

## An Atheist Contemplates the Death of a Squirrel

I could not stop or swerve in time.  
Really I couldn't.

Driving at 50 miles per hour  
I didn't see the squirrel spinning  
in mid air, tail twitching, body  
twisting in obvious pain  
after being hit by the car in front of me  
until a second or two before  
I heard the thump announcing  
that I had put this creature out of its misery.

Had I been able to stop or swerve in time  
would that have been the right thing to do?  
Or was it right to stay the course,  
keep my fellow creature's suffering brief?  
I ponder one of life's imponderables.  
And anyway it hardly matters.  
The outcome could not have been otherwise  
I tell myself.

Pain! I contemplate further.  
If one believes in God,  
I decide, one must believe  
that she or he invented pain,  
and then invented religion  
so that we, the more intelligent beings  
on planet earth who spend time  
pondering questions like whether  
we ought to brake or swerve  
to avoid hitting a squirrel which  
is no doubt condemned—  
should we choose to swerve—  
to a more agonizing death,  
might have some explanation  
for why there is so much of it around:  
Our pain is, somehow  
(at least this is what  
I have heard them say)  
part of God's plan for us.

Why the deity had to invent  
so many religions just to supply us  
with this simple explanation

remains a mystery.  
But then (we are likewise told) God  
is supposed to remain a mystery.

And what of the unhappy squirrel  
whose pain is no less than mine,  
yet whose more limited mind  
is unable to contemplate  
either religion or morality  
and therefore simply suffers—  
without any sense that there is  
a purpose to it?

I suppose some might tell me  
that any god could explain  
the squirrel's suffering too if  
remaining mysterious was not  
so all-important. Still, I wonder  
whether such contemplations  
might be enough  
to turn me into an atheist—

that is, if I wasn't one  
already.

Steve Bloom  
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