships will grow deeper, and creation will expand with

possibilities

The book "Tuck Everlasting" was published in 1995 and became an immediate bestseller. It speculated on the "burden" of immortality. The Marvel character Thanos solves the problem of too many people by wiping out 50% of the universe's population. Because there weren't enough resources to go around.



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- Death is really nothing.

These rationales are nihilistic [nothingness based] and form the bedrock of most Materialist attempts to deal with death. Modern usage traces to Schopenhauer but the predecessors go back to ancient Greek philosophy.

A common Latin motto on Roman tombstones: "Non fui, fui, non sum, non curo". It was sometimes abbreviated: "nf f ns nc". It is translated: "I did not exist, I exist, I do not exist, I do not care."



Richard Dawkins.

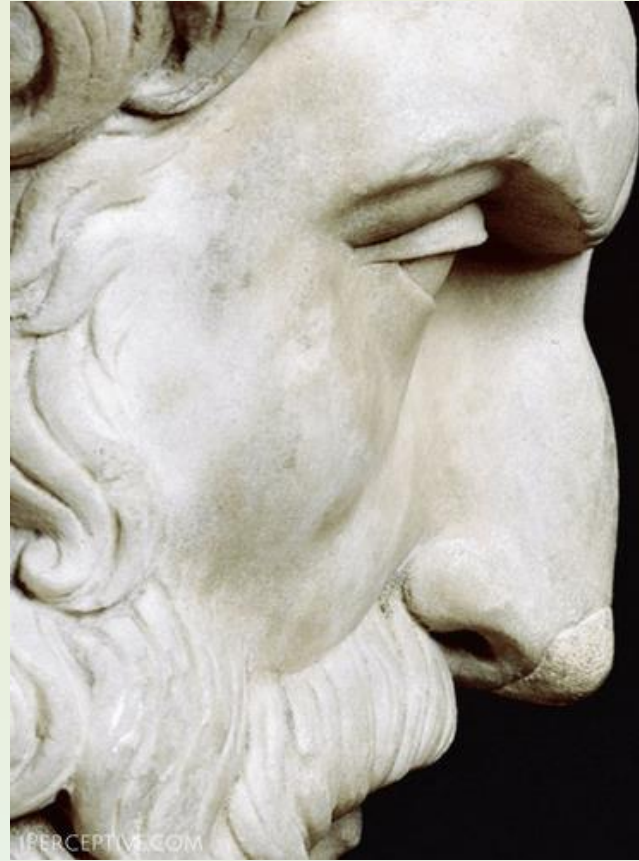
Evolutionary Biologists and Atheist
"We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they are never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place but who will in fact never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Arabia."

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Epicurus [341-270 BC]



Death, therefore, the most
awful of evils, is nothing to
us, seeing that, when we are,
death is not come, and,
when death is come, we are
not.

Epicurus
(LETTER TO MENOCEUS)

By the time of Christ Epicurus had a tremendous impact on Roman concepts of the afterlife. He was the 1st true materialist philosopher. Many Roman gravestones bore the Epicurean statement: “I was not, I was, I am not, I do not care”. Epicurus stated that the purpose of a human was to avoid pain [suffering] and enjoy a pleasant life. Paul faces off against this worldview in 1 Corinthians 15:32 where he describes his suffering as meaningless outside of Christ’s resurrection saying “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.”

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There are several methods by which Materialists try to rationalize their fear of death and whistle by the graveyard:

- Detachment from desire and aversion.
- Living just in the present.

These two reasons are really attempts to deal with the fear of death. They are both borrowed from Buddhism. Most Materialists [Atheists] end up borrowing heavily from Buddhist practice to make sense of the futility of the circumstances.

The Buddhist view of detachment is to cease caring about things because “desire or aversion” causes suffering. To avoid this one must “live wholly in the moment”.

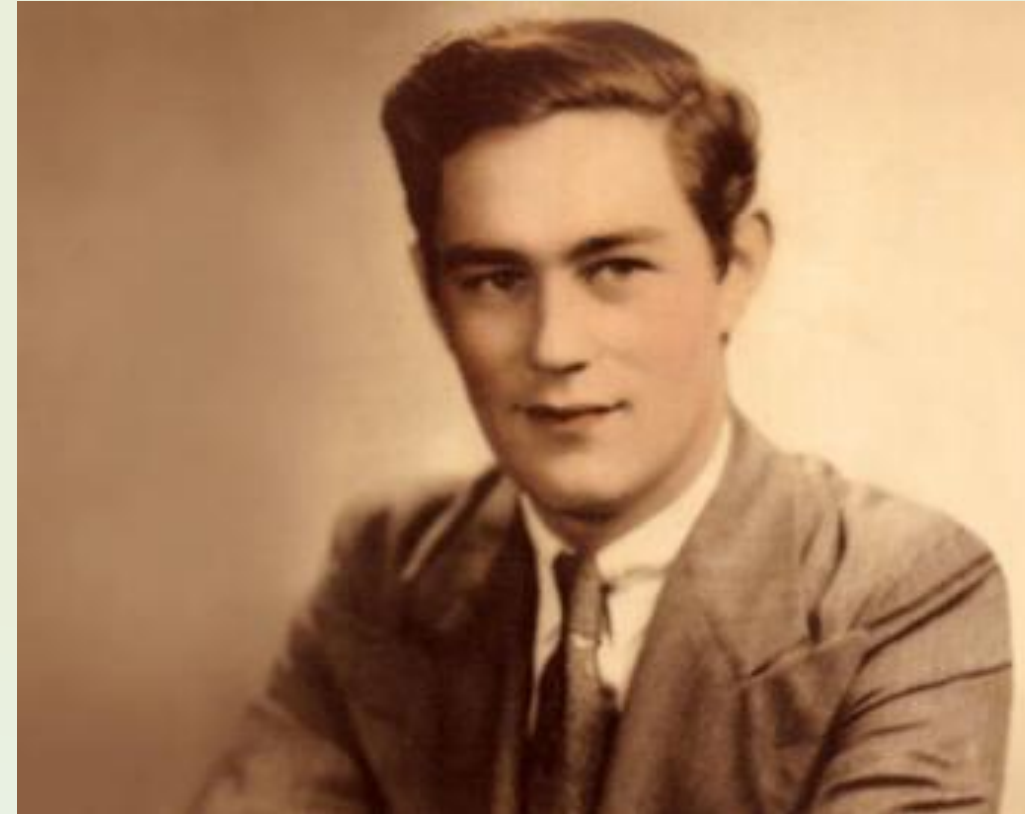


*Siddhartha Gautama “The Buddha”
abandoning his young wife and son
to pursue a monastic life.*

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Henry Gustav Molaison [1926-2008]. He suffered with debilitating epileptic seizures. In 1953 at 27 he underwent a lobotomy eliminate the seizures. This left him with a condition where he had no short term memory [he could only remember things prior to his surgery]. His short term memory was limited to 30 seconds. He literally lived the rest of his life in “the present”. He became a recluse and could not work.



Christ redeems all of us. Our memories included. We would be incomplete without these memories and future plans. Both “detachment” and “living only in the present” are crippling and selfish.

“If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.” - C. S. Lewis [*Mere Christianity*]

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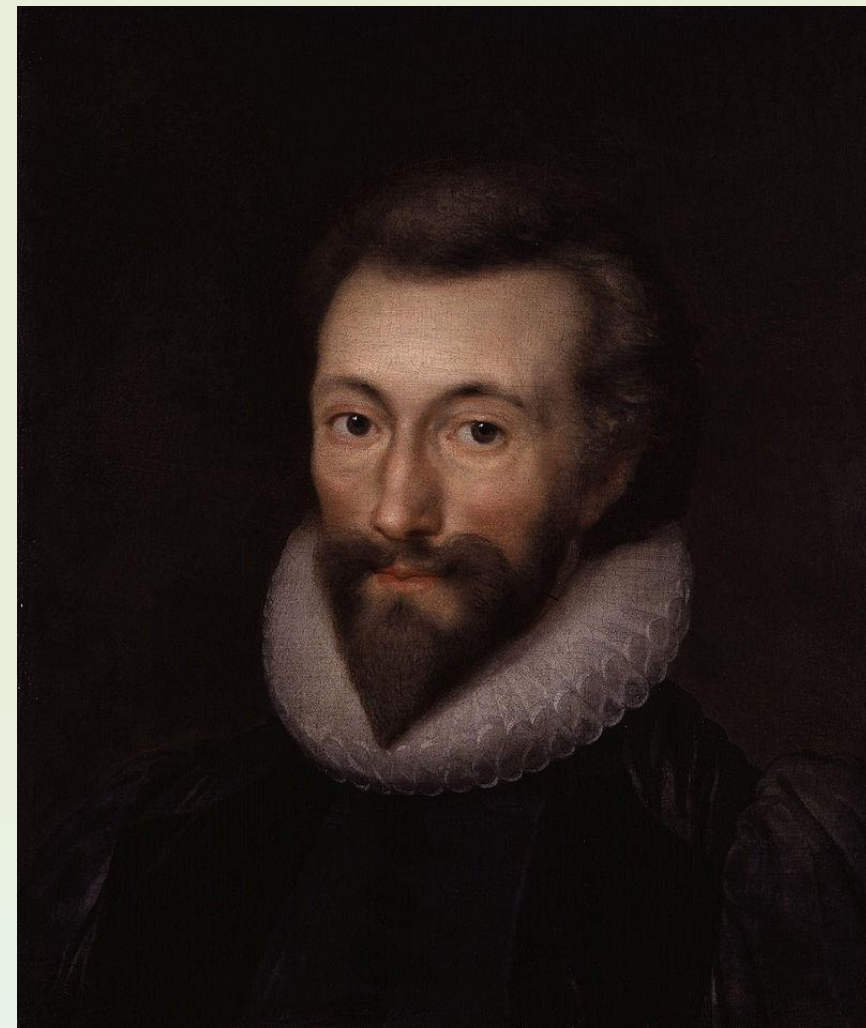
- Individual existence is not real – all is one.
- Our particles go on.

These last two are borrowed from Stoicism and Buddhism.

The first is monism which holds that all things are ultimately one substance so a human is no different than a rock, tree, or planet. The second holds that our particles return to the earth and go into making up other things. We dissipate into the universe and become building blocks for future animals.

The 1st violates the basis of all science: The law of non-contradiction [if something is one thing it can not be another].

The 2nd is simply answered with the simple question “So what if I live?”



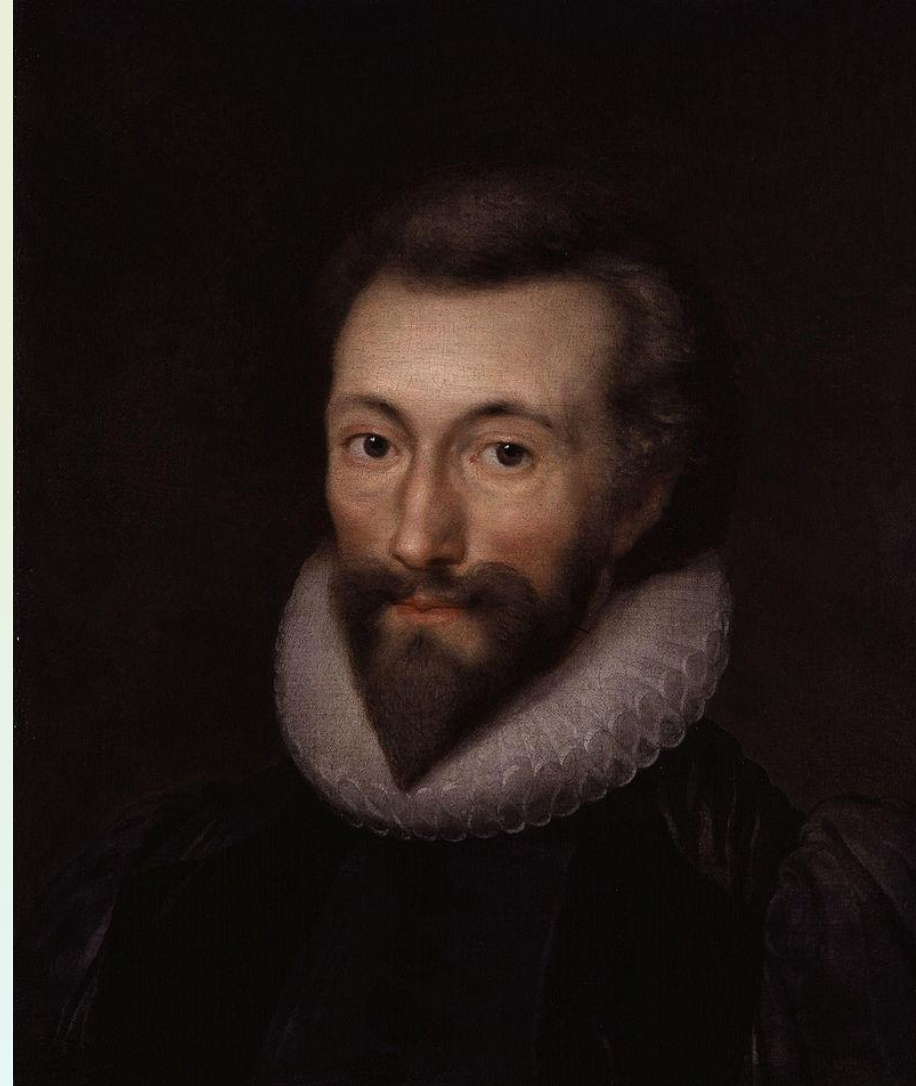
John Donne [1572-1632] in 1624 wrote a profound poem following his recovery from a near death experience.

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For Whom the Bell Tolls [1624] by John Donne

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

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*John Donne
[1572-1632] –
In the 1600s it
was common in
England to toll
the church
bells of a
parish when a
parishioner
died.*

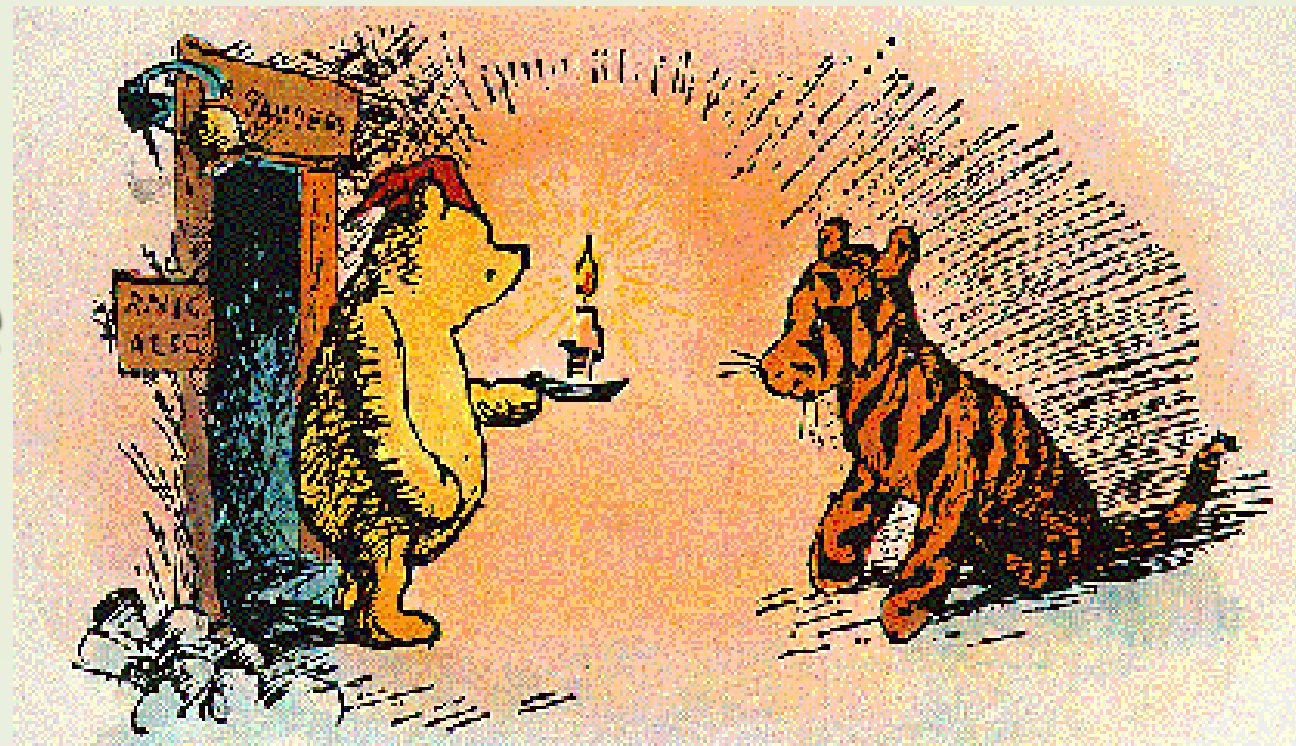
55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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For the Christian because of Jesus' victory over death we can "whistle by the graveyard" in confidence and assurance, we trust in Him.



Pooh and Tigger from from Winnie The Pooh, the original illustration for the book. Pooh and Tigger are positive characters who in their own way take life as it comes, pleasures and dangers, with a sense of confidence and no false bravado or arrogance. Pooh is especially comfortable with his limitations due to his confidence in his relationship with Christopher Robbin.