

P4 – Premises about Authority: Personal vs. Presumptuous

Dear: I've repeatedly tried to make the point that it's you who must decide. Actually, though, such advice was rather superfluous. ["Just like so much advice from a certain grandfather..." Child, behave!] What I mean, Dear, is that it's rather useless for me to say "it's you who must decide", because in reality, you don't have a choice: whatever you decide (even if it's NOT to make a decision or even if you REFUSE to make a decision), that's still your decision.

That fundamental concept, incidentally, is the essence of a philosophy called "existentialism", which I'll get to in later chapters. In a nutshell, it's the acceptance that certain things exist (such as you, your ideas, a universe that's oblivious to your "beliefs", etc.) plus the need for you to make decisions – so, get over it – and get on with it! And although I trust that the idea (that you MUST decide) is another one that's "totally obvious" to you, yet in this chapter, I want to try to guide you to look at the same idea from a different perspective, namely, viewed as a fundamental premiss with significant consequences.

Thus, just as consequences follow from your premiss that the universe is natural (or you might decide that it contains supernatural elements) and just as consequences follow from your fundamental premiss that the way to gain information about the universe is via the scientific method (or you might decide that you can gain information about it with "feelings", such as "listening to your heart"), consequences follow from your (necessary) decision about who has "the authority" (i.e., "who's in charge") to make SUBSEQUENT decisions. They're all subsequent decisions, because your first decision is the critical one, namely, whether you have authority to make all your decisions – or only the decision about who will make subsequent decisions.

Now, Dear, in total, the topic of who has authority (and how they obtain and maintain their authority) is huge, requiring consideration of a great number of "for instances". For instance (!), who's in charge at your house and does the president of the U.S. have authority to use weapons of mass destruction on a pre-emptive basis? In this chapter, therefore, I plan to severely limit consideration of the topic of "authority", focusing on what I'll refer to as "Personal vs. Presumptuous Authority".

Further, I plan to “sneak up on” the topic of authority, starting by comparing your experiences in Mormonism with the experiences that I wish you had received in humanism. Thus, again I must ask for your patience: eventually I’ll get to the points that I want to make about the consequences of your premiss about “who’s in charge”.

In earlier **P**-chapters, I started to try to explain what I mean when I walking and remember for “P”. For easier reference, here’s a repeat of what I review when I’m walking (but I’ll skip the “pirate stuff”):

Philosophy – the only serious philosophical question is how to stop laughing! We’re just tubes... so many tied in knots... without a purpose other than reproduction, following people rather than a few simple principles. Instead, follow principles, not people. Also, try to repay the world’s producers – aware that: “The only way to repay our debt to the past is to put the future in debt to ourselves.”

The priorities are: first premisses, then purposes – and then principles, priorities, and policies – and finally: plans, procedures, and practices (with perseverance). In contrast to all religions (which posit seemingly endless speculations about “the supernatural”), the scientific method has been found to generate a substantial number of premisses (or “useful working hypotheses”), such as the premiss that the universe is entirely natural and that knowledge of it can be gained by the scientific method!

Consistent with such premisses, the primary purpose is to help humanity progress; to help humanity, normally a person needs to survive; of the many ways to help humanity, top priority is to help intelligence expand; other purposes, principles, and priorities then follow, plus policies, plans, procedures, and practices, with the top-priority practice being to always use your brain as best you can.

In this chapter, to start toward examining premisses about who has “authority” and what principles (rather than people) you might want to follow, I’ll begin by trying to explain my meaning for more of the above, first by comparing some premisses, purposes, principles, polices, etc. adopted by “humanists” with those promoted in various religions, particularly Mormonism (because of your experiences). Then, I want to show you how the principal religions of our culture have horribly perverted the prime purpose (to help humanity) – because of the people’s fear, greed, and misplaced confidence in “authority” – and how humanists are trying to correct those terrible errors.

* Go to other chapters via

But before getting into all of that, let me show you some definitions of ‘humanist’ and ‘humanism’. For example, my copy of Webster’s dictionary (Second College Edition, 1979) gives for the definition of ‘humanist’:

1. a student of human nature and human affairs
2. a student of the humanities
3. an adherent of any system of humanism
4. [Humanist] a follower of Humanism.

More revealingly, my dictionary gives the following for the definition of ‘humanism’ [to which I’ve added the notes in “square brackets”]:

1. the quality of being human; human nature
2. any system of thought or action based on the nature, dignity, interests, and ideals of man; specifically, a modern nontheistic [i.e., godless] rationalist movement that holds that man is capable of self-fulfillment, ethical conduct, etc. without recourse to supernaturalism
3. the study of the humanities
4. [Humanism] the intellectual and cultural secular movement that stemmed from the study of classical [Greek and Roman] literature and culture during the Middle Ages and [that] was one of the factors giving rise to the Renaissance.

And maybe I should mention something else, in case you wonder about the word ‘secular’ (e.g., in the phrase “secular movement” in the above definition and in the term that you might have heard used by leaders of your Church, probably derisively and disdainfully, namely, “secular humanism”).

According to my dictionary, Catholic clerics during the Dark Ages introduced the word *saecularis* to mean “worldly, profane, heathen”, in turn derived from the Latin word *saeculum*, meaning “an age, generation”, and in turn possibly derived from the Indo-European base *sei* meaning “to scatter, sow”. The resulting primary uses for the word *secular* are now:

1. of or relating to worldly things as distinguished from things relating to church and religion; not sacred or religious; temporal; worldly...
2. living in the outside world and not bound by a monastic vow or rule...

Consistently, the meanings for *secularism* are given in my dictionary as

1. worldly spirit, views, or the like; especially, a system of doctrines and practices that disregards or rejects any form of religious faith and worship
2. the belief that religion and ecclesiastical affairs should not enter into the functions of the state, especially into public education.

If you then think that the word “humanism” needn’t be modified by the adjective “secular”, I would tend to agree, but I suppose it’s used, in part, because many religious people claim to be humanists (in the sense of being

“students of human nature and human affairs”), and therefore, perhaps it’s useful to distinguish “religious humanists” from “secular humanists”. As another alternative, my preference is to use the term “scientific humanists”, which to me means “students of human nature and human affairs who rely on the scientific method.”

Compared with relatively concise “dictionary definitions” of ‘humanism’, more revealing descriptions of humanists and humanism are available at many internet sites (which you can find by typing “humanist” or “humanism” in any good search engine). For example, on the web page for the Council for Secular Humanism (www.secularhumanism.org) you can find the following *Affirmations of Humanism*, written by Paul Kurtz and supported by many (scientific) humanists.

A Statement of Principles

- We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.
- We deplore efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to seek to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation.
- We believe that scientific discovery and technology can contribute to the betterment of human life.
- We believe in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities.
- We are committed to the principle of the separation of church and state.
- We cultivate the arts of negotiation and compromise as a means of resolving differences and achieving mutual understanding.
- We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance.
- We believe in supporting the disadvantaged and the handicapped so that they will be able to help themselves.
- We attempt to transcend divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and strive to work together for the common good of humanity.
- We want to protect and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species.
- We believe in enjoying life here and now and in developing our creative talents to their fullest.
- We believe in the cultivation of moral excellence.
- We respect the right to privacy. Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express their sexual preferences, to exercise reproductive freedom, to have access to comprehensive and informed health-care, and to die with dignity.

- We believe in the common moral decencies: altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility. Humanist ethics is amenable to critical, rational guidance. There are normative standards that we discover together. Moral principles are tested by their consequences.
- We are deeply concerned with the moral education of our children. We want to nourish reason and compassion.
- We are engaged by the arts no less than by the sciences.
- We are citizens of the universe and are excited by discoveries still to be made in the cosmos.
- We are skeptical of untested claims to knowledge, and we are open to novel ideas and seek new departures in our thinking.
- We affirm humanism as a realistic alternative to theologies of despair and ideologies of violence and as a source of rich personal significance and genuine satisfaction in the service to others.
- We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.
- We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings.

Let me immediately add, Dear, that I don't agree with all the points in the above "Statement of Principles" (of humanism). Thus, if my opinion had been solicited, I would have suggested (for example) the modifications of the following statements as shown [and for the reasons given in square brackets].

- We respect the right to privacy. Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, ~~to express their sexual preferences~~ [I've no desire to "encourage" people to express their sexual preference; of course I support "freedom of speech", but normally I'm not interested in hearing, seeing, or in any other way learning about anybody's sexual preferences!], to practice their sexual preferences in private, to exercise reproductive freedom, ~~to have access to comprehensive and informed health care~~ [that would enslave people to pay for other people's health care!], and to die with dignity.
- We affirm humanism as a realistic alternative to ~~theologies of despair and ideologies of violence~~ supernaturalism [few religions admit to being "theologies of despair and ideologies of violence"!] and as a source of rich personal significance and genuine satisfaction in the service to others.
- We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, ~~truth instead of ignorance~~ [as I'll try to show you in a later chapter (**T**), "truth" is a concept appropriate only for closed systems!], striving for scientific truth instead of accepting "revealed truth", joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness,

~~beauty instead of ugliness~~, [recall “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”!], ~~and~~ reason rather than blind faith ~~or irrationality~~, and [I would add, for reasons to be explained in later chapters – especially in **R** (dealing with Reasoning), **S** (dealing with Science), and **U** (dealing with Understanding)] reliable data and tested hypotheses over deductive reasoning from inadequately evaluated premisses.

And if you wonder why I went through those suggested modifications, Dear, it’s not because I’m particularly concerned about what I perceive to be inadequacies in these “Affirmations” written by Kurtz but to make the following points.

Dear: Not only is there no “dogma” in humanism; no one is automatically allotted any “authority”! Scientific humanists seem to be dogmatic about applying the scientific method, but even in this case, humanists would “ditch their dogma” about the scientific method if a better method of gaining knowledge were found – I presume by applying the scientific method! Also, humanists are willing to recognize (at least temporarily!) someone as an authority who demonstrates wisdom, knowledge, “people skills”, skill in applying the scientific method, and so on, but otherwise, humanists are commonly a bunch of skeptical individualists, united by the desire to help humanity, yet happily telling fake authorities to “Blow it out your ear!”

Specifically with respect to Kurtz’s “Statement of Principles” of humanism, I expect that most humanists would agree that generally he’s done a good job. But, Dear, if you chose to become a humanist and if you don’t like what he’s written, if you think humanism should be more or less than what he describes, then “go for it”: try to improve on what he wrote, maybe try to convince other humanists of your point of view (almost certainly there’ll be a “humanist organization” in whatever city you live in North America), and above all, practice what you preach. Stated differently, I strongly suspect that Kurtz would agree that his above-quoted production should be entitled not *Affirmations of Humanism* but something similar to *Proposed Affirmations for Humanists*; thereby, claiming no authority other than what experience has taught him.

For contrast to Kurtz’s “Statement of Principles” of humanism, Dear, now please reconsider the “Articles of Faith” of the Mormon Church that your parents required that you memorize and “internalize” before you became a

teenager. A copy is reproduced below, to which I've added the italics (to try to "catch your attention").¹

**THE ARTICLES OF *FAITH*
OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS**

1. We *believe* in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy *Ghost*.
2. We *believe* that men will be punished for their own *sins*, and not for Adam's transgression.
3. We *believe* that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by *obedience* to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.
4. We *believe* that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, *Faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of *sins*; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy *Ghost*.
5. We *believe* that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands *by those who are in authority*, to preach the Gospel and minister in the ordinances thereof.
6. We *believe* in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.
7. We *believe* in *the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth*.
8. We *believe* the Bible to be the word of God *as far as it is translated correctly*; we also *believe* the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.
9. We *believe* all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we *believe* that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.
10. We *believe* in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that *Christ will reign personally upon the earth*; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.
11. We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.
12. We *believe* in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in *obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law*.
13. We *believe* in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul – We *believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to*

¹ Copied from "the official website of the LDS Church at <http://www.lds.org/portal/site/LDSOrg>. As you know, Dear, Joseph Smith's "Articles of Faith" were written in 1842, in response to a newspaper editor's request for information about the Church. Their genesis seems to be earlier productions of "lists of principles" by Oliver Cowdery's in 1834, Joseph Young in 1836, Orson Pratt in 1840, and one by Orson Hyde, published earlier in 1842. Subsequently, the list as quoted above (containing slight modifications of Smith's original) has been regarded as "scripture" and included in the Mormon's *Pearl of Great Price*.

be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

Now, Dear, in spite of what you might expect, my plan is to delay detailed comments on the above “Articles of Faith”; in due course, in this and subsequent chapters, I’ll be commenting upon them. For now, let me just mention the following points:

- 1) That’s sure a lot of “beliefs”! If my counting is correct, the word ‘believe’ is repeated 15 times – and some entries contain multiple “beliefs” (e.g., “We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth”). It would be quite a challenge to examine the evidence supporting each belief, and then to adjust each, so it’s held only as strongly as relevant evidence warrants!
- 2) Before you became a teenager, before you entered “the age of discrimination”, your parents required that you affirm “belief” in “the supernatural” (e.g., in gods and ghosts and “the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth”). That’s quite a premiss to force a child to accept – under threat of losing parental love!
- 3) At present, our society and (as far as I know) all societies grant parents “authority” to indoctrinate their children in whatever “beliefs” the parents dictate. In turn, as given in the above “Articles of Faith”, the clerics of your Church claim “authority” over your parents “by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and minister in the ordinances thereof.” Thereby, “authority” is passed on in a chain of command, rather than, for example, gained via the scientific method.

Now, in “due course”, I hope that you’ll carefully consider all items in the above “Articles of Faith”, but actually, Dear, showing you any “Statement of Principles” (of humanism) or “Articles of Faith” (in your religion) is putting the cart before the horse. That’s what I remind myself with: *First premisses, then purposes – and then principles...* That is, Dear, after you’ve settled on your premisses, then the first question to ask about any human endeavor is: “What’s the objective?” or “What’s the purpose?”

Once the objective is clear, once the purpose is known, then formulating consistent principals, priorities, policies, plans, procedures, and practices are relatively easy – although, admittedly, reaching a consensus on details (such as wording) can be tedious (as I illustrated above in the case of humanism and as you can find if you investigate the history of the Mormon’s “Articles of Faith”). Consequently, more important than any of the principles (e.g., in the above “Statement of Principles” for humanists) and even more important than most (but not all) beliefs (e.g., those in the above “Articles of Faith” in your religion) would be a clear statement of the objective (or objectives).

In the above case of “Statement of Principles” written by Kurtz, however, he circumvented the step of separately identifying objectives by incorporating a “purpose” as the first item in his “principles”:

We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.

An editor, however, might recommend changing that statement to: “We are committed to applications of the scientific method to understand nature and to solve human problems.” Below, I’ll examine the objectives (or purposes) behind the “Articles of Faith” of your religion. Before doing so, however, I’d like to insert some general comments.

In general, humanists of course choose premisses different from those chosen by religious people (especially, the difference between the premiss that, respectively, nothing vs. something supernatural exists); then, correspondingly and consistently, they choose different objectives. Consequently, the chasm between humanists (or “naturalists” or “Brights”) and religionists (or “super naturalists” or “theists”, i.e., “god believers”) is huge – unlikely ever to be bridged. In particular and in contrast to all theists, humanists conclude, by themselves (i.e., on their own “authority”) that “the purpose of life” is the totally obvious goal (which an enormous quantity of data almost screams is “the purpose”), namely, to help humanity to continue to evolve. Meanwhile, essentially all religious people in our culture (be they Hindus, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Mormons, or whatever) accept their clerics’ claim (and the clerics’ associated “authority” to make such a claim) that the prime goal of humans is to serve some imagined God – whom the clerics just happen to represent and who, almost invariably, they just happen to “know” is in need of more money!

Thereby, humanists “part company” from all theists for three prime reasons: 1) different premisses (natural vs. supernatural), 2) choice of “prime goals” (help humanity vs. serve some god), and 3) choosing who has “authority” to define “the goal” (i.e., themselves or some one “in authority”, such as some “spiritual leader”) – which then can be viewed as another fundamental premiss (i.e., a premiss about who has authority to make subsequent decisions). And whereas in the past few chapters I’ve tried to show you some of the differences in some of the premisses and purposes of humanists vs. theists, now let me show you a little more about goals and then turn to the third difference listed above, namely, who has “authority” (or in G.W. Bush’s words, who is to be “the decider”).

Consider, then, still more about the choice of “goals” made by essentially all religious people in our culture. In both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT), you can see the claim by the Christian, Jewish, and Mormon clerics that the people’s prime goal is to “adore” God. As I indicated in the previous chapter and will show you more in subsequent chapters, the same “prime goal” is promoted by Islamic clerics, as given in the Koran (or Qur’an); in fact, it’s given even in the word ‘Islam’, itself, which means ‘surrender’ (to Allah). Let me show you a few more details.

In the OT, for example, the “prime goal” of “adoring” God is given as the first of the Ten Commandments, and in the NT (e.g., at *Matthew 22, 37*), the cleric’s Jesus responds to the question “Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law” with

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.
That is the greatest commandment. It comes first.

Actually, though, and as I written before, the cleric’s claim is a ruse: obviously the prime goal specified by the cleric for their followers is that the people are to obey as commanded (e.g., to love God). That is, the people are to OBEY – which really means: obey us, the cleric (which of course includes paying tithes). Consistently, the third “Article of Faith” in Mormonism is (with italics added):

We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.

Such “obedience” certainly seems like a “good deal” for the cleric, but actually, history shows that it only works for a limited time.

* Go to other chapters *via*

That is, history shows that only for a while (sometimes for as long as 1,000 years!) did most people in any culture “buy into” the idea that their prime purpose was to serve the clerics’ god(s). Thus (as I showed you a little in the “excursion” **Ix** and will show you more in **Yx**), although the Ancient Mesopotamians and the Ancient Egyptians “bought into” the goal of serving the clerics’ gods for hundreds of years, eventually the people revolted, leading to the world’s first, two, known revolutions (occurring in Mesopotamia in about 2,200 BCE and in Egypt in about 2,000 BCE). That is, eventually the people refused to accept the idea that their prime goal was to serve the gods (aka the clerics), revolted against the clerics, and overthrew their power structures. More power to the people! But then, as I’ll show you in **Yx**, a new breed of clerics soon corrupted the people’s purposes again.

As I’ll also sketch in **Yx**, similar happened again and again: the Persian abandoned their previous religion for Zoroastrianism, some Hebrew’s abandoned their personal gods for the Persian versions, some Jewish people abandoned the Persian gods for Christianity, other “pagans” abandoned their gods for Christianity or Mithraism (another form of Zoroastrianism), Arabs abandoned their “nature gods” for Muhammad’s version of Zoroastrianism, Christians (and Muslims) split into multiple sects, and so on, out through an including the three current branches of Mormonism. And through it all, the clerics kept scrambling, modifying their claims, but still always claiming “authority” to make their claims, and always but always trying to keep their collection plates full!

Yet, before trying to show you how the clerics, through it all, managed to continue to corrupt “the purpose”, let me mention something else, namely, that if one can trust the Bible (a highly dubious procedure!), perhaps the Ancient Hebrews were an exception: perhaps they continued to accept that the prime goal was to serve their god (Yahweh). Nonetheless (as I’ll show you in detail in **Qx** and **Yx**), even the Bible describes many instances when the Jews basically told the clerics to “blow it out your ears.” Maybe that’s why Moses (or, more likely, Ezra, under tutelage of Persian clerics) gave “a reason for the prime purpose” – which is an oxymoron if there ever was one, because any “prime purpose” must stand on its own!

This “reason for the prime purpose” is given in the OT, for example, at *Exodus 15, 26*, where God allegedly states (as allegedly reported by Moses):

If only you will obey the Lord your God, if you will do what is right in his eyes, if you will listen to his commands and keep all his statutes, then I will never bring upon you any of the sufferings which I brought on the Egyptians...

Thus, in this “covenant” (between “God” and the Ancient Hebrews), the prime purpose of the Jewish people (as prescribed by their clerics) was to avoid suffering (a not unreasonable goal for people!), but as you’ll soon see if you study the history of the Jews, the “God” (aka the clerics) definitely didn’t live up to “his” end of the bargain.

More generally and as I began to show you in **O2** (dealing with “Objectives of the Gods”), there are multiple problems with the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Mormon... clerics’ claim that the prime goal of people is to serve the clerics’ god. One obvious problem is that many people don’t want to be servants – or slaves: a general principle is that slavery isn’t the preferred way to promote the survival of either oneself or one’s family! But even for people who are so ignorant or so fearful of the gods that they accept that their prime goal is to serve the gods (or better, fearful of the imaginary, threatening gods of the clerics), then there’s the not insignificant problem of trying to determine what the gods really want!

In the early days of essentially every religion, the clerics maintained that primarily their gods (aka the clerics) want to be fat and happy, eat the best meat, have plenty of wine to drink, and to live in magnificent dwellings.² Thus, the Egyptian people worked the land and built temples and pyramids, the Babylonians worked the land and build temples and towers, the Jews tended their sheep, worked the land, and built their temple and synagogues, and so on, continuing through Christianity (think of the cathedrals), Islam (think of the mosques), Mormonism (think of the temples, churches, seminaries), etc. But as the clerics got fatter (and happier) living off the fat of the land, and the people got leaner (and angrier) feeding the clerics, people began to question if they were really serving the gods or just the clerics. Thereby, the question continuously arose (and continues to arise): What do the gods want?

² Dear: If you took the “excursion” **Ix**, then you might recall, from the genesis myth of the Babylonians, *The Enuma Elish* (see **Ix4**), that when the chief god, *Marduk*, made humans, he defined their purpose as follows: “Blood to blood I join, blood to bone I form an original thing; its name is Man; aboriginal man is mine in making. All his occupations are faithful service [to the gods]...”

Once people started asking that question, it caused major problems for the clerics of all religions. Thus, as I tried to show you in **O2** by quoting the principle “holy books” of our culture, it’s damn near impossible to determine the objectives of the god of the majority of clerics in our culture. Some gibberish is available that Yahweh (aka “Jehovah” aka “Allah” aka “just plain God”) wants people to reproduce, look after his garden, participate in his cheering section, make war on people peacefully living on their land, and so on, but except for some racists and other extremists, such objectives range between obvious to stupid to evil. Consequently and understandably, other clerics (such as the founder of Mormonism, almost certainly Sidney Rigdon) concluded “there is wisdom” in “God’s great and glorious purpose” – but it “remains with God”! What a cop out!

Besides, there is the stunning concept (described in different ways by Aristotle, Buddha, Confucius, Democritus, Epicurus, Pindar...) not only that humans will never know what the gods “want” but also that any “omnipotent, omniscient, omni-this-that-and-the-other thing couldn’t possibly “want” anything – and anyone who says otherwise is asking for trouble... from the gods... if there are any!

But the absence of any sensible objectives for their god(s) and even the “show stopper” that their god(s) couldn’t possibly want anything, didn’t stop the con-artist clerics. Never underestimate the cunning of competent con artists! Instead, they ignored the illogic of their pursuit, and not having a sensible objective to attribute to their god(s) that the people would easily “buy into”, the clerics chose to focus, instead, on identifying not the purpose of the gods but purposes for the people. Of course, foremost among these purposes for the people (as specified by the clerics) has always been to keep the clerics fat and happy (with their collection plates filled), but the clerics were slippery enough not to advertise that purpose!

Instead (and in addition to loving, fearing, believing, trusting, and so on, their god), the clerics of our culture latched onto the essence of their con game, which the people brought on themselves in conjunction with the world’s first two revolutions in Mesopotamia and Egypt, more than 4,000 years ago: the prime purpose of the people is to gain “eternal bliss in paradise”. That was a purpose that a huge number of people bought into with gusto – simultaneously putting power back in the hands of the clerics. As Volney said about that decision by the people: “Fatal mistake!”

As with any competent con artists, the clerics realized both that to “hook a mark” enticing bait is needed and that the most vulnerable “marks” are dishonest people who want more than they’ve earned. For example,

- Moses (or more likely, Ezra), who apparently was one of the most conservative of the clerical con artists, offered his followers (as described in the OT) a place to live and to raise their families, without so much suffering, in a “land flowing with milk and honey”.
- The original Christian con-artist cleric [not Jesus (for if he existed, reports suggest that he had little but scorn for organized religions) but “Saint” Paul] apparently decided it would be more enticing to offer (following the Ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian priests) not a “land flowing with milk and money” but “eternal bliss in paradise” – which especially “the dregs” of the Ancient Roman Empire grabbed with gusto.
- Then, not to be outdone by a bunch of Christian clerics, the original Muslim con artist (Muhammad, a trader by trade) saw how to offer more for less (as any good trader should!): he offered not only “eternal bliss in paradise” to a bunch of Arab illiterates but also spelled out some enticing details (enticing, at least, for men), e.g., 72 perpetual virgins to satisfy their sexual desires. How these “houris” would remain “perpetual virgins” is a detail with which Muhammad apparently never worried!
- And further, not to be outdone by either Christian or Muslim clerics, the original Mormon con artists (Joseph Smith, then followed by the perhaps equally competent con artist Brigham Young) offered to “the dregs” of American and European societies the added incentives of not only “eternal bliss in paradise” and not only as many women as men wanted, but also “eternal marriage”, a reassembly of families in paradise, and even their own personal “godships” of another world.

In all cases, however, if the people were to receive such “goodies” promised by the con-artist clerics, then they’d need to continue to love, fear, believe, trust, etc., the clerics’ god (aka the clerics) – and above all, keep those collection plates filled! What a con game, what a racket, what stupidity!³

³ Which makes me wonder: what will be next? For obvious reasons, prior con artists (“Saint” Paul, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, etc.) never mentioned anything about the price of gas in paradise, speed limits on its highways, how many cable television channels would be available, internet access speed, lighting for tennis courts, etc. So, Dear, should you want to start your own con game / religion, then...

And yes, Dear, I know only too well that many people have adopted some crazy ideas about “the purpose of life”. But, Dear, if you have any data that support suggestions that there’s any sensible purpose in life other than to help life continue and to progress, then please let me know. I’m not opposed to adopting some other hypothesis, if data support it and if its predictions are validated. If you become convinced that the purpose of life is something else (e.g., to write stupid stuff for your grandchildren, paint pretty pictures, write passionate poetry, make love, rob banks, make war, or even if you are convinced that the purpose of life is to serve Yahweh, Jesus, Allah, or whomever), then please show me the data that support your hypothesis and show me the predictions that follow from your hypothesis.

And yes, Dear, I know that many people claim that “the purpose of life” is to be happy. Such simplistic stuff is contained in the “official” Mormon document entitled “The Purpose of Life”, which I’ll get to in a later chapter.⁴ Specifically it states: “God, your Heavenly Father, has prepared a marvelous plan for your happiness.” But, Dear, such a purpose is “simplistic”, because as soon as such silliness “wears off”, then there’s the need to address the question: How can I be happy?

People can apparently “get happy” on heroin (or other drugs, such as Prozac) or living with the delusion that they’re headed for eternal bliss in paradise, but as I’ll be trying to show you, such “happiness” brings with it a great deal of pain. Besides that, as I tried to show you in an early chapter (in **H**, dealing with Happiness), happiness isn’t a sensible “goal”; it’s an emotion informing us that we’re making progress toward our goals. No matter your choice of goals (writing stupid stuff for your grandchildren, painting pretty pictures,... robbing banks, making war,...), if you make progress toward your goals, you’ll be happy! So chasing “the happiness goal” is simplistic: what’s needed is to identify sensible goals, especially your prime goals.

And so, Dear (and once again!), my summary statement re. goals is this. After spending years examining various goals and evaluating various hypotheses, the only hypothesis that I’ve found that succinctly summarizes an astounding amount of data and that has amazingly accurate predictive ability is the obvious one, which can be stated in many ways: the purpose of life is to live, the purpose of life is to continue to live, life is THE purpose,

⁴ Available at <http://www.mormon.org/learn/0,8672,792-1,00.html>.

the purpose of life is to help life continue, the purpose of life is to help life progress, the purpose of humans is to help humanity, the purpose of intelligent humans is to help intelligence continue and to expand, and so on, including my earlier summary: all people primarily pursue a trio of survival goals (survival of themselves, their “extended families”, and their values). In any such form, such is the prime goal of all humanists.

But again, Dear, if you can identify a better hypothesis (whose predictions have been validated), then I strongly urge you to take the next obvious steps: after you’ve adopted your premisses and chosen your purpose (or purposes), then develop consistent principles, policies and plans (in appropriate priorities), and then, apply consistent procedures and practices to promote your purposes. Please, Dear, never forget that order (which as I showed you, I remind myself with “P” when I’m walking); the *priorities are: first premisses, then purposes – and then principles, priorities, and policies – and finally: plans, procedures, and practices (with perseverance)*.

Thereby, Dear, if one “cuts to the chase”,⁵ then the following seems clear. For scientific humanists the essence is this: the major premisses are that the universe is natural, knowledge about it can be gained by the scientific method, and that there’s no higher “authority” than reality; the prime purpose of humans is to try to help humanity; and then principles, priorities, policies, etc. follow (e.g., as suggested in Kurtz’s “Statement of Principles”). In contrast, in all major religions of our culture (and in Mormonism) members adopt the major premisses (usually by childhood indoctrination) that “supernatural stuff” exists, that knowledge about such stuff can be gained by “listening to your heart” (or using some similar “proof-by-pleasure fallacy”), and that the clerics have “authority”; the prime purpose of members is for their soul to experience “eternal bliss in Heaven”; and to accomplish that objective, the principles, policies, etc. to be followed are those specified in some set of “beliefs”, such as the “Core Beliefs” of Catholicism, the “Five Pillars of Islam”, the Mormon’s “Articles of Faith”, and so on. What a huge difference, then, between “naturalists” and “supernaturalists”!

⁵ Dear: I didn’t know it, but <http://users.tinyonline.co.uk/gswithenbank/sayingssc.htm> informs the reader that “cut to the chase” is an expression (originally from J.P. McEvoy’s 1927 novel *Hollywood Girl*) that came from “the early days of Hollywood”, literally referring to “a cut from a dramatic scene to an action one (the *chase*).”

Yet, perhaps amazingly (but then, as I'll try to show you, understandably – and simultaneously, very sadly), most religious people adopt many of the same principles, policies, plans, procedures, and practices as humanists, but for the wrong purpose – based on different premisses. Stated differently, most religious people do “what’s right” – but for the wrong reason. And most unfortunately for humanity, many religious people also do “what’s wrong” – for the same wrong reason.

Thus, starting from the premisses that the universe is entirely natural and that information about it can be obtained via the scientific method, scientific humanists conclude that the purposes adopted by most religious people (e.g., to gain eternal life in some fictitious paradise) are somewhere between silly and stupid – as are many of the associated principles, policies, plans, procedures, and practices. But humanists also see that other of the principles, policies, plans, procedures, and practices adopted by most religious people are sound – in fact, so sound (because their source is not any religion but evolution) that humanists adopt some of them as their purposes! As a result, humanists jettison all the “supernatural crap” of all religions and simultaneously elevate some of the sound principles, policies, plans, procedures, and practices of most religions to the position of purposes!

Let me say that differently, in hopes that you can perceive my meaning in spite of my poor writing. Most religious people in our culture do try to help other people. They do so, however, not with the purpose of helping humanity – but to help themselves (to get into Heaven and stay out of Hell), which is not only egotistically selfish, it’s sick! Furthermore, in the past, still in the present, and unfortunately probably for a long time yet to come, many religious people don’t help, but hurt, other people (mutilating the genitals of boys and girls, burning “witches” at the stake, torturing and immolating “heretics”, forcing women into marriages, claiming that black people have “the mark of Cain”, tying explosives around their waists and blowing-up themselves and any nearby “infidels”, hijacking and then flying planes into the World Trade Center,...) all to help themselves (to get into Heaven and stay out of Hell).

Please, Dear, think more about the difference between humanists and theists: not only “cut to the chase”, but examine what each group is chasing – and why. Humanists try to help other humans, because data suggest that’s the prime purpose of life: to try to continue to evolve. On the other hand, most

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theists try to help other humans (well, at least those humans with similar “beliefs”!), because those “in authority”, the clerics, tell them it’s the ticket to get into Heaven and stay out of Hell. But then, Dear, think of what theists are thereby chasing: they claim to be “good”, to be “generous”, to be “kind” by helping others, but their real goal is to help themselves (to get into Heaven and stay out of Hell). They claim that their goal is to help others, but what they’re really pursuing is not the goal of helping others but to help themselves. That’s what’s known as ‘hypocrisy’.

And let me mention why I described the theists’ misidentification of their prime purpose as “understandable”. I expect that primitive people who took (and still take) “the leap of faith” to “believe” in the clerics’ God were apparently unable to make the more reasonable “leap of faith” to help and trust other humans – and I certainly expect that the clerics’ separate goal of free-loading on the people didn’t assist the people’s clarity of thought! In contrast and similar to most “social animals” (such as elephants and dolphins), people in the first tribes (which were little more than extended families) undoubtedly understood and practiced “kin altruism” (i.e., helping and trusting those who were closely related).

But as the tribes grew in size, the people couldn’t see that, in larger communities, “what goes around comes around”. They didn’t see that “indirect altruism” (helping and trusting strangers, without any direct payback) would nonetheless benefit them indirectly. So, under the clerics’ badgering, the people chose, instead, to seek direct benefits (for themselves) of helping other humans, i.e., they sought the alleged but direct payback of “eternal life.” But as Einstein said:

A man’s ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.

Thus, Dear, in the context of *first premisses, then purposes – and then principles, priorities, and policies – and finally: plans, procedures, and practices*”, most religions of our culture have “screwed-up” the order: most clerics of most religions of our culture promote the principles, policies, plans, practices, and procedures of helping others, with the purpose being to serve god (aka the clerics) – and thereby, with the purpose of getting the practitioner into Heaven and stay out of Hell (and for the clerics to keep their coffers filled).

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In my view, and in the view of all humanists, that's a horrible perversion of "the purpose": not only does it put the cart in front of the horse and not only is it the wrong cart, but this cart (which allegedly will carry religious people to their never-never land of a glorious eternal paradise) is a totally illusionary cart – a figment of unconstrained imagination. That is, Dear, in the opinion of humanists: the purpose is to help humanity; all the supernatural stuff is horse manure.

“But,” inquired a thoughtful grandchild (and ignoring the reference to horse manure), “what difference does it make? It leads to the same result: people helping other people. ‘All’s well that ends well’; ‘the end justifies the means’.”

No, child, that ain't so! The end doesn't automatically justify the means; the means are ends in themselves; therefore, one must evaluate which “end” is most important – the claimed “end” or the means used to achieve it. To see what I mean, please consider doing what I recommended and illustrated in earlier chapters, i.e., *Look at the Limits*.

A modern limiting case, an extreme case, is the case of “Islamic extremists”. Just as with all Christians and Mormons, a prime purpose adopted by all Muslims is to get into their imagined “eternal paradise”. As I'll show you in **Qx**, the “holy book” of Islam (the Koran or the Qur'an) instructs followers that one set of principles, policies, plans, procedures, and practices to accomplish the purpose of getting into “eternal paradise” is, basically, to be kind to other people (especially other Muslims, just as similar statements by Christians and Jews were restricted to helping other Christians and Jews, respectively). But for this same purpose of reaching paradise, other principles, policies, plans, procedures, and practices advocated in the Koran include killing “the infidels” (just as similar hideousness is promoted in the Bible and the Book of Mormon). Now, granted that Muhammad seems to have meant the specific “infidels” that were causing him so much trouble, ~1300 years ago in Arabia, but unfortunately for humanity, a substantial fraction of modern Islamic clerics ignore that possible limitation, instructing their followers that entrance to paradise is guaranteed by becoming “martyrs” for the “Jihad”, killing as many “infidels” as possible (just as Moses instructed his followers to murder the “unbelievers” who were peacefully living on their land, which is now claimed by Zionists).

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So, Dear, please never buy into the stupidity that “the end justifies the means.” As I’ll show you in later chapters (especially in the “excursions” **Qx**, **Ux**, and **Yx**), adopting such stupidity has led to horrors throughout history (horrors caused by Mormons, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and so on, back to the Ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians). If “the end” (the purpose) is stupid (such as gaining eternal bliss in paradise), then the “means” used to achieve “the end” can be (and have been) horrible. As Voltaire said, more than 200 years ago: “As long as people believe in absurdities they will continue to commit atrocities.”

“Grandfather!” objected a certain grandchild [and I know I’m in trouble when I’m called “grandfather” rather than “grampa”], “you’re barking up the wrong tree, you’re making a mountain out of a mole hill, and besides that, you’re the hypocrite. Both you and religious leaders preach ‘help others’. You criticize them for preaching that the purpose of helping others is to get into Heaven; you complain that such a purpose is selfish. But you’re guilty of the same: you preach that the reason to help others is the selfish objective of helping yourself (via “what goes around comes around” or “you reap what you sow”). You’re just preaching a different kind of ‘paradise’. Your problem is that you have a less developed imagination, unable to envision a Heavenly paradise!”

Good job, grandchild: not for mixing metaphors, but for not being intimidated by some authority figure – even some one so obviously deserving of respect as a certain... (☺). But otherwise, kid, you’re wrong. The same fundamental error is made by all religious people, an error that has led to uncountable horrors; it’s the decision – the fundamental premiss – about whom (or what) they accept as “authority”.

Let me pause to show you my dictionary’s definition of ‘authority’:

1. a) the power or right to give commands, enforce obedience, take action, or make final decisions; jurisdiction b) the position of one having such power [a person in *authority*]
2. such power as delegated to another; authorizations; warrant [he has my *authority* to do it]
3. power or influence resulting from knowledge, prestige, etc.
4. a) the citation of a writing, decision, etc. in support of an opinion, action, etc. b) the writing, etc., cited
5. reliability of a source or witness

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6. a) persons, etc. in government, having the power or right to enforce orders, laws, etc. b) a government agency that administers a project
7. a person with much knowledge or experience in some field, whose information or opinion is hence reliable; expert
8. self-assurance and expertness that comes with experience.

And importantly, let me add that my dictionary gives as synonyms for the word ‘authority’ the words ‘influence’ and ‘power’.

So, Dear, in a round-about-way of responding to your imagined complaint that my problem is an inadequate imagination, that helping others with the goal of getting into Heaven is quite acceptable, let me ask you: What authority do you recognize? Your imagined response to your grandfather is not from someone who recognizes a certain grandfather as “an authority” (at least, not on the subject of Heaven). The imagined complaint is from someone who has reached a conclusion about the existence of Heaven based on some other authority. What authority? Your own? Parents? Friends? Our culture? Political leaders? Church leaders? Some “holy books”? A vivid imagination?!

Dear: Please dig! Please uncover what it is that you are willing to accept as “authority” – because what or whom you recognize as *an authority* will at least *influence* you, and at worst, can gain *power* over you. When you were a child, you accepted your parents’ authority – well, at least you usually did! Their demands were some form of: “Do it or else!” That’s the nature of the child-parent relationship (sanctioned by evolution, by its value to the survival of the species), but do you recognize your parent’s authority in everything? In how you think?

When your mother recited to you the nursery rhyme about a cow jumping over the moon, you accepted it – but do you still accept that assessment of hers of the acrobatic agilities of female domestic bovines? Granted that she’s an authority in accounting, ballet, chemistry, designing Halloween costumes,... but do you recognize her as an authority for what happens to people after they die? Do tell! Do dig! What about your father? He’s a recognized authority in computational fluid dynamics, especially in modeling turbulence, but do you recognize his authority in describing how this universe was created? Really? Why?

Then there’s your grandparents. Your grandmother on my side is an authority on... damn near everything, but I’ll be damned if I’ll accept her

opinion about... [Ah, never mind.] And of course your other grandmother, too, is an authority in many matters (ballet, real estate, cooking,...) but is one of them providing details about paradise? Your other grandfather is recognized worldwide as an authority on chromatography, but if you want my opinion about his opinion about... [Okay, so you don't!] As for me: well, kid, believe it or not, I, too, am (or at least "was") recognized worldwide as an authority in my special field of science, but if your imagined response to my criticism of the concept of Heaven (because of its perversion of the prime goal of humans into a self-serving goal of getting into paradise) is anywhere near your opinion, then obviously you don't recognize my authority on such matters.

But, as I already wrote: good for you! I'm not asking you to recognize me as an authority on such matters. I'm asking you: What does it take for you to acknowledge somebody (or some thing) as an authority? Leaders of your church, perhaps? Recall Article 5 of "The Articles of Faith" of your church:

We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

Really? You "believe" that leaders of your church have "authority". Pray tell: given to them by whom?

And yes, Dear, of course I've heard the claimed answer to that last question. It's claimed that John the Baptist, himself, after being dead for ~1,800 years, popped back into existence, baptized Joseph Smith, and thereby gave him "authority". But then, even if that were true (and of course it's not: the mysterious baptizer was almost certainly Sidney Rigdon!), pray tell where did John the Baptist get his authority?

And yes, Dear, I know how the clerics' claim that Jesus addressed that question. It's given in the New Testament (NT) at *Mark 11, 27*, in the following alleged exchange between Jesus and some Jewish clerics:

They came once more to Jerusalem. And as he [Jesus] was walking in the temple court the chief priests, lawyers, and elders came to him and said, "by what authority are you acting like this? Who gave you authority to act in this way?" Jesus said to them "I have a question to ask you, too, and if you give me an answer, I will tell you by what authority I act. The baptism of John [the Baptist]: was it from God, or from men? Answer me." This set them arguing among themselves: "What shall we say? If we say, 'from God', he will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' Shall we

say, ‘from men’?’ – but they were afraid of the people, for all held that John was in fact a prophet. So they answered, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Then neither will I tell you by what authority I act.”

How’s that for a cop-out?! Not only is there no stated information about where John the Baptist got his authority (although the obvious answer is that he got his “authority” from the people – and they gave it to him because they bought into his con game!), there is also no information (at least in the above quotation) about where Jesus got his “authority”.

Yet, elsewhere in the New Testament (NT), there are claims about where the clerics’ Jesus got his “authority”, but trust me, Dear, you don’t want me to show you details, here. In the “excursions” **Qx** and **Yx**, I’ll devote multiple chapters to trying to show you details about how the clerics claim Jesus got his “authority” – and then the clerics claim that Jesus gave “authority” to the con-artist clerics! Nonetheless, let me show you the NT’s own summary of how the clerics’ claim that Jesus gained his authority.

This summary, claimed to be made by “the first Pope”, the “Apostle” Peter, appears at *Acts 2, 22*:

Men of Israel, listen to me: I speak of Jesus of Nazareth, a man singled out by God and made known to you through miracles, portents, and signs...

That is, Dear, all the stories about the miracles that Jesus performed and all the claims that Jesus fulfilled a bunch of OT “prophecies” is a part of the clerics’ con game to build the people’s “confidence” in the “authority” of Jesus (and in the legitimacy of the clerics’ con game).

Meanwhile, though, all the claimed miracles are just so much fluff: miracles (in the religious sense) can’t occur. As for all the “prophecies” that the clerics’ Jesus allegedly fulfilled, I’ll go through them later in detail (in **Qx** and **Yx**) to show you that they, too, are just more fluff. But in particular, let me mention one such “prophecy”, because Jesus, too, allegedly made reference to it (e.g., at *John 5, 46*):

If you believed Moses, you would believe what I [Jesus] tell you, for it was about me that he wrote.

As for what Jesus was allegedly referring to, it’s in the OT at *Deuteronomy 18, 15*, where Moses allegedly said:

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Then the Lord said to me [Moses]... “I will raise up for them a prophet like you, one of their own race, and I will put my words into his mouth. He shall convey all my commands to them, and if anyone does not listen to the words which he will speak in my name I will require satisfaction from him...”

But even if Moses did say anything similar to that (which is highly doubtful), and even if Moses were referring to Jesus (which is even more doubtful), it just leads to the obvious question: Where did Moses get his authority? And of course all Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Mormon clerics claim that Moses got his authority direct from God. But did he really?

If there's any “truth” in the Bible (which, again, is a highly dubious assumption), then first notice that the Bible states that the Hebrews who knew Moses didn't believe that he got his authority from any god. You can see this in the OT at, e.g., *Exodus 32, 1*, where the clerical authors claimed that the following occurred:

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain [where he allegedly received the Ten Commandments from God], they confronted Aaron [Moses' brother and his spokesman, especially when Moses started to stutter] and said to him, “Come, make us gods to go ahead of us. As for this fellow Moses, who brought us up from Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

From that I conclude that the people didn't buy the idea that Moses had authority from any god. If they had, they wouldn't have abandoned both Moses and his god just because Moses was allegedly up on the mountain for a few days, communicating with his god!

So, then how did Moses gain authority? That, too, is given in the OT, a few lines later (at *Exodus 32, 26*):

He [Moses] took his place at the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord's side? Come here to me”; and the Levites [the future Jewish priesthood] all rallied to him. He said to them, “These are the words of the Lord the God of Israel [and although there are no reports that God actually said these words, yet just as did Joseph Smith and Muhammad, Moses claimed that he spoke for God]: ‘Arm yourselves, each of you, with his sword. Go through the camp from gate to gate and back again. Each of you kill his brother, his friend, his neighbor.’” The Levites obeyed, and about three thousand of the people died that day.

Thus, Dear, see where Moses actually got his “authority”: by murdering his opponents (and thereby terrorizing his followers). The same has occurred

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for the original clerics of all the principal religions of our culture (and similarly, with spades, for Muhammad), as I'll show you in **Qx** and **Yx**.

So, Dear, I ask you again: What authority do you recognize? And of course I realize that essentially all of us will recognize any authority when we're forced to. Thus, most of us accept the authority of a parent who has the ability and willingness to physically or mentally punish us, a maniac who puts a gun to our heads, police with their weapons, a Moses or a Hitler who controls maniacal storm troopers armed with swords or machine guns, a madman politician such as the butcher-emperor "Saint" Constantine (who forced Christianity on the people of the Roman Empire) or the "Prophet" Muhammad (who forced Islam on the Arabs and surrounding nations). But, Dear, if you're not forced into at least temporarily granting authority to those who have the might to enforce "might makes right", then I ask again: What authority do you recognize?

I hope, Dear, that you give that question very serious thought. And in an attempt to influence your thoughts, let me mention three points that I consider critical. Not only are they at the core of what distinguishes humanists from theists; they're at the core of everyone's "very being".

First and foremost is to recognize that one of your fundamental premisses is to decide to whom you'll grant "authority" to make subsequent decisions for you. And yes, Dear, the existentialists are right: you **MUST** make the primary decision – but then, if your decision is to let other people make subsequent decisions for you, then simultaneously, you'll be granting them power over you: they will be the authorities; your job will be to obey! Thereby, religious people choose to be slaves ("thinking" it's their ticket to Heaven).

Second is to recognize the fundamental difference between humanists and "religionists" (or "theists"). Humanists recognize only the authority of the scientific method, which in turn relies on honest and open interpretations of reliable, reproducible data. It's upon such data that humanists base their judgments about purposes, principals, policies, etc. In contrast, religionists rely on, fundamentally, their feelings, whether these be "warm and fuzzy" (comfort, pleasure, love, thoughts of "eternal bliss in Heaven", whatever) or "cold and sharp" (pangs of guilt, fear of Hell, fear of ostracism, whatever).

In reality, however, of course humanists take a more pragmatic approach. They don't necessarily always return to original data (because digging through it can consume an enormous amount of time); instead, they rely on hypotheses that succinctly summarize a substantial quantity of relevant and reliable data, that have predictive capability, and whose predictions have never once failed to pass their experimental tests – plus they rely on people who have built a solid reputation studying relevant data and associated reliable hypothesis. Thus, stated more generally, humanists rely on the authority of the scientific method.

Not so for religious people. In the past (and still today in some Muslim countries), religious Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Mormons accepted the authority of those who wielded the worst weapons. Today, however, in most “western” and Muslim countries, religious people yield authority either to those who controlled their “indoctrination” when they were children or to those who in some other manner managed to capture their imagination. Thus, Dear, if you “believe” in God, “immortal souls”, “life-after-death”, and similar data-less speculations, if you accept the Mormon’s “Articles of Faith”, then you’ve granted the clerics authority – because your indoctrination was effective in capturing your imagination. You never got around to demanding: “Show me the data!”

And as I’ve urged you before, Dear (e.g., in **Ic**, dealing with “Constraining Ideas”), please be careful of people who manipulate and try to capture and control your imagination. Most purveyors of most products use advertisements to try to influence your imagination (e.g., with Madison Avenue stimulation of how much better you’ll “feel” if you buy certain products), most entertainment companies (from Disney to Hollywood studios) depend on stimulating your imagination (e.g., to imagine yourself as the hero or heroine they depict), most successful politicians are successful because of their ability to manipulate your imagination (e.g., to imagine the bounties you’ll receive if they’re elected and the troubles that will result if they’re defeated), and all the principal religions of our culture attempt to capture and control your imagination (e.g., imagining what a wonderful time you’ll have, after your dead, if you just “believe”). Be careful, Dear, because whoever controls your imagination thereby controls you.

And therefore, Dear, my third and final point is to encourage you to ask yourself: Do you recognize the scientific method as your final authority or have you granted authority to someone who has captured and controls your

imagination? I hope that you'll think hard about answering that question for yourself, and to try to stimulate to do so, please consider the following quotations – carefully [to which I've added a couple of notes].

The highest duty is to respect authority. (Pope Leo XIII) [but what “authority”?!]

Heaven [or “The heavens”] and Earth are older than the temples, and older than the Scriptures, and whether we realize it or not, they hold more authority. (Eden Ahbez)

In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth that humble reasoning of a single individual. (Galileo Galilei)

Good intentions will always be pleaded for every assumption of authority. It is hardly too strong to say that the [American] Constitution was made to guard the people against the dangers of good intentions. There are men in all ages who mean to govern well, but they mean to govern. They promise to be good masters, but they mean to be masters. (Noah Webster)

Every great advance in natural knowledge has involved the absolute rejection of authority. (Thomas Huxley)

Does it follow that I reject all authority? Perish the thought. In the matter of boots, I defer to the authority of the boot-maker. (Mikhail Bakunin)

Authority is not a quality one person ‘has’, in the sense that he has property or physical qualities. Authority refers to an interpersonal relation in which one person looks upon another as somebody superior to him. (Erich Fromm)

Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence. (Charles De Gaulle)

Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth... As punishment for my contempt for authority, Fate has made me an authority myself. (Albert Einstein)

An alternative (to describing the recommendation to use the scientific method as the sole basis of authority) is to say: rely on experience.

And as alternative to your being your own authority to make all your decisions (guided by your own experiences using the scientific method), do you really want to grant such authority to a bunch of lame-brained and/or con-artist clerics? The lame-brained ones are those who are convinced that the worldview concocted by savages, continuing on through to the Ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians, is the best available scientific model of the universe! Meanwhile, the con-artist clerics don't really give a damn about

the reliability of their science, just so long as they can continue to fleece the public. And what an astounding ruse it is!

Please, Dear, think of the nerve of the con-artist clerics (all of them, not just Mormon clerics): they presume to speak for God! Talk about ‘presumption’! In the dictionary that comes with the Mac operating system of my computer, ‘presumption’ is defined as follows:

1. an act or instance of taking something to be true or adopting a particular attitude toward something, esp. at the start of a chain of argument or action: *the presumption of guilt has changed to a presumption of innocence.*
 - an idea that is taken to be true, and often used as the basis for other ideas, although it is not known for certain : *underlying presumptions about human nature.*
 - chiefly Law an attitude adopted in law or as a matter of policy toward an action or proposal in the absence of acceptable reasons to the contrary: *the planning policy shows a general presumption in favor of development.*
2. behavior perceived as arrogant, disrespectful, and transgressing the limits of what is permitted or appropriate: *he lifted her off the ground and she was enraged at his presumption.*

Relative to the clerics’ presuming to speak for God, the above definition #2 is “right on”: *behavior perceived as arrogant, disrespectful, and transgressing the limits of what is permitted or appropriate!* If the clerics really thought that their God existed (i.e., rather than just use the ideas as the basis of their con games), you’d think (or at least I think!) that they’d be scared not only “as Hell” but also “of Hell”, because of their presumptuousness to speak for God!

But unsurprisingly, the vast majority of the clerics of the world has always adopted a protective cover: they claim not to speak for their gods but “merely” repeat the “words” of their gods (as given in their “holy books”) – “like parrots, on a dead branch of knowledge, endlessly repeating the same old lines.” Most clerics probably have been and continue to be too dumb (or indoctrinated) to realize that they repeat absurdities. And even the few clerics (typically the clerical leaders), who have been and who now are fairly certain that it’s all a con game (but enjoy the privileges of the game!) are usually careful not to claim that they’re speaking for God – just in case HE really does exist!

Exceptions occur in Mormonism. Thus, as I'll show you with some examples in later chapters, the President (or "living prophet") of your Church (who collects at least million dollars per year for his expenses alone!) does claim to speak for God – but he's careful to make it a group decision (i.e., made by "the Quorum of Twelve Apostles"). In fact, even the first prophet (or "profit") of Mormonism, Joseph Smith seems to have been an exception. To explain what I mean, I don't want to go into a lot of details, here (I'll do that in **Qx** and **Yx**), but let me at least mention a few details, so that maybe you'll gain at least get a hint of my meaning.

The essence is this. Most organized religions were created by people (their "profits") who had serious psychological problems, complete with hearing voices in their heads, voices that they probably concluded were communications from their god or gods. Illustrations include Jesus (if he existed, who reportedly was judged by his mother and brother to be "possessed"), "Saint" Paul (essentially certainly an epileptic), Muhammad (described by his contemporaries, as reported in the Koran, as a "mad poet"), and the almost-certain founder of Mormonism, Sidney Rigdon (who suffered head trauma as a child). Joseph Smith, however, seems to have been an exception.

Smith was astoundingly superstitious and poorly educated, but his father trained him to be a con artist – and he excelled! But being so superstitious, he then apparently worried that he was headed for Hell (for claiming that he could speak for God). Yet, as wily as he was, he found a way around it: I assume as a "defense mechanism", he decided that Hell wasn't such a bad place, after all! Thus, in her *Autobiography*, Helen Whitney (one of Smith's many wives, whom he "wed and bed" when she was 14) wrote:

He [Joseph Smith, Jr.] said, "Let me be resurrected with the Saints, whether I ascend to Heaven or descend to Hell, we will turn the devils out of doors and make a Heaven out of it."

That's quite a suggestion: that the members of his church ("the Saints") were headed for Hell! (For some strange reason, it hasn't been included as one the "Articles of Faith" of the Mormon Church!) Additionally, as reported in the 7 June 1844 issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, the press that Smith ordered destroyed, leading to his arrest and death), Smith stated:

Hell is by no means the place that this world of fools suppose it to be, but on the contrary, it is quite an agreeable place....

Thereby, if those statements accurately reflect Smith's thoughts, he managed to con even himself!

But that aside set aside, Dear, let me return to the need for you to face your existential dilemma: you MUST decide (because you can't avoid it!) who will make additional decisions for you (you or someone whom you grant authority to do so). A choice for you is as given in the "running title" of this chapter: *Personal vs. Presumptuous Authority*.

That is, you can choose to continue to be "the decider" in your life (beyond your first decision about who will make subsequent decisions) or you can choose to grant authority for subsequent decisions to someone presumptuous enough to claim such authority over you – maybe even presumptuous enough to claim to speak for God, whether the person is careful enough to claim only to repeat the words of God as "revealed" by some "profit" and reported in some "holy book" or who (similar to Moses, Jesus, "Saint" Paul, Muhammad, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Jim Jones, Pat Robertson, Warren Jeffs...) is crazy enough, brazen enough, presumptuous enough to claim that he relays messages directly from God.

The consequences to you of those last two choices are significant.

- If you chose to grant authority to someone who claims to speak for God (a Jim Jones, Pat Robertson, Warren Jeffs, or similar, and especially some radical Islamic clerics), then I'm afraid you're "a goner": you'll obey whatever the dictator says, out to an including committing suicide and murder.
- If you chose to grant authority to those who claim only to convey the words of God (however those words are alleged to have been revealed), then I'm sorry to say that, almost certainly, your life will be pretty much "lost". Thus, if they quote some "gospel" that says Blacks have "the curse of Cain", that masturbation or homosexuality or abortion or contraceptives or whatever is "an abomination before the Lord", then you'll "toe the line": you'll do as the authorities dictate.

And because of your experiences, Dear, let me try to hammer the point home by repeating from **M3** (dealing with “Muddled Moralities”) what’s recorded in the Bible, allegedly reporting God’s own words.

Thus, from *Jeremiah 8, 8; Jeremiah 14, 14; & Jeremiah 23, 16 & 32* [to which I’ve added the notes and the italics] there is the following.

How can you say, “We are wise, we have the law of the Lord” when *scribes with their lying pens have falsified it?* The wise are put to shame, they are dismayed and have lost their wits... *Prophets and priests are frauds*, every one of them... *The prophets are prophesying lies in my name.* I [God] have *not* sent them; I have given them no charge; I have not spoken to them. The prophets offer them [the people] false visions, worthless augury, and their own deluding fancies... Do not listen to what the prophets say [such as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, et al.] who buoy you up with false hopes; the vision they report springs from their own imagination, it is not from the mouth of the Lord... It was not I who sent them or commissioned them... This is the very word of the Lord.”

So then, Dear, how can you give authority to any clerics who claim to repeat “the words of the Lord” as relayed by any prophets, when in the above, God allegedly says that all the prophets are liars – of course including the prophet Jeremiah, which meant that he was lying too! Duh.

By the way, Dear, in a later chapter (in **R**, dealing with Reason), I’ll try to show you how to get out of such logical traps, this one called “the liar’s paradox”, which in essence says: “What I’m saying is a lie.” In the Bible, “Saint” Paul’s use of “the liar’s paradox” is notorious, one example being the prophecy that “where there are prophecies they will cease”. Duh. In outline, the method to get out of such logical traps is to see that there is no “paradox”, because such statements actually contain no information. For example, as applied to “the liar’s paradox” that appears as Article 8 of the “Articles of Faith” of Mormonism (specifically, “we believe the Bible to be the word of God *as far as it is translated correctly*”), you can see that, without providing information on what is translated incorrectly, the statement contains no information: most of us already accepted the idea that statements that aren’t correct are incorrect!

In contrast, some passages in the Bible do contain some information – and good advice as well! Examples are at *Ecclesiastics 32, 23* and *Ecclesiastics 37, 13*:

* Go to other chapters *via*

Whatever you are doing, rely on yourself, for this, too, is a way of keeping the commandments... [T]rust your own judgment, for it is your most reliable counselor.

But then, that means you're back where you started: you must make your own decision about who will make subsequent decisions! And I'm sorry, Dear, but I can't make the decision for you. It's your problem; it's your life; it's your decision; the result will be another of your fundamental premisses.

Of course I'd like to help. Fact is, if I had authority (☺) over you comparable to your parents, then rather than forcing you to adopt the Mormon "Articles of Faith", I would have encouraged you to adopt something similar to the following, which might be called a humanist's "Articles of Faith" (or better, "a humanist's premisses"):

I exist, my thoughts exist, there exists a reality external to my mind that's entirely natural, about which knowledge can be gained by the scientific method and above which I accept no higher authority.

Yet I do hope, if for no other reason than for the sake of my genes (!), that the choice you make contains the following two ingredients: 1) to refuse to accept anyone's imagination (or even your own imagination) as authority over your mind, and 2) to accept no higher authority over your life than the authority demanded by Mother Nature, i.e., by reality.

And though I don't think I can help you further with making your decision, Dear, I can offer you what I'm sure are two pieces of good advice. One is to recommend that you read the article entitled *The Meaning of Life...* by the "professional philosopher, now well past his allotted years of there-score-and ten", Raymond D. Bradley.⁶ His summary statement is:

No gods are needed to give our lives meaning. No future life is needed to give meaning to our present life. We ourselves can choose to give our lives meaning, purpose, and value right here and now.

And my second piece of good advice is this: before you tie yourself in a knot with your existential dilemma, trying to decide to whom you'll grant authority to make subsequent decisions in your life, get some exercise!

⁶ Available at <http://www.secweb.org/index.aspx?action=viewAsset&id=745>.