

God and Everything Else

Lincoln Bacal

PROSE, HONORABLE MENTION (Grades 10-12)

Adversarial—that’s what my family called me throughout my childhood when I asserted that I didn’t believe in God. At the time I truly didn’t believe in a higher power, or at least never thought about anything in enough depth to understand what belief in something larger than myself could entail.

Sitting in the chapel of my synagogue on the uncomfortable wooden chairs, I spent Saturday mornings in children’s programming learning about the universe. It didn’t make sense in my mind that God created the universe since I pictured God as a cloud with a face and a beard that was somehow omniscient and all-powerful. At one point I leaned over to my friend and said, “God didn’t create the world. The Big Bang did!”

Growing up, I was captivated by outer space. My dad would show me YouTube videos discussing the size of the universe and tell bedtime stories detailing the plots of science fiction novels he was reading. I knew I didn’t want to be an astronaut, but I was obsessed with knowing as much as possible about our universe and how it works.

In fifth grade my grandpa gave me the book *Physics of the Impossible* by Michio Kaku. It describes concepts and inventions that don’t exist yet, explains the technology we’d need to develop to make them possible, and how soon the human race would be able to make them happen. I must have read the book over 40 times. It’s still on my desk, and I read my favorite sections frequently.

Although I’ve always said I don’t believe in God, I’ve talked to God a number of times. When my dad collapsed in our living room and I had to call an ambulance, I prayed the whole ride to the hospital that he was okay. The doctor explained that he had a blood clot in his heart, so I sat outside his room at the hospital asking for him to be healed. He was healed. Maybe it was science, the doctors who performed procedures, or maybe it was God. Who am I to say those aren’t all the same thing?

In Israel we hiked for four days across the country, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Kineret. On the third night of the hike, we walked as a group into the wilderness. Every few hundred feet someone sat down, ensuring that they were out of sight from anyone else. I was one of the last people to sit down. The sky stretched out above me seemingly forever. I could just make out city lights at the

shore of the Mediterranean. At that moment I didn't feel all the cuts and bruises I'd accumulated or the plain exhaustion from hiking twelve hours a day. I breathed in the desert air, and I knew I was at peace. The only words that I could think were, "The world is so goddamn beautiful and I'm grateful to be here." I remember repeating those words like a mantra all the way back to the campsite, and I carried them with me back to America.

I am grateful to exist. But who am I grateful towards? For most of my life, I have been obsessed with quantifying the universe into scientific terms and concepts. At this point I know I'll never understand everything there is to understand about the universe. It operates so similarly to the concept of God that they have become indistinguishable in my mind. I believe in the universe; therefore, I believe in God. Having a concept, an entity, to direct my gratitude and wishes towards is a lot less lonely than believing that we are alone.

Lincoln Bacal is in 12th grade at Venture Academy in Minneapolis.