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August 13, 2014: How Would God Work?

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Title: How Would God Work?

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8/13/2014—If you don't believe in a being who does tricks with nature—as I do not (really cannot)—then what could God be like? My secularism was, after all, always to be hallowed. How is something hallowed given our current limited view of reality as stuff? Maybe the nature of God is not a good question. Maybe the question to be asked is, how would God work without the anthropomorphism? The phrase “God works in history” is intelligible as saying something about history, about its ultimate tendency. This would be the moral arc of the universe that Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of. But what about my personal life? How could God work in my life in a way that would touch me if there is no being who acts like a human being acts? Maybe a kind of answer emerges in the essay by Charles Simic in the New York Review of Books (August 14, 2014 issue). Simic is a poet. He came to America after WWII. He is today quite well known. Simic is not a religious practitioner. He writes this—“Even a nonbeliever like me feels, now and then, the presence of something outside of language and suspects that this brief experience of transcendence and encounter with being and nothingness is what defines him.” But there is more. The feeling above is inchoate. There is something more to reality than what we can see, touch, hear, taste and smell. But Simic also writes of a feeling of directedness. When Simic reads the poetry of Milosz (and others), he writes, “I knew immediately that I was being shown how to write about my own encounter with history... .” “Being shown?” Why did he not write that he realized that this was how to write about history. Because he had a sense that his future was not just in his own hands. Fate is the way nonreligious practitioners sometimes express this feeling of being directed. And Simic uses that image too. He writes that someone like himself, who was so impacted by the bloody history of Europe, “has no choice but to face the moral obligations fate has assigned to him... .” Would the word God change any of this in any way? If this is not religion, what is it? And how could a human being live without a sense of his own life like this?