Description: A Catholic who rejects his faith and takes to Philosophy, and then later accepts Islam due to many unanswered questions. Part 2: The study of Philosophy and reading the Quran.
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Category: [Articles](#) >[Stories of New Muslims](#) > [Men](#)

I studied philosophy at the university, and it taught me to ask two things of whoever claimed to have the truth: What do you mean, and how do you know? When I asked these questions of my own religious tradition, I found no answers, and realized that Christianity had slipped from my hands. I then embarked on a search that is perhaps not unfamiliar to many young people in the West, a quest for meaning in a meaningless world.

I began where I had lost my previous belief, with the philosophers, yet wanting to believe, seeking not philosophy, but rather a philosophy.

I read the essays of the great pessimist Arthur Schopenhauer, which taught about the phenomenon of the ages of life, and that money, fame, physical strength, and intelligence all passed from one with the passage of years, but only moral excellence remained. I took this lesson to heart and remembered it in after years. His essays also drew attention to the fact that a person was wont to repudiate in later years what he fervently espouses in the heat of youth. With a prescient wish to find the Divine, I decided to imbue myself with the most cogent arguments of atheism that I could find, that perhaps I might find a way out of them later. So I read the Walter Kaufmann translations of the works of the immoralist Friedrich Nietzsche. The many-faceted genius dissected the moral judgments and beliefs of mankind with brilliant philological and psychological arguments that ended in accusing human language itself, and the language of nineteenth-century science in particular, of being so inherently determined and mediated by concepts inherited from the language of morality that in their present form they could never hope to uncover reality. Aside from their immunological value against total skepticism, Nietzsche's works explained why the West was post-Christian, and accurately predicted the unprecedented savagery of the twentieth century, debunking the myth that science could function as a moral replacement for the now dead religion.

At a personal level, his tirades against Christianity, particularly in The Genealogy of Morals, gave me the benefit of distilling the beliefs of the monotheistic tradition into a small number of analyzable forms. He separated unessential concepts (such as the bizarre spectacle of an omnipotent deities suicide on the cross) from essential ones, which I now, though without believing in them, apprehended to be but three alone: that God existed; that He created man in the world and defined the conduct expected of him in it; and that He would judge man accordingly in the hereafter and send him to eternal reward or punishment.

It was during this time that I read an early translation of the Quran which I grudgingly

admired, between agnostic reservations, for the purity with which it presented these fundamental concepts. Even if false, I thought, there could not be a more essential expression of religion. As a literary work, the translation, perhaps it was Sales, was uninspired and openly hostile to its subject matter, whereas I knew the Arabic original was widely acknowledged for its beauty and eloquence among the religious books of mankind. I felt a desire to learn Arabic to read the original.

On a vacation home from school, I was walking upon a dirt road between some fields of wheat, and it happened that the sun went down. By some inspiration, I realized that it was a time of worship, a time to bow and pray to the one God. But it was not something one could rely on oneself to provide the details of, but rather a passing fancy, or perhaps the beginning of an awareness that atheism was an inauthentic way of being.

I carried something of this disquiet with me when I transferred to the University of Chicago, where I studied the epistemology of ethical theory, how moral judgments were reached, reading and searching among the books of the philosophers for something to shed light on the question of meaninglessness, which was both a personal concern and one of the central philosophical problems of our age.

According to some, scientific observation could only yield description statements of the form X is Y, for example, The object is red, its weight is two kilos, its height is ten centimeters, and so on, in each of which the functional was a scientifically verifiable 'is', whereas in moral judgments the functional element was an 'ought', a description statement which no amount of scientific observation could measure or verify. It appeared that 'ought' was logically meaningless, and with it all morality whatsoever, a position that reminded me of those described by Lucian in his advice that whoever sees a moral philosopher coming down the road should flee from him as from a mad dog. For such a person, expediency ruled, and nothing checked his behavior but convention.

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