

Y2 – Your Premises & Purposes

Dear: The university where I earned my bachelor's degree had a stimulating motto: the Latin expression *Tuum est*. When I was there, the common translation was: "It's up to you" – which we struggling students interpreted to mean: "Work harder!" I trust that your university experience will teach you similar. And although the following note, entitled TUUM EST and written by Phillip Harding, probably won't be of so much interest to you as it was to me, yet I have other reasons for wanting to show it to you.

The strength of the Latin language is its ability to express complex ideas in simple words. As a result it is often better left untranslated. A typical example of this is our own... motto – TUUM EST. At its most basic it means, "It is yours." According to the University historian Colonel Harry Logan (himself an eminent Classicist), President Westbrook selected this motto to convey the message that the University... belonged to all the people... not just its Faculty and students...

Of course, it did not take a Classicist, like Harry Logan, to know that TUUM EST is also the Latin for "It is your duty." The students soon found that out, and "It's up to you" rapidly became one of the more popular renderings of the motto, as it still is today.

On the other hand, it is unfortunately probably true that the most famous usage of this expression is known today only to students of the Latin language. The Roman poet Horace ended an ode (Iv.3) of homage to his muse, *Melpomene*, with the line, "The fact that I am inspired as a poet, the fact that I please, if I do please, is your gift [TUUM EST]."

So, gift, duty or possession – take your pick, or, better still, do not translate it, but keep all three, because TUUM EST is a complex motto, worthy of a great University.

In any event, Dear, and although my crystal ball doesn't seem to be so clear as it was when I was an undergraduate, yet I'm quite confident that: "it's up to you" to decide what to do with the gifts (that your "muse" has given you!), that "it's up to you" to decide upon your premises, your purposes, and your values, and that to reach them, you'll need to work hard: *Tuum est!*

Which then, oddly enough, leads me to what I had originally planned for these "Y-chapters" – before I learned about your parents' plans to divorce. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, a part of what I do for "Y" when I walk is just *Y*: "*One more year to live...*", but I suspect that idea won't be of much value to you – until you're older! While you're still a kid (younger

than 50 or so!), maybe better for you would be “You go your way, and I’ll go mine” (or “You go Yahweh, and I’ll go mine”!)¹, or better still, “It’s up to you: *Tuum est*.”

In a later **Y**-chapter I’ll show you the rest of what I review for “**Y**” when I’m walking, but first, let me start on my original plans for these **Y**-chapters, namely, to try to “tie up some loose ends”.

“A few! Ha!”

“Child! Behave!”

I know that there are many such “loose ends” (i.e., things that, earlier in the book, I promised I’d return to), all deal with you (and therefore the **Y**), and most deal with decisions that only you can make (i.e., *Tuum est*).

Unfortunately for me, however, my original plan was causing me substantial difficulty: for more than a month I started to write and then gave up. It just wouldn’t flow. Writer’s block? I’d work for a few hours, and then give up. Your grandmother saw the state I was in, and suggested we go on a trip; my daughter suggested that I not try to write so much; I goofed off, more and more. Then, when I woke up one morning, I finally saw how to do it. It’s a line that I hope that you’ll take to heart, especially because if you hope to achieve some challenging goal, almost certainly you’ll need to remember it frequently: “Just do it!”

It brings to mind a perceptive definition of a ‘professional’ that I once heard and I doubt that you’ll find in any dictionary: professionals are those who do their work even when they don’t want to – not to suggest that I’m a professional writer!

Anyway, possibly the reason why I was having so much difficulty writing these chapters was that my goal of “trying to tie up loose ends” may conflict with my personality: I’ve never been particularly good at “putting on the finishing touches”, preferring instead (similar to most children!) to explore something new. Meanwhile, the reason I wanted to try to “tie up loose ends” here (in **Y** rather than in **Z**) is because, any obvious expectation to the

¹ I found that quotation in Aiken’s collection – but not the name of its originator.

contrary, this is actually the last set of chapters of this book. I've been saving **Z** to show you my speculations about how this universe might have started, i.e., the "Zen (or Zigblat Mechanics) of Zero". [Be tolerant, kid; I use such games to try to maintain my sanity – and don't be similar to my daughter and ask if I think it's working!] So anyway, personalities and potential insanities aside, let me turn to the task of trying to tie up some loose ends – and just do it!

To begin at the beginning, a long, long (long!) time ago, when you were four years old, you asked me why I didn't believe in God. I responded that I'd tell you "when you're older". If you've had the amazing perseverance to read this book, then I trust that now, "when you're older" (!), you understand my response, namely: "Because belief in god (any god) is bad science and even worse policy, both personal and public."

So now, the first loose end that I want to try to tie up is one that I'll pose as a question for you: "If you believe in God, Dear, then why?" [The other "Y"!] And if you don't have any inclination to answer that question, Dear, then my response would be: "Come on, kid, be fair!" I've worked hard for more than a decade trying to answer your question about why I don't believe in God. To me, it seems only fair that you'd spend at least a few weeks answering my question to you – even if you answer it only to yourself!

Of course, no matter your verbal response to the question about your belief in God, only you know your thoughts. But, Dear, whatever thoughts you've adopted, whatever premises you've assumed, please ask yourself: Why? And if (brilliant but devious child that you are) you answer something similar to: "Well, my weird grandfather-with-the-beard advocates that I don't use the word 'belief' but, instead, assign probabilities to the likelihood of the validity of any idea", then my response would be: "Kid, you're not gonna get off that easy! What's your estimate for the probability of the existence of any god – and why?"

And maybe I should pause for a bit to point out, again, that there are (at least) two meanings for 'belief', both illustrated with what seems to be my illogical statement: "Even I, on occasion, have believed in God – but never once have I ever believed in God." In the first usage, "Even I... have believed in God", the meaning of 'belief' is "wish to be"; that is, the meaning of the statement is something similar to: "Even I... have wished that God exists [because sometimes it would be comforting to think that

someone knows what in hell is going on and could straighten things out!].” In the second, usage, in contrast, “...never once have I ever believed in God”, the meaning of ‘belief’ deals with “probability”. That is, the meaning of the statement is something similar to: “never once have I concluded that the probability of any god’s existence to be sufficiently large to be credible.”

In a post² at his blog *Science and Religion News*, Salman Hameed relays a similar conclusion by Carl Sagan (1934–96):

From his last essay, *In the Valley of Shadows* (1996 article in the *Parade* magazine and also reprinted in *Billions and Billions*), when doctors had told him that he had less than 3-months to live:

I would love to believe that when I die I will live again, that some thinking, feeling, remembering part of me will continue. But much as I want to believe that, and despite the ancient and worldwide cultural traditions that assert an afterlife, I know of nothing to suggest that it is more than wishful thinking. The world is so exquisite with so much love and moral depth, that there is no reason to deceive ourselves with pretty stories for which there's little good evidence. Far better it seems to me, in our vulnerability, is to look death in the eye and to be grateful every day for the brief but magnificent opportunity that life provides.

Meanwhile, though, you’ve been taught (or better, “indoctrinated”) since you were a baby to “believe” in “God the father”. I trust you agree that it’s solely because of your [“choice of”!] parents that you were indoctrinated to believe in a particular version of “God the father” (viz., the Mormon version), rather than in a version “worshiped” in another religion (such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, or whatever). Further, I trust you agree that it’s solely because of your choice of parents that you weren’t indoctrinated in a “religion” in which no “god the father” is recognized (such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, or “the religion of adults”: science!). So then, Dear, I have another obvious question for you: Are you sure that your choice of parents was wise?!

Which reminds me of what Yitzhak Rabin (former Prime Minister of Israel, assassinated in 1995 by a Jewish right-wing fanatic) said when accepting his co-award for the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize:³

² At <http://sciencereigionnews.blogspot.com/2006/12/god-and-carl-sagan.html>.

³ Available at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1994/rabin-lecture.html.

A child is born into an utterly undemocratic world. He cannot choose his father and mother. He cannot pick his sex or color, his religion, nationality, or homeland. Whether he is born in a manor or a manger, whether he lives under a despotic or democratic regime, it is not his choice.

Yet, Dear (as someone else said), at birth you were an atheist. While you were still in your crib, you demonstrated that you were also a budding scientist, learning *via* experimentation. Also, brain scans of young children recently revealed that they “naturally” feel empathy for other children. So, as a young child, you were a scientific humanist!

Soon, however, your natural inclinations were re-directed (or “polluted”, depending on your perspective): you were taught that conforming to your original scientific humanism was unacceptable. Further, rather than being taught how to meditate chanting god’s name (OM), or the intricacies of the Yin and Yang of the Tao, or how to prostrate yourself five times a day facing Mecca, or any of many other options, your parents taught you how to “say your prayers to God” every night, to thank your “Eternal Father” before you ate your dinner, and to seek help and guidance from “your savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” in pretty much everything else. So again, Dear: Why?

What was the basis for your mother’s choice? Did she especially like Mormon music? Was she most impressed with Mormon architecture? Was the choice of her religion based on the wit, intelligence, and fellowship of fellow Mormons? Did she intensely study all conflicting philosophies and find that the philosophy of her religion was the most logical? Did she investigate all relevant data and conclude that the data supporting her religion were most reliable? Did she evaluate predictions of hypotheses of all competing religions and find that the preponderance of experimental evidence supported her choice? Or, Dear, was your mother, also, just indoctrinated when she was a child? And her parents?

And so, another obvious question is, again: Why? Why do parents indoctrinate their children in their own religions? But of course the answer to that question is equally obvious: they “think” that what they’re doing is “right”. They’re doing what they consider to be “best” for their children. After all (especially in the case of Zoroastrians, Christians, Muslims, and Mormons) isn’t it perfectly clear that their way is the “only way” to gain “eternal life”? Surely you wouldn’t expect them to deprive their children of this “greatest of all possessions”!

But, Dear, have you given some thought to that? Consider the case of Mormonism. Given that there's somewhere around 6 million Mormons in the world of approximately 6 billion people,⁴ that means that roughly only one in a thousand adheres to Mormonism, i.e., 0.1% of the total population. So, Mormons assume that the other 99.9% of the people have misguidedly taken the wrong path to “salvation” and “paradise”. Isn't that a rather arrogant assumption? Isn't it potentially dangerous? And any way you look at it, doesn't it reveal a tremendous amount of stupidity in the world?

Of course, if adults make stupid choices, they have no one to blame but themselves. As Emerson said:

It is as impossible for a man [or, better, “an adult”] to be cheated by anyone but himself, as for a thing to be, and not to be, at the same time.

Unfortunately, similar isn't true for a child: with a child's needed trust in parents, a child can be cheated out of childhood – and then, in many if not most cases, also out of adulthood.

To be an adult, Dear, then by definition, you must make your own decisions and take responsibilities for the consequences. So, now that you're almost an adult, will you succumb to the mind-numbing nonsense contained already in the *Introduction* to the Book of Mormon? Look at it again:

We invite all men [and women?] everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts [which would be a neat trick if you could think with your heart!] the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father [or Mother?], in the name of Christ [although why one would need to ask anyone anything in someone else's name is unclear!] if the book is true [in the open-system known as reality?!]. Those who pursue this course [those who “ponder” in their hearts and who ask questions in someone else's name!] and ask in faith [“faith” in what, that the sun will come up tomorrow or in the principle that if no tests can be identified to test a statement, then that statement contains no information?] will gain a testimony [from whom – and whose reliability as a witness is what?] of its truth...

The above *Introduction* from the Book of Mormon is obviously addressing “truth” in a closed system – but if you want “truth” in such a system, Dear,

⁴ In case you're interested, Dear, the estimate that there are ~12 million Mormons is apparently unreliable, as you can find, e.g., in a Salt Lake Tribune newspaper report at http://www.sltrib.com/ci_2991263 or see <http://www.exmormon.org/mormon/mormon411.htm>.

then “How about a nice game of chess?” [as the computer “said” in a movie I saw (maybe it was called *War Games*) in which a world war was almost started because of the computer’s simulations].

If you do have a tendency to “believe” in God and in the “truth” of Mormonism, Dear, then in addition to using your brain (not your heart!) as best you can to evaluate such silliness as the above, I encourage you to evaluate your “real reason” for such “beliefs”. Is it that you think that your mother and her mother won’t love you if you don’t “believe”? Do you enjoy the company of fellow believers? Do you enjoy having something to do? Do you enjoy getting dressed up on Sunday? Is it the familiarity of the words and music? Is it that you’ve spent so much time learning all the rules of their game that you don’t want to have wasted all that time? Is it that you enjoy the (fabricated) security of the game in which you can “believe” that you will live forever? Do you can think that you’re one of the “good people”? Do you think that you’re being honest with yourself?

Dear: I strongly encourage you to be honest with yourself and I strongly encourage you to make an honest appraisal of your premises. Premises are fundamental, Dear – as I remind myself with my mantra (from **P**)

The priorities are: first premises, then purposes – and then principles, priorities, and policies – and finally: plans, procedures, and practices (with perseverance).

As I’ve tried to show you in earlier chapters, your premises are fundamental to you, Dear, because your premises (in particular, your premises about how to gain knowledge and therefore about the nature of this universe and your place within it) provide you with the foundation on which you construct your worldview. With that foundation laid, you then choose your purposes (or objectives or goals) upon which the entire framework of your life depends: your objectives provide standards for defining and assessing your values, and your objectives and values provide you with bases for the principles that you choose to adopt. And the rest, the policies you choose and the plans, procedures and practices you follow, although they are as critical to you as putting the roof and plumbing and walls in a house, are mostly just finishing touches.

Consequently, Dear, please take great care (even “extreme care”) to examine and evaluate your foundational premises. To become an adult, then by

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definition, you have no option but to take responsibility for yourself. Insofar as you let others define your life, you'll remain a child. Sorry for the responsibility that this lays on you, kid, but just as for going to the movies, the “adult price” is always higher than a child's.

Throughout your childhood, your parents made most decisions for you, and some of their decisions were unwise. For example, they decided to indoctrinate you with the God idea. Thereby, your parents (and your religious teachers and most politicians in this country) violated what, 150 years ago, the philosopher Schopenhauer considered to be a fundamental principle for human development (which, I know, I've quoted many times before – but it should be memorized!):

No child under the age of fifteen should receive instruction in subjects which may possibly be the vehicle of serious error, such as philosophy or religion, for wrong notions imbibed early can seldom be rooted out, and of all the intellectual faculties, judgment is the last to arrive at maturity.

Propagandists of all types (from Hitler and Stalin to all clerics) have violated and continue to violate Schopenhauer's principle. They add insult to injury with their hideous claim: “Give me a child to the age of four, and his mind will be mine for life.”

In *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, Bertrand Russell expressed his pessimism about the potentials for overcoming such indoctrination.

Those who know that their beliefs are founded in reason are willing to argue their way to victory and are willing to renounce opinions that do not survive such argument. Those who are aware that their beliefs are founded in faith, on the other hand, are unwilling to submit their beliefs to dispassionate discussion and do not expect to change their own beliefs ever. They are perfectly willing, if pressed, to resort to force to change other people's beliefs by brainwashing children, persecuting heretics, and warring with “unenlightened” adversaries. Religious instruction manipulates the vulnerable psyches of young children before they are able to think for themselves, endeavoring to prevent them from ever acquiring this ability. They never attain an intellectual resistance sufficient to counter the influence of dogmatic precepts, to grow up as free individuals.

Such pessimism, however, isn't necessarily appropriate. It assumes that, when they become adults, people who were subjected to childhood indoctrination will be unable to evaluate the evidence and come to their own conclusions. And although there is an overwhelming body of evidence

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<http://zenofzero.net/>

suggesting that such propaganda is usually effective (resulting, for example, in life-long infection of approximately 80% of the people in the world with various versions of the god meme), yet substantial evidence also exists demonstrating that such indoctrination isn't always effective: hundreds of millions of people (if not more than a billion), indoctrinated as children with the god meme, were able to reject it when they reached the “age of discrimination”, the onset of adulthood and maturity. And of course I'd add the assessment that those who never overcome their childhood indoctrination thereby never become adults.⁵

In any case, kid, for you it's “decision time”. And I'm sorry, Dear, but you can't avoid the decision. Nobody can make it for you. As Sartre said: you're “condemned to be free”. He added (in essence): even if you decide to listen to the advice of an angel on your shoulder, it's up to you to decide if you will – and to decide if it really is an angel. Further, even if you decide to delay your decision – to procrastinate – that's still a decision. But I would encourage you not to procrastinate on assessing your premises, Dear, because they'll have fundamental influences all your other decisions, including which university to attend, whom to marry (if anyone), and so on, on and on. That is, there are some decisions that you must make that will have a major impact on the rest of your life, starting immediately.

Fortunately for you, though, there's only one important decision that you must make – and actually, it's a rather simple (even trivial!) to decide. From that one decision, your other decisions will follow rather directly. I would consequently claim that it's far-and-away the most important decision – or assumption – or premiss – that you'll ever make. Consistently, it's the answer to what I consider to be far-and-away the most important philosophical question, namely, the fundamental “epistemological question”: how do we gain knowledge (viz., in Greek, *epistēmē*)?

Notwithstanding all that's been written about “the epistemological question” during the past ~2500 years (reviews of which you can find in many books and at many places on the internet), I think it's a trivially simple question to answer. Although data support the concept that much knowledge is encoded

⁵ In X28 I showed you a few “deconversion stories”; you can find thousands of them on the internet; one that I just finished reading and that you would probably profit from reading is by Raymond D. Bradley, who went on to become an “unabashed atheist” and a professional philosopher; his story is at <http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/bradley/Fundamentalist%20to%20Free-thinker.pdf>; it's entitled “From Fundamentalist to Free-Thinker: It All Began with Santa”.

in our DNA (e.g., how to take oxygen from air, how to digest food, etc., including our “innate moral sense”), yet it seems trivially obvious that we gain additional knowledge about the world external to our mind only *via* the scientific method: guess, test, and reassess. That’s how people learned how to find food, tame fire, kill beasts, irrigate fields, and so on, out to an including decoding DNA and developing the internet. Feynman said that the scientific method is a way to try to make sure that we’re not fooling ourselves, but as far as I can make it out, it’s the only way. As Hippocrates said, more than 2400 years ago: “There are in fact two things, science and opinion; the former begets knowledge, the latter, ignorance.”

For all religious people, their opinions (their ignorance) follow from a single fundamental mistake: not to gain knowledge by the scientific method but to succumb to wishful thinking. That, of course, is entirely consistent with one meaning for ‘belief’: with *lief* the Anglo-Saxon word for ‘wish’, ‘belief’ means, “wish to be”. As Julius Caesar said, “Men willingly believe what they want.” But, Dear, surely you “know” (that is, surely experience has taught you; that is, surely you’ve learned *via* the scientific method) that just because you want something to be so doesn’t make it so. Just because you want to get a good grade on your test, or want a certain person to notice you, or want to get a million dollars, or want to live for eternity in paradise, or... doesn’t mean it’s “true”!

Such is the essence of all religious delusions: living in a fantasyland based on wishful thinking. Further, the farther religious people fall into their fundamental error of “believing” what they “wish to be”, the more fundamentalist they become. In the limit, in the depth of their depraved “thinking”, such fools fly hijacked airplanes loaded with passengers into skyscrapers, convinced in their fantasy that they’ll be instantly transported to a fictitious paradise, where they’ll live eternity with 72 perpetual virgins available to competently relieve them of their sexual frustrations. They arrived at their murderous crash into nonexistence by falling for “proof-by-pleasure logical fallacy”: if it “feels good”, then it’s true — NOT!

That’s exactly the same fallacy that the *Introduction* to the Book of Mormon advocates and in which you were indoctrinated by your parents. When you were sufficiently indoctrinated, you were urged to convey your “testimony” to fellow Mormons, in which you explained to them how you “knew” what you “knew” was “true”, namely, because... [stripped to its essence] it felt good. Well, Dear, sorry to burst the Mormon bubble, but if you’ll be honest

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with yourself, I think you'll agree that what you actually "knew" was only that it felt good. If you want to know if some idea is approaching "truth", then no other way is known than by testing its predictions, i.e., by applying the scientific method.

Of course, as I've tried to show you in earlier chapters, the scientific method doesn't yield "truth" about the open system known as reality. Nonetheless, all evidence of which I'm aware suggests that the scientific method yields the best knowledge that we're capable of discovering. That is, if any succinct, falsifiable hypothesis summarizes a substantial quantity of data, is consistent with other well-tested principles, and yields testable predictions that are confirmed by additional tests, then that series of steps justifies our calling it 'knowledge' – subject to the proviso that we consider it 'knowledge' only so long as later experiments don't reveal its inadequacies. And since that proviso is attached, all knowledge must be considered as only provisional; that is, probabilities should be assigned to every concept considered to be knowledge. As the philosopher David Hume said: "all knowledge degenerates into probability."

In earlier chapters, I showed you some of my estimates for the probabilities of various concepts I consider to be knowledge (starting with the idea that my thoughts exist!) – but I admitted then (and repeat my admission now) that my estimates are extremely crude. Yet, I don't feel overly defensive about the crudeness of such estimates, because when one is estimating extremely small probabilities (i.e., the probabilities that such premises are wrong), then as a practical matter, one chance in 10^{12} , say, isn't significantly different from one chance in 10^{24} . Any premiss that's correct to within 1 part in, for example, 10^{12} (as found, of course, by the scientific method, i.e., by testing its predictions) is "close enough" for me to consider it a "useful working hypotheses".

Now, Dear, I'm sorry if I seem insensitive, but I really can't see how any sane adult could adopt any procedure to gain knowledge other than by the scientific method. When you were a child, your parents and clerics bribed you to adopt procedures such as "listen to you heart", "seek guidance from God", and "study the scriptures", but if you plan to become an adult, then by definition, you'll need to evaluate your indoctrination. In an attempt to help you, I'll briefly comment on their suggestions.

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I assume that “listen to your heart” means something similar to “get in touch with your emotions” (or “become aware of them” – or maybe even “evaluate them”). As I’ve written before (e.g., in **F**, entitled “Figuring out Feelings”), I certainly agree that it’s wise to try to understand one’s emotions: the syntheses that one’s right brain is capable of performing are frequently quite amazing – and amazingly useful. And I also admit that it’s sometimes quite difficult for the analysis capabilities of one’s left brain to try to “figure out” what one’s right brain synthesized (sometime almost instantaneously): sometimes it has taken me days or even weeks to “figure out” why I had a particular “feeling” or “emotion” or “insight”.

But on the other hand, many times I’ve found that such emotions are “way off base”: I’ve been afraid when my fear wasn’t justified, I’ve felt sad when a more thorough appraisal showed me how to be happy, I’ve hated when I should have loved, and so on. As I’ve written before (and as you well “know”), commonly our emotions are derived from a very complex mixture of stimulants (some real, some imagined; some current, some historical; and so on). Consequently, rather than just “listen to your heart”, I recommend that you listen – and then examine, then question, then dig, then... until you determine the source of any emotion (at least, those emotions that might lead you to make a decision). For example, you may think that a certain somebody is the most wonderful person in the world, for whom you’d do anything – but before you do, please examine your emotions, consider the data, evaluate the consequences, etc.

That is, although it’s undoubtedly useful to “listen to one’s heart”, it would be foolish to respond only to one’s emotions. That’s what animals and little children do. Surely adults can do better! What I recommend is what I tried to convey to you way back in chapters **B** and **D**. Convene your Board of Governors in your mind: Left-brain (with its analysis capabilities), Right-brain (with its synthesis capabilities, conveyed as emotions), Instinct or “l’autre moi” (with its typical communication: “Just do it!”), and a representative of your universe of experiences (that is, “someone” able to provide information about how your experiences have contributed to your adopting your values and having specific emotions) – and then listen to (and argue with!) all of them.

As for the advice to gain knowledge by seeking “guidance from God”, somebody’s gotta be kidding! If you followed your parent’s advice (and responded to their admonishments) and tried “talking to God”, I wonder if

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you ever noticed that he never answered – which is consistent with the hypothesis that “there’s no such animal”! As Howard Kreisner said:

Over the years I realized the god I prayed to was the god I invented. When I was talking to him, I was talking to myself. He had no understanding or qualities that I did not have. When I realized god was an extension of my imagination, I stopped praying to him.

From my own experiences, however, I readily admit that to try to understand something (maybe especially interpersonal relationships), sometimes it’s useful to try to “get outside yourself” – to examine the situation from another perspective. As I suggested in earlier chapters, sometimes I do that by asking “Mother Nature” and “Father Sun” for “their opinions”. And of course I realize that it’s just another way of “talking to myself”, but by pretending that I’m having a conversation with “others” who might have different opinions, maybe I have a better chance of seeing other perspectives more clearly and accurately.

And as for “studying the scriptures” (i.e., various “holy books”), I’m sorry Dear, but that’s just plain stupid! Of course I agree that such “relics of antiquity” do contain a few salvageable pieces of knowledge. Thus, the Old Testament’s “love your neighbor as... yourself” is as good a piece of advice as any dolphin can teach you, and the New Testament’s plagiarized advice to uphold “the spirit” rather than “the letter of the law” is as wise today as when Rabbi Hillel conceived it. And if you can tolerate digging through mounds of trash and piles of manure, you can find good advice even in the Quran and the Book of Mormon.

But as I tried to show you in **Qx** (and you can find much more on the internet), all such “holy books” have incorporated their own fatal nemeses (namely, inconsistencies, false “explanations”, blatant errors, failed prophecies, etc.). I’m not going to go through all that again, but as just a brief refresher, remember:

- In the Old Testament we’re told that $\pi = 3.000$ and we’re given two different versions of “evolution” (plants, animals, and then people vs. people, plants, and then animals),
- In the New Testament we’re told that illnesses can be cured by driving out devils and that the world would disappear about 1800 years ago

(whereas, courtesy Christianity and later Islam, in reality only a lot of Epicurean sanity disappeared),

- In the Quran we're told how humans are conceived from blood clots, how the Sun sets in a spring of murky water, and how Allah uses mountains to keep the Earth from shaking, and
- In the Book of Mormon (based on the false idea that American aboriginals are the descendants of "the lost tribes of Israel") we're told that dark skin is the "curse of Cain" and baldness is caused by sin.

Such stupidity leads me to suggest that maybe it's good advice to "study the scriptures" – so that, thereby, you'll gain sufficient evidence to decide that relying on "scriptures" is dumb!

And even though it's undoubtedly obvious to you, Dear, let me again add that, as a practical matter, each of us can't collect all relevant data and then personally apply the scientific method to gain knowledge on all topics. That procedure would be far too slow, laborious, and in many cases, too expensive: some experimental tests of hypotheses (e.g., in astronomy and high energy physics) have required the efforts of thousands of people and cost billions of dollars! Consequently, we must rely on the scientific results and reports of others – but doing so, not with (as Shakespeare said) "your courage screwed to the sticking point" but with your *skepticism* screwed to the sticking point! That is, to gain knowledge in practice, we must rely on what others have learned and relayed in their sayings and writings.

And what a difference there is between the "scriptures" of religion vs. those of science! When you turn to the "scriptures" of science (i.e., textbooks, journal articles, reports, etc.), then on the one hand, you're encouraged to be skeptical, to think for yourself, and to "keep an open mind", and on the other hand, surely you can't help but be amazed at the foundation of science: built on hard work, perseverance, honesty, truthful reporting, openness, frankness, verification... In contrast, in the "scriptures" of all religions, then on the one hand, you're encouraged to suspend judgment, to submit, and ultimately to close your mind to other thoughts, and on the other hand, you can find that all religions are built on a foundation of lies, faked reports, secretiveness, and "blind faith" (some of which I showed you in the "excursion" **Qx** and more of which I'll show you in **Yx**).

* Go to other chapters *via*

Therefore, Dear, choose your “scriptures” and your teachers carefully! As the French poet and novelist Victor Hugo (1802–1885) said: “There is in every village a torch: the schoolmaster – and an extinguisher: the parson.” And as the Buddha (“the awakened one”) [Siddhartha Gautama (or Sakyamuni, or “sage of the Shakyas”), also spelled Siddharta Gotama] said in about 500 BCE to the people of the village of Kesaputta (called the Kalamas), who asked whose teachings they should follow:

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

I’d even go so far as to say, Dear, that after you’ve read the Bible, the Quran, and the Book of Mormon (just to see what’s in those stupid books), then there’ll be little loss if you toss them all in the trash – save for the possibility that you might someday want to show someone else how stupid they are.

On the other hand, after you’ve read Feynman’s *Lectures on Physics* or Morse and Feshbach’s *Method of Theoretical Physics* (or similar books in your special field of knowledge), then hang on to them for the rest of your life. Foolishly I gave my copies of those books to your father, and even though I’ve been “wasting my time” on this book for the past decade, on many occasions I’ve wished that I still had “my bibles”.

At any rate, the point that I was trying to get to was not only to agree with Wittgenstein that knowledge is a “community affair” but also to point out that obviously, so, too, is ignorance. But there is a major difference between the practices and procedures in religious vs. scientific communities, a difference well illuminated by ex-preacher Dan Barker:

Scientists do not join hands every Sunday, singing, “Yes, gravity is real! I will have faith! I will be strong! I believe in my heart that what goes up, up, up must come down, down, down. Amen!” If they did, we would think they were pretty insecure about it.

In reality, scientists commonly meet every year (or so), at international conferences dedicated to their discipline, to try to convince other scientists that what the others think they know is wrong, e.g.,

Gravity is not, in fact, an attractive force; it's the force of repulsion between space (negative energy) and mass (positive energy). To justify that statement, let me show you...

What an astounding difference between that and, for example, weekly meetings of "believing" Mormons, with each in turn "testifying" that what they "feel in their hearts" and what they've read in the "scriptures" is assuredly "true"!

And the even more important point that I was trying to get to, Dear, was to repeat my opinion that quite likely the most important premiss that you will adopt in your life is the answer to the question: "How can knowledge be gained about the reality external to my mind?" I've already tried to convey to you my opinion, based on a lifetime of experience, that the sensible answer to that question is: "*Via* the scientific method." But because I consider it to be the quite likely the most important premiss that anyone chooses, let me try to make sure you understand what I'm trying to convey (even if I repeat myself) by quoting a recent post at my blog.

Your Most Important Assumption⁶

We all adopt many assumptions or premisses: that our ideas exist, that we exist, that there exists a reality external to our minds, and so on. I doubt that I'd get much argument if I claimed that one of our most important premisses deals with "the nature" of "reality", for example, if we assume that it's entirely natural (as do all Brights) or that it contains various "supernatural entities", such as goblins, ghosts, and gods.

In addition, we all make many important decisions, for example, those dealing with trying to survive, to help our families survive (whatever we consider to be the extent of our "families"), to uphold and promote our values, and so on. I doubt, also, that I'd get much argument if I claimed that one of our most important decisions is how to obtain knowledge about the nature of the reality external to our minds. But I may stir some controversy with the claim (argued below) that everyone's most important assumption is one's decision about how to gain such knowledge.

⁶ Posted during February 2008 at www.zenofzero.blogspot.com.

In philosophical terms, my claim is that epistemology (the study of the grounds and nature of knowledge, itself – from the Greek word for ‘knowledge’, *epistēmē*) trumps all other branches of philosophy, such as logic, ethics, aesthetics, ontology, and so on, including the philosophies of science, religion, politics, law, etc. In all other branches of philosophy, epistemology is fundamental, since it addresses the basic question: How does one “know” what one claims to know?

There’s no doubt that we all possess substantial knowledge: our abilities to keep our hearts beating and to digest food, our innate sense of morality, etc. Yet in general, we don’t need to use our analytical capabilities to make decisions dealing with such innate (or instinctive) knowledge. After a billion-or-so years of experimentation, Nature “programmed” such knowledge in our DNA. As examples, if a projectile is coming at your head, don’t think about it, duck! Similarly, if you see a child in danger, you’ll immediately try to save the child. Those species that didn’t pass on such knowledge to their offspring (to help themselves and their “families” to survive) are extinct. Much of ethics, therefore, is instinctive.

Much of esthetics, too, seems to be instinctive; it may even be inherent in the “nature of nature”, that is, derived from fundamental symmetries contained within reality, itself. But I don’t want to go into that, now. It’s a complicated subject at the frontiers of modern physics and the bases of “the standard model” of elementary particles and of string theory.

In contrast to our possessing such innate and maybe even inherent knowledge, to gain new knowledge about the reality external to our minds we must make a fundamental decision: How is such knowledge gained? Exploring possible answers to that question leads to what I consider to be everyone’s most important assumption. To begin to see why I consider it so important, consider options chosen by people in two different groups.

Theists, those who adopt the premiss that various “supernatural entities” exist in the reality external to their minds, thereby and subsequently decide that knowledge about reality can be gained by “listening to their hearts”, by “just having faith”, or similar. All such “methods” are various versions of the “proof-by-pleasure logical fallacy” (viz., if it feels good, it’s “true”). If theists have enough faith (so it’s claimed), they can move mountains – and if they’re unsuccessful, it demonstrates only that they don’t yet have sufficient “faith”!

Scientific humanists, in contrast, adopt the fundamental premiss that knowledge about reality can best be obtained – or even, can only be obtained – by the scientific method: “guess, test, and reassess.” They learn by experimenting. Oh, they might try the theists’ technique of moving mountains by “thought control” (aka telekinesis), but when that doesn’t work, scientific humanists (aka “practical people”!) use dynamite and earthmovers!

The fundamental mistake made by all religious people is to succumb to wishful thinking. That's consistent with one meaning of the word 'belief', which with 'lief' an Anglo-Saxon root word meaning 'wish', then one meaning of 'belief' is "wish to be". The farther theists fall into their fundamental error, the more "fundamentalist" they become. In the limit, in the depth of their depraved "thinking", such fools fly hijacked airplanes loaded with passengers into skyscrapers, convinced in their fantasy that they'll be instantly transported to a fictitious paradise, where they'll live eternity with 72 perpetual virgins available to competently relieve them of their sexual frustrations. They "believe" it so – they wish it so – so (so they claim), they "know" it's so.

Scientific humanists, in contrast, decide to try to gain knowledge about reality not from wishful thinking but *via* the scientific method – not because it "feels good", not because they've been indoctrinated in the method since childhood (although they have applied it, by themselves, ever since they were babies!), but solely because it seems to work. If it stops working, if it's found to have fundamental flaws (but it hasn't yet, as far as I know), then they'll abandon it – for whatever works better! Using the scientific method ("guess, test, and reassess"), ancient hunters made bows and arrows, ancient farmers planted seeds and domesticated animals, ancient engineers built irrigation canals and developed wheels, ancient doctors learned techniques of healing, and so on it has gone, out to an including building airplanes, skyscrapers, and the internet – which Muslim maniacs use to kill people.

I use the contrast between the behaviors of scientific humanists and theists (aka unscientific antihumans) to defend my claim that everyone's most important premiss is one's decision about how to gain knowledge about reality. My reason for this claim is that (as I'll briefly illustrate below) one's choice about how to gain such knowledge is more important than one's choice of worldview, goals, values, principles, policies, plans, practices, etc., because one's choice of how to gain knowledge dictates the rest.

Ayn Rand wrote something similar in her book *Philosophy: Who Needs It?*

Are you in a universe which is ruled by natural laws and, therefore, is stable, firm, absolute – and knowable? Or are you in an incomprehensible chaos, a realm of inexplicable miracles, an unpredictable, unknowable flux, which your mind is impotent to grasp? The nature of your actions – and of your ambition – will be different, according to which set of answers you come to accept. [Italics added]

In fact, if the scientific method of gaining knowledge is adopted, then it can be used even to test our other basic premisses, such as that our thoughts exist, that we exist, and that the universe is entirely natural. Thereby, ontology (the *theory* of existence) can be seen to be rather silly: existence isn't a theory to be proven but a hypothesis to be tested – by application of the scientific method.

To illustrate why I consider our most important decision (our most important premiss) to be how to gain knowledge about reality, I'll list the following abbreviated statements. I go into details elsewhere [in my book].

- Whereas one's claim of knowledge about reality leads directly to one's worldview, therefore, how one chooses to seek knowledge defines one's worldview. Thus, on the one hand, if you decide that knowledge about reality can be obtained only *via* the scientific method, you'll conclude that the universe is entirely natural, thereby defining your worldview. On the other hand, if you decide that knowledge about reality can be obtained by wishful thinking (by just "believing"), then similar to all theists, you'll conclude that the universe is filled with "supernatural entities" (from the "sacred spirits" of the shamans to the resulting gods and ghosts and goblins of "modern" mystics, from astrologers to clerics).
- Whereas one's worldview dictates the purpose (or purposes) one chooses to pursue in life, therefore, one's purpose follows from one's choice of how to gain knowledge about reality. Thus, if your worldview is that the universe (including all life) is entirely natural, you'll likely adopt the premiss that a prime purpose is "merely" to help intelligent life to continue (e.g., by attempting to expand knowledge). On the other hand, if you conclude that the universe is populated, for example, with one or more omnipotent and omniscient gods, you'll likely adopt the premiss that your prime purpose is whatever some sufficiently skilled con-artist cleric dictates to be the god's (or gods') desires (e.g., "go forth and multiply", "kill the unbelievers", and similar stupidity).
- Whereas values can be measured only against some purpose, then once one's purposes are adopted, then one's values can be established; therefore, values also follow from one's epistemological choice. If, for example, you adopt the purpose to help intelligent life to continue by attempting to expand knowledge, then you would place substantial value on learning as much as you can and on sharing your knowledge. On the other hand, if you adopt the purpose to do as some alleged god desires (as dictated by some con-artist clerics), then you'll place substantial value on doing whatever your clerics recommend (e.g., giving alms, paying tithes, having more children, etc., out to, in some cases, flying jetliners into skyscrapers).

Thus, a hierarchy of premisses is established, starting with the most important premiss (how knowledge is to be gained) and below which are premisses dealing with (in order): worldview, purposes, values, principles, plans, practices, procedures, and so on.

In his book *The End of Faith*, Sam Harris summarized well the stupid, fundamental assumption of all theists:

We live in an age in which most people believe that mere words – "Jesus,"
"Allah," "Ram" – can mean the difference between eternal torment and bliss

everlasting. Considering the stakes here, it is not surprising that many of us occasionally find it necessary to murder other human beings for using the wrong magic words, or the right ones for the wrong reasons. How can any person presume to know that this is the way the universe works? Because it says so in our holy books. How do we know that our holy books are free from error? Because the books *themselves* say so. Epistemological black holes of this sort are fast draining the light from our world.

As far as I know (based on the scientific method, i.e., relying on experience), the only way to stop the light of the world from draining into such “epistemological black holes” is to do one’s best to enlighten others, not only to help them see that everyone’s most important premiss is how to gain knowledge about reality but also to see that the only sensible ways to gain such knowledge is *via* the scientific method. And thus this blog and my associated book.

In a nutshell, Dear, I encourage you to adopt the ontological premisses that your thoughts exist, that you exist, that a reality exists external to your mind, and, most importantly, I encourage you to adopt the epistemological premiss that the way to gain knowledge to support all your ontological premisses is *via* the scientific method. The more common, alternative, epistemological premiss is to assume that you can gain knowledge about reality *via* your emotions. That alternative is advocated in all religions, but at most, it’s compelling for children (for whom maybe it’s useful, sometimes, to live in dream worlds – to stimulate their imaginations). As Mangasarian said: “Religion is the science of children; science is the religion of adults.”

Which then leads me to plead with you again, Dear, to never take any mind-warping drugs and to never stop testing the predictions associated with your premisses against all relevant and reliable data. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, that was the essence of your father’s error, which led him (and you!) to be religious. He applied only one test (and it was faulty, at that) that led to his adoption of his premiss that god exists: God, if you’ll save my brother’s life, then I’ll be a believer. Instead, Dear, never stop demanding that your premisses pass any tests that you feel like throwing at them! In addition, Dear, if you are considering adopting any premiss that has no predictive power, then toss it in the junk pile of defunct ideas. Such tests and conditions are of preeminent importance to you, Dear, because it’s necessarily your premisses that will provide the purposes and principles upon which you’ll need to base all the rest of the decisions in your life.

Further, Dear, please take suitable care when you’re testing the predictive power of your premisses, so that the tests don’t endanger your health. For

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example, if you are considering adopting the premiss that you could drive your car safely at 120 mph, then rather than performing an experimental test yourself, take your car to be tested for such speeds by a reliable mechanic. As another example, if you are considering adopting the premiss that it would be safe to have sex with a certain person, then after taking suitable precautions to avoid unwanted pregnancies, have that person tested for venereal diseases (including AIDS) by a reliable physician. And as still another example, if your considering adopting the premiss that the Bible or Book of Mormon or any other “holy book” is true, then keep testing its principles and predictions until you are convinced, one way or the other.

And if only (but only!) you would choose to try to gain knowledge by relying on the scientific method (either directly or with the help of all of those who have gone before you, from cave dwellers to high-energy physicists), then the rest of your important decisions will be relatively simple and the remainder of your decisions will be relatively unimportant. Let me try to show you what I mean.

One important decision you’ll need to make is whether or not your thoughts exist. If you’ve made the important decision to gain knowledge *via* the scientific method, then the decision about whether your thoughts exist will be relatively easy to make. First, collect all the data that you consider relevant: your ideas about your health today, about the weather, how much work you have to do, how you might get so-and-so to do such-and-such, and so on. Then, you could assume that the data can be summarized with the hypothesis: “My thoughts don’t exist” – but then you’ll need to stop trying to apply the scientific method, since you no longer have any thoughts! Stuck with that approach, then test the hypothesis that your thoughts do exist. So far, so good. Now try to develop a prediction from your hypothesis, e.g., “Assuming that my thoughts exist, then it should be possible for me to create new thoughts that could have noticeable consequences...” “Hmm, how about thinking about how much I’d now like to eat a chocolate – creamy and smooth, mouth watering, saliva stimulating, succulent, petal soft on my throat, stomach taming, sugary stimulation of my senses...” You’ll then need to stop, I assume, and get yourself a chocolate. QED.

And just as simple to demonstrate (and less fattening) will be your important decisions that you exist, that other people exist, and that the universe exists. Then, you might want to tackle another important decision, namely, whether

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the universe is entirely natural or if some supernatural-stuff exists. Again, if you're armed with the decision to gain knowledge *via* the scientific method, this important decision is simple. Thus, first collect all the data relevant to all supernatural stuff. How much is there? Zero. Then similar to what Kamian concluded (*viz.*, "NO proof. NO god. NO problem"), you could conclude: "NO data. NO supernatural stuff. NO problem. QED." See how simple life's major decisions become once you begin to apply the scientific method in your daily life?!

You might then turn to what might at first appear to be a more difficult decision to make, namely, to decide on your prime purpose or prime goal for your life. But not to worry, kid, it's just as simple a decision as the rest of your important decisions. Collect all the data you care to collect, for all cases of life that interest you. You can then try a number of hypotheses as potential candidates to summarize all your data, but rather than my dragging these illustrations on much longer, how about jumping directly to the obvious hypothesis: "The purpose of not only my life but all life is to live." Then, test your hypothesis – but wanting to be kind to animals and vegetation, test it only on yourself: "If my purpose is to continue living, then if I hold my breath long enough, I should see if it's correct." Less than two minutes later, I'm quite confident you'll be able to validate your prediction.

And after you've made further predictions and tested them, I'm quite confident that you'll reach the conclusion that your prime goal is a trio of survival goals (of yourself, your family, and your values). [You may even be able to find that, if you repeat the conclusion enough, you'll be able to drive your own grandchildren up the wall!] Then, continuing to apply the scientific method to try to understand your values: if you work at it, I expect that you, too, will conclude that to help your "family" (*i.e.*, the human family) survive, to help intelligent life to continue to evolve, then high value should be place on expanding knowledge, both in depth and breadth, to help solve humanity's problems more intelligently. You could then go on to use the scientific method to attempt to develop a set of principles and policies that you want to adopt – but I advise you not to show them to your grandchildren, because I've found that the patience of modern grandchildren is just not what it was in the good old days; so, maybe stop at "purposes".

Now, Dear, I know only too well that, ever since you were a baby, you've been similarly indoctrinated with the idea that the "purpose of life" is to

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attain “eternal bliss in Heaven.” Nonetheless, let me try to stimulate you to reconsider your indoctrination, by going into details, quoting from the official website of your Church, <http://www.mormon.org/learn/0,8672,792-1,00.html>. As I began to show you with some examples in an earlier chapter, similar junk is available for Islam and Christianity, but given your indoctrination, I want to now dig into details of this example from Mormonism. And I admit, Dear, that I couldn’t resist adding to the following a few “snide comments” [which I’ve put in “square brackets”], after some of which I’ve added paragraph breaks [to try to make the quotation flow a little more smoothly]. Also, I didn’t put the whole of what follows in quotation marks, because there are so many short statements that the quotation marks became a distraction; instead, I’ve put the entire quotation in italics.

The Purpose of Life

Have you ever asked yourself any of these questions:

- *What is the purpose of my life?*
- *Where did I come from?*
- *Why am I here?*
- *Where am I going?*

If so, you’re not alone. Most people have asked these questions. We want to understand the larger purpose and meaning of our lives. Without purpose, living day to day can become tedious and empty.

Fortunately, there are answers to these questions – answers that can give you a sense of purpose and help you find lasting happiness. [Whether the answers are correct, however, is quite another matter!]

Answers such as:

- *You are a child of God. [Ignore the data that support the hypothesis that you’re your parents’ child!]*
- *Before you were born, you lived as a spirit with God, your Heavenly Father. [And the data that support that speculation are...?]*
- *You came to Earth to learn to be more like God. [Unfortunately, however, nobody has a clue what God is “like”!]*
- *When your life on Earth is over, you can return to live with your Heavenly Father... [Either that, or you die (making room for new inhabitants on Earth), all*

the elements of which you were made are recycled in the environment, and at most, maybe some memory of you, in others, lives on – plus whatever you produced that's of value to others.]

Have you ever thought there must be something more to life than just living day to day? There is – much more. [Well yes, actually, I have thought there was more, such as trying to increase knowledge and decrease ignorance, promote good and inhibit evil, help science and hinder religion...]

Your life has a divine purpose.

[A “divine” purpose, no less, i.e., “coming from God”. What a pity that some god never specified this purpose. Instead, all we have are claims of a bunch of con-artist clerics that they know “God’s divine purpose” – without mentioning that any god worth the name couldn’t possibly have a “purpose”, divine or otherwise, for him (or her or it) or for anyone – since such would be a sign of not omnipotence but impotence!]

God, your Heavenly Father, has prepared a marvelous plan for your happiness. [So, according to these clerics, their god’s purpose is to make people happy. Great! I’ll take peace and prosperity for all, a brand new 350Z for me, and oh yah, while you’re at it, how about a strawberry shake and an order of fries – and nah, not to worry about the cholesterol; God’s gonna keep me happy!]

When you realize that God has a plan for you, it is easier to understand why you are on this earth. God wants [cough, cough] all of His children to progress and become more like Him. [We’re to make people cheer us and fear us?!] *This time on Earth provides opportunities for you to grow and progress.* [Well, yah, that’s kinda obvious, but what’s that got to do with any god?]

Coming here allows you to:

- *Receive a physical body.* [How come God couldn’t have arranged that in your never-never land?]
- *Exercise agency and learn to choose between good and evil.* [But, but, but – how come your “holy book” says that Adam and Eve were punished for learning the difference between good and evil?]
- *Learn and gain experience that will help you become more like your Heavenly Father.* [You mean we get to kill women and children just for the fun of it, have survivors grovel toward us, and torture other people for eternity in Hell, as described in the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon? There is, however, a slight problem: I ain’t that keen on killing women and children, having people grovel to me (or to anyone else), or torturing people. Any chance we could become more like humans and less like your damnable god?]

By following our Heavenly Father's plan, you – like all of His children – can someday return to live with Him and with your loved ones. You can have greater peace in this life and eternal joy in the life to come. [And again: where did you say the data were that supports these speculations? Are you sure that the “greater peace” in this life isn't just one, huge, clerically-induced delusion?]

The plan of salvation

You lived with your Heavenly Father as one of His spirit children before you began your life on Earth. [You mean that the DNA molecules of our parents weren't interwoven (when his sperm entered her ovum), creating a new DNA molecule? Golly gee! Do your data refute all the data of the microbiologists? And you published your scientific results where?] You were happy there [as a “spirit child”, without a body? How could you be ‘happy’ without a body?], but God knew that you could not continue to progress unless you left Him for a time. [Good thinking, God old boy: you knew I needed a body to find happiness having strawberry milkshakes! But then, how could I have been happy without a body (when I was with you)? I sure hope that doesn't mean there are no strawberry milkshakes in Heaven. If so, count me out! Eternity without a strawberry milkshake? Pshaw! Sounds like Hell to me!]

So He presented His plan – the plan of salvation. [But unfortunately the Board of Governors turned him down. So, not to be defeated by a bunch of old cronies who wanted to maintain the status quo, God figured out how to circumvent them to introduce his plan.] It allowed you to come to Earth, where you would gain a physical body and would have experiences that would help you to learn and grow. The purpose of the plan is to help you become more like Him. [You already said that – and I already said I don't want to be like your hideous god. Are you into murdering women and children?]

Heavenly Father knew that while you were on Earth you would make mistakes – everyone does. [Even God, according to the Bible; that's why he allegedly flooded the place!] So, as part of His plan, He provided a Savior, Jesus Christ, who would make it possible for sins to be forgiven [did Jesus also forgive God's sins?], and for all people who accept His sacrifice to return to live with Heavenly Father. [But if you don't “accept his sacrifice”, if you don't buy into the clerics' con game, if you refuse to put money in their collection plates, then, boy, are you in for big troubles!]

The fact that you are living on Earth means that you accepted Heavenly Father's plan and came here wanting to do all you could to receive all He has to offer. [Hello? I didn't agree to any goddamn plan in which I get to murder women and children! Show me where I signed that contract! And besides (as well as “instead”), how about “the fact that you are living on Earth” means that, a few billion years ago, a DNA (or RNA) molecule started reproducing and managed to encase itself in a cell? That explanation is consistent with available data. What is your explanation consistent with – besides your dreams of keeping your collection plates filled?]

The marvelous thing about Heavenly Father's plan is that by following it, not only can you return to Him after you die – you can also find peace and happiness in this life... [And the even more “marvelous thing” about this plan is that it manages to keep the clerics' collection plates filled – and it's not illegal! – yet!!]

What is 'Heaven' like?

Heaven is the place where God lives and the future home of those who follow Him. [Either that, or it's a dream world, concocted by clerics, who would rather con people out of their money than work for a living.]

The hope of our Heavenly Father and the goal of each person on this earth is to return to live with Him. [Wow! For that one, you're gonna get your fingernails torn off for eternity: it's bad enough that you say that God is so unfulfilled that HE has “wants” and made “plans” (that'll cost you your toenails); now you're saying that HE has hopes! Okay, but do me a favor: try to keep your eternal screaming down to tolerable decibels! When the rest of us die, we've got some serious sleepin' to do!]

*This means that the opportunity to return to our Heavenly Father has been provided through the grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ. [But, but, but... why did God reportedly say (*Genesis 3, 22*): “This man [Adam] has become like one of us [gods], knowing good and evil; what if he now reaches out his hand and takes fruit from the tree of life also, eats it, and lives for ever?” So the Lord God drove him out of the garden of Eden...” or, in Sidney Rigdon's rewrite (*Book of Moses 4, 28*): “And I, the Lord God, said unto mine Only Begotten: ‘Behold, the man is become as one of us to know good and evil; and now lest he put forth his hand and partake also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever, Therefore I, the Lord God, will send him forth from the Garden of Eden’...” Thereby, isn't it totally obvious (except to nincompoops) that your God doesn't want people to live forever?!]*

After we are resurrected we will be judged and rewarded for the things we have done in this life. [And this is the “gospel truth”, direct from the wisdom of the Ancient Egyptian priests – who kept their con game going for more than 1,000 years (although, admittedly and unfortunately, there's never been a single shred of data to support such silly speculations.)]

*Jesus Christ taught His Apostles that in His Father's house are ‘many mansions’ (*John 14: 2*). [He added (although it's not normally reported): “If you buy that, then let me tell you about a great sale that I have today on some beautiful ocean-front property in Arizona.”]*

Our loving Heavenly Father is anxious to reward all of His children according to their obedience to His commandments and their willingness to follow the Savior. [Wow! Will you never stop insulting God! First you said He had “wants” and “plans”, then you said He had “hopes”, and now you have the audacity to say HE's “anxious”! Wait 'til he gets his tentacles on you! After toenails and fingernails, guess what comes next! (If you think, with tenacity, it might come to you.)]

Those who do these things and are worthy to return to the presence of God and Christ become “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8: 17) of all that the Father has. They will return to live with Heavenly Father and with their families in His eternal glory. [But don’t forget: if you don’t fill our collection plates, then...]

Those who choose not to follow our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ will receive a reward according to what they have done in this life, but they will not enjoy the glory of living in the presence of God. [So, Dear, according to this fairy tale, your grandmother and I won’t need to spend eternity groveling to the jealous tyrant who demands a cheering section, trains people how to make war, and get his kicks out of killing people. Instead, we get to...]

What happens to families after death?

[It depends on what you mean by “families”; if you mean those people whose DNA molecules are similar, then isn’t it obvious that so long as life continues, then so do our families?] *Families can be together forever – not just for this life. [That’s what I just finished saying!] Just as some of life’s sweetest joys can come through family associations, the loss of a beloved family member can be a source of our deepest sorrows. [Well, actually, my experience has been that the loss of a family member by death isn’t so painful as the loss of a family member’s mind to religious balderdash.]*

But death does not need to be the end of our relationships with cherished loved ones. [True: we can still think about them.] The Lord revealed to the Prophet [“profit”?] Joseph Smith that the “same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there [in eternity], only it will be coupled with eternal glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 130: 2). [Oh, great! So if your were the child of an abusive, belligerent, incestuous, deadbeat father and a religious-kook, drug-dependent mother, who would take out her frustrations by beating her children, then... Thanks anyway, but...]

Family members who accept the Atonement of Jesus Christ and follow His example can be together forever through sacred sealing ordinances performed in God’s holy temples. [So I guess it follows that if you want to break free, if you want to live your own life, then stay away from those “sacred sealing ordinances performed in God’s holy temples”.]

Why do good people suffer?

[Because they are forced to put up with religious crap?!] *Do you sometimes wonder why God allows all of the suffering in the world? [Nope: it never once crossed my mind that any god had anything to do with it; it seems obvious that what we’re dealing with is planning ahead (or failure to do so) plus limitations caused by natural uncertainties.] Why is it that even the innocent or those who are trying to do good are subjected to pain, sickness, tragedy, and death? [I just finished explaining that!] Perhaps even you or your family are experiencing such trials. These questions are some of the most difficult to answer [especially if you can’t think] and have been asked since the beginning of time. [Really? I didn’t know that there were people*

around at “the beginning of time”. In which scientific journal did you say you published your stunning result?]

You can gain some insight into the answers when you consider that God has a plan for your life and that He knows and understands you. [Boy, that’s some “insight” – similar to the “insight” you get when you pretend that you can fly like Superman – except that, as apparently someone forgot to tell you, it ain’t nice to say “God has a plan.” Only unfulfilled people have plans. By your saying that “God has a plan”, you’re saying that HE’s unfulfilled – and pity you for the consequences of that blooper! Talk about taking his name in “vain”: you’re saying that he’s “wanting”!]

As part of that plan, you live on this earth and are subject to natural and physical laws. [I guess it would just interrupt the flow if I pointed out that ‘physics’ is the Greek word for ‘nature’, so you just finished writing “subject to natural and other natural laws”] *You are also subject to the consequences of sin and the results of choices made by you and by others.* [People don’t ‘sin’; they make mistakes! And talk about the consequences of choices, how about the consequences of buying into your bill of goods?!]

Yet no matter what happens, you are a child of God and He loves you. [Pity the poor people who are loved only by God! Maybe if they tried to be nicer to other people, then somebody besides God would consider them to be worth loving!] *He knows, and wants you to know, that your time on this earth is but a small part of your eternal life.* [And we clerics want you to ‘know’ that, too – not that we want you to ‘know’ what ‘knowing’ means, but how in Hell else are we gonna get you numbskulls to keep filling our collection plates and thereby keep carrying our useless carcasses?]

God takes no pleasure in your suffering [only the clerics do – cause it’s a great ruse to keep their collection plates filled!], *but He knows that difficulties, regardless of their cause, can bring His children closer to Him and can make them stronger.* [And what, pray tell, do you mean by ‘stronger’? ‘Stronger’ in faith but weaker in intelligence; ‘stronger’ in carrying your useless carcasses but weaker in behaving as humans?]

His son, Jesus Christ, suffered all things. [Really? I’m sure glad to hear that he suffered through the crash of the hard drive on his computer, ‘cause let me tell you, unless you experience it...] *When you turn to Him you can be assured that He understands and can help you through your trials with His love and direction.* [Great! So then tell me, Jesus, will Norton Utilities really resurrect all my files or do I need to use Tech Tool Pro? And are you sure Tech Tool Pro isn’t the cause of some of the problems? I tell ya...]

Trials and adversity are a part of this life. [Yes – but someday I’m sure that humans will be able to eliminate all religions. What a glorious day it will be when people learn to evaluate all religious crap for what it’s worth. Why then...] *But when you understand that God has a purpose and plan for you, and that our Savior, Jesus Christ, can give you comfort and peace, even in the most difficult times, those trials*

take on a different light. [Similar to “the light” that I’ve heard accompanies taking cocaine...] *There is no simple answer* [Agreed!], *but when you have faith in God and His plan* [then you’ll know that you’re definitely barking up the wrong tree], *you can be assured that there is purpose in all that happens to us here on this earth* [Agreed! – the purpose is THE purpose: for life to continue]...

Happiness comes from knowing God has a purpose for your life

[Really? From all the data I’ve examined, ‘happiness’ seems to be, usually, an emotion associated with our concluding that we’re making progress toward our goals – whether the goals are stealing stuff from a convenience store, imagining we’re placating some giant Jabberwock in the sky, or helping human intelligence expand. Happiness can also be stimulated, apparently, by using various drugs that produce or stimulate the production of dopamine in our brains. But the goal of life isn’t to be happy! If it were, then people “should” get “high”, for example, on illegal drugs – or even on currently legal drugs, such as various religions. Instead, the goal of life is to live – and if we’re able to see that each of us is just a temporary host of an amazing molecule that has been continuously living for the past multi-billion years, a molecule that has now developed a brain capable of experiencing and understanding so much (including nature), then we can see that our prime goal is to help this life, this intelligence, to continue living. To do so, the best thing we can do, the most moral act we can undertake, is to use our brains as best we can to help intelligence go on. And of course, by making progress toward that goal – in whatever way we can help humanity (from conscientiously supplying community goods and services to making scientific discoveries, from being educators and entertainers to police and politicians, from stopping killer viruses to intercepting threatening asteroids, from being loving parents to being silly old grandparents, and so on) – then we’ll find happiness, telling us that we’re making progress toward the realistic goal of trying to help life go on.]

None of us goes through life without trials – sometimes very severe ones. We may have problems with family, friends, work, or health. We may have personal weaknesses that we struggle with. But our problems don’t mean we can’t be happy. [Of course not, you clowns: to make progress overcoming obstacles (i.e., to feel happy), there must be obstacles to overcome! If you want to have “eternal happiness” then go to Hell – that (in your dream world) is where you’d have some problems to overcome; that’s where you would have the potential to find some happiness! In contrast and in more ways than one, you’ll never find happiness in Heaven.]

Knowing that you are a child of a loving Father in Heaven and that your life has a purpose can help you see your challenges in a new way. [Definitely so! And so (I am told) can getting high on marijuana and heroin.] *They can become stepping stones to help you become closer to your Heavenly Father.* [In your dream world!] *With an eternal perspective, you can endure life’s trials with greater faith and hope.* [And if that doesn’t work, try heroin or some anti-depressant drug (such as Prozac), whose highest per capita use in American states (and with twice the rate of use by women as by men) is in Utah (surprise, surprise), where about 70% of the people are Mormons.]

As you ask your Heavenly Father for help and strength, you can find peace and happiness regardless of your circumstances. [I agree! Of course, asking “your Heavenly Father” ain’t gonna get you anywhere, but you’ll be able to slip even deeper into your dream world.] You can have the assurance that you are not alone – that God loves you and will help you as you turn to Him [Ah yes, you’ll get “assurance”, all right; not the reality, of course, but you’ll definitely get “assurance” – especially from the con artists with the collection plates.]

Sorry about the extent of my comments, Dear, but on the one hand, stupidity really “gets to me”, and on the other hand, surely it’s time – or better, way past time – to end such stupidity. What such clerics are selling (similar to the clerics of all the principal religions of our culture) is “make believe” – it advocates living in a dream world: there’s not a single scrap of evidence to support it; participants might as well imagine that they’re living in some Han Christian Anderson fairy tale or Walt Disney cartoon!

And in view of all such craziness, let me add my expectation that, if (or when) we have (or already have had!) visitors from outer space (i.e., extra-terrestrials or ETs), surely they would be absolutely astounded at the craziness that has developed on Earth by humans grasping after answers to the question: “What’s the purpose of life?” If ETs examined the answers to that question promoted by prehistoric people, then examined the answers adopted by the ancient Egyptians, Sumerians, Indians, and Chinese, then by the Persians, Greeks, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Mormons and so on, and by the vast majority of “modern” people, I wouldn’t be surprised if the ETs would in some manner quarantine this planet, in an attempt to insure that such craziness wouldn’t infect the rest of the galaxy!

But here, Dear, I don’t want to try to dig into all the silly answers that primitive people dreamed up (and all clerics still promote) about the “purpose of the purpose”. As I tried you show you a little in **O2** (dealing with “Objectives of the Gods”) and more in the “excursion” **Qx** (dealing with “the Quagmires of Revealed Religions”), and I’ll show you still more in **Yx** (dealing with “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”), stumped by trying to understand their purpose, primitive people (and their clerics) focused on attempting to understand the purpose of the gods. Nonetheless, let me at least briefly address a couple of summary topics.

One topic is, once again, to congratulate our primitive ancestors for concocting various models or “worldviews” that “answered” their questions – even though none of their models had a single shred of data to support

* Go to other chapters *via*

them and none provided any predictions that could be tested, except by dead people! In contrast, for “modern” adults to continue to “think” that such models adequately describe reality and that they should “teach” their children such silliness (that some god made the universe, and if the children are “good”, then they’ll get to live forever in paradise) is so disgraceful that such people should be “time transported” back thousands of years, to when their stupidity would comport with prevailing ignorance.

And the other topic (on which I’ve spent a considerable part of this book and will show you still more in **Yx**) is the trouble that such ignorance has caused. That is, for the past 5,000 years of recorded history, people have had ferocious arguments over the answer to the crazy question: What’s the purpose of the purpose? In a truly innumerable number of cases, the resulting arguments have led to brutality, torture, murder, and wars. And if one could laugh in the face of such horrors, the funniest thing about all of it is that, through all the pain and suffering and bloodshed, everyone agreed on the purpose of life: to gain pleasure; to be happy! Troubles arose, however, because people couldn’t agree on how to achieve happiness – and the troubles continue today.

As a superficial summary, what happened during at least the past 5,000 years is that most people couldn’t decide on their purposes for themselves, other than to “be happy” or “enjoy”. The trouble with adopting such purposes, however, is that they’re soon found to be superficial: people enjoy eating if they’re hungry, but not when they’re full; they enjoy satisfying any appetite, but the enjoyment vanishes when they’re satiated; they’re happy pursuing any goal, but the happiness vanishes when the goal is reached. As John Sullivan wrote in a recent “Letter to the Editor” in the *Wall Street Journal*: “Not only human survival but human civilization is built upon the principle of man’s discontent with his circumstance.” But failing to see the benefit – the necessity – of unhappiness, people sought to identify other, more “overarching” (even unattainable!) goals in which they staked their happiness: as the poet Robert Browning wrote, “Ah but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for.”

Faced with the vagaries of Mother Nature (from droughts to floods, from volcanic eruptions to hurricanes, and from illness to death), primitive people easily and clearly saw a more significant goal: to placate the gods – if only, but only, they could figure out what the gods wanted. The only “evidence” they had to go on was their own experiences – especially their experiences

* Go to other chapters *via*

with powerful, male, tribal leaders. And whereas such leaders liked young boys and girls, the people agreed to offer them to the volcano god; their tribal leaders liked feasting on freshly cooked animals, so the people offered the same to the gods; they liked fine furs and clothes and sparkling gems and minerals, so “bring it on”; and the leaders liked it when the people didn’t go against their wishes, or if the people did, then the people should offer the leaders bribes for “forgiveness for their sins” – and the mystics of the priesthoods salivated (and still salivate) over that money maker!

Actually, it’s bizarre what the mystics did. Originally, they didn’t know their objectives any better than the people did, so they dreamed up their own, for example, “Our purpose is to serve god.” Perhaps some modern-day mystics are still too ill-informed that they don’t know the objectives and so continue to promote the purpose (or purposes) dreamed up by mystics thousands of years ago. But I suspect that a great number of modern mystics (especially the clerical leaders) are well aware of what the real purpose is, but for their own purposes (anything from a free ride on the backs of producers, to the thrill of their power-mongering trips), they prefer to promote the purposes espoused in their “holy books”. Then, armed with their self-serving purposes, the mystics had an objective against which “values” could be measured – and their stupid concepts of morality (obey!) and justice (judged by their giant Jabberwock in the sky) followed.

Now, Dear, of course I don’t blame primitive people from the past for concocting their myths. Ever since the human brain was sufficiently developed for thinking abstractly (using words), it was no doubt perplexed by two obvious questions: how did life begin and what’s our purpose? These are the two questions addressed, for example, early in the Bible, in *Genesis*. But there are no useful answers in *Genesis* (or anywhere in the Bible); the “answers” given just camouflage, covering up the original questions with god-filled goo. For example, after one finishes reading *Genesis* (and the whole Bible!), one might say: “Okay, fine, God made us, and our purpose is to do God’s will; but what God’s purpose?” That is, as I sketched in **O2** and showed you more in **Qx**, after a thousand or so pages of mythical junk in the Bible, one is no closer to answering the original questions than when one started.

So, what are the answers? Well, how about this: God’s purpose is the same as for us humans, that is, to enjoy – and what he enjoys most is eating human ears. That’s right: eating ears! Haven’t you ever noticed that, as

humans grow older, their ears grow larger. So, except in cases where God sees particularly tasty-looking ears on young people (and kills them for their ears), God has the rest of us keep growing our ears until they're as big as they're gonna get. Then, he kills us and eats our ears. He also likes rabbit ears – therefore their size and the notorious fecundity of rabbits!

Now, you may not “believe” the above, Dear, but I tell you: I've explained this purpose of God to many people, and never once has anyone been able to prove I'm wrong! So what's a person to think? I mean, either you're a believer or you're one of those horrible unbelievers; it's up to you. And besides, to my mind, it's a better purpose than what's reported in the Bible to be God's purpose: to kill people to “glorify” God – or better, “gore-ify” Him. I mean, that's the kind of purpose that might be expected from a petulant little brat, not the all-knowing, all-powerful, infinite, eternal Lord of the Universe – who loves eating ears!

You think I've made an error? You doubt that we're just domesticated animals beings raised for God's consumption of our ears? Well, then, how about the possibility that there are no gods, that there is no “supernatural”, that everything is natural, that what you see is what there is, that life on Earth began when a complicated hydrocarbon molecule learned how to reproduce itself, and that our purpose is to try to continue – plus, whatever else we decide?

Thereby, Dear, do you see what an astounding mess humans got themselves into by imagining that gods exist? Imagination run amuck! “Superstition gone to seed!” And of course it's not the fault of the primitive peoples of the past; they were just stumbling around, trying to make sense of it all. The fault – the ignorance – the evil – lies with the stupid clerics, the con-artist clerics, the damnable clerics who perpetuate their junk, despite the overwhelming evidence that the universe is natural, that there is no “supernatural”, and therefore, there are no gods.

And though I expect that my point is abundantly obvious to you, yet let me try to say it differently. For the clerics of the world, the “supernatural” is a con artist's dream-come-true. They can (and do!) say whatever they want: “The purpose of the gods is...”, “God wants you to...”, “God's purpose is...” and therefore, “Your purpose is...” Whatever they hawk, they find buyers – and it's all profit – as it always has been for all “prophets”!

Further, the clerics hit the jackpot with the idea of a single, all powerful (omnipotent), and all knowing (omniscient) god. Before they adopted monotheism (e.g., in times depicted in the Epic of Gilgamesh, in Homer's epics, and in the early part of the Old Testament), the majority of the people probably paid attention to the clerics (and even to their gods), but not all the people and not all were covered. For example, if you took the "excursion" **Ix**, you might remember that Gilgamesh reportedly flung the hind quarters of Taurus at the goddess Venus, Agamemnon called Apollo's priest "Seer of evil...", Ulysses killed the priest who "must have prayed many a time that it might be long before I got home again", and Ulysses cursed Zeus (aka Jove): "Father Jove, of all gods you are the most malicious." Also, if you took the "excursion" **Qx**, you might recall that Abraham met his god face to face, laughed at his suggestion that Sarah could have a child, and talked him out of wholesale slaughter of everyone in Sodom and Gomorrah, Jacob (aka Israel) not only met his god face-to-face but spent all night wrestling with him, and Moses' wife Zipporah zonked some sense back into his god. But as I'll show you some details in the "excursion" **Yx**, ever since Ezra adopted Zoroaster's (or maybe it was Pharaoh Akenaten's single, all powerful god), then the power-mongering clerics had it made.

To understand the significance of the clerical concoction of an omniscient, omnipotent god, Dear, I'd strongly encourage you to go to the web page of Anton Thorn at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Sparta/1019/Thorn2.html>. Of the many penetrating essays at his website, what follows are excerpts from his essay "God and Omniscience",⁷ the whole of which I'd encourage you to read. In what follows, I've added a couple of notes in square brackets and eliminated his references and footnotes.

God and Omniscience

Commentary by Anton Thorn

Christianity [and Islam and Mormonism] holds that God is *omniscient*. While this term has proven a bit troublesome to define, it is generally taken to mean *exhaustive knowledge of the universe*, i.e., of *all existence*. This means, any being said to be omniscient must possess all possible knowledge of all things, past, present and future. No knowledge, even knowledge of fictions, could lie outside the purview of the omniscient mind.

⁷ At <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Sparta/1019/Omniscience.htm>.

Although most Christians [and Muslims and Mormons] happily accept this characteristic as a necessary part of their deity's personality as stipulated by dogma, few believers actually examine the claim of exhaustive knowledge to discover the problems this notion leads to.

Many critics of Christianity have already pointed out how the notion *omniscience* cannot cohere with other characteristics supposed to belong to the Christian deity, such as *omnipotence* and *omnibenevolence*. In this paper, however, I will not repeat those arguments, as they already stand firmly developed and resist challenge by defenders of god-belief claims. Instead, I discuss two problems that the notion omniscience necessarily brings into the matter of God's supposed character which usually go unnoticed and are not likely anticipated by those who posit such notions. I also offer what I consider to be the hidden reason why authors of theistic religions would choose to ascribe the notion of omniscience to their deity or deities, given the fact that this notion cannot be integrated with the facts of reality...

Unearned Knowledge: Omniscience as *knowledge without method*

For an omniscient being, knowledge cannot be said to be a product of reason, as in the case of man. Reason [when it includes application of the scientific method], which is man's only means of knowledge [of reality external to man's mind], presupposes non-omniscience. The very task of reason is to proceed from previously validated knowledge to evaluate new knowledge claims according to its congruity with that previously validated knowledge, with the intention of validating new knowledge as a result. A being said to be omniscient by nature does not have to go through this drawn-out process [viz., the scientific method] as there would never be any new knowledge for it to acquire or validate; it simply knows because it already knows. No means or method of knowledge is at all applicable in the case of an omniscient being...

If the knowledge God has can be said to be rightfully belonging to him because God creates knowledge, then this suggests that God at one time did not have the knowledge that later he created it. This again calls the claim of God's omniscience into question. Knowledge for man is always the product of some kind of mental effort. But for God, claims the religionist, knowledge is, as stated above, in effect a spontaneous phenomenon.

This notion is clearly at odds with knowledge as man knows it, and the theologians' attempts to resolve this problem have only increased their payload of more problems rather than resolve any. Any resistance to grasping this distinction should be noted by the critic, for it is nothing short of an admission on the theist's part of his own pursuit of the unearned. As David King states,

The concept of omniscience is the secret wish-fulfillment of every mystic. To acquire one's knowledge, by a process of struggle and effort, is abhorrent to the mystic. But to know everything, to know it instantaneously and without effort, to know it causelessly without any specific means of knowing it, or acquiring one's

knowledge, or holding one's knowledge, this is the mystics' passionate dream. The concept of omniscience is a psychological monument to the mystics' hatred of effort.

...the theist positing an omniscient being must in the end confess his desire for unearned knowledge. For man, knowledge is not gained without some effort of discovery, reasoning and validation. An omniscient being, however, has no need for these. An omniscient being would require no method of acquiring or validating knowledge as these presuppose non-omniscience and fallibility. What the theist most likely secretly desires is a source of ready knowledge that he can claim at his disposal (through such notions as 'revelation', 'faith', ["listening to one's heart"], etc.) that bypasses all method of reasoning.

If the mystic can claim access to such a source of knowledge, and this claim is accepted, those who accept such a claim grant to the mystic unearned authority – i.e., authority without substantiation of productive effort. This pursuit of unearned authority is evident in the case of the spokesmen for orthodox religious philosophy, for they assert as with authority their god-belief claims as if they were knowledge of certainty. Yet when pressured on matters they must admit that the roots of their knowledge – their 'omniscient god', the alleged source of their knowledge – is incomprehensible – which means, beyond their understanding. Thus, with this admission, the theist surrenders all potential authority on matters of reason and truth. Further, positing the notion of omniscience only broadcasts the religionist's own pursuit of the unearned, in this case, of unearned knowledge.

Omniscience as *knowledge without purpose*

What purpose would exhaustive knowledge of the universe serve any living being? Why would any being require such knowledge? Would a being necessarily just have exhaustive knowledge about the universe if it did not need it for any specific reason, or to fulfill any specific purpose? Without a purpose to fulfill, it seems such exhaustive knowledge of the universe would be superfluous at best, even cumbersome.

For man, knowledge undeniably serves a variety of purposes, all of which can be reduced to one general overall purpose: to deal with the problems of his existence. Whether it is learning how to eat a bowl of cereal, learning where the bowl in the cupboard for the cereal is, learning what ingredients are in that cereal, the process required to manufacture that cereal, the means of distributing that cereal to consumers who purchase it, or learning how to run the business that manufactures that cereal, all these things point to a single fundamental issue: man's *mortal* existence.

God, however, is said to be immortal, eternal, everlasting. Certainly, such a being does not face the same problems of existence that man does. Indeed, such an entity could not face any problems (and even if it did, God is also claimed to be omnipotent, so it would face no problem that it could not overcome). Therefore, God requiring any knowledge at all – either limited knowledge that is the result of a productive

process of reasoning, or unlimited, exhaustive knowledge of the universe that requires no method – could not be for the purpose of dealing with the problems of its existence, since it is a given (by reference to its other attributes – immortality and omnipotence) that God will overcome all problems, if in fact it could be said that God faces any problems. An immortal being would not need knowledge to solve problems because it could not be said to face problems. Thus the question of why God would require omniscience remains unanswered...

Statements to the effect that God could have a purpose for which he would require such complete knowledge would be moot in the light of God's other characteristics. Any notion of how God could be said to have any purpose at all is itself moot in the light of the fact that he is supposed to be an eternal, immortal being, a being that can know no loss, no threat, no death, no demise, no privation of any sort. Such a being would have a nature radically different from that of man. For it is precisely because man *does* have something to lose – ultimately his life – that makes values possible and even relevant to his existence. A rock, for instance, cannot know death – it is not alive. It cannot know value. The same with a robot. A robot has no awareness of its own existence, like the rock, and therefore can have no knowledge of potential loss of its own existence, and hence can know no values...

The *Real* Reason For Claiming God is Omniscient

Now that we can safely determine that God – if defined as an omnipotent, immortal, everlasting being – would have *no need of its own* for exhaustive knowledge, we now turn to the only other reason left for positing omniscience as a characteristic of God: a need *outside of God*. What need *outside of God* could there be for God to have omniscience? Any answer to this question would impose a circularity of vicious proportions, since God is said to be the *creator* of anything that is outside himself; he would be said to have created his own need, but would he have needed to create this need? Furthermore, if anything that is outside of God, either the totality of everything outside him proper – such as the universe, or whatever else besides the universe God is said to have created – or any part of that totality – can be said to require that God be omniscient, then the purpose of God's omniscience is then dependent upon something outside him.

What could this purpose be, then, if it is something *outside* God? Could the universe require an omniscient God? On what basis could one make such an argument? For its mere existence? Well, we already should know that existence exists, and that existence exists independently of any form or act of consciousness. What would such an argument hold that the universe could gain from the omniscience of God? The universe itself is not a living being, so it cannot know value; 'value' according to objective theory of ethics only applies to living beings capable of rationality which face the alternative of non-existence. Neither God nor the universe fits this criterion. Therefore, any argument that concludes that the universe requires that God be omniscient, and that is the purpose that God has for being omniscient, will fail.

But man is a living being, and he can know value. Indeed, value is what makes his life possible to begin with. Can it be for man's sake that the priests and theologians assert that God is an omniscient being? Could man himself be the purpose of God's omniscience? While most Christians may have a hard time admitting to this, it appears to be the only plausible answer to the riddle that the theologians and priests have set up for themselves regarding an omniscient deity.

Thus by considering these points, we know that God himself would have no need for all the superfluous knowledge that omniscience would bring, for God is said to be immortal and indestructible. Such a being would have no need for such knowledge. Therefore, any purpose for God's omniscience must be outside God, if indeed there could be said to be a purpose for God to be omniscient. We also recognize that the universe itself could find no advantage in the omniscience of God, so the universe as the recipient of the benefits of God's omniscience is incoherent. The same would be the case for inanimate objects in the universe. A planet or asteroid, for instance, has nothing to lose – such entities cannot know value, therefore these things cannot be the purpose of God's alleged exhaustive knowledge.

Hence, we must turn our attention to man himself as the purpose of God's omniscience, for in fact, it is from men to begin with that all claims of god-belief originate (the stars do not align in the form of letters and attest to the existence of God or gods by spelling out their names). But what could man need that would be fulfilled by an *omniscient* God? Man himself cannot tap into the mind of an alleged being which is said to be omniscient, so there is no direct benefit for man in having his God be omniscient.

But perhaps there is an indirect benefit that is fulfilled by God's alleged omniscience. What could that indirect benefit be, and whom would it benefit? To answer this question, we have little alternative other than to direct our attention to those who posit God's omniscience in the first place, for here is where such inquiry would necessarily have to start. Who is it that asserts that God is omniscient? Is it the layperson? No, it is not. Lay persons receive instruction, they do not author it. The priests, however, are the ones who *do* author church instruction, and it is from this source – the priesthood itself – that we first learn of the characteristics of God.

What would the priests have to gain from attributing the notion of omniscience to the deity that their laity have accepted as their God? What would the notion of omniscience lend to that deity that no other notion could achieve? What advantage would the priests have by describing their God as an omniscient being? Quite simply, their advantage would be one of tremendous influence over the individuals under their care. And this influence is precisely what the priests seek to begin with.

How would supposing an *omniscient* deity prove effective in enlarging the influence of a priesthood? Quite simply, actually. An omniscient God is more than just a God which would know everything. Such a God would know everything about each believer, which means He would be *all-seeing*. Belief in an *all-knowing, all-seeing*

God would be far more frightening than belief in a God of limited knowledge and vision into the lives of His believers. Indeed, the fear factor of religion is in fact substantially intensified by the notion that God is all-knowing and all-seeing. The priests who invented the god-belief of the Judeo-Christian tradition knew very well what they were doing, and crafted their God with the maximum capacity to wage terror in the minds of believers and render the maximum obedience to the priesthood.

Consider the psychological ramifications of belief in an omniscient God. An individual accepting belief in such a being would never be able to know privacy in the most private haven of his existence: his own mind. While the priest himself may not claim omniscient privilege to the minds of his flock, the priest is ever ready to remind the believer of the all-seeing eye of their voyeuristic God. There is possibly no greater paralyzing psychological fear than belief in a being which can know one's own private thoughts, feelings, impulses and motivations. The priests who invented and developed prototypical god-beliefs knew well to include this notion of omniscience as a means of compulsion, as a tool of enslavement, as a force ensuring obedience to the priests' own whims.

Recognition of this fact should be no secret to either believers or critics of Christianity [and Islam and Mormonism]. Indeed, some spokesmen for the religion are quite open about these issues. For instance, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* [rev. 1988] states that God's "possession [of omniscience] is incomprehensible to us, and yet it is necessary to our faith in the perfection of God's sovereignty" [s.v. *omniscience*]. Such admissions as this clearly affirm the conclusion that the purpose of positing God as an omniscient being lies outside God and is centered on man. Authorities of Christianity have also admitted that, like the other characteristics attributed to God, omniscience "is well calculated to fill [believers] with profound reverence. It should alarm sinners..." [Ibid.]. (It should be noted that Christians often supplant the term "fear" with the more euphemistic "reverence".)

But fear is not the stopping point for the priest. Fear has never been enough for those who seek the unearned through the dominion of others. Indeed, fear is merely a starting point; it is the means of getting the believer's attention. Threats of hellfire and everlasting torment are usually enough to perk up the ears of those who've accepted many of the other (often unconsciously held) premises shared with the priest's worldview, such as belief in the superiority of others, the substitution of knowledge with emotion (i.e., mysticism), and the ethics of self-sacrifice. But threats such as this are not enough in themselves to achieve the priest's purpose. What the priest sought could only be gained by convincing believers that they were unworthy of the self-esteem their religion denied them.

The well-known freethought author George H. Smith poignantly identifies the power of psychological sanctions employed famously by priests and religious leaders in his book *Atheism: The Case Against God*:

A physical sanction, if successful, causes the emotion of *fear*. A psychological sanction, if successful, causes the emotion of *guilt*. A man motivated by fear may still retain an element of rebelliousness, of determination to strike back given the opportunity. A man motivated by guilt, however, is a man with a broken spirit; he will obey the rules without question. A guilt-ridden man is the perfect subject for religious morality, and this is why psychological sanctions have been extremely effective in accomplishing their purpose. [pg. 301]

And effective they have been indeed! So effective that for the nearly 2,000-year history of Christianity, morality has been equated to unquestioning belief, humility, selflessness, obedience and servitude, self-inflicted ignorance (“judge not”), herd mentality, and, most importantly, the ethics of self-sacrifice. These ‘virtues’ (or more accurately, ‘anti-virtues’) have been the perennial hallmarks of religious morality, and Christianity is perhaps their most perverse champion.

The intended effects of a psychological sanction, “if successful,” as Smith points out, are no less than the complete disablement of the believer’s mind. Not only does an effective (i.e., *successful* in the context of Smith’s point) priesthood have nothing to fear from a flock of mentally disabled followers, it stands to gain precisely the benefits it seeks to gain without putting forth the effort they loathe so much: an income! For the priest, the cycle of the unearned is complete: from claiming unearned knowledge to pursue unearned wealth and influence. The means of choice is the only means that could avail itself to those seeking the unearned: deceit, dishonesty and the threat of force. The history of the church stands as a monument to the priest’s desire for the unearned [and similarly for Muslim and Mormon clerics]...

Thereby, Dear, with their concoction of an omniscient, omnipotent god, clerics established the ultimate dictatorship: in the worst civil dictatorship, people spy on each other and report on misdeeds to the dictatorship’s henchmen; in the clerics’ dictatorship, with their omniscient god, people spy on themselves and then report not only their misdeeds but even their mis-thoughts to the clerics! Even Orwell couldn’t imagine a more hideous dictatorship than those now operated by Christian, Muslim, and Mormon clerics: the dictator (the clerics’ omniscient, omnipotent god), not only knows everything you do but also your every thought. Thereby, clerics turned people’s guilt into gold (for the clerics)!

Fortunately for humanity, however, not everyone tied themselves in verbal knots wondering about “the purpose of the purpose” or in mental knots wondering about “the objectives of the gods”. In fact, most people have had perfectly good “instincts” about their purpose, namely, for themselves and their families to continue living. If you don’t think that you have similar instincts, Dear, then hold your breath until you change your mind!

Further, some people saw through the stupidity of it all. Not only were they skeptical about “the god idea” (since no data supporting such a speculation were available), and not only did they (therefore) have the sneaking suspicion that all clerics were a bunch of con artists, they saw that what the clerics were pedaling couldn’t be so: if the clerics’ god was all that he was claimed to be (viz., omnipotent, omniscience, and omni-this-that-and-the-other thing), then HE couldn’t possibly “want” anything (not even more ears to eat!), because then, HE wouldn’t be omni-this-that-and-the-other thing. Thus, God couldn’t have a purpose, either for HIMself (or HERself or ITself) or for people, or else HE (SHE or IT) wouldn’t be God! So, said Shin-eqi-unninni, Homer, Pindar, Confucius, the Buddha, Epicurus, and others (basically): “Forget about the gods; forget about death; focus, instead on life and, in particular, on humanity.” And thus, slowly and painfully, humanism was born.

Dear: As nearly as I can guarantee you anything – more than I can guarantee you that you exist! (which I can guarantee only to within about 1 part in 10^{25}) – I guarantee you that there is no omniscient, omnipotent god who has a purpose for you and knows your every thought. Only you know your thoughts, and it’s for you to decide your premises and purposes. I would, however, strongly recommend that you decide to gain knowledge *via* the scientific method – and that you make sure that you get enough exercise!