

ATHEISM IN ALAIN DE BOTTON'S *ESSAYS IN LOVE*

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Abstract:

This study aims at describing the influence of atheism to the main character's morality as well as describing the frailty of his atheism. This literary study belongs to qualitative research. In conducting this study, philosophical approach is employed to analyze atheism found in the novel.

The main character does not believe the existence of God as he refuses to believe that everything happens in his life is predetermined or fated by God. He considers God as a myth, which does not truly exist. He also considers religion as a mere illusion created by human mind to keep them strong in facing hard and miserable life. Atheism gives influence to his morality as he does not consider God as the lawgiver. His moral judgment is based on utilitarian ethics in which the moral of an action should be judged by the consequence it entails. Such a relative moral judgment may offer a better concern for humanism. However, his relative judgments can be the frailty of his atheism since his moral judgments become unwise when he is under negative feeling such as sadness and desperation. Under negative feeling, his atheist's morality may approve his immoral action which leads to self-destruction.

Key Terms: atheism, *Essays in Love*, philosophy, ethics

INTRODUCTION

Essays in Love, a novel by Alain de Botton, is one of the contemporary novel in which the story is told from atheism's point of view. De Botton is an English author who tends to apply philosophical thought in all his works. *Essays in Love* was first published in 1993. As represented by the title, this novel mainly tells about love. What makes this novel distinct from other love-story novels is that the story is told from philosophical point of view in which the main character quotes many phrases and statements from great thinkers such as Kant, Nietzsche, Plato, and Hobbes. The main character in the novel is an anonymous person from which the point of view of the story is told.

The illustration is sublime manifestation of the author's thought which inevitably contain personal judgments on morality. The moral value which the author shares to the readers is influenced by several factors such as cultural background, education, and spiritualism. One of the spiritualism will be mentioned is the system of belief known as atheism. An atheist has their own values of morality. Although the main character is an atheist he still considers the religious doctrine to

decide goodness. It is interesting to identify and analyze how morality goes with atheism.

It is reasonable that the main character in the novel prefers to be an atheist rather than clinging to certain religious belief in which he has found it erroneous and hypocritical. Nevertheless, atheism along with philosophy of life shaped by this thinking still has its own flaws as reflected in the psychological conflict that is experienced by the main character in the novel. The purpose of this study is to describe the main character's atheism and its influence to the main character's morality. Through deeper analysis, this study also aims at discovering the weakness of the main character's atheism in relation to his morality.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

1. Categorization of Atheism

In real society, atheism emerges in various forms. It maybe manifests itself in mild absence of belief in God or any supernatural beings such as ghost. Atheism may also appear in the form of strong and strict rejection of any religious belief by accusing religion as manipulative, false,

and enslaving doctrine. Martin (2007:2) classifies atheism into two kinds. The negative atheist includes those who simply have no idea about God and those who are unable to decide whether God exists or not. Positive atheist includes those who are really think that God does not exist because they have reasons to believe in such a way.

Atheism may be distinguished according to its explicitness. In such dichotomy, Smith (2003:13) divides atheism into two broad categorizations. If a person does not believe in God and he does not reject or deny explicitly the truth of theism, he belongs to implicit atheist. If he deliberately and openly expresses his rejection or denial to the truth of theism, he is an explicit atheist.

2. The Atheist's Arguments

a. Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument seeks to find a causal explanation by gathering empirical facts of why the universe exists. Cosmological argument from theism states that there is a cause of the universe and the cause is God's

act of creation. From cosmological argument, atheism rejects the theism argument that God is the reason for the existence of universe. Smith (in Martin, 2007:184) argues that atheism believes that the universe is self-caused.

b. Ontological Argument

Ontological argument from atheism is actually the disagreement from the ontological argument initially proposed by Anselm, Descartes, and Plantinga whose logical arguments for the existence of god was made in defense of theism, and especially to support Christian theology. According to atheism, the theism attempt to reach a conclusion that God exists from mere analysis of the concept of God has always failed to be proven by pure logic. Thus, atheism believes that God is just an idea or concept. People may have idea on a thing which has not always required the real existence of the thing itself. Everitt (2004:33) states God

and its revelation exist only in the mind, and such an existence cannot prove its real existence.

c. Argument from Evil

God as an omnibenevolent and morally perfect creator is incompatible with the fact that there exists natural and moral evil in this world. As a benevolent creator and protector of the world, God should prevent evils like natural disasters and crime which bring much suffering to human beings. Lewis (in Antony, 2007: 231) states that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and completely benevolent deity. It is to say that evil could not coexist with God. The existence of evil in the world implies that such a benevolent God does not really exist.

d. The Autonomy of Morality

There are different arguments between atheism and theism on the nature of morality. Theism believes that morality comes from God and the existence of morality

proves the existence of God. On the contrary, atheism believes that morality has its own autonomy since it does not require external source such as God or society as the lawgiver. Morality is human nature and people can be moral even without the existence of God.

An atheist believes that morality has nothing to do with God. Le Poidevin (1996:73) states that even without believing in God human still have moral. It is supported by a statement from Baggini (2003:39) that if God is the source of morality, what is considered good and bad or what is right or wrong will likely depend on God's judgment. So, if God does not exist, there will be no divine law and anything will likely be permitted.

From the given arguments, it can be concluded that modern atheism in rejecting the existence of God tends to argue the plausibility of the concept of God proposed by theism instead of

the essence of religious doctrine itself. Nielsen (2005:59) says that atheism rejects the existence of God and all its transcendental nature attributed to it because they are just beyond human rational thoughts and thus its existence cannot be proved empirically.

3. Atheism in Society

In society where religion plays important role in life, the development of atheism has become an essential phenomenon which believers and unbelievers cannot ignore. Atheism is important because theism as the opposite system of belief is also important. Both atheism and theism have capability to affect society in many aspects of life. Atheism however can be regarded as either a cultural phenomenon or intellectual phenomenon. Hyman (2010:1) explains that atheism as the opposite system of thought to theism, viewed from intellectual perspective, has shared its role in the development of philosophy, literature, art, and science. Atheism, viewed from social perspective, has influenced

politics, ideology and moral value in society.

Atheism as intellectual phenomenon develops initially and significantly in Europe. Atheism has become an acceptable and plausible outlook among intellectuals. Despite the rising number of atheist in Europe, atheism is still stigmatized by society as immoral and closely related to left-wing revolution. The term atheism is mistakenly confused with communism (a political theory in opposite to capitalism) which favors collectivism in a classless society. Hyman (2010:11) states atheism was connected with violent revolutionary politics in French Revolution. The storming of the Bastille on July 14th of 1789, especially in the British mind was marked by violence, murder, brutality, and extremism. This has given traumatic memory to European people who later consider atheism as negative and immoral.

In such a position, people who indeed do not believe in God are reluctant to declare themselves to public as atheist. According to

a survey commissioned by the BBC in 2004, as cited from Zuckerman in Martin (2007:49), 44 percent of the British do not believe in God. While according to a survey conducted by Greeley (2003), 31 percent of the British do not believe in God, but only 10 percent self-identify as atheist. It shows that more than a third of populations living in Great Britain are atheists but they are unwilling to proclaim their identity as atheist. Zuckerman (ibid: 47) explains further that the tendency of atheists not to designate 'atheist' as their identity can be accepted, since their announcement will only give them disadvantages in their social activities.

To fight this stigma, atheists manage to give atheism a positive impression to society. Converse (2003:162) states that atheism may become a positive social force to promote morality. Their attempt is done by convincing public that an atheist is also a moral being.

RESEARCH METHOD

The primary data in the form of dialog and narrative description will be

taken from de Botton's novel *Essays in Love* published by Picador in 2006. The theories as secondary data is taken from literature related to the subject of atheism including relevant books, collections of essays, and articles. This study belongs to qualitative research. It is conducted by document as the method of collecting data. So, this research is not conducted simply to show or outline the visible meaning of atheism in the novel, but rather to offer more meaning that cannot be discovered without involving philosophical approach as the viewpoint from which the novel is interpreted.

THE ANALYSIS

1. The Main Character's View on God

In such a contemporary novel, religion is considered playing less-roles in personal life. The conflict in the story is resolved by means of self-effort, self-awareness or cooperation among men. The characters, usually far from being religious, cope with every problem by logic. In short, they count on mind not miracle. They accept God as a mere concept which exist in society but they do not believe that God, who has predetermined their

destiny and takes control over their life, truly exists for real.

Like the majority of citizen of London, the main character in the story does not appear to be a religious person. Even though he is socially ascribed to be a Christian, there is no line in the novel depicting him goes to church or just says a prayer to God. He does not engage in any religious activity. His life, as depicting by himself, is a “late-twentieth-century urban life” which he spends mostly to work. His business is reflected on how he hardly spared his time to meet Chloe, as he described about himself, “We led the typical romance of late-twentieth-century urban life, sandwiched between office hours and animated by such minor external events as walks in the park, strolls through bookshops, and meals in restaurants” (de Botton, 2006: 89). The main character is described in this quote as a citizen which can be classified into middle-class society. He is a successful young architect with high income. In such a condition, he is financially secured as reflected in his lifestyle, taste, and preference.

The main character is an educated person. It can be recognized in the story that he has vast knowledge on art, literature, and philosophy. His interest in those three subjects is known from the book he has read. He reads literatures from ancient Greek epics, Shakespeare, Proust, to Flaubert. He reads philosophy from many great thinkers whose expressions are often quoted in the novel such as Plato, Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche. In addition, he is also interested in psycho-analysis of Freud as well as sociology from Auguste Comte and Karl Marx. His interest in studying philosophy makes Chloe nickname him ‘Socrates’ (de Botton, 2006: 66).

His reading addict is shown in the novel as he considers bookstore as his favorite place to visit during his day off. Even when he celebrated Christmas in Paris, bookshop is one of the destination he did not want to miss, as written in his narration “I walked out of the hotel alone and headed towards Saint-Germain, where I spent two hours browsing in a series of bookshops” (ibid: 281-282).

His interest in art is shown in his hobby in architecture, film, and painting (ibid: 227). The main character's interest and appreciation in painting and other artworks actually reflect his social class as well as his education level. He admires Giacometti (1901-1966) is Swiss sculptor and painter known for his bronze sculptures of elongated figures.

His financial security sustained by his professional job and his high education which is also supported by his interest in philosophy, has prevented him from having absolute necessity to take God into account in dealing with his life. For him, God is an irrational being which is unacceptable by rational thought. He refuses to believe in God because such a belief is against his rational thought.

His rejection on God is represented by his disbelief on fate. Religious doctrine teaches its adherent that God has determined a course of events that will inevitably happen to men in the future. The main character's rejection to believe in fate is reflected from the first sentence written in the novel.

The longing for a destiny is nowhere stronger than in our romantic life. All too often forced to share a bed with those who cannot fathom our soul, can we not be excused for believing (contrary to all the rules of the enlightened age) that we are fated one day to run into the man or woman of our dreams? Can we not be allowed a certain superstitious faith that we will ultimately locate a creature who can appease our painful yearnings? (ibid :1)

The nineteenth and twentieth century, as mentioned by the main character, is called the enlightened age because many great thinkers, scientists, and philosophers appeared to join an enlightenment movement emphasizing on the use of empirical method in science. The words in brackets show that the main character, as an intellectual and educated people who lives in a rationality, thinks that believing in fate and superstition is against the rule of rational thinking. His disbelief on faith is also shown in his realization to what he called in the novel as *romantic fatalism*. He finally came to realize:

The moment when I would feel that our meeting or not meeting was in the end only an accident, only a probability of one in 989.727, would also be the moment when I would have ceased to feel the absolute necessity of a life with her - and thereby have ceased to love her (ibid: 16).

Instead of fate or destiny predetermined by God, his meeting with Chloe, a captivating girl he once believed to be his perfect soulmate, is merely coincidence.

As a highly educated architect, the main character in the novel would not easily fall into conclusion that his very slim chance to meet Chloe in the airplane, as represented by the probability of 1 in 989,727, might be significant that their encounter is fated by God. It is in accordance with Nielsen's statement: "if we have a scientific education and philosophical sophistication, along with a willingness to reflect on such matters, these things, taken together, should underpin a religious belief" (2005:79). The main character's rational thinking, nourished by his education and his knowledge of philosophy, makes him think with a secular mind, which rejects religious consideration. It is no wonder that Morgan (2000:101) describes British society toward the millennium era as "spiritually impoverished". The majority of British are lacking belief in God and trust upon their own religion.

Despite the fact that his rational mind rejects religion and God, the main character cannot deny that he still becomes part of Christian society in which he lives. He is a non-believer but still socially tied to Christianity. In the story, it was depicted that he celebrates Christmas day as follows. He says "Chloe and I spent Christmas apart, but when we

returned to London in the new year, we began spending all our time in each other's company" (ibid, 2006:89). What is meant by Christmas in England is actually the period extending from December 24 to January 6, a religious holiday for Christians to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. However, celebrating Christmas is not always represented by religious activity. Christmas for the main character is nothing more than a holiday which gives him time to travel and have a good time. He would spend Christmas by taking a romantic trip to Paris, as depicted in this passage: "I bought her books, I took her jackets to the dry cleaner's, I paid for dinner, I suggested we make a trip to Paris at Christmas time to celebrate our anniversary" (ibid.: 266). Christmas, for those who are skeptical on religion, is just a leisure time devoted for rest and pleasure. The main character in the story spent his Christmas in Paris just for watching cinema, visiting museums, eating out in a café, and making love with Chloe. After his trip to Paris ended up with a broken heart when Chloe made a confession that she had had an affair with Will, the main character spent the rest of the

Christmas time staying hopelessly in the bed of a hotel. What he did is described as follows.

I could not stand to be alone in my flat over the Christmas period, so I checked into a room in a small hotel off the Bayswater Road. I took with me a small suitcase and a set of books and clothes, but I neither read nor dressed. I spent whole days in a white bathrobe, lying on top of the bed and flicking through the channels of the television, reading room-service menus and listening to stray sounds coming up from the street .(ibid: 328-329)

Being a Christian does not always mean to be a faithful Christian. The Christian label attached to the main character is only a formal identity. In order to be accepted by society, the main character needs to show his identity by which other people know how to treat him right. To confess explicitly in public that he is an atheist is considered improper, selfish, and indirectly offensive. It is because atheism is not openly acceptable to society in which religion still plays important role. It is reasonable for him not to reveal that he, in his way of thinking, applies the concept of atheism. In this case, instead of identifying himself as something opposite to what the society would expect, he lets society falsely identify him as Christian.

The main character's atheism is basically the system of thought underlying his viewpoint. In practice he cannot completely detach himself from any religious practice in his society. What he rejects is the system of belief, but he still can accept its cultural and social manifestation as real phenomena. Therefore, celebrating Christmas for him is nothing more than a form of his respect to society. It can mean eating out in a restaurant, taking trip to Paris, or just lying himself alone in a bed of a hotel without requires his heart to believe in Jesus and his divine revelation. In other words, he sees Christmas as a merely cultural event similar to New Year's Day.

What makes the main character an atheist is just his rejection to the concept of God proposed by Christianity. He just cannot accept that God truly exists, he does not believe in the Resurrection of Christ, or that heaven and hell is up there. The main character's lack of belief in God is caused by the incompatibility of the concept of God described in Holy Scriptures and religious doctrine to philosophy and logic. Bible as the Holy Scripture on which

revelation is revealed, has contained many contradiction to science, a subject which its truthfulness is more reliable to him. Moreover, the mismatch found among Holy Scriptures of different religions such as Psalm and The Koran has become unacceptable truth for such a rationalist.

People may doubt the existence of God or be skeptical to his own religion, but they prefer to be indifferent to it instead of showing it to public. Chloe and the main character are both skeptical on God and religion. The difference is that Chloe occasionally still needs to believe in God when her life is under threat, as the main character inquired “How come she liked to keep her options open about God (‘at least till the first cancer’) but why was I so closed on the matter?” (ibid: 99). The main character himself does not deny that religion is still needed by some people to make them keep holding on through difficulty and misery. He agrees with Pascal’s argument that:

Even though the odds were in favour of God not existing, ... religious faith could still be justified because the joys of the slimmer probability so far outweighed the abomination

of the larger one. And so it should perhaps be with love. Lovers cannot remain philosophers for long, they should give way to the religious impulse, which is to believe and have faith, as opposed to the philosophic impulse, which is to doubt and enquire. They should prefer the risk of being wrong and in love to being in doubt and without love. (ibid:166-167)

The main character compares religion to love. To believe that God exists to protect those who believe in it or to be assured that love will finally requited for those who are falling in love are socially and psychologically advantageous. These delusions give them strength and confidence in dealing with their insecurity and uncertainty of life.

Britain, in formal sense, is recognized as a Christian country since the majority of its population is identified as Christian. Nevertheless, they are rarely engaged in their religious practice. It is also stated by Davie (2007:135) that “In terms of belief, behaviour and institutions, however, Britain is much more like her European neighbours - with low levels of religious activity, but higher levels of nominal allegiance and religious belief”. In practice, British are actually secular society.

This secularization is primarily caused by the Second World War in which the church failed to offer solution to end the war. People considered religion has failed to save the world from sufferings. Morgan (2000:24) states “And yet, for all the formal trappings to remind the people of their religious inheritance through the centuries, the impact and mystique of Christianity were clearly on the wane, especially among the post-war generation and ex-servicemen”. In this case, Christianity is only an attribute, like the Cross symbol they are wearing or tattooed in his arm which does not exactly represent his faith and thought.

Atheism, to which the main character is led by his rational thoughts, fundamentally changes his view of his life and this universe. The main character in giving the meaning to life is not the result of his own contemplation and experience, but it is also influenced by the books he has read. Life according to him is not to serve God. It is reflected on how he sees God with skepticism. God is considered unreliable and not useful to support his life. He tends to despise and scorn God by his

remarks, as implied by his opinion: “In the world whose God has died hundreds years ago and computer, instead of Oracle that foresees the future, the lover’s belief on faith is nearly a sort of mysticism” (ibid: 15). Like Zarathustra once said, for the main character, that “God is dead” (Nietzsche, 2003:7). Believing in God is like believing in the myths of ancient Greek which is against logical thinking he employs to deal with every problem he encounters in life. In addition, the main character frequently avoids using the God’s name directly to refer to this Supreme Being. This avoidance of calling it ‘God’ and the use of metaphors such as ‘Aphrodite’, ‘the giant mind in the sky’ (page 8), ‘Oracle’ (page 15), and ‘someone at 30,000 feet’ (page 14), shows that he actually dishonors and undermines God.

The main character's lack of belief in God also reflects on what he thinks about death. Death according to him is a mystery and often become the source of fear. According to the main character's thought, religion is deliberately invented by society to appease this fear. The fear of death forces people

to approach God and to be religious. Actually, it is not the death itself which makes he feels afraid, but rather not being ready to face the reality that after he releases his last breath, he will come to nothing, and soon be forgotten by those who love and know him well. It is reflected on his realization after he failed to commit suicide by swallowing twenty effervescent vitamin C tablets.

As I observed this acidic chemical spectacle silently, I was struck by the incoherence of suicide: I did not wish to choose between being alive or dead. I simply wished to show Chloe that I could not, metaphorically speaking, live without her. The irony was that death would be too literal an act to grant me the chance to see the metaphor read, I would be deprived by the inability of the dead (in a secular framework at least) to look at the living looking at the dead. What was the point of making such a scene if I could not be there to witness others witnessing it? (ibid: 325-326)

There will be no more life after death. So he thinks that killing himself is a useless attempt to symbolize his disappointment to Chloe if he, as a dead body, cannot witness the Chloe's reaction over his death. As he believes that humans are only mortal being and death will

be the end of everything, he can appreciate life more than believers who feel sure that their life may be prolonged in infinite afterlife. An atheist's hope when he died is neither to reach Heaven nor to be able to see God, but to be memorized by those who still alive as long as possible.

2. The Influence of Atheism to the Main Character's Morality

Atheism, as the belief underlying the main character's viewpoint inevitably influences his morality. In a very brief definition, morality means "judgments about right and wrong" (Steele, 2008:97). Morality which becomes a main concern of Ethics is actually not easy to define. Many theories and philosophers have distinct notions on morality. Basically they can be divided into two distinct axioms or principles. The older theory such as divine command theory believes that morality derives from God's law which He enforces with divine sanctions. People care about right and wrong because they care about whether they are going to go to Heaven or to Hell (Harman, 1977:92). While newer theories such as Emotivism, Functionalism,

Utilitarianism, and even Nihilism do not believe that morality derives from such an external source. These theories influence the main character's moral judgments, as shown in the table below.

Table: 1. Identification of the Main Character's Morality

No	Thoughts / Judgments	Notion	Underlying Theory
1	“Was my love for Chloe moral, and her rejection of me immoral? The guilt owed to Chloe for rejecting me depended primarily on the extent to which love could be seen as something that I had given selflessly. ...”(page 300)	A moral action must be done free out of duty and free of any expected return.	Kantian philosophy (Immanuel Kant)
2	“I had called	The morally	Utilitarianism

	Chloe evil because she 'displeased' me, not because she was in herself inherently evil.” (page 304)	correct course of action is the one that produces benefit for the greatest number of people.	(J. Bentham, John S. Mill)
3	“My moral code was a mere sublimation of my desires.” (page 305)	Moral beliefs are not cognitive but are themselves attitudes for or against something.	Emotivism
4	“What gave me pleasure and pain determined the moral labels I chose to affix to Chloe.” (page 305)	The rightness or wrongness of an action always depends on the consequences of the action.	Utilitarianism
5	“I was an egocentric moralizer, judging the world and her duties within it according to my own	Something is good or bad, relative to a cluster of interests, roles, and functions.	Functionalism

interests.” (page 305)		
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In the eyes of the main character, goodness and badness, right or wrong, they have nothing to do with God. He believes that “A person is never good or bad per se, which means that loving or hating them necessarily has at its basis a subjective, and perhaps illusionistic, element” (ibid: 156). This statement approves that his morality is basically a subjective matter. His moral subjectivism is also verified by his confession “We make moral judgements on the basis of preference, not transcendental values.”(ibid: 303). It is in contrast to divine law theory employed by theism including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam which takes God as the lawgiver of morality.

One of the misleading stigmas attached to atheists is that atheism leads to immorality. This assumption does make sense if it is viewed from theism perspective. Since religious people take God’s commandments as the source of morality, so they see atheist who rejects God and its revelation as their

lawgiver, they will have no standard for their morality. Therefore, if they believe God does not exist, then morality is nothing more than a form of delusion. In short, there is no absolute rule about what is good and bad, what is vice and virtue, and the absence of God as the lawgiver means everything will be permitted. Finally, this belief will lead atheists to immoral life.

In case that the main character rejects the existence of God, his morality emerges from his self-consciousness instead of the fear of God. Skutch (2007:2) describes morality as “the effort of harmonization to mitigate, by means of self-conscious agents, the conflicts which spring up everywhere as a secondary effect of the very universality of the impulsion toward harmony or order”. Thus, morality is basically the people's conscious effort to keep and develop harmony in their individual lives, with other people around them, and with the wider realm of nature that supports their life.

Atheist morality is not based on God's commandments or God's condemnations. The main character

agrees that being morally good is for the sake of human being, not to satisfy God's expectation since he does not believe in God. He also stated that moral must be free from the expectation of reward, as he considers "To love someone is moral only when that love is given free of any expected return, if that love is given simply for the sake of giving love" (ibid: 301-302). In this case, his moral aspiration is based on Kantian ethics. To love Chloe has moral worth only if he does it because it is right by the moral law, not because of any external motives. Thus, at the hopeless moment after his break-up with Chloe, he realized that his love to Chloe was not completely sincere and he had been wrong to judge that to love is always moral and to refuse love is immoral. His view that a moral action must not be done for the expectation of reward is practically in contrast to theism's view. Religious people might do what they consider a virtue in the hope that God will give much better reward in afterlife.

The main character's moral value is practically relative, as he refuses to judge something as inherently good or bad. In the novel,

he quotes from Hobbes's *Elements of Law* as follows.

Every man called that which pleased and is delightful to him, good; and that evil which displeased him: insomuch that while every man different from other in constitution, they differ also one from another concerning the common distinction of good and evil. Nor is there such thing as *agathonhaplos*, that is to say, simply good... (ibid: 303-304)

The main character's moral relativity is reflected in his perception of sex. Contrary to Christian's moral value, he considers premarital sex is basically not immoral. His philosophical view considers sex as antithetical to thought, as he puts it "Sex is instinctive, unreflexive and spontaneous, while thought is careful, uninvolved, and judgemental. To think during sex is to violate a fundamental law of intercourse" (ibid: 60). As he has learned in Biology class, sex is a basic need for human being as a mortal creature needs it for regeneration. Therefore, premarital sex cannot be treated as a crime. What makes sex is moral or immoral is not simply the matter of doing or not doing it, but rather the impacts and consequences result from this action. Having sex with his

girlfriend, Chloe, is moral as long as there is no guilty feeling, violence, and coercion involve in the process. In the contrary, to have sex with girlfriend of other is considered immoral by him because this action may be disadvantageous to others and ruin their happiness. When Chloe had an affair as she had slept with his American fellow, Will, what Chloe had done is labeled as immoral, as reflected in this passage:

Though there had been no contract, only the contract of the heart, I felt stung by Chloe's disloyalty, by her heresy, by her night with another man. How was it morally possible this should have been allowed to happen? (ibid: 298)

The main character's ethics is in accordance to utilitarianism. To consider an action is moral or immoral, it can be judged by its useful or harmful consequences for others. So, the main character's moral standard is not according to religious doctrines. The main character's morality is human-oriented which is based on human conscience rather than forced compliance to strict and unalterable divine law.

Despite the difference concept of morality, an atheist may

share similar moral code to those who believe in God. As proposed by le Poidevin, "Atheists may have exactly the same views about what counts as good and bad, and may behave just as well, or as badly, as theists" (1996: 73). As stated in the novel, the main character agrees that "to respond to insult with a challenge to a duel" is morally wrong. Such a moral judgment is also applied in most religion. The only difference lies on their motive in doing virtuous deeds. A theist takes his God into account, while an atheist does not.

However, there is similarity between theism and atheism's morality in their profitable outcome for humanity. Their morality, even though taken from different source, both leads to altruism. Altruism, as the opposite principle to egoism, makes people have unselfish concern for other people's happiness and welfare.

Altruism can be the reason why the main character still respects those who have opposite belief to him. He may undermine their God and their religious doctrines, but he cannot hate the adherents just because they prefer to believe in what is wrong. Religious people, for

the main character, are false in their conceptual thinking, but as long as their conducts don't disturb the harmony of life, they are morally blameless. Such toleration, if possessed by those who believe in God, may avoid suicidal bombings, decapitation, civil war, or any life-taking action disapproved by a nonreligious person like him, which ironically often find their approval from certain religious bigotry.

3. The Frailty of the main character's Atheism

Atheism as a philosophical system is mainly held by intellectuals who have much time in their life to study and think about complicated ideas. It is supported by the fact that particular subject of study such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, and physical science tend to exclude religious belief in explaining phenomenon for the sake of its objectivity. Both physical and natural science are linked to methodological naturalism, which is explained by Ruse (in Harrison, 2010: 229) "... in doing science one assumes that there are no God-directed supernatural causes like miracles, and metaphysical naturalism which is equivalent to

atheism, meaning that there are no supernatural factors or entities." These intellectuals including scientists, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, even artists, poets, and novelists have indirectly spread the spirit of atheism through educational institutions and mass media. Thus, atheism influences their system of thought and become acceptable philosophy among European society. McGrath puts it: "Popular culture was led by intellectuals, who increasingly became the shapers and movers of Western thought" (2004:49). In such a position, intellectuals and their atheism also play important role in society.

Atheism, for the main character may be employed as system of belief to replace religion. The main character can abandon God if he is able to get what a religion could offer for life in atheism. If Marx proposed religion as alienation from economic repression then he would not need this alienation since he did not have financial problem in his life. If Freud considered religion as projection of fear then it would not help much since he had nothing to fear about his future. Atheism is

more acceptable and compatible for people like him, whose life guarantees his wealth, health, safety, and security.

Nevertheless, the main character's atheism has several flaws. His disbelief in God and supernatural being is not always firmly held. The weakness of his atheism is obviously reflected in his feeling of hesitation of his own belief when he has to deal with love.

The main character once explained that he could only be skeptical over something that considered unimportant to his life. As he approved: "Philosophers tend to limit epistemological doubt to the existence of tables, chairs, the courtyards of Cambridge colleges, and the occasional unwanted wife" (de Botton, 2006:163). On the contrary, it is hard to doubt the existence of love which is too important for him. The importance of love to his life is reflected in his remark: "... in essence, we are not wholly alive until we are loved" (ibid: 186). From this remark, it is revealed that love and life should coexist. The absence of love will make his life become meaningless.

Falling in love has made the main character change his behavior and his view on many things. He who used to feel skeptical on God and religious matters, when he falls in love with Chloe, is persuaded to believe in superstition and fate. This change is admitted by the main character in this passage below.

I had often tried to share my enthusiasm for Chloe with friends, with whom in the past I had found much common ground over films, books, and politics, but who now looked at me with the secular puzzlement of atheists faced with messianic fervour.(ibid.: 55)

The main character and his friends used to have the same opinion on the film they watch, the book they read, and similar comment on recent political issue. His love to Chloe however has made the way he sees things somewhat different. Every little thing he does with Chloe is considered so miraculous that he will excitedly tell it to his friends. Concerning this unusual attitude, the main character calls himself as someone who preaches with *messianic fervour* as a metaphor to represent how he has behaved like a religious person which is in

contradiction to his nature as an atheist.

As an atheist, the main character once said that believing in fate is against the rule of rational thinking he employed. However, when it comes to deal with love, he is tempted to believe that he and Chloe, a stunning girl he ever dreams of, has been fated to spend their life together.

The main character's rational mind suggests that his meeting with Chloe is not predetermined by fate, that all that happen in his life is merely coincidence. He believes that none ever write the story book of his life. However, the meeting with Chloe is considered too good to be true for him. Facing this miracle, he is challenged to calculate the probability of their accidental meeting on the plane by mathematical calculation. In his realization the main character admitted that:

Flicking a coin, a probability of one in two prevents me from turning to God to account for the result. But when it is a question of a probability of one in 989 727, it seemed impossible, from within love at least, that this could have been anything but fate. It would

have taken a steady mind to contemplate without superstition the enormous improbability of a meeting that had turned out to alter our lives. Someone (at 30,000 feet) must have been pulling strings in the sky. (ibid: 13-14)

He is lured to believe in destiny when his logic fails to satisfyingly provide an explanation why an odd and bizarre event, as his encounter with Chloe, could happen. It is also reflected on his statement in the novel "From the time of each of our births, it seemed as though the giant mind in the sky had been subtly shifting our orbits so that we would one day meet on the Paris-London shuttle" (ibid: 8). His belief that there might be 'a giant mind in the sky' has obviously deceived his atheism.

Another frailness of the main character's atheism is related to his ethics. Atheist often argue that their concept of morality is better than theism's morality. It is because "... religion, with its threat of punishment and promise of reward, introduces a non-moral incentive to be moral that is absent in atheism" (Baggini, 2003:40-41). Theoretically, the main character's morality which is based on

Utilitarian and Kantian ethics could more effectively prevent him to commit an evil action which may cause harm and hurt to others. But in practice, this moral belief which counts on his rational thought, has almost failed to prevent him to commit evil action to his own life. His moral weakness is reflected in his attempt to kill himself.

Suicide was what crossed his mind when he could not accept the fact that Chloe did not love him anymore, as he thought in desperation:

Man is the symbolic, metaphorical creature: unable to communicate my anger, I would symbolize it in my own death. I would do injury to myself rather than injure Chloe, enacting by killing myself what I was suggesting she had done to me. (ibid: 325)

This immoral action is unworthy of such a man with rational mind. It is obvious that suicide is morally evil as proposed also by theism since this action represents egoism instead of altruism.

Beside his incapability to express his hopeless feeling, his suicide finds its approval from his feeling of unworthiness of life, that his life could give no advantage to

others. Abandoned by Chloe, he becomes a pessimistic man with no hope and interest in life. His life is undesirable, as proven by Chloe's rejection. Hence, according to his desperate mind, it is not totally wrong to end his life. His rational thought will lose its sensibility when he involves emotion in his thinking process. Departing from his feelings of disappointment and desperation, his moral judgments are compromised with his subjective preference - to die rather than to live without love.

By the fact that love may become a matter of life and death, theism's morality may offer a better solution in dealing with such a case. Love should be bound by marriage and killing oneself is strictly restricted as God commands its adherents not to do so at all costs.

The main character's morality may be more ideal in its concept. It gives him more concerns for others and the universe regardless of their skin color, social class, religion and creed. However in real situation, when his wisdom is often distorted by negative feeling such as grief and depression, his ego and subjective mind tend to justify

his own weakness. In solitary, as the result of his refusal to believe that God is always there to watch him, his morality fails to create harmony within himself.

CONCLUSION

The main character's atheism is actually an implicit atheism which is projected in his skeptical view toward God and religious belief. His skeptical view is shown in his disbelief in fate. He believes that every event happens in his life is merely coincidence instead of being planned or fated by God. He also views religion as human invention, a kind of illusion to give people strength in facing their hard and miserable life. However, he believes that religions still play important role in society as positive social and psychological force.

His morality is based on his rational thinking concerning humanity. His morality is influenced by utilitarianism as his moral judgment is based on the consequences of the action for others rather than on the action itself. Such a relative and flexible judgment, however, become a strength as well as weakness of his

morality. His morality leads to altruism, which means it makes him become unselfish and have more concern toward others and its environment, but under desperate state of mind his morality tend to approve his weakness and fail to prevent him from committing evil to himself. In general, it can be concluded that the main character's atheism can be a positive force to create harmony of life in society as long as he himself can keep an internal harmony between his intelligence and his wisdom, between his mind and his heart.

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