

Juvenal was an early 2nd century Roman who coined the phrase, "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" known better as, "Who watches the watchmen?" It comes in a piece of political satire about hushing things up. (What, did you think modern governments thought of it first?) Essentially, it questions how people in power can be held to account.

Who is going to do the watching, though? Socrates suggested society could be fed Plato's "noble lie," a story devised to inculcate good behaviour. His version was that a god ordained everyone to be of a certain group in society, in order that they might have good regard for each other's place in the community. So watchmen, ordained for integrity, therefore live up to it. Hmm. Some will now think I've just shot myself in the foot - what with being a priest and telling you that God made you in His image. Well, Juvenal, Plato and Socrates were on the right track, but it's Hitchens that's going to put them right 2,500 years later (lol).

Noble lies are often spun by people in positions of power to get what they want - which sadly is not always for the good of all. However, this is just the result of the noble lies we tell ourselves, thinking that life will be more easily lived if we kid ourselves that we are anything more than anyone else.

I personally discovered that admitting to this, warts and all, let me live my life more easily because if God has made me who I am, then actually there must be good in it. Unfortunately we avoid loving who and what it is that God has made us by all sorts of noble lies: prejudice, intolerance, pretentiousness, etc, which might make us feel better about ourselves for the time being...

Elijah, my big hero - next after Jesus, of course! - having run off into the desert, was asked by God in the silence, (paraphrased) "Now it's just you and me, who actually are you?" I think Elijah then understood that the truth about ourselves is that God is with us, God is within us, God restores us to the glory that is his image without big flashes of lightening or Potteresque magic spells because what he made us to be is enough.

So, the best person to be the watcher? According to Socrates: "[Whoever] has a divine ruler within themselves." He will be relieved to know I agree with him.