

## GODS

JOHN WISDOM (1944)

Two people return to their long-neglected garden and find among the weeds a few of the old plants surprisingly vigorous. One says to the other, "It must be that a gardener has been coming and doing something about these plants."

Upon enquiry they find no neighbour has seen anyone at work in their garden. The first man says to the other, "He must have worked while people slept."

The other says, "No, someone would have heard him and besides, anyone who cared about the plants would have kept down these weeds."

The first man says, "Look at the way these are arranged. There is purpose and feeling for beauty here. I believe that someone comes, someone invisible to mortal eyes. I believe that the more carefully we look the more we shall find confirmation of this."

They examine the garden ever so carefully and sometimes they come upon new things suggesting the contrary and even that a malicious person has been at work. Besides examining the garden carefully, they also study what happens to gardens left without attention. Each learns all the other learns about this and about the garden.

Consequently, when after all this, one says, "I still believe a gardener comes," while the other says, "I don't," their different words now reflect no difference as to what they have found in the garden, no difference as to what they would find in the garden if they looked further, and no difference as to how fast untended gardens fall into disorder.

At this stage, in this context, the gardener hypothesis has ceased to be experimental; the difference between one who accepts and one who rejects is now not a matter of the one expecting something the other does not expect. What is the difference between them? The one says: "A gardener comes unseen and unheard. He is manifested only in his works with which we are all familiar." The other says, "There is no gardener." And with this difference in what they say about the gardener goes a difference in how they feel toward the garden, in spite of the fact that neither expects anything of it which the other does not expect.

But is this the whole difference between them – that the one calls the garden by one name and feels one way toward it, while the other calls it by another name and feels in another way toward it?

And if this is what the difference has become, then is it any longer appropriate to ask, "Which is right?" or "Which is reasonable?"

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You'll notice Anthony Flew (*Theology & Falsification*, 1971) makes important changes to Wisdom's story. Flew makes the two men into explorers in the jungle; they discover a clearing, not an untended garden. Wisdom seems to suggest that *both* men are drawing reasonable conclusions, but Flew argues that only the sceptic is being reasonable.