

Tyler Sulsenti

Professor Pennino

HLI 390

25 June 2018

2001: A Space Odyssey and God

For centuries our civilization has sought for knowledge. To be more precise, the knowledge of the meaning of life and the origins behind it. Some modern thinkers have turned to science to attempt to answer all questions surrounding our nature and origin and some even believed they have the Universe's greatest mystery solved. In reality, we simply do not know for sure and never have. Humans, all throughout history, have attempted to solve this puzzle by putting faith into thought. Religion and science. The ancient Greeks believed in several Gods that each controlled a certain part of the natural world to explain its wonders. The medieval Norwegians had their own similar practices. People of Jewish, Catholic and Mormon faith all believe in a singular God who governs all aspects of creation. Countless other world and historic Religions have been so influential in our civilizations that people have built their lives around them and there have been countless wars over Religion throughout history and there still are today. At the bottom line however different all of the Religion are, they all are based around the answers to the same universal mystery, to explain the origin of the universe and the purpose of man. Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* explores humanity's dependence on some higher power as it explores the process of the rise of human evolution. Although not explicitly shown or told in the film, there is evidence of a God in the film that helps to guide humanity through its course and perhaps unlocks some of these marveling mysteries that have plagued us for all of human history.

The very first scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* presents us thousands of years back in time with a title card “The Dawn of Man”, which may seem like a strange opening scene for a film titled *2001: A Space Odyssey*, however we soon learn that such a scene is important to establish a connection to humanity’s reliance on a higher power. We are shown a tribe of apes, or pre humans, that exist with no seeming purpose for it. They merely drink water and hunt food and attempt to survive. We see them, gathered around a watering hole drinking the water for survival. They are soon pushed out of their watering hole by some other tribe of aggressive pre human apes that put their chances of survival at risk. We then seen the defeated tribe huddle under a rock at night, uncertain of what will happen to them tomorrow. One ape, however stands out as he gazes into the moonlit sky. We are never told, but perhaps this ape is special or the leader of this particular tribe. The next morning, they discover something rather unnatural, a smoothed out rectangular slab, a monolith, that frightens them. The monolith here is like no other rock monolith that some creature of this time would have ever seen. It is a smooth prism with perfect 90-degree angle corners suggesting that it must have been made. One ape, presumably the moon gazing one, conquers his fears of the unknown and reaches out to touch the stone. Eventually, the rest of the tribe follows. Nothing extraordinary happens and we cut to a shot from directly under the monolith looking upward, creating a direct alignment with the stone and the sun. We later see a scene where an ape, presumably our moon gazer, is scavenging the bones of a dead animal for food and the film cuts back to that monolith shot. Here either the ape remembers the monolith or the monolith somehow signals the ape to learn and evolve. The film is not clear on this but it is evident that the monolith has some sort of influence in the ape’s thoughts. He picks up a large bone from the pile and realizes he can use it to smash other bones with ease. After teaching this new trick to all his fellow apes, the return to the watering hole and

bludgeon the rival apes who took it from them, regaining control of the watering hole and securing their survival for another day. The apes, with the influence of the monolith, learned how to use tools to better their lives which is an evolutionary feat people of modern times may not fully understand the importance of since we are born into a world powered by tools.

The film then transitions to the future or in this film, the present, and we learn that humanity has evolved to the point where space travel is something as not extraordinary as modern day air travel. Humanity learns of some alien structure buried underneath the surface of the moon and travels to unearth it. The viewer then learns that this structure is another monolith as it looks exactly the same as the one presented to the apes. The moon monolith emits some ear-piercing noise that is later discovered to be a radio transmission that sends humanity on an expedition to Jupiter to find out what the monolith is trying to get them to reach. Once again, humanity's actions are being influenced by some unknown power. Humanity send a ship, piloted by HAL 9000, a super computer greater than or equivalent to a human mind, and two humans, David Bowman and Frank Poole, to Jupiter's system to investigate the signal. During the journey, Bowman and Poole discover an issue with their ship and HAL suggests a method of diagnostics. Mission Control informs that the HAL unit must have been in error since their HAL unit has said so. A HAL unit is known to be unable to make errors so this makes Bowman and Poole unsure about their HAL and they plot to disconnect him should trouble arise. HAL learns this and reacts by killing Poole in space and attempting to kill Bowman, to secure his own survival. Bowman survives and disconnects HAL and proceeds with the mission. However, when Bowman disconnects HAL, a prerecorded video message is played in the ship that tells Bowman of the true origins of the mission, traveling to the monolith's signal, and about the monolith on the moon. Only HAL had knowledge of this, the crew was uninformed.

At Jupiter, Bowman discovers the moon monolith's signal has led them to yet another monolith. This one is floating on its side in the emptiness of space. Bowman leaves the ship in a pod to investigate the stone and is suddenly pulled into a vast array of light which is known as the stairgate. In this unusually and unexpected turn of events, Bowman is transported to a strange but elegant room with no way out. There he sees various older versions of himself and becomes them, aging rapidly. The last stage is him lying very old and weak in a bed staring at an upright monolith that he reaches out for. He is then transformed into a giant fetus in a bubble, orbiting the earth. This form is known as the Star Child.

Throughout this entire film we constantly see humanity influenced heavily by these strange monolith objects. It started at the creation of man with the apes and tools. We do not know if humanity has encountered one before the moon in 2001, but after the unveiling of this one they encounter several more. Each monolith serves as a purpose to evolve humanity further. The first seen monolith teaches the apes how to use tools for better survival. The second monolith is buried under the moon, therefore, humanity would have had to evolve enough to master spaceflight to the moon and also be able to successfully exist on the moon long enough to dig it up. This one influences man through its radio signal to Jupiter, propelling man further into space and yet again expanding their capabilities. When at Jupiter man, specifically Bowman, encounters the most influential monolith yet as this one helps him to transcend through space and time to visit himself and then evolve into the Star Child, a presumably higher being than human. Each and every time a monolith encounters man, it influences their progression and evolution from something as simple to a tool to a new form of life.

These influential actions create a dependency of man on the monolith because without its influence, it is possible that none of these evolutions would have occurred or may have

occurred at some point in time much later, hindering the evolution and progression of man. The nature of the monolith however is completely unknown and to the humans, alien. They have no idea where it is from or who or what made the structure and how it does the things it does. This directly correlates to a God-like entity that works in a mysterious unknown way to help better man. For example, if we use Christianity as an example Religion, one particular story in the bible is when Jesus Christ, the God figure of Christianity, performs miracles such as healing the blind or turning water into wine. Perhaps one would argue that these are not mysterious like the monolith because Jesus Christ is a human figure who is named the Son of God. We can dive into other stories of Christianity such as the story of Moses and the burning bush. God, a mysterious higher power with no known figure, speaks to Moses through a burning bush to appoint him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. This is parallel to the monolith and some God or higher power communicating with or influencing man through the monolith. In the Bible, God grants Moses the power to part the Red Sea so he may successfully complete his quest to save the Israelites from the oppression by the Egyptians. These stories of Moses are also present in the Jewish religion as they are a part of the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. This unnatural power, much like that of the monolith transcending Bowman through time and space, was introduced by a higher power to influence humanity in some, presumably better, direction.

Other Religions, such as ancient Greek Mythology believed in multiple Gods that would each explain a different part of the natural world. For example, in ancient Greek mythology, it was believed that Helios was the god of the Sun and would personify it as such. It was often believed that vast unexplainable entities like stars were considered to be Gods. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the final monolith evolves Bowman into the Star Child, a link between the stars and humanity. This alludes to some higher power or being residing amongst the stars

and life on a land or planet would be primitive, much like the Gods of Olympus, more specifically Helios the God of the sun. In the film, the Star Child rests in a bubble just outside the Earth gazing upon it. As the camera pans out, a black bowed rectangle of the empty space between the Star Child and the Earth. This could be a bowed monolith symbolizing the bridge between the Earth and some higher power being like the Star Child or the beings behind the monolith. One could argue this black space is simply space and not a bowed monolith but the character's name Bowman and this scene do not seem to be coincidental as he becomes the bridge between humanity and the God like beings behind the monolith and its influence.

Humans are obviously the most intelligent beings on Earth and, as far as we know, the Universe, however this could surely change as the Universe is vast and we know very little about it. But as the most intelligent beings on Earth, we started out somewhere less intelligent like the apes in the beginning of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It is not absurd to think some higher power somewhere influenced us to evolve to state we know today. Many Religions believe this to be true and *2001: A Space Odyssey* explains it in a spacial, alien manner. The laws of nature state that a species must evolve and adapt to survive and that is exactly what humanity did to become the alpha species of Earth. In *2001: A Space Odyssey* we see this through God or at least God in the form of a higher alien power behind the mysterious monoliths as they attempt to influence humanity to reach unexplainably surreal new heights in evolution and progress. It is completely impossible to know exactly how humanity will evolve next and what heights it will reach or what will influence humanity to get there but something surreal could very well happen with the new modern day space race to mars and beyond and humanity should hope that it will at least be somewhat comprehensible.

Works Cited

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