The Natural History of Secular Christianity

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Abstract

Human beings are social animals, not solitary ones. Morality is an instinct we have because it helps us socialize, live together harmoniously. This paper reviews how the evolution of morality and other mental functions associated with our survival and sociality gave rise to cultural behavior among the small groups of humans during the Palaeolithic period when the tribe was personified as a supernatural identity and guardian, a totem, an ancestor and ultimately a god. Loyalty to the tribe required loyalty to the tribal god representing the tribe. Preservation of the tribe meant mistrust of other tribes and their gods. The merging of small groups rendered obsolete the tribal, locally cultural conception of religion, but it persisted as monotheism in the imperial stage of society from about 2000 BC, becoming the world religions. Today's empires are global, and a belief system modelled on local tribes in competition is naïve divisive. Out-group hatred is more of a threat than any in-group moral benefits, and they too are disappearing with the failure to preserve small group coherence, and justice and fairness in capitalist society. The moral failure of imperial religion on the urban and global scale is the "Death of God". Humans now cannot afford the moral laziness of constantly appealing to a supernatural totem in an otherwise do-nothing religion. Imperial religion was and still is a tool of the political right, used to manipulate us. Yet Christ offered an ethical scheme that is essentially a practical morality of mutual lovingkindness which does not require a supernatural God. It is Secular Christianity, a world view any scientist and atheist could adopt without compromise, and most Christians should.

Biology provides a broad source of information about humans that has no substitute. It clarifies long standing paradoxes. It shows that some things have indeed been missing from the debates about morality, and that they have been missing because the process of organic evolution that gave rise to all forms of life has been left out of the discussions.

R D Alexander, *The Biology of Moral Systems* (1987)

Morality, an Evolutionary Adaptation

> In 1739, the Scottish philosopher David Hume wrote: "When any hypothesis… is advanc'd to explain a mental operation, which is common to men and beasts, we must apply the same hypothesis to both." A century later, Darwin showed that all forms of life have a common origin. Yet, to this day, the idea that humans and animals share characteristics and abilities, including mental ones, as a result of shared evolutionary history, still seems hard to swallow for some.
>
> Frans de Waal

If God has prescribed human morals, it is up to us to think about what God has told us and apply his moral rules. But Michael Gazzaniga, an eminent US neuroscientist, reports that most scientific studies of morality find no correlation between moral reasoning and moral behavior such as helping others. The fact is that most people are moral, irrespective of their justification of it. Whatever the basis for anyone's morals, some supposedly highly pious religionists from Catholic popes to Protestant televangelists have been rotten to the core, but most people behave well.

It looks as though morality is the way we behave as humans—with the exceptions behaving badly—yet we do not have to struggle with moral problems on a daily basis. Steven Quartz of the California Institute of Technology says "what our brain is for, what our brain has evolved for, is to find what is of value in our environment". Each moment we meet a new situation, and our brains instantly assess what they see and make judgements, some of which we might consciously consider, and many more remain in our unconscious minds. These instant judgements are the basis of our morals.

It is like tasting something new (David Brooks, "The End of Philosophy", *NY Times*, 6 April 2009). When a child, particularly, does not like it, they spit it out, often with an obvious show of disgust. Adults might show more decorum, but usually there is little weighing up of the pros and cons. It is the same when you come across a wonderful sight. You do not consider its merits at length to get your impression of it. You can judge it instantly. The same is true of moral judgements. We make quick intuitive decisions about what feels right or not. Having made a judgement we might try to rationalize it, but many people cannot, and the whole process begins at a young age, before we can speak, and before our brains have started formal reasoning.

When a child tastes something strange and unfamiliar, its instant reaction is to find it disgusting. In that way, it has a natural defence against noxious food. It is an instinct that has evolved. Those without it often died by eating poisonous or rancid food. Those who remained had inherited the trait to find new food disgusting. They have to be persuaded by people they trust that the food is wholesome. They have to acquire the taste. The same applies to a landscape. We have evolved to like certain landscapes because they are our natural home. A landscape of blackened rocks devoid of vegetation is not inviting. Nor is a baking

hot desert, or a malarial swamp. But a green valley with a lake, trees and deer roaming about looks inviting to us. It is a natural home for us, and we have evolved to know what is good for us.

Morality is similar. Jonathan Haidt of the University of Virginia says the emotions control morality, and our emotions have evolved. The evolution of morality depends on our social nature. People are not separate units but combine together into groups and communities of mutual assistance.

Conservatives and religionists have long ago decided that evolution is a matter of vicious competition—a dog eat dog contest red in tooth and claw—and humans are essentially the same, basically competitive animals saved from bestiality by God's morals. Human competition is the biological justification for the capitalist economic system but morality mediates it slightly, and that slight modification is what makes it acceptable, or even divine. Heinz Kohut, a psychoanalyst, thought human behavior should never to be described as "bestial" because no animal would behave in the ways humans do to be described as beasts:

> Hitler exploited the readiness of a civilized nation to shed the thin layer of its uncomfortably carried restraints, leading to the unspeakable events of the decade between 1935 and 1945. But the truth is—it must be admitted with sadness—that such events are not "bestial"… but are decidely human.
>
> Heinz Kohut (1972)

But the competition invoved in evolution does not have to be savage, or even direct, the way the naïve right wing likes to maintain. Social animals band together in groups because each individual among them benefits. Sociality is about co-operation within groups. Social animals stand together against common threats, then more advanced social animals like human beings help each other, build houses together, take on different jobs in a division of labour, and evolve such that these communal and co-operative traits are reinforced. And besides obvious changes like these that evolve, so too hidden or more subtle emotional changes evolve too, often driven by the hormonal secretions, opioids and brain chemicals like dopamine, which make us feel good by helping, trusting or being friendly with others. By being social, we end up caring about the rights of other people, as well as our personal rights, and loyalty, respect, culture, and traditions, all social issues. We are all descended from successful co-operators.

As Darwin saw, competition has made us co-operative, empathetic and altruistic towards others of our kind, and, through it, even to animals not of our kind. The only trouble so far is that we tend still to distrust other humans who are not in our own local group, with the definition of "local" itself slowly evolving from family, to clan, to tribe, to nation, to empire and ultimately to the world.

Intuitive morality explains how we lead practicable social lives without excessively pausing to make judgements about others. We trust others to be moral like ourselves. If they betray our trust, we expect others in society like ourselves

to punish the betrayers. That is the law! Our judgements are largely instinctive, but have been codified to some extent with our use of language and reason. So, sometimes we have to use reason to supplement or substitute for our moral intuitions.

Brooks thinks the realization that morals are not external—imposed by God, or worked out by reason—but are largely instinctive is "an epochal change". It challenges much of how philosophy is imagined—the metaphysical problem of ethics is no longer a hard one. It challenges the traditions of all "the religions of the book", for religion—God—is shown not to have been the source of the distinction between right and wrong. Trying too hard for balance, Brooks writes:

> It challenges the new atheists, who see themselves involved in a war of reason against faith and who have an unwarranted faith in the power of pure reason and in the purity of their own reasoning.

What, though, has morality to do with irrational faith? What the evolutionary theory of morality has done is remove the connexion between morals and faith that religions have seen as necessary. The theory of evolution is the pinnacle of reason, and now it explains why we have morals, and how properly socialized human beings apply them instinctively with no recourse to religions, bibles or God.

Evolution is a scientific idea which is continually giving us new insights, though it is almost impossible to get anyone indoctrinated with religion to appreciate it. Science has naturally explained many of the phenomena considered by religious people to be signs of God. Just as morality can be explained by evolution, so too can feelings of awe, transcendence, patriotism, joy and self sacrifice. Indeed, they are mainly traceable to the same facts—that we have evolved and are social. Our societies transcend us. We are in a social contract with other human beings, a mutual bargain that we treat others as we ourselves would want to be treated. Our loyalty to society has metamorphosed to our loyalty to God. Society is God!

Most people think that morals have been given to us by God, and God's laws should be applied in practice. They have been fixed forever, whence the laws of Moses, Sharia law, and the inerrancy of the Protestant *New Testament*. God's law is unchanging, but the trouble is that no one can agree on what it is that He has prescribed! The whole of human history has seen laws changing constantly—evolving!

The laws in relationship to women now give them much closer equality to men than they have enjoyed under the dominance of the patriarchal God for 2500 years. The aim is that both sexes should be legally equal. The law in relation to race has similarly evolved by leaps and bounds in the last few hundred years after millennia of gross inequality under the patriarchal God. Human beings everywhere are increasingly being seen as equal, quite properly. The progress has

been made painfully slowly, despite the faith of Christian believers in the divinity of Jesus, who insisted that his followers should consider all men, even enemies, as if they were God Himself. Christians have almost universally ignored this commandment as too hard.

The one whom many Christians treat as if he were God, Paul, condoned slavery and the inferior status of women. He was sufficient for them to ignore the word of the man who is meant to **be** God. Let anyone actually look at evidence—what actually happens in history—and they will see that law always evolves, like everything else. If we have an unchanging law, it is the law of evolution.

> The moral nature of man has reached its present standard, partly through the advancement of his reasoning powers and consequently of a just public opinion, but especially from his sympathies having been rendered more tender and widely diffused through the effects of habit, example, instruction, and reflection… nevertheless the first foundation or origin of the moral sense lies in the social instincts, including sympathy; and these instincts no doubt were primarily gained, as in the case of the lower animals, through natural selection.
>
> Charles Darwin

All mammals have a common ancestor from which they have differentiated in response to different environmental needs. Just as some evolved specialized wings or flippers, some retained more generalized limbs. In the same way, subtle features like sociality varied, and among the more social animals degrees of play led to a variety of co-operative and empathic responses. In humans, one such set of responses is called morality—responses like honesty, altruism, compassion, generosity and being fair. Morality is just a particular example in one familiar species of a general behavior in social animals. It evolved as a result of the evolution of social living.

Darwin saw that human morality was an extension of the animal instincts of social animals. Stories of animals feeding disabled ones is remarkably common. Sighted animals have often been observed feeding blind ones. We can take morality further than animals, and consequently many people have refused to see the basis of morality that exists in animals too. But the difference between animals and humans is one of degree only.

So morality is rooted in evolution, particularly in the evolution of sociality. It is the *quid pro quo* of living in groups. It is not simply the opposite of selfishness. It is a broad adaptive strategy for social living that has evolved in social animals (M Bekoff and J Pierce, *Wild Justice*, to which this section is indebted). Solitary animals cannot be moral at all, they have nothing to gain by it. Social animals help each other because they individually benefit by it. Morality is not altruism. It is a selfish strategy but depends on reciprocity.

Social animals restrict the behavior of their group members. The restrictions a group imposes offer the security, welfare, and fairness that makes group life

beneficial. These are "self regarding" behaviors—they benefit each individual—but are also "other regarding" because they have to accept a duty to regard the other members of the group too.

> Dogs are a good example of a species that have and obey social rules. That's why we like them so much, even though they're large carnivores.
>
> Frans de Waal

When dogs or wolves play with each other, savage biting is forbidden. The animals have an etiquette, and will "apologize" when they bite too hard. Pack animals like these also have manners, an order of precedent when feeding, by which the higher ranked animals get the first choice, but all get fed. Other animals have grooming etiquette, and formal methods of approaching each other which assure the animals they are not being threatened.

Like humans, animals living in groups have to lose some of their individual freedom to be a part of the group. To have the benefits, they have to compromise elsewhere. It is a trade off of freedom for security. Frans de Waals speaks of "community concern" as the characteristics of the group that confer benefits on to the individual. Any individual group member not promoting the desirable group characteristics will be treated as "bad" while those that do will be treated as "good". The shriek marks here signify that the animals are not consciously reasoning which is "good" and which "bad", but that they have evolved the ability to do it to their own advantage. That they do, by whatever means, looks very much like morality.

Yet some evolutionary biologists, still influenced by *Genesis*, have refused to accept that animals can have morals. In their view, only humans have morals because we are uniquely made in the image of God. Once morals are seen as an evolved trait, it is plain that other animals must have them, or the behavior from which morality evolved. Animal morality is different only in degree from human morality, just as a wolf's paw has the same basic structure as the human hand.

It is obviously possible to define morality so narrowly that only humans can be included, but that is neither scientific nor honest, and can only serve to hide important connexions. We differ from animals in being conscious of our beliefs and actions, and consciousness is the feature available to us that allows us to reason. Morality, though, does not have to be conscious. It is based on emotions, and they work quite well unconsciously.

That emotional reactions are nested in levels of evolution is suggested by the evolution of the brain itself which P MacLean saw as being in three distinct stages, each built on to the previous one. The most primitive is the reptilian brain (the R-Complex) which controls basic functions like breathing, heartbeat, and flight or fight. Next up is the limbic system which controls emotions. Lastly, the most recent addition is the neocortex, the outer brain which controls abstract thought and speech. In humans and perhaps apes, emotions might be refined by

the work of the neocortex, but the essential emotional responses are in the limbic system, and there is no reason to suppose that mammals do not experience it despite it being there!

Equally animals cannot attempt to describe their emotions, but humans have symbolic language to try to describe them. Their inability at articulating their emotions does not stop animals from having them. Rather the opposite. We can be confident that we share the faculties of our limbic systems, a lower level of mental exertion for us, but one animals surely have. What language in humans has done is provide more efficient means of transmitting important skills necessary for effective social life, like empathy, fairness and trust. It emphasizes the higher degree achieved by humans in codifying justice and morality, but cannot affect the roots of it shared by other social animals. Reflective judgement is not a precondition of moral behavior.

So, morality is a trait that has evolved. Evidence of morality has been observed in animal behavior studies of great apes, some monkeys, wolves, hyenas, dolphins, whales, elephants, rats and mice. Studies of the levels of morality in these animals can help us understand the emergence of morality in human beings as we evolved from apes. Of course, morality in a non-human species might look rather different from human morality, though all of it is social. Human morality is related to law. Law is imposed by the group when voluntary restrictions—morals—are not applied.

Studies show that, in primates, bats, social carnivores, and toothed whales and dolphins, the larger the social group an animal is in, the larger the size of the individual's neocortex. The social intelligence hypothesis is that social living promotes higher intelligence. The need to keep track of one's companions in the group, handling them socially and knowing how to treat them and trust them pushes for the growth of the brain and of intelligence. Teaching young ones the communal codes, forming alliances, and even using deception all require greater intellect.

The components of morality are sociality, intelligence and emotion. Rats and mice might seem lowly creatures to us, but they are social, emotional and intelligent. They show empathy for other rats or mice.

> Empathy resides in parts of the brain so ancient that we share them with rats.
>
> Frans de Waal

Rats will not take food once they realize another rat nearby will get a shock by it. J Paaksepp has shown rats experience joy when they are playing, and even let out a rat laugh when tickled. Reactions like joy seem to be brought on by the release of opioid chemicals into the blood, giving a sort of high from the experience.

Socially favourable factors are called prosocial. The behavior patterns that contribute to prosocial behavior, and so to morality, appear as several broad

characteristics, important among them being co-operation, empathy and justice.

1. Empathy comprises sympathy, compassion caring, helping, grieving and consoling.
2. Co-operation comprises altruism, reciprocity and trust, and for those animals that hesitate in any of these are the sanctions of revenge and punishment.
3. Justice comprises fairness, sharing, equality, just desserts, fair treatment, and then the sanctions of indignation, retribution and spite.

Morality implies immorality. To have one, the other must be possible. The same applies to some of the components of morality. Empathy implies cruelty. To imagine the suffering of another does not only lead to a helping hand, it also leads to the sadistic torturer. The prevalance of honesty makes dishonesty a potentially advantageous tactic.

Many people, even ethologists, will not use the word “moral” of animals, preferring to stick to “prosocial”, but prosocial actions are not necessarily moral. Parental care is not considered moral, but an instinct common to most advanced animals. When actions among animals seem to be moral in some sense, they are inadequately described as simply prosocial, though prosociality is the basis of morality. Social insects are very social animals but the degree to which they make choices, as opposed to acting purely on instinct is much less clear. Mammals do seem to make choices, and so can be more accurately described as moral.

Religious people find that consciousness of our actions is the essential moral difference between us and animals. Can animals decide for themselves what to do? Are they moral agents? Can they act autonomously? The religious view has long been that animals are robots. It is not a view that anyone, religious or not, that has owned a pet can accept. And human history has advanced through us training certain animals—dogs, horses, mules, camels, elephants, llamas—by rewarding some things they did, and punishing others. The rewards and punishments condition the animals to make the “right choice”—the choice we want!

But the animal **is** choosing, and sometimes the animal will choose to disobey. A dog might sit obediently looking at a beefsteak on the kitchen table even when his master is out of the room, but it might snatch the steak and make the most of it. The dog has chosen to “sin”, despite all its contrary training. Darwin certainly thought animals had the power of self command—they could make choices:

> Besides love and sympathy, animals exhibit other qualities connected with social instincts, which in us would be called moral. And I agree with Agassiz that dogs possess something very much like a conscience.
>
> C Darwin, *The Descent of Man*

Plainly animals **do** choose, and it is often hard to believe they are not consciously

aware of their bad deeds. They often behave as if they are guilty, so must expect to be punished. That surely is the point of the training. The animal is, of course, being made to behave in ways that might not be natural to it, at the command of a human being. But animals can still have agency within their own societies:

> Wolves have a keen sense of how things ought to be among them.
>
> R Solomon, *A Passion for Justice*

All we are trying to do is to extend it to suit ourselves, but we should not use human standards for comparison in cases of animal morality. That the animals **choose** to obey the group's restrictions is shown by them sometimes disobeying them, and the avoidance being punished when noticed. Crows, intelligent birds, can recognize and remember others' bad deeds, like those who steal from their cache, and they will help another that requires help in driving off a thief, even if they did not see the act of theft themselves. They trust their friends:

> It was a moral raven seeking the human equivalent of justice because it defended the group's interest at potential cost to itself.
>
> Bernd Heinrich, *Mind of a Raven*

Animals obviously make choices in their own societies, like whether to play, and whether to help another animal. Any animal that can respond flexibly must be making choices in the same way, and we now know that highly trained human activities like playing tennis involve unconscious decisions—we reach to make a shot **before** we are conscious of it. So we highly intelligent animals are much less conscious than we think. The difference in degree of consciousness in humans and other advanced mammals is less then we ever thought.

Training is simply conditioning, and much of human morality is conditioned. Parents condition their children in the culture of their tribe, or society. So do elephants. When families break down, as we are now observing in our own societies, all too often, the proper acculturation of our children does not happen, and the next delinquent generation just does not know how they are meant to acculturate their own children. We are in a vicious downward cycle. The same is true of elephants that have been ravaged by poachers in the African wild life parks. Elephant matriarchs, the group leaders, are being shot before they have passed on their skills to their young, and a generation of delinquent elephants has arisen. Impulse control in children is essential to the development of morality, yet animals need to do it too.

Do animals have emotions? Few would doubt that animals can get angry when provoked, and anger is an emotion in human beings. Our physiologies have a lot in common. It is absurd to deny animals, with which we are so similar, any emotions at all on the grounds that God made us in His image, and not animals! It is not extreme to see that we are all mammals, and as a first approximation will experience pain, joy, love and anger in comparable ways. I will cry out in pain if I burn my finger, and my cat will shriek if I tread on its tail. But if we both feel

pain, what stops us both from feeling fear or love? Admittedly, an emotion will not be felt in precisely the same way across species, but, when it involves the same neural architecture or opioid responses in the same contexts, then there is no reason for us not to think the feeling will be of a similar kind. Indeed, it is perverse not to think it.

There is now no doubt that animals have emotions, but there are still scientists who preserve the theological dogma that human beings are distinguished from animals by their emotions. The old notion of refusing to consider emotion in animals on the grounds that only humans have feelings, is ridiculous and counter intuitive. As we all have a common evolutionary heritage, it is sensible to judge what looks like emotion in an animal when we would expect it as that emotion.

> We are human and cannot avoid the language and knowledge of our own emotional experience when we describe a strikingly similar reaction observed in another species.
>
> S J Gould

Emotions are not the highest product of evolution. They had evolved long before reason and language. Admittedly, we should not anthropomorphize the animal, but, though it will not be philosophizing about its experience, it nevertheless still feels it. You do not need to be able to describe your joy or sadness to experience it, and that is just how animals are. We are simply recognizing after an awfully long time failing to appreciate it, that we have feelings in common with animals. It is just that we can tell others of it.

In the 1990s, neuroscientists noticed that certain neurones in macaque monkeys fired off when they watched the researchers pick up food. The same neurones fired when the monkeys were themselves picking up food, so they were firing from the recognition of the same act by the researchers. The neurones mirrored the activity itself when observed in others, so they were termed “mirror neurones”. Mirror neurones have since been found in songbirds, like swamp sparrows—they help them to learn their songs—suggesting that they occurred as far back as the common ancestor of birds and mammals.

As they fire when the animal sees or hears the action being performed, they give it the same feeling as it experiences when it does the same thing itself. They therefore stimulate imagination and concern. They trigger when we imagine ourselves doing what others are doing. They are signals of empathy! If another is hurt, the observing animal can sense what it feels like:

> Mirror neurones allow us to grasp the minds of others, not through conceptual reasoning, but by direct stimulation—by feeling, not thinking.
>
> G Rizzolatti, neuroscientist

Since 2007, neurones throughout the human brain have been identified as mirror neurones. Humans give others signals which they involuntarily recognize and

respond to, like giggling triggering a spate of it, and similarly yawning triggering yawning. They let us understand the emotions of others, and are vital for comprehending language. Other primates have the same sort of responses, Orang Utans, for example, and, besides primates, empathy has been observed in elephants, whales, rats, mice, and social carnivores.

Until they were found in whales, scientists thought the large neural cells called spindle cells occurred only in humans and apes. They play a role in empathy, intuition and feelings. In whales they appear in just those parts of their brains where they help in them making rapid reactions from quick decisions, such as whether another whale is in distress and a quick response is needed. Whales have three times the spindle cells of humans. They are likely to have an advanced emotional life.

Humans are successful as a species because of our nurturing, altruistic and compassionate traits, not, as capitalist social psychological theory makes out by being greedy, acquisitive and selfish, which its proponents consider Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection implies. Scientists at UC Berkeley, led by Dacher Keltner, author of *Born to be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*, have noticed that social living implies "survival of the kindest":

> Because of our very vulnerable offspring, the fundamental task for human survival and gene replication is to take care of others. Human beings have survived as a species because we have evolved the capacities to care for those in need and to co-operate. As Darwin long ago surmised, sympathy is our strongest instinct.

What Darwin called sympathy, we now more commonly call empathy, the ability to understand another's emotions, and to respond in an helpful way. In humans, we can use our imaginations to share the other's perspective, but the essence of empathy is emotional linkage. It might have started as an extension of the emotional linkage of a mother and her infant. Empathy is the outcome.

Keltner with Laura Saslow and Sarina Rodrigues found that many of us are genetically predisposed to be empathetic. They gave nearly 200 people tests to measure their ability to identify and feel the emotions of others. They also sampled DNA from them. Certain brain chemicals have been linked with moral feelings. Animals that have to live in close proximity, perhaps for security in numbers, can put up with it better when they enjoy social contact. People can have one of three DNA variations of a particular gene that's the receptor for oxytocin, a natural chemical that is secreted into the bloodstream and the brain, where it promotes social interaction, nurturing and romantic love. It is the love hormone.

The three DNA variants are AA, AG, or GG—depending on the genetic information they receive from each parent. People with GG variation of the

oxytocin gene receptor are significantly better on the empathy tests compared with those with the AA and AG variants, and therefore at reading the emotional state of others. Moreover they seemed less reactive to stress, which the researchers tested by measuring the participants' heart rate as they anticipated a loud bang.

So, for some people, empathy is innate, something that's rooted in the genetic makeup they get from their parents. Says Rodrigues:

> The most useful information we can take from this study is that some people are going to be a bit more naturally closed off and unable to really understand what other people are feeling, and this could be in large part due to the fact that they're so consumed by their own stress—that it's somehow impairing them from connecting with others and reaching out.

But what about those who have the AA or AG variation—are they doomed to go through life emotionally cut off from others? No. Genes do not determine everything. Our genome may predispose us to certain behaviors, but ultimately, our lives are shaped by the interaction between our genes and our experiences. Genes give us a predisposition to act in a certain way, but through determining to find better ways of socially connecting with people or handling stress, anyone can overcome these obstacles. In the old terms of Nature and Nurture, both count.

Besides oxytocin, Keltner *et al* are also studying the vagus nerve. Both the vagus nerve, a uniquely mammalian system that connects to all the body's organs and regulates heart rate and breathing, and oxytocin, play a role in communicating and calming. Two people separated by a barrier took turns trying to communicate emotions to one another by touching one other through a hole in the barrier. For the most part, participants were able to successfully communicate sympathy, love and gratitude and even assuage major anxiety.

From activity in the threat response region of the brain, many women grew anxious as they waited to be touched. However, as soon as they felt a sympathetic touch, the vagus nerve was activated and oxytocin was released, calming them immediately. Keltner said:

> Sympathy is indeed wired into our brains and bodies, and it spreads from one person to another through touch.

The same goes for smaller mammals. Rat pups whose mothers licked, groomed and generally nurtured them showed reduced levels of stress hormones, including cortisol, a hormone triggered by stress and anxiety, and had generally more robust immune systems. In another study, the level of cortisol of both white and Latino students dropped as they got to know each over a series of one on one get togethers.

The basic response to alarm calls—startled behavior—has been refined through evolution until the distress and anxiety of the alarm call is manifested by seeing another suffering. Such a phenomenon is quite basic in vertebrates at least. Many cruel experiments have shown how distressed animals are when they see others of their kind being killed. When a rat sees a nearby rat being decapitated, its stress reaction is clear. Even throwing a rag bloodied with the murdered rat on to the cage of another makes it stressed. The witnessing rat can sense what is happening, and experience it. It is empathy!

Rhesus monkeys will not feed when they know another will get an electric shock as a consequence. Frans de Waal (*Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, 2006) explains that a rhesus monkey was subjected to an experiment in which it pulled a chain to get food. Monkeys learn such tricks immediately. But then the experiment was arranged so that, besides delivering food, another monkey in the next cage got an electric shock when the chain was pulled. The monkey pulling the chain soon realized it was causing the other monkey distress, and it stopped doing it, and would not do it again for five days, until it was really hungry. Another starved itself for twelve days before it was forced to by hunger to pull the chain again. The monkeys would rather starve than cause pain to another monkey nearby, and it was not only when the other monkey was kin. When the monkeys were related, the longer they would starve themselves rather than cause distress, showing that genes and evolution were invoved even though the concern the monkeys had for each other was not limited to close kin. In monkeys and apes, as well as humans, the compassionate trait has extended to unrelated creatures in close enough proximity to notice distress in others of their kind.

Rats will not depress a lever to get food once they realize that by so doing they cause a rat in an adjacent cage pain through an electric shock. Stanley Milgram doing the same experiment to humans (who pretended to be shocked) found many were willing to apply such serious shocks that the victims would have died if the shocks were real. In another experiment with rats, one was suspended uncomfortably in the air, but another rat perfectly free to do as it wished could press a lever to release the suspended rat. The free rats did just that!

Mice can feel empathy. They are observably distressed when nearby mice are tortured. Empathy in small mammals like mice shows it is probably common to all mammals, and certainly to more sophisticated species. Once it is accepted that many mammals can sense the pain of another of the same kind, the basis of morality must exist.

A chimpanzee in an American zoo was unusual. It had cerebral palsy, the only confirmed case of it in chimps. Did the chimps tease it and take advantage of it, as humans too often do to disabled people? Not a bit. All of them showed kindness, helping it to feed, and grooming it, and even an alpha male was gentle towards it. Great apes will console another ape that has been worsted in a fight. It is a sign of cognitive empathy. The same has not yet been observed in monkeys. Monkeys have mirror neurones that are associated with empathy, but do not seem to have

spindle cells which also seem necessary. Faults to the spindle cells of humans seem to cause autism.

Whales and dolphins grieve for a lost relative. A Rodrigues fruit eating bat has been seen acting as a tutor and a midwife to a young pregnant female. It has not been easy to observe bats in the wild giving birth, but having been seen, the experts think midwifery might be the normal practice among bats. More remarkable still is that the two bats were not related, so the act was one of altruism.

In an oft quoted case, a young female elephant with a crippled leg was harrassed by a young male showing off. A mature matriarch defended the crippled elephant, chasing off the bully, and returning to caress the young female's bad leg with her trunk, and generally showing concern. Elephants grieve, and are the only other animal besides humans that are curious about the corpses and bones of the dead of their species. Compassion for the ailing and grief for the dead indicate concern for others—empathy.

Elephants that found a herd of antelope locked in pens in an African National park, followed the lead of their matriarch and released the catches on the gates of the pens letting the captive animals escape. Was that perversity or empathy?

Empathy is at the core of justice, and empathy for those who can be seen to be unjust, like tyrants and torturers, evaporates—they are likely to get their just deserts if their guard falls.

Evolutionary fitness is not at all only shown by mutual fighting, as many still seem to think. Animals co-operate much more in Nature than they show aggression towards each other, quite contrary to the popular "Darwinist—red in tooth and claw" capitalist idea of animal behavior. Social animals spend much more time co-operating with each other than fighting. Peter Kropotkin (*Mutual Aid*) showed at the beginning of the twentieth century that co-operation was a much more reliable way for animals to survive than competition, but it has taken 100 years for anyone to catch on to the truth. Animals in groups much more often will be found helping each other than squabbling:

> Real competition and struggle between higher animals of the same species came very seldom to my notice.
>
> P Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*

Mainly it was mutual aid. Even the so-called feeding frenzy is not as frenzied as it sounds. Social animals take their food in a set order of precedence, and, before the feeding, they will communally defend the kill against scavangers keen to steal it, irrespective of their place in the feeding hierarchy. Even animals of different species are known to help each other, just as humans and dogs or horses do. Ravens have been seen leading wolves to the carcase of an elk. The animal is too big and tough for the ravens to pull apart, but they are happy to let the wolf pack

do it, then they get a lot of bite size pieces themselves.

Co-operation is the widespread basis of animal morality. Co-operation is behavior by which both parties benefit at the time. There is usually no, or very little cost to the parties above that which arises out of the social nature of the animals. Some animals co-operate more readily and more often than models of animal behavior predict, even though the act of co-operating might not yield any immediate benefit. The benefits must be longer term, but if the behavior is to be repeated, the animal must experience some affective state that rewards the activity. The most basic such state is "affiliation"—liking and feeling close to others. It happens from family closeness but also from pair bonding (love) and friendship.

Social interactions among primates was mainly affiliative, and only occasionally agonistic. Chimpanzees have been known to help humans retrieve things lost in the animals' pen or cage, with no reward as an incentive. They also freely share their food and have developed ideas of reciprocity, division of food and co-operation to ensure it is done in an orderly way. Chimps remember those who have shared their food with them, and act in a friendly way towards them. It can only be described as gratitude. Capuchin monkeys do much the same.

How can such traits ensure human survival and raise our status among our peers? Robb Willer thinks an answer is generosity—the more generous we are, the more respect we get. In a study, each participant had some cash and were told to use it in games testing sharing, ostensibly for the "public good". It found more generous people received more gifts, respect and co-operation from the others, and wielded more influence over them:

> The findings suggest that anyone who acts only in his or her narrow self interest will be shunned, disrespected, even hated. But those who behave generously with others are held in high esteem by their peers and thus rise in status. Given how much is to be gained through generosity, social scientists increasingly wonder less why people are ever generous, and more why they are ever selfish.
>
> Robb Willer, UC Berkeley

The assumption that nice guys finish last is shown by all this work to be false. Instead it supports the idea that humans respond to compassion, when adequately nurtured and supported. Keltner said:

> This new science of altruism and the physiological underpinnings of compassion is finally catching up with Darwin's observations nearly 130 years ago, that sympathy is our strongest instinct.

Being nice to others does indeed bring its own rewards in a feeling of wellbeing and that promotes co-operation. Oxytocin, a hormone, is another chemical that helps co-operation—promoting mutual trust. Trust is helpful when people wish to join together in co-operative ventures, giving an utterly unconscious and

unreasoned response to others in our social network. R Axelrod and W Hamilton showed long ago that animals co-operate more with those that have given them reason for trust. Once we know someone, we just trust them without any need to think about it.

Co-operation also activates the reward centers of the brain, releasing dopamine, which then makes the co-operation feel pleasurable, and so encourages it. Social animals, kept isolated form each other, suffer stress and psychosis. Endogenous opioid peptides (EOPs) make animals more inclined to associate closely and co-operate. Positive contact leads to the release of EOPs, and that makes the animals seek contact. The EOPs effectively give animals in groups a high—they feel pleasure or joy in social contact. Equally mutual aid or co-operation makes people feel good.

Reciprocal altruism is the zenith of co-operative behavior, and some think only humans are capable of it. Yet dogs and hyenas have social mechanisms for peacemaking as complex as those of primates. Ethologists reporting such behavior in dogs, hyenas, rats and crows have found peer reviewers of their reports rejecting them purely on prejudice not on science. They judge such low animals as absolutely incapable of reciprocal altruism so they refuse to consider evidence of it.

It ought not to be said that science should be prejudiced against anything, and rejection should only be based on science better than that submitted. Novel observations can then only be rejected on the basis of identifiable flaws, and not because someone refuses to believe they can happen! What, anyway is too low? In colonies of initially indistinguishable amoeba called slime moulds, in certain conditions some of the animals volunteer to die by becoming a stalk to suspend the fruiting body and propagate the colony. R Hudson, et al, who observed this happening, called it altruism, and what better word is there for it, yet these are animals that are so low, they normally live as individual cells.

Mammals, birds, and even, it is said, crustaceans, will play. In young animals, play emerges to build them up through exercise, and to let them develop life skills. It hones physical and mental skills. Yet they need an incentive to do it, and the incentive is pleasure. Because play is so useful in physical and mental development, it has become pleasurable. It stimulates the release of endorphins, and that makes it fun. It is Nature’s way of doing what is good for us, and the species.

Morality seems to have evolved from play. Morality has the form of a game with rules, and punishments for breaking them. Animals play out of choice, and continued participation depends upon fairness, co-operation and trust. As play is by mutual agreement, animals that habitually cheat don’t get played with. Among coyotes, 60% of yearlings that left home died, but only 20% of the ones that remained at home until they were more mature died. Those that tend not to play fairly tend to get isolated and might be the ones more likely to leave the family

group. It seems that the ones more tolerated by their kin, because the play fairly, stay at home until they are more mature, and, being better prepared, succeed better when they eventually do leave.

Play therefore is necessarily fair. Through it, each animal gets to understand what is acceptable to others and what is not—what is right, and what is wrong! Once all understand the rules, the game is stable, and all can enjoy it while they choose to play. Play, for social animals, is therefore essential practice for sociality, and the rules of sociality for any species are its morals. If justice and morality are seen as social rules meant to maintain group harmony, then they are equivalent to play.

Tests even on young human children show they have developed a sense of justice from early on. They can judge a kind person from an unkind one from their behavior towards others maybe as early as 15 months. As it appears so young, it suggests that it might also appear in apes and other social animals. It emerges too young in humans to be learned, so must be instinctive—an evolved behavior.

Among human beings, there is no doubt that those who feel they are being justly treated are more content and physically healthier than those who do not. R Wilkinson (*Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality*) found that Scandinavians living in fairly egalitarian societies are healthier than people living in manifestly unequal societies like the USA. Inequality causes ill-health through the physiological effects of social stress. L Mitchell (*Stacked Deck*) adds that trust of others is difficult, if not impossible in societies like the USA where self interest is vaunted above everything else.

Without trust everyone becomes suspicious and defensive. Effectively, unfairness breeds mistrust, and mistrust breeds social instability. Trust is essential for group cohesion, and, without it, societies fall apart. Pack size in wolves depends on social factors, not availability of food. It is the pressure between social attraction and social competition, and when competition gets too much, a rebellion causes the pack to splinter. Justice presumes a personal concern for others, but it is a sense, a feeling, first, and is rationalized second. So reason or logic is not essential to the "sense" of justice, and that is why justice does not require an human intelligence. Having it simply means we have been able to catalogue and canonize our morality, but the moral code existed in society already.

> Biology provides a broad source of information about humans that has no substitute. It clarifies long standing paradoxes. It shows that some things have indeed been missing from the debates about morality, and that they have been missing because the process of organic evolution that gave rise to all forms of life has been left out of the discussions.
>
> R D Alexander, *The Biology of Moral Systems* (1987)

Religion and moral education cannot be the only, or even the ultimate, source of morality. Moral reasoning, perhaps, but morality itself, no! Moral education is often motivated by an institutional agenda, to do what is best for those within the

moral community, preaching partiality—not plurality—lumping into one category all those who do not accept their particular morality, and failing to practise compassion towards outsiders. If religion is not the source of our moral insights, and moral education has the potential to teach partiality and objectively immoral behavior, then where does our gut feeling for moral right and wrong come from?

The answer is biology, as we have seen—animals have their own morality without any need for reason, or moral institutions. Studies of the human mind confirm it. All humans—young, old, male, female, conservative, liberal, wherever they live, whatever their religious or moral education, highly educated or with no education—have a natural, biological moral code. With it, we have principles for judging what is morally right and wrong. It is an "impartial, rational and unemotional" ability, which does not prescribe who we should help or who we can harm. It is an intuition guiding us to know when helping another is necessary and harming another is forbidden.

A moral sense test run online asks for a participant's gender, age, nationality, education, politics and religion, then sets a series of situations requiring a moral judgement—is it morally forbidden, permissible or obligatory? The moral dilemmas are deliberately unfamiliar. As no one has experienced them before, and as neither the law nor religious scripture provides any guidance, people are thrown back on to their instinct or intuition.

Many of the situations are like the railway signalman faced with a runaway carriage that will kill five workmen on the line, unless he switches the points to send it up a side track where only one workman will be killed. The dilemma is that someone will die, should it be one or five? These are problems that force us to wrestle with the consequences of our actions using our internal moral code. Thousands of people responded to a hundred dilemmas. People could be categorized from their preliminary responses into a wide variety of social groups. All the cultural and moral groupings reacted similarly. There is no social communal effect, and whatever morality was displayed must have been the basic instinct of morality we all have as humans, irrespective of our social affiliations.

It turns out we judge actions as worse than failing to act. Pushing a person into the factory vent to stop a poison gas from emerging is worse than allowing the person to fall in. Using someone as a means to some greater good is worse if thereby you do them some harm than if you don't. It is the difference between an evitable (avoidable) harm and an inevitable (unavoidable) harm. Distinctions such as these are rational, abstract, and unemotional until, at least, we are obliged to act.

If this code is universal, then why are there are so many moral atrocities in the world? Clinical studies of psychopaths reveal they lack feelings needed for self control, they feel no remorse, shame, guilt or empathy. Some say they do not understand what is right or wrong. They cannot do what is morally right because they do not know what it is. In fact, recent work shows they **do** know what is right

and wrong, but do not care. Their moral knowledge is intact but their moral emotions are damaged.

So, the answer is to do with emotions, the feelings we have by which we identify with others in our human group. When we fuel "in group" biases by elevating and praising members of the group, we often unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, denigrate the other by feeding the most nefarious of all emotions, disgust. We label the other—the members of the "out group"—with a description that makes them subhuman or even inanimate, often parasitic and vile, and thus disgusting. When disgust is recruited, those in the "in group" have only one way out—purge the other.

The psychology of prejudice, of creating distinctive classes of individuals who are in the tribe and outside of it, is flexible and so capable of change. All animals, humans included, have evolved the capacity to create a distinction between members of the "in group" and those in the "out group". But it is not set in the genome. It is a matter of experience. Studies of child development show that within the first year of life, babies prefer to look at faces from their own race to faces of a different race, they prefer to listen to speakers of their native language over foreigners, and prefer to listen to their own dialect of their native language. But if babies watch someone of another race speaking their native language, they are much more willing to engage with this person than someone of the same race speaking a different language.

It is all experience, but some responses are more important than others. They are plastic, malleable, changeable! Racial prejudice is reduced among children of mixed parentage. Adults who have dated someone of another race are less prejudiced. It follows that by introducing all children, early in life, to all variety of religions, political systems, languages, social organisations and races, they will be more tolerant. Tolerance is improved by more experience of diversity. We are instinctively xenophobic, but we can indeed learn to love the stranger in our midst. We just have to do it!

We have an inbuilt morality, but we also respond to socializing through experience. If our socialization is narrow, our inbuilt morality applies only to the narrow group we know, with all its prejudices. If our socialization is broad, then we realize our morality applies to everyone. So, our evolved capacity to intuitively judge what is right or wrong is not sufficient to live a moral life. These are two reasons why:

1. Our moral instincts evolved for small human groups, often an extended family. Today we live in a large communities, cities and nations, where our small group instincts need to be adjusted by wider experience of the variety intrinsic to large groups. We cannot have a small group temperament when we live in immense cities, and that is why laws have had to substitute for morals. If society were more moral, laws would not need to be so intrusive. Moreover, modern living has faced us with modern moral decisions. Again

we cannot make adequate decisions based merely on clan morality.

2. It means we have to look less narrowly, and listen to the universal voice of our species, in relation to the whole of it rather than the local group. Living in an age of WMD and in a global village we have to be sensitive to the larger scale of the consequences of our judgements. At one time we could fight off a challenge from another tribe with little damage, some injuries and a few deaths. Now the damage will be serious and global, millions dead and injured, and no one will escape it.

> Theists and agnostics do not behave less morally than religious believers, even if their virtuous acts are mediated by different principles. They often have as strong and sound a sense of right and wrong as anyone, including involvement in movements to abolish slavery and contribute to relief efforts associated with human suffering.
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> M Hauser and P Singer, *Morality without Religion*, 2005

Some ethicists accept that evolution explains our physical nature, but deny it explains our moral nature. A Christian author of some apologetic website wants atheists to explain where their morals come from, and how they can distinguish right from wrong. They are popular Christian demands, but they never listen to the answers proffered, and so keep asking the same things over and over again. Is not that a sign of some form of dementia? Perhaps it is equally demented to keep answering, but since Christians think that if you do not answer their endlesly repeated inquiries, they start to say you cannot, the atheist has a reason for continuing to play the demented Christian game.

Millions of people with no religion live moral lives, and millions more who do not subscribe to Christianity do too. You do not need any religion to live a moral life, nor any particular one. Religious communities are no more moral than secular ones. Psychological studies have not found any significant correlation between frequency of religious worship and moral conduct, but criminal convicts are more likely to be believers than to be atheists. We have an intuitive moral faculty that guides our judgements of right and wrong, the outcome of millions of years in which our ancestors lived as social mammals. It evolved!

Of course, evolution is not teleological—it has no purpose, no goal, but the theory of evolution can show what is necessary in given circumstances of environment and current evolutionary state. Thus, it explains convergent evolution. A torpedo shape with fins suggests a creature requires water to survive. It has evolved characteristics that show it needs water around it. Similarly wings suggest flight. Equally, evolution suggests animals have evolved a set of behaviors necessary for harmony when they live in social groups. Human morals are what we have recognized as these behaviors in our species.

Animals that would be rivals and perhaps enemies in a solitary state have come together to live jointly because it gives them an edge over their solitary ancestors they left behind. But they have to restrain what was once a natural way of

behaving in the interest of preserving the social set up. Dogs will play together, apparently quite roughly, but they do not bite each other with the savagery they could. They have an instinctive social code not to bite seriously during play with another group member:

> Instinct is any action that does not require learning or experience for the animal to perform it and is done without the animal necessarily knowing what the benefits or consequences of that action will be.
>
> Professor Steve Jones

It is an instinct that has evolved along with the group form of living, but if dogs were to become intelligent enough to think of their behavior and to codify what is good behavior, calling it their moral code, biting other dogs savagely would be forbidden. That is what the intelligent ape, humans, have done. In a sentence, humans evolved morality as part of our nature, just as ants evolved a characteristic scent trail as part of their nature—to promote social co-operation.

So, we can see we are social creatures, and we can see that living socially requires conventions called morals, and we can see that morals that do not strengthen, or at least preserve our instinct for social order, are bad for us. Evolution therefore can, in this sense, prescribe what our behavior should be, given that we wish to preserve our circumstances, our success at sociality and civilization, and our mutual co-operation.

> Once we had religion to tell us who we are. Then, for a while, we had Freud. Now we have evolutionary psychology, which, as an attempt to construct a science of human nature on Darwinian principles, marshals two of the most powerful ideas in contemporary culture—science, our most authoritative way of knowing, and nature, our highest ground of moral appeal.
>
> William Deresiewicz

Edward O Wilson, a Harvard professor emeritus, initiated the study of evolutionary biology, then called "sociobiology" with his eponymous book, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, (1975). Evolutionay psychology is "the study of the biological basis of all forms of social behavior in human beings", but as a study based on evolution, it draws on the study of behavior in other social animals and particularly other primates.

Emotions evolved in much more primitive animals that ourselves, evidence that our moral emotions also have evolved. Primatologist, Frans de Waal argues that components of moral psychology, such as the sense of fairness and the emotions evoked by it, like gratitude and inequity aversion, are homologues of psychological systems in other primates. He asks:

> Do animals show behavior that parallels the benevolence as well as the rules and regulations of human moral conduct? If so, what motivates them to act this way?

And do they realize how their behaviors affect others?

Are the emotions, dispositions, and mental abilities—empathy and the recognition of norms—required by moral behavior present in our closest living relatives, the apes, and even in more distant relatives like monkeys?

To test it, female capuchin monkeys, trained to swap coins for food, were put in adjacent cages. To get an item of food in a transparent bowl in front of them, they had to give up a coin. The experiment was to test the monkeys' reaction to manifest unfairness. When they were given the same item, say a piece of cucumber, they did not react. When one was given a tastier morsel, say a grape, the one who only got cucumber refused to give up its coin, expecting the same reward. When one got nothing at all, or kept getting the poor deal, it might throw the coin down in apparent anger and disgust.

So, the female capuchins seem to measure reward in relative terms, comparing their own rewards with those available, and their own efforts with those of other monkeys. They are quite like human beings who judge rewards on the basis of fairness. In an economic game in which a monetary prize is divided by one person, and the share offered is accepted or rejected by the other, both men and women incline to reject low offers considered unfair, even though acceptance gives them something rather than the nothing they get by rejection. They would rather punish the unfair dealer than to gain only a small share, and so they forego their share, when the dealer's is disproportionately high, to punish him by depriving him of a much larger sum.

The female monkeys, like people, seem to have social emotions displayed in response to their efforts, gains, and losses in relation to others. However, the same is not true of male capuchins. Any slight behavioral variation between human sexes are uncertain (Fehr finds some, see below), unlike the clear distinction in behavior of the sexes of the monkeys. And when the game is varied so that rejecting the deal does not hurt the person who offered the unfair deal, people tend to accept the deal, but to the female monkeys in equivalent situations it makes no difference. They reject the deal anyway.

Certainly, female capuchin monkeys have a marked sense of fairness, though males do not show it. Of course, there is no need to imagine that monkeys would behave like humans at all, so the differences between male and female capuchins need not be surprising, and might have something to do with capuchin society. Perhaps it is male unfairness that concerns female capuchins! The experiment shows an unsophisticated animal compared with a human being has some sort of sense of fairness, and feels disgust over lack of it. Frans de Waal has done far more work on other primates and has written popular books about it. Lower animals have a moral sense, and that suggests morality evolved.

Normative cognition—the capacity to grasp norms and to make normative

judgements—is a product of evolution. Norms are ancient and universal and from an early age, people are adept at reasoning about normative matters. It shows that normative cognition evolved—normative cognition is an adaptation, and this is supported by an, as yet, small but significant body of sociological and psychological evidence, and by evolutionary models.

Richard Joyce says the capacity to make moral judgements is a specifically human adaptation for motivating us to act in a prosocial way. The universality of morality is evidence that it evolved—it is not just cultural. The tendency to make moral judgements—morality—exists in all known human societies.

As we evolved, moral judgements promoted prosocial behavior. They expressed to our ancestors the common judgement of the group of why anyone should act favorably to others in society, even though directly it might be somewhat detrimental to themselves. People had this instinct because those without it had been unable to live in a group. Those with it could, and the group was stronger for it. Moreover, morals are particularly suitable to us because we can speak. The evolution of speech will have enhanced the adoption of spoken moral condemnation and praise, promoting the reciprocation of prosocial behavior to cement human groups.

> Moral systems are systems of indirect reciprocity.
>
> R D Alexander

Joyce distinguished seven ways that moral judgements differ from other kinds of normative judgements. They:

1. are often ways of expressing approval, contempt, and generally departure from standards, when spoken publicly, but they are also assertions, expressions of belief
2. are uttered, when pertaining to some word or deed, as disinterested criticism irrespective of the interests and aims of those criticized—they are not simply advice
3. are obligatory, not optional
4. transcend human conventions
5. govern social interpersonal relations, particularly to combat selfishness
6. imply punishment, justice
7. induce a feeling of shame or guilt, a moral conscience being necessary to regulate moral conduct.

Morality is present, according to Joyce, in every known human culture. In every one there are norms with all or most most of the seven features he identifies as distinguishing moral norms from any other norm.

Moral norms and conventional norms can be distinguished in use. Moral norms hold independently from any authority, are considered universally applicable, are justified by the harm done to others, whether social rights, or social justice, and

violations of them are treated as serious. Conventional norms depend on authority, apply only locally, are justified by reference to convention, and violations of them are considered less serious than violations of moral norms. Elliot Turiel *et al* argue that early in their development and panculturally, children can distinguish moral norms and conventional norms. Moreover, infants' react with concern and care—empathy—to others' suffering, and they display helping behaviors towards other kids. These findings suggest the ability to make moral judgements is innate, and therefore are evidence for the evolution of morality.

From the evolutionary history of specific aspects of moral psychology, it is uncontroversial for anyone except fundamentalists that morality evolved. The only convincing answer to the origin of morality is the one Christians refuse to accept—that morals come from our evolutionary history, which has brought us to be social animals. Yet, many American Christians seem to think we are not social, mainly because the word "social" is taboo in the USA where they have invented the word "societal" by adding a syllable—as is their wont—often out of ignorance rather than intention, but here because the proper word "social" is too much like "socialism", a notion they have been conditioned to hate.

Americans think capitalism, the notion they are conditioned to love, means that all humanity are selfish, we are all in competition, and that is the Law of Nature we humans follow. People who hate Darwinism are suddenly social Darwinists. It is almost the opposite of the truth. All animals are selfish to a degree because they have to have some sense of difference from the rest of the world to survive at all, but some animals, of which humans are the prime example, have discovered that they improve their chances of survival, not by fighting each other, but by clanning together to fight everything else. Clanning together is the meaning of the word "social".

A major implication of social living is that without it we would be much less able to survive than we are with it. All we need to do to confirm this is to look at the other apes that still survive in the world, and we see that they are often solitary, or live only in family groups or small bands, so they are not social, or are only social in a small way. Though humans began in similarly small groups, they made such a success of their sociality they now live in vast cities, or in well populated countries where no one is far from another human being or even a large city of them. The benefit of living socially is co-operation whereby social groups can do far more than a man, his wife and his children can do alone.

But such co-operation requires some sacrifices so that the benefits can be enjoyed, and the sacrifices are precisely the source of our morals. We cannot do certain things when we live together in extended groups that we might do as solitary hunters. We co-operate for safety, for obtaining food, and so that our children who are helpless for a remarkable number of years, unlike other animals, can be protected while parents help to feed them or educate them. We each have to give up a little freedom to get the benefits of society. That is something the diehard US Christian indoctrinated with capitalist propaganda cannot bear.

Society has the function of reducing competition between humans so as to improve the ability of humans to succeed in solving other problems by co-operation! Social Darwinism is an oxymoron.

Yet the morals we get from social living, respect for other humans, honesty in dealing with them, eschewing theft from them, caring and sharing with them to our mutual benefit, living frugally rather than lavishly, all of this is advocated by the world's major religions, not because some all powerful god has told us to do it, but because an even more important imperative demands it—the need to preserve society and civilization for our own good. The same moral teachings are common to all humans because we all of us need society to live as humans. The absence of a supernatural god does not leave morality relative. It does not, in other words, leave it arbitrary. Morality is conditioned by our lives—the fact of social living. It is a more certain absolute than God because society is real. Indeed, society is the origin of God. God is society writ larger than life!

Now, one can postulate situations where morals clash. Ethical decisions are not completely rational. Put into the situation of a railway signalman faced with a decision to direct a runaway carriage down one track or another, when one man will be run down in one case, but five in the other, most people act rationally and decide it is more moral to let one man die than five. Neuroimaging of their brains confirms that rational regions became active when they were making the decision. The crucifixion of Christ in the bible is rarely interpreted as directing us that saving several lives by sacrificing one life is the moral thing to do, yet that's what most people, even of different cultures, accept as moral.

Yet the same people mostly consider it wrong to decide a healthy man should be killed so that his organs could allow five others to live, even though the logic is the same in most ways. The difference is that, in the first case, external circumstances dictated that someone had to die—the decision was not to kill. In the other, it was! The decision was to kill someone to harvest his organs, a repugnant thought to most people. If all six were in a ward and were dying, and someone had to decide—from data on their lives and prospects for future life—which ought to die first, thus letting the other five live, there would be less moral trauma.

Indeed, even in a variation of the first case, when the only way to save the five is to shove a man off a bridge into the path of the runaway carriage, 80% thought it immoral. When people suffering damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex make the judgement, they are twice as likely to be willing to shove the man off the bridge. This region of the brain is responsible for "prosocial sentiments", such as guilt and compassion. It is activated by viewing morally evocative photographs, such as ones of a hungry child, even when no judgement is required, and when volunteers elect to donate money to charity.

So rational centers of the brain and emotions seem both to be invoved in making moral decision, but few people can give convincing reasons for their different

choices. Indeed most people cannot explain their choices in much more common moral dilemmas. Choice seems to be based on emotion. Joshua Greene, a cognitive neuroscientist and philosopher at Harvard, thinks emotion and rationality have to compete in the brain. The main difference between the original case and that of shoving a man from the footbridge is the negative emotion in actively killing someone overriding reason. He finds the medial frontal gyrus and other emotional centers in the brain are activated when people contemplate personal moral dilemmas, like those described of killing the man, though others benefit.

> Emotions tell us we'll feel terrible if we push the man, cognition says—"Push him! Five is greater than one".

Stanley Milgram showed that moral trauma is much reduced when some authority commands that some deed is necessary, and when technology intervenes between decision and act, so that the intervention of the mechanism to switch the railway points make the decision easier than it is to hold the gas mask over the victim's face. And when the victims are never seen at all, as when they are being bombed from 6 miles high, or shelled from a ship twenty miles offshore, there is no trauma among those ordered to do it. People's moral sense yields to authority, and physical and technological distance. The trauma of antisocial behavior, of torture and murder, is relieved when people feel they are not to blame, it is not their decision, or the act is attenuated somehow by distance and they cannot see the consequences of their deed, just as Milgram showed. They satisfy themselves by the rationalization that it is not their fault.

Jonathan Haidt thinks morality has five components, concern for harm and fairness being two commonly accepted, but he adds respect for authority to them, as well as group loyalty, and purity or sanctity. He finds that liberal people emphasize the concern for harm and fairness, but conservatives balance those with equal attention to the other three. Purity, for US conservatives seems to boil down to sexual propriety.

For Jews and Hindus, purity is freedom from pollution or disgust, which arises from the idea of the purity of the sacred, profane things polluting the sacred. But the sacred began in primeval society as whatever was reserved for tribal use, and preserved from personal use—improper use was pollution and therefore disgusting.

Moslems are most outraged at any disparagement of Allah, their God being a supreme authority meriting the utmost respect, but other fundamentalists—like right wing authoritarians in the US—are almost as bad in the value they place on the authority figure they carry with them. Socialists and communists seem to emphasize communal loyalty and material equality (fairness), but another reflexion of community loyalty is nepotism valued by western businessmen and politicians.

A popular example of a moral clash is that of the moral to feed one's children, and the moral not to steal, when you find you have to do one or the other because you are too poor to buy food. What do you do? The blogger at *Evaluating Christianity* considered this. But the situation as outlined is of a family group isolated from others in our modern society, the capitalist scheme of human selfishness and indifference. It would not arise in a primitive society because the others in society would know of this man's plight, they would do what society is meant to do in one of its functions, they would care for the man and his children in the absolute expectation that he will do the same in return should the situation arise. It looks like a conscious tit for tat, but the consciousness is the rationalization of what happens naturally in any well ordered society that people would be willing to die to preserve. Again, put rationally, or in a Kantian way, the motive to help is duty. Everyone in a tribe feels it their duty to help others. Nothing is wrong with that surely. Didn't Christ teach the same, you indoctrinated false Christians?

Neuroscientist, Jorge Moll, sees prosocial sentiments as the core of morality and thinks they evolved to allow our ancestors to form attachments and co-operative groups in primitive societies. Haidt speculates that morality is an elaboration of primate social behavior that evolved to promote cohesiveness in groups of early humans, giving them an advantage over less cohesive groups. M Hauser (*Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*, 2006) agrees that morality comes from primate social behavior, though he puzzles that…

> when you say something is moral, how does the brain know it's moral as opposed to just social?

Well, let us hazard a guess that the distinctive moral feeling is different because it is instinctive, whereas what he means by "just social" is a social convention.

> For Hauser, moral intuition is not the product of culture and education, nor is it the result of rational and deliberative thought, nor does it reduce to the workings of the emotions. Instead, it is human nature to unconsciously and automatically evaluate the moral status of human actions—to judge them as right or wrong, allowed or forbidden, optional or obligatory.
>
> Paul Bloom and Izzat Jarudi, *Nature*

Hauser sees moral instincts in terms akin to Chomsky's idea of an "ultimate grammar" as a refined instinct behind our language skills. Chomsky is probably wrong, and probably Hauser too, the actual instinct being much less inchoate than any grammar or code. Even so, these ideas take us further forward than did the idea of God.

Given certain circumstances, people respond in different ways when faced with a moral dilemma, falling at different places in the spectrum from selflessness and

empathy to selfishness and gratuitous cruelty. The question is whether this range is unalterable, or whether society can change people's inclinations. Historically, one would imagine people can certainly be influenced by a society's culture, but investigation and confirmation is needed, and then the best ways of making desirable changes have to be decided.

Little research had been done on the moral differences between people until recently. Ernst Fehr of the University of Zurich says women tend to be more altruistic than men, older people tend to be more altruistic than younger ones, and, although people with higher IQs tend to be more altruistic than the rest, students are less altruistic than nonstudents. No standard personality traits such as shyness, agreeableness and openness to new experiences correlate with altruism.

Christian Smith of Notre Dame University has studied what motivates people to give. He finds that many westerners think they are badly off:

> Consumer capitalism makes people feel they don't have enough, so they feel they don't have enough to give away.

Their perceptions are relative to the wealth they see around them, and so they do not feel well off when they see much wealthier celebrities and stars parading glamour and consumption on TV with little to merit their status. Despite that, the spectrum remains, and some people do give generously. Smith says:

> Being taught that it's important to give and, even more, having that behavior modeled for you makes a big difference.

The corollary of that is that we westerners have been taught to be greedy, taught not to be generous. Our society teaches us to be selfish. How people react depends on how they see others reacting. Poor people help each other, but the rich feel there is no need to do it. Their friends are all wealthy, and those who are not should help themselves—just as they did!

Yet financial security is not the whole of it. Empathy and compassion are emotional states, and depend on the general emotional condition of the individual. Emotionally secure people who feel in charge of their lives and do not feel threatened have most empathy and compassion for strangers. Those who are anxious and less secure, or feel worthless and incompetent and have few and insecure relationships are less altruistic and less generous. Psychologists Philip Shaver, the University of California, Davis, and Mario Mikulincer, Bar-Ilan University in Israel, found in a series of experiments that such people are less likely to care for the elderly, or to donate blood. Shaver wondered if it would be possible to induce feelings of security and self worth, thereby strengthening the neural circuitry that underlies compassion and altruism.

> If only people could feel safer and less threatened, they would have more psychological resources to devote to noticing other people's suffering and doing something to alleviate it.

It illustrates the dysfunction in western society. Society is meant to stop people from feeling threatened, supposed to make them feel safe, but they do not feel it is working, so they feel no need to contribute. They see it as a question of fairness, like the female capuchin monkeys.

Shaver and Mikulincer had volunteers watch a young woman perform a series of unpleasant tasks. She had to look at gory photographs of people who had been severely injured, had to pet a rat, had to immerse a hand in ice water, and then was asked to hold a tarantula. Faced with this latter effort, she seemed to try, but apologetically had to give up. As in the Milgram experiements, she was an accomplice, acting the part. The experimenters, feigning perplexity, announced that the experiment had to continue, and would anyone be willing to take the apparent subject's place. This was, of course, the real experiment. Volunteers who previous tests showed were trusting and secure in themselves were four times more likely to swap places as those who were anxious and insecure.

Making someone feel more secure had a beneficial effect on everyone. When people show they are concerned that everyone should be safe and secure, the unsure ones will return the effort. Virtue can be improved when people feel others are willing to help, and they begin to feel more secure and confident in themselves. In short, when society is doing its job!

In the Milgram experiment, a minority of subjects actually refused to obey their orders and would not apply any more shock treatment to people they thought were truly suffering. One attributed his refusal to continue with the torture to being brought up to see society as a class struggle, which taught him that authorities had a different view of right and wrong from his own. Moreover, in those different times, his army training told him that soldiers had a right to refuse illegal orders. Being taught to be critical and independent in everyday life was good mental training for morality. Passive acceptance and dependence on others for every thought bred callousness and lack of consideration.

Ultimately how do you judge what is moral? If morals are supernatural gifts from God, when we are faced with a novel dilemma, we have no way of judging what is the moral way to act. Either God has given us the gift of moral judgement, or He has not—we are good or we are wicked through the grace of God, and our choices depend on that. If, on the other hand, morality is devised by humans living together to provide individual security, then the moral act is the one that causes least harm, or does more good, for other people.

A terrorist throws a bomb into a restaurant full of innocent diners. He is plainly immoral. He is harming innocent people for his own personal reasons. A waiter

falls on to the bomb, smothering the blast with his own body. He dies but saves twenty others. He is a hero.

It is an obvious and extreme case, but the morality of it is that, though the waiter lost his own life, he saved all those others. The most extreme such case is that of Christ, whom Christians say died to save the whole of humanity! So, morality is the welfare of other people in society. The instinct is to preserve oneself. That is what a solitary animal would do. The moral animal tries to save others, tries to be a Christ!

Some Christian critics seem proud they do not get what is a simple argument. Others say they understand the evolutionary argument itself, but that it is inadequate, simply labelling inherited conduct as morality. To refute the evolutionary explanation, one critic poses a series of questions meant to ridicule the whole idea of evolutionary morality, meant to reduce the evolutionary argument to absurdity, to the contradiction that we ought to be unselfish because it is better for us—but that is selfishness:

- "Why ought anyone be unselfish in the future?" When a group of chimpanzees punished one chimp for being selfish by withholding food, the errant chimp learnt the moral norm of the group, that the chimpanzee ought not be selfish.
- "Why ought the chimp (or human) not be selfish?" The answer is that selfishness hurts the group.
- "Why ought we be concerned about the health of the group?" The answer is that the species does not survive, when the group does not survive.
- "Why ought I care about the health of the species and whether the species survives or not?" The critics' answer is that, if the species dies out, then I will not survive.

Not that we actually evolved from chimpanzees, as Christians love to pretend evolutionary theory says. It's just the way you tell 'em! But an animal can be both selfish and unselfish, depending on whether its motivation is ultimate or proximate. An ultimate motivation is what the final outcome will be, whereas a proximate motivation is what motivates it in any particular situation. The Christian might wish to appear caring to the poor and meek, an apparently proximate motivation, yet really be motivated ultimately by their fear of hell fire, and preference for entering God's pearly gates. Animals are driven by the instinct to reproduce at all costs, yet social animals often have a highly developed instinct of empathy towards other animals of their own kind, and sometimes even not of their own kind. There need be no contradiction.

The bigger fault in this criticism is that it is presented as **being reasoned**, as if the animal is making thought-out choices. Evolution works unconsiously by elimination of the bad more than by selecting the best, and it rarely consists of conscious choices. The "chimps" do not figure out that they will be unselfish. The "chimps" that survive are the ones who **are unselfish**. The selfish ones die out,

the unselfish ones, sheltered by the group, reproduce. Eventually "chimp" societies consist of a majority of unselfish "chimps", so that when "chimps" get intelligent enough to be aware of their behavior, they appreciate unselfishness as the norm, and disdain selfishness as being abnormal… we might say "wrong". So, the selfish one gets punished. If it teaches the animal a lesson, then it has learnt to be unselfish. That is what intelligence can do for us. If not, it will be repeatedly punished, and might be expelled from the group, when it will probably die. So that is the end of another selfish animal in the line.

At no point are the "chimps" thinking about whether they will survive or not. The survival is simply the more probably destiny of the unselfish ones. What we can do, as even more intelligent animals is hypothesize reasons for unselfishness. We get to realize that unselfishness can be a benefit to the group in that it survives better, and therefore we each of us are better off in the survival stakes by living together in unselfish groups.

Christians seem unconscious of the fact that the main motive in modern society is selfishness, the motive of capital accumulation, yet it directly opposes the teachings of their incarnated God. Should this remain the case for much longer, western society will end up on its knees. These Christians ought to be looking at their own incoherent beliefs, and deciding what their morality actually is, selfishness or unselfishness.

Morality, then does not arise as something that some clever man or philosopher, like Kant, decided *a priori* was a good thing deserving of being taught to our children whose minds hitherto were empty of all thoughts. John Tooby of the university of California, Santa Barbara, and an editor of *The Adapted Mind* denies that the brain is a blank slate, shaped almost entirely by learning—the Standard Social Science Model (SSSM). He suggests humans have evolved a variety of systems to handle social and environmental challenges faced in the past by our ancestors—natural selection separates the brain into behavioral categories, indeed as Kant realized.

What happened was that reason dawned slowly in people who awoke to find themselves living in a society set in the natural world. In other words, society was to them part of Nature, a given. No one consciously invented society, but people already were living according to certain rules, not laws, not written down, but nevertheless held instinctively as self evidently true and necessary. They were morals! Society had morals already, and they were a puzzle, just like everything else in life to the earliest people to think. They had to explain them, and they explained them as being intrinsic to the tribe.

The so-called "naturalistic fallacy" may be used against the notion of a moral instinct—facts cannot be assumed to indicate values. Some critics therefore say the evolution of moral behavior is inadequate because it merely describes past behavior, whereas morality is prescriptive, it is normative, it looks forward to how we ought to behave, not just at how we do behave. They can only allow that

morality is evidence for the existence of a moral God, the moral standard of the universe, prescribing what we should do. So the evolutionary argument does not work, and the God argument must therefore be so. Of course, the latter does not follow from the former, but Christians cannot understand that either.

The philosopher, R M Hare, seems to have shown that arguments concerning values could not be tested for truth the way arguments about facts could be, and so moral principles were arbitrary. Professor Philippa Foot did not agree. In *Natural Goodness* (2001), she rebutted the distinction between descriptive meaning, dealing with facts—and evaluative meaning, dealing with moral qualities, showing that, for living things, evaluative meaning is a special type of fact. Besides actions, the physical componments of living beings can be considered good—it is natural goodness, good at a necessary function. A tree can legitimately have good roots, just as a human being can do a good deed. The good roots or good actions are necessary in the lives of members of a species:

> It is surely clear that moral virtues must be connected with human good or harm, and that it is quite impossible to call anything you like good or harm.

Moreover some moral needs can be questioned until at some point it is ridiculous to continue, like: “Why do you hate feeling hungry?” or “Why do you want to feel secure?”. Such questions are ridiculous because any human being must already know the answer, and, if someone does not, they cannot be human, or must be damaged in such a way that the answer cannot enlighten them anyway. They are questions that are fundamental to the moral instinct.

The “naturalistic fallacy” is therefore not bound to be fallacious. To thrive, humans have to have good societies, and so they have evolved a necessary morality. Moral goodness is the natural and necessary treatment by humans of each other. They ought to be moral if they wish to maintain good societies, and thus thrive.

Another objection to the evolutionary explanation is that it makes no reference to evolved morals being true. It is typical of Christian question begging because it implies the answer desired—that morals are indeed some sort of God given absolutes, or metaphysical universals. All religious people **know** that the morals of their own religion **are** true. Is “Thou shalt not kill” true?Is it true that the leopard has spots? How can something that is multiply verified not be true? Leopards have spots. Equally, morality exists. The moral instinct is true! That truth is not in question.

The question evolution answers is how did morals come to be? Evolutionary theory can identify what is good and what is bad in some prescribed conditions, such as social living—the human situation. So, the answer remains that human morals are an evolved instinctive behavior to permit animals to live harmoniously together. Badness, evil to godfearers, is what goes counter to our need to promote

social well being, co-operation and mutual assistance. Good is what is meant to promote sociality and co-operation. That is why the leaders of the world's religion taught us to help one another, and not to do each other down. Yet the capitalist ethic is the opposite of this, so it is plain that capitalism is immoral.

Morals are not absolute because nothing like an absolute God exists to ensure they are absolute, and human beings can choose to ignore their instincts, but if they were to break down widely, then society would end, and if that breakdown could not be repaired, humanity would die out. We have good reason to treat them as absolutes for us! If we hope to remain human into the future and continue human civilization that extends back into the past, then we had better consider morality seriously, and particularly what we have been doing to destroy them in the interest of an economic dogma.

Because of evolution, empathy, the instinct for helping and sharing and mutual regard are hard wired into many people's brains, and were selected because human groups with these instincts succeeded better than those without them:

> Research suggests that we are hardwired with a strong and intuitive moral impulse—an urge to help others that is every bit as basic as the selfish urges that get all the press. Infants as young as 18 months will spontaneously comfort those who appear distressed and help those who are having difficulty retrieving or balancing objects. Chimpanzees will do the same, though not so reliably, which has led scientists to speculate about the precise point in our evolutionary history at which we became the "hypercooperative" species that out nices the rest.
>
> Harvard psychologist, Daniel Gilbert

We have not evolved into "ants", perhaps because the hard wiring is far from being that complete, or more probably because complex animals like us do get some benefit from the tension that remains between the selfish and the unselfish ones among us. Careful studies show that groups benefit from some selfish behavior provided that it can be controlled by shame… by the moral authority of the group exerted upon freeloaders to conform with social standards.

Maybe the trouble with human society and its religions is that the freeloaders have taken control of group morality by taking control of the religions meant to promote it. These are what Christians call the shepherds, and the rest are the flock. Shepherds too often have been greedy selfseekers, while the flock are the ones who cooperate and share to get things done under what the shepherds claim is divine guidance. Shepherds want them to retain their innocent motivation, as long as it does not threaten their position. When it does, they start inquisitions and local genocide to keep the trouble makers suppressed or dead.

The inborn absolutes of equality, compassion and personal liberty, were all too often disguised to believers by the scheming shepherds while in full view to anyone able and willing to read Christ for themselves, but, through science, in the

years since the Enlightenment, they are re-emerging in their native purity. Christians had little to say about slavery except approving and encouraging it until the Enlightenment, but since then they have claimed they abolished it. The same is true of the exploitation of women, the blessing of armies, the perversion of justice, in respect of liberty and human sexuality or innocence. Even as it goes on unabated, clerical protest is essentially limited only to direct victims. Morality seems nowhere to matter in it except as a reason to seem contrite while apologizing with deep insincerity.

Besides morals, Christians have trouble accepting that such abstracts as love and beauty can be treated by science, especially drawing on evolutionary theory. Love, like sex, is scientifically measurable. Humans do not just mate with anyone. The brain helps detect and promote appropriate responses to the sexual signals for sex and love.

Attraction between people comes from the evolved urge to reproduce. The human body advertises by certain signals the suitability of the human as a sexual partner. In studies of children, physical attractiveness was related to balanced facial and body symmetry. In studies of adult men, the size ratio of a woman's waist and breasts correlated with a man's preference for a woman. Women who develop pronounced hips and breasts bear the signs that signal easy child bearing, and an ability to feed them:

> …MacCann, with one hand on *The Origin of Species* and the other hand on the *New Testament*, tells you that you admired the great flanks of Venus because you felt that she would bear you burly offspring and admired her great breasts because you felt that she would give good milk to her children and yours.
>
> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

So males, in their desire to reproduce, favour features of the female body promoted by hormones characteristic of sexual maturity. In studies of adult women, a deep voice and broad shoulders were popular factors in finding a man attractive. Men with a deep voice and muscular physiques signal their masculinity, and these signs indicate to a woman they will father healthy offspring.

Besides that, the smell of a potential mate contributes to the decision. Subconsciously, people determine compatible genes by smell, helping to explain otherwise unaccountable physical attraction between people. All of it seems to be driven by chemicals, the pheromones of armpits and crotches, and the hormones that make and signal maturity, as well as the corresponding chemicals that produces responses in the brain and therefore behavior. The potential partner detects the pheromones, their brain recognizes them, and initiates flirting behavior towards the scent target.

These are some contributing factors towards sexual attraction, but what about love? The purpose of a longer lasting attraction is plain enough. Human children

take a lot of looking after while they are growing and filling their large brains with experience. A permanent or semipermanent bond ensures that the father as well as the mother will remain together to help the child mature. People have evolved to become partially addicted to each other while they have sex and therefore children—it is love. It explains the pain felt from unrequited love, or the loss of someone loved to another—cold turkey, withdrawal symptoms!

What of rape? Is rape an evolutionary adaptation—a trait encoded by genes that confers an advantage on those who possess them? Maybe, in the late Pleistocene, 100000 years ago, men with the rape gene could sire children not only with willing mates but also with unwilling ones. So, the rapist had more chance of leaving offspring with the rape gene. That, the theory deduces, is why we still have rapists in our midst in our civilized world. Those without the gene were less successful and eventually died out.

The whole idea leaves out the role of society. Bands of humans were small, and no rapist could escape being known by others in the band. Rapacious men might be notionally fitter in evolutionary terms than ones who mate by consent, but only when they can get away with raping. Even in primitive societies—indeed, possibly in prehuman primate societies—the cuckolded men are not likely to stand by and allow the behavior in society. They will get others in society to join with them to stand up to the rapist to punish him, and the punishment will have been death or expulsion from the tribe—which probably amounts to the same thing.

Anthropologist, Kim Hill, checked it out. For decades, he had studied the Ache, hunter gatherer tribesmen in Paraguay. The Ache live much as humans did 100,000 years ago, so he could use his knowledge of Ache life as a proxy for the humans of a ten myriad years ago. He never heard of rape among the Ache, but he could study the effect of rape on the evolutionary prospects of a late ancestor of modern humans, by studying the prospects of a young Ache man. He carefully calculated the odds of raping being evolutionarily successful in Ache society.

Hill assumed that rapists target only women of reproductive age, benefiting the rape hypothesis because girls younger than 10 and women over 60 are also often raped in our society—rapes that can lead to no evolutionary advantage. Then he calculated rape's fitness costs and benefits from his studies of Ache society. Rape increases a man's evolutionary fitness providing that the rape victim is fertile (15 percent), that she will conceive (7 percent), that she will not miscarry (90 percent), and that she will not let the baby die even though it is the child of rape (90 percent). The rapist lost fitness points when he was socially snubbed as a known rapist—in a small hunter gatherer tribe, rape and rapists indeed cannot hide from public view. Then he might be expelled from society, probably to die. Rape obviously costs fitness points, too, when the husband or some other relative killed the rapist.

Calculating the reproductive costs and benefits of rape, the cost exceeded the

benefits by a factor of 10. Such low odds of benefiting do not suggest any advantage for the rapist in evolutionary terms, but quite the opposite. The rape hypothesis fails in practice when people are socially organized.

Primitive morality is fossilized in the world's ancient holy books where it is not plainly unspeakable. The innocent punters do not know what to believe, but are trained to believe their minister, of whatever denomination they may be. Modern pastors and prelates pretend the bible is all God's word, and therefore necessarily good, even when God is carefully describing how Midianite virgins should be kept alive to be ravaged by the conquering Israelites. There is good in the old books, but it is good mixed with ancient immorality and primitive justice. Absurdly, the fossilized books ignore everything that has happened in the last 2000 or so years. According to the clergy and their devout slaves, we have nothing morally to learn from all these years of human triumph and misery.

For the innocent and unsuspecting convert, Christian faith comes with a great deal of secular political belief, and it is invariably conservative, and morally backward. In the US, ministers tell their congregations who to vote for—normally the Republicans. Christians get to make donations not just for the upkeep of their pastor and his radio or TV station, but also for the pastor's preferred political candidate. That means that believers in Christian "Truth", ancient morality tales that few people now understand properly—and mostly those that do are not Christians—are controlling the secular state, and are telling others, who refuse to believe the nonsense they propagate, they should believe the same lies and mythology.

Christianity and the Abrahamic religions, if not the Asian ones, keep people from taking responsibility for their actions, and that is essential to any personal morality. Christianity is "Truth", complete with emphatic capital and citation marks. So, truth is merely what they believe of the teachings of Christianity, teachings that most scarcely know, and do not understand for what they are when they do. The propagation of this "Truth" goes on generation to generation with no examination and no justification except the authority of the previous generation, and each generation is taught to be certain about it. It is God's Word. So the religious chain letter passes on *in perpetuum*.

Truth as something verifiable is unknown to them, and they are taught to disparage it. They are deliberately kept ignorant by the shepherds. There is no other explanation for it. And why should the shepherds want to do that? To keep them malleable, obedient and dependent.

Religion, an Evolutionary Spandrel

> The affirmation of God… speaks proudly of man's appraisal of his own condition—of his perfection and weakness, of his ideals and failures, of his hopes and fears.
>
> Patrick Masterson, *Atheism and Alienation*

Believers in some religion always say their beliefs come from a higher authority than any other types of belief. It has become a social custom, not only by proponents of a dominant religion, but also by opponents of it to grant religious leaders a privileged position in regard to morality. People still consider religion and ethics to be inseparable, that religion is the basis of ethics. Without religion there is no morality.

The belief that human morality requires religion is not true. It is a result of two millennia of Christian indoctrination, of children being taught it from an early age, taught to think moral rules come from the bible, from the "Ten Commandments" and, less often, the teaching of Christ. Those taught it, usually just accept it thereafter, even as adults. Edgar Dahl, a spokesman for the German Society for Reproductive Medicine and an editor and author, refutes it in an essay, "Imagine No Religion", in *50 Voices of Disbelief: Why We Are Atheists* (2009).

According to the "Divine Command Theory of Ethics", right is what God approves of, wrong is what God disapproves of. As the Greek philosopher Socrates noticed more than two thousand years ago, it is flawed reasoning. Consider a simple question:

> Is charity good because God approved of it, or did God approve of charity because it is good?

- If charity is good just because God approved of it, then, if God chose to approve of cruelty and decry charity, cruelty would be good and charity would be evil. Would we then have to approve of evil because God did?
- If God could never approve of cruelty because He is good, what can saying "God is good" mean? If, by the first argument, "good" means approved by God, then God is simply approving Himself. It is circular reasoning, and so invalid.
- Divine command theory means God's commands are arbitrary—evil could be good, and *vice versa*, if God commanded it. Either that or the doctrine that "God is good" is tautological.
- The tautology is avoided if God approved of charity because **it** is good. But the judge of charity's goodness could not just be God, for the decision is then again arbitrary, and could be otherwise.

- The judgement must have some objective basis, such as relieving human suffering and reducing the amount of misery in the world. When charity does that, God finds it is good, and so approves of it.
- If then God is judged by us as being good, based on what He approves of as good for us as a whole species, the doctrine that God is good must be so.
- Now, though, it is not God's approval or disapproval that makes some actions right and others wrong. Rather, it is their effect on human welfare that makes some actions right and others wrong, and God uses that to approve or disapprove.
- Once you accept a criterion of God's goodness, there is a standard of right and wrong that is independent of God. The religious conception of ethics has therefore necessarily been abandoned. We do not need God to tell right from wrong. Instead we judge what is moral by reference to the welfare of humanity as a whole.

Contrary to what religious leaders claim, ethics and morality are independent of religion and theology. Clergymen and moral theologians have no greater claim on moral truth than anyone able to comprehend that we humans judge human behavior in relation to human society.

> We are moral because our genes, as fashioned by natural selection, fill us full of thoughts about being moral.
>
> M Ruse

Most people make some effort to check the truth of claims for ourselves. Yet when it comes to religion, they do not. They are most persuaded by stories that contradict the known laws of nature. Miracle tales are popular among believers. Yet they want a God with human feelings and emotions. Why do some humans commit to religious impossible beliefs they can never hope to verify?

Richard Dawkins likens religion to be maladaptive, a dangerous disease of human society:

> Religion is a virus more destructive than smallpox, but more difficult to eradicate.
>
> R Dawkins, *The Humanist*, 1997

Religion is a cultural meme, jokes, theories, rumours, religious doctrines, etc. Memes for him are the new replicators (*The Selfish Gene*). Daniel C Dennett accepts folk religion as including primitive practical knowledge, but knowledge that is not corrigible like science (*Breaking The Spell*, 2007).

Yet, the great religions of the world all conceive of god as benevolent towards human beings, yet their history sets humanity at odds with itself, inspires people to hatred of each other, to distrust and to warfare. They teach a universal god, but in practice each religion has its own separate god, and these gods inspire mutual

antagonism because the gods are mutually exclusive. Is God universal? Or is there a family of gods that hate each other? If there is a family of them, why does each of them claim to be universal? Are even the gods deluded? What is the truth, and how did the situation arise historically?

In prescientific times religion had a function as a protoscience, to give pseudo explanations of cosmological and meteorological events, the seasons, psychological cures for some illnesses, and so on. It sufficed when there were no alternative, better explanations, but most of it was fancy, depending on ignorance and the placebo effect.

In modern times, religion has been touted as valuable, despite its fancies and fables, because it make us feel better about life, or at least resigned to its worst vagaries—Marx's "opium of the masses. Tests show religion **can** make people feel better. Actively religious people compared with nonreligious people are often happier, live longer, suffer fewer physical and mental illnesses, and recover faster from medical interventions such as surgery. Of course, it is an error to assume the reason is spiritual, or has anything to do with God. It is possibly more a function of the lifestyle choices devoutly religious people make. They do not smoke and drink, fornicate or generally have live unhealthily. Their lifestyle leads to the benefits, but it is a style that many people today think is hardly worth living—it is so dull!

But does religion give an evolutionary or social advantage? If some behavior has evolved, then it has given some advantage to the animals that have it. Organisms with it are better adapted to survive and more likely to pass their genes on to the next generation. There are two feasible ways that religion might benefit evolving humans. It might provide and enforce some kind of moral code, so keeping social order, or simply bring a sense of communality, of group membership. These two options both relate to our social nature, and so might have something to do with the way we evolved, and not be exclusive. We are not social because we like to congregate in church, we congregate in church because we are social beings. Nor are we moral because it feels nice and healthy to be good, but because living socially requires us to live morally. Social animals need a cohesive, supportive group. Immoral animals are evicted from the pack and die alone, unless they can find another pack that will take them in, and they then behave morally, having learnt their lesson.

Scott Atran says humans were naturally selected for their ability to respond quickly and emotionally to the array of dangers they faced:

> The evolutionary imperative to rapidly detect and react to rapacious agents encourages the emergence of malevolent deities in every culture, just as the countervailing imperative attached to care givers favours the apparition of benevolent deities.
>
> S Atran, *In Gods We Trust*, 2004

Religion is seen by Atran as a beneficial by product of biological development—what Stephen Jay Gould called a spandrel, a contingent feature that acquires a value of its own. Pascal Boyer (*Religion Explained*, 2001), agrees. Evolution gave us mental tools for adaptive value, but they have been hijacked for other functions that may or may not be maladaptive. Religion used them once it had started, especially our social inclinations and changed people's behavior and so it spreads from one mind to another as a meme.

Religious behavior arose from the general culture of the tribe as part of its function of group adaptation. Culture was the group adaptation, and religion was an aspect of it, but one that did not begin with any need for concepts such as gods or a God. The tribe was held together, they speculated, by a power called the totem, and morals were handed down by this power or with it. Eventually, the totem became what we call God. So, God is the tribe, the human group, and nothing more is needed to explain morality.

Animals before they evolved consciousness could hardly have anticipated death or pain, and so could not have evolved behavior that assumes it. Loneliness however is a central feeling associated with social living. Social animals like being together and felt uncomfortable alone. Solitary animals are the opposite. It was the communal gathering of the people of the tribe, and their reservation of certain areas and objects for communal usage that led to religion and the idea of the holy when the gathering began to concentrate on veneration of the tribal totem, which eventually became its god, and led on to religion as we know it today.

An advantage of religion might be as a display system (Richard Sosis). People display their commitment to the society by professing beliefs held in common, but apparently bizarre and showy, like peacock's tail. There is a pride in undertaking the strange and unfamiliar rituals, often involving pain akin to torture, to prove their commitment to the group. Such participation in the group display separates the insider from the outsider.

Some others take the human group itself as the basis of religion. David Sloan Wilson (D Sloan-Wilson *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion and the Nature Of Society*, 2003) argued that religion was a group adaptation. Followers of Dawkins will not admit it, though partly at least it is individual selection for communal behavior which gives the now social individuals the advantage. United groups are stronger than individuals and divided groups, so sociality is an adaptive trait. The argument is about the mechanism of it. Human bonding practices evolved into religion, and religious systems are passed down culturally.

For Robin Dunbar too, the group is what is important. The hominins joined in larger groups for which larger brains were an advantage to cope with more interpersonal relationships which require a theory of mind to be effective. It means having an idea that others are like them, and think in the same way. It also requires an understanding of intentionality, and that extends to different

dimensions. Higher order intentionality lets us arrive at sophisticated language, culture and religion, the latter again helping group cohesion.

The prime argument here is that religion is a side effect of natural mental processes—an evolutionary spandrel. We have moral instincts to support us as social animals—animals for which society is essential, not just an option—and we have an instinct to attribute agency to anything suspicious or unusual that we experience, an instinct that helped us survive by being cautious. These have contrived to give us religion, an explanation of phenomena we experience through our sociality. We explain our culture and traditions as being invented and preserved by invisible guardians who develop into gods, and our moral instinct is explained as the behavior these invisible guardians expect of us towards other members of our group.

Humanity evolved from a common ancestor with the apes, and the apes evolved as a type of monkey that got too big to walk on branches so it swung by its arms beneath them. Some apes were mainly solitary animals, living in family groups and no more, while some became social and lived in groups bigger than a family group. Gorillas are solitary and chimps and bonobos social. Humans developed as a social ape like the chimps and bonobos.

Social animals benefit individually from living in groups and helping each other. They make friends, share food, groom each other, and help each other fight off predators. They are better off than their cousins who do it all alone. But troops of animals have to cohere together. They have to bond. Individuals in the group have to give up a little of their freedom to help others in the group, and enjoy the same favours in return. In particular, they have to agree on a leader whom the others will obey if the group is not to splinter and fail, especially under stress, such as a predator attack. The rest of the group have to follow the leader or be expelled for disobedience. Then they have to live alone or hope to join another band of animals, both difficult prospects.

Accepting and being willing to follow a chief or a king became necessary for the primitive groups of proto humans. The human animal was social before it became human as we know it, conscious and thinking. Sociality became at least partly instinctive. Few people indeed would be happy to live apart from society, however romantic it might sound to be Robinson Crusoe. For a long time they accepted as natural that they had to follow the dominant animal—indeed, a dominant class, because the dominant male surrounded himself with a dominating elite—to benefit from the security offered by the group, and in so doing they were no longer entirely free to do as they wished. They were free to forage, to mate among similarly ranked animals in the hierarchy, and to seek favours from more senior animals, but they were obliged to share food when it was scarce, yield a mate to a dominant animal if it took a fancy to her, and help to defend the troop when it was endangered, particularly, in such a circumstance, responding to the call of the leader, and following his strategy. The leader was the chief and he set the rules.

When did religion first appear? One indication is burial. Some experts believe this also began 200,000 years ago, with the Neanderthals, but the motivation for inhumation need not have been religion, but disgust—to get rid of the smell. Better evidence may be burial with grave goods, Which anthropologist, Robin Dunbar, thinks started about 25,000 years ago, but even this need not be because of belief in an afterlife, which anthropologists usually assume. Dunbar thinks grave goods imply a sophisticated theology, which required time to evolve itself.

It could be simply sentiment—people were buried with objects that meant a lot to them just because it was theirs and their friends felt such treasured possessions should not be recycled to others. And it is just as possible that the habit of burying people with treasured possessions led to mothers telling ætiological stories to explain it, and the favoured one became the story that we lived on after death, and needed our goods for this afterlife.

The first human beings emerged in Africa around 500,000 years ago. Modern people like us arose about 200,000 years ago, complete with a frontal cortex to their brains just like ours. These lobes of the brain are where we get our intelligence, our ability to think and speak about abstract ideas, and our creativity. Then change and motion in Nature were explained by intent—everything had a spirit, and the spirit had an intent, a natural purpose. But just as people in social groups had leaders, the spirits had leaders too, and these became gods too—nature gods. Humans had settled down to agricultural lives, and the seasonal cycle had become important for knowing when was the right time of year to sow the life giving seed saved from the previous year. Each year vegetation was born from the seed, grew, ripened for harvest, then died. Between death and new life was a harsh period not easily conducive to life, the hot summer or the freezing winter, according to where you were. The host of vegetation spirits had a leader, the vegetation god, and the life of the god explained the vegetative cycle.

The vegetation god's life cycle was also paralleled by the path of the sun through the heavens, and the relation of the two cannot have been long missed once humans began to speculate on these things. The endless repetition of essentially similar natural events in a cycle impressed on poor mortal mankind that the gods of Nature had ordered the world, and the nature of society was also ordered, a notion that is still standard religious fare. But note that in the early stages of speculation about the world, essentially all of it seems to have been considered sacred. Everything had its spirit, and the whole of the year was prescribed by the work of gods and spirits. The very countryside was a vision of the divine, and particularly awe inspiring and beautiful spots had their own shrine or simple altar, perhaps merely a stone, for the visitor to pour on a little oil, or wine, or break a crust of bread, or sprinkle a little salt, as a token of gratitude to the local spirit or God.

As consciousness developed and humans settled into an agricultural existence, they had to commandeer territory, live in permanent villages then towns, and the chief's rules became the law, and he became the king. Now the king was having

trouble in keeping the social group in order. It was getting bigger and more diffuse. He required more allies and better ones, and among them was the shaman, a man who knew more than most and pretended he knew more than that. The people, already in awe of the king, had it explained by the shaman or priests, as being special powers derived from tribal ancestors, spirits who watched over them all. These were the first ancestor myths, and any memorable king became a powerful ancestor to later generations and eventually one became a tribal father, the mythical founder of the tribe.

Subsequent kings referred back to this father for their authority, and the custom of the tribe was to acknowledge it by ritual, so that eventually the father became the tribal god. Naturally, the God had all the powers of the king and more, and guided the tribe through his favoured sons, the king, and his priesthood. The rituals were explained in their myths as coming from the tribal father and god, and these together with the tribes own preferred customs, rites of passage, styles of clothing, cooking, working, building, merrymaking and decorating became the tribal culture. All of it was the gift of the tribal god.

Let tribes coalesce into cities, nations and empires, and each time a culture would emerge, either that of a dominant tribe, perhaps a conqueror, or that of the most civilized tribe, even though conquered, because the conquerors could see the advantages of it, or naturally various hybridizations as the cultures mixed. The prevalent culture of this imperium was tending towards a universal one, and its supernatural leader towards a universal god.

Now all of this is highly simplified being based on what went in and what came out socially—that we began with leaders of tribes of apes and ended up with emperors, and that at some stage the group set up a supernatural leader called their god, but some such scheme must have happened. The concept of supernatural power encompassed more than the power of a leader in a social group. The concept of supernatural powers explained, however inadequately, many inexplicable things in early societies, things we now know are perfectly natural. Evolutionary psychology has been quite rapidly explaining much that was formerly mysterious about the physical basis of religion.

Modern religions have also evolved more recently, over several millennia, into the imperialist religions we now have, state religions acting as part of the imperialist state apparatus to keep us civil, that is, voluntarily orderly and law abiding. Only in the broadest sense can we confirm essential morality from the morals of the world religions. The earliest religions found in traditional small scale tribal societies were not religions as such at all. Religion did not exist until it budded from the culture of the early tribes where it was a social glue.

The idea that religion acts as a kind of glue that holds society together was conceived by sociologist, Emil Durkheim. Even early tribal culture, still in hunter gatherer times, required the tribe to gather as a whole periodically in a festival or some sort of celebration, apparently set up by a “Big Man”, someone in the tribe

with the charisma to get people together to do things. Such endeavors promoted co-operation and mutual bonding, becoming a feature of tribal cultural activity. The rituals which went along with these celebrations, including rites of passage, slowly evolved into religion.

Modern studies show rituals release endorphins, natural opioids in the brain. Endorphins cause a mild euphoria, and so have become part of the body's pain control system, becoming effective when pain is modest but persistent. Endorphins also stimulate the immune system. Plainly wild or persistent dancing, being strenuous, will cause the release of endorphins—some modern young people get addicted to working out, for that reason—but why should rituals that are not at all strenuous? One cannot imaging singing hymns is strenuous, or counting rosary beads, or listening to a sermon. And so why would endorphins be associated with ritual when it is not physically taxing or painful?

Evolution could explain it, if it had involved pain and had gone on for a long enough time, but that seems unlikely in human beings, for whom, as far as we can tell, religion is a recent innovation. The fact of the matter, as we find it, is that rituals stimulate the release of endorphins, and that explains why early humans came together to perform rituals. The euphoria was a reward for taking the trouble to bond together as a group, and was understood as a feeling of fellowship. The same feeling is obtained by modern religious ritual, though it is far from stressful.

We inherit our sociality from our primate predecessors. Monkeys and apes are social and co-operative. Social animals have to forgo some of their personal demands to keep the group together. An animal in a group that is too greedy, selfish and demanding of the others, we saw is soon resented by the others and is driven out of the social group, to suffer and die alone. The ones who remain have less antisocial genes and the strength of sociality is increased. In monkeys and apes, unselfishness is demonstrated by social grooming, an activity that also releases endorphins. It begins to look as if endorphins evolved not only pain relievers, but also as sociability promotors. Again, it is the reward for being sociable. Apes that willingly groom others feel good about it.

Language is an efficient way of "grooming", allowing several people to be "groomed" at once. Robin Dunbar proposed that in human groups grooming was replaced by chattering and laughing with each other, rather like monkeys. When humans began to talk meaningfully, beginning in the groups of females and children gathering roots and berries as an adaptation of alarm calls, warnings and commands to each other, but especially to warn and instruct children in the group, this evolved into gossiping. Naturally, the children sharing the space with the women were brought up with the gossiping habit which consequently spread quickly, to the men too. Gossiping is a group activity not merely a one to one activity, so it is a better social glue than grooming, and leads on to storytelling, further strengthening bonding. So, language evolved because gossiping was a better way of social bonding than grooming, and tribal celebrations, which became religion, allowed larger groups to bond.

The social rituals which were such an important part of early tribal society were justified to the children during the gathering and gossiping sessions by stories. When children asked, "why this?", and, "why that?", the mothers would invent spurious reasons, probably as a joke rather than with any serious intent. It made the mothers chuckle, but became an artform, and led to mythology. Each tribe invented reasons for its celebrations and rituals. Thus mythology became part of the celebrations and then that evolved into theology. To invent a mythology, then a theology, our ancestors had to develop cognitive abilities beyond those of their ancestors.

Most, if not all, human groups have had a religion. So, the pertinent question is "what purpose does it serve?". What has persuaded people to believe that all the weird behavior associated with religions has some benefit? The first step to an answer is the fact that natural selection gave us a mind adapted to certain particular concepts and variations similar to them. These concepts and their variations are what makes religion attractive to us. Many attempts at analyzing religion fail because they concentrate on some aspect of it familiar to the analyst. Yet, the word religion is meaningless to the many people in the world who have only ever met one religion, their local or tribal religion. To them, religion is an aspect of their local or tribal culture not noticed as being peculiarly separated from it. Religion is mainly distinguished from culture when people are exposed to different ones, with different practices, when tribes coalesced into cities and nations, and commerce began on a wide scale.

We humans are social animals. It does not mean that we are essentially solitary animals who have **decided** to live together. It means we have evolved to be social. We have developed basic emotions and habits of mind adapted to social living. We are not solitary animals because we cannot do without our neighbors, without some neighbors—a group of people around us. No human left fending for itself until adulthood can emerge as normal. Our humanity is a function of being social, of having other people around us as we grow up, with whom we interact, who help and teach us. Consequently, human beings have a "social mind", and it is this social mind that makes religion possible.

If there is any one factor responsible for religion, this is it, but the social mind is itself complex, with many different aspects, with different purposes and origins. We have inference systems, we have emotions and we have a multitude of additional mental features and adaptations inclining us towards ways of living harmoniously with others in our group, but with a suspicion and distrust of strangers. These complicated mental interactions, adaptations to social living, happen to make us susceptible to religion too. Religion is a by product of social life, a by product of the evolutionary direction we have taken—to live communally and co-operatively.

We in the modern world regard the supernatural as mysterious, which is to say that it is out of the ordinary and peculiar to such an extent that no one has ever had the chance to study it adequately enough to understand it. People in less

sophisticated societies than ours, however, often regard the supernatural as commonplace—far from being out of the ordinary, it is perfectly normal. Their world is infested with ghosts, witches, curses and malevolence, all of it everyday stuff, albeit not well understood. The peculiarity of the supernatural to us is rather a measure of how far we have moved from needing it in our daily lives.

Yet, in churches, people can be as primitive as they wish, even in our society. No one sane talks to statues, but uttering a prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary or a saint to intercede with God on their behalf is commonplace among Catholics. They are talking to a statue or other image of the Virgin or saint as if it could hear them, but they claim they are not talking to the image but merely using it as a focus of their prayers. Well the ancient Greeks and Romans standing before the statue of Zeus or Jove might have made the same claim!

If a vandal had hacked the statue of the Virgin or saint into pieces, the reaction of the Christian would be outrage. Why should the spoiling of a mere artifact used as a focus of attention cause such outrage? Plainly the statue is more than just a focus of attention to the pious Catholic. They feel outraged because the statue or image is actually the Virgin or saint in some sense—it is sacred! It is not just a painted sheet of wood or a carved block of stone, for they must know that an artist or a monumental mason could replace the image using the common materials, the wood and stone, needed for it. Then they would have a new, perhaps better, focus for their prayers, that they could address as if it could hear them. The point is that the believers praying to the image suspend their knowledge of reality for the sake of their beliefs—their religion—and others find it acceptable that they should do so, often even though they would not do it themselves.

People have mental categories that let them infer the properties of certain things once they have been classified in an appropriate category. Most things thus categorized are everyday things we meet in our experience of living, but, once some strange violation of the properties of an object normally categorized appropriately are understood to have occurred, it is regarded as supernatural. Thus a flying horse is considered as supernatural, and similarly a talking donkey. But excessive violation of norms does not make something even more supernatural, but rather it makes them comical. A flying talking donkey would not seem supernatural to most people, but merely a cartoon character, even to most believers. The categories apply to all the subjects of experience before they can become supernatural in some way. They are thought of as the “essence” of things. Cattle have hooves, horns and eat grass. The category for cattle is like Plato’s ideal or form of a cow or bull—a template for all the real cows and bulls that exist.

Knowing the category of an object allows us to infer its general characteristics, for it tells us the appropriate template or ideal. Categories can therefore be arranged into taxonomies, super and sub categories, and the supernatural menagerie consists usually of the categories with a defective or abnormal property. Among the categories is one for people like ourselves that can recognize

others as having a mind like our own. But violate the category by imagining a mind free of a body and we have something supernatural—a spirit or a god—a disembodied mind or personality. Natural categories apply to objects we meet in normal life, and that our predecessors met with during our evolution, but once we add an abnormal characteristic, the category is no longer normal or natural. We have invented it. We invent the supernatural. But how do we do it and why?

Even infants can recognize intention in the movement of things. When they are shown an animated cartoon of a hill with, say, a blue circle attempting to ascend it, assisted sometimes by a red triangle, but hindered by a yellow square, then are offered a red triangle and a yellow square to hold, they favor the "helpful" red triangle and sometimes even smack the "naughty" yellow square. Not only do infants see intentionality in the shapes shown on the cartoon, they even judge them morally.

From tests like this, psychologists are sure that humans, even at this young age, are aware of intent and morality. They may attribute intent to their toys and judge them accordingly. Evidently, it is natural for a human mind to do these things. As they could hardly have learnt these things at such a tender age, they must be instincts. We have them because they have given us a reproductive advantage in our evolution.

We have evolved in a dangerous and uncertain world where we are prey for certain large raptors. By being able to anticipate intent, we have improved our chances of survival, and the sooner we do it, and can bawl to alert our mother and others in the group, the more likely are our chances of living to be able to produce offspring. Whatever it was in our genetic make up that gave us the ability, is passed on to our own kids, but not to the kids of those without this factor, and so our lineage has the reproductive advantage. Eventually, those without it have all died out, and all humans have it. It has become a human instinct.

A leopard is intent on killing us to eat us, but so too is a rotting log when it is actually a crocodile, and maybe even when it is a rotting log, for we might innocently use it to step on, and be propelled into the water when it yields to our weight. Thus we do not only conceive of animate objects as having malicious intent. Yet by attributing intent to inanimate objects, we are violating a natural category and putting them into a supernatural one.

Intuitions about categories are not necessarily conscious, because young children have such intuitions. They are fully aware that a real cat can move of its own accord, but not a toy cat. Asked to explain why, the children will even offer a rationalization. They might say the real cat can move because it has legs. When the legs on the toy cat are pointed out to them, they might agree, but themselves point out that these are not good legs. They already have real cats properly categorized as different from toy cats, but they do not know why. People are the same in their approach to the supernatural. They have intuitions about the intentionality of spirits, categorizing them as disembodied minds but cannot

explain how such entities can see without eyes, or think without a brain.

Religion depends on different cognitive dimensions of the human brain apparently alien to what many of us think of as religious. Besides being social animals, we are also generalists—we are situational generalists because we can survive in different environments, and we are dietary generalists because we are omnivorous. Being a generalist has some evolutionary advantages, but some dangers too. We are often faced with passing through places with food we are not familiar with, and they might not be wholesome. Our reaction, one that has evolved—people that did not have it did not survive—was a sense of disgust for things that seemed unwholesome.

We can safely scavenge animal carcases that are not long dead, but beyond a short while, depending on conditions, dead meat begins to putrefy. It then becomes disgusting to us. We will not eat it. Things that stink are most often unwholesome, and we have evolved to avoid them. Places that stink are the same, and we find that food and places might look unpleasant to us. Our sense of disgust is a warning to us of decay, pollution, contamination, excreta—the presence, in fact, of invisible poisons—dangerous bacteria. Disgust is a warning system against potential contagion, which:

- operates though the danger itself is not visible
- tells us that the danger is immediate—we need to respond quickly
- warns us that we need to clean ourselves, for the danger is contagious and we might spread it.

This “contagion system” that we have makes us hyper cautious. People may be neurotically obsessed with cleanliness, using disinfectant and multiple washings when they suspect something disgusting has polluted a utensil, or a food preparation area, but when our contagion system was evolving, we had no remedies like disinfectants and pure water for cleaning. Repeated and thorough purification was the only alternative to discarding the object all together.

We are a co-operative species. Our ancient need to range widely together while hunting and gathering has also made us particularly inclined to exchange information. Gatherers gossip together about where roots and berries can best be found, and hunters chatter about where the game will be and when. We therefore need to be able to find landmarks and to navigate our foraging and hunting space, note seasonal changes in the habits of game, exchange knowledge about potential hazards, and so on. We are bonded together by gossiping, not by grooming as in apes, because gossiping allows us to interact with a group of people simultaneously. Living together allows us to co-operate to our mutual advantage, and to do that we need to exchange information. Humans are like squirrels but we hoard information.

> I suspect you know I realise you find it is hard to understand my explanation of how you can know what I think God wants you to know.
>
> Eighth order intentionality?

Another peculiarity of living socially and co-operatively is that we need to understand what other people's intentions are, and that means gathering even more information. We have to remember other people's faces and characteristics—their personal data—and be able to comprehend multiple levels of intentionality *via* a theory of mind or intuitive psychology—realizing that others have intent, noticing what interests them, realizing their aims, and figuring out their motivation. Gossiping relays one to another what we need—information—information that is socially useful about status, skills, sexual interests and honesty. To retain all this data, we need a mental filing system. Our social intentions are far more complicated than those of most other species, whence our "social minds" and "social intelligence".

In 1988, British psychologists, Dick Byrne and Andrew Whiten, proposed the Machiavellian Intelligence Hypothesis. Monkeys and apes can use sophisticated social knowledge about each other to decide how they they are likely to behave in the future. The animals will then prefer relationships based upon their decisions. It amounts to them having a "theory of mind", which is what it is now called. Theory of mind (ToM) means understanding that other people have a mind of their own, just like our own, understanding what another person is thinking, and realizing their beliefs might not be the same as our own. Using it, we assume everyone behaves like us with conscious purpose, and we try to work out their intentions. Primitive people even extend their Theory of Mind to animals and even rocks, trees, mountains and so on.

It allows people to handle orders of intentionality, or beliefs about what another believes. To think "I want something", then extend it to "I think you want something", is an extension of thought from intentionality to second order intentionality. Such statements contain two notions of intent, what I think and what you think. Thinking has to reach at least second order intentionality for people to think God thinks something.

Robin Dunbar thinks theory of mind has to reach a sophisticated level before religion, such as we understand it, can arise. The reason is that modern western religion is concerned with doing God's will, and so the worshiping animal has to understand that God has a will of his own. God, in short, is thought of as a personality.

A simple personal religion is third order intentionality. I think what God thinks I ought to think. But religion was always a social matter, not simply a personal one, and so to be social, fourth order intentionality is necessary. We want you to think that God thinks we ought to think such and such. That is the basis for communal religion, Dunbar says. Dunbar takes it further still—religious morality requires us to agree upon what God wants us to think and do. That is fifth order

intentionality! At the fourth order of intentionality, we still do not agree on what we think about what God thinks. Dunbar says the introduction of this mutual agreement extends intentionality to the fifth order—I think you think that we both think that god thinks we ought to think so and so. For Dunbar this gets us to where we are, and religion based on such understanding is proper social religion or communal religion.

Fifth order intentionality is the limit of most people's capacity. Even so it is what Dunbar calls neurally expensive, because most human thought only requires us to understand to the third level of intentionality. Religion therefore has given us the huge advantage of stretching our level of intentionality to the fifth level, and so it is a big boon to humanity, and why religion evolved.

To see the evolution of religion, Dunbar looks at other animals which he thinks "are locked into first order intentionality". Great apes can however manage second order intentionality. But mammals as lowly as rats have empathy, so they must know how a distressed rat is feeling. Sounds like second order intentionality. The rat observing the distress of the other rat must sense what the distressed rat wants!

Now Dunbar looks at the fossilized skulls of animals to get a relationship between the volume of their frontal lobes where he says intentionality operates in the brain. The level of intentionality they can achieve scales linearly with the volume of grey matter. There were two main periods of primate brain expansion. Brains grew about 50%, from roughly 450ml about two million years ago to 1000ml by 1.8 million years ago. It was a rapid expansion, yet no noticeable change in in human behavior can be seen in the archaeological remains—mainly stone flakes knapped from flint and used for butchering animals or chopping plants.

Why then were brains getting larger? Brain tissue is expensive in terms of energy, so any chance increase in brain size seems most unlikely. Possibly it was because people were living in larger, more complex groups, having to keep track of more people, and maintain more social relationships. And interpolating from Dunbar's graph, *Homo erectus*, as early as two million years ago, would have achieved third order intentionality, giving them personal beliefs.

The second period of expansion was slower, from roughly 600,000 to 200,000 years ago. By the end of it, our brains were the size we now have. Curiously, the Neanderthals in Europe, already separated from the lineage we came from which was still in Africa, also saw an increase in brain size, but they went extinct 30,000 years ago. Steven Mithen thinks the growth was caused by the evolution of language, but it seems odd that language should have evolved simultaneously in two species several thousand miles apart.

If language is the answer, then both groups of ape men must already have had some sort of proto language—they had both, in other words, already started to develop language long before it noticeably accelerated brain expansion, but both

species were evolving in parallel. In both, language was supporting the growth of sociality. From his graph, Dunbar find archaic humans about 500,000 years ago achieved fourth order intentionality, giving them a social religion.

Archaeologists until 1996 favoured a recent date of 50,000 years ago for the advent of language as a human skill. Anatomists saw an asymmetry between the two halves of cranial casts of *Homo sapiens* from their emergence 250,000 years ago, and so favoured the much earlier date. The language centers of the brain are in the left hemisphere, and they surmise the reason for its larger size was their use of language.

According to Nicholas Humphrey, another factor in brain expansion was to let us live longer. The fossil record suggests it began to happen about 100,000 years ago. It allowed grandparents to provide important cover for the family, while children were learning the intricacies of the growing degree of socialization and language ability needed for successful human groups. Contemporary hunter gatherer societies show that families with involved grandparents have less infant mortality. The old people in that community, the wise old men and old women, not only look after older children while parents are hunting and gathering with the younger ones, but also teach them the practical and social skills of their culture. Dunbar found anatomically modern humans about 200,000 years ago achieved fifth order intentionality, early enough for all living humans to have this trait, but late enough to suggest that other hominins never had it.

The size of the primate brain's neocortex relates with the size of their social groups. Both are simple numbers, the size of the neocortex being a proxy for mental complexity, and the size of the group for social complexity—the larger the group, the more relationships there are. Dunbar considered the neocortex rather than the total brain capacity because it is the part of the brain where consciousness is seated. It is the grey matter associated with intelligence, and surrounds the white matter deeper in the cerebrum. In small mammals, like rodents, it is smooth, but, in primates and other larger mammals, it has deep grooves (*sulci*) and wrinkles (*gyri*) which increase its surface area without changing its volume.

Brain casts also allowed cranial capacity to be measured, and so their typical group sizes to be estimated. The earliest hominins corresponded to the brain sizes of modern apes, but thereafter increased. Large brains were indeed linked to the need to hold large groups together. The same applied in nonprimate mammals. Even 500,000 years ago, group sizes reached 115 with grooming times of over 30% of the day—if grooming had been kept as the social bonding activity. By 250,000 years ago group sizes would have reached 130, with grooming time getting close to 35%.

150 was reached 100,000 years ago, and grooming would have been impractical as a social glue. Language had probably already taken over, as the anatomists suspected. The size of the human neocortex corresponds with a group size of

150—now called Dunbar's Number, and it seems to have been reflected in society up until modern times. Everyone gossips, though gossip, in our society, is frowned upon as tittle tattle and trivia, not worthy of anyone sensible. One reason, in a male dominated world, is that women are more accomplished gossips and often have better verbal skills than men. Yet men have dominated our societies for three or four thousand years, and claim they do not gossip but speak only of serious things. Yet when they converse in their pubs and clubs, they are very often gossiping too.

Women are probably better verbally because groups of women gathering roots and berries, accompanied by children, were the first to practise gossiping, and so have better developed verbal skills than men. The children, male and female, heard them and picked up the habit in the company of their female guardians, but once adult, the males had less opportunity to use speaking, often requiring to be silent to stalk game. Thus, talking passed to men secondarily, as a childish habit less often used in adulthood, but it then extended male bonding too by being found useful in planning the hunt and how to work together on other mutually useful projects, like house building and toolmaking—in co-operating.

Religious communities like Hutterites and the Mormons lived in groups of 150. Businesses can function informally with less than 150 employees, but bigger ones need managers. A company of soldiers is about 150, and so on. In hunter gatherer societies, the largest group is a tribe of 1500-2000 people, the maximum number of faces people can put a name to, but tribes are grouped into clans of about 150 kinfolk. Neolithic villages had a population close to 150. People tend to have about 11-12 close friends and relatives, corresponding to a grooming clique in primate societies, suggesting an evolved neurological basis for these numbers. So, around the time our ancestors evolved fifth order intentionality, their groups exceeded about 120 in size. Dunbar concludes that religion evolved to bond increasingly large human groups.

Dunbar's theory of religion based on levels of intentionality require God to be treated as a person. He is a personality with His own will that religious humans have to try to suss. Scientific studies have been done to test how people think of God.

Uffe Schjødt of the University of Aarhus, Denmark, *et al*, used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to scan the brains of 20 devout Christians. They were given two tasks:

1. to silently recite the Lord's Prayer, then a nursery rhyme. The same brain areas, associated with rehearsal and repetition, were activated.
2. to improvise personal prayers, then make requests to Santa Claus. Improvised prayers triggered patterns that match those seen when people communicate with each other, and activated circuitry that is linked with the theory of mind—the awareness that other individuals have their own independent motivations and intentions.

Two of the activated regions are thought to process desire and consider how another individual—in this case God—might react. Also activated were part of the prefrontal cortex—important to theory of mind, linked to the consideration of another person's intentions, and an area thought to help access memories of previous encounters with that person. Previous studies have found that the prefrontal cortex is not activated when people interact with inanimate objects, such as a computer game. The brain does not activate these areas because they do not expect reciprocity, nor find it necessary to think about the computer's intentions.

This area was not active during the Santa Claus task, suggesting volunteers viewed Santa as fictitious, but God as a real person. However, It was like talking to another human. There was no sign of anything mystical. The results show people believe they are talking to someone when they pray, an outcome that pleased both atheists and Christians. Atheists said it showed it was all an illusion, while Christians said it was evidence that God is real.

From the theory of intentionality outlined above, Robin Dunbar agrees that religious people treat gods as "having essentially human mental traits, like characters in a novel or play". The ToM suggests believers think they know God's brain. Nicholas Epley, *et al*, shows us they are right. People often reason egocentrically about others' beliefs, using their own beliefs as an inductive guide. Correlational, experimental, and neuroimaging evidence suggests that people may be even more egocentric when reasoning about a religious agent's beliefs like God.

Nicholas Epley and others studied people's beliefs about God's beliefs. They asked subjects questions about controversial moral issues, such as the death penalty and abortion, and also asked them about what they considered famous people, like Bill Gates, average Americans, and God thought on those issues. In all the experiments the volunteers professed belief in a patriarchal God, mostly the Christian God.

Subjects' own beliefs on important social and ethical issues corresponded most strongly with those they attributed to God. In both nationally representative and more local samples, people's own beliefs consistently correlated more strongly with estimates of God's beliefs than with estimates of other people's beliefs. Believers' estimates of God's beliefs were more egocentric than their estimates of other people's beliefs. **Subjects' attributed their own beliefs to God.**

It may indicate that people attribute to God their own moral beliefs, but it may also reflect that people get their moral belief from their religion. So Epley added a control. He used an already established technique to alter the beliefs of the subjects.

We are more malleable than we would like to think. Our beliefs can be manipulated simply by asking leading questions. Epley asked his subjects to write

an essay espousing the opposite opinion to that they expressed on initial questioning, or to prepare a speech on say the death penalty in which they had to take the opposite view to their own. Questioned again, subjects had shifted the beliefs they attributed to God, but not as consistently those attributed to average Joes and famous people. What one thinks God believes can be shifted by the same methods used to shift our own beliefs. The manipulative method, in short, not only changed their own opinions slightly, it changed what they thought was God's will in just the same way.

Lastly, a neuroimaging study showed the same parts of the brain were neurally active when reasoning about one's own beliefs and when reasoning about God's beliefs. When the subjects were thinking about what other people might believe, different regions of the brain were neurally active. In particular, reasoning about God's beliefs activated areas associated with self referential thinking, more than did reasoning about another person's beliefs.

Trying to imagine the thoughts of other people causes mental activity in different areas of the brain from those active when imagining God's thoughts. God is thought of as a person, but is not thought of like any other person. "Hurrah", the believer cheers, but the areas of the brain active when imaging God's thoughts are simply those active when one is thinking oneself! Believers are not thinking of God as a personality different from themselves. God **is** themselves, totally and utterly! It gives a whole new meaning to the notion of God being a personal God.

God and the believer are the same person. Believers map their own beliefs on to God's, projecting onto God their own moral beliefs. God is an imaginary self. So God did not make man in his own image, but humans make God in **their own** image. The faithful think of God as a person, but He is not a person separate from themselves. They subconsciously endow God with their own beliefs even on controversial issues. It explains a lot about religion.

The discovery automatically makes every believer as good in God's eyes as they judge themselves to be. Believers regard God's beliefs as a moral compass, but the compass is just one's own existing beliefs. A compass reliably points north no matter what direction a person is facing, but, unlike an actual compass, their inference about God's will, God's compass, point people in whatever direction they are already facing!

It also means that the innate morals they were born with are automatically projected on to God, and so seem to them to emanate from Him! Tribal people see God as a personification of the tribe, and just as each individual is a fraction of the tribe, each will see themselves in the tribe's personification of it, God. Jordan Grafman explained that these findings helped explain why supernatural religious agents were often attributed a physical form and issued edicts that resemble the social practices of the culture from which they emerge.

Epley's work certainly shows that gods have human mental traits because Epley

shows us that God is a reflexion of ourselves. We are divinely narcissistic. We have fallen in love with our own image, like budgerigars, and now worship it. No wonder religion is so compelling.

Incidentally, Uffe Schjødt, *et al*, in a related study also used fMRI to investigate how assumptions about speakers' abilities changed brain responses in secular and Christian participants who received intercessory prayer. They found an audience's assumptions about a speaker's charismatic abilities have important effects on their critical faculties. They are more gullible!

Schjødt and his coworkers examined the brains of 20 Pentecostalists and 20 non-believers while playing them recorded prayers. Both groups were told that six of the prayers were read by a non-Christian, six by an ordinary Christian, and six by a healer. In fact, all were read by ordinary Christians. The aim was to identify brain processes behind the influence charismatic people have on their followers. Pentecostal Christians think some people have divinely inspired powers of healing, wisdom and prophecy.

The result was that only in the Christians did brain activity change in response to the prayers. Their medial and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex—parts of their prefrontal and anterior cingulate cortices—deactivated in response to speakers supposed to have healing abilities. The deactivation still occurred when the speaker was considered an ordinary Christian, but to a lesser degree. These parts of the brain are involved in vigilance and skepticism when judging the truth and importance of what people say! So, the study shows that, in some people, areas of the brain responsible for scepticism and vigilance become less active when they think a speaker was charismatic—had an extraordinary message or divine powers—in this study, the Pentacostalists. An independent analysis revealed that this deactivation predicted the Christian participants' impressions of the speakers' charisma and feeling of God's presence during prayer.

More generally, it suggests an important mechanism of personal influence. The results may extend beyond religious leaders, so that brain regions may be deactivated in a similar way to speeches and statements by authoritative people generally, like doctors, parents and politicians, a mechanism of authority in interpersonal interactions, explaining why some people can influence others, but suggesting that their ability to do so depends on preconceived notions of the authority's abilities and trustworthiness. A conviction that God is behind the charismatic figure gives the guru figure immense authority and therefore power over their followers. That is why it can be so dangerous, and why believers are particularly affected by this phenomenon.

In the normal human being, the structures in the brain needed for all the social functions our societies demand now already exist through evolutionary adaptation to developing human sociality, so people naturally enjoy human groups and co-operating with others. Unless they have some mental deficiency, like autism, they no longer have to work out how to interact with others. It is instinctive. Nor

are we limited to merely responding to events. We can imagine what will or might happen, and what we are aiming to achieve, and plan ahead. Our thoughts are effectively decoupled from direct external input. In short, our mental processes, our imagination, can be our motivation.

Human behavior is conditioned by this plethora of mental systems, and they have changed their focus over the millennia. The human sense of disgust has changed from being only disgust at food, and perhaps certain places, to disgust at others in society. Disgust at the corruption of a corpse motivated people to dispose of them, albeit with suitable ritual in recognition that this obnoxious piece of rotting meat was once a group member, a relative, perhaps, or a friend. Specialists emerged ready to take on the task of handling dead bodies to dispose of them, people undertaking to do an essential job for the health of society. But our disgust and contagion systems meant those benefiting attached their disgust of physical corruption to those handling the corpse, finding them to be as polluting and untouchable as the corpse itself. Then their families were too!

The fear, in fact, was of the invisible agents that spread poison as bad emanations from decaying bodies, the danger we now know to be that of the transfer of bacteria, but then thought of as an evil agent or fluxion. Unclean people could carry these emanations which became personified as malevolent agents or spirits. From these changes arose the whole religious doctrine of pollution and cleanliness. It shows that religion often and perhaps generally depends upon evolved human behavior that does not seem relevant to religion in the least, in this case upon our mental systems for infering what may be bad for us reproductively—it might kill us before we reproduce—and so has become instinctively avoided.

We have different types of such systems controlling our emotional reactions, social reactions and behavior towards others—morals! It is this natural architecture of the mind that religions have commandeered for their own, often unnatural and often antisocial uses. In many of the major religions, their adepts think religion is principally about beliefs because now their religions mainly are. It hinders the appreciation of the proper psychology of religion. Religion is properly an aspect of culture—the particular habits and practices that mark off one people from another. Religion is to be **done**, not merely contemplated, and **done** socially, not in isolation. Even in a vast religion like Catholicism, much of it marks off important events in the life of the Church—the church calendar—or the members of its congregation—weddings, christenings, funerals, etc.

In tribal societies, it is the same, the ceremonies and rituals being considered to have been prescribed by some ancestor of the tribe, or a spirit or god in less localized religions, and these supernatural agents supervize the proper performance of the rite. To all intents and purposes, the supernatural agent is another, albeit senior, member of the tribe or congregation, which interacts with members by giving and receiving—giving reassurances and strength while receiving sacrifices, prayers and gratitude. These agents were thought to have a

personality and a commitment to the worshippers, whether as ancestors or gods.

worshippers know, in their turn, that by performing the ritual precisely according to the proper prescription, the agents will be impressed in some way, and will favor the tribe, but tribal members are often unconcerned about the nature of the agents or how they have acquired their superpowers. It is enough to know that they do have the power to influence material lives, and this is as true of many believers in advanced religions today as it was of the original tribal ones.

Whatever the nature of ancestors spirits and gods, they are usually construed as people with essentially human personalities and similar intentions—agency. We saw that an evolved trait of humans, a trait which exists for its survival value, is to see agents behind many events that we experience in life. The rotten log by the river proves, fortunately, not to be a crocodile, but still throws the human who steps on to it into the river. Imagining that such logs lurk with some malevolent intent makes people hyper cautious, thereby saving lives and giving us an instinct for caution by attributing intent where there is none, in fact. We are evolutionarily predisposed towards agency.

Of course, we are familiar with agency directly through interacting in sophisticated ways with our fellow humans, each of whom we know have their own motives and intentions. So, by imagining agency in inert things, we are attributing them with a human quality of their own, or to an hidden agent residing within them and causing their response to our presence. In a similar way, as children we see faces and forms in the patterns made by shadows and the wallpaper, in clouds, in knots in tree trunks, in eroded rocks, and inanimate objects generally in Nature. S E Guthrie (*Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*, 1993) has delved into this tendency of ours to anthropomorphize things in our environment in some detail. Our hyper sensitivity to such shapes is again beneficial to our survival.

From these degrees of hypersensitivity, we are inclined to get false positives—we see or suspect agents where there are none—and we are alerted to potential threats when nothing actually threatens us. We are therefore generally ready to respond at the crack of a twig, or the creak of a floorboard, an ominous shape, a scent or breath of air. We are inferring from signs and signals around us that danger lurks—something possibly with malevolent intentions towards us, perhaps a predator or someone from an enemy tribe. It is natural for us to do it, and even when we reassure ourselves that we are safe, there was no predator there after all, we still suspect something was. Something hidden is out there! By attributing signs and sounds around us with intent, we are giving things in our environment a human characteristic, and so are creating a supernatural category. We are creating God—or rather spirits and gods—in our own image—not the reverse!

As the signs and sounds were not comforting, but the exact reverse, the spirits, the disembodied personalities we imagined out there, were not conceived as being kind. They were thought of initially as being malevolent. Even the ancestors were

not initially thought of as being well disposed towards us. At root, they were akin to predators and enemy tribesmen, and invited fear and loathing. Their unpleasantness was rationalized as being because they were strict guardians of tribal culture and values—after all, they had given them to us—and they had founded the tribe for our benefit as members of it, so ultimately they had us at heart. They were essentially kind, but were angry when tradition was badly kept. Eventually, kindness overpowered anger, and we ended up with Christianity.

Of course, in human society, children are introduced to their parents concepts before they have ever been in a wood alone. Our impressions have been conditioned or pre-empted by culture, ever since humans began to gossip, and eventually, we lose all awareness of how our ancestors arrived at a particular concept. Only with evolutionary psychology has evidence of our mental structures, their history and consequences, begun to emerge.

Sociability is so instinctive to us that children from the age of three make up little dramas which they act out with their toys, or with totally invisible, entirely imaginary friends. Studies show that these friends are not some confusion of reality and imagination. The children know perfectly well that their imaginary friend is not of the same nature as their real friends. Moreover, these children have a better developed intuitive psychology to allow them to play the roles of their "friends" appropriately. These friends cannot be properly shared with other children—they do not possess knowledge of their history and personalities as imagined by their originator.

Imaginary friends help to give children a theory of mind that is useful socially, and can be applied to the human conception of spirits and gods, but those who believe in spirits or gods do not consider them in any way imaginary, and the concepts of them **are** shared with other members of the tribe or church. Believers interact "socially" with them using social inference systems which it is assumed they share with tribal members or other co-religionists. A prayer to an ancestor or god assumes that they know and share our own concerns. The central difference is that we know our fellow humans have limited information, whereas the supernatural agent has far more, and perhaps total information.

The information they are considered to have, though, in tribal society, at any rate, is not abstract knowledge or encyclopedic knowledge, but it is social knowledge—knowledge pertinent to our social interactions within our own existence in our own society. It has been called "socially strategic" information because it is what we would like to know to be able to function more effectively within society. Ancestors or tribal gods, we think, always have this "strategic" information about our circumstances, so they know when we have done something contrary to tribal custom, of which they are the guardians—they know when we have sinned!

Another evolved mental system is our moral intuition. It is essentially an inbuilt emotion—an instinct—which we rationalize, making it easy to think it is purely

reasoned. The emotion involved is not a heavy one like anger or even a softer one like love, but simply a feeling, comfortable or uncomfortable depending on whether we have acted according to it or otherwise. We saw that even young infants—barely toddlers—can have moral feelings, so they cannot have been taught. We naturally feel it when something is morally wrong. Most of us naturally feel it is wrong to deliberately harm others, and we feel guilty when we do it. Moreover, sociopaths usually know what is wrong and that they are doing wrong—they are not devoid of morals—but they are not emotionally bothered by it. Their fault is not lack of any sense of morality, but a lack of guilt, the feeling acting immorally arouses.

So the feeling of moral wrongdoing seems to be instinctive for children to have it at a young age without having been taught it by normal upbringing or formal teaching. These latter serve to reinforce and rationalize the moral instinct, not to create it. Warm blooded animals and birds feel empathy for others ot their kind, and even others not of their kind. It is caused by mirroring their distress. We feel it, and normally would feel it for the people we know we are harming when we act immorally—a feeling of the hurt our victims feel. The conflict induces guilt, a twinge of punishment for doing it. The sociopath is socially defective in not getting any such feeling.

Most young children, barely out of infancy, know that certain acts are intrinsically wrong. What is wrong or right to them is not merely a question of viewpoint. They are moral realists. Psychologist, Eliot Turiel, testing young children, has confirmed that they behave morally despite their immaturity. Even three and four year olds know that non-playful hitting of others is wrong, without any prescription given by adults. Shouting, however, is only seen as wrong when it has been specifically forbidden. One is an intuitive moral feeling, whereas the other is a social convention. At a slightly older age, children can put both moral and conventional harms into a taxonomy. They know the relative seriousness of immoral acts and conventional proscriptions. Perhaps surprisingly, neglected and abused children mostly retain their moral awareness, at least while young.

Morality, therefore is an instinct. It has evolved along with group living because it promotes prosociality instead of antisociality. But it must have evolved because the group would not tolerate anyone trying to cheat, or free ride, or trying otherwise to exploit the good will of the rest of the group. Such bad eggs must have been expelled from the nest! Antisocial people were thrown out, were deprived of group benefits and would have had to fend for themselves as solitary animals unless they were accepted into another group. Mostly, they could not have survived long in the face of rivalry from the groups. Even if they had succeeded in reproducing, their antisocial nature would have passed down their genetic branch and will have prevented any group of them from being stable. They would have remained as solitary animals, and eventually been eliminated by social humans.

Successful groups remained successful by continuing to expel antisocial

members, leaving behind all those who were socially inclined, and they would have passed that inclination down their genetic branch until groups consisted predominantly of people who had inherited the genes responsible for sociability and co-operative behavior. Yet, even today, studies show that about a fifth of all humans try free riding and cheating within our groups, and now they cannot be expelled. Either the process has not been completed, or a small number of free riders and cheats has some other advantage for society, and the proportion has therefore stabilized. If not, though, the logical equivalent of expulsion would be the death penalty for cheats, or sterilization, but the four fifths of us who are gentle co-operators find that inhuman and unsatisfactory, so the prospect for society is that cheats will increase until society collapses. In our modern society, among the cheats are bankers and corporate bosses.

By the time we are adults, our history in society of being betrayed, violated, having our trust broken—or their opposites—has conditioned us to being forgiving or being avenging. Psychologist Michael McCullough of the University of Miami (*Beyond Revenge: The Evolution of the Forgiveness Instinct*, 2008) argues that both forgiveness and revenge solved evolutionary problems for our ancestors:

> Evolution favors organisms that can be vengeful when it's necessary, that can forgive when it's necessary, and that have the wisdom to know the difference.

In a successful social setting, forgiveness has obvious benefits, whereas revenge is not too obviously beneficial. But it is a deterrent against taking someone for granted, cheating or freeloading. A cheat, knew what to expect. It was primitive justice. The trouble is that it leads to tit for tat vengeful actions whch are hard to break, whence the need for forgiveness at, preferably, an early stage to break the cycle of revenge threatening to follow.

When people can count on society, on the rule of law, for punishment, they are less likely to seek personal revenge. Conversely, when society lacks a mechanism to defend people's rights, they cultivate a tough reputation not to be messed around, develop vigilante sub groups, and gangsterism. Justice in a well ordered society is reliable, and has no need to be savage. In a badly organized society it is unreliable, and the lack of reliability means that people demand disproportionately savage punishment for those found guilty.

Many Americans believe the US has the best justice system there is. Many more think it is one law for the rich and one for the poor. It is the same in the UK. People want to feel they have the best, and overlook the manifest flaws in the system to maintain their illusion. Simone Weil (1909-1943), born of Jewish parents, had a deeply felt sense of injustice in the world, and came to see that all religions were true in the sense that they were meant in some way to counter it. One of her insights was that people who accept positions of high office were accepting undertaking to exercise their duties with scrupulous propriety. It meant,

those entrusted with such power and authority agreed they deserved a greater punishment if they misused the trust given them.

In our societies, people high up the social scale will be let off their crimes or given token punishments. The impeached Richard Nixon, a scheming crook, was reprieved by his VP, Gerald Ford, shortly after getting his feet under the White House table, when he automatically succeeded Nixon into office with no reference to the electorate. Ford judged Nixon to have "suffered enough". Weil thought punishment for breaking society's trust should be designed to compel "a higher devotion to the public good. The severity of the punishment must be in keeping with the kind of obligation which has been violated." Thus, the greater the violation of public trust, the greater the punishment. In America, punishment is not related to violation of public trust or to the harm done to society.

> Steal a little and they throw you in jail, steal a lot and they make you king.
>
> Bob Dylan

Petty thieves go to jail, but the swindling executives of piratic banks can freely enjoy their Ponzi bonuses at grave economic and social cost.

So it has always been essential to the preservation of society that cheats are reliably and justly punished, preferably by expulsion from society so that future society is not contaminated by their descendents. That is what we did for two million years until we settled into modern civilization a few thousand years ago, and the capitalist economic system a few hundred years ago, when we decided to reward those who rob us all for their personal aggrandizement.

Religion has failed to combat the corrosive influence of capitalistic social theory on our societies. While capitalist theory says we are in perpetual competition, our nature as revealed by psychology and biological evolutionary analysis says the opposite—we are social, and our nature is to help and nourish each other. Lovingkindness is the supposed basis of Christianity, but all the Christian sects have changed the message to mean lovingkindness to our closest kin and friends. As far as others are concerned we should do our best to exploit them, to get one over on them, because, so the theory goes, they will do it to us. Yet, we are meant to be kind to everyone, even our enemies, the Christian God says. Why then does the most religious developed nation advocate selfishness as its main motivator, and keep on starting foreign wars? Is it because it is also the most capitalist nation, and capitalism is its real religion?

You only have to read some online lists to know the appalling hatred of right wing Christian fundamentalists. They obviously do not read their bibles, or they cannot comprehend some of the best and simplest English published in the last 400 years. The Pew poll in autumn 2010 proved that more than a half of professing US Christians know little or nothing about their religion. The puzzle is why the remaining Christians who are still interested in Christ's socially uniting messages put up with a load of cracked pots despoiling their God's teaching.

Maybe they are no less budgerigars than the others, but they ought to feel a duty to correct the terrible wrongs being perpetrated in the name of God. By not doing it they are condoning the evil, for evil it is. What, if you are a Christian, could be more evil than teaching the opposite of Christ's teaching? It is what comes of putting your trust in right wing authoritarian devils!

Primitive morality is based on the evaluation of each and every one of us as being valuable to the others, and worth preserving to such an extent that it has been partially hard wired into us to do it. Modern capitalist society, attempting to train us to be selfish to suit a few who are, is going quite against our nature. Capitalism is making us greedy, selfish and consequently antisocial, and the outcome will be the end of our present society. We should not think we are being good or altruistic by helping others, but that such action is what is expected, it is natural. Being bad, being greedy and selfish beyond our needs, is unnatural.

There are doubtless costs involved in punishing wrongdoers, but the cost of not doing it is the destruction of society. It might already be too late. The cheats and free riders are in control, and it is the received wisdom they are able to propagate from their privileged position of power in society that theirs is not just the best but the only economic system for today, even though it reduces to "beggar my neighbor", the very antithesis of society and, for that matter Christianity!

Most of us are outraged that bankers can rob us and go unpunished, rather rewarding themselves for their cleverness by giving themselves huge "bonuses"—otherwise meaning a cut of the swag. Equally, we are enraged when big businessmen pays no regard to the environment that we have to live in—they have the resources to live anywhere they wish—and have negligible thought for the welfare of the less fortunate, who have to scratch a living out of the environment as they find it—poisoned and polluted from corporate greed. Many of us condone their greed, and some of us approve of it—a monstrous crime—yet we get angry when someone pushes in front of us in a queue.

The serious cheats seem remote to us, and we get angry with those who are close, a reflexion of the pleistocene world in which our social life evolved. Similarly, we can relate and be appalled at one, or a few, deaths we can relate to, but cannot emote with the thousands killed annually on the roads. We sympathize with our own dead soldiers fighting in distant wars, but we cannot relate with the many more innocents they are killing in that foreign country, nor can we understand why.

It makes sense for us to legislate against the cheats, which we do in a small way through regulation, and to ensure that they are properly punished, which now we rarely do. Exploiting the group, cheating and freeloading has to be costly to those perpetrating these antisocial crimes. At present we reward them, or rather let them reward themselves. They should feel guilty, but are persuaded by their own ubiquitous propaganda that they deserve their rewards. In the traditional small group societies of humanity, the equivalent of entrepreneurs and bankers—the

"big men"—were enterprising for the common good, and felt adequately rewarded by the pleasure they brought and the admiration and honor other members of the tribe held them in. Even in ancient Rome, wealthy people often spent much of their fortunes in public works and entertainments to be honored by the people. In the UK today, we have the honors system whereby people recieve a medal, a title or certificate for doing their public duty. Needless to say, mostly these honors go to the cheats and free riders!

Gratitude is the opposite emotion of guilt. It is the positive feeling of reward someone earns by helping others or willingly co-operating when cheating was open to them. Rich men who have become vastly wealthy from the labor of others, like the rich Roman, can earn the gratitude of the multitude by returning much of their wealth to the public, and it used to be common for rich men to do it, even in recent times. Today, it hardly ever occurs, and when it does, it has a hidden sting, an ulterior motive. It is charity that somehow feeds the the entrepreneurs' market, or more generally supports the continuation of the antisocial economics by which they got rich—a form of propaganda, or even cornering the market.

What the arguments for capitalism miss is that co-operation, even within the capitalist system, is far more important than competition. Turiel's studies showed that childen under four years of age will punish those who refuse to be co-operative. Adults in eastern societies will punish others for some slight, even killing them in so-called "honor killings", most often of women seeking independence from feudal social rules. Sometimes feuds between families or clans last for generations. In western societies, we avoid it by trusting to the law, but the law must be seen to be applied, and must be applied fairly to work. To repeat, society depends upon miscreants being punished to hold together.

Religion has not been clearly visible in much of this, but the fact of evolved morality is central to it. We have that instinct for what is socially wrong and right. Once we humans begin to think in terms of powers like totems and ancestors, spirits and gods, having a personality, we accept that they are interested parties in the moral decisions and behavior of the tribe. These powers were part of the tribe—the personification of it—and, like us, were interested in what went on in it. Members of the tribe all shared knowledge of the nature, powers and personality of the spirits, so, although the spirits objectively were imaginary, they were not merely subjective. What is subjective is known only to one person. What is objective is agreed by everyone.

The spirits were considered as disembodied tribal members, ancestors—not fantasies or imaginary, but actually present still, a shared albeit invisible reality. The same remains true of our concepts of God, Allah, and so on. Believers confuse shared beliefs with objective reality, because, for them, they are objective reality—they agree on them. But nowadays, agreement is not sufficient. Objective reality has to be testable, and the result of the test agreed upon! It prevents everyone agreeing on something that can be shown to be false.

The key point about the ancestors or gods is that they possess strategic information concerning the tribe. They know and guard what is right and what is wrong in and for the tribe, who is honest, who are suited for marriage, what is relevant, who deserves punishment, what is fair—everything that is important to the human social mind.

Much of what is important to the social mind is naturally moral, derived from the moral instinct that underpins sociality. Consequently, the strategic information possessed by the ancestors and spirits is information concerning morals. Given sufficient information about some act—all the relevant information, in other words—we feel we can judge whether it was right or wrong. The ancestors have all such strategic information within the tribe. After all, they founded the tribe, and are the guardians of its culture, which is to say that they are the personification of the tribe. So the basic religious idea is that of a disembodied social mind aware of everything happening of any moral or social consequence, and supposed able to make a correct judgement of it.

If someone utters a word which is taboo—or blasphemous, as we might say today—we know the supernatural agent knows we uttered it. We therefore feel guilty. Most of us feel guilt when we do something immoral, and the belief that supernatural agents have that piece of strategic knowledge offers us an explanation of our natural instinct. We worry that someone saw us, and fear that even if no one human did see us, an ancestor did. Here then is an encapsulation of the basic notion of religion. Failure to follow our instinct to help others and co-operate with them makes us feel guilty, we think we have been seen by an ancestor, or god and so feel guilt. We are therefore obliged to keep the ancestors on side by being moral, if possible, and if not by placating them in some prescribed way.

The ancestors or spirits are persons—personalities—with a social mind and respond to those seeking to help them just as a fellow human in the tribe would. To keep the spirits on side, the tribespeople offer them a sacrifice. Ancestors are tribal members still, and everyone likes a feast, so having a feast pleases the ancestors no end. The whole tribe will eat the sacrificed pig or sheep, and everyone will benefit from having a high protein meal once in a while. In addition, people benefit because the ancestors respond with favors exchanged with the tribe for honoring the ancestors with the sacrifice. It is simple a fair exchange of favors. You scratch my back and I will scratch yours, but not with a fellow living human being in the tribe, but with the spirits of notionally former members—the ancestors. Once again, it reflects the co-operative society.

Our social mindset readily lets us picture unseen beings as the causes of inexplicable happenings, like fortune and misfortune. Such events were seen not in general terms but in social ones. Thus, an accident might be seen as due to some sort of cheating—maybe witchcraft. The same is true of someone proving to be exceptional at some valuable skill that changes the regard they are held in by tribal chiefs, and even their whole social status. Some differences in social status

may be acceptable—classes or castes—but such differences are justified as being differences in the "essence" of people in the different castes, essence being an intrinsic unchangeable quality. As essence does not change, good fortune might be seen as having been caused by someone, an evil spirit or a witch, and witches were considered to be cheats or thieves, people aiming to take what is not theirs—status, wealth, health or even life. The ancestors are then seen as protectors.

Such constructs are functions of our social minds. We live socially and interact socially, even before we have to confront Nature, so fortune and misfortune is a social matter. Someone—an ancestor or evil spirit or witch—caused it, and that idea with our moral instinct generates the notion of unseen people causing things to happen that otherwise would be inexplicable.

Tribal spirits are often ancestors, or totem animals often considered as related to the tribe as a type of ancestor, or a present day cousin or even sibling. So, totem animals can be ancestors too. But ancestors are dead, and here arises the notion of life after death, because the ancestors are still supernatural members of the tribe, though they are dead! Death is not final. The tribe continues to exist when members of it die, but its customs and culture continues on as if it is everlasting. That is rationalized as the ancestors continuing to guard the tribe and its traditions.

Ancestors remain members of the tribe, retaining their human characteristics, their ability to exchange favors with living members, and their senses of anger and gratitude when the tribe's culture is violated or a gift offered. Yet they have no bodies. Their putrefying bodies have had to be disposed of in some way, for putrefaction is disgusting to us. Even Neanderthals knew something had to be done with dead bodies. They surrounded their dead with flowers, and attempt to make them less disgusting by disguising their smell and appearance while they were being ritually buried. Early modern humans did the same. It was an early commonplace that corpses had to be removed as digusting, but these had been valued members of the tribe not long before, and their personalities remained with the tribe to guide it.

Human societies seem always to have a link between death, spirits and religion. A feature of the social mind is that it is a narrative mind—it strives to join up experiences into a coherent story. It finds the effects of causes and the causes of effects. Perhaps as a result people realized that they can plan ahead. The have learned that by doing something a particular effect can be expected. Early humans were not always right in their inferences but they were often enough to appreciate that planning was possible and its value. Naturally, they must have realized too that they would die, but must also have felt that, when they did, remaining as respected members of the tribe, albeit now as ancestors, was a comfort to them. They joined the guardians of the traditions of the tribe, so they had better know them and stick to them while alive, for when they were dead they would be relying on reciprocating with the living members for their succor. It was a fair

exchange, but they had to do their bit, even when they were dead.

Psychologists find that people, told stories in which death is prominent, begin to act as moral guardians though they are still alive. They get much harsher in wanting to punish social deviance, and are more rigorous in punishing defamation of treasured cultural symbols, like the national flag, the cross, the prophet Mohammed, and so on. They also become more suspicious of people from other groups, more inclined to judge their activities negatively, and more antagonistic to those, even of their own community, who disagree with their views. Awarenes of mortality generates a socially defensive attitude, a psychological trick used continuously these days by governments—especially those of the right—stirring up fear of terrorism when the chances of getting killed in a road accident are far more likely. By sticking to tribal—to social—norms, people establish their right to be post mortem guardians of them—to become tribal ancestors, or, today, to expect an afterlife in the balmy place!

People seem to desire the comfort of a life and purpose after death, but funerary rituals have nothing to do with it. They all emerged from the disposal of the dead body. People are anxious and emotional while the dead body is still around, but the anxiety is not about their own death. Corpses are horrible, not merely because they are corrupting by the minute, but because they once were a person—they once had a personality, perhaps that of someone we knew and loved. Emotions are therefore mixed in the presence of a dead body, and it is the conflicting emotions of love or respect versus disgust that appals us. Modern horror films play on it by having the dead walking. Similarly, the ancient Hellenes could not comprehend the Christian idea of resurrection without conjuring up thoughts of a putrefying corpse apparently alive and walking.

From Zoroastrianism, dead bodies were thought of as polluting—a manifestation of disgust and contagion—so they could not be treated in a way that allowed the elements to be polluted by them. Corpses had to be kept clear of contact with water or the earth, at least while the flesh was still putrefying, and cremation was forbidden as polluting fire and air. Zoroastrians had the Towers of Silence in which dead bodies were placed on stone tiers to be picked by crows and vultures until only the dry bones remained, or they were placed in stone tombs—a tradition that was continued in the Zoroastrian offshoot, Judaism—until only the bones remained to be placed in an ossuary. Stone was considered impervious to the pollution, so protected the earth from corruption.

Contact with a corpse polluted the person who had been in contact with it, and he, or she, required ritual purification—holy men particularly. Undertakers could not avoid such contact and pollution, so they were a caste of untouchables, pollution being thought of as contagious. The social mind, alongside its natural feeling of disgust at bad meat, has an associated feeling of contagion—that contact with anything decaying could have undesired consequences. These are evolved instincts that religion uses incidentally, but which give its doctrines and rituals a cachet of truth, and produce related tales of the undead flitting around as vampires

spreading contagion with a bite for which religion—the cross—is the cure.

The contagion system applied to dead bodies is naturally widespread, invoking personal feelings of disgust and unspecified but fearful danger. Moslems have to dispose of a corpse within a day. The horror of death is that we knew the dead person only yesterday as a person! Now it is disgusting and getting more disgusting by the hour. So, the doctrine and ritual of death concerns the proper disposal of the dead body while insulating we who still live from the horror of it. It is less horrifying when we think they still live on as ancestors, and will in a sense remain with us in the tribe—but spiritually! The ritual assures us that this belief is upheld, and that we too in our turn will escape putrefaction in the same way. The magic implicit in the ritual lets the person and not the disgusting body transfer effortlessly to its new state of being, and with no danger to those of us who remain. Without the proper death rites, the corpse might reanimate itself as a zombie, vampire or werewolf, some horrible, predatory monster.

Anthropologist, Alan Fiske, has revived the older observation that the repetition of rituals and their need for precise observation are reminiscent of OCD (Obsessive Compulsion Disorder) in an individual. In both cases the people involved are often concerned with cleanliness, and the use of particular behavior to ensure cleanliness, though their actions might not necessarily seem to have any purifying value. In both cases, failure to follow the ritual correctly creates a sense of forboding, danger or disgust. Quite why is rarely obvious, but it plainly relates to the contagion system of the brain, and that is ultimately the instinct of keeping the tribe free from contagion—protecting it from hidden dangers betrayed only by the fear and loathing they produce.

A rite or ritual differs from ordinary acts in being prescribed by rules, like a game.

> Life must be lived as play, playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing, and then a man will be able to propitiate the gods, defend himself against his enemies, and win in the contest.
>
> Plato, cited by J Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 1949

The civilized state—law, order, craft, trade, art, poetry, knowledge and, ultimately science, all begin in primitive ritual, imitative magic to mimic the great processional movements of existence—a sort of childish playing at being Nature which metamorphoses by superstition into necessary acts without which the world would stop. Primeval man "plays the vital order of Nature in a sacred play, in and through which he actualises anew or 'recreates' the events" thus maintaining cosmic order. A gambler who settles on the same set of numbers gets trapped by his habit. He fears that if he does not bet them, they will come up that very week, so he must gamble every week—or lose out! The primitive game began as a make belief reality, passed into being a synthetic reality then became a mystical reality. By then, it has become, for those participating, countless generations down the line, the cause of what it began as representing.

The Greeks had a sacred rite they called a "*dromenon*"—something acted. From it comes the word "drama" for the play itself. It was a cosmic act, the events leading to a vital natural occurrence. The drama was understood as a perfect recreation of the events anticipated, showing how they should be! Such acts had to be done precisely or they were worse than useless, inducing calamities. Religion is a game, but modern believers have forgotten!

Indeed, rituals look very much like games, that have become fossilized and their original meaning, and perhaps purpose, lost. They are, for example, often conducted in an archaic dialect, or even a dead language. Rituals were communal, originally everyone in the tribe would have been involved in them, and even still, in modern extended societies, they serve to unite families and close friends who otherwise live apart, weddings, funerals, church congregations, and so on.

It is likely that rituals began as occasions of social bonding—feasts and fun days—social even to the extent of involving ancestors, the formerly living members of the tribe who had become its guides, guardians and ultimately gods. They were explained as necessary to keep the world working. Among the natural phenomena to be perpetuated were also the social ones the primeval people were forming—their rituals, rites, sacrifices and ceremonies. Tribal rituals were assigned to specific purposes, sowing, harvest, births, marriages, passage into adulthood, and to specific cultural occasions for the tribe, which then became celebrations of the ancestors. From this ritual play comes the earliest culture, law and government, and religion.

Among the earliest games must have been that of pretending to be the animals hunted. Ancient rock paintings show it, so it certainly happened, and suggests why many gods in many cultures are animals or half animals—humans with animal bodies or heads. Those simple, naïve, primeval people, who played at being the herds moving seasonally, become enslaved by the thought that they must do it for fear that the herds will go elsewhere if they do not keep up the ritual. In hunter gatherer societies, the herds of animals would not appear in their seasonal migrations, or the even more important roots and berries collected would be blighted if the drama were not enacted. In primitive agricultural societies, the crops would rot, wither or not ripen.

> At the great seasonal festivals, the community celebrates the grand happenings in the life of Nature by staging sacred performances, which represent the change of seasons, the rising and setting of the constellations, the growth and ripening of crops, birth, life and death, kin, man and beast.
>
> J Huizinga

It is easy to appreciate that the primeval person playing the animal convinced themselves they were it—their drama had recreated the actual. The play has then ceased to be simply play and has become religious—the man imagines he has the spirit of the animal within him. With this delusion, drama or make belief becomes holy. What was a game had become a ritual—had become religion.

They often required a marked off area or space with distinct boundaries considerd "sacred" which probably was the name of a label saying, "Special! For tribal use only" Similarly, certain objects were reserved for use in the ceremonies only, a sacred cauldron, a sacred drum, a sacred spear or wand. By being reserved for the ceremony, they were kept clean or pure and unpolluted by everyday or profane use. Anyone who used or sought to use any such object or space for something other than the purpose for which it was considered sacred would pollute, contaminate or corrupt it. Natural feelings of disgust and contagion were applied outside of their original meaning to violations of anything reserved for a communal purpose.

Religion is play acting consecrated to a god or gods. The gods are also part of the play, and so too is the act of consecration. Make belief is at the base of all religions. Clues to this are the way make belief, or pretending, in sport, poetry, song and the theatre are prescribed in ways similar to the make belief of religion, and the law, for that matter. They all occur in special places and at special times, have similar names and are repeated as needed. A sacred place is a church or a temple, but also a stadium, arena or tennis court, not to mention a law court. Originally they were all a grove or a field, marked off for the sacred purpose.

Primitive people know their religious game is not entirely real. They know they are play acting when they wear fearsome masks to make themselves into evil spirits and go about scaring the women and children. The women act scared, though they know the mask only hides a man. Yet they still believe the real purpose of it all and so pretend to be duped. They act as if it were real because, for them, in a sense, it is, though they know they are playing roles. Only modern believers are completely duped by their Christian rituals. Intelligent people today can see ritual and religion for what it is—a show, a drama, a representation, a performance, a recreation—but at the time it was thought of as reproducing or re-creating a reality, and necessary for it. Some people still think it, being unable to see the ritual as merely a performance with extremely primitive origins.

The ritual, the sacred game, had to be formalised and repeated in its sacred or consecrated playground, the special place in which it is played. The inheritance of a sacred space for magic, mystery and sacrament from primitive imitative play was rationalized later as the need to isolate the communion or the initiate from evil influences. Consecrating the play area made it holy and confered God's protection, a bit of primitive magic—part of the game! It still is the same! It is so infantile, it is embarrasing. In respect of time, the occasion of the holy drama was a feast, a special day set aside for its singular purpose, a holy day, eventually a holiday—when the participants rejoiced that the continuity of existence had been guaranteed for another season.

When societies got far too big for everyone to act in the play, provision was made for spectators or a congregation who could join in to a degree by acting as the chorus or simply by their enthusiasm, the whole being accompanied by joy, merriment and feasting in celebration of a job accomplished to everyone's

advantage. From it, the community had a secure and wholesome feeling of order and well being to carry into the next season that the play has to be enacted.

All are games played according to prearranged rules. Indeed, in an important sense they serve to demonstrate that they have preserved the rules—they have fossilized them. Preserving the rules is their main function, for by doing it, they preserve the order of the universe. The rules stand for, indeed are, cosmic perfection.

> No skepticism is possible where the rules of a game are concerned for the principle underlying them is an unshakeable truth.
>
> Paul Valéry

Agreed rules are binding and cannot be gainsaid. The one who does so is the spoilsport and is despised and ostracised. Early societies and cultures formed around those who agreed to certain rules. The spoilsport is the apostate, the heretic, sometimes the rejected prophet who might cut loose and start a new game with his own rules. In other games, he is the outlaw, the seditionist and the iconoclast. The cheat is not as disrespected as the spoilsport because he nominally sticks to the rules. Since he knows he is cheating and so has an advantage over the others, he becomes the priest.

> The origin of any sacred act can only lie in the credulity of all, and the spurious maintaining of it in the interests of a special group can only be the final phase of a long line of development.

So writes Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*), apparently citing A E Jensen. It might be that the "special group" believed their own stories, after all, they were all they had to believe, but it is certain that particular invididuals invented them and inculcated them into the others. And this happened at the outset. There is no obvious reason why a bunch of animals should all spontaneously start to imitate Nature. One of them must start the games and be joined by others who become leaders when yet more join.

Primeval people played games that were either mimickry or contests. So one primitive game form was the contest, in Greek, the "*agon*", which is shown on ancient Greek pottery, the flute players shown accompanying it indicating it is not just a fight. Nature was seen as dualistic, and different forces were in contention, so simple mimickry was accompanied by sacred competition, though sometimes the competition is only mimicked too. At other times, it is serious, and might often have been to the death once the playing was accepted as having an essential purpose.

In primitive tribalism, the tribe was often divided into two halves (*phratriai*) in which inbreeding was not allowed. Each member had to select a sexual partner from the other half of the tribe. The two halves were strongly bound by tribal ties,

but were rivals within the tribe. The dualism reflected their cosmic dualistic ideas about Nature. The totem of one might be a high flying bird, and that of the other a lowly tortoise. The Chinese called one “yang” and the other “yin”. “Yang” was sun, warmth and summer. “Yin” was moon, cold and winter. The tribal dualism was an imitation of Nature, of night and day, and summer and winter, as examples. At some stage the play required the youths and maids to separate and then come together again at some great festival of maturity called marriage. This mating ritual eventually was fossilized almost universally because it had reproductive advantages that strengthened tribal vigour. Less vigorous tribes were overcome and enslaved or obliged to adopt the same practices, until it was universal.

At these meetings, members of the *phratriai* contended in a series of individual contests. They had a ritual purpose and so the game element had already become representational being critical to the smooth running of the world, and the prosperity of the group. Each victory ensured future success for the group. It saved the group in a small way for another season. It was good! A defeat left them uncertain. It was bad, though good for their rivals.

It did not matter that some contests depended only on luck not on skill or strength. Luck was sacred too! The idea of holiness for most people is a guarantee of happiness, of good fortune or good luck. Fate is the future, and might be good or bad. Religion conditions it to be good, believers think.

The contests were held and the honors bestowed on the winners. Honor is the prize of virtue, said Aristotle. It proves to a man his value, and to his peers. Virtue, honor, nobility and glory came from the contest, the *agon*, a game. Homer wrote in the bible to the ancient Greeks “always be the best and excel over others”. That was the noble aim. Nobility was founded on virtue, originally manly qualities and then good qualities. Honor went to the best, until some became wealthy enough to keep the honors anyway, giving rise to the noble class. The idea that nobles **should be** virtuous always remained, nevertheless. Though many were wicked and all were selective about what being virtuous required, many took their duty to be virtuous seriously.

The Hellenic games were always religious, and the *agon* was always sacred. Contests needed not to be of the physical type. Quizzes, singing, and eating and drinking contests were popular. Alexander the Great celebrated the death of Kalanos with a festival that involved heavy drinking contests in which 35 contenders died during the competition, and six more, including the winner died later. Alexander was himself a big drinker, and, since he died young and not in battle, might have died in a similar fashion—perhaps of an inflamed pancreas.

The Roman games were also sacred. The people’s right to the Roman games was a holy right. They had to be conducted with precise ceremony, and were usually either annual seasonal events, or one off occasions in honor of a pledge made to a god. These characteristics show they were sacred events.

> During the growth of civilization, the agonistic function attains its most beautiful form, as well as its most conspicuous, in the primeval phase. As a civilization becomes more complex, more variegated, and more overladen, and as the technique of production and social life itself become more finely organised, the old cultural soil is gradually smothered under a rank layer of ideas, systems of thought and knowledge, doctrines, rules and regulations, moralities and conventions which have all lost touch with play. Civilization… has grown more serious. It assigns only a secondary place to playing. The heroic period is over, and the agonistic phase too a thing of the past.
>
> J Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 1949

A law suit is a type of contest, and also began as play. In Greece, it was an *agon*, a contest with fixed rules, decided by an umpire. Trial by ordeal was judging a case by a test. That is what the agonistic origins of law were—a contest. The word "ordeal" simply means a divine judgement. Any judgement made by a god was just, to the primitive way of thinking. To determine justice therefore was a divine act requiring all the ritual procedure of any other sacred event. It was performed in a sacred space called a court.

The three goddesses, Diké—Justice, Tyché—Fortune, and Nemesis—Vengeance often appear together and look similar, Diké and Tyché even having scales in their hand. The latter two look like the same goddess at root. They are a reminder that law began as a game, an *agon*, a contest between two people aggrieved decided by fortune—the judgement of a god.

Contests could be physical, chance or verbal. Boasting and slanging matches were old forms of verbal dualling which became more sophisticated, when invectiveness gave way to winning debating points. Even today, our courts do not pretend to try to discover the truth. The point of litigation is to win, not to expose the truth. Suppression of evidence has often been used, usually by the prosecution in criminal cases, to ensure an otherwise dubious victory.

In war, victory also shows a cause is favoured by the gods. It is a just cause, and so the war must have been just. Rogue politicians like Bush and Blair argue the same case still, from their modern hypocritical Christianity. Time was, brief and intermittent though it admittedly was, when some Christian princes—the Merovingians did, for example—actually turned to single combat to settle disagreements. "It was better for one to fall than a whole army". Indeed, the pretence of it remained a ritual of chivalry for hundreds more years but it no longer stopped battles. Could anyone imagine Bush or Blair agreeing to fight Saddam Hussain in single mortal combat? We would have fewer wars if it were obligatory for all war mongering leaders to start the hostilities personally by single combat with the opposing leader.

> Things have come to such a pass that the system of international law is no longer acknowledged, or observed, as the very basis of culture and civilized

> living. As soon as one member or more of a community of states virtually denies the binding character of international law and… proclaims the interest and power of its own group—be it nation, party, class, church or whatsoever else—as the sole norm of political behaviour, not only does the last vestige of the immemorial play spirit vanish, but with it, any claim to civilization at all. Society then sinks down to the level of the barbaric, and original violence replaces ancient duties.
>
> J Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*

While the warriors in ancient times had power, the sages and smiths had magical power. Knowledge out of the ordinary was cosmic knowledge, and therefore sacred. It revealed the divine order or *rtam* (Sanskrit, Persian, *arta*) which religious play acting kept as it should be. Competitions in this knowledge also found a part of the dualistic contests on the occasion of the sacred dramas. Catechisms are a simple form of them. In 589, at Toledo, the Visigoths converted from Arianism to Catholicism. The occasion was celebrated as a knowledge contest between the highest clerics on each side, on the subject of theology.

Natural processes were seen as struggles of opposites. Heraclitus said strife was the father of all things. Empedocles saw attraction amd discord as conflicting elements. Anaximander also saw discord in that "things must necessarily perish in that same principle from which they arise, for they have to render expiation to one another and atone for the wrong they did according to the ordinance of time". Time is Zurvan, in the Persian religion, apparently the father of the two contending spirits of Zoroastrianism.

The Persian religion was dualistic. It saw the world as a battleground between two equal gods, one good and one wicked. All human beings could do was to choose between them—personally—and so minutely influence the cosmic battle. Much of the Greek philosophical views were inspired by this, the world's first super-religion, taken into Greece by the invading forces of Cyrus the Great around 550 BC. This same Cyrus was the original messiah of Judaism, being called God's anointed in the Jewish scriptures.

Poetry and singing contests were also a part of the sacred festivals of primitive people. Both conflict and love imply rivalry, and such strife is the core of poetry and literature. And poetic language is arcane. It purposely sets riddles for the hearer thus overlapping with the knowledge contests. In Christendom, they revived in the *cours d'amours* of Languedoc at the time when its dominant religion was Catharism. The "Love Court" was a contest between troubadours conducted like a law court. The defence of honor in love was the poets' nominal purpose, and a whole set of given poetic forms served it.

Myths were also presented in poetic form from ancient times, to be easier to remember, for they were meant to be recited or acted out. They were explanations of holy things, names, origins, meant seriously at first for they had become accepted as sacred by all but the *cognoscenti*, but gradually they lost meaning as factual knowledge progressed. They could not just be dropped but eventually had

to be read allegorically to preserve any sacred meaning in them. The Christian holy books are the same.

Old myths become shackles that cannot be broken free from because people consider them as sacred. The skeptical Greek philosophers often could not voice their true opinions about religion for fear of the mob. It got Socrates! The elected demagogues that rule us today want to bring back this madness. They want to make it illegal to say, “The bible is not only not God’s truth, it is mainly not even true!” Such men are throwbacks to primitive times and they will take the whole of society with them, if we let them. Believers can keep their ancient myths and psalms, if they wish, but no sensible society will let them force them on to everyone else. They should keep them for the liturgical purposes they were intended for, not an absolute truth that they plainly are not.

So ritual boils down to actual or symbolic ways of preserving the sociality of the tribe. The peculiarities of it arise because people have their moral and social instincts but do not know why, and celebrations they once held for reasons purely of social bonding in commemorating certain important tribal events end up being necessary for the future success of the tribal community. Of course, the social bonding is necessary, but the peculiar ceremonies and practices are not. People do not properly understand the basis of their sociality and come to believe that the details of ancient traditions are vital to its purpose. Then when the detailed prescriptions are not precisely followed the ritual is invalidated. The social occasion has become a religious service.

These are also emotional occasions, but we have always been baffled also by our emotions—essentially the ways our instincts drive us. We fall in love and are ecstatic when our love is requited, and upset and depressed when it is not, yet we are simply being instinctively driven to find a mate with whom we can reproduce. Reason has no explanation for it until our reproductive drive is recognized. If we were left with pure logic as our only drive to reproduce, we might easily decide it is too much trouble for us. Many of the logical set might choose to remain childless, and die off, but those with a perverted sense that they want to have sex together will do so, until the only people remaining in the world are those with the sexual drive. That is what happened, and most people have an instinct to have sexual relations. It is called falling in love.

What happens is that we try to rationalize our instincts. We try to say why we love someone. Tiny babies cry when they are held by someone they are not used to. It is a protective instinct. They can distinguish family and familiar friends from strangers. It is not a racist or xenophobic instinct because people of quite different racial characteristics will be trusted when they are among the familiar circle, and the same is true of strangers who have also been accepted within the circle. It is a xenophobia for those not already known to the infant, suggesting it is related to the natural sociality of the family, community or tribe. People of other tribes have been described as having a different “essence” or “blood” to explain the phenomenon. Our tribe has it, but another tribe has another unfamilar one. It is

easy to see how such ideas can metamorphose into racism and feuding in national and imperial societies much bigger than the size of the natural tribe. It becomes easy to justify social division into castes and classes based on such inadequate logic.

Such "naïve sociality" is a flawed attempt to explain our social situation. We extend it in terms of our social brain into speaking of whole groups of people as if they all thought alike, have the same memories and desires, and even characteristics—Germans are methodical, Chinese are inscrutable, etc. Originally it applied to nearby tribes, often our rivals and perhaps enemies. In company law still, a corporation is legally a person, a way of absolving corporate bosses from any social responsibility for their actions in this greedy age.

Many rituals are rites of passage—they mark stages or events in one's life like a Bar Mitzvah, a wedding and the last rites. People feel that something in the ritual transforms them, and it is particularly strong when the rites are painful, as in some initiations into adulthood. The feeling is one of crossing over, or transcendence, some mysterious force propelling and guiding one across. Early men found much of their lives mysterious, accepting their customs and culture as given and guided by the power of their totem or ancestors. Modern explanations are increasingly the same for many of us, as the educational system is slowly destroyed. Newton explained why the apple fell onto his head. It was caused by the force of gravity. But that is no explanation to those who never discover what gravity itself is. The word "gravity" simply explains it for many of us. Something unobservable and mysterious serves as an explanation for something commonplace. God as an explanation for everything is a more significant example of the same thing.

As explanations, rituals are similar. Something mysterious in them is supposed to bring about the required effect. Initiation rites and marriage rites allegedly change people, but no one knows why. Just as gravity, a mysterious force for most people, explains why things fall to earth, so the ancestors' spirits or gods explain the effectiveness of rituals. Apples fall whether we have a word for gravity or not, and similarly people pass through adolescence into adulthood or have children whether or not they have been ritually initiated into adulthood or ritually married, whether or not supposed ancestors have approved it. Habit and culture builds upon the social inclinations of our social minds to create the psychological illusion that the ritual effects the transformation. That there can be nothing in it generally is proved by some tribes and peoples realizing that the mysterious ingredient is not invisble beings but is actually the living community, or the power that represents it, the totem.

Similarly, atheists today might willingly attend the religious wedding ceremony of a friend or relative, because they are willing to accept it as a communal recognition of the couple's commitment to each other. It is an illustration and justification of the notion that God and society are really the same thing. The religious believer has simply forgotten and failed to work out anew that God is simply a personification of society. Initially everyone lived in a community and

did not know it as a god but appreciated that it was beneficial and they were wise to act in ways that supported it. They celebrated social life thereby strengthening the community, but when the community became associated with symbols and spirits, the original purpose of the celebrations was lost. They came to think the symbolic ancestors of the tribe had prescribed all tribal culture, and these became gods and then God in imperial society.

A tribe has a life of its own, and that was evident even to early modern humans. It was not merely the current members. All the current members will eventually die but the tribe will continue to exist. Its members become a younger generation, but its customs and culture remain the same, and life within the tribe is the same as it always was. Tribal culture evolves only slowly. Our social minds therefore have personified the tribe. We know our tribe existed before our earliest memories, but how did it start? Humans like to have narrative explanations, for they mimic our personal experience. Tribes had totems, or probably later, tribal ancestors, so it is natural that the older members should invent stories about the foundation of the tribe by the totem, or by some heroic ancestor. The totem spirit or the founding ancestor thereafter preserved the traditions of the tribe.

Eventually the heroic founding ancestor was identified utterly with the tribe, such that the characteristic of the tribe became those of the founding ancestor. This personification of the tribe became its god—it lives forever, knows all the tribe's strategic data, guards its morals and its culture, was much more powerful than any individual and would punish those who were recalcitrant, but helped and protected members who accepted tribal norms and honored them and it. Society was quite baffling, and much in Nature was too, but it was beneficial to those who co-operated with it, and punished and even rejected those who did not. It was generally benign, but could by angry. Eventually, the supernatural ancestor was given these characteristics and became a god. Of course, by then, the process had been forgotten, and when the imperial age arose, the tribal gods became a monotheistic God! Only with the work of Emile Durkheim then the realization that morality is an instinct has it been possible to work out this broadly true narrative.

Religious ritual and doctrine then has a firm basis in human sociality and our social brains. Religion is a by product of our sociality, of our evolution as social animals—S J Gould and R C Lewontin (1979) likened it to the spandrels of old churches, the intersection of two arches. It is the arch that is important, a spandrel simply being a consequence or by product of two adjacent arches.

Various mental systems, which have evolved for quite different purposes, have helped to reinforce communal behavior in such a way as to fossilize it in ritual. Religious ritual evokes keen emotions linked to evolved instincts like our contagion system—an instinctive response to hidden danger. Refusing to join a ritual in a small tribal society became sufficient to make others doubt your commitment to the tribe, and could lead to expulsion, so most tribal members would hesitate to do it. What became called religious practices thus strengthened

social unity but at the cost of increasing lack of flexibility or intolerance, and the imposition of a sort of communal compulsive obsession, a type of automatism.

Moreover, a group's religion is an important cultural marker. The ritualized traditions of the group define its boundaries and membership, distinguishing it from other. Rituals have to be practised precisely or they will be ineffective. Tribes believe that their ancestors preserve their rituals, and will be angered and will then fail to reciprocate, bringing misfortune to the tribe. Rituals are therefore highly conservative customs. Ancestors and gods were peculiar to a tribe and a people, and all of this myth and paraphernalia is what we came to call religion, once we began to see it as a separate aspect of our lives and not an integral part of them. People with different religions and spirits were different people from different tribes whom we treated with suspicion and even hated as enemies.

Religion still has this xenophobic aspect to it, and remains an important source of division and tension between people. So religion has the peculiar double effect of helping to unite individual social groups of co-religionists, while dividing such groups from each other often murderously. It stems from the million or so years that we lived in small groups of around 150 people with their own distinct culture which differed from those of neighboring tribes. Now that the tribes have coalesced into empires with WMD, it is a small group mentality we will retain at the cost of our own existence, or at least of civilization's.

At each stage of social development, the people looked to a god who favoured them as a people—a god who stood for the people and their culture, often being their founding father! The god was the mythical identity of the group, a metaphor for the group. Each society had a god standing for it, and assisting it supernaturally—notionally. Eventually the reality of the first sense, that the god **was** the society, was forgotten in the dominance of the second, that God was a supernatural being guiding the society. The reality, of the metaphor of the tribe as its god, became an imagined independently existing superbeing which took on natural attributes, especially those of the sun, to make them even more superhuman! God existed in the group as its social identity, the supernatural simply being a delusion fostered by the clever men in the group to preserve its social cohesion among the less intelligent of its members.

Religion was part of tribal culture, but once tribes coalesced into cities, nations and empires, populations exceeded the practical limits of the natural human groups of the last million years. The god united the group, but simultaneously divided every group from its neighbors. The worshippers of Yehouah wanted nothing to do with worshippers of Molech or Kemosh, the bible tells us. When the groups were tribes of hundreds only, it scarcely mattered, but in the imperial age, with the world shrunken to tribal dimensions, with tribes of billions, it matters.

Unity could not be maintained across increasingly vast empires when communications were poor and slow. When people of one religion spread into the region of people with another, they were likely to change religions in a generation

or so to the local one. Alternatively the religion of the incomers and that of the locals might syncretize—merge some or all of their rituals and doctrines. Religion therefore separated from culture, *per se*, making it possible to have people of otherwise different cultures with the same religion. But it had to be engineered.

The deliberate propagation of a religion required proselytism and state support. Imperial religions became political entities aimed at making it possible to rule large populations more easily. Each empire had an imperial god, the god of the conquering nation, and it would be given a special status among the local gods of the empire. Religious professionals emerged and founded institutions to establish and maintain religions centrally, and to propagate a unified doctrine and identity. Religious doctrines in the age of imperialism were devised by the professionals to suit imperial policy.

With the invention of writing from about 4000 BC, doctrines and laws could be written down, and eventually some religious professionals took the job of scribes. Scribes were effectively secretaries, but not merely ones who wrote things down, they were administrators like the Secretary of State in the US, and Home Secretary in the UK—senior officials. Such important people were only possible in imperial states with need for them, and the economic base to support them. Small states did not need any or many scribes, and those they had were devoted to the king's affairs of state and not to recording myths. City states and the prenational small entities of the ANE had no pressing need to record the doctrines of their local religion. Everyone knew what was relevant because religion in such countries had still not separated from culture. It was the empires that required a massive administration and an imposed—albeit subtly—religious compliance to maintain order.

Across the large space and time that comprised an empire, doctrines and their justification had to be known to all the professionals in different places so that they all told the same story in their exhortations of the people in their temples. Ordinary people mainly remained illiterate, and could not afford books anyway, so the priests in their temple services expounded the law and their narrative explanations to the ignorant masses. The professionals were offering a "service" like a blacksmith, but a religious one, for which a payment was similarly required. The payment came through their share of the sacrifices offered. When the priesthood of a temple like that at Jerusalem served a large community, sacrifical animals were commodities delivered in large volumes, and the priesthood got exceedlingly rich, in the case of Jerusalem, especially when the Persian empire fell, and they were no longer obliged to feed a lot of the takings into the Persian treasury. Thus it was that a caste of Jewish priests were extremely rich by the time of Christ. They had a monopoly in the Jerusalem temple that served Jews everywhere, and by then there were millions of them, each committed to give an annual contribution to the temple, and to undertake a pilgrimage there at least once before they died.

In the age of imperialism, the tribal leader had grown so large, and received so

many natural attributes, solar ones, storm ones, and fertility ones, that the universal God had become a god of all things. The gods of Assyria and Babylon had become such universal gods, but the first with a developed theology was the Persian God Ahuramazda, the god of the prophet Zoroaster.

In the Ancient Near East, emperors would "restore" the proper worship of the local God of conquered people, claiming that previous rulers had introduced or allowed improper practices. Now the new ruler, a stickler for religious correctness, a man sent by God—a messiah—would restore the religion to its pristine state. In fact, he was changing it to suit his imperial needs. The Persians perfected this method, partly because they did not have enough trained administrators to rule their vast empire, and relied on the priests of such "restored" religions to do the job of administration and control for them.

The sudden emergence of Judaism is the prime example. In 450 BC, Herodotus could find no Jews anywhere to mention in his famous *Histories*. By 300 BC, when the Persian empire fell to Alexander, and the Macedonians imposed Hellenization on to the ancient world, there were millions of Jews in and around the Persian empire. Now, religion was a choice. People joined the group with beliefs that they liked. When any such faith group had privileges like tax concessions from the emperor, people were ready to join it. That is how the Persians encouraged the growth of Judaism—to supply an administrative caste for the Persian empire, and a fifth column abroad. Christianity under the Romans after Constantine was similar, and Moslems introduced the same incentive to convert.

This Iranian invention had an immense influence on the western world, but one that has not been recognized, largely because the west could not in Victorian times contemplate being influenced by people with brown skins. The influences that were acceptable were those of the Jews and Greeks, both considered to be white races. Iranians might have been Aryans but they were brown nevertheless, and hardly distinguishable to Europeans from their Moslem Arab neighbors. The same attitude prevails in Washington still. But the Persians and Greeks were closely related Aryan tribes, as the Greek myths suggest.

The Persians had built a huge empire from the remnants of their predecessors. They had incorporated the most creative Greeks, those of the mainland, into their empire, and they had invented Judaism as a religion, based on Zoroastrianism, to unite their conquered peoples, establishing a prominent temple for them in Jerusalem. Intelligent Greeks were not much interested in religion, but they were immensely impressed by the imperial Persian theological system which aimed to explain all in one the whole of existence. The Greeks took many ideas from the Persians and the Babylonians, the advanced culture the Persians sequestrated, and treated them philosophically, while the Jews had many of the same ideas by quite a different route, the purely religious one. So, both western influences stemmed previously from Persia, and these comprise the unrecognized Persian influence on the west.

Persians spoke of *arta*, or order and truth, as a dominating principle, and the Greek philosophers took up the idea of an ordered world—the cosmos. Nature plainly has an order in it. The spirits of mountains, trees, and rivers as they had been understood, were subject to an abstract order, and the philosophers made them into laws put into place by God. But were the gods in command of that order, or were they subject to it themselves? The speculating philosophers had already decided on monotheism but some went further, claiming that the natural order subjected even the gods, or God, and going further still, some claimed God was no more than the natural order of the cosmos. God had lost His soul, His psyche or personality, and become an abstract principle. The logical final stage of this evolution was to lose God all together—the order of nature was not a God, and was not supernatural in any way. It was entirely natural and explicable in its own terms. Nature was by definition natural. It was simply how things were, what existed, and the way in which they quite naturally came to exist.

Some Greeks got that far over 2000 years ago, but many people today still cannot get that far. Parental and social conditioning have kept people holding on to primitive beliefs in the imperial gods of the last two millennia—essentially a tribal god magnified to suit an imperial culture. These people still teach that their god is the God and Creator of the universe—a tribal god! The morality of this primitive god, however large he seems, magnified to suit the western empire, remains primitive. Without a truly universal God, major conflicts are inevitable and potential casualties uncountable, yet the universal god cannot be a supernatural one. Such gods are deluded conceptions of primitive tribal people. In reality, God is the tribe, and, in the global world, God is humanity as a whole.

Constantine tried to unite the different arms of the Christian church to make it into an imperial religion at the Council of Nicea, and, when the western empire collapsed a century or so later, the Catholic Church was left with a similar monopoly in Europe. Religious institutions always like to have a monopoly, and fight hard to retain it. The Catholic church kept its monopoly all through the dark ages until the failure of Christ to reappear at his expected parousia around 1000 AD triggered a wave of dissent, accompanied by theats from the Moslems in the east. The vicars of Christ decided on genocidal crusades to retain their power, and succeeded against the Cathars, but failed against the Moslems. The failure helped Europe to emerge from the darkness *via* the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment. It is now all again under threat from fundamentalists in the USA and in the Moslem world.

The service offered by religious professionals was that of interceding with a divinity on behalf of the worshipper. They charged a good price for it , not hesitating to take a widow's last mite, but they needed a bill of trade, so when literacy spread under the Greeks, they wanted to advertize their services, and so put together popular accounts of the religion written in the common language of the Greek world—Koine Greek. Thus the Jewish scriptures, which previously had been unknown, were published in Alexandria.

A few hundred years later, the Christian scriptures were added to them, but initially Christianity had spread organically, and different churches had different accounts and sometimes doctrines too, and new ones were being added. Only when Christianity became the Roman imperial religion were the anomalies sorted out by Constantine at the aforementioned Nicene Council. Later councils continued the process of settling doctrine. The established texts were known as the "Word of God", and constituted absolute truth, guaranteeing that the established churches had the religious monopoly. Moreover, imperial religions had to have an imperial god. Local traditions and gods were anathema unless they were squarely behind the monopoly position, so they promoted monotheism, relegating local gods to saints, or often demons, following the example of Zoroaster for whom the word "*daeva*" (*diva*) meant a devil—an earlier god who had turned wicked.

Imperial monotheistic religion, however, eventually got too staid and dull for some, and got too obviously a tool of the state. Periodic rebellions occurred, led by some charismatic religious leader, or influenced by religious syncretism. Today, in the US, religion is often some evangelical minister's business, his way of making a lucrative living from the admiration of people who permit him to swindle them of their hard earned dollars. It is cynical exploitation, very often of poor and gullible people, quite the opposite of the teachings that Christians attribute to their God, Christ. They are also often blatant covers for right wing politicians whose objectives are diametrically opposite to the alleged objectives of Christ, and certainly opposite to the social origins of religion as a whole.

Generally, the rebels complain that the institutionalized religion has lost something of the original, and demand a return to it—a restoration! All they have, though, to go on is the narrative and doctrines set down in its founding documents, themselves a product of the original institution's religious professionals. Few if any have understood the social basis of religion so they cannot call for a restoration of that, and, in any case, it would mean referring to other religions, none of which are considered valid. There is only one true religion—whatever religion it is that people have been induced to hold. People only believe in their own good nonsense, while regarding everyone else's as plain or evil nonsense!

Mental laziness might be one factor. Religious explanations are easy to grasp. God did it, probably by a miracle, and maybe with the help of an angel or a prophet. Nothing could be simpler to comprehend. So, in real life someone turns up, claiming to be a prophet or an angel, bearing a message, a new revelation or warning from God, and supported by a few slick conjuring tricks to demonstrate their divine power, and always there are people happy to be convinced. Only people who are exceptional are good enough to be given such godly powers, yet they appear to common inspection to be normal human beings. It makes them all the more believable to their supporters. God has to come down to the human level to be able to relate with them.

The Christian Son of God is the epitome of this. The American psychologist, William James, thought the experiences of exceptional people—mystics—was how religion began. Today, though, we can examine, by brain scanning methods, the living brains of people who experience some feeling or phenomenon that they interpret as religious or God given. Other people with the same experience as shown by the brain scan do not, however, feel that it is in any way religious. The interpretation seems to depend on prior expectation. What does give people mystical experiences are some types of epilepsy, implying that mysticism might be a mental defect not a gift. Indeed, the old mystics and prophets not uncommonly sound insane, and today are likely to be committed to the care of a psychiatrist.

Religion is more other worldly and mysterious than other abilities we have developed as side effects of our mental evolution like reading, writing, making pictures or composing music. The mental processes behind religion are like the mental processes behind these talents. We have them for mundane evolutionary reasons to do with our social lifestyle, but find then that they have allowed us to do extraordinary things quite unrelated to why they originally evolved. Mystics and prophets, when they are not simply confidence tricksters, seem to be those who handle the mystery of such evolutionary spandrels in religion on the very edge of sanity.

Most ordinary people's religious concepts are independent of the extended theology of the modern churches. They have been persuaded by their close kin and influences to believe, just as they would in small scale society, and have broad ideas that God is protective as long as they remain good too. They are moral people. They have a smattering of doctrine and religious narrative mainly learned at school and through films and videos, so they feel able to decide what God wants of them. But most of their general religious impressions are had from others in their immediate community of friends.

They feel that God is theirs, so that what they do is broadly right and what others do is often wrong. Essentially they make God's mind up for him, and God thinks just what they do! Religious professionals will disagree but will rarely say they do, for it is all too easy, especially in the modern USA, for anyone to find a church that suits them irrespective of Christ's original teaching. Believers therefore always think they are right even though few indeed of them have a clue about the teachings in their Holy Book, and the bent pastors can always reassure them by cherry picking biblical citations.

So, people do not normally think theologically, even the devout ones. The whole mental system of thinking about what we now distinguish as religion has evolved without religion in mind. Pascal Boyer (*Religion Explained*, 2001) summarizes thus:

- the intuitive psychology system treats ancestors (or God) as intentional agents

- the exchange system treats them as able to exchange favours with us
- the moral system treats them as witnesses to and guardians of moral acts
- the recognition file system treats them as people with distinct if general characteristics.

Skeptics can accept all this, but consider the spirits as mythical or imaginary, for even imaginary and mythical beings can be processed by our mental systems. The reason is that inferences about these need not involve the separate mental system that separates truth from falsehood. The skeptic engages it and decides "false", but then can simply treat the spirits as fictional beings. The religious do not engage their truth and falsehood processes because they have been taught not to, either by upbringing or persuasion.

The primitive tribesperson will not question the absurdity of offering a lamb as nourishment to an immaterial being for a favor, then instead treating the tribe to a feast on the sacrifice. The reason is that everyone on the tribe agrees that is how things are. Similarly, Christians are persuaded that an almighty universal God will favor them because they attend church regularly, sing hymns to Him, pray, and listen to an exhortation. As all the Christians they know accept it, and no one questions it. To them, it is a fair exchange between them and a good God. By being a function of several different mental processes besides the exchange system, the concept of hidden beings is all the more convincing.

Believers like to cite plausibility as a good reason for belief, and it is the appeal of the constituents of belief to the different aspects of thinking that makes them plausible. Ghosts or gods are thought of as just like people, but they have no personality other than what the believer projects on to them—their own! Necessarily then they are perfectly plausible.

Religion was an aspect of the culture of separate small human groups, so it came to each generation through it being raised in that culture. In a good measure that remains true still. People take to the religion of their immediate community, especially that of their parents, and disparage others. They adopt the practices they are used to, and nowhere are religious practices totally arbitrary because they depend on certain mental processes shared by all integral human beings. All of the multitudes of possibilities that do not engage them will, at best, be fads or fairy tales. Only those that activate mental inference systems for agency, predation, death, morality, and social exchange can produce the supernatural beings that most religions require.

Gossiping is the human substitute for grooming in apes—intimate social bonding. It exercises many of our mental systems, and most concerns our local society, some being passed on from one generation to the next, becoming culture. Most gossip is forgotten, but when it engages several mental processes at the same time, it excites us, is remembered and passed on. Richard Dawkins has likened them to genes, calling them "memes". Jokes are a good example. They are

persistent bits of gossip, and bits of gossip that get reinvented when they fade in the communal memory.

Some of these excite us because they are unusual or mysterious, they violate our experience and intuitions. Particularly interesting to us are when agency is attributed to other than human beings, giving rise to a plethora of stories, myths and ultimately religion. The only agents we know are human, and with our ideas of how other minds work we can second and third guess them, but we also think they can know what we do, and often do, and more! When these agents are our ancestors, they also guard our moral behavior, and misfortune considered the result of an agent might be a punishment. The exchange system is invoked to placate the ancestors, and with them come rituals which have to be performed precisely, and so do not change easily. The rituals match the culture and life of the tribe, over time, becoming its essence, and being preserved then by the invisble ancestors who have passed it on to us down the generations.

Eventually, in big societies, religious specialists take over the function of conducting the rituals, then begin to prescribe and write down doctrine. But most people retain a simple concept of religion as a social event—going to church—and at sparse intervals will rebel against the institutionalized, imperial religion. Religion relies on certain evolved ways of thinking, accompanied by cultural selection, and ultimately politics. Belief is a by product of our evolution. We have no genes for religion, and no instinct for religion, but it is an out growth of the way we have evolved to think. Primarily it is an outgrowth of our moral instinct, and our inclination to see agents behind everything that happens. These together with some of our prosocial ways of behaving let us conceive of moral guardians just like ourselves but invisible—and we have gods and religion.

God is Dead

> Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have him in the street.
>
> Herman Melville

The believer conceives of God as a superhuman being. Though He is above Nature in this definition, and above humanity, believers say He exists in a way that lets Him manipulate Nature, for He is conceived of as its Creator. Thus the God of the believers is constructed in their heads as having a set of features or properties—omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and omnibenevolence—and with these characteristics this God can alter reality. But in so doing, in altering reality, He must be leaving footprints, a spoor, signs of His presence and activity. The features that characterize God, that define Him in the minds of believers, necessitate His leaving a trail in the natural world, and any such trail can be observed.

As the conception of God, for believers, is that He is supernatural, He cannot Himself be observed by natural means, but His footprints, necessarily left when He interferes in reality, can be seen, and from them the existence of God inferred. The existence of God is therefore inseparable from the existence of signs of His presence in reality. If there are no such signs, either God does not exist to make them, or He might exist but has no effect on the world or consequences for it, and, so far as the world is concerned, He does not exist. No footprints of this God have been found. The God of the believers, does not exist as far as the world, and we humans in it are concerned.

That disposes of the God of the believers, but they might have misapprehended the nature of God, giving Him impossible and unrealisable characteristics. Maybe in error, they built God into an impossible and therefore undetectable being, so that we have missed entirely a wholly comprehendable and possible concept of Him.

> That people may exist, organized for action in history, as a force to achieve a historical destiny, what is required—that they discern God, or own themselves to be His people? What is it that alienates man from himself—the confession of God's presence in history and in man's consciousness, or the suppression of Him from history, and the repression of Him from consciousness?
>
> J Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God*

Or are these questions meaningless because they refer to a meaningless and impossible God, but once God is restored to His original form, then there is no need of any special act to suppress or discern Him at all? He is perfectly acceptable as He is, except to people who have got too used to an impossible God, a personal God, an imaginary God, and cannot let go of it.

When Descartes says, "*Cogito ergo sum*", we can follow him. The only view we have is a subjective one. If anyone comes to imagine God in their thought, then

that might be their own god. But having established self and a subjective god from the act of thinking, how can they relate to reality? How does anyone transcend the purely subjective? Descartes claimed to do it, establishing his god as the God of all, but it was a trick. Effectively using the flawed ontological argument for God, that his subjective idea of a God necessarily exists, he invented a transcendental God, one that transcends the self and subjectivity, becoming objective, other and therefore real.

Needless to say, no imaginary object can be made real by imagination, whatever powers one gives to it, and that includes imagining it to have the powers of a god, or of self creation. However one can test one's subjective impressions by consulting other people that one perceives to exist alongside you—in society. Is it possible to agree on what one has observed? When a large number of people agree under different circumstances—in other words when they test their impressions as carefully and as widely as possible—and agree upon what they have seen, then it can be considered *pro tem* as an objective reality.

But the group could and did agree on imaginary things. Primitive societies agreed that an ancient tribal father lived on as a spirit to guide the tribe, thus becoming its god. The whole of primitive culture depended on agreement on how things happened or were done, and what it was—partly reality and partly an agreed mythology—that explained it. Only in the last few centuries has the arbitrary nature of the explanations including god been realised. Science insists on the testability of beliefs in the agreed reality, not accepting them merely in the imagination. When different opinions arise, they can be tested separately, and even the people that hold them can be tested to ensure that they are not imagining something others cannot see. Ultimately, what really transcends the subjective self is the objective other that comes out of the agreed observations of society. It is society, not God, that transcends the self and leads to objective reality.

Descartes established self and subjectivity as basic being, but used a device to transfer basic being to an imaginary superbeing, God. Eliminate the trick and it is clear that the transcendence from self is not to god but to society. Baruch Spinoza, a Dutch Jew from Amsterdam and an admirable mind, admired Descartes', and also wondered how he could get to objective reality from subjective appearance. But he used the same trick. If God does not exist, then His essence does not include existence, so He must exist. Reality necessitated the absolute existence of God. It is no different in its arbitrariness from Descartes, but he did see at the same time the links between God, man and society.

Society equates with God even in Descartes' and Spinoza's reasoning, properly considered. It is not God but society, nowadays the human race as a whole, that transcends self, becoming the first principle of philosophical thought. Primacy of objective thought necessarily is the group not an imaginary god. So, what Descartes saw as divine order, a result of God's will, is actually the social imperatives of the group, of society, for it to remain stable. Descartes, having established his imagined God as being in control of everything including his self,

concluded that anything he thought sufficiently clearly had to be true, thereby debasing truth as self, as subjectivity. But when God is the group, and truth is only possible by testing against reality, and agreeing on the outcome, then truth is objectively established.

Jean Paul Sartre saw Descartes had reasoned falsely, and that humanity established truth not God. Truth is social truth, but it is not arbitrary because of its necessity to match reality. Truth is not divine, it is humanistic and socialistic. One might try to argue as postmodernists do that a group could have a false idea of reality, but that is only possible at the fringes of it. If any individual has a false idea of reality, then before long there will be dire consequences. A drug addict or lunatic might think they can fly, but let them try and reality will expose the false belief. We cannot have evolved to the stage we are in without us all having a good idea of reality bred by natural selection into us.

Kant realised that we saw order in the world because our brains reflect the world in which we live. He said we have mental categories for things, and we mentally categorize our experiences. Inasmuch as it is so, it is because of evolution. Over millions of years of evolution, our brains have adapted to reflect reality closely. Similarly, in the years we have adapted to be a social animal, our brains and social behavior have adapted to it, so that we have an instinct for proper behavior in society. We call it morality. The only false ideas of reality we can safely have are those that have no particular consequences for ill, and among them is the idea of God. We had a false idea of what god was, but there was a truth behind it that preserved god as a social belief. The truth was that God **was** society, and so belief in a transcendent God, though false, helped preserve primitive societies.

Descartes could have been much more revolutionary than he was, but by upholding the primacy of the imaginary God, fearing for his life otherwise, he failed to carry forward his thoughts honestly, and missed a trick:

> Descartes, at the price of considerable ambiguity and even inconsistency, remained faithful to a theological viewpoint.
>
> P Masterson

This failure left the subjective human being alienated in truth from reality. The person had to choose between selfishness or a false god. For many, Descartes, perhaps, included, God had become a habit which continued as it was, but for others, there was only a void. Many, god or no god, could only get the sense of the subjective, and selfish attitudes could grow unchecked and unbalanced. A few filled the void with new ideas of humanism and socialism but worked out on the hoof, so to speak, with God still looming large. Now they can be seen to have been more correct, in that God is a metaphor for human society.

But people kow-tow to a god that is merely an imaginary tribal chief or oriental potentate. As the king of our tribe, everyone is obliged to honor and worship this imaginary father, in the west, the God of the Jews and the Christians. Not to do so

is to threaten the foundation of our society, yet the worshippers happily support death and destruction to others without a qualm. Yet God **is** society. He **is** the people. And the man Christians claim is their God said so! Now that the tribe is global, the practical dictums of Christ are essential. God is the human race, and everyone has to be treated as God. The supernatural God is finished.

Two thousand years ago, this ultimate stage was already clear, and it was clearest to a man who was one of a small nation of people in the Levant that had suffered for 600 years at the hands of rival imperialisms. The Judahites had been ruled successively by the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians. They had had an imperial god pressed on to them by the Persians, and had accepted it as their own. Then the Greeks and the Romans successively replaced the Persians. Indeed, in the Jewish myths rewritten in the time of the Egyptian Greek Ptolemies, already God was being depicted as a practical unifying principle in uniting the diverse tribes of the Israelites into one people. Believers never see the practical lessons of myths because they are so dazzled by the supernatural glory they expect.

Finally, a leader of a Jewish sect, the Essenes, realized that a new concept of god was needed, not a supernatural one to be served like an idol, but a practical concept, a reversion to the true meaning of a god—the people it represented. The message was to return to the practical, realistic roots of religion when the god stood for the people, practically and realistically, not supernaturally and unrealistically. God was merely a metaphor for the bonding, the love, the people of a tribe enjoyed one with another.

This leader was Christ. Now, a third of the world claim to be Christian, and the God they accept as a man called Christ, 2000 years ago was showing them how religion had got it wrong. His fundamental commandments to love one another, even your enemies, and to love God as the least of your fellows, recognized that God and society were the same. Love of God was the mutual love of people within society. The successful society would be that in which everyone loved each other. Even, then, in Roman times, it was necessary. How much more of a necessity is it now? God is the human race. We either love our fellow human beings, or we shall destroy ourselves in mutual mortal combat There is nothing supernatural beyond. Heaven is what we create on earth through mutual love, or it is hell on earth and possibly extinction through mutual hatred. You cannot kiss God’s finger but stamp on his toe! You love even the least among us as God. Secular Christianity is now a necessity.

Christ’s message was lost in a fervour to set him up as the latest of the old supernatural gods. He had realized that no god existed for people to suffer. The answer, pronounced from his own lips, was love! God wanted people to love one another—everyone! But his followers took it to mean only people who agreed that he was their saviour, and utterly contrary to what he had said, they adopted faith in his own dead body as the criterion of love. Practical love was ditched for no love, or love as a minor side effect of faith. Regrettably, Christ came too soon.

His followers did not get it, and those that did were ignored and scattered. The message was presented as the old God of ritual and worship, a god of love whose followers spent their time hating everyone else, and many of their own persuasion.

The myth of Christ expresses dictums for social living, which being social, are objective. One was to love each other and another was to love God, and a third was that loving God was loving each other. These principles of Christ abolished the gap between God and man.

The Gnostics saw every individual as being a little spark of God, but separated from Him. The metaphor means they were alienated from the rest of human society, and their duty was to behave in such a way that they could return. Augustine said that each of us was made for God, for society, "and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee"—in society again. Religion was to keep people loyal to the tribe, to the society represented by the god, in the global age, the global society. The concept of a supernatural god could be denied and was, but the concept of God as society cannot honestly be denied.

The antichristianity Paul promoted, restated and re-established ancient supernatural ideas in place of the practical reality of Christ. An abstract "faith" replaced practical love, though Paul, to seem Christian, spoke of love too. Anyone with faith was supposed to love, but as faith alone was sufficient to save, love hardly ever got a look in. Pauline antichristianity was a "do nothing except serve the invisible idol" religion. Paul was the antichrist.

For seven hundred years of the "do nothing" religion in the Dark Ages, nothing was done! Some Christians realized at the millennium that nothing was going to happen! No promised parousia occurred, and they were left as destitute as before with no prospects for another thousand years. So, the more intelligent and critical Christians began to look for an alternative to doing nothing. It was Catharism, and when the Church woke up to the danger to its vested interests, it murdered them *en masse*. Hardly what Christ taught, was it?

Having woken up, the Church became active, but not in Christ's way with love, it became active with hatred. It saw the danger of Islam, and the danger at home, and intent on killing two birds with one stone, it launched the crusades. Until this day, unscrupulous men, often Christians, have used the external threat to arouse people to hatred and murder to deflect them from their direct concerns. Catharism continued despite the threat and so the robber barons were set on to the Cathars in a genocidal attack. To ensure none escaped and any future heresies would be nipped in the bud, the Holy Inquisiton was launched. For five hundred years it hounded, imprisoned, and tortured anyone suspected of practising the true teaching of Christ. But all this activity had also woken up many people who had lived only semiconsciously in the do nothing years, set them thinking, and gave birth, through the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, to untrammelled reason.

In this period, theologians made every excuse to keep the sacred separated from the secular, reason from faith and God from the people, all reversions to the supernatural ideas of religion that had preceded Christianity. …Christ came too soon.

A PARABLE: A Christian on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the church calling out unceasingly:

> I seek God! I seek God!

Among the Christians standing about, he caused a great deal of amusement. "Why! is he lost?" said one. "Has he strayed away like a child?" said another. Or, "Does he keep himself hidden?" "Is he afraid of us?" "Has he taken a sea-voyage?" "Has he emigrated?" … the Christians cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The prophet jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. He called out:

> Where is God gone?" I mean to tell you! We have killed him, … you and I. We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the grave diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? … even gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife, … who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves? What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event … and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher history than any history hitherto!

Here the prophet was silent and looked again at his hearers. They also were silent and looked back at him. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, so that it broke in pieces and was extinguished. Finally, he said:

> I come too early. I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is travelling, it has not yet reached men's ears. Lightning and thunder need time, the light of the stars needs time, deeds need time, even after they are done, to be seen and heard. This deed is as yet further from them than

> the furthest star, … and yet they have done it!

The prophet made his way into different churches on the same day, and there intoned his *Requiem aeternam deo*. When led out and called to account, he always gave the reply:

> What are these churches now, if they are not the tombs and monuments of God?
> Nietzsche

Is God dead? Nietzsche thought the Christian God was dead, but few Christians concur. Whatever the condition of God, some thought Christianity was once dying. But Christianity in the USA revived *via* the fundamentalist evangelicals, and elected Bush, proving beyond doubt that God was indeed dead. Though they talk conventional Christian talk, and fill the place with churches, America is Godless, and it is most Godless where Americans profess the most piety. God is most dead where people worship Him most.

Evangelicals are worshipping a dead God. How can Christians feel the presence of God when He is dead? Did they feel the presence of **God** when He was alive? They did not stop hating, but instead hated in God's name. So God Himself cannot have been near them in any supportive or inspiring way. What then was the presence they felt? What else could it be in Christian terms but the Devil? Gnostics said the Devil is the God of this world, an imperfect world. He glories in its imperfections. Giving Christians a false impression he was God, and approved of their false notion of God's will, was the Trickster's greatest trick. God's followers were too easily fooled, so He has gone.

God, the supreme God, died. He has left no trace of Himself. Science confirms it. He has allowed science to prove it, because Christians have betrayed Him. As Judas betrayed Christ, Christians betrayed God. They rejected His injunction to love their enemies, or even each other. They were not content with simple, frugal and humble lives but wanted wealth and fame, pursuing greed and selfishness. Now they are killing the earth, and have killed God. Christians have tied to a throne His putrefying corpse and kneel before it praying for favours, convinced the corpse moves and acts, and is granting them blessings.

> God—the deification of nothingness, the will to nothingness, pronounced holy.
> Nietzsche

"America is truly a semibarbarous nation" theologian, William Hamilton, once wrote. Part of the reason for its barbarism was that it had no history, and, as a consequence Americans looked hopefully to the future instead. The vision of the pioneers led the US to greatness, but it also bred a religious utopianism. It became the grotesque sin and mass delusion that Americans are the Chosen People of God, blessed to evolve into His kingdom. Many seem to think they are already there, but the rest of the world demurs. Yet that wish to look forward can be

redeeming.

God is dead because Christians have never obeyed His proclamations. The plain evidence of God, when He appeared as a man in the bible, was that He wanted Christians to be like Him. His teaching was essentially worldly and practical. The other world would come sometime, like a thief in the night, but meanwhile those who wanted to be part of it had to do certain prescribed things. They had to love God, their fellow men as themselves, and give all they had to the poor, thereby being poor themselves, and obliged to live frugally. As the world gets exploited and over populated, you know now that this final message was not to be dismissed, but the first thing Christians did was to dismiss it, and so it has remained—ignored.

Gnostics never accepted the Christian God as being God. They considered the Christians to be worshipping a lesser, even an evil God, the God of this world only—Satan. It is why there was wickedness and corruption in the world. Some Gnostics wrongly concluded it must be all right to be corrupt too, but most believed that Satan was a minor God or wicked angel who had stepped beyond his level of competence, and would be brought to order when the Supreme God of pure spirituality and goodness got enough support from humanity. Satan's world was hell, and heaven was to come. Good people who paid no homage to the wicked God would get there.

To do it Christ had shown the way. Human beings had to be like him, to live lives of perfection. The Cathars were believers in this Christ, and opponents of the Christian Church. Their fate was genocide at the hands of barons bribed by the Christian Church to kill them all off. Those who escaped were hounded for centuries by the Holy Catholic Inquisition. To this day, there are Christians who defend this torture and genocide as necessary to defend the faith. Such sentiments proved to Cathars that Satan was indeed the God of the Christians. Christ had invited His disciples to love humanity, but their response throughout history was to kill, maim and torture their fellow human beings, even when they were Christians too. Christians ignored God, so God now is dead.

Science has shown God is dead, but Christ lives on. The life and teaching of Christ still remain as examples of how Christians must be to be Christians. Though God is dead, He can be resurrected, Christianity can be resurrected—the messiah lives. Jews have a God but no messiah, now Christians have a messiah but no God, though he is not the messiah of Christians but of Christs! Christians can have a messiah and a God, but only by aiming to be Christs. Then God will be resurrected. And Christians can yet be Christs, just as Jesus intended. Christ taught correct morality, but too few Christians led the life of Christ. And, full of Devilish hubris, assuming God's role as Judge, they boasted they were saved. Through following Satan, they were sure they were saved!

In the concept of the "church", mankind has pronounced holy precisely what

> "the bringer of glad tidings" felt to be beneath and behind him.
>
> Nietzsche

The church is an immoveable stone rolled before the tomb of Christ. Satan instituted the Church not Christ. Christ did not need a Church. He needed no mediators. His message was simple and clear. Love one another! Be Perfect! Be a Christ! "It is too hard", they groaned, so they invented the Church and faith. They ignored God. Doing His will was too hard, so Satan invented "Faith Alone", and Christians snatched it up because it was easy. Doing something, loving others, being humble, was too hard. Faith is doing nothing.

Doing something is all together harder than professing faith. Having faith in Christ is doing nothing. They could continue as they were, merely saying, "I am a Christian. I have faith in Christ. I am saved" They thought they could tell God how good they were, and He would then save them! Satan incarnated as Paul, and negated the message of God when **He** incarnated. Christians praised God, praised Christ, but ignored what He said. They believed Paul, and boasted of their faith. Christ said, "be humble", but Paul liked to boast—Christians boast. But they are not saved! They have killed God.

Only the heretics read Christ's message that they had to be Christs to be saved, so they were murdered and burnt in their thousands as Cathars, Bogomils and witches. Their true message was maimed and mutilated, but it did trigger the Reformation, emerging as a victory for autonomous worship, free of the Catholic Church and its priests. People were liberated to read the bible themselves, and to appeal directly to God. Even given this small measure of autonomy, what did Christians do?—they set up new churches with priests called pastors and ministers, clerical mediators to spy on them, to tell them how to read their bibles and what they should understand by it. The fish escaping Satan's net were netted again, and made into political fodder for the rich and powerful.

The Church had blinded people to the plain truth, and no one could see it, even when they were given the chance to read Jesus's life and proclamations for themselves. They called him Jesus because he was telling them how to be saved, but they ignored him and believed Paul, Saul, the Devil incarnate, who taught them a cosmic Christ accessible by faith.

Christians did not want God. They rejected Him. They chose Satan. The new Israel went the way of Israel. They became Pharisees. Those who had received Christ's message and tried to be perfect were smoke and ashes. Only a remnant remained, and remained silent out of fear. God had died. He had yielded to the pricks. He withdrew beyond transcendence and left behind a putrefying corpse, the body of Satan with a mask of Christ to be worshipped, its brain eaten by the maggots that fell from it.

Christians did not want a God with a brain. Their's was an idiot God, a God who did what they wanted. Christians could not love others, do right and be perfect. It

was too hard, needed too much effort, too much thought, a brain! “I think” and “I believe”, *cogito* and *credo*, are opposites. Christians preferred *credo*. They didn’t want to think, didn’t want to do anything. So they wanted a God who made it easy, who had no brain Himself, who legislated what they liked and they picked, simple standards that nobrains could understand easily and claim were forever true, static. Yet God had ordained natural laws, and rules of progress, so the simple standards Christians understood fossilized as the world moved by them. By their rejecting their own brains, and selecting a brainless God, God died.

The Church alienated mankind permanently from God, for the eternal benefit of the demons who claimed to be healing the rift. God was meant to be human life, but, in many of its essentials, it opposed human life. God became a hole, a void, an emptiness, that faith was needed to see, but no one honestly could. But, like the Emperor’s New Clothes, some took the opportunity to claim they could, and the others felt obliged to agree. Yet God was indeed easy to see, and he had explained that he was everywhere. He was human society, and that is why He wanted everyone to love Him by loving each other.

Nietzsche pronounced that “God is dead!”. For believers in God, He cannot die. What can die is the utility of the notion of God. Few of our rulers believe in God, if they ever did, and fewer still intelligent people believe in Him anymore. God used to be a useful concept for rulers, but the utility of the concept is getting marginal. For an increasing number of people, it is no longer possible to think about, or believe in, a transcendent God who acts in human history. Christianity will have to survive, if it does, without him.

> Nietzsche raised his cry on behalf of a new and emancipated man who had moved beyond the necessity for the cosmic crutches which measured the steps of ordinary men, while hobbling the feet of the bold and setting blinders on their vision. Nietzsche proclaimed the necessity for a new scale of values, a new measure of worth, to replace, rather than to fulfill, the goals and meaning of the now dead Christian tradition.
>
> Emerson W Shideler

Already in the 1960s, some prominent Christians thinkers were agreeing with Nietzsche. Among them were Thomas J J Altizer of Atlanta’s Methodist school at Emory University, Paul van Buren, a professor and Episcopal minister at Temple University, William Hamilton of Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and Gabriel Vahanian of Syracuse University. In various ways, these theologians tried to define a Christianity without a God:

> The death of God is a historical event. God has died in our time, in our history, in our existence.
>
> Thomas J J Altizer

> I think I became one of the most hated men in America. Murder threats were

> almost commonplace, savage assaults upon me were widely published, and **the churches were seemingly possessed by a fury against me**.
>
> Thomas J J Altizer

Christian love, not Christ's! Besides Nietzsche, among the sources of this enlightenment were:

- Sören Kierkegaard who saw organized Christianity as a kind of idolatry that has obscured the real message of the Gospel behind irrelevant and outdated cultural forms.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote in a Nazi prison cell of the need for the church to develop "a nonreligious interpretation of Biblical concepts", and of a secular world that no longer finds God necessary as a hypothesis to explain the sun and stars or as an answer to man's anxiety. He mixed together Barth and Niebuhr. Barth was not interested in the historical Jesus, Niebuhr rejected social betterment as a substitute for the kingdom of heaven. Christologically, Bonhoeffer reversed both, citing Christ as the exemplar of how to deal with the social and political problems of humanity—the human condition.

What is meant by the death of God? One reply is Bonhoeffer's in one of his prison letters. He said our coming of age forces us to a true recognition of our situation *vis à vis* God. God is teaching us that we must live without him. He has forsaken us (*Mark* 15:34) because we are to stand on our own two feet without depending on him constantly. God used the cross to announce that he was leaving, having incarnated to show how He meant us to live. Yet human religiosity refused to accept the message, and indeed turned it back on itself *via* Paul, so we still look in distress to God to redeem us in the world, even though He has shown us how to redeem ourselves.

The views of the chief proponents of the death of God were summarised in the 60s in *Time* magazine:

- Altizer saw the death of God as an historical event, as if God really did die on the cross. Humanity had lost the sense of the sacred that was so vivid in the medieval world. Instead of trying to put God back into human life, the Christian should welcome the total secularization of the modern world, because it is only in the midst of the radically profane that man will again be able to recapture an understanding of the sacred. The collapse of Christendom and the onset of a secular world without God are necessary preludes to the rediscovery of the sacred. The death of God is essentially a redemptive act.
- Paul van Buren thought any talk of God, and therefore the prospect of his reappearance, was philosophically meaningless. Trained in the philosophical method of linguistic analysis, he denied the objective truth of statements about a God for whom no sensory verification is possible and so could not be verified empirically. With talk of the transcendent ruled out, all theology became

Christology, so Van Buren sought a belief in ethical behavior as exemplified by Christ. He aimed to rephrase the Christian doctrine of man and to examine "the human imagination as a central theological category—to what extent religion was in someone's imagination, and how important imagination is for all aspects of his life".

- William Hamilton argued that the theologian today has neither faith nor hope—only love is left. He concluded by affirming, not the historical Jesus, but the Christ "bringing the Kingdom, the new age, here and now into the midst of ordinary lives" who shows us a "way to be human", who establishes a bond of comradeship, who draws us out of our private lives into the world, who provides us with a place to stand.

> What he was is hidden, what he proclaimed, offered, defined, is not.

Awareness of God's death summons Christians all the more to follow Jesus as the exemplar and paradigm of morals and conduct, and especially his commitment to the love and service of his fellow man, something that Christians have to do to be Christian—but mostly do not! Hamilton defined Christ as "a place to be", meaning that the example of Christ required Christians to do what they imagined Christ would do. So, the place of Christ today is in the midst of struggles for justice and equality, standing up firmly against the constant use of warfare, opposing corruption at every level, but especially among those we have to trust.

> In the time of the death of God, we have a place to be. It is not before an altar, it is in the world, in the city, with both the needy neighbor and the enemy.

- Vahanian believed that God, if there is one, is known to humanity only in terms of human culture, and thus is basically an idol, the product of the encounter between primitive Christianity and Greek philosophy:

> Theologically speaking, any concept of God can only be an approximation. Only God can have a concept about God.

The church's idol is no longer relevant to secular culture and has been either neutralized by overexposure or rejected entirely. God is dead, and will remain so until the church becomes secular enough in structure and thought to proclaim him anew in ways that will fulfil the cultural needs of the times. Since the spirit of the times is irretrievably secular, with all notions of transcendence and otherworldliness rejected, Vahanian worked toward a historical explanation of how secularization came about.

Talk about "the heavenly Father" refers to another world, for which we have no empirical evidence it exists, and none that it ever did, and it all sounds empty. Scientists do not invoke God to explain any scientific observation. Scientific explanations are quantitative and impersonal, restricted to that which can be

studied, tested, experimented with as elements of the empirical situation. As God is undetectable, being transcendental and beyond experience, though He is presumed to act somehow within or upon a situation, He is necessarily outside the scope of science. Nothing is seen or noticed that could be God, yet the believer insists God is acting. Science demurs. It deduces that such a God is imaginary.

If God has the features of something merely imaginary, statements of other presumed qualities, characteristics and acts of God are simply meaningless. All have to be assumed for no reason, and whatever they might be, they leave the situation just as it was before these features were imagined, and do not alter the empirical situation. In short, if the whole notion of God were abandoned, the situation would remain just as it was when God was presumed to act! Whatever caused the phenomenon being observed would remain unaltered, and so the observations would remain unaltered. What science hypothesizes must be necessary and sufficient to prescribe the phenomenon, or some such hypothesis is forthcoming as it has in every gap presumed for God in the past. Science has Nature, not God before it, and that is what it investigates. God is superfluous.

Even in ordinary everyday experience, God is now superfluous. If we are worried about our dependents when we die, we can rely on our relatives and friends, as people have always done, or we can today buy life insurance that will provide them with some income. Meanwhile, we rely on people trained in medicine to help to keep us alive when we get ill. Our lives are no longer in the hands of God. We can speak to our friends and relatives, though they be miles away, or even on the other side of the world, and in odd instances even outside the world! God had nothing to do with these miracles.

For Freud, “religious ideas have arisen from the same need as have all the other achievements of civilization”. Belief is inherently different from knowledge, because it does not rely on proof. Religious doctrines cannot be proved, so religion is illusion, indeed, some are so improbable and contrary to what we know about the world, they seem like delusions. The reality of them is eminently questionable—they can neither be proved, nor be refuted—so it is wrong to make anyone think them true, to believe in them. Belief is the source of society’s intellectual poverty.

In *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, Van Buren’s central topic is the empirical content of the gospel that remains when it is divorced from its irrelevant and objectionable supernaturalism. The meaning of the gospel must be stated without appealing to factors beyond the reach of empirical investigation—God. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s aphorism in his *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus*, is “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”.

The kind of psychological help God used to give people, in their insecure lives, is provided in technical ways today. God is unnecessary now, if He was ever necessary. What is necessary is that people behave properly towards their fellow humans in society. If they do not, society becomes intolerable, and cannot be

sustained without force, and ultimately a revolution against the oppression. Morals not God give us the social security we need, and morals have been gradually eroded because our economic system teaches a different morality from that required in society. Christ's teaching is primarily moral, God being a psychological crutch to help keep us moral. So Christ's message is essentially humanistic.

God is a myth, so his death necessarily is, but myths express metaphorical truths. They express succinctly particular meanings, particular wisdom, to guide our lives. God is a metaphorical expression of the human community, originally a small one, the clan or tribe. God is superhuman because the tribe, with its own particular culture, is superhuman. People were born into a tribe, it taught them everything they knew, it offered them security, it provided them with companionship, and co-operation, eventually they died in the same tribe, so it lived on when the individual died. The person was dependent on the tribe, and they were therefore dependent on the tribe's personification, God. They gathered with the tribe to worship its God, meeting together to reinforce their commitment to the tribe and its God. Yet there is no God. It is the tribe elevated in the imagination and thereafter notionally doing what the tribe did.

Sometimes myths die. The tribe dies by conquest or by voluntarily assimilating to a larger community for added security. The old myths are redundant, and new ones have to be adopted by a ritual rebirth into the new tribe. The old God is dead, or is made into a minor God in the new God's court, and all his myths no longer stand for any community. Gods die.

If no God is to be found apart from Jesus, and if his Father can only be found in him, the *New Testament* gives its answer to the question about God by pointing to a man—Jesus, called Christ. The reason for confining our knowledge of God to Jesus is that in him we have data that are ostensibly empirical. Whatever men were looking for in looking for God is to be found by finding Christ. So, the empirical content of the gospel is the exemplary life and teaching of Christ. Questions about God are only usefully answered in the life of Christ. Not that the *New Testament* writers, or even Christ Himself knew this or were intentionally saying it.

The intention of Christ and the apostles was to instruct their followers in a practical ethic, and, in those days, they all saw the source of the ethic they were teaching as being God. They were faced by their own intellectual legacy, the general beliefs of their time and place—first century Judaea—where God was central to their world view, just as science, technology, freedom and democracy are to ours. God might have seemed strangely whimsical, but He was their source of motivation and righteousness.

Jesus was their righteous teacher, who taught them what was right and did what was right for them. By adding that Jesus was the archangel Michael, and the archangel Michael was an aspect of God, the first Christians aimed to teach their

successors to live like God. Paul spoiled Christ as a good example by equating him with God. So the aim of showing Christians they should live lives of Christ ended up in the worshiping of Jesus as God, and not living lives of Christ because it was too hard to expect mortals to live the lives of Gods.

Christ, and Jews of the day, did not think it was impossible. He told them "You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt* 5:48), and he and the Jews of the day knew God's instructions to Moses to tell the Israelites "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord Thy God, am holy" (*Lev* 19:2). It was an aspiration to live by, not to be idly dismissed as Christians quickly did.

The Christian excuse for emphasizing faith, and not good works as they should, is that it does not require any effort—no attempt at perfection or holiness—to be saved, merely a profession of faith, and regular masses to prove it. The rest of the time do as you wish, but, if you are a Catholic, confess your sins occasionally to give the celibate priest a thrill. Hardly any Christians, even ministers, try to be perfect, so what sort of example are they to a generality taught to be greedy and selfish to get on in capitalist society. Capitalism and Christianity are incompatible. You cannot give all you have to the poor and get rich!

Even some traditional Protestant thinkers thought the new theology had merit. Gordon Kaufman of the Harvard Divinity School thought a re-examination of the doctrine of God was long overdue. Considering the prospect of nuclear holocaust, Kaufman had to dispense with divine Providence. God might not will nuclear destruction, yet can Christians rely on His not intervening in history to prevent it? If not, human beings will have to determine their own destiny. Christians who believe in Providence would be hard pressed to accept this idea of God without thinking that God, the God of Providence, had in some sense died.

> Because of what is going on in Christianity and Islam, people with Gods are dangerous. And one of the things you can do to help your brothers and sisters is to take Gods away from people so their weapons won't be quite so sharp as they are with monotheism.
>
> W Hamilton

Harvard's Harvey Cox concluded his book *The Secular City* with the idea that Christianity may have to stop talking about God for a while—effectively what Christians wrote about God was meaningless:

> Is it the loss of the experience of God, the loss of the existence of God in Christianity, or the lack of adequate language to express God today?

The critics complained that, if faith is stripped of all the mysticism surrounding the deity, little was left of religion. It rather proves that it was the mysticism that these believers wanted in religion, not the ethics. Accordingly, their main argument was that the death of God thinkers reduced Christianity to just another

kind of humanism with a Jesus inspired morality. Don Cupitt justified Christianity becoming a form of humanism as implicit in the metaphor of God coming down to earth as Christ. Read traditionally, by this act God had directed His emphasis away from the mystical and placed it four square on to human shoulders. Sadly Christians since Paul have placed their emphasis back on to the mystical, quite contrary to the proper reading of the myth. Daniel Day Williams taunted the movement with the aphorism:

> There is no God, and Jesus is his only begotten son.

It illustrates the inability of many Christians to produce cogent arguments, even when they are professors of religion. It is easier to make cheap jokes over serious matters for the benefit of their unwashed congregations. Secular Christianity sees Christ not as a son of a dead God but as a social moralist, the equivalent of a Confucius. The death of God ministers simply replied:

> If Jesus can wonder about being forsaken by God, are we to be blamed if we wonder?
>
> William Hamilton

Nietzsche critized Germany's most prominent Christians, like the Kaiser and Bismarck, as those who profess to be Christians but are "antichristians in their deeds", but he thought there **was** such a thing "possible in all ages" as "genuine Christianity". He opposed moral hypocrisy not morality. Writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, he thought the Germans, as Christian then as the US is today, held to a religion that was not religious, truths that were not truthful, and goodness that is not good. The parallel with the USA today seems perfect.

Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche's best biographer and interpreter (*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*), cites Goethe to illustrate "the resentful bourgois morality that purports to be Christian, even while it insists on throwing the first stone":

> I let Gretchen be executed and Ottilie starve to death. Don't people find that Christian enough?

As Kaufmann puts it, what Nietzsche denounced "was not sincere Christianity but insincere Christianity—those who are unchristian in their practice but profess Christianity, as well as those who superficially seem Christian in their practice but whose motivation and state of mind are unchristian". These latter effect an appearance of pious humilty and devotion to others but for their own purely selfish reasons. Many clergymen fall into this category.

Christians seek a reward for doing nothing much. As Hegel, a minister himself, said:

> You want to get a tip for having nursed your sick mother and for not having poisoned your brother.

You are required in any even half decent society to nurse a sick mother and not to kill others on some whim or imagined slight, but Christ made the requirements explicit and extended them to everybody, even the least among us, and our enemies. The reward was the kingdom of God, an ideal world, all right, if not now soon, perhaps for your children—but not without putting in the effort!

In *The Gay Science*—"Gay" does not mean homosexual—Nietzsche describes the best kind of disciple as being one who believes in his master's cause so strongly that he would question it in every possible respect confident that, if it were truly good, it could withstand every test. Moreover, the master would welcome it, knowing it was meant constructively, and would even provoke his disciples to criticize him, so that he could expose weaknesses and right any wrongs he had not considered. Accepting criticism was the highest sign of culture, the sign of the *übermensch*—Overman: most often translated "superman" but corresponding to a Christ, someone trying to be perfect.

The inference is plainly that Christian refusal to criticize their beliefs is no sign of culture, and does no favours to their Lord and Master, who was utterly misrepresented by poor disciples, or, more likely, later disciples particularly Paul, when the religion passed out of the hands of the original disciples into the Roman sphere. Nietzsche suggests they should be asking, in response to their claim to have had some experience of God, questions like:

1. What precisely did I experience?
2. What happened in me and around me?
3. Was I thinking and reasoning clearly, or did I get confused?
4. Am I sure I could not be mistaken?

> None of them has raised such questions. All the dear religious people do not raise such questions even now. Rather they have a thing for things that are against reason, and they do not want to make it too hard for themselves to satisfy it.
>
> Nietzsche, *Gay Science*

Nietzsche held that conviction was no proof of truth, so the death of martyrs never showed their beliefs were right. Maybe they died morally, in that they believed they were not deceived, but it requires them to have tested their beliefs honestly to show they have not actually been deceived, or deceived themselves.

Nietzsche's attack on Christianity is an attack on its hypocrisy, its failure to measure up to the gospel teachings of Christ, and the way he lived and died himself:

> There was only one Christian and he died on the cross. The "*evangel* [Evangel: Greek for "good news" or "glad tidings"] died on the cross. What has been called "evangel" from that moment was actually the opposite of that which he had lived.

Jesus had rebelled against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees… "the disbelief in 'higher men', the **No** to all that was priest and theologian".

Nietzsche said, in *Antichrist*, that resist not evil was the profound phrase that was the key to the gospels. The Christian should not want to retaliate. Christ did not, and he was showing Christians how they were to be. The "Glad Tidings" were to exist here and now in love, love of everyone near or far, without "subtraction or exclusion" and irrespective of their position in life:

> Everyone is a child of God… and as a child of God everyone is equal to everyone.

Christ called himself "Son of Man". His followers called him "Son of God". Who then is God but Man—human society?

> The "bringer of glad tidings" died as he had lived, as he had taught. Not to "redeem men" but to show how they must live… He does not resist, he does not defend his right, he takes no steps to ward off the worst—on the contrary, he provokes it. And he begs, he suffers, he loves **with** those, **in** those who do him evil. **Not** to resist, **not** to be angry, **not** to hold responsible—but to resist not even the evil one—to love him.
>
> Nietzsche, *Antichrist*

So, Nietzsche admired what Jesus taught, and how he lived. What he criticized was faith in Christ, particular in its use in suppressing Christian action—which is more than mere charity as Christians understand it—and against reason. He opposes faith because Christians profess it, but hypocritically hardly ever think it implies them doing anything, except going to communion:

> Christians have never practised the actions Jesus prescribed to them. The impudent, garrulous talk about the justification by faith, and its supreme and sole significance, is only the consequences of the Church's lack of courage and will to profess the works Jesus demanded.
>
> Nietzsche, *Will to Power*

> The Church is precisely that against which Jesus preached.
>
> Nietzsche, *Will to Power*

Faith, to Nietzsche, is opposed to Jesus's glad tidings. Jesus taught and demonstrated a practice, a practice that remains possible and necessary. A large

number of people, perhaps even a majority, instinctively practice it in a small but natural way, both Christians and even more so non-Christians. Those who do not practice it at all, or practice it falsely, particularly the Christian hypocrites, need to be taught it afresh without the intervening false interpretations of the Pauline Churches. Christians indeed ought to be willing to expose the hypocrisy of the people, especially in high places, in positions of leadership and trust, who use Christianity as a screen. They certainly ought not to defend them, and, worse, put them into positions of trust when they are manifest hypocrites.

Paul is "the first Christian" for Nietzsche. To follow Christ, to put doing good to others before self was too hard for Paul, but he wanted to be a Christian, so he invented faith in the body of Christ as a substitute for faith in the teaching and practices of Christ. The latter meant doing something, practising what Christ had preached.

Faith in the body of Christ was a cynical crib of the ancient dying and rising faiths of those Hellenistic times. It was the mystical nonsense Hellenized Jews, his original main audience, were surrounded by. It required them doing nothing except attend communion, and proselytizing, the success of which gave them an assurance of heavenly favour, for which the bishops who lived off the platter were ever grateful. It was a great way to convert pagans to Christianity, especially as Christ was simultaneously being given attributes typical of the solar gods and tribal fathers they already worshipped.

All the pagan convert had to do was essentially what they had done before. They had then had faith in one or another god—even in polytheistic systems people had a preferred god—and they merely changed to the new god, Christ, or even just took Christ to be a version of the old god. Nothing could have been simpler once Paul had made faith and not deeds into the criterion of Christianity. Paul had substituted faith in Christ for living like Christ, a much harder prospect. The change was a negation of Christ's life and preaching:

> It is false to the point of nonsense to find the mask of the Christian in a "faith", for instance in the faith in redemption through Christ. Only Christian practice, a life such as he lived who died on the cross is Christian.
>
> Nietzsche, *Antichrist*

W Kaufmann says it seemed to Nietzsche the idea of God giving His son as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, "the *trespass sacrifice*", in its "most revolting, most barbarous form—the sacrifice of the guiltless for the guilty" was "gruesome paganism" and faith in it a travesty of Christ's message.

Christ blessed people for their lives, the meek, the poor, the righteous, the peacemakers, all of those who by their actions were creating the kingdom of God, a kingdom that began in the heart and appeared on earth, not after death. To postpone it until after death betrayed Christ far more seriously than did Judas. Making death the gateway into a better life depreciated and deprecated this life

into something of no importance, so then it could be freely abused, whether your own or someone else's.

Christ taught that people should aim for perfection here on earth, but Christians consider that all that matters is faith, an imagined guarantee of entry to life after death. What could be more cynical? The doctrine of two worlds allowed the Christian to maintain a double standard. And, built by Paul, this negation of Christ was doubly emphasised, in the Protestant revolution, by Luther, who told his followers that, by having faith, they were assured of Christ bearing their sins—they were thereby, with no effort at all, justified—made just, meaning righteous—and so automatically saved! Christ was no more than an old fashioned apotropaic human sacrifice—a human scapegoat carrying away sins, with no effort on the part of the sinner. Instead of trying to live lives free of sins as Christ taught and demonstrated, the Christian just says, "Thanks a lot, Christ, take my sins too!" And Lo! he is saved. This is a travesty of Christ's teaching and God's will, and surely it is obvious!

Christians since Paul have taken God as an idiot, and as a consequence the world has suffered horribly at the hands of Christians, the people meant to improve it. Do these Christians think their God was really saying, "Do as you like, forget everything I used to say about righteousness, and everything I said when I incarnated in person on earth, just have faith in yonder image of a dying man, for he will carry off every sin you commit". Such a belief is amoral if not utterly immoral. Christ made it multiply clear that God incarnate was not just him, Christ, but was incarnate in every human life, even the most insignificant and objectionable. Whatever you did to the least person in the world, you did to Him because mankind **is** God.

Once society is seen as God, and a God that can be corrupted, then religion is plainly the attempt to keep society good and not corrupt, an attempt that began within oneself, as Christ was plainly teaching. It is hypocrisy to want to blame society's ills on to others, and therefore to want to change **them**, until you have perfected yourself. That is where humility comes in. It is not at all humble to to claim you have perfected yourself, and so have the right to judge others. Judge not that thou not **be** judged. Once you feel able to judge others, they will feel they too have the right to judge, and judge you.

Paul's revaluation of Christ's message into its negation was tempered by his desire to seem to hold on to Christ's message:

> And now abideth faith hope and charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity.
>
> *1 Cor* 13:13

For the benefit of ignorant Christians, charity is love. It translates *agape* which is "love" in Greek, and Germans like Nietzsche had only *liebe* to translate it. The word that *agape* translates in Hebrew means "lovingkindness". Charity has come

to mean token giving to a good cause, a charity, but Christ meant sincere lovingkindness extended to everyone—compassion, kindness and care.

Paul paid lip service to love while otherwise emphasizing the central importance of faith for salvation, but Luther had no hesitation or compunction in declaring faith "infinitely much greater and more sublime" than charity, though charity is a "beautiful" virtue. Luther proved his own satanic origins by often repeating faith expressed through love was devilish and "confuses us into Turkish and Jewish errors". So, love was only for Moslems and Jews, but Christians had faith! So, Luther proclaimed:

> Faith alone, without any works, makes just before God.

Works of love are not necessary to salvation at all. Then he says:

> He does not have a truthful faith in whom the works of love do not follow faith.

Faith alone saves. But no faith is true that does not engender love. If "true" faith means faith that justifies, then true faith both engenders love and justifies. Unless the faithful person loves as well as having faith, it is not true faith and so cannot save. Therefore love is necessary for salvation. Faith alone is not sufficient to save.

It is a contradiction unless false faith, the sort that does not engender love, saves just as well as faith that is true and does engender love. The love then is irrelevant, just something that sometimes comes of faith but not always, and the truth of the faith is an irrelevant matter too in respect of justification. Faith simply has the side effect of making some people loving, or charitable. Plainly, Protestant Christians take him to have repudiated love as the whole point of Jesus's teaching, and they spout out, "*Sole fide*, faith alone", yet he does, from the last citation seem to think that love is an incidental consequence of faith, not necessary for justification but inevitable with faith nevertheless. It seems a confusion.

Luther, like all Christians thinks he knows God's brain better than anyone else, and went further than anyone else in repudiating Christ, yet seems utterly confused and contradictory in his statements. He plainly contradicts himself with bald statements like these:

> Faith without works, ie a sentimental thought, a mere delusion, and dream of the heart, is false and does not justify.

> Faith without works is nothing and useless. This is understood by the papists to

> mean that faith without works does not justify.

So, despite all that *sole fide* stuff, faith without works is "nothing and useless". How can Lutherans say they believe all this incomprehensible rubbish? Nietzsche considered Lutherism the ultimate withdrawal from Christ because it implied the believer was scared to do anything at all for fear of it being sinful. The answer therefore was to do nothing except to sing hymns and praise God, stimulating recreations no doubt, but not anything that God ever said helped anyone to be saved, however big the church you do it in.

Luther, Calvin, Knox, Mather, Swaggart, Torquemada, Loyola, and a host of others, Catholic or Protestant and still hailed by many as model Christians, did not live lives remotely like Christ's. For Nietzsche their professed Christianity was a screen beyond which they could hide their incapacity for Christian love, their complete inability to treat people like God.

And, of course, these Christians could not allow their followers to conclude by rational thought that they were charlatans. Catholics could not read their bibles for themselves and were conditioned to respect the interpretation of it given them by the doctors of their faith, but Protestants could read their bibles and think about what they contained. So Luther added to his rejection of Christ:

> Whover wants to be a Christian should tear out the eyes of his reason.

> Reason and the wisdom of our flesh condemn the wisdom and the word of God.

> You must part with reason and not know anything of it, and even kill it, else one will not get into the kingdom of heaven.

It is plain why modern US Protestants are so irrational. Luther added to faith being unreasonable as a necessity for salvation. "I believe because it is absurd", as Tertullian said. "No", retorted Nietzsche, "You mean 'I believe because I am absurd.'" Surely Christians who believe in the Devil as well as God cannot accept any rejection of thinking and reason as anything other than satanic. If God made mankind in His own image, He must have made them complete with the organ of thinking in their heads. He must have expected them to use it try to figure things out. That means reasoning. Why then would he have said, "But do not reason about faith, and I have sent Paul and Luther to tell you so"? Or do they think God has no brain, and it was the Devil who gave it to us?

It must be simpler to think God gave you a brain, but that opponents of God want to discourage you from using it. Paul and Luther tell you not to use it, and so are agents of the Devil. In Christ's terms, Man is God. So, when he is good, God is good, but when he is bad, then God becomes Satan, so men who are opponents of

the good God must be wicked men, satanic men. They are men who do not want the best for all of mankind, but something that helps only some, unscrupulous types like themselves, to live off the mites of widows, the very types Christ condemned—theologians and clergymen—but also today corrupt politicians and businessmen. Nietzsche saw that Protestantism was a paralysis of reason, and that faith was a veto against science. They negated the Christianity of Christ.

Being social is natural to human beings. To regard society as God is therefore to explicate a return to Nature, but not a return to the wild. It is society that stops us from being brutes, that makes us other than brutes. Nietzsche saw this "return to Nature" as an "ascent to Naturalness". Living harmoniously together to our mutual advantage brings to us every advantage that society can bring, without any concomitant loss through the destruction of conflict.

Bands or tribes were our natural state, and originally they rarely clashed because they were distributed sparsely in a world big enough to ensure they kept apart—there was no need for rivalry. As the world got smaller and human populations got bigger, clashes began to happen, and rivalries eventually became calamitous. Now we are in the stage of the global tribe, and war is no longer an option. Humanity has the power for self destruction. Humans need to unite in a global culture, with a global God—the recognition that God is mankind, whatever name He is given. Only mutual respect, mutual justice and mutual love is possible if we are to avoid mutual destruction.

It means we have to get to know each other, not to be xenophobic or to use pejorative terms about each other. To refuse to meet and get to know the other's point of view is not loving, and cannot be Christian. Nietzsche explains the love spoken of by Christ as being friendship:

> Who knows this love? Who has experienced it? Its true name is **friendship**.

Christ was advocating that everyone was potentially your friend, so everyone must be friendly to others. The friendship he was thinking of was that of classical times, a "deeply and strongly" felt friendship, but all friendships have to begin somewhere, and it makes friendship hard to come by when you begin by hating someone else even though you do not know them at all. It is made all the harder with modern propaganda habitually applied through the press to demonize particular nations for political reasons. It is obvious that it is not Christian, but the politicians who do it, their aids and advisers and the newspaper owners who transmit it almost all profess Christianity. They are just those Christians Nietzsche condemns and Perfects or *Übermenschen* should call them to order.

Humans try to stand out from Nature in their technology, but they must try increasingly to blend in it, to be symbiotic rather than dominating. Humanity must become more organic, and less mechanical. Love must extend to Nature. Goddess is a metaphor for Nature, God a metaphor for human Society and the Son or

Christ is a metaphor for righteous people, those who try to be Christs, who do what society requires to keep stable and everyone secure, and what Nature needs to keep wholesome and provide for human needs—a holy family.

> Modern mainstream religions see man as an individual. Their concern is simply to provide people with a personal solace so that they tend to divert attention from our duty to the community and the environment in which we live.
>
> Edward "Teddy" Goldsmith

Nietzsche is often criticized for being hard, perhaps even callous to ordinary people, but his message was that each one of us has to be hard on ourselves to do as Christ wanted. People who are true friends can be hard on each other, in pointing out failings, because they recognize in it an aim for mutual improvement and so will not take offence, and will forgive any given inadvertantly, for example by criticizing in error. In short, true friends can be frank with each other, and the friendship will endure and strengthen. Nietzsche did not advocate hardness against those who were not strong enough not to be hurt:

> When the exceptional human being treats the mediocre more tenderly than himself and his peers, this is not mere courtesy of the heart—it is his duty.

A "duty" or responsibility is a feeling we have brought on from living socially. Despite 2000 years of Christianity, everyone knows their rights, but few know even what a duty is. It is an obligation to human society, that is to God, once society is seen as being God. We cannot ignore other humans because we have a responsibility towards them as members of our society. They are not some means for us to make a fast buck, they are fellow citizens and human beings. If the person we are intending to use would not agree to being treated in that way, and if we would not agree to being treated ourselves the way we intend to treat others, then we have a warning it is not right, and we should not do it. It is the universal moral law—the Golden Rule—that makes us feel guilty when we neglect it.

Guilt is the feeling normal humans have when they fail in their duty, by thinking irresponsibly, speaking irresponsibly and acting the same way. The Persian religion had the central tenet of purity of thought, word, and deed, and this is the source of it. We ought not think in a way that does not consider the consequences of what we say or do for others in society. We all have to take responsibility for our words and deeds, and that requires the precondition that we take responsibility for our thoughts too. Those who do not are already desocialized. They have lost, or are losing, their humanity.

The Christ, Nietzsche's *übermensch* or superman is dutiful, but does not seek a witness to flatter them for being a good Christian. That is the "neighbor love" of modern Christianity, the mutual admiration societies of Christian church memberships. Philosophers since Socrates sought to expose hypocrisy, and so too did Christ, but Christians now do not notice. For them love means self love. They

love each other, but hate everyone else. Very Christian today, but not what Christ taught, and particularly not what he did! Nietzsche joined Christ and Socrates in wanting to expose hypocrisy. He aimed to expose what was behind the façade of Christian virtue.

To be kind, humble or obliging out of necessity was a slave's morality. If the slave was not any of these they were likely to get a whipping. The worshippers of ancient idols served them. They considered themselves slaves to their God, and often were tattooed with the symbol of the God to show it. The sign of the cross with water at a Christian baptism is a relic of it. It is a tattoo that Christians think God can see, but no one else. The are slaves to God, just as the ancient people were, and they attend "services" for their God. Christian morality is a slave morality because God's slaves will be punished in hell fire if they do not practice Christian morality. Yet they do not practice what Christ taught, a morality that was not a slave morality but a purely voluntary love of mankind. Good Christians are good out of fear of retribution, but Christ tried to teach them to **want** to be good to others. True virtue, the love of Christ is done for its own sake. So Nietzsche defined duty differently:

> Duty means wanting a goal not for the sake of something else ["something else" meaning a reward or to avoid a punishment] but for its own sake.

It is socially valuable in its own right. It is self fulfilling. Christ is said to have abrogated the Jewish law of Moses, but the love he proclaimed he said fulfilled it, thereby disposing of the need for it.

The burden of Christian love falls greatest on to those most conscious of it, on to those with a strong sense of duty and purpose towards society—the strong—Christian leaders. They are the ones who consistently most spectacularly fail to carry it. Nietzsche criticized Kaisar Wilhelm and Bismarck. One could be hard on one's leaders because they ought to want sincere and constructive criticism. They are not the weak, are they? Bush and Blair are archetypes of modern Christian leaders. They ought to have been Christs but preferred to be Caesars. They could have shown Christian love and demonstrated Christian practice. They failed.

Secular Christianity

> Relief of the human condition is what we must be doing. You cannot really define the meaning of human life other than to find some particular point at which the relief of the sorrows of the human condition is your business.
>
> W Hamilton

Through most of recorded history men have feared change and longed for permanence. However, change has begun to displace both stability and permanence as the higher good. It sets us off from men in most of recorded history. Our age differs from how men have seen themselves from the beginnings of time until recently. Never before have we been so sensitive to the ways we are shaped by the economic, social, psychological, and political environment. These new ways of thinking so intimately associated with the scientific, technological, and educational explosions of our time are the core of secularity.

Lloyd Geering (*Christian Faith at the Crossroads*, 2001) reviews the recent history of Christianity, saying "secularization" describes best what has been happening since the Enlightenment. It is taken to mean a turn away from religion—in the west, from Christianity:

> By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.
>
> Peter Berger

Religion involves the institutionalization of claims of the divine or supernatural, while the secular is everyday culture and the natural. This definition excludes expressions like "secular priests" and "secular Christianity" as self contradictory. Though it is a legitimate meaning of secularization, it has a more subtle and more original meaning. In the late medieval context secular did not mean "antireligion" but simply "not in a religious context". At that time, "secularization" meant the process by which a "religious" was allowed by the Church to leave a monastic order to follow their Christian vocation among the "nonreligious". Obviously, the parish priest was not a "nonreligious", but he lived and worked in the community, not in a monastery, so he was a "secular" priest.

In medieval times, religious people tended to despise human affairs in favour of meditating on God and the afterlife. If Christ did not condemn meditation, he did not teach that other people and their troubles should be ignored in favour of it! From this, the meaning of "secular" is effectively "this worldly" and its opposite is "other worldly". W B Hodgson in 1850 said:

> Secular… should never have come to mean the opposite of religious. The fact that something may be described as secular does not preclude it from also being religious. Thus rightly considered the secular is religious in its tendency and

> issue, the religious is secular in its application and practical development.

Geering says the word "secularism" first appeared in *The Reasoner*, 25 June, 1851. Readers were told it had to do with things that "can be tested in this life". So secularization is a change of emphasis from "other worldliness" towards "this worldliness", a focusing of our attention on this world and away from an imagined other world. Harvey Cox, author of *The Secular City* wrote:

> Secularization is man turning his attention away from worlds beyond and toward this world and this time.

The British secularist, G J Holyoake (*The Origin and Nature of Secularism*, 1896) explained that the word "secularist" meant a way of thinking, and Ernest Rénan, author of the well known *The Life of Jesus*, said why secularization is not necessarily antireligious:

> Whether one is pleased or not, the supernatural is disappearing from the world: only people not of this age have faith in it. Does this mean that religion must crash simultaneously? Indeed not. Religion is necessary. The day when it disappears the very heart of humanity will dry up. Religion is as eternal as poetry, as love. It will survive the demolition of all illusions… Under some form or other, faith will express the transcendent value of life.
>
> E Rénan, 1868

"Faith will express the transcendent value of life"—this life, because it must do, or it is worthless. René Girard (*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, 1961) says denial of God does not eliminate transcendency but diverts it from the *au-delá*, that which is the supernatural, or in an imaginary spiritual life, to the *en-decá*, that which is natural, or in this material life.

The point for secular Christianity is that Christians are free to think about and address the effects of secularization on religion. Christians have to see that profound commitments can be undertaken without absolute claims being upheld. We have to learn to live with relativity because God cannot be proved and faith in an unknown quantity can only be valuable when it appears in reality as humanism.

It leaves the future of religion open. Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, shows how conversion to Christianity has "frequently been assisted by the belief of converts that they are acquiring not just a means of other worldly salvation, but a new and more powerful magic". *Sole Fide* is belief in religious faith as a magic charm. Not surprisingly, traditional Christianity has failed, but it is not what the man it is named after meant anyway, and what he taught remains sensible as practical social morality. Christians must face the fact that the whole purpose of the teaching of Christ was practical—secular. Absolutes are means to

practical improvements or they are nothing. Paul changed the emphasis from practical care and help for others to self obsession about personal salvation through mystical concepts meant to be psychological ways of staying strong while enduring the hardship incumbent on Christians for love of others.

Secularism is inseparably connected with how we experience, act in, and give shape to our world—secularization. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* tells us "the movement towards secularization has been in progress during the entire course of modern history". The Enlightenment reacted against the medieval tendency to ignore Christ's life and teaching for Paul's mysticism, and secularization appeared as humanism. Thinking of and seeing our world secularly, we secularize it—humanize it.

Secular Christianity is of deep concern for the future of humanity. The concern is for the survival of men and of our sick, secular world. Theologians and thinkers, both lay and professional, of almost every branch of the Christian tradition, have periodically explored secular Christianity. Paul van Buren (1970) said unless a secular christianity successfully emerges, Christianity is unlikely to be of any help in the secular world. We read on the internet:

> Nietzsche was right that secular Christianity or Christianity without Christ is unsustainable…

Indeed, secular Christianity might be unsustainable as Nietzsche said, but secular Christianity cannot be Christianity without Christ, can it? If it is without Christ it cannot be Christianity. Secular Christianity is Christianity without God—the traditional supernatural God. Despite two millennia of traditional Christianity, humanity is in dire straits and desperately needs what secular Christianity has to offer—the practical application of care and compassion from each human to all others.

Where we are going and what is to become of us is not a matter of Providence, fate, or luck, but of what we do. We now see ourselves as active makers of our lives and world. It is up to us, we are responsible. If we pollute our world beyond the point of human survival, if we over populate the world beyond the point of sustaining life, if we blow it up into atomic dust, **we** will have done it, it will be **our** own fault. We could have done otherwise. When Christians come to think they are responsible for what they are and do, and do not blame their own faults and failings on to Providence, when they begin to act as Christs in this world, then we have secular Christianity.

Christianity, in common with some other mass religions, posits another world which God might allow Christians to enter after death subject to His judgement of how well they have done His will. The other religions have a somewhat different outlook, and conditions, and even Christians differ in some repects. All these differences have offered Christians endless chances to evade their duty to their

God undertaken by their commitment to Christian belief. They end up quibbling about imponderables impossible to prove one way or the other instead of being Christians as Christ directed them.

Colin Williams sees the difference between traditional Christianity and secular Christianity as "thinking from below" rather than "thinking from above"—it amounts to accepting that God has given His revelation, and now it is up to Christians to act on it, instead of constantly making vain appeals to God to do it for them. He cites *Luke* 7:22, "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear", noting that these things have happened through human effort on behalf of the blind, lame, lepers and deaf and not through any additional interventions by God. We know what to do. The problem is doing it, and doing it for everyone, not just our best friends, relatives and compatriots.

Christians are lagging behind in the cultural shift. Traditional Christianity has always been associated with a conservative attitude, resistant to change. The shift necessary is not an easy one for Christians to make. Secular Christianity is a different Christianity from that which has gone before. Christians have been wrong—quite obviously wrong—in thinking that God needs to be worshipped. They have been wrong in ignoring Christ's life and teaching in favour of his deification. They are wrong in relying on the magical effect of simple unquestioning belief instead of actually doing anything to fulfil Christ's teachings. They are wrong in thinking that God will instruct them on how to be Christians, demonstrate it Himself by appearing on earth and showing people how to behave towards others, only to be constantly expected to do it all Himself. All of this is obvious in fact, but Christians have a vested interest in believing Paul—it is a lot easier just to believe you are saved for believing it!

Traditional Christians, observing the way Christianity has changed almost from the moment that Christ breathed his last, justify the changes from what they consider to be God's own words, spoken from His own lips, the lips He assumed when He came to earth in human form, by saying Christianity is maturing! They treat the original words of their God incarnate as the first words of a child, and since then the message has matured with age. The very words of their God are now dismissed by traditional Christians, Pauline Christians, as being an echo "of what loudly was proclaimed in the religious childhood of Christendom". The fact is that in all logic, if Christ was the omnipotent God, then any changes to his words made since he died, are a corruption of what God came to earth to teach. Paul corrupted God's own words, and so have most theologians since. We have to admit that the words of Christ reported in the gospels were written down half a century after Christ died, so they already have a gloss of the first changes to Christ's teaching, and several of them are obvious. We now have a check on what Christ taught because his life was that of an Essene, and we know what Essenes taught from the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. Much of it confirms the gospel teachings.

Christianity, throughout almost its entire history and all the changes and transformations it has undergone, has accepted, and refined the priority of values

established by Paul, not Christ, who emphasized secular works sustained, pricked and prodded along through faith. As Van Buren put it, Christianity valued the eternal over the temporal, permanence above change, unity over plurality, the universal above the particular, and the absolute above the relative. Christianity saw a believer's role as passive, as accepting that which was decreed from eternity as unchanging and unchangeable. Can Christianity change to bring about that which Christ envisoned—the kingdom of heaven on earth? Or must it continue in the wrong direction it has been sent in since its simple practical tenets were hijacked by Paul into perpetuating the mysticism of the ancient religions of the dying and rising gods?

Secularity was basic to the origins of the Christianity. Harvey Cox, in *The Secular City* presented secularization as coming directly from the bible. Christianity has been changing through its history. When one thinks of the original revolution against Christianity of S Paul which horrified the Jerusalem Church which was the direct inheritance of Christ and was run by James, described as "the brother of the Lord", or S Augustine's subsequent changes, or later Aristotelian, Renaissance, Kantian, Hegelian, or Existentialist transformations of Christianity, the secular form of Christianity, though seeming outrageously novel, is actually more original. The shift is not an easy one to make because this accumulation of previous changes has altered Christianity so fundamentally from the original that it will be hard for traditional Christians to accept it.

Though some have considered the possiblity of a compromise Christianity, a hybrid of the original with its much altered descendent, it simply will not do. It posits a few token changes towards secularity so that Christians can continue much as they have been doing. Yet the two approaches are incompatible. Either God is making a difference in the world and rewarding Christians for doing nothing, or God has told Christians what they must do, and they now have to get on with doing it, or not, as they choose. Efforts to turn away the thrust of the argument only succeed to the extent that Christians are willing to turn their backs on the secular shift. As Paul van Buren put it, Christians just cannot stand still in a revolving door. They either must not enter it, or they must step in and pass through it.

Christians in the US are fond of boasting the sociological finding that some 90 percent of Americans are Christians. At the same time they whine on about secularization, while repeatedly voting into power Christians who can hardly be distinguished from devils, their Christianity being so thin, incoherent, cruel and different from the teachings of Christ. Far from being secular, the US is and has been for some time, in the grip of its rabidly Pauline Christian minority, a block of 60 million, mainly protestant fundamentalists who control the electoral system. Obama, is barracked by Christians for not attending church on Christmas day. Despite its vaunted Christian majority, most Americans will not have done either, and a lot of evangelical pastors will have spent quality time over Christmas with their mistresses.

The US is not the Secular City, and each day, in its Byzantine corruption and injustice, it comes closer to total collapse. The religiosity of Americans brings no detectable wane of injustice, racism, imperialism, self-interest, narrow-mindedness, and bigotry. How can it be that a country devoted to the entirely admirable practical morality of loving each other can be so corrupt, and decadent? Could it be that their Christianity does not work, that their Christianity could hardly be worse if it had been devised by the devil—that proper Christianity has been bypassed, and actual Christianity is a secular morality that no Christians are in the least bothered about?

> In certain countries in the world a good dose of secularism would break the repressive holds certain state ratified religions have over people's lives.
>
> Graham Ward, *True Religion*, 2003

A secular world needs guides for conduct, and a social vision that can challenge the *status quo* and stir us to work for a world better than the one we have. Christianity, understood in terms of devotion to an unchanging, eternal, universal, and absolute unity, succeeded in calling man to a passive role of preserving a static, unchanging, eternal, and absolutely conservative world. Secular Christianity is a source of ethical insight and motivation in a secular age by calling men to follow the actual deeds that Christ recommended to bring about the kingdom of heaven—social righteousness, being caring to other people in their distress and suffering, because when you too are distressed someone will be at hand to be merciful and compassionate to you in return. The kingdom of heaven is what we get when everyone does the same, when it is expressed utterly instinctively.

Most ordinary people are inclined to act in that way naturally, but the mores of capitalist society are diametrically opposite, and those are the norms everyone is fed these days. Thirty years ago, Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first woman Prime Minister declared society dead. Ever since then everyone has been intent on killing it off. Secular Christianity is to provide secular people with ethical insights in a secular age. Its only purpose is to preserve society, for society does indeed die when greed gets the better of lovingkindness. That was what Christ was teaching—it was his secular message.

Professor R B Braithwaite (the Eddington Memorial Lecture of 1955, *An Empiricist's View of Religious Belief*) argued that Christianity may be understood by a contemporary empiricist as a way of life, wherein faith expresses the intention of living according to a morality of agapé—love. Most critics argue that Braithwaite reduced Christianity to morals, dispensing with any need to believe in the existence and activity of a personal creator God. Traditional Christians say their faith is a moral commitment—though many fail to show it, if it is so—but it is also an affirmation about what is so, about the nature and mechanics of the world—it is made and sustained in motion by God.

The trouble about committing the morality of Christ to his or any other view of

what is so, is that it is subject to so many different opinions that it promotes division among people, and evasion of Christ's morality by Christians who find discipleship too hard. It is the morality that is important, not any particular views of the world. And morality as well as religion commits us to beliefs about what is so. Anyone who takes a moral stand is committed by it to the belief that it makes sense to speak of morality. Moral action cannot be an utterly vain pursuit. Faith can.

> Faith and Philosophy are air, but events are brass.
>
> Herman Melville, *Pierre*

Secular Christianity can only be of service to the world as a moral enterprise, a matter of how people shape their lives and their world. A moral system must help us to see such a matter more clearly and to help us to decide whether we ought to make such a judgement. The moral question is "what ought I to do?". A moral principle is that I should do so and so. If we are all selfish and greedy, as we are taught by the necessity to support our economic system, then morals have no point at all.

A system in which we are all fighting for priority of wealth and power requires us to be brutal in asserting our own wants and desires, and utterly callous towards the needs of others, except in so far as we can profit from them. Medicine in the US has no moral imperative. It exists for profit, and only a relatively small part of it is based on Christian love. And who opposes any change to it? The horde of Republican voting fundamentalist Christians who have in actuality rejected Christ. The judgement that it is American society that is sick—that its priorities are wrong and antichristian—is surely a moral judgement.

"God is love" summarizes Christ's message, but it has to be clearly seen as meaningless outside of a social context, and acted upon within society. It cannot be fobbed off as most people, even professed Christians, and even many clerics do. The imagery of the kingdom is a social vision of what human life could be like and what the world could become. It is the social outcome of the personal duty to love other people.

The central image for a secular Christianity is that of the kingdom, the image of human life to come—here, in this world! Secular Christianity offers to a secular society needing direction the social vision of a world of righteousness, justice, and love, which depends on our active and imaginative efforts for its creation—the vision of a world in which change and plurality are valued, and Christian life then is living so as to realize that social vision:

> Where there is no vision, the people perish.

Secular Christianity working for social change and seeking to transform the style of human life naturally depends on the life and teaching of Christ as the primary

source of its social vision, but not the only one. The issues which confront us today are moral ones—the style of life, the shape and functioning of our institutions, the direction of foreign affairs, the priorities of our politics, the justification of war. A Christianity understanding itself primarily as a moral affair, as Christ saw it, might save us all in a sick world.

"Moral" is an adjective applied to questions, judgements and actions in human life, and "ethics" is the noun for study of these moral matters—for reflecting upon moral issues. As secular Christianity is concerned with morals and not with being or God, ethics replaces theology as secular Christianity's philosophy. The ethical issue of the decision concerning a secular Christianity is the choice for Christians between their own past and a future for their children among everyone else in the world.

Social ethics is secular Christianity's primary reflective activity, analyzing the state of society and the quality of human life against its vision, seeking strategies to bring the present world into closer conformity with the world of the vision, and doing it. Each advance towards the vision would itself become subject to new criticism in the light of that vision—a dialectic advance. So the revolution in which a secular Christianity would be engaged would be permanent, constant, or ever renewed.

Secular Christianity with the kingdom as its social vision is frankly a revolutionary movement, and nothing signifies it more than the death of Christ as a social revolutionary protesting against the oppressive imperialism of Rome over its subject people. The death on the cross is a condemnation of a hard and cruel society unresponsive to people's needs, a political challenge, a revolt against every establishment, a call to political and social risk, and not just to our own immediate circumstances. After all, Christ was crucified according to Roman law, for the Romans were the policemen of the world at the time.

With its eye on the vision, the word of a secular Christianity about, for, and to the world would be "permanent revolution". Christians must never be tempted to identify some modest accomplishment with the kingdom itself, nor turn to some other story to find an easier vision, nor one more agreeable to some particular conditions or culture, as it did with Paul the apostle and his offer of salvation by faith alone, as many modern Christians see it.

Secular Christianity will tell and retell Christ's story whenever Christians meet together, but the emphasis must be on the morals and the life Christ led, an active life ultimately sacrificed in service to others. A gentle Jesus, meek and mild, is a reference to his manner towards others, not how he lived. Christ was far from passive, he was an active man. Luke was a follower of Paul, but even *Luke* 17:20, placing the kingdom within us, cannot be read in a passive, do nothing, way. The kingdom exists as the earthly vision of those faithful to Christ's commands to do something to achieve it. The kingdom is a symbol or vision of a situation on earth, not a projection in the clouds. Secular Christianity can give up fighting for the

existence of the conventional God. Secular Christians concentrate on morality as the route to the kingdom, and working like Christ to serve it, an ideal in which no one is not loved, no one is maltreated except by society itself, justly, for failing in their moral duty.

Traditional critics told their flocks secular Christianity was the easy way out—it was religion without sacrifice! The sacrifice they were concerned about was the sacrifice of the naïve lambs' dollar bills on the platter in the church collection. One Christian blogger, defending traditional Christianity against the moral variety, writes:

> When your religion says "whatever" on doctrinal matters, regards Jesus as just another wise teacher, refuses on principle to evangelize and lets you do pretty much what you want, it's a short step to deciding that one of the things you don't want to do is get up on Sunday morning and go to church.

Obviously this man, a clergyman and Christian teacher, is more concerned with people being absent from church than the fulfilling of Christ's real purpose. The secular approach to Christianity is far from the easy way out as traditionalists claim. The reverse is true. The easy way out is attending Church occasionally to worship God, without acting like Christ!

Secular Christianity only says "whatever" to the dud parts of Christianity, the parts that odious clergymen have persuaded people is the whole point of religion—God and His worship. That is only love of self, not love of God. Jesus was a wise teacher, but not just another one because he was the Christian wise teacher, and Christians use his name because they claim to follow his teaching. In fact they follow the teaching of another man, Paul, the apostle, who changed Christ's teaching into belief in Christ himself as a redeeming dying and rising God, an ancient and popular idea.

Evangelizing in Secular Christianity is not recruiting someone new to your church to relieve you of a little of the burden of keeping the pulpit parasite. It is teaching people the importance of, and need for, moral behavior. Traditional Christianity simply tells them they should be Christians to be "saved", a purely selfish reason, when Christ taught the exact opposite—people were to be unselfish, and that is what saved them. Lovingkindness to others, like the Good Samaritan, is a Christian duty, not an option. Christ knew and said that his way was hard. Actually loving other people, even the lowest, and even your enemies is hard, but that is the way to the kingdom of heaven. If it is too hard for many Christians, they are deluded to think they are saved in any way by giving money to their church and pastor.

The Christian God is a metaphorical God—Christ—not the old supernatural being, Yehouah. Yehouah died at the crucifixion because His old ineffective myths had been replaced by new ones, a purer moral way of living taught by

Christ. Jesus lives metaphorically, resurrected because he lives in the moral code he taught living on in those who follow it, putatively the people called Christians. Christ died cruelly at the hands of his fellow human beings precisely to show that it was inhuman and ungodly to kill people. Christ had said it—every person alive was him—a cruel deed to anyone was a cruel deed to him, and a good deed to anyone was a good deed to him. He stood for the totality of the human tribe, so he was its metaphorical God.

The king is dead, long live the king, is the meaning of the myth of the crucifixion and the resurrection. An old Jewish national God died and a universal God of love was resurrected. But Christ was only resurrected if Christians act like him as he told them. They failed. So Christ was never resurrected, or only briefly. Secular Christianity is the final attempt to resurrect Christ—the moral teacher showing and telling us how to behave to live in a kingdom of heaven. Christians preferred to live in a kingdom of hell. Can Christ be resurrected at last? Then Christians must be reborn as secular Christians and the old Christian replaced by the new.

Due to its loyalty to a supposed absolute, and understanding humans, though made in God's image, as being passive and helpless, traditional Christianity is unable to throw itself unreservedly into the struggles against the selfishness and division which confront the human race, and so is unlikely to take the side of change, much less revolution. Pauline Christianity's abhorrence of the fundamental changes in our political, economic, and social life needed to reverse the disastrous course of the arms race, racism, urban collapse, mass starvation, pollution and heat death of our environment, stands little chance in competition with its obsession with personal salvation and other worldly solutions.

> This is a very dark period. I certainly believe that never in my lifetime has the church been so paradoxical. On the one hand, it is seemingly stronger than ever before. On the other, it is weaker and more mindless than ever before. In all major denominations, fights are going on because fundamentalism is so extraordinarily powerful today. Fundamentalism is in ultimate conflict with the modern world.
>
> Thomas J J Altizer

There is no guarantee that the fatal course we have plotted in our present society, under the influence of Pauline Christianity for so many centuries, can be reversed.

Secular Christianity might be rejected by secularists and traditional Christians alike. So far it has been! But its message is at least more comprehensible to the secular hearer wishing to understand what Christianity is really about once it is stripped of the gaudy Hellenistic mysticism Paul dressed it in. It ought also to be comprehensible to the traditional Christian too, because it does not stop their personal belief in God, but simply asks them to accept that the message of Christ did not demand it. His message was aimed at everyone as a practical ethic for a successful caring unoppressive society. Those who accepted it, and acted on it, living the life of Christ were Christians. They live their lives according to the

teachings of Christ, whether they believe in God, or indeed Christ himself. Those who reject his message of social morality, or fail to see it, or are misled by vain mystification, or refuse to love their fellow human beings and even want to kill them, do not live lives of Christ, and are not Christians.

Christ had taken religion right back to its origins when God **was** the people in a real sense, and only above them in an imaginary sense—that of being a totemic leader. God is really a comfort in distress when He is your concerned and compassionate neighbor. You both recognize it in having the same God. Man finds…

> …his identity, meaning and purpose, both as an individual and as a member of society in terms of a sacred world view.
>
> P Masterson

The sacred world view today exclusively means belief in a supernatural god, but it became it from the practicalities of tribal belief. Then the sacred world view was God, Nature and Society, in which Nature and Society were no less sacred than God, because, in practice, they **were** God. As long as the tribal culture was secure then God was. God was immanent in the tribe, is immanent in society. This world view rejects God as being transcendent, the core trouble with religion. Transcendence takes God out of the real world into the supernatural, into imagination. It makes a practical God into a figment of the mind.

Modern antichristians will argue the opposite, and claim Christ repeatedly spoke of a transcendental God. But Christ was, like anyone, bound by the convictions of his day, and spoke in the terms appropriate to his time, yet we have to distinguish between the conventions any thinker uses, and even what he seemed to think he meant, and the logical outcome of his principles and method. Despite speaking conventionally for an Essene, his teaching cast off conventional shackles, and showed the revolutionary way forward. He proclaimed a new society, a thoroughly unconventional global society, but in conventional terms, and he proclaimed love as his method. Even the antichrist, Paul, had to proclaim it too, to pretend to be a Christian, but dug its foundations away, and replaced it with more of what had gone before—mysticism and ritual.

Christ had removed the distinction between Jew and Greek. They can be understood as being antagonistic cultures, but even warring cultures could be reconciled in a new global culture, a new God, in which Jew and Greek undertook to love others as if they were God Himself. In establishing faith, Paul immediately asserted a new distinction between people, and a basis for new antagonism, with no practical value. Belief alienates man from man, the believers' tribe from the unbelievers' tribe, with nothing to alleviate the antagonism. Faith in practice replaces love as the prime purpose of Christianity turning it into antichristianity. Faith in Christ simply made Christ into a supernatural god with no substance behind him, because the substance just became a slogan. The faithful liked to talk the talk but refused to walk the walk, or, in most cases, never got to realise there

was more to Christ than faith anyway.

Now it is clear that supernatural gods were always a fancy, and they must now be abandoned and replaced by practical love. The antichristianity that Christianity became has to be ditched for secular Christianity. Christians must practise what Christ preached, and do what he did. They must be Christs not Christians! Christ proclaimed the kingdom of God, and he meant the kingdom of the real, practical God, the global society, achieved when people act as Christs. God is the least among us. He is our enemy, the type of people we hate most. Yet Christ said love them. He did not say love only the famous, the rich, and the arrogant, and aim to be like them. He said love the least, the poor and the humble, and aim to be like them. God is Everyman, and that means us. We treat fellow human beings like God.

Antichristians treat other human beings like the Devil. So, they are easy to detect. The transcendence of God is their mistake. They have been taken in by the attempts of professional Christians to make the transcendental God, the imaginary God, into an objective one, and in so doing they make it in their own image. But what realistically can the antichristian do, when they already hate their neighbor? No human can be perfect, but this is gross imperfection. They have to try. If they cannot love, then at least they must not hate, and especially must not act on their hatred. Even Christ had to take an initial step!

In practice, loving someone you do not know, is being kind to them, being concerned and caring. It positively is not harming them! It is being the Good Samaritan.

God as a metaphor for society does not have to be good. Societies wanted to be good, and so their concept of a god that stood for them was a good god. But societies can be bad, and a theological dualism makes perfect sense when god is seen as society. The god standing for a bad society is Ahriman, Satan. Only clergymen of the religion of the good god ever suggested that anyone prayed to the wicked god. No one sane wants society to collapse into disorder and chaos, but the image of it was an incentive for people to support their own god, and so the society it represents.

The trouble is that societies do indeed rise and fall, and fallen societies maintain the religion of society's god, even when its clergymen are among the most corrupt and the worst offenders in the society. Satanic society is too profitable for its elite to abandon it, so they still try to maintain it to their own advantage though most citizens suffer from their criminality. Loyalty to God is needed then by the corrupt classes even more than before.

The trouble is that the people are then being flagrantly conned, for they are preserving a rotten society that has to be cut down by the roots. The roots are the ordinary suffering people, and they cut down corrupt society by revolution. From, the outset, revolution in the bible is a gross sin against God, yet it is in fact only a

sin when society is good. It is a necessity when it is corrupt. Adam rebelled, the Tower of Babel was a threat to God, and Satan led the wicked angels in rebellion. All well and good providing that society is good, and so God is good, but, when society is wicked, God is wicked.

The Gnostics posed the question of whether the Jewish God was good or wicked, and the Cathars saw the Catholic religion as wicked. If people had been misled and God was wicked, the rebellion of Satan was justified. If God had lied to Adam about the fruit, then the Snake was right to tell him. And though the descendents of Noah who built the Tower of Babel were shown as rivalling God in building a tower to the sun, God just seems pevish or jealous about their skills. Was God good? If not rebellion is justified.

When society is seen in the context of God, the propaganda of the clergy that God is necessarily good is seen as false. The human instinct is to preserve society, but, when society gets unbearable, people will risk its destruction rather than tolerate perpetual injustice and suffering. Society ought never to fall to such levels, and Christ's doctrine of love, applied in practice should ensure it never does. But when wickedness already prevails, the prospects of the wicked taking to Christ's true doctrine are remote, and there might be no alternative but revolution. That indeed might have been Christ's own situation. He thought a revolution was needed to remove the wicked rulers of Judaea, the temple priesthood called Sadducees and their guardians, the Roman military.

The conscious realization that God is society makes it clearer to everyone where they stand, and what we are doing *vis-à-vis* God. Christ made it clear what we all must do subjectively to bring about an objective heaven, a kingdom of God on earth. The evolution of society shows he was right in simply advocating in practice the identity of God with society—no longer fractured but the whole of humanity once the imperial age was entered.

Then the first philosopher of the Enlightenment, Descartes, pointed to God as social humanity, but copped out to preserve a conventional supernatural god. Honestly presented, it again confirms Secular Christianity. We need to be Christs, each of us, to bring about the change. It means sacrificing our selves, our selfishness, for others.

The first Christians called themselves saints, perfectly holy men, those who acted like Christ. The developed Church told people all they needed to be Christians was faith, and to love God, but they were not **required** to love each other, and to prove they loved God by loving each other. These latter principles were what made Christs or saints. Faith only made Christians, and Christians are antichrists. Society demands that we be saints, that we be perfect, that we be Christs!

Christ's message was to every individual. It required a personal decision, personal thought, and commitment, personal acts of love of other people in society. Salvation was resurrection into a perfect world, but this world, an imperfect world

made perfect. How could it be? Because perfect people were resurrected. Salvation was of those who were perfect, and when everyone did as Christ told them and showed them, and became Christs themselves—were perfect—then so was the world! "But that is impossible", the thoughtless Christian protests. "Christ was God."

Quite so, but God incarnated as a man. He was a man. God did not incarnate as a God. He did not incarnate as half a God and half a man. He was a man! He was born of a woman, his mother. He always said he was a son of man, a humbling expression meaning he was indeed a man, born of a woman, a female man. He did no miracles, because men cannot do miracles. They were given to him by the gospel writers, mainly making some parables into events, and making metaphorical allusions into reality. God incarnated as a man so that He could show how He meant men to be, and to teach them directly, from His own lips as a man what He meant as a God.

No man, in an imperfect world, can be a perfect man. Christians think their idiot God does not understand that! They tell God it is impossible, so that they do not have to try. The incarnated God showed He was less than a perfect man—he was angry, sarcastic, had poor judgement of character, had little sense of humour doing such a serious task, was too single minded to marry, and called out in despair as he died. God incarnated was not a perfect man, and, in wanting human beings to be perfect, was not giving them an impossible task. They were to be Christs, not more perfect even than Christ.

Obviously God wanted people to be as perfect as they could be. God knows you cannot be more perfect! God as Christ tried to be a perfect man, but the nature of humanity meant a perfect man was less than perfect. Christ tried to be perfect, he wanted to be perfect, and that is what is expected of human beings. It was what Cathar Perfects tried to do. Christians burnt them to cinders for trying to do what Christians would not do themselves.

And who were Christians to say it was impossible in any case? Who was to be the judge of that? They tell us God is the judge, but Christians wanted to judge, and did to their own satisfaction, but that is not God's. They said being a Christ is impossible, but why do they think they can second guess God? Satan's agent, Paul gave them to believe that by some mystical faith in the body of Christ they were saved, with no reference to God, or with God obliged to rubber stamp the power of their faith.

God is allegedly almighty. He cannot be compelled by anything, let alone empty faith. How arrogant can you be to stand before your God and tell Him you are saved? God is the judge of your perfection as a Christ. **He** judged what you have put into it, whether you have seriously tried or just put on a façade. All you have to do is your best at the task He has given you. He knows when you have cynically done less than you could, but he knows that you cannot do better than you can. He knows what it is like being human! He is human!

Perfection can hardly come out of imperfection, but the attempt is what is important, what draws people closer to heaven, a perfect place. Once the gap is close enough, heaven and earth are indistinguishable. Conventional Christian belief is that the effort to be perfect is rewarded by salvation, and even those who have died, having met God's criterion, are resurrected into heaven with uncorruptible bodies, and eternal life. Such is the ancient Jewish teaching, derived from that of Persian religion, and the reason why the kingom is to come in earth as it is in heaven. At the End, there is no longer a distinction between them. In heaven, you who tried to be perfect in life, and never succeeded, but tried your best, will **be** perfect, for there are no problems, solutions, time or motion needed in heaven, the perfect world. You are simply joined together with God. Christian perfection is to be God!

But God is dead. Christian have ignored and rejected Him, while pretending to obey Him in every detail. Nothing should concern them on earth except living good lives of love of God, of other people and being humble and frugal, yet they love Mammon not God, they want to be rich and famous, and will kill each other for such selfish pleasures. God wanted them to make their efforts individually, for once everyone has destroyed the evil within them then evil is destroyed, but they built temples and agreed among themselves they were to respect bishops and pastors instead of ordinary people, even their enemies.

They were told directly by God that they served God by serving their fellow men, they loved Him by loving other human beings, but they parade ceremoniously into churches to flaunt a false love of God while plotting to exploit and kill Him in practice. They were not to tell others how to remove the motes from their eyes while they themselves had planks in theirs, and God was the judge of their success in removing their planks, not themselves. They were not to judge. God Judged!

Christ did not tell them to institute any theocracy. The universe is God's, the power is God's. He will institute a theocracy of His own when mankind does as God wants. Theocracy will happen when people are acting like Christs. It can never happen while they act like devils and worship the putrefying body of Satan they have appointed as God.

They choose to take an easy road to heaven, but the easy road is to hell, and Christ told them so. They believed Paul, so they do what Satan wants, they kill and torture in God's name. That is not God's will, and the name is a guise for Satan, it is not God. It should be clear to any human being that wilfully causing pain to others is not love. Pain is to warn people of injuries, it is to save them something worse, and to use it deliberately for torture is the sure way to hell. It is using natural kindness, God's kindness, for evil. There can be no salvation for torturers. Anyone who does it, or condones it, is wicked. It is the opposite of being a Christ, it is being a demon of hell.

Christians permit torture. God cannot endure it, so they killed Him. He is dead.

They want eternal life for themselves, and no life for anyone who does not worship the putrefying corpse they worship. God is dead, and now they have the problem of resurrecting Him, if salvation is what they really want.

The answer ought still to be clear. To turn to Christ!—the Christ they can read about in the gospels, without any professional bloodsucker standing over them. Christ told them what to do, and he showed them how to do it. They must turn from faith to love. They must have no excuse that love needs faith. Faith needs love. There can be no proper faith in God unless you do what he told you—love others, even your enemy! Don't make any excuse about not needing works. Love **is** works. Christ said he came to fulfil the law, and the works spoken of biblically means works of the law. The law is fulfilled when everyone is a Christ, when everyone is full of love for others. Then the law, the works of the law, are fulfilled. Works and law then are unnecessary, love having superseded them. So there is no antithesis between works and faith, when works means love.

There can be no waiting for God to return before they do it. Love is works, it is activity, it is deeds. It is not like faith. Faith is intrinsically passive. It is empty unless, as James, "the brother of the Lord" said, it is is filled by lovingkindness to others. Faith in God is shown by love of God, and He said that means love of people. Not just your relatives and best friends, nor just fellow Christians in the same church, but, even the least of them—even your enemies.

> As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me.

These are the christian God's own words, spoken from His own lips. He says clearly that any good or ill that you do to others, you do to God. So, love others, serve them, even the least of them—especially the least of them—and you serve God. Harm them and God knows, for you are doing it to Him. Love cannot be hidden, what good is love that no one knows about? Love has to be public, visible. Love cannot be abstract, it must be open, demonstrated by kindness and compassion. It is the only way to love God.

You cannot serve God like serving an idol, dressing it and feeding it. You cannot imagine God is a megalomaniac, constantly demanding praise and worship, sacraments, ceremony and ritual. These distract people from what is important. It is obvious, because true, that Christians were tricked into believing that all of these distractions meant something to God. God wants to be loved. He has told you how to do it—by imagining that everyone else in the world **is** God. So, love **them**. So why have Christians not done it? If you want to be saved treat even your enemies as if they were God. That is being perfect. That is being a Christ. The Cathar influence on Luther shows in his wholly correct imperative to Protestants:

> Become a Christ to your neighbor.

If faith helps you to do it, then faith can be salvific, but faith alone does not save and never did, according to God. If it did, then Christ need not have appeared at all. Good men have had faith since Abraham, if not before, so why did God have to appear to demonstrate the value of faith? Christ's distinctive message was to fulfil the law of Moses, God's commandments meant for people to use as a measure of righteousness. Christ brought a much easier measure of righteousness for people to understand. Love. When people love one another, society is better for everyone, and God's will is fulfilled.

God's will then is that people should live together harmoniously, not that they should fight over God's name, or whether they should pray five times a day or eat fish on Fridays. All of the minutiae of this faith and that are devilish distractions from the simple principle of love. Perfection is acting perfectly towards each other. Only people who do it satisfactorily in life, as God judges, can ever be saved, and all anyone can do is to try their best to be a Christ, and put their faith in God's merciful judgement.

Kierkegaard said faith was subjectivity. The Christian God is perceived only subjectively. Science is perceived objectively. Science has to be objective. It is systematic objectivity. It has to find what is true for all. It is communal observation, social observation. Subjectivity is solitary observation. Subjectivity is the antithesis of objectivity. It is solitary and selfish, in contrast to objectivity, which is social and sharing. So, science cannot see God, yet science is the social endeavour, and God is the solitary and so antisocial endeavour.

God banishes science, and science banishes God. Faith, being subjective, needs the negation of the objective to succeed. So, perpetually it negates the objective. Reality is what is agreed upon by several different observers. It is objective. Faith and God are subjective and therefore not part of reality. They negate reality.

The myth of Christ expresses dictums for social living, which being social, are objective. One was to love each other and another was to love God, and a third was that loving God was loving each other. These principles of Christ abolished the gap between God and man. They are objective principles. They are social principles. From them God is seen to be a metaphor for the whole of humanity, the whole of human society.

Faith is subjective, showing that faith is not part of these principles, or even compatible with them. It is solitary and selfish. Only by defining faith as the act of adopting and practising these principles can faith be rendered social and objective. Anyone who adopts and practises them can say they have faith and call themselves Christian without accepting a supernatural God. Practising these principles to the best you are able means you are being a Christ, and so you are a proper Christian, and the principles and practices of Christ then are faith. The principles **must** be practised.

Once the Christians' God had incarnated Himself to tell humanity how to behave

in the social world that helped lift them above the brutes, He must have thought His task was over. He could leave humanity to progress towards deity themselves. He meant to depart with a sense of achievement. Yet no sooner had Christ been crucified than a human agent of Satan—Satan in disguise—arrived to garble the message, and make it into its opposite. God wanted to show mankind how to succeed without Him, but the God of Paul was substituted, and no one noticed. Some followers of Christ tried to object, but were pushed aside. God became Satan and he instituted the Church.

Occasionally prophetic people see a little of the truth, but humanity, under the rule of the Devil, always kills its prophets.

Dietrich Bönhoffer saw that God never meant people to have to pray to appeal to Him to solve their problems. God had given us a brain for that, and our biggest problem, as social animals, was ourselves, and God gave us the solution to that—to love one another. Bönhoffer's idea of secular Christianity and religionless Christianity were to stop focusing on ritual, and start doing what Christ wanted us to, like helping the poor. Bönhoffer argued that the church was no longer needed to carry out Christ's wishes because everyone is capable of carrying out God's will without any greater help than his own will and power.

There is no point in asking God to do what he has equipped us to do ourselves. Love of others, universally adopted, banishes loneliness, despair, fear, selfishness, greed, it inspires forgiveness, compassion, generosity and charity. It banishes too the avaricious clergyman, a confidence trickster who pretends he has the way to God, or will bribe Him given the money! And Christians trust him! Do they think God is present in the garish church adverts these men display, or in the exploitative TV shows they produce to make fortunes out of naïvely false expectations and the despair they help to create.

God is found more easily than that. He has told you Himself that He is standing next to you in the subway and at the football match, sitting next to you in the theater and the cinema, working with you. He is even the terrorist trying to blow you up, and the robber jumping on you from the alley. God is Everyman. If you love a wayward child, you will try to find out what is causing their problem and help them. They have a problem with society and therefore society has their problem. You try to solve their problem, not add to it. That is the sense in which He meant people are children (*Mark* 10:14). God has told you to do it, and how, and doing it, you no longer need invite Him to break His own laws to help you in particular. God is not partisan. If you do not love Him, love everybody, you are assisting the Devil. God has told you. Now go away and do it. You no longer need Him.

William Blake was another prophetic figure. He is said by many to have been a mystic, seeking God, but, though Blake was a Christian, he had no regard for Churches. He saw that Christ had been hidden by Vada's Veil, the obfuscation and confusion of the Church with its worthless sacraments and ceremonies.

Mysticism is tolerated in Christianity because many Catholic Saints were mystics, but barely, because it is basically Gnostic, being founded on the Gnostic dualist idea that man is a battleground between the spirit and the flesh.

Spiritually, man is a part of God, a spark or misplaced atom aspiring to find its way to rejoin the supreme Good, God. The pleasures of the flesh tempt him to remain tied to the earth, the domain of a wicked God, Satan. The mystic disregards the body and even wants to discard it as a hindrance to the rise to the spiritual level, and union with God in the Godhead. So, earthly life becomes nothing to the mystic. He lives an extreme asceticism, enduring self inflicted suffering, the pain of which is a catharsis. He mortifies the body until symptoms of starvation and neglect begin to appear as an ecstatic state. In torturing his body, he goes through hell, hoping to rise then to heaven, and thinks the ecstasy, the symptoms of bodily breakdown from neglect, are its first glimpses.

Blake had little regard for the Christian God but he was a heretic, a Cathar or a Gnostic, in essence. Cathars sought God but considered it was a personal quest, and no business of anyone else. Naturally, they gave each other support and guidance, but they had no notion of magical sacraments, sacred prescriptions, or concern about what other people were doing to reach God, or not. Blake was similar, but he recognized the quest for God was for Man. Man was God.

> Thou art a Man, God is no more,
> Thine own humanity learn to adore.

Blake held that “less than All cannot satisfy Man”, and “the Desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite, and himself Infinite”. Blake did not regard God in a supernatural way. The quest for God was finding the Gnosis of it—the secret knowledge of it. The secret was that God **was** Man.

Blake opposed Christian hypocrisy that substituted church attendance for the proper objective of lifting Man towards God, and the orthodox mystical self denial in the material world as a way of getting to heaven. He opposed sanctimonious Christian apologies for tolerating injustice, suffering and evil, man’s exploitation of man, and Christians’ excusing it in prejudice:

> And all must love the human form,
> In heathen, Turk, or Jew;
> Where Mercy, Love, & Pity dwell
> There God is dwelling too.

Until Nietzsche towards a century later, no one criticized traditional Christian ethics so frankly. Blake was like Nietzsche too in hating the hypocritical morality of Christianity. Sexuality is not a matter of morality—what is immoral is not caring for any children that result—yet for Christians, by an historical accident, it

is uppermost in morals. Sexual restraint distorts man's real nature, for life is holy. The main heresy for Christians is any human's right to live a natural and enlightened life so long as they are not burdening others:

> Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed & govern'd their Passions, or have no Passions, but because they have cultivated their Understandings.

Nietzche spoke of a "power" (perhaps today what would be called *charisma*, originally a Christian term) that made men into overmen (*Übermenschen*, Christs), what put them on the way to being gods, "energy" gave them eternal delight for Blake. Jesus is venerated because he heralded man's joy, not because of any imaginary redemption—because he was a rebel against false Law, not because he was divine. In Blake, joy is what redeems:

> We are put on earth a little space,
> That we may learn to bear the beams of love.

To love in the way that lifts us towards God is to carry a burden, but once you learn to do it, it becomes a delight. The war between good and evil, for Blake, is a metaphorical struggle in man to resolve the opposites in life. Man never fell, to need redeeming, as the Christian myth maintains, so there is no need for a religion to do it, no original sin to be redeemed. The sense of original sin, that makes human nature sinful, is an invention of the Devil, the Creator God, Urizen. Blake saw Satan saying plainly "thou art worshipped by the Names divine, Jesus and Jehovah"!

Satan rules this world, "the Empire of nothing". Spectrous Chaos told mankind, "That human form you call divine is but a worm", meaning to us, a snake, Satan, then He calls God, "the Great Selfhood, Satan". Blake saw the God of the Christians to be Satan, the God of this world, not God. Satan is Self. God is Others. Satan is the solitary, the unsocial, the atavistic man. God is the communal, social, progressing man. For Blake, at the apocalypse, God appeared as hell which Jesus had to pass through before eternity began. Hell is this world. Blake devoted *Jerusalem* to "Jesus only", for Jesus was Christ and Christ was "Universal Humanity".

> I still & shall to Eternity Embrace Christianity and Adore him who is the Express image of God.

Contrary to Christ's messages, the Church has made the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular, into permanently antagonistic enemies. If the least of human beings is God, there can be no such division. The Christian thinks they have a Christian cloak donned or doffed accoring to the occasion. That is satanic.

You cannot be kind to people in church, and outside of it expel people from their land to build a golf course, or a used car lot, herd cattle for hamburgers or chop down forests for hardwood. You cannot invite God to bless America, then order the bombing of innocents, or even not innocents, in God's view uttered by His own lips. God is not an American. He is Everyman. Two faced behavior towards people is contrary to God's will. Yet Christians who do precisely this expect to be saved.

Who is responsible, but Paul? Christianity, Buber says, is dominated by Paulinism without love, for even Paul, to effect to be teaching what Christ taught, had to speak of Christian love while pressing the primacy of faith. Even Paul can be redeemed when love is put first instead of faith.

Christ died for humanity's sake. How can the Christian do that? Christ died for the love of humanity. He sacrificed himself for others, and he was their example, their role model. They had to love like him, even their enemies, and the love had to be public, had to be open, like a man openly and publicly nailed to a cross. Blake knew that every act of true kindness, not mere tokenism, was a personal sacrifice. You did not have to do it, but, like Christ, you chose to. Each little sacrifice was a little death. Christ's death on the cross did not have to be emulated literally by his disciples actually dying, but they had to give their lives nevertheless, dying little deaths, making small sacrifices in every act of lovingkindness undertaken. God knows loving others is not easy, especially loving your enemies, and requires genuine determination to do. It was a sacrifice, like Christ's but smaller. And that is how the Christians should die for humanity, like Christ. But they would not do it.

If true Christians had to be Christs, how then can they be resurrected? When being a Christ is the way Everyman is, then humanity is reborn into the new society that arises when the old satanic one dies and rots away.

> We behold as one, as one man all the universal family, and that one man we call Jesus Christ.
>
> William Blake

The universal family is the kingdom of God.

The Christian has to reject the mumbo distractions of serving the Devil, of the Church. God does not require service, He is not an idol. The stone sealing the tomb of Christ, that is the Church, has to be rolled aside. The seal must be broken to allow Christ's word to be heard again, his practical proclamations for living like God. The Church had sealed them up, and instead resurrected the ancient mysticism of primitive religion. Instead of driving Satan from human society, the Church set Him up as a false God, and worshipped him, not the true God. It encouraged Christians to do nothing but have faith and wait forever for the parousia of Christ, when they were supposed to be cultivating it within themselves, growing within themselves the true love of others that God desired.

The parousia can never come by waiting. It can never come because evil men decide it is time it should and set off holocausts of hatred. It depends on mutual activity, mutual love strengthening society because society is what saves us all from isolation and barbarity. When you all love each other, society **is** the kingdom of god, but there is no magical way to it. It requires effort, sacrifice, a multiplicty of tiny personal deaths, a willingness to lose a little more Self for others. You must do what Christ, God, taught you to do.

Instead Christians celebrate holy communion, separating themselves from others to worship an idol, and think it is enough—worse, what God wants! The Eschaton comes when people are Christs, not by sitting smugly secure in a worthless faith. Real faith recognises continuous acts of love towards others as the little deaths you each suffer, like Christ, for humanity to be resurrected from atavistic selfishness.

Hoping or praying for a return to Eden is doing nothing. It is wishful thinking. Eden is a paradise lost, but Christ showed the way to restore it, to resurrect it, to make human existence divine, through universal love of others. To reject it as impossible is to serve the Devil. It is not easy, but it is easier than being crucified, for our sacrifices are small, and often are immediately rewarding. The lost paradise is valueless to us. Remembering it is idle. The task in hand has to be addressed, not golden pasts. The task is to be perfect, as perfect as possible in an imperfect world. That will satisfy a gracious God. The task is to make little sacrifices for others a habit, to make it an instinct. That is what being a Christ is. That is being perfect.

Once it is done, the wicked God of the world will die. The good God, as Christ, will be resurrected from death in Everyman, for God is Everyman, and human society will be the kingdom of God. Every moment of peace, joy and delight you ever experienced will come together, every moment of gratitude for care and compassion, for relief that assistance is at hand, will be realized. It will not be perfect, but only as perfect as possible. Even then you shall have ascended to heaven, and man and God will sit on the same throne!

> All real living is meeting.
>
> Martin Buber

It is human nature to be responsible, that is, to consider the consequences for others of our words and deeds. It requires that we should be responsible too in our thinking, for we can think of the consequences of our words and deeds before we utter or do them respectively. The Zoroastrian religion's central tenet was to be pure in thought word and deed, a reflexion of our need, as social animals, to be responsible.

We have evolved as social animals, and cannot be human without the cultural influence of society, the conglomerate of our fellow humans around us. Society has given us the advantages that have taken us to our technological civilization,

and is the reason why we need to respect our fellow humans—to accept them as having as much right to the benefits of social living as we have, and indeed to benefit from our care and attention, just as we benefit from theirs.

Personality involves the sharing of personal life with other people, with mutual respect for one another's freedom and responsibility. Such qualities are what constitute those that categorize what is personal about us. We are caring and attentive to others—it is the Christian meaning of love. We value them and their contribution to our existence. The Christians call their God a personal God for just this reason—He is concerned about them! But truly God is society, not a supernatural phantom.

It is society—our fellow beings—that cares for us as we would like God to. When it is functioning properly, it succours, protects and saves us from danger and destitution, but when it fails, it does the opposite, allows us to be exploited, deprived of necessities and exposed to danger and poverty and even forced into it despite our best efforts. It happens when more powerful people treat weaker ones as nonhuman, as objects or things, or even as undesirable or evil, rather than as equal personalities with their own human persona as valuable as ourselves.

The central personal value of human beings as social beings is to value other people and to value ourselves as contributing to the good of others—the social good. That is why self abuse is wrong as well as abusing others, although self abuse is only criminal when others suffer as a consequence.

It is our responsibility to think of the consequences of our words and deeds. The authority for behaving in this way has nothing to do with any ultimate authority in the universe that prescribes in advance what is good and bad. What is good and bad is certainly prescribed in advance, but it is prescribed by our situation in life, by where we find ourselves as a result of a particular line of evolution. We are social animals, and it is that which prescribes our morality. That, not God's laws, is what is given, and what cannot be avoided if we hope to remain human. By ignoring other people's humanity, treating them badly or even killing them off, as if they were bacteria or blades of grass, we bring about the weakening and ultimate destruction of human society.

That is on the cards when we see certain signs, most importantly when government itself—those elected or appointed to rule us—ignore social necessities, ignore morality whether towards us or towards the people of other nations, in its decisions. When this disdain for human values descends to everyday society, we know it is not long to a collapse of society into chaos, and all that is likely to prevent it is a decline into authoritarianism and virtual slavery in a police state. The destruction of society is most often preceded by a decline in personal values and morals, a decline in our regard for each other!

Society as the basis for human morality is a much clearer and easily understood basis than God. It is real! It depends on mutual love. Even if you believe God is

real too, it is plain that God means us to live socially and with mutual respect and kindness. If everyone could be greedy, and selfish, and do just as they wanted without censure, civilization could not exist. Lying, thieving, fraud, sexual exploitation, and murdering, once they become commonplace will destroy all incentive for social living. If they are to go unpunished, then we might as well all join in. We must decline to the level of the liars, thieves, fraudsters, pimps, and murderers—effectively acting like solitary animals out only for themselves. It is the logic of the capitalist ethic, the victory of selfishness over lovingkindness. The co-operation essential to civilization cannot exist… civilization dies.

The main religions of the world consider human life as sacred, an awareness from early times that society is necessary for human life, but, at first, the society that mattered was purely local—the tribe. People beyond the pale did not matter as much as those within it, but that is no longer true. The human tribe is now world wide. John Donne urged us not to ask for whom the bell tolls. He was right, it tolls for us all. We have a common fate. Love of God is necessarily love of our neighbor, love of other people. No Christians, or few, seem today to comprehend this simple fact.

Christianity above all religions identifies humanity with God, the human person with a personal God. It is stated explicitly that the failure to love others—even the least among us—is to reject God. Even those who cannot escape their addiction to a supernatural father, cannot evade the plain fact that He, in the person of Christ, a man, made the love of others the requirement for salvation. Neglect society, neglect suffering people, or worse, add to their distress, and you are causing suffering to Him, God. He said it Himself in lucid words. For the believer in the supernatural, it is a profound metaphor, but as God is a personification of society in fact, it is a profound truth.

Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* as a parable of the attitude of the wealthy to the poor, then in 1843, yet its message has still to get through to Republicans and apparently a lot of Democrats in the USA.

> The poor seek food for their stomach, the rich stomach for their food.

The TV version, made in 1999 with Patrick Stewart as Scrooge perfectly illustrates this essay on personal values, and sociality. Scrooge was, of course, a miser and mean spirited. He had no personal values other than profit—self aggrandizement. But, with a bad stomach caused by indigestion, he has a series of dreams on Christmas Eve which wake him to Christmas day a changed man. Every Republican, banker and corporate boss who calls themselves Christian ought to make a point of watching it every time they feel their greed getting an advantage over them—most of the time probably! There is more to humanity than making money, but America has forgotten it.

It was Jesus himself—God!—who said that the test of worthiness for the kingdom

of heaven is feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless:

> As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me… As you did it not… you did it not unto me.
>
> *Matthew* 25:40, 46

Could God, in the human shape of Jesus, be clearer about how to be saved? He is clearly saying that every human being, however insignificant they seem to you, is actually God Himself! You Christians judge a man to be evil and kill him—a poor Afghan, a Vietnamese peasant, a Moslem Arab—then you are killing God. How then have you any claim to be saved? You rejected God's own word. Your personal values are as far from those that God taught as it is possible to be, yet you still expect Him to save you! He even said you ought not to judge others, lest you be judged. But you do not care. Why? Because you can be no Christian while ignoring what God told you. You can have as much faith as you like but you are not **being** a Christian! The apostle, Matthew, did not write:

> He who hates is born of God and knows God,

yet that is what most modern Christians seem to think. Mostly, they are taught they are saved because of their faith, and that is sufficient. They do not have to actually do anything. But Christ not faith is the measure of Christians. His behavior is recorded in the bible. For what purpose, if faith is all that is needed for salvation? The reason is that people were meant to live in a particular way to be a Christians. They were meant to live like Christ—thinking as he thought, teaching as he taught and doing what he did.

Yet throughout history, ever since the formulation of the false doctrine of faith as a magic charm, Christians have burnt and murdered other people, especially any of them who tried to live like Christ. What is the lesson of the crucifixion? Surely it is that we ought not to do it. We are not supposed to go around torturing people and cruelly killing them, because we are doing it to God, just as He said! Every person Christians kill, is God being crucified again. *Matthew* 25:40 said so. If they believe Christ is God, Christians cannot escape this conclusion.

No one could be considered a Christian who did not lead the life of Christ, like the Cathar Perfects. Christianity has an established tradition of poverty and giving from its earliest days, in anchorites, monks and nuns, and even Santa Claus. They were all trying to stick to the Essenic poverty principle of Christ, but were always marginalized by the power and wealth of mainstream clergy, bishops and popes. Since the poor are blessed, the churches should advocate poverty as the holy state, as they once did, and frugal living should be essential to Christian status, while personal aggrandizement should be condemned. Honor should come from service to society, not to personal financial gain. Constantly, the churches faced dissension by those who saw Christ being sidelined by the followers of Paul. Constantly, movements arose demanding a return to apostolic principles, but

always they became corrupted by the freeloaders.

That leads us to another weakness in Christianity—its alliance with the political right, not a new thing, but quite contrary to the evidence of the gospels and *Acts of the Apostles*. The church supports certain personal morals that promote social cohesion, such as honesty and refusing to allow divisions between couples by adultery, but it says nothing, or nothing very audible, about financial conspiracies, banking irresponsibility and corporate greed, or about the growing corruption of politicians, or about arbitrary imperialist wars that only the owners of huge corporations find justifiable by their raking in the war bucks.

Nor do they have anything much to say about international hypocrisy, double standards and the revival of torture by we supposedly civilized people, again to serve no one except the insatiable megarich. Why should ordinary people listen to the clergy spouting about sex, drugs and rock and roll, when they virtually ignore the bigger and grosser sins of the corporate bosses, and governments, not to mention the clergy themselves? If the churches really advocated that Christians should live according to the morality of Christ himself, there would be a lot more respect for them.

> It is very difficult to be a good Christian. Most Christians are a poor advertisement for their religion.
>
> M V C Jeffreys, Institute of Christian Education

Indeed, and Jeffreys also thought the Church made an error in getting involved in the controversy with science. By accepting that God explained whatever science did not, the greater the success of science, the less the space in truth for God and Christianity. Archbishop Temple also saw it as the greatest folly, and sensible Anglicans since classified science as a tool revealed by God for human use. Then the evangelicals took over! For the typical educated Anglican of old, religion had no quarrel with science.

It does not stop science having a quarrel with religion over the very virtue Christians admire about themselves most of all—their faith. As it stands, Christianity is built on faith, belief in incredible and untested fables. Science will not accept anything that is not thoroughly, even ultimately exhaustively, tested and shown to be true. It is an unbridgeable gulf. Christianity wants people to be credulous—to believe just what they are told. Science requires people to be skeptical—not to believe anything until it has been tested and proven.

Some eminent scientists like to simultaneously profess Christianity, but they can only do it by accepting two incompatible systems as being true at the same time. They must reserve a different compartment of their brain for their religion from that of their science, but others, equally and more eminent, cannot see why there should be some artificial line drawn to stop skeptical questions being asked of religious belief, or to permit unproven answers to them to be sufficient, when they are not elsewhere. There is no reason. The simultaneous belief in Christianity and

science is unreasonable, irrational. The credulous and skeptical approaches to life are immiscible.

Even though the Christian God of the gospels appeared on earth, acted in certain ways, gave his disciples lessons in how to live correctly, and related parables and maxims encapsulating his teaching, Christians escape the obligations this places upon them by pleading that God has to remake them first! This whole nonsense comes from Paul not from Christ. The message of Christ was that Christians remade humanity by their example, and their persistence—by their discipleship. The teachings of Christ were lessons in self help, not an encouragement by God to do nothing.

Christ's point was that his disciples should do it, then his supernatural father would approve. The psychology is plain—many people had to want the approval of a traditional God to do anything. That is the role of faith, but the desired effect is achieved by action, by deeds, by works! So, if you need to believe God has to approve as your motivation for doing as He said, then fine, Believe! But the outcome is that we all benefit from moral behavior whether God is smiling on it in approval or not.

And so the point for us is that we should **be** moral, not that we should pray God will make us moral. Belief in the supposed moral assistance of God is why Christians are all too often totally immoral. Whether you believe God exists and will help you or not, the onus is personal. If you believe in God and the gospels, you should realize that by appearing in the flesh, He has already helped you by teaching you what He understands by morality, and demonstrating the moral life Himself. He said we should do likewise, and the true believer must accept what he said, taught and did, then do as they were told! Excuses are satanic.

But the excuses come! Christians reply that human beings are too imperfect to make anything good of themselves. Human failings throughout history prove the necessity of God's help. It is a satanic excuse. God has actually done His bit. If He is to do more, then He could have done it at the outset, and saved everyone a lot earlier, and saved a great deal of grief. God is, Christians tell us, almighty, so He could make us all perfect at any time at all, but why should He? He has told us, if we are to believe the gospels, what we must do. Surely, He has a right to think that anyone calling themselves a Christian will read, take note and act on His teachings and example. But they do not! They read, take note and act on Paul's example!

Some Christians do it, and must be the ones the rest of Christianity call the "real Christians". Real Christians get on with being a Christ. Fake Christians boast about their faith. In 2000 years of the history of Christendom, God could have waved his wand, or raised His right hand, and transformed every one of the faithful. He has not done it, because he has done as much as any Christian can expect, given that we are supposed to have free will—shown the way! Yet they still expect Him to do everything. It seems they do not want free will. Surely they

must see that their expectation is nothing to do with any God, but is a trick of the trickster god—Satan. Or in simple psychological terms, most supposed Christians are fobbing off the difficult decision actually to be Christian—that is to be moral, and show some lovingkindness to other people, particularly the oppressed, the poor, and the meek.

Being moral is a social duty. Faith is empty of all meaning unless the faithful Christian displays their social duty to others. Do they know and understand Christ's most famous parable—the Good Samaritan? Brought up to date, it would be called the Good Arab, forty years ago, the Good Vietnamese, seventy years ago, the Good German or Japanese. God is our neighbor. God is any one of our fellow human beings. God is a personification of human society. God is even our enemy. It is meant to help us, not kill us. We make ourselves by building a sympathetic society, or we shall fail by not trying. For those who had not noticed, we are failing! There are questions to be asked about human failure to be humane, even to strangers, but the answers are social and environmental, not "spiritual", unless spiritual simply means realizing what is necessary and doing it!

People have evolved to live in small bands of less than 200, and in groups of less than ten such bands agglomerated in a tribe or village, but now we live in a world sized group. Our nature is to trust people with the same culture as ourselves. At one time that would have meant the 200, or at most the 2000, but now it is a whole nation, and it must become the whole world, if nation sized tribes are not to destroy us all, and the world too. Then, if any survive, they will be back to the 200 or so people who started out, back to the stone age.

The kingdom of heaven of *Matthew* can be realized in actuality by the continuation and growth of civilization as a caring society, and the chance of us spreading into the universe. God will not do either, we shall do it ourselves—reach for the stars or return to primitivism. We must overcome our suspicions and senseless hatred of others, and care for them and co-operate with them, or indulge in an orgy of unstoppable self destruction for which there is no grandstand seat in heaven unless you are on the international space station at the time. You will be thanking God you missed a quick and painful death, only to realize you face a slow and lonely one.

So forget divine grace except perhaps as a psychological prop. It is not the gratuitous mercy of a superbeing that will save us, but our own willingness to hear the message of the Good Samaritan, and help other people **as if they were God**. The fobbing off to God or Christ of our personal moral responsibility is the very reason we do not adapt to the modern social situation. Christians congratulate themselves on their faith and kindness to their friends and relatives while declaiming on the idleness of the poor, and the evilness of foreigners, and boasting of their own hard work. They pride themselves on their charity while disdaining the poor as workshy, and refusing to offer the hand of kindness to them. They should read again the attitude Christ, their God, avowed. They are hypocrites.

Many tell their children the story of the Good Samaritan while advocating the invasion and bombing of poor countries. Admittedly, not all Christians are as hypocritical as many US Protestants, but even the concerned ones are never heard as voices against their more odious coreligionists. It seems that none of them will deny that someone who professes Christianity is a Christian even though they do not measure up to Christ's standards. Bush and Blair witness to this truth! As long as people are encouraged to rely on the saving grace of God, they will not be addressing the question of what they **need to do** to save themselves.

"Of ourselves we can do nothing" is the Christian admission of defeat. Pauline Christianity is defeatism. It relies on the Christian theory of the existence of a supernatural God being true. What if they are wrong? Their theory of God saving them for their faith releases them from having to do their moral utmost in practice. All they have to do is satisfy themselves that they have shown God they have faith that He will save them, and He **will** save them, indeed He is honor bound to save them for their faith, most of them think!

Reliance on Gods and spirits is the human disease that might be fatal to the species. We have to cure ourself of worshiping the magnified image of ourselves as if it were an independent superpower. It is the delusion of a flowing oasis in the middle of the reality of a scorched desert that we have to work out how to cross safely by our own co-operative social efforts.

Pious people and many less pious opportunist believers have relied throughout history on the leap of faith, a belief that the cliff before them is only a narrow chasm easily leaped over with little or no effort. But they are invited take it on trust in the dark, without even seeing whether whether there is another side accessible with minimal effort, or it is just a dangerous cliff and a plunge into death. Perhaps they would have done better to be less gullible, more skeptical, and chosen more self effort to find a safer surer path. It is the safe path we have to find by eschewing the Christian invitation to take the leap of faith that has failed for 2000 years, and indeed many years before albeit with somewhat different myths attached.

And what is this salvific superpower that Christians put their faith in? We described it as a magnifed man, and Christians must concur because they accept that man and God have the same image. For Christians, God made man in His image, so the image of God is the image of man all right. The question is whether God or the man is the original, the primary image. God is hypothetical, but we have no doubt about the existence of humanity. Humanity, for Christians, is the problem. The problem about God is His existence.

It follows that God has been created in the image of man, not the reverse, and science supports this view. Scientists at the university of Chicago led by Nicholas Epley have shown that believers attribute their own opinions to God, and that their consideration of what is God's will corresponds to activity in regions of the brain that are active when they formulate their own views. When people

formulate what they infer are other people's views, different parts of the brain are activated, the ones that ought to be active when thinking about God's will, because God, in Christian theory, has His own personality. The work shows that everyone attributes their own opinion to God. Any perfect being, even God, cannot hold contradictory opinions simultaneously, so that He can agree with every one of His contrary worshippers. From another viewpoint, though, we have a clear explanation of why every believer thinks they know exactly what God thinks—He thinks whatever they do!

It is odd that, over the last 2000 years, Christians have claimed, and still claim, to be realistic, while they accuse atheists and humanists of being unrealistic. Thus the evidence of history is held to show that humans cannot improve themselves, yet in most of that time Christianity has dominated the western world. The evidence of history therefore indicts Christianity even if it also indicts the human species—Christianity is supposed to be the cure for sin!—yet Christians are blind to the failure of the nostrum they claim to be administering. Surely Christianity has proven it is no better than blood letting as a cure all, and has too often descended into blood letting anyway.

It is a philosophy of despair to keep applying the same poultice when it has repeatedly done nothing to relieve the symptoms, but Christians continue to tell nonbelievers that humanity has nothing but despair without God. The answer for Christians is fantasy—salvation is the cure for original sin, even though the agent of salvation is no more than their own fancy labeled as the "grace of God". In practice, it is "Christian love", something that so few of them apply themselves to practising, and something which needs no God to understand except as a metaphor for us all, for "love" or lovingkindness is necessary for society—it is care, compassion and help for others, especially when they are suffering and in need.

> The most obvious meaning of history is that every nation, culture and civilization brings destruction on itself by exceeding the bounds of creatureliness which God has set upon all human enterprises.
>
> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*

The bounds that "God has set"means the social necessities of humanity, what is needed to preserve the sociality that is our essence. They boil down to personal values, the value we place upon our relationships with other human beings who are in every important respect the same as us, and the value we hold important to remain true to it. This we must hold to, in our everyday existence, now, every minute, and forever, with allowance only for minor lapses. It is how we all live together as human beings, and resides in our inner selves as a consequence of our evolving as social animals.

We have also been endowed with thought, and can suppress and override our instincts. The gospel message was that we must not do it, leading to callousness and disdain for each other, yet it has become the principle of capital

accumulation. Christ warned against it, and told us how to avoid becoming indifferent to each other's plight, but Christ's modern disciples generally ignore it. The reason is the Christian has been encouraged to take only an incidental interest in this life, this temporary sojourn in a vale of tears, for an eternity of bliss is up for grabs. Their whole attention is on this dream. They chorus:

> The redemption of mankind lies beyond this world.

If that is true, what was the purpose of God coming to earth to show and tell them how they should behave in this sinful world? It makes a farce of their own God's mortal life and teaching. If it is true, every bit of love expended in this world is a waste of effort, and to no avail. The admonition of God is not that this fiction will save you if you cannot save yourself, it is that you should be making the effort to save yourself.

God is a large warning notice in the schoolroom of life saying, "Love one another, or you will destroy one another". There is no small print that adds, "but don't try too hard, for if you fail, I will save you instead". Paul, the apostle of Satan, added that. God is the human intuition of what is required for the preservation of human society, and that means humanity itself. Our intuition is that we must love one another, or suffer dire consequences—the breakdown of society and civilization as it is, and at some stage the breakdown will be final.

As long as Pauline Christianity influences us to think more of the fantasy of an afterlife and thereby less of the world we know and occupy, we cannot reckon with the human condition realistically, nor take our responsibilities seriously. Christians have to realize that God has not given them an opt out. Those who were meant to be a moral vanguard cower at the back shivering that they are not worthy, while boasting of the irrepressible faith that will save them. If they have the faith, why are they not at the front showing the moral way according to Christ's precepts. Why do they value riches when Christ could not have been more definite about the moral virtue of poverty? Even their dream of life after death is conditional on what they do in this life, yet they use faith as an excuse for avoiding good works!

To love others, even strangers, foreigners and enemies, brings salvation, not singing hymns, silent prayers and lighting candles. Christ, God incarnated as a man, Christians tell us, was unequivocal about it, yet they ignore God and pursue the do nothing faith of Paul. Faith and doing nothing is not an option. Even in Christian terms it is self defeat and deception, for Christ told them precisely what they had to do. By kidding themselves that faith was sufficient, that universal love was unnecessary, they condemn themselves. If people fail to preserve human society, humanity dies, and God dies with it, for God is human society.

It is quite impossible, however you look at it, for the Christian to retreat from the claims of this world into a mystical other world. They know, even in their own

beliefs, to pass through the Pearly Gates, they must meet the necessary conditions, conditions tested in the here and now. It is no coincidence that the conditions are the basis of a successful human society. The set of Christians beliefs can be condensed and summarised in the *Golden Rule*, a simple expression of the human empathy necessary for society to function.

> And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.
>
> *Luke* 6:31, Christian Version

> That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.
>
> *Talmud*, Jewish Version

> Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you.
>
> *The Farewell Sermon*, Islamic Version

> Never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self.
>
> *Mahabharata*, Hindu Version

> Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.
>
> *Analects*, Confucian Version

> Just as sorrow or pain is not desirable to you, so it is to all which breathe, exist, live or have any essence of life.
>
> *Acaranga Sutra*, Jain Version

To survive, society requires us to actively practice the Golden Rule that expresses out fundamental instinct to be merciful and helpful to other human beings. It simply says **treat other people well if you wish to be treated well yourself**. That is the purpose of society, and the purpose of religion is to propagate what is good for society:

Christ told Christians they had to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless, not feed the bankers and evict the poor. Yet where was the Christian protests over social injustice on a grand scale like the baling out of the megarich at the expense of the poor? The only realistic way to interpret the kingdom of God is that it is what we can achieve here on earth when Christians actually begin to do what God told them to do.

God plainly said it is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Christians have consistently tried to get round this crystal clear statement with all sorts of excuses and inventions, but their own God said it, and meant it. A camel cannot get through the eye of a needle. The message is unequivocal.

The kingdom of God is a human society of lovingkindness, a perfect human society. Rich men, by whatever means, have taken more than their fair share out of society, and God expects them, the Christian writings tell us, to give it to the poor. Successful people can get fulfilment from their success, and then double it

by giving what they have earned back to society. Christianity is a way of telling us all to think about, respect and help out other people when they need it. If we all do it, we all benefit. What is difficult about that?

It is simply our social instinct, the social instinct common to social animals, expressed verbally because we can use language. It was a rule of small scale early human societies, which became a rule of God when tribes adopted Gods to stand for them, to encapsulate tribal culture and offer a basis for enforcing it. Then the origin was lost in the allegory. Good for the tribe is God of the tribe.

Once, and still, Christians asked how atheists and humanists could be moral themselves, as they believed in no God to enforce it. Only fear of getting on the wrong side of God makes Christians moral, but infidels had nothing to make them good. Why then are atheists no less moral than Christians? Indeed, plenty of evidence shows Christians generally are less moral than atheists. Christians thought they had the source of morality on their side. That is wrong. The source of morality is the objective need of an instinct of care for others in a society, when animals, that in the wild solitary state would be competitors with each other, are to live co-operatively together.

The moral instinct is fundamental. It is religions that are derivative. They derive various expressions of moral laws as a codification of our natural behavior to be social. Religions are hypocritical in supporting an opportunistic system like capitalism based on an assumption of human selfishness as the motivating principle of life, despite the age old maxims of their holy books. Self aggrandizement and greed supplant the caring and sharing religions once supported.

It follows that religions have lost their social *raison d'etre* and should be abandoned unless congregations demand a restoration of their original principles, unless they begin again promoting human fellowship, genuinely and sincerely, and not merely exclusively but universally. The Universal Church is not at all universal, it is highly exclusive. Secular Christianity is the genuinely Universal Church, eschewing sacraments and ritual in favour of thoughts, words and deeds—living the life of Christ to the very best of anyone's ability, and that amounts to being kind.

The social purpose of Christianity is self evident but has been distorted by the emphasis of Pauline Christian bishops and ministers on rigmarole, for that is what keeps the churches and their ministers rich and influential. Christ, in modern Christian practice, is not treated as if his word counts as God's word. Christians believe in a Trinity of God, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, supposedly all equal but different aspects of God, but treat Paul, who has no claim other than his own even to be an apostle, as if he, not Christ, were God.

Few honest scholars demur from the view that Jesus was an Essene, their teachings being essentially the same, the notable differences being entirely

because Jesus thought the apocalypse—the Day of God's Visitation—was imminent whereas most Essenic writings expected it at some unspecified future date. Jesus was wrong. The apocalypse was not due then, and has still not happened. So, later Christians had to make changes to Jesus's reported words to match the reality.

Essenes were a highly social sect of Judaism who held their goods in common as the apostles did. They kept nothing significant in their own possession, believed in hard work for the common good, helped each other, orphans, widows, fallen women and the elderly, had lodging houses, hospitals, and had decided riches were sinful, so they called themselves the Poor.

It is hardly surprising that modern US Christians refuse to accept that Christ was an Essene, and overlook Christ's teaching in favour of Paul's. Christ and the Essenes to all intents and purposes were communists. American economic ideology goes completely against Christ's teachings, so Christ—God!—has to be sidelined. Americans have been indoctrinated that communism is evil, yet God was a communist in an earlier period. They claim to be God fearing, but ignore God in practice, and naturally ignore love in practice, except where it takes or ought to take no effort, loving one's relatives and best friends. The communist God, US Christians rejected, wanted them to love their enemies. That is too hard! So, they reject God for Paul. Paul said they were fine just having faith, and they took the easy option.

Since Paul, Christians have had almost two millennia to justify their revisions of Christ's social teaching. They convince themselves it is human to hate most other humans, but, with the help of the Holy Ghost and no effort on their own part, they will eventually learn how to love. The Holy Spirit is God again, or some aspect of Him able to change people's nature. They have lost the metaphorical meaning that it is the security people will feel in a society in which people **do act** towards each other with lovingkindness. It is the product of mutual love, not some catalyst of it, though it becomes self catalytic when people begin to help one another rather than doing them down. Love as empathy and assistance unites what were entirely separate and self reliant animals—they are united in the society they form in their joint purpose in forming it, co-operation to their mutal advantage. When Christians say that love unites people in God, God is a metaphor for society.

For the Christian, deflecting all their attention to their fantasy world somehow means they are better able to deal with the real world, though they have abandoned it in fact. Doing nothing except wallowing in the spiritual jacuzzi of faith solves social problems? That is the problem. It obviously solves nothing, but it is sufficient for most of two billion Christians.

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him, but I will maintain mine own ways

> before him.
>
> *Job* 13:15

If this insane trust in fantasy means society collapses, then we shall all be slain, and there will be no more ways for us to maintain before Him. The trust will have been misplaced.

Christians miss the point of the supposedly divine statements in the bible. They take them each separately and miss the big picture. Practical social advice dominates the big picture, yet they miss it entirely through their determination to find mysticism. They miss that personal implementation of the teachings are needed for salvation. Faith is merely to give confidence in the practical social teachings of Christ. It is a type of self hypnosis meant to stiffen resolve, but its psychological purpose has been subsumed by an overlaid fantastic delusion. Christians have made faith itself into a divine object which magically and effortlessly endows them with salvation.

> From one end of the bible to the other, salvation is social.
>
> M V C Jeffreys, Institute of Christian Education

Indeed, Christians are social up to a point. They make themselves into little self congratulatory tribes called congregations centered on a local temple called a church, where they pursue their own rituals with no concern for society at large, except to vote for the candidate their pastor recommends in his sermons. Of course, they are mainly friendly and helpful to most of the Christians with whom they share the church, but otherwise their principles amount to loyalty to city, state and nation, irrespective of how unspeakably unchristian their rullers are.

In workaday life and at these various levels, little of their Christianity shines. Christian children can buy hand guns and even machine guns, and it is an offence to their parents that anyone else in society who might feel threatened by the preponderance of deadly weapons in irresponsible hands should object. Their God, the biblical Christ, refused to carry a weapon, advocating passivity when struck, and urging people to turn the other cheek, defying the aggressor to continue to strike a defenceless man. In a society such as Christ envisaged, it would never happen. No one would strike a defenceless man once, let alone twice, but it requires the example of someone refusing to strike back to start it off.

How many US Christians would do it? Their leading lights are obsessed with revenge, a primitive emotion that Christ was trying to stamp out. God, if Christ is God, as Christians claim, was a pacifist, and practiced in His sojourn on earth what He had preached centuries before, according to the Jewish myth of Moses—thou shalt not murder. American Christians boast of the kill ratio—how many of the enemy is killed for every US soldier. Most of the enemy are, of course, innocents caught in the cross fire, a situation that arises because Americans always start wars in someone else's country, so the innocents are always the enemy. And this is the same America that calls itself a Christian

nation.

Christian congregations voted into power, for a second term, a Christian leader, the mindless joker called George W Bush, after he had spent billions of US tax dollars on the mass murder of a million Arabs… in revenge! Either these Christians do not understand what God is saying to them, or they do not consider Christ to be as important as they pretend. Their congregational sociability is just a veil they can hide behind, hoping that God does not notice what they have been up to, like an infant hiding behind its mother's skirts. In their little groups they define what it means to be a good Christian, with little or no reference to what their God told them. They decide good Christians are just like themselves, so they conclude they are all good Christians! That being so, it is the rest of the world that is wicked.

Most Christians make up the principles of their religion to suit themselves. They pick bits of Christ's teaching, but ignore most of it as being outdated, and unsuitable for modern life. They prefer a lot more of Paul, though Paul taught something utterly different from Christ, with only a little of the original practical teaching sprinkled here and there to be able to maintain the pretence of Christianity. Yes, Paul spoke of love, but emphasized faith, so that faith is what engages Christians today, not love—except of themselves!

They also like quite a lot of the primitive parts of the Jewish scriptures, though Christ had said his own teaching fulfilled the Jewish law, and elsewhere added that it had abrogated it. The Jewish law, in short, is irrelevant to Christians who follow Christ correctly. Otherwise they pick what they like from the opinions of their friends and relatives, from popular prejudice and from political propaganda, even when it is utterly contrary to what Christ was saying.

Needless to say, members of the church on the next block prefers a different collage of beliefs, but most agree children and madmen should have access to lethal weaponry because it was essential to pioneers 300 years ago fighting their way across the west, annihilating the native people of America so as to be able to take what belonged to them. So, the right to carry guns was enshrined in the constitution, and there it remains even though it is contrary to every principle and necessity of civilization, and contrary to God's own teaching. A gun is, after all, meant to kill people, yet murder is expressly forbidden by the God of these people. Is that not a little contrary? Is it not contrary to Christianity?

Of course it is, but these Christians are not followers of Christ, but followers of Paul, perhaps even followers of Satan, if we are to believe what they tell us about this other Christian God—the evil one! Satan, according to the Christian gospels is the tempter God, the one who tries to persuade them to sin. He even tried to persuade Christ to sin, but Christ turned down all his tempting offers. These stories are related to show Christians how they are supposed to react, but what do they actually do? They fall hook line and sinker for the temptations, and still think they are good Christians!

US Christians insist they need hand guns to protect themselves, yet their own God needed no weapons, and tried to show them why weapons were superfluous in a civilized world. Obviously, they have no real faith in their God. So, the faith they boast about is tinsel, it is decoration, it is cosmetic, meant to show to others how wonderful they are. They just cannot comprehend that once guns are made illegal there is no reason to have one. The same goes for riches. Christ was offered all the riches in the world, he was offered the world itself by the Devil, but refused. But Christians cannot accept it. They all want to be rich, at whatever cost it is to the earth, and others who live on it. God said the poor, not the rich, were blessed—they would be rewarded. Christ pointed out that birds and lilies had no more than Nature had endowed them, yet were dressed in more splendour than Solomon with all his riches. They were following their nature, and human beings should do the same—be civil to each other, be kind to each other, then we are all rich.

Christianity is incoherent, not least because most of its adherents do not follow Christ, and, for all their spouting, do not know the first thing about what he taught. They think he taught what Paul taught. They also seem not to appreciate there is a whole lot more to the world than their own church, and that it is our duty to understand it and treat it with compassion. Nor do they understand that to be a Christian they have to be like Christ, not like Tony Soprano or Tony Blair.

Christians call Christianity a communion. It means a fellowship, a community, and it is, not because it is meant to be distinct from society but because Christians are supposed to be role models for others in society to follow. People are not to be compelled to be social, but to be encouraged to be. Lovingkindness spreads by usage not by coercion, and there is no way it will spread when Christians put odious antisocial monsters into power, and tolerate a society in which social principles are actually frowned upon in favour of selfish ones.

It is more important that society should be moral than that it should be Christian, but Christians have seen their main duty as getting converts rather than getting people to be moral. Recruiting anyone and everyone has been their aim, and the local vicars and pastors love it because they are the benefiaries from the extra dollars on the platter. Congregations are cash cows for churches and their clergymen with ambitions of their own TV channel and trophy mistress.

If the shepherds are greedy, how can the sheep not be? Ministers vie with each other to get bigger congregations, and do not care how they do it, using grossly commercial and very unChrist like methods, and antichristian nonsense. They treat Christianity as a brand to be tailored to popular demand. Their congregations seem not to notice. They believe what they are told, instead of believing what they read, and they are blind to Christianity as a social framework for living peacefully and securely together.

Christians boast their uncritical discipleship, but they are not disciples of the biblical Christ, but merely of their own pick and mix of arbitrary teachings. All

they require is a set of behavior that other Christians will accept as adequate for them to profess Christianity. The criteria, though, are not Christ's own.

Of course, it is true that Christ's teaching is not always free from ambiguity when separate maxims and parables are compared. They have to taken in their historical context which is not always clear, and they have to be taken as a whole, by their overall significance, not picked apart, the way Christians and their theologians do.

The four gospels split into the three synoptic gospels, *Mark*, *Matthew* and *Luke*, and *John*, and modern Christians beyond Sunday school prefer *John*. It is a good reason for rejecting it. It is the closest to the conventional mystical concept of Christianity, but the synoptics are closer to the original Christ, both in time and teaching. The synoptics express the simplicity of Christ's original message, and are closer to the purity of our inate biological morality. They are better, therefore, than the works of John and Paul, the real founders of the Christian mysteries in which the original purer moral message was diluted by the religious approach popular in the Roman empire when Paul began to spread his hybrid brand of Christianity which became the Roman Church.

The synoptics are not mysterious, except in the bits added later, and they are not as pure and simple as they once were, through later interpolations to suit gentile Romans and their ambitious bishops, but the speeches of Christ are simple and to the point, offering social and moral standards for his disciples to live by. Much has been changed and omitted even in the synoptics, but we can still identify our natural instincts in many of their succinct sayings.

If you must believe that Christ is God, then you should take note of what he is saying where he is saying it most clearly, and not where it is hard to comprehend and even to read. You should have faith that the almighty being you worship can tell you what He means with clarity, and if it is not clear then it is a reason to think it has deliberately obscured to leave you vulnerable to the machinations of those who purport to explain it.

But belief in God as a superpower is unnecessary. We believe in these saying because they match what we feel internally, our fundamental moral evolution as social beings. If we accept the standards and attitudes of our social group, we accept them because we feel them to be right, but we ought not to feel they are right just because our peers accept them. Most of us feel instinctively it is right to help others and wrong to harm them. Christ's sayings make total sense to us without needing God. That is secular Christianity.

I believe religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy and endeavouring to make our fellow citizens happy. My own mind is my church, and to do good is my religion.

Thomas Paine

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