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John Teehan, *In the Name of God: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Ethics and Violence* (Blackwell Public Philosophy Series volume 9), West Sussex UK, 2010; 272 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4051-8382-6.

The theory of biological evolution is one of the major theories used extensively today in many contexts, involving diverse disciplines such as linguistics, economics, and cognitive science. Moreover, its impact on culture in general, whether positive or negative, is undeniable. Since the time of Charles Darwin, many scholars have analysed and discussed the implications of this theory to religious belief. Recently, however, an interesting shift has occurred in this area. After decades of discussing evolution-related arguments for and against the existence of God, scholars have become aware that the theory of evolution can possibly be seen as accounting for the existence of religion itself. Inquiry in this area is crucial. If evolutionary biology does indeed explain the emergence of religion, what then? Will the claims of religion be irretrievably undermined? Or will evolutionary biology be seen as an ally to religion, in the sense that it will illustrate, once and for all, what religious believers

have been convinced of for centuries, namely that being religious is an essential part of being human?

These questions form the backbone of Teehan's impressive study. He concentrates on two aspects of the phenomenon of religion: morality and violence. One may think that violence should not really be part of religion. For Teehan, however, some form of violence is always present in religion. Violence is not a corruption of religion but, in a way, one of its essential ingredients. He argues that the elements of religion that motivate pro-community moral attitudes are the very same elements that produce division, prejudice, aggression and violence. All religions, therefore, turn out to be inherently double-faced. Teehan's main contribution comes from applying evolutionary psychology to gain exciting new insights into this area of anthropology.

His first chapter presents the main features of the evolution of morality. The mechanisms behind the emergence of morality are probably the following five: kin selection, reciprocal altruism, indirect reciprocity, cultural group selection, and the environmental filtering of moral emotions. After explaining these processes in some detail, Teehan proceeds by showing that morality has a tendency to become typically religious. This happens because of the way morality tends to include communal belief in supernatural beings. Hence, the main argument here is that religious beliefs are a natural outgrowth of cognitive and deliberative processes that did not themselves evolve for religious purposes. With this starting point established, Teehan then dedicates two chapters for the study of how traces of the evolutionary account just outlined can be detected within Jewish and Christian religious traditions. He is careful to avoid reductionism. He does not argue that these two religious traditions are mere products of evolutionary psychology. He accepts that monotheistic traditions are rich

and irreducible cultural units, but argues that they are constructed upon a common moral psychological framework. Some readers may not agree with his insistence that religious traditions are all violent, sometimes in unexpected ways. Is it right, for instance, to say that Christianity is violent because it retains the idea that the wicked will suffer eternal punishment for their sins?

Teehan's overall practical conclusion is that there should be a shift of attention. People need to minimize talk about religious beliefs and focus on truth. Religious beliefs have nothing sacred about them. They are the mere product of psychological processes that are guided by blind social constraints. Truth, on the contrary, is essentially the end of the process of inquiry. Of course, the idea of genuine human flourishing is crucial for this process, and yet this idea is open to discussion and experimentation. But Teehan argues that there are definite signs of progress. For instance, he claims that progress definitely occurred within Christianity when kinship was first understood in terms of close family and ethnic affiliation, and then eventually understood in universal terms: seeing others, all others, as part of one's group simply because of their being human. These reflections lead Teehan to endorse the kind of humanism defended by John Dewey and Paul Tillich.

There is an interesting question, however, that Teehan could have considered in more detail. If religion can generate both positive and negative behaviour, religious believers are obliged to be religious in a positive way. And this obligation is a moral judgment. Clearly then, if morality is a product of evolutionary mechanisms that gave rise to religious traditions, the two disciplines are forever mutually dependent. Great care is needed to avoid the vicious circle of saying that morality produces religion and religion produces morality. Great care is needed also to explain how progress can be definable at all. Charles Darwin himself had an inkling of this problem. At one time

he realized that his own mind, as it was becoming aware of the truth of evolution, was itself a product of evolution. So in his autobiography (1876), he expressed some apprehension: “Can the mind of man, which has ... been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animals, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions [regarding the existence of God]?” (*The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. Francis Darwin, vol. 1 [London: John Murray, 1888], p. 313).

So the inquiry needs to continue. The next step should start from where Teehan and others like him have achieved so far and should attempt to produce a satisfactory account of what philosophers and theologians call self-transcendence. This is a considerable challenge. Chances are that it will not be met in the near future.

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