

P9 – Problems Religions Cause Societies

Dear: Moving on to problems religions cause societies, I should first acknowledge, once again, that religions don't cause all social ills. Even if all organized religions were eliminated (or maybe I should say, more hopefully, “even when all organized religions are eliminated”), freeing humanity from a curse that has continued for thousands of years, I'm sure that it'll still be a struggle to find social justice and to achieve peace and prosperity. Yet, my “assignment” was to show you some sick social policies caused by “the god idea”; therefore, that's what I'll emphasize.

But I need to continue to solicit your patience, Dear, while I first try to “set the stage” (showing you some complications in the struggles for fair laws, social justice, and peace and prosperity) before showing how religions enter, “stage right”, to cause even more problems. Yet, if you were to ask for a brief summary of my opinion about why religions cause societies so many problems, maybe the best I could do is this: the root cause is an almost unbelievably bizarre and horrible combination of ignorance and arrogance.

Ignorance is one thing, and as I've already demonstrated, I keep returning to Socrates' brilliant summary: “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance” (although, once again, perhaps his idea would be better translated as: *There is only one good, willingness to learn, and one evil, refusal*). In any case, when religious leaders (and followers) add arrogance to their ignorance, it's horrible – it's immoral. A descriptive phrase is “the criminal arrogance of religion” – although in our society, unfortunately, such ignorant arrogance is not yet punishable as a crime.

Let me show you a few examples of how others have described the arrogant ignorance of religions. Carol Lewis (not Lewis Carroll!) wrote:

Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victim may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated, but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.

The Supreme Court of Wisconsin (*Weiss vs. District Board*) also summarized it well:

There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed.

President James Madison, commonly referred to as “the father” of our Constitution, wrote similar (in a January 1774 letter to William Bradford):

Ecclesiastical establishments tend to great ignorance and corruption, all of which facilitate the execution of mischievous projects.

In his 1 April 1774 letter to Bradford, he added more:

Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise [sic], every expanded prospect.

In public, in his *A Memorial and Remonstrance*, addressed to the General Assembly of the commonwealth of Virginia in 1785, Madison stated:

What influence, in fact, have ecclesiastical establishments had on society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the civil authority; on many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wish to subvert the public liberty may have found an established clergy convenient auxiliaries. A just government, instituted to secure and perpetuate it, needs them not.

After serving to create the Constitution in 1787 and as president from 1809 – 1817, Madison concluded (in a 3 December 1821 letter to F.L. Schaeffer):

The experience of the United States is a happy disproof of the error so long rooted in the unenlightened minds of well-meaning Christians, as well as in the corrupt hearts of persecuting usurpers, that without a legal incorporation of religious and civil polity, neither could be supported. A mutual independence is found most friendly to practical Religion, to social harmony, and to political prosperity.

In that summary, President Madison was echoing the sentiments of both President Jefferson and President Washington. In an 1814 letter to Horatio G. Spafford, Jefferson wrote:

In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own. It is error alone that needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself.

And in a 1813 letter to Alexander von Humboldt, Jefferson wrote:

History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance of which their civil as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purposes.

Similarly, in an 1792 letter to Edward Newenham, Washington wrote:

Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind, those which are caused by a difference of sentiments in religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing, and ought to be deprecated. I was in hopes that the enlightened and liberal policy, which has marked the present age, would at least have reconciled Christians of every denomination so far that we should never again see the religious disputes carried to such a pitch as to endanger the peace of society.

Yet, as Washington suggested in that letter (with his words “I was in hopes...”) religious disputes continued. Further, as I’ll be trying to show you, such disputes (derived from a horrible combination of ignorance and arrogance) continue today, still at “such a pitch as to endanger the peace of society” – and of the world.

To get a first glimpse of reasons for our failures to learn the lesson that Madison mentioned and why, as Washington said, religious disputes “endanger the peace of society”, consider again Article 12 of the Mormon’s *Articles of Faith*, which my poor grandchildren have had to memorize and “internalize”:

We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.

Really, Dear? Do you really “believe in being subject to... rulers”? How about if you proclaimed, instead, an “article of faith” similar to:

“I’ll participate in the process of paying some people to meet in various legislatures to try to establish laws (because it’s too much of a pain for me to work on the laws myself, and because I’ve got better things to do with my time), but if (as is so common) our representatives demonstrate their incompetence, then I’ll work to throw the bums out on their rears!”

Further, Dear, do you really “believe in... sustaining the law”? What if (as is so common) the laws are relics of the past and should be junked? How about if you proclaimed, instead, an “article of faith” similar to:

“When I encounter still another law that forces people to adopt the immorality of obeying rather than the morality of thinking, or that tramples on anyone’s right to claim one’s own existence, or that promotes or perpetuates some social injustice, then I’ll do whatever I conclude is appropriate to have such laws trashed!”

That is, Dear, if your parents, your Church, and your society coerce you to “proclaim” and “internalize” some concepts, then how about concepts such as those contained in the following quotations?

It’s the first responsibility of every citizen to question authority. [Benjamin Franklin]

Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men; men governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons. And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity. But is uniformity of opinion desirable? No more than of face and stature... Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, and imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one-half the world fools and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth. [Thomas Jefferson]

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the individuality of every one of its members... The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators but names and customs. [Ralph Waldo Emerson]

A coerced “choice” does not reflect virtue, only compliance... you cannot force a person to be moral; you can only make them conform. True morality requires freedom and cannot exist without it. [Wendy McElroy]

Tradition has always been the great enemy of the founders of great traditions... diversity and non-conformity are the very soul of [our] heritage. [Herbert J. Muller]

The opposite of courage is not cowardice, but conformity. [Robert Anthony]

I would encourage you to consider such revised “articles of faith”, Dear, to “keep faith” with those who, throughout history, fought (with words and weapons, with philosophy and science, with revolutions and wars) – and were wounded and died – to defeat the huge number of religious and political power mongers who tried to deny humans the “right” to make such proclamations.

Now, Dear, I need to constrain myself, here, so I won’t head off on a tangent, showing you some of the long, tangled, and bloody history that has

led to your being able to make such “proclamations” as those suggested above. I’ll show you some of this history in the “excursion” **Yx**; there, I’ll try to give you historical perspectives of not only some of the problems that organized religions have caused societies but also some of the major problems that people have managed to get themselves into, even without any “help” from organized religions! Here, instead, let me just list some common human experiences that have led everyone in every society to seek freedom and justice.

- Although indoctrination, propaganda, and coercion can influence us, yet unless mind reading and subsequent torture occur, we’re all free to think as we please. It’s then common that we want to say what we think and seek to do what we decide. Therefore, all humans (and probably all animals) want and seek freedom from any oppression.
- In addition, unendingly, nature has taught all humans (and probably all animals) the meaning of “natural justice” (that things have causes) and “personal justice” (that, when we can influence an outcome, we generally get what we deserve and don’t get what we don’t deserve – taking due account of processes that are beyond our influences).
- Nature has also taught us that she can be brutal (though not malicious), and in response (as the philosopher John Lock wrote about “the social contract”), individuals join with others in societies, agreeing to various moral codes, customs, and laws, constraining the freedom of their natural state in exchange for mutual help in overcoming nature’s vagaries.
- Schooled in nature’s lessons about natural and personal justice, all people have demanded a similar “justice” in their interactions with others. The rudiments of this “interpersonal or social justice” is, again, that people should generally get what they deserve and shouldn’t get what they don’t deserve. A subsequent central tenet of social justice is “equality before the law”.

Unfortunately, however, this central tenet (or condition) of social justice is a condition that’s essentially impossible to satisfy – because all laws always have been (and always will be) promulgated by various “factions” (i.e., by groups primarily promoting some special interest).

You may think (or maybe it's that you "hope") that what I just finished writing is incorrect. But, Dear, let me give you a single, silly example to show you it has merit. Thus, consider the law in this country requiring everyone to drive on the right-hand side of the road. Consider, now, all those people who would prefer to drive on the left-hand side of the road – maybe all "south paws"! Then I challenge you to show me "the justice" in requiring that they drive on the right-hand side of the road.

Now, Dear, I know that the above was a silly example. As far as I know, nobody really cares much which "convention" or "custom" is chosen – so long as we all agree to abide by the same convention (for safety). But the same isn't true for all our laws: thousands of examples of laws could be given for which groups in our country have diametrically opposing opinions, for which at least one group maintains that the specific law is "immoral", and that being forced to abide by the law is therefore "social injustice."

As examples, consider laws dealing with abortion, birth control, child protection and capital punishment, drugs and desegregation, education and euthanasia, feminism and fornication, gambling, homosexuality, indecency – just to list a few from 'a' through 'i'! The resulting claims of "social injustice" (associated with what at least some people describe as "immoral laws") can be so serious that, before addressing specific "social injustices", I want to go into more detail describing how people manage to get themselves in such a mess – even without "help" from any supernatural silliness!

Thus, Dear, when people choose to join (or choose to continue to be affiliated with) any society, then to promote their trio of survival goals, the people willingly accept some organization (some "government") that will:

- Promote security (both military and economic),
- Promote various freedoms (subject to various constraints),
- Promote some law and order (even without justice!),
- Promote some semblance of interpersonal and social justice, and
- Promote various other goals of the people, which for now I'll "sweep under the rug" with a phrase such as "promote shared values".

For example, the Preamble to our Constitution states (sweeping much under a very big rug – but done beautifully!):

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America...

But rhetoric aside, does it work? By “ordaining” and “establishing” the Constitution, were the goals achieved? Was justice “established”? Were the “Blessings of Liberty” secured? Anyone who thinks so should read about the Civil War, or watch reports of workers’ strikes or racial riots, or participate in some “uncivil demonstration” against [whatever].

More generally and throughout history, all societies have been in constant turmoil. Perhaps you see why: “in the beginning”, individuals were free to do as they pleased, subject only to the laws of nature (experiencing natural justice) and their own ability to influence outcomes (experiencing personal justice). But living alone can be quite dangerous (threatening one’s survival) and living alone certainly inhibits the possibility of offspring (threatening the survival of the species). Therefore, individuals joined into groups, with the fundamental “social unit” being the family. Families joined into larger groups, agreeing to restrict some freedoms (agreeing to follow various customs) for the mutual protection provided by “the tribe”. In time, some of these customs became laws (i.e., penalties were defined for violating the group’s customs), and the set of customs and laws generally defined the “values” of the majority of the people in the society.

But certainly it doesn’t follow that the rest is “smooth sailing”. In our society, for example, some people conclude that if we are to pay taxes to “establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity”, then each taxpayer should contribute equally. Meanwhile, others hold that taxes should be an equal percentage of everyone’s income. And still others maintain that taxes should be on a “progressive scale”, with higher-income earners paying a larger percentage of their incomes.

If, Dear, you would consider only those three “opinions” and only about “fair taxation”, then I expect you’ll conclude that no “rational” solution is available – or it can be said, “justice” can’t be achieved. Thus, any of the following arguments can be (and have been) advanced.

Equal Taxation: Those with higher income can argue that equal taxation is the only “fair” taxation, but those with lower income will argue that such a taxation scheme would be “unfair”, because a larger fraction of their total income would be needed to pay taxes, leaving them painfully less for food and other “necessary” expenses.

Equal Percentages Taxes: It can easily be argued that this scheme is “fair”, because (for example) Bill Gates should pay the same fraction (say 5%) of his income for national defense (even if that is a relatively huge amount) because he will profit more from defense of his fortune. But people with little income can (and do) argue that if they pay the same fraction of their income for national defense (for example), then they will have insufficient funds left to buy food and other “essentials”, whereas Bill Gates will never experience this “depravation”.

Progressive Taxes: As you might expect, most people with low incomes favor this scheme (and elect representatives in Congress to promote such a scheme, i.e., members of the Democratic Party), but it’s easy to argue that such a scheme is little more than “mob rule”, with the “mob” robbing the rich. On the other hand, those with low incomes can (and do) argue: “Progressive taxation laws existed when you high-income people set out to earn more money; if you didn’t agree with the laws, then you didn’t need to earn so much money!”

But disregarding such rhetoric (and associated “demagoguery” or “demagogy”, i.e., attempts to control the people by stirring up their emotions and prejudices), let me return to (and begin to address) the fundamental questions that shape and can shake and even destroy the foundation of any society: *What customs are “correct”? What laws are “right”? What are the chances that “social justice” can be achieved? What are the prospects for peace and prosperity?*

And I wrote “begin to address” those questions, Dear, because I don’t plan to complete my attempts to answer them until later (in the **X**-chapters), after I’ve shown you more about Reasoning, Science, Truth, Uncertainties, Values, and Worldviews (in **R** through **W**). Nonetheless, because I’m not trying to write a mystery novel, let me try to subdue any suspense (which might be developing in your mind) by immediately giving you my summary answers to the last two questions listed above: the “chances” (for more social justice) and “prospects” (for peace and prosperity) are fairly good –

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provided that a greater percentage of all people learn to laugh-off all ideas about all giant Jabberwocks in the sky and learn to make social decisions based not on religious dogma but on tested hypotheses derived from careful analyses of the best available data (i.e., based on the scientific method).

But those “answers” aside for now, let me return to the questions posed about what customs are “correct”, what laws are “right”, and similar. If you ponder such questions for a while, Dear, I expect that you could easily be overwhelmed by their complexity – and easily become discouraged about humanity’s future. The greatest minds throughout history have done their best to answer such questions (addressing such questions, in ethics and politics, is almost always the task to which famous philosophers have finally turned), and yet, still we have riots and wars in which people seek redress from various “injustices”. Therefore, Dear, please don’t expect that the answer is “obvious” or that attaining justice is “trivial”, but on the other hand, as I’ll try to show you, progress toward social justice is possible – via scientific humanism. Yet, before outlining how to make progress solving such problems (a little of which I’ll do in the rest of these **P**-chapters and then do more in the **X**-chapters), let me try to show you more about the nature of the problem.

First and foremost, let me remind you (as I tried to show you in earlier chapters) that ideas about social justice are just opinions. As Emerson said, in effect: one person’s opinion of social justice is another person’s opinion of injustice. What could be added is that such opinions are sometimes held so strongly that the result can be riots, revolutions, and wars. That is, differences in opinion about what’s “just” or “fair” has caused, does cause, and no doubt will continue to cause major strife within and among societies.

In an earlier chapter in this group, I suggested my opinions about the odor of dead horses and about the social justice of banishing all clerics to the Hell they invented. I expect that almost everyone would agree with my opinion about the odor of dead horses but that most religious people would agree with the social justice of banishing to Hell only the clerics of other religions! And thus the difficulty in judging and attaining social justice. As Emerson said: “One man’s justice is another’s injustice”, and so long as opinions differ, social justice won’t be achieved and social strife will continue. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c. 540 – c. 480 BCE) even went so far as to propose that strife is necessary for the existence of anything: “all things happen by strife and necessity.”

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To illustrate resulting strife in our society, let me list a few cases that are relatively recent as I engage in the personal strife of writing this chapter:

- When O.J. Simpson was acquitted of the murder of his ex-wife and her friend, the majority of black people in this country seemed to consider the verdict as “finally a black man’s victory over white man’s justice”, while the majority of white people in this country seemed to consider the verdict as “a travesty of justice”.
- When the Senate voted not to impeach President Clinton for lying to a Grand Jury, the majority of Democrats in this country considered this failure “totally justified”, while the majority of the Republicans in this county considered the failure to impeach to be “grossly unjust and unfair”.
- Two boys at Columbine High School in Colorado felt that they were treated ‘unfairly’ by their classmates (especially by “jocks” who teased them) and so sought ‘justice’ by taking guns to school, killing 12 students and a teacher. As a result of this incident (and other, similar incidents) approximately half the people in this country have concluded that stricter rules on guns are ‘justified’; the other half have concluded otherwise.

And of course there are a huge number of other examples, all of which suggest a number of possible “root causes”: perhaps Emerson was right (social justice is just opinion), perhaps Heraclitus was right (strife is necessary), but I think that it was Socrates who was right “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.” I therefore conclude that “root problem” to be solved is to dramatically reduce ignorance.

Now, Dear, you’ll need to be especially patient with me while I try to explain what I mean. To eXpose what I consider to be a fundamental flaw at the foundation of our society (and at the foundation of most societies) will require several chapters, culminating in the X-chapters. In outline, my “eXcavation plan” (and my reasoning) is as follows:

- Many if not most disagreements about social justice arise from different opinions about morality;

- Differences in opinions about morality arise from different choices of values;
- Differences in choices of values arise from misconceptions about objectives (since values have meaning only relative to objectives);
- Many if not most misconceptions about objectives arise from confusion caused by the clerics of the world;
- A major if not the dominant source of this confusion about objectives is the ignorance of all clerics – both the ignorance of those clerics who are apparently too stupid to understand “the god lie” and the ignorance of those clerics who apparently understand it, but who ignorantly perpetrate their con games for the power and wealth thereby accrued.

The solution to such problems (and the way to improve chances for “social justice” and for “peace and prosperity”) is therefore for more people to see: 1) that we all have the common objective to help humanity solve our problems more intelligently (thereby, to help human intelligence evolve) and 2) that the best way to accomplish this common objective is to base decisions on knowledge (i.e., on fruits of applying the scientific method). That’s the essence of scientific humanism.

Immediately I should acknowledge that the previous paragraph’s outline could cause confusion. Again, please be patient with me; it will take me quite a while to explain what I mean. Further and again, please don’t jump to the conclusion that I’m laying all the evils of our society (and of most societies) at the doorsteps (or altars) of the clerics of the world – although I agree with Socrates that all evils can be traced to ignorance. In particular, not all social injustice is caused by clerics; much is caused by people immorally seeking wealth and power, an immorality that, in turn, is derived from their ignorance. But whereas a certain four-year old asked me why I didn’t believe in god, what I want to say in response, in part, is that belief in god has led to some horrible social policies (and horrible social injustices), and such evil can be traced to the stupidity of the god idea and the corresponding ignorance of the clerics of the world.

Now, Dear, toward trying to explain the previous two paragraphs, let me ask you to consider the following points.

- Humans certainly are “opinionated animals” – but then, so are most animals. Have you ever tried to take a bone from your dog? Although he’s normally amazingly friendly, he certainly seems to have an “opinion” about who owns “his” bone!
- In contrast to opinions held by other animals, however, opinions held by humans are notoriously nonuniform, e.g., about the taste of various foods, the appearance of various dress styles, the odor of various smells, the stimulation from various sounds, etc.
- When humans hold different opinions (such as opinions about justice of an outcome), there is very real danger of controversy and conflict (just as with other animals).
- The possibility that opinions about ‘justice’ of an outcome can be more nearly uniform (than those for our many other opinions) seems to be derived from all animals (including humans) learning similar lessons from Mother Nature about the meanings of natural justice (i.e., the principle of causality) and personal justice (i.e., that generally, we get what we deserve).
- But the importance that humans ascribe to ‘justice’ is certainly not solely because it’s a strongly held opinion that is widely shared (since we can have very strong and widely shared opinion about, e.g., the odor of dead horses); instead, the importance we place on the ‘justice’ of an outcome can normally be found in the nature of the outcome.

Therefore, Dear, to understand why people ascribe so much importance to ‘justice’, consider first the “things” we call ‘outcomes’. The huge set “of things we call outcomes” can be divided into a number of subsets, such as the following:

- Subset #1 of actual outcomes,
- Subset #2 of possible outcomes (i.e., outcomes that didn’t occur – at least at the time and place of interest – but that could have occurred without violating any laws of Nature), and
- Subset #3 of fanciful or imaginable but impossible outcomes (such as walking on water, feeding thousands of people with just a few loaves of

bread, and so on), which violate Nature's laws, which therefore would be called "miracles" if they occurred, which form a part of the mythology of various religions, and for which no reliable data support suggestions that they ever occurred.

When we express an opinion about the 'justice' of an actual outcome, normally we're making a mental comparison between an actual (Subset #1) outcome and a possible (Subset #2) outcome.¹

We can further subdivide each subclass of outcomes (actual, possible, and fanciful) into three groups: say a Group A of outcomes over which humans have no influence (i.e., cases in natural justice), a Group B of outcomes over which an individual could have some influence (i.e., cases in personal justice), and a Group C of outcomes that many individuals could conceivably influence and over which a single individual (a judge) might have total control (i.e., cases in interpersonal and/or social justice). From all of which, Dear, I hope that you'll conclude something close to: "Grampa, what the devil are you talking about!"

My purpose in leading you down that garden path, Dear, was to remind you that, in life, we're not only surrounded by, but even immersed in, an enormous variety of outcomes. Trying to influence outcomes is what life is all about: we call it "setting goals". Our evaluations of the progress we think we're making toward desired outcomes are measured by our feelings of happiness (and sadness). If an outcome toward which we've striven is thwarted by some injustice, then as a minimum, certainly we won't be happy – and we can be much more than just sad, in particular, angry. That is, depending on the significance attached to the outcome, sometimes when humans are thwarted by some 'injustice', they'll fight, riot, revolt, or even go to war, to eliminate perceived injustices. Consequently, Dear, the key to understanding the importance of 'justice' – and actually, the key to understanding most concepts – is, once again, to focus on objectives.

Thus, Dear, to see why people seek – and even demand – justice, I hope that, once again, you'll ask a question that will become "second nature" to you: what's the objective? For example, if a man is improperly imprisoned and says he wants 'justice', his objective is (as a minimum) to get out of prison;

¹ Incidentally, Dear, when we express an opinion about the "luck" of an outcome (where such 'luck' is quite different from its 'justice') then we are commenting on the probability that, of all possible outcomes, the one that actually occurred would have occurred.

if a woman is earning only a fraction of what a man earns for doing the same work, her objective is (as a minimum) to get a salary increase; and so on. That is, Dear (as by now you might have expected me to conclude!), what one really ‘wants’, when one seeks justice, is to promote one’s trio of survival goals.

Thereby, Dear, maybe you can see why we seek justice – and even demand it. As I quoted at the start of the chapters on justice:

Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit...

But it’s not that we seek justice for “justice’s sake” (just as we don’t seek freedom for “freedom’s sake”) – that is, it’s not just that we prize ‘justice’ and ‘freedom’ as abstract concepts – but for their value. The ‘value’ of anything can be judged only with respect to some objective (or objectives), and the high values that we place on ‘justice’ and ‘freedom’ are derived from their value to our trio of survival goals. In the most extreme cases, ‘justice’ has enormous value even to our most primitive goal of achieving our own survival: if there’s no ‘justice’ in a society, then the probability increases even that we’ll be murdered. Therefore, Dear, in so far as all humans seek their trio of survival goals, all humans will never cease to seek – and even demand – justice.

Seeking justice, essentially everyone in our society (and probably in every society) adopts the fundamental “moral principle” of “equality before the law”. This has been stated well by many people, for example:

In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. [John Marshall Harlan, 1839-1911]

Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political... [Thomas Jefferson, 1743-1826]

Even-handed justice. [William Shakespeare, 1564-1616]

[Our Athenian] laws secure equal justice for all...” [Thucydides, c. 460 - 400 BCE, known as “the world’s first reporter”]

Yet, when compared with practice, this fundamental principle of our legal system (this fundamental tenet of the public’s moral code) seems similar to the “fluff” that school children are indoctrinated to recite every day, namely,

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that in this nation there is “liberty and justice for all” – and I suppose I’d better explain why I describe this rhetoric as “fluff”.

First, Dear, consider “liberty for all”. In reality, the only way to circumvent all constraints on one’s liberties is to have no desires – which would leave one less than human (or a Buddha, which would be a mistake, although I’ll delay explaining what I mean until the next chapter). Further, the only way to be free from constraints imposed by other people is to be a hermit – but even then, if you have any desires (such as to eat) Mother Nature will impose her own constraints. Therefore, it’s essentially impossible for anyone to be completely free, i.e., “liberty for all” is impossible.

That is, Dear, if you have desires and if you decide to pursue them by belonging to a society, then you must agree to constraints on your liberties. The ideal, then, isn’t “liberty for all” but minimum constraints on your liberties. In turn, this minimum has two components: 1) minimum authority of others to constrain your liberties and 2) the same constraints for all. Consequently, although it would be more difficult for children to recite, a more appropriate phrase than “liberty... for all” would be something similar to “maximum liberty, equivalent for all”.

Second, Dear, consider “justice for all”. As I’ve already tried to show you, “justice” of an outcome of social interactions is, as Emerson said, just opinion. For many cases in social justice, fortunately, these opinions won’t be too different or too contentious (i.e., there will be fairly wide-spread satisfaction with the “social justice” experienced), in large measure because of what Mother Nature has taught each of us about natural and personal justice. But in many cases of social justice, unfortunately, all parties won’t be satisfied with the outcomes. For such cases, the best one can hope for is, as Heraclitus said ~2500 years ago, “an attunement of opposite tensions, as between a bow and a lyre” or equivalently, as stated ~50 years ago by U.S. Judge Learned Hand: “[Social] Justice, I think, is the tolerable accommodation of the conflicting interests of society...”

Yet, Dear, if you think about those assessments for a moment, I expect you’ll conclude that what’s being described is rather sad. What if the attempted “attunement” is in fact discord? Who’s to say that a particular “accommodation” is “tolerable”? What if the claims made by one side of a dispute are bogus (e.g., suing McDonalds for serving hot coffee or suing gun manufactures for selling “dangerous weapons”) or what if the claims are

little more than extortion (as apparently is the case with many “racial discrimination law suits” filed by “the Rainbow Coalition”)? Experience has shown that any attempted “accommodations” or “compromises” with bogus claims and extortion are bad public policy. And on the other hand, what if the proposed “accommodation” violates the “civil rights” of groups of citizens, as was the case for all the forced “accommodations” for black people throughout most of this country’s history? The resulting attunement can then be discord, so intolerable that the result is riots, revolutions, and wars.

If you’ll think about such matters for a while, Dear, I’m sure you’ll agree that there can be (and are!) a huge number of causes for “legitimate grievances” about the “social justice” experienced in our society (and in any society). There are so many problems and their consequences are so significant that you may want to try to constrain your emotions by listing the topics alphabetically:

- Abuse of power (by a huge range of factions in any society, including academicians, bureaucrats, clergy,... police, politicians, the poor when organized into a mob,... the wealthy,...)
- Bogus law suits and biased laws, leading to what is essentially legalized robbery (especially in our tax laws)
- Corruption and incompetence within the judicial system (politicians, police, lawyers, judges,...)
- Discrimination in laws and legal procedures against various groups (atheists, Blacks, Chicanos, the disabled,... smokers,... women,...)
- Etc. (!)

Therefore, Dear, “justice for all” is a joke – in fact, a cruel joke. If Heraclitus and Hand were correct, then social justice is just an independent judgment of where the bow is best placed on the lyre, attuning opposite tensions. At best, if there’s a common moral code, the music may be harmonious; normally, if the judge is at best disinterested and the laws are fair, the music may be tolerable; not uncommonly, however, judgments in social justice just cause more discord – because one side in the dispute is

forced to replace hope (for justice) with more injustice. Perhaps the best one can hope for, therefore, is not “justice for all” but “equality of justice”.

And thus, Dear, notice the better slogan used by the French during their revolution (and now their motto): not “liberty and justice for all”, but “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” – with the “Fraternity” (or the individual’s desire to continue to belong to the group) derived from the group’s guarantee of each person’s equal justice before the law and each person’s freedoms (of speech, assembly, and so on). Thus, in France’s motto, “justice” is replaced by the more general term “equality” (but actually, this word is too general – because people are not and never will be equal); the importance of the concept of “fraternity” is that it contains the moral principle of “trying to get along”. That is, I think the ideas in France’s motto could be improved, e.g., “Optimum Fraternity, Equal Justice, Maximum Liberty”, but then, not only would it be more difficult to train school children to chant such a slogan but also a compelling argument can be made that children shouldn’t be indoctrinated with any slogans; instead, they should be encouraged to use their brains as best they can.

Anyway, Dear, rather than portraying our society as having “liberty and justice for all”, a more accurate portrait can be seen if you will consider reasons why our prisons are predominantly populated by representatives of racial minorities and poor people (i.e., there’s a higher percentage of them in prison than in the general population). Correspondingly, and probably giving a clearer view of the root problem, consider why people of wealth (e.g., O.J. Simpson) and political power (e.g., President Clinton) are more likely to go unpunished for their crimes. Similar was described by the Roman historian Plutarch (46 - 120 CE) who wrote the following about the laws written by Greek law-maker Solon (c. 638 – c. 559 BCE), who is generally credited with being the founder of democracy:

Anacharsis laughed at [Solon] for imagining [that] the dishonesty and covetousness of his countrymen could be restrained by written laws, which were like spiders’ webs... [These laws] would catch, it is true, the weak and poor, but [could] easily be broken by the mighty and rich.

In particular, in our society, the public’s moral principle of “equality before the law” is violated by the common advice: “Get the best lawyer that money can buy”. Not only is that “unfair”, it’s a horrible perversion of “justice”!

Please, Dear, stop for a minute to consider the problem of inequality before the law – and how it might be possible to diminish such inequality. To begin your consideration, realize that there's a wide spectrum of competences of lawyers, just as is the case in any profession. Yet, when you hire professionals in other fields (to work on your plumbing, your car, your teeth, your health, your finances, your house, etc.), normally you have appropriate professionals work on something that belongs to you. In such instances, maybe only communists (who argue for “equality of possessions”) would argue that everyone should have equal professional help fixing one's plumbing, car, teeth, and so on (although recently there have been many demands for equal treatment for health care, i.e., by medical professionals). In the case of the law, however, there is an advertised and a desired “equality before the law”; it's the moral base of our entire judicial system. Consequently, if “equality before the law” is a central tenet of public morality, then it's “morally wrong” for anyone to hire more competent legal advice than anyone else.

What has undermined public morality is that lawyers have expropriated what belongs to all of us, namely, knowledge of our laws. That's understandable, of course, because our laws, now, have become so complicated that even lawyers can learn only a small percentage of the total body of law (and therefore, there are now “tax lawyers”, “estate lawyers”, “criminal lawyers”, “civil-rights lawyers”, “corporate lawyers”, and so on). Consequently, if you have sufficient wealth, you can hire “the best lawyer that money can buy” to defend your case in court – but again, based on the tenet of the public's moral code that there's to be “equality before the law”, hiring “the best lawyer that money can buy” is immoral.

Some progress toward correcting this immorality has been made. As you can find on the internet, *The Criminal Justice Act of 1964* provides “free counsel” (i.e., lawyers) in Federal cases for defendants who are too poor to pay. Also, as you can also find on the internet, the 1966 decision of the Supreme Court known as *The Miranda Decision* contains the following statement (to which I've added the italics and the note in “square brackets”):

To summarize, we hold that when an individual is taken into custody or otherwise deprived of his freedom by the authorities in any significant way [and this means all “authorities”, not just those involved in Federal cases] and is subjected to questioning, the privilege against self-incrimination is jeopardized. Procedural safeguards must be employed to protect the privilege, and unless other fully effective means are adopted to notify the person of his right of silence and to assure that the exercise of the right

will be scrupulously honored, the following measures are required. He must be warned prior to any questioning that he has the right to remain silent, that anything he says can be used against him in a court of law, that he has the right to the presence of an attorney, and that *if he cannot afford an attorney one will be appointed for him...*

But with these relatively recent advances, only perhaps 10% of the immorality has been removed – certainly “equality before the law” is still far from achieved.

Let me illustrate how far we have yet to go, before “equality before the law” is achieved, by suggesting the following.

- No one should be able to hire a lawyer: just as important as poor people being supplied with lawyers is that rich people shouldn't be able to “hire the best lawyer than money can buy”.
- In every case, lawyers for each side should be assigned by appropriate courts by a random-selection process (e.g., by assigning to each side, in every dispute, lawyers whose names would essentially be drawn from a hat).
- “Private practice” of law should be illegal: all lawyers should be employed by the courts (i.e., all lawyers should be “civil servants”, employed by municipal, city, country, state, and Federal governments, answerable to the people).
- Prosecutors shouldn't have any advantages for finding and evaluating evidence: law-enforcement agents should do all investigations (to determine what occurred) and then prosecuting and defense attorneys should have equal access to all information collected.
- Methods would probably be needed to prevent abuse of the system, e.g., by punishing people for filing what are found to be “frivolous” law suits (perhaps by fining everyone who files a “frivolous” law suit a certain percentage of their annual income to pay for “court time” required to settle any dispute, perhaps up to a maximum of 50% of one's annual income for each case).

Yet I should add, Dear, that such changes have very little chance of being enacted (unless and until there are public riots and maybe even revolutions),

because of the “special interests” of specific factions, especially the entrenched and politically powerful interests of so many lawyers who are making enormous fortunes from current immoralities of our justice system.

Further, such changes as suggested above would be just the beginning toward the moral principle of “equality before the law”, because so many of our laws, themselves, violate this moral principle. Most outrageous (or egregious) are our tax laws, but I don’t want to give you examples – for fear that I won’t be able to constrain my rage. Let me just summarize by saying that I’ll never vote for any member of the Democrat Party so long as Democrats continue to buy votes for themselves from the poor by robbing me, and I’ll never vote for any member of the Republican Party so long as Republicans continue to be bought by wealthy special interests, who mount expensive campaigns for robbing me. And maybe the worst of it is that, just as for the proposal for making the private practice of law illegal, I can see essentially no way that our society can remedy the problem of immoral laws – without a revolution.

Theoretically, laws could conform to the moral principle of equality before the law if laws were written and enacted (i.e., “promulgated”) only by those who either 1) wouldn’t be influenced by the law or 2) had no way of knowing which side of any decision that they would eventually find themselves.² Such options, however, are almost never available: if members of Congress were sufficiently ethical to “recluse themselves” from voting on any matter in which they or their constituents had a stake, then no one would be left to vote!

As I’ll try to show you in later chapters (e.g., in **Yx**), the problem of how to promulgate “fair laws” has been with us ever since humans formed into groups. A partial solution to this problem may be to require “term limits” on all elected officials; then the propensity of politicians to pass laws that are thinly disguised procedures to “buy votes” might be constrained. Amendment XXII to the Constitution (ratified in 1951) limits the President to serve, at most, for two terms (eight years); theoretically at least, similar limitations could be proscribed for all members of Congress (and for members of all State legislatures).

² Incidentally, Dear, that’s a particular application of Rawls’s theory of justice, details of which you can easily find on the internet, e.g., search using “Rawls” + “Theory of Justice”.

As you can find on the internet, such “term limits” have recently been enacted in several states, but the movement has more recently been constrained and in some cases reversed. One problem is that States that adopted “term limits” found they were “shooting themselves in the foot”: their representatives in Congress lost seniority and therefore power, and the people of the State then suffered loss of revenue. Another problem is that “term limits” have in some cases failed to conform to various State Constitutions. (I don’t know if “term limits” have been judged to violate the Federal Constitution).

But such problems could be solved by appropriate Amendments to relevant Constitutions, requiring “term limits” for all politicians. But I expect that chances of ever ratifying such Amendments are small, especially at the Federal level, because many poorer and smaller states (e.g., Alaska and West Virginia) prosper from the current system, in which their members of Congress (especially in the non-representative Senate) are able to rob larger, richer states (such as California and New York). Besides, even if a Federal “term limit” Amendment were passed, members of the two dominant political parties would undoubtedly continue to pass laws that favored the election of members of their own party (even if the law proscribed that they, themselves, couldn’t be re-elected). And thus the “factionization” would continue (as was warned in one of the Federalist Papers, as I’ll show you later).

How the desired changes could be accomplished isn’t clear to me. What’s desired is a system that satisfies two different goals, in turn reflecting two different classes of laws. In one class of laws, “equality before the law” requires that each citizen’s ballot have equal weight (e.g., laws dealing with all judicial matters, including civil rights); in another class of laws, “equality before the law” requires that “he who pays the piper calls the tune”.

One possible solution at the Federal level is to elect representatives to two houses of Congress in different ways, to reflect these two different classes of laws. Further, whereas all fiscal laws now must originate in the House of Representatives, perhaps consideration should be given to electing members of the House in a manner so that each citizen’s ballot is weighted in proportion to taxes that the voter paid since the prior election. On the other hand, members of the Senate could be elected as now, with each citizen’s ballot weighted equally – but not to elect two senators per state but a fixed number of senators elected by all citizens. Then, laws dealing with fiscal

matters would have a better chance of being fair for the citizens who pay the bills (primarily represented by members of the new House), and laws dealing with civil rights would have a better chance of being fair for all citizens (primarily represented by members of the new Senate).

But I should add, Dear, that I doubt that the needed Constitutional Amendments would ever pass – so long as current conditions persist, in which the majority of the people profit from robbing the minority who pay the vast majority of the taxes. If alternatives are explored, one could be to change the way of defining “voter districts” (at least to elect members of the House). Thus, rather than the current method of defining “voter districts” according to population, perhaps a method could be devised based on equality of taxes paid. That suggestion, however, would probably also need a Constitutional Amendment, which probably wouldn’t pass. Still another alternative, which perhaps could be realized without a Constitutional Amendment, is to weigh each representative’s vote in the House in proportion to taxes paid (since the time of the previous election) by the electorate whom he or she represents.

But perhaps a revolution will be necessary. As Jefferson said: “I hold it that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.” In 1776, a slogan for the American revolution was “No taxation without representation”; in the intervening 200+ years, the envisioned republic has degenerated to just a few notches above anarchy; the current tax laws of our “democracy” are little more than legalized robbery. If a revolution should be necessary, I wouldn’t encourage the slogan “No representation without taxation!” (because equality before the law will demand that all citizens still have has equal representation in the creation of some laws); instead, I’d encourage a slogan such as: “Those who pay get their fair say!”

But with the above, Dear, I was leading you down still another garden path – or maybe you think it’s more like a thorny thicket! Ostensibly, I was responding to the questions *Who gets to make the laws?* and *What are the chances for social justice*, but my real motives were threefold:

- 1) To suggest to you that there are major problems in our society camouflaged by the “fluff” of “liberty and justice for all”,

- 2) To begin to set the stage for showing you (in **X**) how scientific humanism can maximize liberty and justice (by focusing on the “universal objective” of helping humanity and by basing opinions, about how best to help humanity, on data rather than dogma), and
- 3) To be able to now turn to my “assigned task” of showing you how organized religions get involved in the contention and strife of society – and just cause more problems by promoting their stupid dogmas.

Thus, Dear, finally (☺), let me now turn to some of the problems that religions cause societies, especially our own.

In our society (and probably in every society) there are a great number of contentious issues. I want neither to list them all nor to comment on any in detail, but to get you to start thinking about them (and I think you’ll find that they’re not just like thorny thickets but like briar patches on a slippery slope!), consider issues such as: abortion, birth control, capital punishment, divorce, euthanasia, feminism, gambling, homosexuality, immigration,... If I were to summarize my own opinions about all such issues, maybe I’d try something similar to the following.

In general, I have enough trouble minding my own business. If other people don’t bother me or others, I won’t bother them. But if other people abuse others (especially children – abused physically, emotionally, sexually, or mentally), then such behavior does “influence me”, both in my feelings (when I see others hurt) and in my pocketbook (when I’m expected to pay to try to correct damages). In such cases (but not for cases of fetuses unable to survive without demanding nourishment from their mothers, but including cases of distortions of children’s minds by religions), then I support social efforts (funded by taxes on me) to promote the general welfare [e.g., with free birth control devices and procedures, including abortion (to try to make sure that every child is wanted by its parents) and with free education (including all trade schools and any level of “higher” education, provided only that students continue to make “good” progress and that the schools are accredited)]. Also, I support social efforts (funded by taxes on me) to fight crime (to protect potential victims, to root out causes of what I consider to be undesirable behavior, and to punish the offenders [out to an including capital punishment (if the crime is terribly heinous, if there is zero doubt about guilt, if there’s a chance that such punishment will deter others

from similar crime, and unless there's some other way to banish the criminal from society at even less financial burden)]. Otherwise, in general, my experience has been that the best policy is to let people be – to let the system go free.

But I should add, Dear, that I haven't given the above "statement" more than a few minutes thought, and if you see ways to improve it or if your ideas are different from mine, then I'd be glad to hear your views and certainly I'd be willing (even eager!) to change my statement, if your opinions seem better founded than mine.

Other people, of course, have made similar assessments of the desirability of minimum societal constraints on the liberties of individuals:

I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty, than those attending too small a degree of it. [Thomas Jefferson]

I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted upon more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe – "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. [David Thoreau]

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community against his will is to prevent harm to others. [John Stuart Mill]

My own statement of the underlying principle is (as I've mentioned before, but failed to justify adequately, except by claiming "personal experiences" as my guide): if in doubt, let the system go free.

Now, Dear, for contrast, consider opinions about similar issues expressed by various religious leaders. I'm certainly not going to show you many such opinions (doing so would require several books!), but just to illustrate and especially because of your "Mormon experience", consider the following statements. On abortion, "Elder" Dallin H. Oaks (of the "Quorum of the Twelve Apostles", i.e., one of the leaders of the Mormon Church) wrote the following in his article entitled "Weightier Matters," published in the March 2000 issue of the Mormon magazine *Liahona*:

In this effort [toward making "righteous choices" to move toward "eternal goals"], Latter-day Saints follow the teachings of the prophets. On this subject [abortion] our prophetic guidance is clear. The Lord commanded, "Thou shalt not ... kill, nor do

* Go to other chapters *via*

anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6). The Church opposes elective abortion for personal or social convenience. Our members are taught that, subject only to some very rare exceptions, they must not submit to, perform, encourage, pay for, or arrange for an abortion. That direction tells us what we need to do on the weightier matters of the law, the choices that will move us toward eternal life.

Thereby, I suppose, Mormons aren't permitted to cut their hair or their nails (i.e., to kill living cells), from which new humans could be cloned!

Similar nonsense is preached to most “fundamentalists” in the “Christian right” (or better, “Christian Reich”) including all Catholics, as I'll show you in later chapters. I'm especially amazed at the statements by Catholic leaders that everything possible must be done to protect the “immortal soul” of the “unborn child”, because if its soul is “immortal”, then nobody need worry about it! In contrast, my opinion is that, given a woman's demonstrated irresponsibility that led to her experiencing an unwanted pregnancy, I'm not encouraged that she'll be able to meet the massively greater responsibilities needed to successfully rear her child. Therefore, I'm quite prepared to provide assistance (through my taxes, and especially for poor women) so that any woman's option to have an abortion is readily available, thereby minimizing (in the long run) the costs to society (and to me) of her mistakes.

On birth control, the Mormon position, as described in a letter from the First Presidency to bishops and stake presidents, dated April 14, 1969 (as reported by Philip F. Low in an article in the May 1971 issue of *Ensign*) is as follows:

We seriously regret that there should exist a sentiment or feeling among any members of the Church to curtail the birth of their children. We have been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth that we may have joy and rejoicing in our posterity. Where husband and wife enjoy health and vigor and are free from impurities that would be entailed upon their posterity, it is contrary to the teachings of the Church artificially to curtail or prevent the birth of children...

I'm sorry, Dear, but I can't help guessing a plainer statement of that policy would be: “Come you Mormon mothers: keep our revenue flow coming!” And I'm sorry to add, Dear, but it's hard for me to come to any conclusion other than: anyone who would advocate such stupidity isn't sane.

The position of Catholic clerics on abortion is bizarre. As H.L. Mencken wrote (here, paraphrased): “To accomplish birth control, Catholics are permitted to use mathematics – but not physics or chemistry!” In contrast

and for similar reasons as outlined above (plus the thought, already stated, that “the last thing this poor old world needs is more people”), I’d be willing to provide assistance (through my taxes) so that free birth-control devices are available to everyone (throughout the world). Garret Hardin (whose books – such as *Managing the Commons* and *Stalking the Wild Taboo* – I hope you’ll read) said it better than I ever could:

Society does not need more children; but it does need more loved children. Quite literally, we cannot afford unloved children – but we pay heavily for them every day. There should not be the slightest communal concern when a woman elects [to use birth control or] to destroy the life of her thousandth-of-an-ounce embryo. But all society should rise up in alarm when it hears that a baby that is not wanted is about to be born.

But enough details for now – maybe even too many, already! Yet, if you want more examples, not only are many available on the internet, I’ll be showing more in later chapters, especially the **X**-chapters.³

Here, instead, let me try to generalize, to try to show you what I consider to be the root cause of “the problems religions cause societies”. In a nutshell, as I already summarized, the cause is an astoundingly horrible combination of “ignorance and arrogance”. Let me try to explain what I mean more completely.

In our society, individuals and groups are free to express opinions (thanks to the successful struggles of so many people during thousands of years).

³ As I mentioned in a footnote in an earlier chapter, another example that I recently encountered on the internet (at <http://www.hells-handmaiden.com/2007/09/28/god-sex-violence-immorality/>) quotes an article by Gregory S. Paul entitled “Cross-National Correlation of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies”, which was published in Vol. 7 (2005) of the *Journal of Religion and Society* and is available at <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2005/2005-11.html>. The following quotation from the first website linked above summarizes Paul’s article: “In general, higher rates of belief in and worship of a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult mortality, STD [Sexually Transmitted Disease] infection rates, teen pregnancy, and abortion in the prosperous democracies.” In his article, Paul states: “There is evidence that within the U.S. strong disparities in religious belief versus acceptance of evolution are correlated with similarly varying rates of societal dysfunction, the strongly theistic, anti-evolution south and mid-west having markedly worse homicide, mortality, STD, youth pregnancy, marital and related problems than the northeast where societal conditions, secularization, and acceptance of evolution approach European norms.” Paul also states, based on his analysis of the data: “The non-religious, pro-evolution democracies contradict the dictum that a society cannot enjoy good conditions unless most citizens ardently believe in a moral creator. The widely held fear that a Godless citizenry must experience societal disaster is therefore refuted.” But as I also mentioned in the earlier footnote, I think that the data don’t support such a strong statement: better would have been to change the last phrase from “is therefore refuted” to “is therefore not supported by the most obvious interpretation of the data.”

Sometimes, however, it's admittedly and unfortunately the case that we'd be well advised to keep our opinions to ourselves. For example, in this book, I've identified neither your name nor mine, because I'm worried about the crazed religious nuts "out there" who "think" that only their opinions "deserve" to be expressed. It's true that "freedom of speech" is guaranteed in our Constitution (the first "right" listed in the "Bill of Rights"), but some repercussions for speaking freely can be subtle, and when they're not subtle, some of us sometimes choose silence over experiencing the repercussions – especially if the repercussions are directed against members of one's immediate family – especially against one's grandchildren!

But regardless of my decisions about when I choose to speak freely, I certainly acknowledge the right of other individuals or any group to express opinions (provided that expressing their opinions doesn't endanger the physical or mental well being of others). Thereby, in principle, certainly I support the claims of religious groups of their "right" to become involved in any "public-policy debate" by expressing their opinions. Simultaneously, however, I have three major complaints with any such involvement.

- 1) The dominant characteristic of all organized religions is to promote the *status quo*, even when this "status" includes some terribly sick social policies. Thereby, past performances of essentially all organized religions involved in essentially every public-policy debate have been atrocious: almost without exception (and none comes to mind!), organized religions advocate maintaining the status quo, in matters ranging from science to education, slavery to women's rights, homosexuality to abortion, and worker's rights to waging war. As Reinhold Nieburh wrote:

There is no social evil, no form of injustice which has not been sanctified in some way or another by religious sentiment and thereby rendered more impervious to change.

Humans have prospered, however, not from maintaining the status quo but through change, growth, and evolution – and public debates are appropriate to judge how best to manage change (not to hear from still another religious ignoramus that, once again, the best policy is to maintain the status quo).

- 2) A pre-condition for productive debate about public policies is that all involved will remain “civil”. Religious groups, however, almost invariably violate this condition. In modern times, religious groups (at least in our country) don’t normally advocate violence (although in the past, as I’ll show you in **Yx**, most religious groups have not only advocated but also practiced violence, for example, murdering uncounted millions of “heretics” because of their opinions). But in modern times even in our country, religious groups still almost invariably violate “civility” by refusing to act as civilized humans: civilized people will not only listen to the opinions of others but also will consider such opinions; religious people, in contrast, almost invariably refuse to consider the opinions of others (or are intellectually incapable of such consideration).

- 3) For any society to make progress toward goals, the goals must be clear and widely accepted, knowledge must be sought, and all members of society must demonstrate appropriate humility toward reliable data. If the vast majority of people decide, for example, to try to stop an incoming asteroid from hitting the Earth, then we’d better figure out how to do it and (humbly) admit that shooting at it with bows and arrows ain’t gonna work!

Which then again brings me to the “ignorance and arrogance” of religious people, ignorantly seeking to placate their gods (for imagined personal benefits and in spite of a total absence of supporting data) and worse, arrogantly asserting that they possess “knowledge” about what their god wants (in spite of a total absence of supporting data and in spite of the illogic of the idea that their all-powerful god “wants” anything). Please, Dear, think about it: what could be more arrogant than to proclaim that the all-powerful, all-knowing, creator of the universe supports your opinions?! Religious people are the ultimate name-droppers: “GOD wants us to...” Blow it out your ear!

Dear, we all have limited knowledge. My knowledge of biology, for example, is embarrassing – and I still don’t know how your grandmother manages to make such good apple-sauce (although I have the suspicion that it’s the amount of cinnamon she uses). You, in contrast, shouldn’t feel embarrassed about your limited knowledge, because you’re just starting to learn. Thereby, by the way, I again would recommend a change to Socrates statement from “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance” to *There is only one good, willingness to learn, and one evil,*

refusal. But more to the point that I want to make, let me now try to educate you about what actually should not be an important topic!

Dear: As near as I can guarantee you anything, I guarantee you that no leader in your church (or any leader of any religion) has any knowledge, whatsoever, about how this universe was created [yet, from all available evidence, I strongly suspect that this universe created itself out of “totally nothing” (in a manner that I sketched in **A** and will sketch more in **Z**)]. I similarly guarantee you that no one knows what happens when people die [although, from all available evidence, I suspect that our mental activity simply stops and our bodily materials begin to decay into the components from which they were temporarily assembled]. And similarly, Dear, as near as I can guarantee you anything, I guarantee you that people don’t have “immortal souls” [the only “things” that can live beyond our death are any ideas that we might have created and (modified as they would be) the DNA molecules that we temporarily hosted] and that there are no gods or any other “super-natural” stuff – and there never were! Anyone who claims to “know” otherwise is arrogantly ignorant.

So now, let me begin my summary description of problems that organized religions cause societies. As I tried to show you in the previous chapter, any organized religion is a group of people governed by a dictator (a Church president, a Pope, a head Rabbi, a chief Ayatollah, or whoever) or some ruling group (Quorum of Twelve, Council of Deacons, or whatever) whose ideas for governance are based not on data but on some dogma, that is (according to my dictionary): “beliefs... handed down by authority as true and indisputable... [suggesting] arbitrariness, arrogance, etc.” Followers in religious groups are required to accept their dictator’s dogma on “faith”.

That people should want to join (or want to continue to be affiliated with) groups whose leaders dictate how group members are to think is rather surprising (suggesting that some people prefer the security of following orders rather than the uncertainty associated with thinking for themselves), but if the leaders would reach sensible decisions, then this craziness shouldn’t cause other people, other groups in our society, or our society as a whole, very many problems. But as I began to show you in previous chapters, the ignorance of religious leaders has been mind-boggling, and such ignorance has caused individuals, families, and other groups of people a great many problems.

* Go to other chapters *via*

In its essence, the start of the problems caused by “the god idea” is that the separation of societies into subgroups (i.e., into different religions) is according to ideas (or ideologies) or better, speculations (i.e., opinions whose scientific foundations are weak to nonexistent). One subgroup maintains that all invisible flying elephants are pink, another maintains that they’re purple, and so on, through all conceived colors of invisible elephants. Now, if the differences in opinions ended there, then maybe not too much trouble would result – especially because, as far as I know, neither side could produce any data to substantiate their claim or to discredit the claim of their opponents about the color of invisible flying elephants! But then, major problems in societies develop because of peculiar and undesirable characteristics of religious groups, such as the following.

1. Commonly, religious opinions are held with strong convictions (consistent with one meaning of the word ‘religion’, i.e., to hold tightly). Thus, instead of such people calmly and quietly suggesting that their bias is to believe that invisible flying elephants are pink (or whatever), commonly they vehemently proclaim their convictions with arrogant certainty.
2. Commonly, religious groups actively promote their viewpoints. Thus, rather than adopting a “quiet philosophy” such as “live and let live” or Rodney King’s “can’t we all just get along”, religious groups not only actively attempt to recruit others to adopt their views (that all invisible flying elephants are pink) but also, while various people seek social justice (which, in any case, is almost always difficult to achieve), religious groups commonly jump into contentious debates, arguments, and confrontations, causing still more trouble, promoting their dogma.
3. Then, as if that weren’t enough, religious people commonly and arrogantly claim (usually with substantial enthusiasm, commitment, and zeal – perhaps mostly to camouflage their own insecurity) that the creator of the universe not only shares their opinion but also has conveyed this knowledge to them in their “sacred” writings.
4. And then, to add still more to their “caldron” of “toil and trouble”, the clerics claim that the giant Jabberwock in the sky is on their side, alone; they claim that anyone who says otherwise is an “infidel” – and time-and-time again, the result has been intergroup rivalries, murders, and

wars (which continue today and will probably continue throughout your lifetime).

Put differently, Dear, there's this: it's already difficult enough to find compromises among conflicting opinions in any social group, but when various religious groups maintain that their opinion is supported by the creator of the universe, they become major pains in the ass!

Shakespeare's description of the despicable role of supernatural nonsense in human societies may never be surpassed. Here it is, from Act IV, Scene 1 or *Macbeth*, complete with stage directions (in italics) and a few of my notes [in "square brackets].

*A cavern. In the middle, a caldron boiling.
Thunder. Enter the three WITCHES.*

FIRST WITCH:

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.

SECOND WITCH:

Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

THIRD WITCH:

Harpier cries: – 'tis time, 'tis time.

FIRST WITCH:

Round about the caldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw. —
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Sweltere'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i'the charmed pot.

ALL:

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire, burn; and, caldron, bubble.

SECOND WITCH:

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the caldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg, and howlet's wing, —

For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

ALL:

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire, burn; and, caldron, bubble.

THIRD WITCH:

Scale of dragon; tooth of wolf;
Witches' mummy; maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark;
Root of hemlock digg'd i'the dark;
Liver of blaspheming Jew;
[Horrible, to include that too –
[See religion in full view!]
Gall of goat; and slips of yew
Silver'd in the moon's eclipse;
Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips;
[There again, religion trips
[Even Shakespeare in its grips!]
Finger of birth-strangled babe
Ditch-deliver'd by a drab,—
Make the gruel thick and slab:
Add thereto a tiger's chaudron,
For th'ingredients of our caldron.

ALL:

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire, burn; and, caldron, bubble.

SECOND WITCH:

Cool it with a baboon's blood,
Then the charm is firm and good.

The three witches then proceed to supply Macbeth with some prophecies about his forthcoming doom. In our day, the roles of the three witches could be well played by, say, the President of the Mormon Church, the Pope, and the Grand Ayatollah of Iran. They load up the social pot with all their supernatural nonsense, stir it up, and the stench of their concoctions and their incessantly chanting (“Double, double toil and trouble; fire burn and caldron bubble”) make it even more difficult for sensible humans to make progress solving difficult social problems.

But analogies aside, let me return to the task of trying to describe more clearly (even if only in outline) the nature of the problems that clerics cause societies. Again, Socrates summarized the situation well, with his “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance”, but because there are so many branches of knowledge and so many roots of ignorance, perhaps some amplification is needed to describe the evils caused by religions.

In fact, the term ‘religion’ (or maybe better “organized religion”), itself, hides a multitude of ignorances. One especially twisted and hideous root of ignorance (and associated arrogance) feeds on supernatural nonsense. I’m sorry if I offend, Dear, but it’s “totally asinine” to promote the totally data-less idea that some giant Jabberwock in the sky is in control, who created the universe, and who “suitably” rewards or punishes a person’s “immortal soul” depending on the person’s behavior, especially the person’s behavior in public. It’s not just ignorant, it’s bizarre!

Further, Dear, arrogance, itself (“a strong feeling of proud self-importance that is expressed by treating other people with contempt or disregard”) is another form of ignorance. In contrast, self-confidence, which is usually desirable, needn’t be arrogant: to successfully tackle the many challenges in our lives, we need confidence in our abilities to overcome such challenges. Yet, self-confidence usually has little to do with our assessments of the competences of others, and therefore, usually has little to do with arrogance. For example, your assessments will undoubtedly lead you to conclude that some people are more competent than you, in some areas, and less than you, in other areas. But even if you knowledgeably conclude that you are more competent than someone else in some area, it would be ignorant to display arrogance toward that person, if for no other reason than because that person could help you pursue joint goals – but probably wouldn’t, if you’re arrogant. That is, again, being arrogant displays ignorance.

Further, and more to the point about “arrogant ignorance” of religious people (as well as their “ignorant arrogance”), Isaac Asimov saw it clearly:

Imagine the people who believe such things and who are not ashamed to ignore, totally, all the patient findings of thinking minds through all the centuries since the Bible was written. And it is these ignorant people, the most uneducated, the most unimaginative, the most unthinking among us, who would make themselves the guides and leaders of us all...

Thus, compounding the evils derived from the ignorance of religious people, there's the evil derived from religious arrogance: the "strong feeling of proud self importance... treating other people with contempt or disregard" – because they reject your religious ignorance!

As Nicholas Kristof (a columnist of the *New York Times*) recently described it, this religious arrogance is "that essential human conceit that God is on the pew beside us, a member of our own sect." But actually, it can be much worse than conceit. Two horrible examples are Hitler's "I believe today that my conduct is in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator" and President George W. Bush similar religious arrogance "I believe that God wants me to be president."

The resulting social strife from religious arrogance has been and continues to be absolutely staggering. As I mentioned earlier, some people have described it as "criminal arrogance"; another example is Candace Chellew, who uses the phrase:⁴ "This 'criminal arrogance of religion' – this equating of our own desires with the desires of God..." That, however, is an exaggeration, because religious arrogance is (unfortunately!) not yet legally classified as a crime – although I think it should be, because introducing into social dialogue any phrase similar to "Because God says so" is similar to yelling "Fire!" in a crowded theater – which is a crime.

Of course the crime is not in speaking (or even yelling) but in not evaluating possible consequences of what's said. Anyone is crazy who "thinks" that they are conveying the opinions of the "creator of the universe" – of what, the first symmetry-breaking fluctuation in a total void?! But when religious people (especially religious leaders) make claims that they're conveying "the creator's opinion" (about abortion, birth control, civil rights, divorce, ethics, fornication, or who knows what), then such should be classified as crimes – because people can be (and are) then trampled to death as the crowd heads for the exit. Such idiots should be under observation in intuitions for the criminally insane.

And worse, not only is such behavior not yet criminalized, it's even customary! Nonetheless, when the president of this country, for example, claims some guidance for his opinions from some giant Jabberwock in the sky, then in my opinion, the president should be thrown in jail – for criminal

⁴ <http://www.whosoever.org/v7i1/godbless.html>

arrogance! And similarly for every cleric in the country! It's a crime against logic, it's a crime against science, it's a crime against society, it's a crime against humanity, for a person to claim that some fictitious creator of the universe supports the speaker's opinion.

In contrast, it's "legal" to claim that one's opinion is supported by some law book (or even some "holy book", for then, people with differing opinions can challenge the law – or laugh at the holy books). It's acceptable to claim that one's opinion is supported by wisdom gained from a long list of experiences (even if recorded in some horrid "holy book"). It's desirable to demonstrate that one's opinion is derived from a hypothesis that not only succinctly summarizes a substantial quantity of reliable data but also whose predictions have passed every test thrown at it. But when a person claims that his or her opinion is supported by some god, thereby engaging in the "criminal arrogance of religion", whereas we can't yet throw the person in jail, at least we can collectively yell: "Blow it out your ear!"

But even such ignorance and resulting evils don't encompass all problems that religions cause societies. For example, all Mormons who accept (as they must) "Article of Faith #8", which states "We... believe The Book of Mormon to be the word of God", therefore accept the following (from the Book of Mormon at **1 Nephi 14**, 10):

[T]here are save two churches only [or, in plainer English, "there are only two churches"], the one is the Church of the Lamb of God [viz., the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, i.e., the Mormon Church] and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God [viz., those who aren't Mormons] belongeth to that great Church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth.

As a result, any "good" Mormon is despised by all "good" Christians.

Similarly, all Muslims who accept (as they must) their clerics' "holy book", the Koran (or Qur'an), as God's (or Allah's) message to them, therefore accept (*Surah 9:29*):

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last day [i.e., the final "judgment day"]... nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth [i.e., Islam] from among the People of the Book [i.e., Christians and Jews] until they pay the Jiziyah [a special tax] with willing submission and feel themselves subdued.

As a result, any “good” Muslim is despised by all “good” Christians and Jews.

And similarly, all Christians who accept (as they must) their clerics’ “holy book”, The New Testament, therefore accept (*Matthew 16, 17*):

Then Jesus said: “Simon son of Jonah, you are favored indeed! ... I say this to you: You are Peter, the Rock; and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall never conquer it [i.e., Christianity will continue forever]. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven [i.e., Christian clerics get to decide who gets into heaven]; what you forbid on earth shall be forbidden in heaven; and what you allow on earth shall be allowed in heaven.” [i.e., the Christian clerics gave themselves the authority to define ‘morality’ not only on Earth but also in heaven!]

As a result, any “good” Christian is despised by all “good” Mormons, Muslims, and Jews.

And similarly, all religious Jews who accept (as they must) their clerics’ “holy book”, the Torah, accept *Exodus 19, 5* and *Deuteronomy 28, 9*:

If only you [Israelites] will now listen to me [God] and keep my covenant, then out of all peoples, you shall become my special possession; for the whole earth is mine. You shall be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation... The Lord will set you up as his own holy people... Then all people on earth shall see that the Lord has named you as his very own, and they shall go in fear of you...

As a result, any “good” (religious) Jew is despised by all “good” Mormons, Muslims, and Christians. And thus the animosity, hatred, persecutions, and religious wars that have raged throughout the world throughout history. Oh, not to be forgotten, of course all of them (all “good” Mormons, Muslims, Christians, and religious Jews) despise all unbelieving, infidel, pagan, heathens (such as your grandmother and me).

Further, even worse than ignorantly and arrogantly claiming to convey the opinions of the creator of the universe is claiming to be “doing God’s will”. Hitler claimed he was “doing God’s will” by ordering the extermination of all Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals; President G.W. Bush claimed to be “doing God’s will” bringing freedom to Iraq; religious anti-abortionists claimed to be “doing God’s will by bombing health clinics and killing doctors who provide abortions; and so on. And of course all religions (not just Judaism and Islam but also Christianity and Mormonism) have promoted and undertaken “killing the unbelievers” (such as your

grandmother and me), claiming not only to be “doing God’s will” but even for our own good! And yet, even though they have murdered millions of us for refusing to cringe before the ignorant, arrogant clerics and their followers, we still keep thinking for ourselves.

The ignorant arrogance of claiming to be “doing God’s will” is especially horrible. For many cases of ignorance, commonly there’s some reason to hope that stupid behavior derived from ignorance can be corrected. But such hope is demolished when religious idiots and megalomaniacs such as Moses, “Saint” Paul, Muhammad, all the Popes, Martin Luther, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Hitler, Osama bin Laden, and both Presidents Bush are convinced that they are “doing God’s work”. As the co-founder and first President of Cornell University, Andrew Dickson White, wrote in his 1898 book *The History of the Warfare of Science With Theology in Christendom*: “The cardinal doctrine of a fanatic’s creed is that his enemies are the enemies of God.”

Thousands of examples could be given; many hundreds of quotations are given in Aiken’s collection; here, let me just give you just a few examples, from just the past few years – enough so that (I trust) you’ll shake your head in sorrow.

I don’t know that atheists should be considered citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God. [President George Bush, Sr.]

I want you to just let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you. Yes, hate is good... Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a Biblical duty, we are called by God, to conquer this country. We don’t want equal time. We don’t want pluralism. [Randall Terry, Founder of the American group “Operation Rescue”]

How can there be peace when drunkards, drug dealers, communists, atheists, New Age worshippers of Satan, secular humanists, oppressive dictators, greedy money changers, revolutionary assassins, adulterers, and homosexuals are on top? [U.S. presidential candidate Pat Robertson]

All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims. And ulema [Islamic “scholars”] have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries... On that basis, and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to

liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. [Osama Bin Laden]

I really believe that the pagans, the abortionists, the feminists, and the gays, and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way, all of them who tried to secularize America – I point the finger in their face and say “You helped this happen.” [Jerry Falwell, giving his opinion about who is to blame for the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon]

And thus, Dear, my summary: organized religions are nothing but ignorance organized with arrogance.

Now, Dear, there’s much more that could be written (and has been written) about “sick social policies” resulting from (or perpetuated and re-enforced by) religions. But, for here and now, I want to discontinue my description of problems that religions cause societies. Recall that already, many times, I requested your patience when I’d just introduce a topic, promising to return to it later. Well, I’m doing that again – and my reasons include the following.

1. All the “negativity” in these chapters makes me not only sad but also quite angry.
2. I’m now over the hill (in more ways than one!), and if I don’t go off on another trail, it’s now a relatively short shot to the dam at **Q**!
3. At the dam, I’ll offer you an “excursion”, **Qx**, in case you don’t believe that religious policies are so bad as I’ve depicted (but they are – in fact, as I’ll try to show you, they’re even worse than I’ve shown you).
4. If you wonder how humanity got itself into such a terrible mess, I’ll outline some of the history in the “excursion” **Yx**.
5. Before I dig deeper (in the **X**-chapters, to try to show you not only details about the sick social policies caused by religions but also how humanity might solve such problems), I want to show you more about scientific humanism (in the chapters **R** through **W**).

* Go to other chapters *via*

That is, after showing you more sick social policies advocated by the principal religions in our culture (in **Qx**), I want to show you more about Reasoning (in **R**), the Scientific Method (in **S**), “Truth” (in **T**), Uncertainties (in **U**), Values (in **V**) and Worldviews (in **W**). After that, I’ll return to more of this “policy stuff” in the **X**-chapters – but there, I’ll try to show you how humanity might yet eXtricate itself from the religious morass it’s in and might make meaningful progress toward more peace and prosperity.

For now, I’ll terminate my current digging into problems that religions cause societies with just a few hints of how to solve such problems. A good summary was given by E. Haldeman-Julius:

The influences that have lifted the race to a higher moral level are education, freedom, leisure, the humanizing tendency of a better-supplied and more interesting life. In a word, science and liberalism – the two forces, fundamentally skeptical, that we have seen continuously at work in human progress – have accomplished the very things for which religion claims the credit.

Further, as I’ll try to show you in the **X**-chapters, two fundamental problems that humanity must solve are: 1) “the system” known as humanity is a system without a clear, unequivocal, and “universally-accepted” prime objective, and 2) although there is fairly widespread acceptance of a common objective (which can be expressed in a phrase such as “to help humanity progress”), yet there isn’t comparable widespread agreement about how to achieve “progress” toward that objective. The solution, therefore, is to educate as many people as possible both about reasons for adopting the objective of helping humanity and why the best method known to achieve that objective is via applications of the scientific method.

That is, in a nutshell, the solution is to educate the people, especially children, to replace the ignorance and arrogance of religion with the knowledge and humility contained in “scientific humanism”. But as I’ll try to show you in the **X**-chapters, that’s a very difficult nut to crack – in large part because of objections by “the religious” to teaching their kids the essence of “critical thinking”. Because of their objections, I expect that it will require a long time – many generations – before clerics will finally be convicted for crimes against humanity. And whereas it’ll take me a long time to explain all that and whereas it’ll take a much longer time to convict all the clerics for their crimes against humanity, then, Dear, certainly there’s plenty of time available, now, for you to get some exercise!

* Go to other chapters *via*