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The necessity of atheism

Percy Bysshe Shelley

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The Necessity of Atheism is a work on atheism by Percy Bysshe Shelley, published anonymously in 1811 while he was a student at University College, Oxford. A copy was sent to all heads of Oxford colleges at the University. The content was so shocking to the authorities that he was rusticated for refusing to deny authorship, together with his friend and fellow student, Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Shelley made a number of claims in Necessity, including that one's beliefs are involuntary, and therefore, that atheists do not choose to be so and should not be persecuted. Towards the end of the pamphlet he writes: "the mind cannot believe in the existence of a God." Shelley signed the work, 'Thro' deficiency of proof, AN ATHEIST,' which gives an idea of the empiricist nature of Shelley's beliefs. Shelley also believed himself to have "refuted all the possible types of arguments for God's existence," in Necessity. - Wikipedia A philosopher as well as a poet, Shelley argues that the divine attributes of God are merely projections of human powers; life everlasting cannot be empirically demonstrated, for it runs counter to all the evidence for mortality given by the natural world, which is the only world we know. During his brief life, Shelley affronted the armies of Christendom with a single-minded purpose. As Shelley observes in his dialogue "A Refutation of Deism", there can be no middle ground between accepting revealed religion and disbelieving in the existence of a deity - another way of stating the necessity of atheism. In all, these essays provide an important statement of the poet and freethinker's enlightened views on skepticism, faith, and the corruption of organized Christianity. - Alibris

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