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THE ARROGANCE OF THE ATHEISTS:

THEY BATTER BELIEVERS IN RELIGION WITH SMUG CERTAINTY

BY S.E. CUPP

BACK IN COLLEGE, WHILE I WAS BUSY PRETENDING THAT A BLOTTOED DISCUSSION OF NIETZSCHE OVER $1 BEERS MADE ME AN INTELLECTUAL GIANT, MY FIFTYSOMETHING FATHER, WHO'D WORKED SO HARD TO SEND ME THERE, WAS QUIETLY BEING SAVED.

(CUPP, I THINK WE'VE ALREADY SPOTTED THE PROBLEM: NOT ENOUGH TIME IN THE BOOKS AND PERHAPS A LITTLE TOO MUCH COLLEGE TIME SPENT IN THE PUB DOWNING $1 BEERS. THE FACT THAT YOU ADMIT THAT YOU THOUGHT THIS MADE YOU AN INTELLECTUAL GIANT IS THE FIRST SIGN THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE MORE SERIOUS ISSUES THAN JUST ALCOHOL CONTROL).

HAVING LONG ESCHEWED ANY TIES TO HIS SOUTHERN BAPTIST UPBRINGING, HE SUDDENLY FOUND HIMSELF BORN AGAIN AND ON A QUEST TO KNOW GOD BETTER.

(CUPP, THAT IS QUITE COMMON AS PEOPLE GET OLDER AND START FEELING NERVOUS ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES THAT THEY HAVE BEEN WARNED ABOUT IN THE BIBLE).

AS A LONGTIME ATHEIST, I WAS A LITTLE SURPRISED.

(WHY CUPP? WHAT DOES YOUR ATHEISM HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR FATHER FEELING THE IMPENDING PRESSURE OF PASCAL'S WAGER?).

BUT EVENTUALLY I CAME TO BE RELIEVED BY THIS DEVELOPMENT.

(CUPP, WHY WOULD YOUR FATHER'S ACCEPTANCE OF AN IMAGINARY WORLD INHABITED BY INVISIBLE GHOSTS BE A RELIEF?).

WHILE MY FRIENDS' FATHERS WERE BUYING FLASHY SPORTS CARS AND EXCHANGING THEIR WIVES FOR MODELS, MY OWN FATHER WAS TURNING INWARD AND ASKING: IS THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN THIS?

(CUPP, IT SOUNDS LIKE YOUR FRIENDS' FATHERS WERE A WHOLE LOT SMARTER THAN YOURS. IS THAT WHAT HAS YOUR PANTIES ALL KNOTTED UP IN A BUNCH? YOU'RE MAD BECAUSE YOUR FRIENDS' FATHERS WERE FINDING HAPPINESS IN WAYS THAT YOU DISPPROVED OF?).

I WAS ALSO PROUD OF HIM FOR BECOMING A STUDENT AGAIN. AS I WATCHED HIM PORE OVER C.S. LEWIS, LEE STROBEL AND EVEN NEOATHEIST THINKERS SUCH AS SAM HARRIS AND CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, I THOUGHT IT AMAZING THAT HE STILL WANTED TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW.

(CUPP, IT'S TOO BAD HE DIDN'T PAY MORE ATTENTION TO HARRIS AND HITCHENS. UNFORTUNATELY THEY DON'T OFFER THE COMFORTING FAIRY TALES THAT MEN WHO HAVE ROUNDED THIRD AND ARE HEADING FOR HOME WANT TO HEAR. LEWIS AND STROBEL DO).

IT WAS A REVELATION I'D EXPERIENCE OVER AND OVER AGAIN - MEETING FAITHFUL BELIEVERS AND DISCOVERING THAT, NO MATTER HOW LONG THEY'D BEEN IN THE FOLD, MANY WERE STILL ON A DOGGED QUEST FOR SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE.

(CUPP, I THINK YOU MUST HAVE BEEN HITTING THE $1 BEERS WHILE WRITING THIS. FAITHFUL BELIEVERS AREN'T ON ANY KIND OF QUEST FOR SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE - THEY ALREADY BELIEVE THAT ANCIENT DESERT NOMADS HAVE PROVIDED THEM WITH THAT KNOWLEDGE. THEY ARE NOT ABOUT TO RISK ETERNAL DAMNATION BY ALLOWING DOUBTS TO DEVELOP SO CLOSE TO THE FINISH LINE).

AND IT'S WHY I DECIDED TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL AS WELL AND STUDY RELIGION IN A MORE MEANINGFUL WAY.

(CUPP, YOU ARE CLAIMING TO BE AN ATHEIST. EXACTLY WHAT DEFINITION ARE YOU USING? I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU WRITE ONE THING THAT I WOULD EXPECT TO SEE AN ATHEIST WRITE.

ATHEISTS STUDY RELIGION BUT I KNOW OF NONE THAT FIND ANY MEANING IN ANCIENT WORKS OF FICTION).

IT WASN'T NECESSARILY AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF A HIGHER POWER, BUT A REALIZATION THAT I KNEW LITTLE ABOUT THE BELIEFS I HAD RAILED SO ARROGANTLY AGAINST.

(CUPP, WHEN HAVE YOU EVER RAILED ARROGANTLY AGAINST BELIEVERS? THE ONLY PEOPLE YOU EVER RAIL ARROGANTLY AGAINST ARE ATHEISTS. BUT I WILL AGREE THAT BEFORE RAILING AGAINST ANYONE'S BELIEFS YOU SHOULD FIRST EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT THOSE BELIEFS).

WHICH BRINGS ME TO THE PROBLEM WITH MODERN ATHEISM, EMBODIED BY THE LIKES OF HARRIS AND HITCHENS, AUTHORS OF "THE END OF FAITH" AND "GOD IS NOT GREAT," RESPECTIVELY. SO OFTEN IT SEEMS LIKE A CONVERSATION ENDER, NOT A CONVERSATION STARTER.

(CUPP, THAT IS BECAUSE BELIEVERS HAVE NO ANSWERS FOR THE QUESTIONS THAT HARRIS AND HITCHENS POSE).

AND THE LOUDEST VOICES OF TODAY'S MILITANT ATHEISM, FOR ALL THEIR TALK OF RATIONAL THOUGHT, DON'T SEEM TO WANT TO DO TOO MUCH THINKING AT ALL.

(CUPP, WHY DOES IT SEEM TO YOU THAT THEY DON'T WANT TO DO MUCH THINKING? CAN YOU SUPPORT THAT ACCUSATION WITH ANY EVIDENCE?).

AS JAMES WOOD WROTE IN THE NEW YORKER, "THE NEW ATHEISTS DO NOT SPEAK TO THE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WHOSE FORM OF RELIGION IS FAR FROM THE EMBODIED CERTAINTIES OF CONTEMPORARY LITERALISM.

(CUPP, WOOD MUST NOT BE LISTENING BECAUSE THE NEW ATHEISTS DO SPEAK TO ALL BELIEVERS WHETHER THEY ARE FUNDAMENTALISTS OR OTHERWISE).

INDEED, IT IS A SETTLED ASSUMPTION OF THIS KIND OF ATHEISM THAT THERE ARE NO INTELLIGENT RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS."

(CUPP, THAT WAS A CLASSICAL STRAW MAN. NEW ATHEISTS DO NOT ASSUME THAT RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS ARE NOT INTELLIGENT - THEY ASSUME THAT THEIR BELIEFS ARE NOT).

WHAT SPIRITUAL QUEST ARE THEY ON, EXCEPT TO PUT AN ABRUPT END TO THOSE LIKE MY FATHER'S?

(CUPP, NOW YOU ARE TRYING TO EQUATE THEM TO BELIEVERS BY CALLING WHAT THEY DO, A "SPIRITUAL QUEST." ATHEISTS DO NOT GO ON SPIRITUAL QUESTS. IF YOU ARE REALLY AN ATHEIST, AS YOU CLAIM, I SHOULDN'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT).

FOR THEM, THE SCIENCE IS SETTLED, THE DATA ARE CONCLUSIVE AND THE BOOK (NO, NOT THE GOOD BOOK) HAS BEEN WRITTEN.

(CUPP, IF YOU KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT SCIENCE YOU WOULD KNOW THAT NOTHING IS EVER "SETTLED." THEORIES REMAIN VALID ONLY AS LONG AS THEY CAN PROVIDE THE BEST ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS THAT WE SEE IN THE UNIVERSE AROUND US.

AS FOR CALLING THE BIBLE "THE GOOD BOOK," IT IS OBVIOUS YOU HAVE NEVER READ IT).

TIME FOR EVERYONE ELSE TO PACK UP AND MOVE ON TO OTHER BUSINESS, LIKE, PRESUMABLY, ACCUMULATING WEALTH AND FULMINATING AT THE SIGHT OF THE NEAREST CHRISTMAS TREE.

(CUPP, JUDGING BY YOUR SUCCESS AS A WRITER, IT WOULD SEEM YOU HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH ACCUMULATING WEALTH. WHY DO YOU TRY TO IMPLY THAT THAT IS A BAD THING?

ATHEISTS DO NOT FULMINATE AT THE SIGHT OF A CHRISTMAS TREE UNLESS IT IS BEING DISPLAYED IN VIOLATION OF OUR CONSTITUTION. THEN, EVEN CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE FULMINATING).

THE MILITANT ATHEIST WANTS NOTHING MORE THAN TO SPOIL THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.

(CUPP, FOR AN ATHEIST - YOU KNOW ALMOST NOTHING ABOUT ATHEISTS. WE COULD CARE LESS ABOUT THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY. OUR CONSTITUTION GUARANTEES THE RIGHT OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL TO TAKE THAT JOURNEY IF THEY SO DESIRE.

IT IS THE CHRISTIAN WHO DOES EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO SPOIL THE JOURNEY OF ANYONE WHO CHOOSES A PATH OTHER THAN CHRISTIANITY. THEY ACCOMPLISH THIS BY THREATS OF BURNING FOR ETERNITY FOR NOT BELIEVING IN THEIR GHOST. WHEN THAT DOESN'T WORK, THEY RESORT TO MORE PRACTICAL ATTACKS, AS THEIR LONG, BLOODY HISTORY ATTESTS TO).

THAT'S BOTH MEANSPIRITED AND RADICALLY UNENLIGHTENED.

(CUPP, THERE EXISTS NO ONE MORE MEANSPIRITED OR RADICALLY UNENLIGHTENED ON THE PLANET THAN THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN.

OKAY, I TAKE THAT BACK. YOU GOT ME SO WORKED UP, I ALMOST FORGOT ABOUT YOUR BROTHERS OF THE BOOK, ISLAM. YOU KNOW, THOSE PEOPLE YOU HAVE BEEN AT WAR WITH FOR THE PAST 1,400 YEARS).

THOUGH MORE THAN 95% OF THE WORLD FINDS SOME MEANING IN FAITH, GOD-HATING COMIC BILL MAHER SHRUGS THIS OFF AS A "NEUROLOGICAL DISORDER."

(CUPP, I THINK BILL WAS BEING TOO KIND. I THINK THEIR NEUROLOGICALS ARE OKAY, IT'S THEIR BRAINS THAT HAVE BEEN INFECTED WITH A VIRUS THAT KEEPS THEM IN A CHILDLIKE STATE UNTIL THEY DIE.

THE FACT THAT 90% OF THE WORLD IS INFECTED DOESN'T MEAN THAT IT IS NORMAL, IT ONLY MEANS THAT THE DISEASE IS WIDESPREAD).

HIS VERSION OF A QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE WAS A SERIES OF SCATHING JOKES AT THE FAITHFULS' EXPENSE IN THE DOCUMENTARY "RELIGULOUS."

(CUPP, WHAT MAKES YOU THINK BILL WAS ON A QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE? AND IF HE DID GO ON A QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE, I'M PRETTY SURE THE LAST PLACE ON EARTH HE WOULD LOOK WOULD BE AT RELIGIOUS SITES).

THE LATEST INCARNATION OF THE THOUGHT-ESCHEWING SECULARIST IS AMERICAN ATHEISTS SPOKESMAN DAVE SILVERMAN, WHO SUMS UP THE ARGUMENT THIS WAY ON ATHEISTNEXUS.ORG: "RELIGION IS MY BITCH."

(OKAY CUPP, I'LL GRANT YOU THAT WAS A LITTLE ROUGH. PERSONALLY, I WOULD EXERCISE BETTER JUDGMENT IN SELECTING A BITCH).

HE HAS ALSO TWEETED, "YES IT IS A MYTH. DEAL WITH IT. ALL DELUSIONS ARE MYTHS."

(CUPP, AND YOUR PROOF TO THE CONTRARY IS?).

IT'S THESE SNARKY AND CONDESCENDING REJECTIONS, NOT OF FAITH ITSELF BUT OF THOSE WHO PROFESS IT, THAT REFLECT A TOTAL UNWILLINGNESS TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW ABOUT HUMAN NATURE, THE WORLD AROUND US AND EVEN OF SCIENCE ITSELF.

(CUPP, SILVERMAN'S STATEMENT HAD NOTHING TO SAY ABOUT THOSE WHO PROFESS FAITH - IT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSED FAITH ITSELF.

YOUR READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS INDICATE THAT YOU MAY HAVE RELOCATED THAT STASH OF $1 BEERS. AT LEAST YOU COULD FINISH WRITING BEFORE EMPTYING OUT THE BOTTLES).

WHILE THE NEOATHEISTS PAY ONLY CURSORY ATTENTION TO DISMANTLING ARGUMENTS FOR GOD, THEY SPEND MOST OF THEIR TIME PAINTING HIS FOLLOWERS AS UNCULTURED RUBES.

(CUPP, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? BOOKS DISMANTLING THE ARGUMENTS FOR GOD ARE EVERYWHERE. EVEN THE BOOKS YOU, YOURSELF, MENTIONED EARLIER BY HARRIS AND HITCHENS CONTAIN SOME OF THOSE ARGUMENTS.

HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED WAITING UNTIL YOU ARE SOBER BEFORE WRITING YOUR ARTICLES?

GUESS NOT).

THE FACT THAT RELIGION HAS INEXPLICABLY PERSISTED, EVEN DESPITE COPERNICUS, DARWIN AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT, DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE MUCH SOCIOLOGICAL MEANING FOR THEM.

(CUPP, HOW WOULD YOU KNOW THAT? THEIR BOOKS PROVE THAT THEY ARE FAR MORE AWARE THAN YOU ARE, OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF FOLLOWING RELIGIOUS DOGMA).

THE TRUTH IS, FOLKS LIKE MAHER AND SILVERMAN DON'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT ACTUAL BELIEF - IN FACT, THEY ARE MUCH MORE CERTAIN ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE WORLD THAN MOST ACTUAL BELIEVERS, WHO UNDERSTAND THAT A MEASURE OF DOUBT IS NECESSARY FOR FAITH.

(CUPP, NOW I THINK YOU'VE DOWNED THE WHOLE PITCHER. HOW IN THE WORLD DID YOU CONCLUDE THAT A MEASURE OF DOUBT IS NECESSARY FOR FAITH? NOTHING IS REQUIRED FOR FAITH. IN FACT THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT FAITH IS: BELIEF BASED ON NOTHING. DOUBT IS THE LAST THING ANY FAITH PERMITS. THAT IS WHY HELL ISN'T FOR RAPISTS OR MURDERERS BECAUSE THEY CAN REPENT AND BE SAVED; IT IS FOR NONBELIEVERS - THOSE WHO DOUBT.

THE REASON MAHER AND SILVERMAN ARE MUCH MORE CERTAIN ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE WORLD THAN MOST ACTUAL BELIEVERS IS BECAUSE THEIR BELIEFS ARE BASED ON PROVABLE SCIENTIFIC FACT NOT ANCIENT FAIRY TALES HANDED DOWN BY IGNORANT, NOMADIC GOAT HERDERS WHO CLAIMED THAT AN INVISIBLE GHOST WAS TELLING THEM WHAT TO WRITE DOWN).

THEY WANT TO FOCUS ON THE DOWNFALL OF A GAY PASTOR OR THE NATIVITY SCENE AT A MALL.

(CUPP, ATHEISTS HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH GAYS. YOU ARE CONFUSING US WITH CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS; THEY ARE THE ONES WHO THINK GAYS SHOULD BE KILLED, AS COMMANDED IN, WHAT DID YOU CALL IT EARLIER?, OH YEAH, "THE GOOD BOOK."

NATIVITY SCENES DON'T BOTHER ME. BUT I'LL BET YOU WOULD DRINK A YEAR'S WAGES IN $1 BEERS IN ONE WEEKEND IF YOU WENT TO THE MALL ON CHRISTMAS AND SAW A SCENE OF MOHAMMED FLYING OFF TO HEAVEN).

I WONDER WHAT THEY'D SAY TO SOMEONE LIKE IMMACULEE ILIBAGIZA, A SURVIVOR OF THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE WHO SAYS THAT HER FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST GOT HER THROUGH 91 DAYS OF HIDING IN A 3X4 FOOT BATHROOM WHILE HER FAMILY WAS MURDERED OUTSIDE.

(CUPP, AS AN ATHEIST, WHY WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT HER SURVIVAL WAS DUE TO HER FAITH IN CHRIST? DID HE BRING HER WATER? DID HE BRING HER FOOD? DID HE SEND PEOPLE TO BRING HER THESE THINGS?

YOU KNOW, I'VE BEEN PRETTY PATIENT UP TO THIS POINT, BUT THERE COMES A TIME WHEN ONE CAN ONLY REMAIN POLITE FOR SO LONG BEFORE IT BECOMES NECESSARY TO JUST COME OUT AND SAY IT:

S.E. CUPP - AN ATHEIST?

YOU ARE A LIAR.

I CAN'T PROVE IT - BUT EVERY SINGLE THING YOU SAY PROVES IT).

WOULD THEY TELL HER SHE WAS CRAZY? DELUSIONAL? TO JUST DEAL WITH IT? I WOULD HOPE NOT - BUT I AM NOT SURE.

(CUPP, WHY WOULD THEY HAVE TO TELL HER ANYTHING. IF SHE USED IMAGINARY FRIENDS TO HELP HER DEAL WITH HER HORRIBLE SITUATION THEN FINE. SHE DID WHAT SHE HAD TO DO TO SURVIVE. IF SHE WANTS TO CREDIT JESUS, THAT'S HER BUSINESS. BUT THEN MAYBE SHE SHOULD ASK HIM WHY HE PUT HER THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE; AND WHY HIS PLAN REQUIRED THAT HER PARENTS BE BRUTALLY MURDERED.

A LOVING GOD EXPLAINS NONE OF THOSE THINGS. SADLY, THE REALITY OF EVIL HUMANS ... DOES).

WHEN THE ESTEEMED THEOLOGIAN DAVID MARTYN LLOYD-JONES ASKED C.S. LEWIS WHEN HE WOULD WRITE ANOTHER BOOK, LEWIS RESPONDED, "WHEN I UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF PRAYER."

(CUPP, I THINK THAT WAS LEWIS' WAY OF SAYING HE WAS THROUGH WRITING.

I NOTICED YOU SWITCHED FROM INSULTING ADJECTIVES WHEN REFERRING TO ATHEISTS, TO ADJECTIVES LIKE "ESTEEMED" WHEN REFERRING TO A THEOLOGIAN. CAN'T YOU AT LEAST TRY TO HIDE YOUR BIAS? EVEN A LITTLE? COULDN'T YOU AT LEAST PRETEND FOR THE SAKE OF JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY?).

IT WAS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT HE - A THINKER WITH A MUCH SHARPER MIND THAN, SAY, MAHER'S - DIDN'T KNOW EVERYTHING.

(WELL CUPP, SINCE MAHER'S MIND IS ROOTED IN REALITY AND LEWIS BELIEVED IN POWERFUL, VENGEFUL INVISIBLE GHOSTS, I'M NOT SO SURE THAT LEWIS IS THE ONE WITH THE SHARPER MIND).

I IMPLORE MY FELLOW ATHEISTS

(CUPP, LET ME INTERRUPT YOU. YOU ARE NOT AN ATHEIST; AT LEAST NOT BY ANY DEFINITION I HAVE EVER SEEN. IN THIS ARTICLE YOU HAVE DONE EVERYTHING EXCEPT TAKE COMMUNION.

FOR YOU I IMAGINE THE BIG ATTRACTION OF COMMUNION IS THE WINE).

TO TAKE THIS HUMILITY TO HEART.

(CUPP, THAT IS CODE FOR "ATHEISTS KEEP YOUR MOUTHS SHUT").

THERE'S STILL A LOT TO LEARN, BUT ONLY IF YOU'RE NOT TOO BUSY BEING A KNOW-IT-ALL.

(CUPP, THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THEY KNOW IT ALL BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE ANSWERS BY AN INVISIBLE GHOST WOULD BE THE CHRISTIANS. IT IS THE SCIENTISTS AND RATIONALISTS WHO ADMIT THEY DO NOT HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

ADDITIONALLY, ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY IS FOUND IN ONLY ONE PLACE ... AND IT ISN'T SCIENCE.

AS ALWAYS, YOU PEOPLE HAVE YOUR FACTS COMPLETELY BACKWARDS).

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

HUGE BLACK HOLE LURKS IN OUR BACKYARD

WEIGHING IN AT THE EQUIVALENT OF 6.6 BILLION OF OUR SUNS. THIS BEHEMOTH IS THE LARGEST BLACK HOLE IN OUR COSMIC NEIGHBORHOOD

ACCORDING TO NEW MEASUREMENTS, THE BLACK HOLE INSIDE A NEIGHBORING GALAXY, KNOWN AS M87, IS OBESE AND FILLED WITH THE EQUIVALENT OF 6.6 BILLION OF OUR SUNS.

THESE SUPERMASSIVE BLACK HOLES ARE RELATIVELY RARE, SCIENTISTS SUSPECT, SO IT IS SURPRISING THAT SUCH A BEHEMOTH LIVES RELATIVELY CLOSE BY -- JUST 50 MILLION LIGHT-YEARS AWAY.

IT'S ALMOST ON TOP OF US, RELATIVELY SPEAKING. FIFTY MILLION LIGHT-YEARS -- THAT'S OUR BACKYARD EFFECTIVELY.

THE FINDING REFINES PREVIOUS ESTIMATES OF THE SIZE OF M87'S BLACK HOLE, WHICH RANGED FROM ONE BILLION TO MORE THAN SIX BILLION TIMES THE MASS OF THE SUN. THE RESEARCH IS EXPECTED TO HELP NAIL DOWN ESTIMATES OF EVEN BIGGER BLACK HOLES ASSOCIATED WITH ANCIENT DISTANT GALAXIES KNOWN AS QUASARS.

ASTRONOMERS USED A LIGHT-SPLITTING SPECTROGRAPH ON THE EIGHT-METER GEMINI NORTH TELESCOPE IN HAWAII TO MEASURE THE SPEEDS OF STARS ORBITING M87'S BLACK HOLE. THE MOTIONS ARE DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF THE BLACK HOLE. THE DATA WAS THEN USED TO CALCULATE THE BLACK HOLE'S MASS.

THE MEASUREMENTS ARE ABOUT 10 TIMES BETTER THAN PREVIOUS OBSERVATIONS, LARGELY BECAUSE OF TELESCOPE ENHANCEMENTS THAT COMPENSATE FOR DISTORTIONS IN EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE.

EVENTUALLY, ASTRONOMERS HOPE TO BE ABLE TO DIRECTLY DETECT THE POINT WHERE MATTER AND ENERGY FALL INTO A BLACK HOLE, A REGION OF SPACE SO DENSELY PACKED THAT NOT EVEN PHOTONS OF LIGHT CAN ESCAPE ITS GRAVITATIONAL GRASP. THE DOORSTEP TO THE BLACK HOLE, FROM WHICH THERE IS NO KNOWN EXIT, IS KNOWN AS THE EVENT HORIZON.

RIGHT NOW THEY HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT AN OBJECT IS A BLACK HOLE; BUT WITHIN A FEW YEARS, THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO IMAGE THE SHADOW OF THE EVENT HORIZON.

SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN WRESTLING TO UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BLACK HOLES AND HOST GALAXIES IN HOPES OF LEARNING MORE ABOUT HOW THE UNIVERSE CAME TO EXIST AND EVOLVE.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS THAT THE SIZE OF A BLACK HOLE AND THE SIZE OF ITS HOST GALAXY WERE MATCHED ARE TURNING OUT TO NOT ALWAYS BE THE CASE.

THE RELATIONSHIP APPEARS TO BE MORE COMPLICATED THE CLOSER ASTRONOMERS LOOK. IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS, THEY'RE GOING TO START SEEING MORE AND MORE BLACK HOLES THAT ARE ATYPICAL.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

VOLTAIRE (1694 – 1778) 84 YEARS

HE WAS A FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT WRITER, HISTORIAN AND PHILOSOPHER FAMOUS FOR HIS WIT AND FOR HIS ADVOCACY OF CIVIL LIBERTIES, INCLUDING FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND FREE TRADE. VOLTAIRE WAS KNOWN AS A PROLIFIC WRITER AND PRODUCED WORKS IN ALMOST EVERY LITERARY FORM INCLUDING PLAYS, POETRY, NOVELS, ESSAYS, HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC WORKS, MORE THAN 20,000 LETTERS AND MORE THAN 2,000 BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS. HE WAS AN OUTSPOKEN SUPPORTER OF SOCIAL REFORM, DESPITE STRICT CENSORSHIP LAWS AND HARSH PENALTIES FOR THOSE WHO BROKE THEM. AS A SATIRICAL POLEMICIST, HE FREQUENTLY MADE USE OF HIS WORKS TO CRITICIZE INTOLERANCE, RELIGIOUS DOGMA AND THE FRENCH INSTITUTIONS OF HIS DAY.

VOLTAIRE WAS ONE OF SEVERAL ENLIGHTENMENT FIGURES (ALONG WITH MONTESQUIEU, JOHN LOCKE, JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, AND ÉMILIE DU CHÂTELET) WHOSE WORKS AND IDEAS INFLUENCED IMPORTANT THINKERS OF BOTH THE AMERICAN AND FRENCH REVOLUTIONS.

"THOSE WHO CAN MAKE YOU BELIEVE ABSURDITIES

CAN MAKE YOU COMMIT ATROCITIES."