

Yx38 – Closing Comments – 3 – Adoption of the God Lie

This is the 38th in a series of posts dealing with the history (and even some prehistory) of what I call “the God Lie”, and it’s the third of four posts containing some closing comments on the 1) Origins, 2) Promotion, 3) Adoption, and 4) Rejection of the God Lie. My goal for this post is to provide some closing comments on what appear to be the most important reasons why people adopted (and still adopt) the God Lie. When convenient, I’ll illustrate those reasons with the insights entertainingly created between 1985 and 1995 by Bill Watterson¹ in his Calvin and Hobbes comic strips (which, I remind readers, are still copyrighted and can’t be used for commercial purposes without the approval of Universal Press Syndicate).

In the previous two posts, I tried to convey some closing comments on apparent origins of the God Lie and how it was promoted. In his amazing 1921 book *The Story of Religious Controversy*,² the ex-Catholic priest Joseph McCabe (1867–1955) provided the following summary (to which I’ve added the italics):

The clue to the evolution of gods is... the rise of man to tribal organizations under chiefs. When men become hunters and fighters, the strong or cunning man gets chosen as leader. He becomes a chief. The leadership becomes hereditary. And, as the spirit-world is a duplicate of the living world, there are more powerful spirits in the world beyond the grave. Famous ancestors or former members of the tribe rise in the memory above all the ordinary spirits, who are individually forgotten. They are on the way to become gods. But it is a very gradual process, with all sorts of shades of belief, all degrees of “godness”, so to say.

We see the rise from a crowd of spirits to a few outstanding spirits which, *under the fostering influences of the priests*, became what we may call gods. We see the nature-gods gradually... rising to importance above deified ancestors. We see rude huts over chief’s remains or fetishes growing into carved temples. *We see priesthoods gaining in power, wealth, and organization.* We see the departed spirits gradually acquiring a home, at first in the forest or beyond the hills or in some other vague place, then underground, then with the great spirits in the sky. We see, in fine, a strong tendency everywhere for one great spirit, and it is very commonly the sky-god, to predominate. The whole story of man’s religious evolution lies before us, not in a dead and speculative chronicle, but in living remnants of the various ages through which the [human] race has passed...

¹ See, e.g., http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Watterson.

² At, e.g., http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/joseph_mccabe/religious_controversy/.

The facts give no indication whatever of a religious instinct, an inner sense or urge, or whatever new name one invented. *From beginning to end it is a question “of drawing wrong inferences from observed facts”* – the shadow, the dream, the nightmare, disease, death, the movements of wind and river, the rain, the sun and moon, the annual birth and death of vegetation. *The only urge beyond the subtle urge of priesthoods [to gain power]... is the curiosity of man.* He itches to explain things. From beginning to end religion is an explanation or interpretation of obscure and dark things.

With respect to the power grab by priests (and other clerics), maybe in the beginning it was (as McCabe wrote) “[the subtle urge of priesthoods \[to gain power\]...](#)” but as they gained power, the subtlety certainly subsided! As Rudolf Rocker³ (1873–1958) wrote in his 1937 book *Nationalism and Culture*:⁴

Although the priest is the [claimed] mediator between man and this higher power on which the subject feels himself dependent and which, therefore, becomes fate to him, Volney’s contention that religion is the invention of the priest shoots wide of the mark; for there were religious concepts long before there was a priestly caste. It can also be safely assumed that the priest himself was originally convinced of the correctness of his understanding.

But gradually there dawned on him the idea of what unlimited power the blind belief and gloomy fear of his fellowmen had put into his hands, and what benefit could accrue to him from this. Thus awoke in the priest the consciousness of power, and with this the lust for power, which grew constantly greater as the priesthood became more and more definitely a separate caste in society. Out of the lust for power there developed the “will to power”, and with that there evolved in the priesthood a peculiar need. Impelled by this, they tried to direct the religious feelings of believers into definite courses and so to shape the impulses of their faith as to make them serve the priestly quest for power.

It’s easy to agree with Rocker that the people’s “[blind belief and gloomy fears](#)” provided clerics with opportunities to gain power over the people. In turn, Rocker was apparently agreeing with Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), since Rocker put “[will to power](#)” in quotation marks and Nietzsche’s (posthumous) 1901 book is entitled *Will to Power*.⁵ In his 1886 book *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche wrote:⁶

³ See, e.g., http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Rocker_-_Works.

⁴ From <http://www.anarchosyndicalism.net/rocker/nc-2.htm>.

⁵ At, e.g., http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/nietzsche_wtp01.htm.

⁶ From http://www.planetpdf.com/planetpdf/pdfs/free_ebooks/Beyond_Good_and_Evil_NT.pdf.

[Anything which] is a living and not a dying body... will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant – not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power...

It would be a misreading of Nietzsche, however (and a misreading of anthropology and psychology), to conclude that man's "will to power" is confined to power over other people: ever since descending from the trees, humans have sought power over their environments, food supplies, modes of travel, etc. Such people were (and are), as Nietzsche wrote in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:⁷

... the creators, the harvesters, the celebrators... the victor[s], the self conqueror[s], the master[s] of [their] senses, the ruler[s] of [their] virtues.

Thus, for the vast majority of humans, our "will to power" is our "will power" (!) to understand, grow, and prosper. It's only for certain pathetic humans (such as pimps, misogynist patriarchs, politicians, priests and other clerical parasites) that their "will to power" degenerates to seeking power over other people.

In their will to gain power over people and yet with no capabilities other than mouthing meaningless words (such as 'god', 'sin', 'afterlife', and so on), ancient priests and subsequent clerics concocted various religious confidence schemes, as I outlined in the previous post. But of course, for their con games to prosper, then as in any con game, clerics needed (and still need) to appear to provide people with relief from their fears – and more. Therefore, to "hook their marks" clerics provided a variety of "come-ons" with the exact "hook" that ensnared (and still ensnares) each "mark" depending on specific psychological weaknesses of each "mark".

Stated differently, there are a mind-boggling number of reasons why people adopted (and still adopt) the God Lie. In earlier chapters (starting at Chapter X2)⁸, I reviewed some of those reasons, which I (somewhat jokingly) listed alphabetically as follows:

Addiction, Animal-training, (seeking) Answers, (out of) Arrogance, (wanting) Assurance, (feeling) Awe, (feeling) Betrayed, (desiring to) Belittle (others), (seeking) Career-advancement, (seeking) Certainty, Childhood Conditioning, (seeking)

⁷ From <http://philosophy.thecastsite.com/readings/nietzsche3.pdf>.

⁸ At http://zenofzero.net/docs/X02_EXcavating_Reasons.pdf.

Comfort, (seeking) Company, (seeking) Control, Cowardice, Credulity, (seeking) Customers, (fearing) Death, (lost in) Dreams, Egomania, Epilepsy, (seeking) Eternal Life, (out of) Fear, Following (leaders), Foolishness, (seeking) Friends, (out of) Frustration, (desiring) Goals, (out of) Greed, (seeking) Guidance, (out of) Guilt, (to get out of the) Gutter, (seeking) Happiness, Herd instinct, Hero worship, (seeking) Hope, Hypnosis, (unconstrained) Imagination, Ignorance, Indoctrination, (out of) Inquisitiveness, (lacking) Judgment, (seeking) Kinship, (desiring) Kindness, (seeking) Knowledge, (intellectual) Laziness, (out of) Loneliness, (searching for) Love, Megalomania, (seeking a) Mate, (searching for) Meaning, (out of) Misery, Narcissism, (fear of) Ostracism, (an) Opiate, Pack instinct, Parental pressure, (seeking) Peace, Political (purposes), (some other) Psychosis, (seeking) Purpose, (unanswered) Questions, (sheer) Rationalization, Revelation, Savagery, Schizophrenia, (seeking) Security, Selfishness, Selflessness, Socialization, (seeking) Support, (following) Tradition, (simply) Training, Tribalism, (unease caused by) Uncertainty, (to relieve) Unhappiness, (because of) Visions, (marriage or other) Vows, (out of) Weakness, (seeking) Wisdom, (living on) Wishes, Xenophobia, Yearnings (for assurance, brotherhood, comfort, development, empathy, friends, guidance, heaven, insight, justice, kindness, love...), Zonked out (on drugs).

In this post, I certainly don't want to repeat details about those reasons or how different people seem to combine different reasons to "justify their faith" (to themselves). Instead, here my goal is "simply" to provide some summary comments on what seem to have been the predominant reasons why the God Lie started – and continues to this day! In the process, I'll try to illustrate that each "positive" reason (i.e., one that had some "upside potential") also contains "downside" or "negative" consequences. I'll emphasize this dual nature of some of the principal reasons for adopting the God Lie by displaying the dichotomy even in the section titles that follow.

1. Satisfying / Frustrating Quests for Understanding

Undoubtedly, the deep roots of all organized religion are buried in ignorance, feeding on fears (e.g., of death and of powerful, natural forces, which still today are commonly, ignorantly, and ridiculously called "supernatural forces"). More than 350 years ago, Thomas Hobbes⁹ (1588–1679, after whom Bill Watterson named Calvin's plush-toy-tiger Hobbes, and who, in his 1660 book *Leviathan*,¹⁰ was the first "to advance a secular, scientific account of moral and political life") summarized the origin of religions as follows:

⁹ See, e.g., <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-religion/>.

¹⁰ At, e.g., <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-contents.html>.

Fear of things invisible is the natural seed of that which everyone in himself calleth religion.

But describing the same reason more positively, then rather than saying that all religions are based on ignorance, we can acknowledge that a reason why people adopted (and still adopt) the God Lie is to try to satisfy their desire for knowledge and understanding. This was expressed by McCabe (in the quotation at the start of this post) as “[man] itches to explain things.”

Approximately 2300 years earlier, Aristotle expressed the same idea as: “Man by nature desires to know”.

As far as I recall, however, Aristotle neglected to add two obvious and important points:

- 1) That we desire knowledge because it usually helps us to survive (and prosper), and
- 2) That most unfortunately, far too many people fail to evaluate if answers they are provided actually contain any knowledge,¹¹ let alone, understanding.¹²

As a result, in the case of organized religions, the people’s positive attribute of seeking knowledge is overwhelmed by the negative consequences of clerics’ providing the people with, not understanding, but balderdash. In his Calvin & Hobbes comic strip, Bill Watterson aptly illustrated the concept:



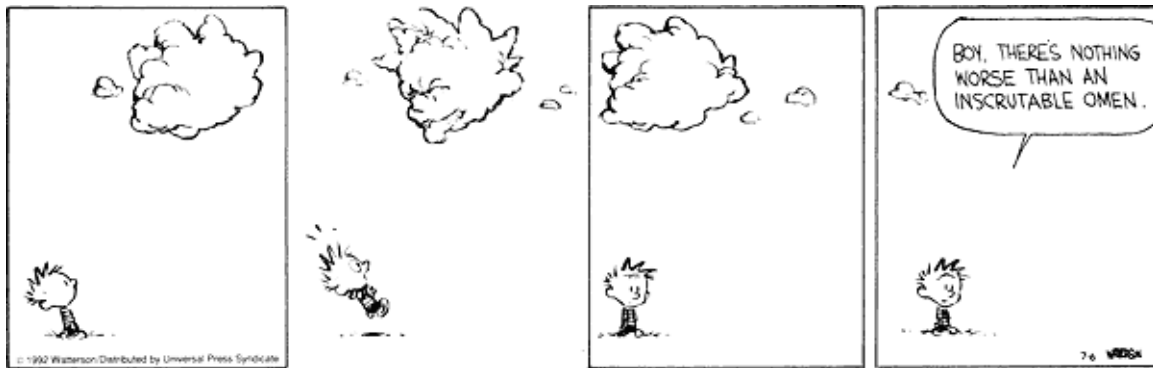
Yet, supplied with similar balderdash, religious people claim that they then have understanding! For example, Islam’s ludicrous “holy book” (the Koran or spelled Qur’an) conveys the nonsense:

¹¹ See http://zenofzero.net/docs/T1_Truth_&_Knowledge.pdf.

¹² See http://zenofzero.net/docs/T2_Truth_&_Understanding.pdf.

And one of His signs is that He [Allah] shows you the lightning for fear and for hope, and sends down water from the clouds then gives life therewith to the earth after its death; most surely there are signs in this for a people who understand. (30, 24)

In reality, the cause of thunder and lightning has (of course) absolutely nothing to do with people's fears and hopes; instead, the causes of people's fears and hopes when they encounter lightning storms are the storms, themselves! Similarly, the claim that Allah “sends down water from the clouds then gives life therewith to the earth after its death” is (of course) more nonsense: life on Earth has continued for two or three billion years, not only not dying for lack of rain during dry seasons, but much of life is well-supplied with water in the oceans! Further and similar to all religious people, the poor Muslim people have had (and continue to have) great difficulty interpreting the alleged “signs”, as Watterson illustrated:



“To the rescue”, all clerics have always been available to provide the people with interpretations of such “signs” and “inscrutable omens” – for a price! And most unfortunately, the vast majority of humans have been (and continue to be) satisfied with superficial, erroneous claims to understanding, e.g., the pathetic, pompous, pious claims to “understanding” peddled by clerics that gods exist and are in control – of course adding that they (the clerics) are in communication with the controlling gods. Silly people!

Similarly, many silly people are amazingly susceptible to “conspiracy theories”, e.g., probably the majority of Muslims accept the “theory” that the “Jews control... [whatever, from the media to the world]” and probably the majority of the members of the American Tea Party movement accept the “theory” that anthropogenic global warming is “nothing but a hoax promoted by liberal lefties.” The commonality seems to be that, yes, people desire to know, but even more so, they just want “explanations”!

Of course, most people would probably prefer if the supplied explanations were correct (i.e., if the alleged understanding has a high probability of being correct), but many people are apparently satisfied if they are given some reasonable sounding (and preferably simple) explanation, even if the “explanation” is some cockamamie conspiracy theory or some equally cockamamie explanation containing the word ‘God’ – which is simply an abbreviation for “I don’t know” (or, as Americans usually slur it, “I dunno”).

For example, consider the following illustrations (which I already used in an earlier chapter):¹³

- Why is there so much evil in the world? To which the clerics respond: “**God works in mysterious ways.**” (Translation: “**I dunno.**”)
- Why do bad things happen to good people? Response by clerics: “**God works in mysterious ways.**” (Translation: “**I dunno.**”)
- Why doesn’t God defeat the devil? Response by clerics: “**God works in mysterious ways.**” (Translation: “**I dunno.**”)
- Who made the universe? Response by clerics: “**God did.**” (Translation: “**I dunno.**”)
- What existed before “**the beginning**” and what did God use to make the universe? Response by clerics: “**God only knows.**” (Translation: “**I dunno.**”)
- Who created God? Response by clerics: “**God always existed**” or “**God created himself.**” (Translation: “**I dunno.**”)
- Why doesn’t God eliminate all the confusion about his existence? Response by the clerics: “**God works in mysterious ways.**” (Translation: “**I dunno.**”)

As Nietzsche had his Zarathustra say in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

... into every gap they [the prophets and priests] had plugged a delusion, their stopgap, whom they named God.

The result in religious people is an amazing combination of ignorance and arrogance, as Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899) outlined:

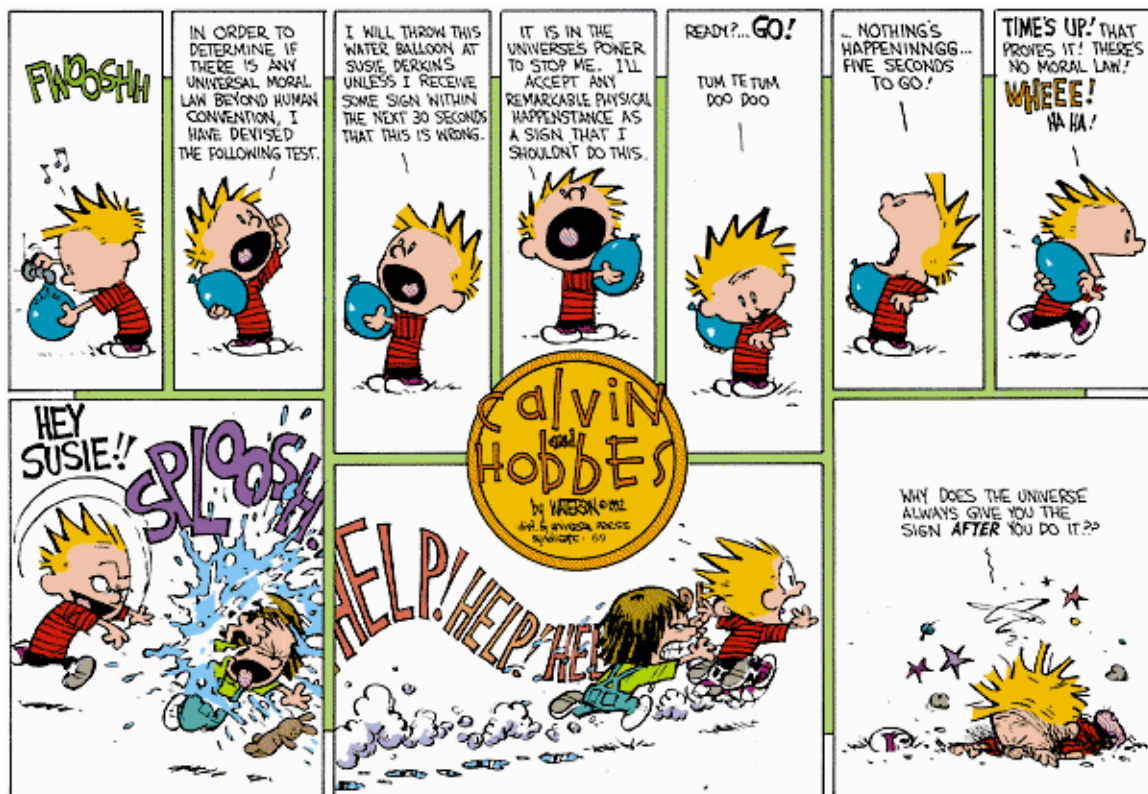
¹³ At <http://zenofzero.net/docs/1aAwarenessofIdeas.pdf>.

Only the very ignorant are perfectly satisfied that they know. To the common man the great problems are easy. He has no trouble in accounting for the universe. He can tell you the origin and destiny of man and the why and wherefore of things. As a rule, he is a believer in special providence, and is egotistic enough to suppose that everything that happens in the universe happens in reference to him... Think of the egotism of a man who believes that an infinite being wants his praise!

Such people, it would seem, fail to appreciate the wisdom expressed by Pharaoh Akhenaten (who reigned from about 1353 to about 1336 BCE):

The wise man doubteth often, and changeth his mind; the fool is obstinate, and doubteth not; he knoweth all things but his own ignorance.

And so, religious people looked (and still look) for guidance from their gods:



[(1) Calvin (C): {Filling a water balloon} "Fwooshh" (2) C: "In order to determine if there is any universal moral law beyond human convention {e.g., as I've described in earlier posts, the ancient Sumerian's *Mummu*, the ancient Egyptians' *Ma'at*, the ancient Hindus' *Ritam*, the ancient Persians' *Asha*, the ancient Greeks' *Logos*, the ancient Hebrews' *Wisdom*, the Gnostics' *Sophia*, and the Christians' *Word*}, I have devised the following test." (3) C: "I will throw this water balloon at Susie Derkins unless I receive some sign with the next 30 seconds that this wrong." (4) C: "It is in the universe's power to stop me. I'll accept any remarkable physical happenstance as a sign that I shouldn't do this." (5) C: "Ready?... Go! Tum te tum doo doo." (6) C: "...Nothing's happeninngg... Five seconds to go!" (7) C: "Time's up! That proves it! There's no moral law! WHEEE! Ha ha!" (8) C: "Hey Susie!!" {SPLOOSH} (9) {Susie chasing Calvin, and Calvin yelling} "HELP! HELP! HEL..." (10) C {Clobbered}: "Why does the universe always give you the sign after you do it?"]

Actually, with the above strip, Watterson provided some lessons also for irreligious people, including:

- 1) Experimental results can easily be misinterpreted.
- 2) In your experiments, ensure that all variables are controlled (and realize that few women can be controlled – claims of all the Abrahamic religions to the contrary notwithstanding).
- 3) In particular, ensure that all sentient beings allegedly involved in your experiments are present (after, of course, confirming that they exist!).
- 4) Be very circumspect of proposed hypotheses that violate already well-established principles, e.g., as Ayn Rand wrote 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.

- 5) Thereby, realize that some theories aren't worth testing, e.g., as Richard Feynman relayed:

Some years ago I had a conversation with a layman about flying saucers – because I am scientific, I know all about flying saucers! I said, “I don't think there are flying saucers.” So my antagonist said, “Is it impossible that there are flying saucers? Can you prove that it's impossible?” “No”, I said, “I can't prove it's impossible. It's just very unlikely.” At that he said, “You aren't very scientific. If you can't prove it's impossible, then how can you say what's more likely and what's less likely?” But that's the way that IS scientific. It's scientific only to say what's more likely and what's less likely, and not to be proving all the time the possible and impossible. To define what I mean, I might have said to him, “Listen, I mean that from my knowledge of the world that I see around me, I think that it's much more likely that the reports of flying saucers are the results of the known irrational characteristics of terrestrial intelligence than of the unknown rational efforts of extra-terrestrial intelligence.” It's just more likely; that's all.

2. Satisfying / Manipulating Basic Instinctive Needs

As Rucker wrote, clerics built their power on “the blind belief and gloomy fear of his fellowmen”. People's primary fear (“programmed” into our DNA) is fear of death; therefore, in their “blind belief”, people eagerly adopted (and still adopt) the untestable idea of “life after death” – too blinded by fear (and greed) to notice that “life after death” is an oxymoron.

* Go to other chapters via

Stated more positively, however, people adopt religions seeking security. Thus, as Episcopalian Bishop John Shelby Spong recently wrote (for which he has received continuing criticism from Christian fundamentalists):¹⁴

People don't realize religion is never a search for truth. Religion is a search for security. Now [i.e., currently], we have theological enterprises that try to shape truth. But the bedrock of our religion is a search for security. And that comes out of the very dawning of self-consciousness... [We] started out by naming every tree and rock and shrub and bush and river and ocean – it had a spirit. And we worked out a way of accommodating that spirit. That's where religion starts – in a search for security in a radically insecure world.

When people first adopted the (silly) idea that they would be immune from death is unknown. As mentioned in the previous post, archeological data suggest that such a belief existed even 100,000 years ago! If the beliefs of Native Americans a few centuries ago are indicative of beliefs of earlier hunter-gatherers, then belief in a “happy hunting ground” after death was widespread tens of thousands of years ago. As mentioned in earlier posts in this series, by the time the pyramids were constructed (~4,500 years ago), Egyptians were obsessed with the idea of life-after-death, just as fundamental Christians are, today, as well as the vast majority of “modern” Muslims.

I expect that few people would deny that there are positive aspects to belief in an afterlife. Undoubtedly, overcoming fear of death is desirable, but it should be done rationally. For example, in contrast to the irrationality of religious people, the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–271 BCE) reasoned:

...death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living.

More succinctly (as I argued in an earlier chapter):¹⁵

One can't be aware of a lack of awareness.

¹⁴ From <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1405840/posts>.

¹⁵ See <http://zenofzero.net/docs/FiguringoutFeelings.pdf>.

But although there may be benefits from religious methods for avoiding fear of death, there are also many negative aspects of especially Christian and Muslim speculations about the oxymoronic idea of “life after death”. (Do words no longer need meaning?!) Later in this post, I’ll briefly mention more of those negative aspects, including denying reality and engaging in corrupting, greedy quests for unearned rewards. In this section, though, I want to focus “just” on the negative consequence that, unfortunately for humanity, people coupled (and still couple) their fear of death and their wishful belief in an afterlife with the concepts of good and evil. Watterson illustrated the concept in a strip that I already used two posts ago, but I think it’s so insightful that I hope readers will consider it again:



Linking people’s fate in an imagined afterlife to their behavior in this (our only!) life was (and continues to be) not only the primary “meal ticket” of all Christian and Muslim clerics but also has resulted in an absolutely horrible corruption of the concept of morality. As I’ve described in earlier chapters (e.g., starting at Chapter **J2**)¹⁶ and earlier posts in this series (e.g., starting at **Yx14**),¹⁷ moral values (as with any values) have meaning only relative to some objective. For social animals (such as humans) a set of “moral behaviors” slowly evolved (with experience) to assist individuals to live productively with others in families, clans, tribes, and communities. Such are the real-life bases of morality. In contrast, if an individual’s prime goal is to live eternally in paradise, then he or she will adopt whatever moral principles the con-artist clerics claim are necessary to attain that goal, out to an including crashing hijacked airliners into civilian skyscrapers, murdering thousands of innocent people.

¹⁶ At <http://zenofzero.net/docs/J2JusticeandMorality.pdf>.

¹⁷ At, e.g., <http://zenofzero.blogspot.com/2009/01/law-lie-1-morality.html>.

Thereby, clerics of all organized religions hijacked morality. In conflict with the reality that moral activities are those that evolution and experiences have revealed to be beneficial for people and their communities, clerics promote the silly idea that moral principles are rules of conduct declared, once-and-for-all by their (fictitious) gods! Consequently, if the clerics tell the people that birth control is evil, masturbation and homosexuality are “**abominations before the Lord**”, Jews killed Jesus or are “pigs”, girls can be sold like cattle, women are less intelligent than men (and are to be obedient to them – and can be killed by them for “dishonoring” their families), wives can be raped at will (or be beaten), thieves should have appendages cut off, adulterers should be stoned to death, and similar rules that barbarians established a thousand-and-more years ago, then foolish, “modern” people abandon their natural and developed understanding of morality in a greedy grab for eternal life in paradise.

Yet, it’s clear that clerics were (and continue to be) clever con artists, having learned how to capitalize on the people’s fears and greed and knowing that “you can never cheat an honest man.” As I reviewed in earlier posts in this series, the assumed linkage between morality in this life and fate in an imagined afterlife is abundantly clear in ancient Egypt’s *Book of the Dead* and in Zarathustra’s speculations. Such wild speculations then came to dominate first Jewish, then Christian, and especially Muslim “holy scripture”. And in what one must admit was a competent “bait and switch”, clerics managed to transfer people’s fear of death, first to fear of the god who “judged the dead” and then to fear of the clerics (who claimed to be spokesmen for their gods). As all clerics learned, fear is a powerful motivating force.

For example, the Jewish Bible (the *Tanakh*) frequently repeats the hideous message (e.g., at *Job* 28, 28, *Psalms* 111, and *Proverbs* 9, 10):

The fear of the LORD is [the beginning of] wisdom...

What the Jewish clerics undoubtedly meant (similar to all clerics before and since) was: “**Fear us clerics!**” Then, following Zarathustra, subsequent Jewish, Christian, and Muslim clerics “upped the ante”, coupling people’s fear of death with fear of punishment after death. For example, the New Testament (e.g. at *Luke* 12, 5) promotes the hideous idea:

But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into Hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

* Go to other chapters *via*

<http://zenofzero.net/>

That same hideousness is repeated again and again (and again!) in the Koran:

Me [Allah] alone should you fear (2, 41) ...fear me if you are believers (3, 175) ... fear Me [Allah]. (5, 3; 5, 44)... call on Him [Allah] fearing and hoping... (7, 56) ... remember your Lord within yourself humbly and fearing (7, 205) ... fear him [Allah] (9, 13) ...surely I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a mighty day (10, 15) Most surely there is a sign in this for him who fears the chastisement of the hereafter... (11, 103) They fear their Lord above them and do what they are commanded. (16, 50) Say: I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the chastisement of a grievous day... (39, 13) We [Allah] know best what they say, and you are not one to compel them; therefore remind him by means of the Quran who fears My threat. (50, 45)... And We left therein a sign for those who fear the painful punishment (51, 37)... He who fears will mind... (87, 10)

In addition, the Koran contains some of the most hideous descriptions of a fictitious Hell that have ever (unfortunately) been recorded. I won't illustrate them; interested readers may want to start at the webpage of the Shariah Program,¹⁸ which contains approximately 200 quotations (I can't be bothered even to count them all) from Islamic "holy scripture" describing the Hell imagined by macabre Muslim maniacs.

In happy contrast, Hindu clerics at least had the decency to promote (in *The Upanishads*):

He who knows the joy of Brahman (viz., God)... is free from fear.

But even in this case, it's a crazy case of freedom from fear – it's a delusion generated by denial, similar to what Watterson illustrated:



¹⁸ At <http://www.shariahprogram.ca/articles/hell-devil-description.shtml>.

Thereby, one can clearly see a major “downside” of belief in an afterlife: living in the delusion of an afterlife, people lose control to the clerics of the one life they have. As Robert Ingersoll wrote:

The priest pretended to stand between the wrath of the gods and the helplessness of man. He was man’s attorney at the court of heaven. He carried to the invisible world a flag of truce, a protest and a request. He came back with a command, with authority and with power. Man fell upon his knees before his own servant, and the priest, taking advantage of the awe inspired by his supposed influence with the gods, made of his fellowman a cringing hypocrite and slave.

It’s no wonder that, since so many humans fear death and therefore hold fast to the delusion that they’ll live forever, people who believe such nonsense develop so little wisdom. As Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) said:

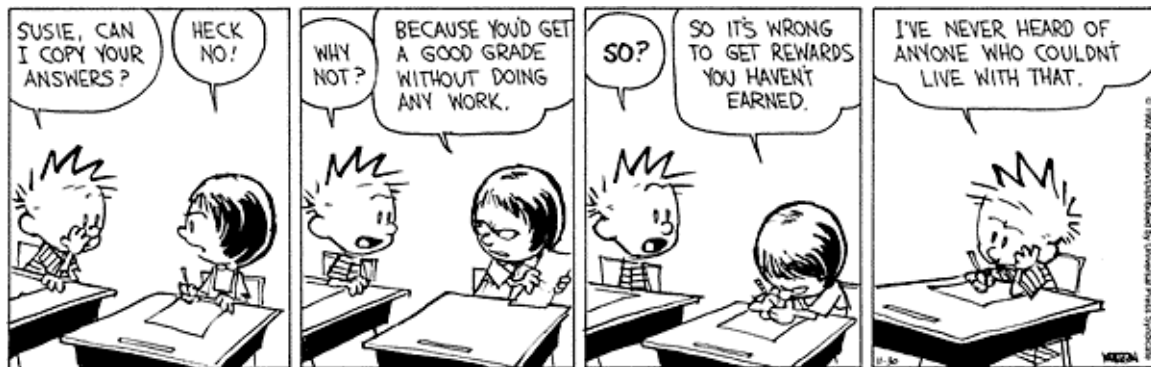
Fear is the main source of superstition, and one of the main sources of cruelty. To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.

In addition to fear, greed can be a powerful motivating force, as ancient Egyptian and Zoroastrian clerics learned. Following them, Christian and Muslim clerics added (to the stick of a fearful hell) a carrot of greed for perpetual paradise, to get their donkey believers to obey them. And people bought into the con games, obviously “thinking” that the risk (in losing control of their lives to the clerics) was worth the potential reward (of eternal bliss in paradise).

I put the word ‘thinking’ in quotation marks, because such a conclusion is mind boggling in its egotistic stupidity: do such people really “think” that their blind beliefs in clerical fairytales sufficiently justifies their gaining eternal life in paradise?

Wouldn’t someone who dismisses such fairytales and concentrates on helping humanity (e.g., by inventing labor-saving devices from wheels to the internet, by developing vaccines against killer viruses, by stopping annihilating asteroids, or “just” by saving ecosystems, defusing the population bomb, or making progress in reducing violence) be more likely to receive such a reward?

But then, as Watterson illustrated, many people are happy to gain unearned rewards:



Christian clerics, however (probably because they decried pleasures of the flesh as “sinful”), weren’t able to construct a very appealing picture of Heaven: everything they proposed would eventually become “boring as hell”! The madman Muhammad, in contrast, was able to construct an appealing picture of Paradise (at least for men): he made it an eternal whorehouse, each man “blessed” with 72 “perpetual virgins” (*houris*).

Watterson, however, saw more. I mean, even a *mujahideen* would probably get bored with his 72 *houris* (probably more correctly translated as “white raisins”)¹⁹ after the first few hundred thousand years or so in paradise. In contrast, Watterson saw the need for people to be creative:



Calvin, though, wondered about the need even for creativity:

¹⁹ See Chapter Yx34 or <http://www.corkscrew-balloon.com/02/03/1bkk/04b.html>.



As another option, probably the theologian John Calvin imagined that we want to create because we were allegedly created in the image of a creator god:



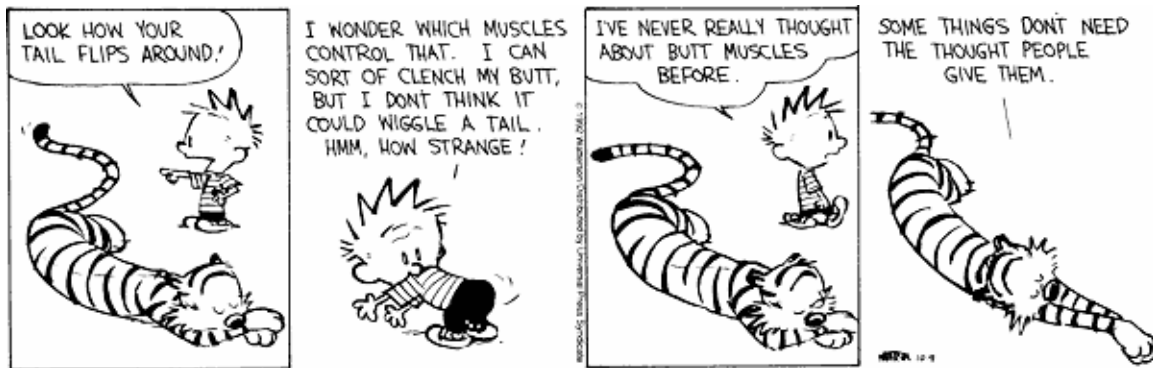
Agreed: God must have had “a goofy sense of humor”! Otherwise, for example, how else can one explain the Biblical story about God's destruction of the Tower of Babel, destruction that God allegedly “justified” as follows (*Genesis 11, 6*):

Here they are, one people with a single language, and now they have started to do this [build the tower]; henceforward nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach.

I would certainly hope so! Aren't we to be creators in the image of a creator god?! Further, as Nietzsche had his Zarathustra say:

Creating – that is the great redemption from suffering, and life's becoming light...
Away from God and gods this Will lured me: what would there be to create, after all, if there were gods?

But maybe Watterson again saw it better, this time relayed in a response from Hobbes to another of Calvin's curiosities:



I'd certainly agree that gods and afterlives, for example, "[don't need the thought people give them.](#)" In fact, I'd go so far as to say that thinking about such things is a total waste of time – save for time spent considering how to rid the world of such ignorance and associated fear and greed.

It's all sooooo... Stupid! Christianity, for example, promises to satisfy demands from nonproducers to get something for nothing – and not get some measly "something", but the most astounding benefit imaginable for absolute pittance, i.e., eternal life in heaven (while enjoying watching your enemies' unending agony in hell), as a "reward" for simply saying you believe such balderdash.

Of course, to gain such rewards, Christians are also required "[to love one another](#)" and to love God, but as Ingersoll saw:

[Human love is generous and noble. The love of God is selfish, because man does not love God for God's sake, but for his own...](#)

Similar applies to Christian love of others: it's not done out of generosity but greed (for eternal life in paradise). Nonetheless, some defense of Christianity can be mounted, in that (at least now, after being "humanized" by Humanists) it's not quite so depraved as Islam: Islam promises eternal life in paradise not for just believing in its silliness but for killing those who don't! Thus, although Christianity is bad, Islam is evil.²⁰

²⁰ See Chapter Yx35 or <http://zenofzero.blogspot.com/2010/09/five-foundational-evils-of-islam.html>.

3. Additional Psychological Manipulations / Guidance

As I suggested earlier in this post with my alphabetized list, there are many reasons why people adopted (and still adopt) the God Lie. Many of these reasons are consistent with “codes” programmed into our DNA. These include our instinct to continue living, our herd and pack instincts (which manifest in our tendencies to join tribes or communities and to follow charismatic leaders), and our instincts as social animals (e.g., seeking companions, being altruistic, punishing “cheaters”, etc.). In this section, I’ll address a few such reasons (dealing with seeking purposes, friends, and companions) that have both positive and negative consequences. In the final two sections of this post, I’ll address other reasons and methods that have predominantly negative consequences, both for individuals and their societies.

It’s correct, of course, that positive attributes of religion dealing with forming communities and acting purposefully are available in many other venues, including families, civic organizations, and communities of Humanists,²¹ Brights,²² etc. But being the first of such organizations by thousands of years (except, of course, for families and clans), religions certainly are much better established, organized, and funded. In fact, one can see that most religions are modeled after interactions in families and clans, as recent anthropological studies have investigated:²³

[Craig T.] [Palmer](#) [associate professor of anthropology, Univ. of Missouri] and [Lyle B. Steadman](#), emeritus professor of human evolution and social change at Arizona State University, explored the supernatural claims in different forms of religion, including ancestor worship, totemism (the claim of kinship between people and a species or other object that serves as the emblem of a common ancestor), and shamanism (the claim that traditional religious leaders in kinship-based societies could communicate with their dead ancestors). They found that the clearest identifiable effect of religious behavior is the promotion of cooperative family-like social relationships, which include parent/child-like relationships between the individuals making and accepting the supernatural claims and sibling-like relationships among co-acceptors of those claims.

“Almost every religion in the world, including all tribal religions, use family kinship terms such as father, mother, brother, sister and child for fellow members,” Steadman said. “They do this to encourage the kind of behavior found normally in families – where the most intense social relationships occur. Once people realize that observing

²¹ See, e.g., <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism>.

²² See <http://www.the-brights.net/>.

²³ From <http://munews.missouri.edu/news-releases/2008/0909-palmer-religion-evolution.php>.

the behavior of people communicating acceptance of supernatural claims is how we actually identify religious behavior and religion, we can then propose explanations and hypotheses to account for why people have engaged in religious behavior in all known cultures.”

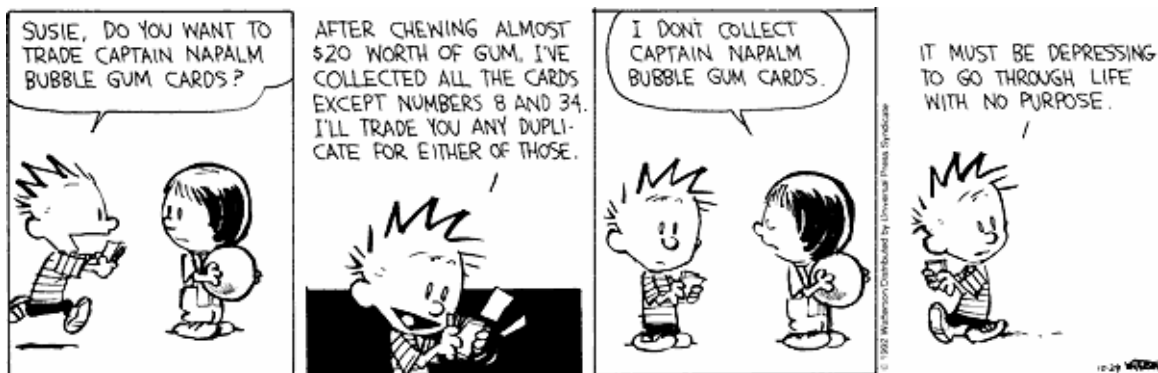
At the Richard Dawkins Forum, in a thread foolishly deleted by an incompetent administrator, "bobalu49" added:²⁴

Basically, they [the anthropologist mentioned in the above-quoted news release] observe that religious talk facilitates social cooperation in family and kinship relationship groups. Religion serves a fundamental social organizational purpose (establishing authority and cooperation) and for that reason has survived. “Man” invented “God” in his own image, and invented religion to help keep the family and tribe together. Religion is such a successful invention it doesn’t depend on whether there is any truth behind any of the claims of a supernatural being or not.

It’s not so much that God is a delusion as it is a metaphor used to get little children to behave. Unfortunately some folks never grow up and take responsibility for their own actions. Thus we hear people telling us it’s “God’s Plan” to invade other countries and kill thousands of people including innocent children.

Come to think of it, this sort of religion requires that there not be a god or else they couldn’t get away with the atrocities they commit in the name of their god.

In addition, many people apparently are unable to discern their purpose in life (e.g., to help all types of intelligence prosper). As a result, such people are susceptible to suggestions made by others, because as Watterson illustrated, living one’s life without a conceived purpose can be depressing:



²⁴ Originally available at <http://www.richarddawkins.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=56921&sid=ab6e1fb8c6d25efb8d43489f28e7b6b9>.

As well, people (being social animals) seek friends:



Meanwhile, Calvin had an ideal, imaginary friend (Hobbes), always much more agreeable and reliable than any real person – just as religious people have their ideal, imaginary friends (e.g., Jesus or Muhammad):



[(1) C: "True friends are hard to come by." (2) C: "I need more money." (3) C: "I wish people were more like animals." (4) C: "Animals don't try to change you or make you fit in. They just enjoy the pleasure of your company." (5) C: "Animals aren't conditional about friendships. Animals like you just the way you are." (6) C: "They listen to your problems. They comfort you when you're sad. And all they ask in return is a little kindness." (7) H: "Whooonk *Sob* It's so... so **true**! Hoot! THBPBTPH!" (8) H: "...and speaking of 'a little kindness', I'd have a tuna fish sandwich any time soon that you happen to make one..." (8) C: "Of course, **some** animals get on your nerves once in a while."]

Actually, speaking about “a little kindness” and “get[ting] on your nerves”, there’s more to having Yahweh, Jesus, Muhammad, or Allah as one’s “friend”. It was illustrated by someone else’s perceptive removal of one letter in a line familiar in Christian and formerly Christian countries: “You’ve got a f_iend in Jesus.” That is, in all the Abrahamic religions (and in all, similar, political tyrannies), fear and love of God (or similar, tyrannical leaders) are weirdly intertwined in a “paradoxical psychological phenomenon” now called the Stockholm Syndrome²⁵

...wherein hostages express adulation and have positive feelings towards their captors that appear irrational in light of the danger or risk endured by the victims, essentially mistaking a lack of abuse from their captors as an act of kindness.

Maybe readers remember the Patty Hearst case. The psychological diagnosis seems to be that people (e.g., battered wives) can begin to love those who don’t mistreat them quite so badly as they might, “mistaking a lack of abuse from their captors as an act of kindness.” As stated in the referenced Wikipedia article

Psychiatrist Frank Ochberg, widely credited with Stockholm Syndrome’s psychiatric definition, describes it as “a primitive gratitude for the gift of life,” not unlike that felt by an infant.

Maybe it’s why people can proclaim their love for brutal tyrants (Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, and other tyrants, such as those now ruling most Muslim countries). I can imagine such people thinking:

The glorious ruler hasn’t yet unleashed his fury on me. Isn’t he wonderful?

Although the sickness is now called the Stockholm Syndrome (because psychiatrists first recognized it in hostages during a 1973 bank robbery in Stockholm), yet given the number of sufferers inflicted, it would be more appropriate to call it “the Abrahamic-Religion Syndrome”. That is, clerics of all the Abrahamic religions require followers to simultaneously love and fear their (fictitious) god. Thousands of years ago, clerics apparently stumbled upon the value (to them!) of inducing the Stockholm Syndrome in their followers, probably by seeing (and possibly experiencing) similar psychoses induced by political tyrants.

²⁵ From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm_syndrome.

For example, as I sketched in earlier posts in this series (e.g., start at **Yx12**), the clerical authors of the Pentateuch (whom I refer to as Ezra and co-conspirators) probably modeled the behavior of their “mythical Moses monster” after such historically verified, tyrannical monsters as the Egyptian pharaoh Thothmes III (c.1480–1425 BCE) and the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser (c.1115–1076 BCE). Moreover, ruling by fear was probably the norm for most mid-eastern tribal groups, providing a template for the subsequent ruling by fear (while demanding love) promoted in Christianity and Islam, respectively established by (the “butcher emperor”) Constantine and (the madman) Muhammad.

Thus, still another reason why people adopted (and still adopt) the God Lie is that they suffered (and still suffer) from the Stockholm Syndrome, saying to themselves, in effect:

Isn't God wonderful? He hasn't yet destroyed me, like He did Job. And if I just do exactly what the clerics say, then maybe He won't torture me for eternity in Hell.

Yet, even if their imaginary “friends” (Yahweh, Muhammad, Allah...) are the worst-imaginable terrorists, for some people, their only friends are imaginary or animals – or as in the case of Calvin, an imaginary animal:



But as Richard Dawkins asked:

Wouldn't it be lovely to believe in an imaginary friend who listens to your thoughts, listens to your prayers, comforts you, consoles you, gives you life after death, can give you advice? Of course it's satisfying, if you can believe it. But who wants to believe a lie?

Unfortunately for the rest of us, a significant fraction of all humans obviously do believe such a lie: it's called the God Lie.

Of course, we can't know if religious people "truly believe" the God Lie, but what does seem obvious is that they WANT to believe that it's "True". Once again, however, that's a pleonasm, since the root of the word 'belief' is the Anglo-Saxon word 'lief', meaning 'wish'; so, 'belief' means "wish to be". Thus, proclaiming a belief in god merely states the wish that god exists. Yet, there's wisdom in the expression: "Be careful what you wish for."

4. Guiding / Corrupting Societies

Additional negative aspects of the methods used by clerics to control communities are obvious. Certainly it's the case, as Calvin saw, that there's a lot of lying going on – civilized life sometimes recommends that we lie, e.g., to disguise our greed:

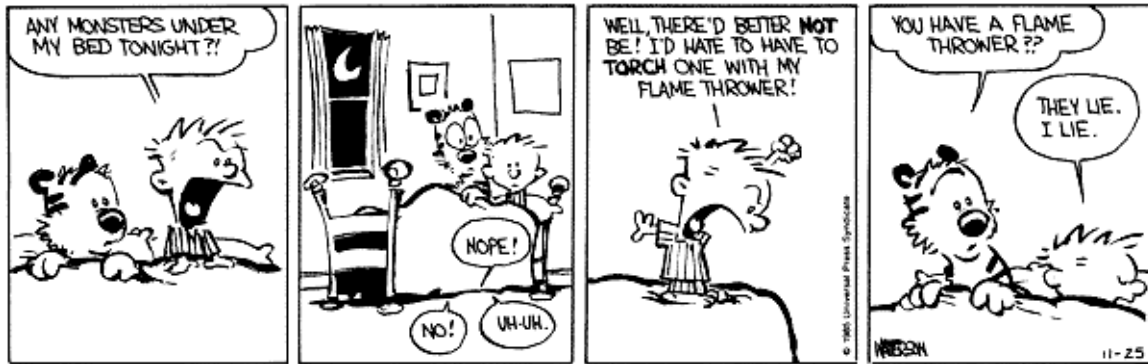


But even so, being civilized life doesn't require that we lie to ourselves:



Yet, lying to oneself is a prime requirement of all organized religions: denial of reality. And once people begin to lie to themselves (e.g., that they "truly believe" that their protecting/threatening god exists and that they'll get eternal bliss in paradise just for obeying lame-brain but conniving clerics), then lying to others becomes progressively easier:

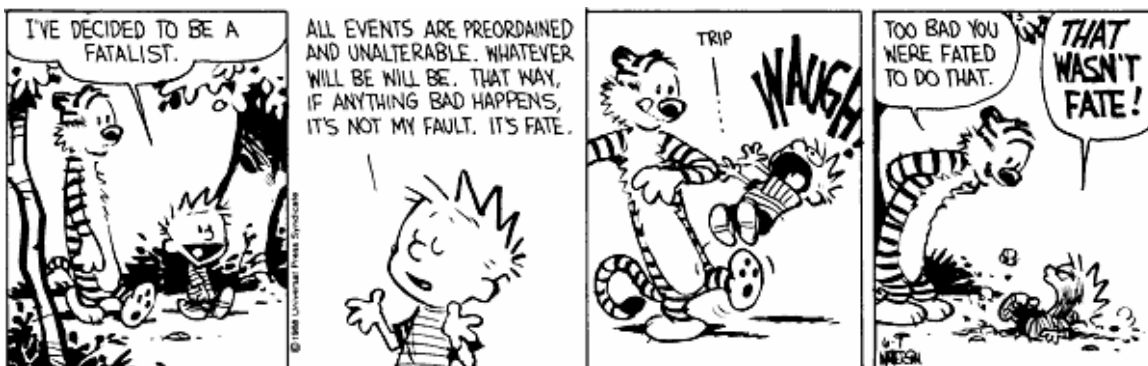
* Go to other chapters via



Thereby, Christians and Muslims (for example) become slaves to their delusions, controlled by clerics in power (just as Calvin was controlled by his parents):



Especially in the case for Muslims (as I addressed in Chapter Yx35), they also become astoundingly fatalistic, regardless of how evidence contradicts their fatalism. As a result, nothing (so they claim) is their fault:



In their resulting stupor, religious people live in their lies, delusions, denials, and deceptions, seeking happiness:



And yes, religious people can thereby seem to gain happiness, but as George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) said:

The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact than a drunken man is happier than a sober one.

What's “[more to the point](#)” is that, by denying reality, all organized religions corrupt both real happiness (making progress toward real goals)²⁶ and the real bases of morality (which, again, aren't proclamations from some god but are simply ways found through experience to be useful for social animals to interact).²⁷

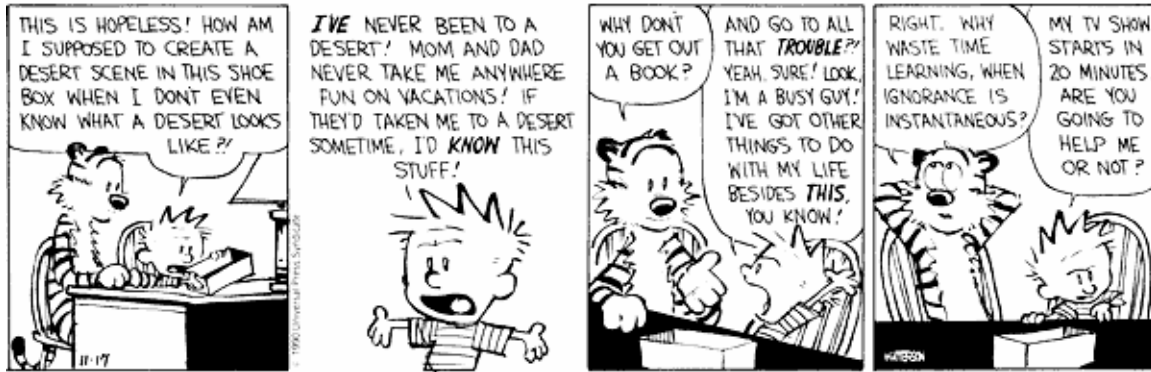
The corruption starts with lying to oneself, as Thomas Paine (1737–1809) saw:

It is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what one does not believe. It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime.

And to top it off, after denying reality, lying to themselves, living in delusions, refusing to learn, and blaming others, religious people amazingly develop ignorant arrogance:

²⁶ See <http://zenofzero.net/docs/Happiness.pdf>.

²⁷ See http://zenofzero.net/docs/M4_Morality_without_Gods.pdf.



[(1) C {working on a homework assignment}: “This is hopeless! How am I supposed to create a desert scene in this shoe box when I don’t even know what a desert looks like?” (2) C: “I’ve never been to a desert! Mom and Dad never take me anywhere fun on vacations! If they’d taken me to a desert sometime, I’d **know** this stuff!” (3) H: “Why don’t you get out a book?” C: “And go to all that **trouble**?! Yeah, sure! Look, I’m a busy guy! I’ve got other things to do with my life besides **this**, you know!” (4) H: “Right. Why waste time learning, when ignorance instantaneous?” C: “My TV show starts in 20 minutes. Are you going to help me or not?”]

As Robert Ingersoll saw, such ignorant arrogance is the death knell of social cooperation:

When a man really believes that it is necessary to do a certain thing to be happy forever, or that a certain belief is necessary to ensure eternal joy, there is in that man no spirit of concession. He divides the whole world into saints and sinners, into believers and unbelievers, into God’s sheep and Devil’s goats, into people who will be glorified and people who are damned... He has not the modesty born of the imperfections of human nature; he has the arrogance of theological certainty and the tyranny born of ignorant assurance...

Thereby, adopting the lie of an afterlife in heaven has managed to turn life on Earth into hell. As D.M. Brooks wrote in his 1933 book *The Necessity of Atheism*:²⁸

There are embodied in all [religious] creeds three human impulses: fear, conceit, and hatred; and religion has given an air of respectability to these passions.

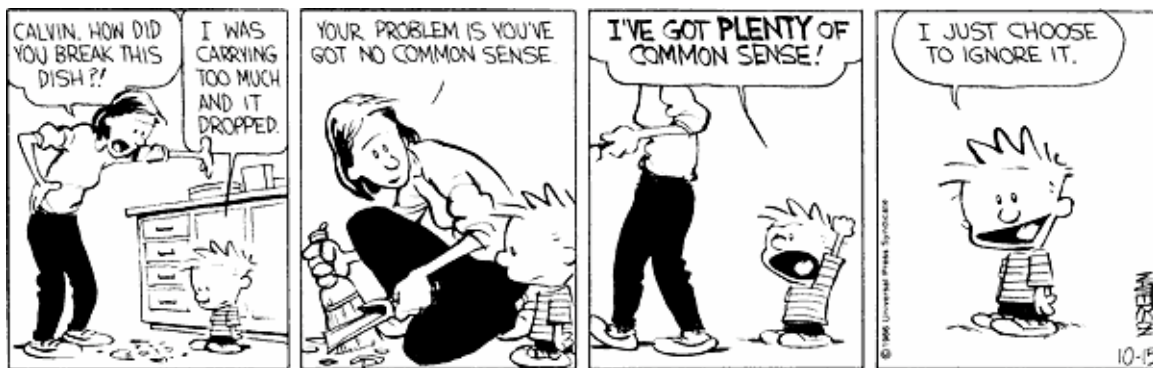
Religion is a malignant disease born of fear, a cancer which has been eating into the vitals of everything that is worth while in our civilization; and by its growth, obstructing those advances which make for a more healthful life... religion has provided the shackles and securely and jealously enslaved the mind. With the aid of his religious beliefs man has been ensnared into a mental prison in which he has been an all too willing captive. Surely it is easier to believe than to think.

²⁸ At <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20248/20248-8.txt>.

Religious philosophy is slave philosophy; it teaches of a God who is personally interested in the individual and who will reward present misery with future bliss. The demoralizing effect of this infamous fraud is apparent everywhere.

If a worker is constantly assailed with this nonsense from the pulpit, the result is the production in him of a mental as well as a physical slavery; it aggravates his mental inertia, and the force of repetition achieving its effects, he soon resigns himself to his present miserable state drugged with the delusion of a better life in the hereafter. He believes that his destiny is predetermined by God and that he will be rewarded in heaven for his sufferings on earth.

And the basic cause is that religious people abandon common sense:



Choosing to ignore common sense is one of the dumbest and most irresponsible thing that religious people do: they don't apply common sense to judge what does and what doesn't qualify as 'evidence' and they don't apply common sense to hold beliefs only as strongly as relevant, reliable evidence warrants.

Such foolishness is called 'faith', and audaciously, clerical con artists of the world describe such faith as a "moral good", instead of the evil it obviously is. The consequences of such evil (to individuals and to societies) have been horrible. Some such consequences were described well more than 200 years ago by Paul Henri d'Holbach (1723–1789) in the Preface to his 1772 book *Good Sense*:²⁹

When we examine the opinions of men, we find that nothing is more uncommon than common sense, or in other words, they lack judgment to discover plain truths or to reject absurdities and palpable contradictions.

²⁹ From <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/7319> (to which I've added some paragraph breaks).

We have an example of this in Theology, a system revered in all countries by a great number of men; an object regarded by them as most important, and indispensable to happiness. An examination of the principles upon which this pretended system is founded, forces us to acknowledge that these principles are only suppositions, imagined by ignorance, propagated by enthusiasm or knavery, adopted by timid credulity, preserved by custom which never reasons, and revered solely because not understood.

In a word, whoever uses common sense upon religious opinions, and will bestow on this inquiry the attention that is commonly given to most subjects, will easily perceive that Religion is a mere castle in the air. Theology is ignorance of natural causes, a tissue of fallacies and contradictions. In every country, it presents romances void of probability, the hero of which is composed of impossible qualities. His name, exciting fear in all minds, is only a vague word to which men affix ideas or qualities, which are either contradicted by facts or inconsistent.

Notions of this being, or rather, *the word* by which he is designated, would be a matter of indifference, if it did not cause innumerable ravages in the world. But men, prepossessed with the opinion that this phantom is a reality of the greatest interest, instead of concluding wisely from its incomprehensibility that they are not bound to regard it, infer on the contrary that they must contemplate it, without ceasing, and never lose sight of it. Their invincible ignorance upon this subject irritates their curiosity; instead of putting them upon guard against their imagination, this ignorance renders them decisive, dogmatic, imperious, and even exasperates them against all who oppose doubts to the reveries which they have begotten.

What perplexity arises when it is required to solve an insolvable problem; unceasing meditation upon an object, impossible to understand, but in which however he thinks himself much concerned, cannot but excite man and produce a fever in his brain. Let interest, vanity, and ambition co-operate ever so little with this unfortunate turn of mind, and society must necessarily be disturbed.

This is the reason that so many nations have often been the scene of extravagances of senseless visionaries, who, believing their empty speculations to be eternal truths and publishing them as such, have kindled the zeal of princes and their subjects and made them take up arms for opinions, represented to them as essential to the glory of the Deity.

In all parts of our globe, fanatics have cut each other's throats, publicly burnt each other, committed without a scruple and even as a duty, the greatest crimes, and shed torrents of blood. For what? To strengthen, support, or propagate the impertinent conjectures of some enthusiasts or to give validity to the cheats of impostors, in the name of a being who exists only in their imagination and who has made himself known only by the ravages, disputes, and follies he has caused.

Savage and furious nations, perpetually at war, adore, under divers names, some God, conformable to their ideas, that is to say, cruel, carnivorous, selfish, bloodthirsty. We find in all the religions “a God of armies,” a “jealous God,” an “avenging God,” a “destroying God,” a “God,” who is pleased with carnage, and whom his worshippers consider it a duty to serve. Lambs, bulls, children, men, and women are sacrificed to him. Zealous servants of this barbarous God think themselves obliged even to offer up themselves as a sacrifice to him. Madmen may everywhere be seen who, after meditating upon their terrible God, imagine that to please him they must inflict on themselves the most exquisite torments. The gloomy ideas formed of the deity, far from consoling them, have everywhere disquieted their minds and prejudiced follies destructive to happiness.

How could the human mind progress while tormented with frightful phantoms and guided by men interested in perpetuating its ignorance and fears? Man has been forced to vegetate in his primitive stupidity: he has been taught stories about invisible powers upon whom his happiness was supposed to depend. Occupied solely by his fears and by unintelligible reveries, he has always been at the mercy of priests, who have reserved to themselves the right of thinking for him and of directing his actions.

Thus, man has remained a slave without courage, fearing to reason, and unable to extricate himself from the labyrinth in which he has been wandering. He believes himself forced under the yoke of his gods, known to him only by the fabulous accounts given by his ministers, who, after binding each unhappy mortal in the chains of prejudice, remain his masters or else abandon him defenseless to the absolute power of tyrants, no less terrible than the gods, of whom they are the representatives.

Oppressed by the double yoke of spiritual and temporal power, it has been impossible for the people to be happy. Religion became sacred, and men have had no other morality than what their legislators and priests brought from the unknown regions of heaven. The human mind, confused by theological opinions, ceased to know its own powers, mistrusted experience, feared truth and disdained reason, in order to follow authority. Man has been a mere machine in the hands of tyrants and priests. Always treated as a slave, man has contracted the vices of slavery.

Such are the true causes of the corruption of morals. Ignorance and servitude are calculated to make men wicked and unhappy. Knowledge, Reason, and Liberty can alone reform and make men happier. But every thing conspires to blind them and to confirm their errors. Priests cheat them, tyrants corrupt and enslave them.

Tyranny ever was, and ever will be, the true cause of man’s depravity, and also of his calamities. Almost always fascinated by religious fiction, poor mortals turn not their eyes to the natural and obvious causes of their misery, but attribute their vices to the imperfection of their natures and their unhappiness to the anger of the gods. They offer to heaven vows, sacrifices, and presents to obtain the end of sufferings, which in reality, are attributable only to the negligence, ignorance, and perversity of their guides, to the folly of their customs, and above all, to the general want of knowledge.

Let men's minds be filled with true ideas, let their reason be cultivated, and there will be no need of opposing to the passions such a feeble barrier as the fear of gods. Men will be good when they are well instructed – and when they are despised for evil, or justly rewarded for good, which they do to their fellow citizens.

In vain should we attempt to cure men of their vices, unless we begin by curing them of their prejudices. It is only by showing them the truth that they will perceive their true interests and the real motives that ought to incline them to do good. Instructors have long enough fixed men's eyes upon heaven; let them now turn them upon earth. An incomprehensible theology, ridiculous fables, impenetrable mysteries, puerile ceremonies are to be no longer endured. Let the human mind apply itself to what is natural, to intelligible objects, truth, and useful knowledge.

Does it not suffice to annihilate religious prejudice to show that, what is inconceivable to man, cannot be good for him? Does it require any thing but plain common sense, to perceive that a being, incompatible with the most evident notions – that a cause continually opposed to the effects which we attribute to it – that a being of whom we can say nothing without falling into contradiction – that a being who, far from explaining the enigmas of the universe, only makes them more inexplicable – that a being, whom for so many ages men have vainly addressed to obtain their happiness and the end of sufferings – does it require, I say, anything but plain, common sense, to perceive that the idea of such a being is an idea without model and that he himself is merely a phantom of the imagination?

Is anything necessary but common sense to perceive, at least, that it is folly and madness for men to hate and damn one another about unintelligible opinions concerning a being of this kind? In short, does not everything prove that morality and virtue are totally incompatible with the notions of a God, whom his ministers and interpreters have described, in every country, as the most capricious, unjust, and cruel of tyrants, whose pretended will, however, must serve as law and rule the inhabitants of the earth?

To discover the true principles of morality, men have no need of theology, of revelation, or of gods: they have need only of common sense. They have only to commune with themselves, to reflect upon their own nature, to consider the objects of society and of the individuals who compose it, and they will easily perceive that virtue is advantageous and vice disadvantageous to themselves.

Let us persuade men to be just, beneficent, moderate, sociable, not because such conduct is demanded by the gods, but because it is pleasant to men. Let us advise them to abstain from vice and crime, not because they will be punished in another world, but because they will suffer for it in this. *These are*, says Montesquieu, *means to prevent crimes – these are punishments; these reform manners – these are good examples.*

The way of truth is straight; that of imposture is crooked and dark. Truth, ever necessary to man, must necessarily be felt by all upright minds; the lessons of reason are to be followed by all honest men. Men are unhappy only because they are ignorant; they are ignorant, only because everything conspires to prevent their being enlightened; they are wicked only because their reason is not sufficiently developed.

By what fatality, then, have the first founders of all sects given to their gods ferocious characters, at which nature revolts? Can we imagine a conduct more abominable than that which Moses tells us his God showed towards the Egyptians, where that assassin proceeds boldly to declare, in the name and by the order of *his God*, that Egypt shall be afflicted with the greatest calamities that can happen to man? Of all the different ideas, which they give us of a supreme being, of a God, creator and preserver of mankind, there are none more horrible than those of the impostors, who represented themselves as inspired by a divine spirit, and “Thus saith the Lord.”

Why, O theologians! do you presume to inquire into the impenetrable mysteries of a being whom you consider inconceivable to the human mind? You are the blasphemers, when you imagine that a being, perfect according to you, could be guilty of such cruelty towards creatures whom he has made out of nothing. Confess, your ignorance of a creating God and cease meddling with mysteries, which are repugnant to *Common Sense*.

5. Educating / Brainwashing Children

The prime reason why religious people show such little common sense is, of course, childhood indoctrination in supercilious, supernatural nonsense. In turn, a critical component of such brainwashing is parental indoctrination of their children, by parents who were similarly brainwashed when they were children. And in turn, the reason why childhood indoctrination is so effective is because the survival advantage of trusting our parents is “programmed” into our DNA. As Richard Dawkins wrote in his book *Unweaving the Rainbow*:³⁰

Children are naturally credulous. Of course they are, what else would you expect? They arrive in the world knowing nothing, surrounded by adults who know, by comparison, everything. It is earnestly true that fire burns, that snakes bite, that if you walk unprotected in the noon sun you will bake red, raw and, as we now know, cancerous. Moreover, the other and apparently more scientific way to gain useful knowledge, learning by trial and error, is often a bad idea because the errors are too costly. If your mother tells you never to paddle in the lake because of the crocodiles, it is no good coming over all skeptical and scientific and ‘adult’ and saying, “**Thank you mother, but I prefer to put it to the experimental test.**” Too often, such experiments would be terminal.

³⁰ From <http://scilib.narod.ru/Biology/Dawkins/Rainbow/index.html>.

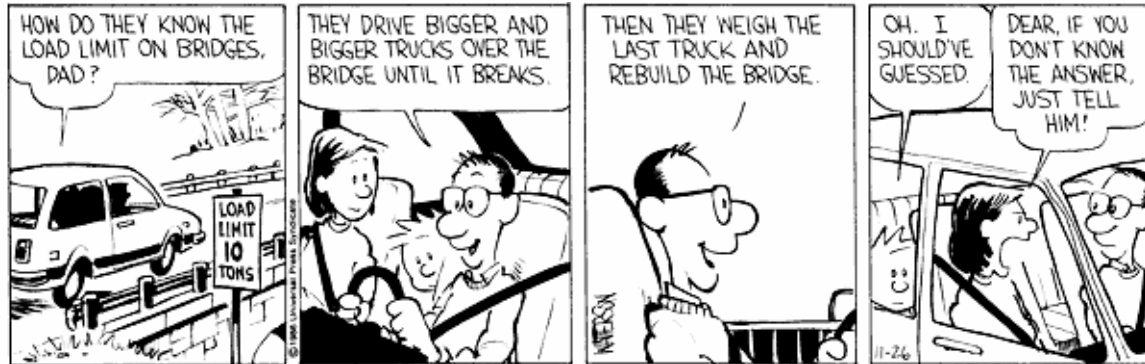
It is easy to see why natural selection – the survival of the fittest – might penalize an experimental and skeptical turn of mind and favor simple credulity in children. But this has an unfortunate by-product which can't be helped. If your parents tell you something that isn't true, you must believe that, too. How could you not? Children are not equipped to know the difference between a true warning about genuine dangers and a false warning about going blind, say, or going to hell, if you 'sin'. If they were so equipped, they wouldn't need warnings at all. Credulity, as a survival device, comes as a package. You believe what you are told, the false with the true. Parents and elders know so much, it is natural to assume that they know everything and natural to believe them. So when they tell you about Father Christmas coming down the chimney and about faith 'moving mountains', of course you believe that, too.

Children are gullible because they need to be if they are to fulfill their 'caterpillar' role in life. Butterflies have wings because their role is to locate members of the opposite sex and spread their offspring to new food plants. They have modest appetites satisfied by occasional sips of nectar. They eat little protein by comparison with caterpillars, which constitute the growing stage in the life history. Juvenile animals in general have the role of preparing to become successfully reproducing adults. Caterpillars are there to feed as rapidly as possible in order to chrysalize into flying, reproducing, dispersing adults. To this end they have no wings but instead have stout munching jaws and voracious, single-minded appetites.

Human children need to be credulous for a similar reason. They are information caterpillars. They are there to become reproducing adults, in a sophisticated, knowledge-based society. And by far the most important source of their information diet is their elders, above all their parents. For the same kind of reason as caterpillars have chumbling, Hoovering jaws for sucking up cabbage flesh, human children have wide open ears and eyes, and gaping, trusting minds for sucking up language and other knowledge. They are suckers for adult knowledge. Tidal waves of data, gigabytes of wisdom flood through the portals of the infant skull, and most of it originates in the culture built up by parents and generations of ancestors.

Not to grow up properly is to retain our 'caterpillar' quality from childhood (where it is a virtue) into adulthood (where it becomes a vice). In childhood our credulity serves us well. It helps us to pack, with extraordinary rapidity, our skulls full of the wisdom of our parents and our ancestors. But if we don't grow out of it in the fullness of time, our caterpillar nature makes us a sitting target for astrologers, mediums, gurus, evangelists and quacks. The genius of the human child, mental caterpillar extraordinary, is for soaking up information and ideas, not for criticizing them. If critical faculties later grow it will be in spite of, not because of, the inclinations of childhood. The blotting paper of the child's brain is the unpromising seedbed, the base upon which later the skeptical attitude, like a struggling mustard plant, may possibly grow. We need to replace the automatic credulity of childhood with the constructive skepticism of adult science...

Of course, skepticism can develop not only from scientific studies but also from receiving conflicting “information”, e.g., from different parents, as Bill Watterson suggested:



Sometimes, however, a child’s intelligence and experiences provoke revulsion at some indoctrination:



Richard Dawkins continues:

On their own, then, the words ‘gullible’ and ‘credulous’ are not quite right for children. Truly credulous people believe whatever they have most recently been told, even if this contradicts what others have told them before. The quality of childhood that I am trying to pin down is not pure gullibility but a complex combination of gullibility coupled with its opposite – stubborn persistence in a belief, once acquired. The full recipe, then, is extreme early gullibility followed by equally obstinate subsequent unshakeability. You can see what a devastating combination this could be. Those old Jesuits knew what they were about: “Give me the child for his first seven years, and I’ll give you the man.”

The efficacy of childhood indoctrination has been known for thousands of years and has been utilized by all tyrants, not just religious leaders, as the following quotations illustrate:

- Shall we, then, thus lightly suffer our children to listen to any chance stories fashioned by any chance teachers and so to take into their minds opinions for the most part contrary to those that we shall think it desirable for them to hold when they are grown up? By no manner of means will we allow it. [Plato]
- Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it. [Bible, *Proverbs* 22, 6]
- Give me a child until he is seven and he is mine for life. [Ignatius of Loyola, 1491–1556, principal founder and first Superior General of the Jesuits]
- Give me four years to teach the children, and the seed I have sown will never be uprooted. [Vladimir Lenin]
- Education is a weapon, whose effect depends on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed. [Joseph Stalin]
- At every hour of every day, I can tell you on which page of which book each schoolchild in Italy is studying. [Benito Mussolini]
- By educating the young generation along the right lines, the People's State will have to see to it that a generation of mankind is formed which will be adequate to this supreme combat that will decide the destinies of the world... I will have no intellectual training. Knowledge is ruin for my young men. [Adolph Hitler]

And the poor kids grow up without knowing how their minds have been warped by their indoctrination:



Meanwhile, the answer to Calvin's question, "[What kind of sicko would brainwash \[kids\]?](#)" is obvious: tyrants, such as clerics! It's immoral – and should be a crime.

Indoctrination of children explains why the probability is high (I expect it's greater than 90%) that people who are religious profess the religion of their parents. In his 1980 communication "The Freedom of Conscience and of Religion",³¹ the damnable Pope John Paul II put the following spin on such brainwashing of children, arguing for

...freedom for parents to educate their children in the religious convictions that inspire their own life, and to have them attend catechetical and religious instruction as provided by their faith community...

What about freedom for children not to be brainwashed in religious balderdash?! Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) clearly saw both the problem and its solution:³²

We know that man is in general superior to all other animals, and this is also the case in his capacity for being trained. Mohammedans [Muslims] are trained to pray with their faces turned towards Mecca, five times a day; and they never fail to do it. Christians are trained to cross themselves on certain occasions, to bow, and so on. Indeed, it may be said that religion is the *chef d'oeuvre* [viz., 'masterpiece'] of the art of training, because it trains people in the way they shall think – and, as is well known, you cannot begin the process too early. There is no absurdity so palpable but that it may be firmly planted in the human head if you only begin to inculcate it before the age of five, by constantly repeating it with an air of great solemnity...

The human intellect is said to be so constituted that "general ideas" arise by abstraction from "particular observations", and therefore come after them in point of time. If this is what actually occurs, as happens in the case of a man who has to depend solely upon his own experience for what he learns – who has no teacher and no book – such a man knows quite well which of his particular observations belong to and are represented by each of his general ideas. He has a perfect acquaintance with both sides of his experience, and accordingly, he treats everything that comes in his way from a right standpoint. This might be called the "natural" method of education.

Contrarily, the "artificial" method is to hear what other people say, to learn and to read, and so to get your head crammed full of general ideas before you have any sort of extended acquaintance with the world as it is, and as you may see it for yourself. You will be told that the particular observations, which go to make these general ideas, will come to you later on in the course of experience; but until that time arrives, you apply your general ideas wrongly, you judge men and things from a wrong standpoint, you see them in a wrong light, and treat them in a wrong way. So it is that education perverts the mind.

³¹ From <http://www.cin.org/jp2ency/freedom.html>.

³² From <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/7/3/10732/10732-8.txt>.

This explains why it so frequently happens that, after a long course of learning and reading, we enter upon the world in our youth, partly with an artless ignorance of things, partly with wrong notions about them; so that our demeanor savors at one moment of a nervous anxiety, at another of a mistaken confidence. The reason of this is simply that our head is full of general ideas which we are now trying to turn to some use, but which we hardly ever apply rightly. This is the result of acting in direct opposition to the natural development of the mind by obtaining general ideas first, and particular observations last: it is putting the cart before the horse.

Instead of developing the child's own faculties of discernment, and teaching it to judge and think for itself, the teacher uses all his energies to stuff its head full of the ready-made thoughts of other people. The mistaken views of life, which spring from a false application of general ideas, have afterwards to be corrected by long years of experience; and it is seldom that they are wholly corrected. This is why so few men of learning are possessed of common sense, such as is often to be met with in people who have had no instruction at all.

To acquire a knowledge of the world might be defined as the aim of all education; and it follows from what I have said that special stress should be laid upon beginning to acquire this knowledge "at the right end". As I have shown, this means, in the main, that the particular observation of a thing shall precede the general idea of it; further, that narrow and circumscribed ideas shall come before ideas of a wide range.

It means, therefore, that the whole system of education shall follow in the steps that must have been taken by the ideas themselves in the course of their formation. But whenever any of these steps are skipped or left out, the instruction is defective, and the ideas obtained are false; and finally, a distorted view of the world arises, peculiar to the individual himself – a view such as almost everyone entertains for some time, and most men for as long as they live.

No one can look into his own mind without seeing that it was only after reaching a very mature age, and in some cases when he least expected it, that he came to a right understanding or a clear view of many matters in his life, that, after all, were not very difficult or complicated. Up till then, they were points in his knowledge of the world which were still obscure, due to his having skipped some particular lesson in those early days of his education, whatever it may have been like – whether artificial and conventional, or of that natural kind which is based upon individual experience.

It follows that an attempt should be made to find out the strictly natural course of knowledge, so that education may proceed methodically by keeping to it; and that children may become acquainted with the ways of the world, without getting wrong ideas into their heads, which very often cannot be got out again. If this plan were adopted, special care would have to be taken to prevent children from using words without clearly understanding their meaning and application. The fatal tendency to be satisfied with words instead of trying to understand things – to learn phrases by heart, so that they may prove a refuge in time of need, exists, as a rule, even in

children; and the tendency lasts on into manhood, making the knowledge of many learned persons to consist in mere verbiage.

However, the main endeavor must always be to let particular observations precede general ideas, and not *vice versa*, as is usually and unfortunately the case; as though a child should come feet foremost into the world, or a verse be begun by writing down the rhyme! The ordinary method is to imprint ideas and opinions, in the strict sense of the word, “prejudices”, on the mind of the child, before it has had any but a very few particular observations. It is thus that he afterwards comes to view the world and gather experience through the medium of those ready-made ideas, rather than to let his ideas be formed for him out of his own experience of life, as they ought to be.

A man sees a great many things when he looks at the world for himself, and he sees them from many sides; but this method of learning is not nearly so short or so quick as the method which employs abstract ideas and makes hasty generalizations about everything. Experience, therefore, will be a long time in correcting preconceived ideas, or perhaps never bring its task to an end; for wherever a man finds that the aspect of things seems to contradict the general ideas he has formed, he will begin by rejecting the evidence it offers as partial and one-sided; nay, he will shut his eyes to it altogether and deny that it stands in any contradiction at all with his preconceived notions, in order that he may thus preserve them uninjured.

So it is that many a man carries about a burden of wrong notions all his life long – crotchets, whims, fancies, prejudices, which at last become fixed ideas. The fact is that he has never tried to form his fundamental ideas for himself out of his own experience of life, his own way of looking at the world, because he has taken over his ideas ready-made from other people; and this it is that makes him – as it makes how many others! – so shallow and superficial.

Instead of that method of instruction, care should be taken to educate children on the natural lines. No idea should ever be established in a child’s mind otherwise than by what the child can see for itself, or at any rate it should be verified by the same means; and the result of this would be that the child’s ideas, if few, would be well grounded and accurate. It would learn how to measure things by its own standard rather than by another’s; and so it would escape a thousand strange fancies and prejudices, and not need to have them eradicated by the lessons it will subsequently be taught in the school of life. The child would, in this way, have its mind once for all habituated to clear views and thoroughgoing knowledge; it would use its own judgment and take an unbiased estimate of things.

And, in general, children should not form their notions of what life is like from the copy before they have learned it from the original, to whatever aspect of it their attention may be directed. Instead, therefore, of hastening to place “books”, and books alone, in their hands, let them be made acquainted, step-by-step, with “things” – with the actual circumstances of human life.

And above all let care be taken to bring them to a clear and objective view of the world as it is, to educate them always to derive their ideas directly from real life, and to shape them in conformity with it – not to fetch them from other sources, such as books, fairy tales, or what people say – then to apply them ready-made to real life. For this will mean that their heads are full of wrong notions, and that they will either see things in a false light or try in vain to “remodel the world” to suit their views, and so enter upon false paths; and that, too, whether they are only constructing theories of life or engaged in the actual business of it.

It is incredible how much harm is done when the seeds of wrong notions are laid in the mind in those early years, later on to bear a crop of prejudice; for the subsequent lessons, which are learned from real life in the world have to be devoted mainly to their extirpation. “To unlearn the evil” was the answer, according to Diogenes Laërtius, Antisthenes gave, when he was asked what branch of knowledge was most necessary; and we can see what he meant.

No child under the age of fifteen should receive instruction in subjects which may possibly be the vehicle of serious error, such as philosophy, religion, or any other branch of knowledge where it is necessary to take large views; because wrong notions imbibed early can seldom be rooted out, and of all the intellectual faculties, judgment is the last to arrive at maturity. The child should give its attention either to subjects where no error is possible at all, such as mathematics, or to those in which there is no particular danger in making a mistake, such as languages, natural science, history, and so on. And in general, the branches of knowledge which are to be studied at any period of life should be such as the mind is equal to at that period and can perfectly understand.

In his book *The Necessity of Atheism*, Brooks summarized well the evils of indoctrinating children in religious balderdash:³³

I execrate the enslavement of the mind of our young children by the ecclesiastics. Is anything so pitiful to behold as the firm grasp that the Church places on the mind of the youngest of children? Children at play, children of four and five years of age, will be heard to mention with fearful tones various religious rites, such as baptism and confirmation, and to perform in their manner these rites with their dolls. Fear! Fear! instilled into the minds of the impressionable children!

Think of the degradation that the ecclesiastics practice when they insist that from the time a child is out of its infancy its instruction shall be placed in their hands. They take the most precious possession of man, his mind, and mould it to their desire.³⁴ The mind of a child is plastic, it is like a moist piece of clay and they mould it and form it to their desire. Warped and poured into the ecclesiastic mould of fear, the mind of the child becomes set and fixed with the years.

³³ From <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20248/20248-8.txt>.

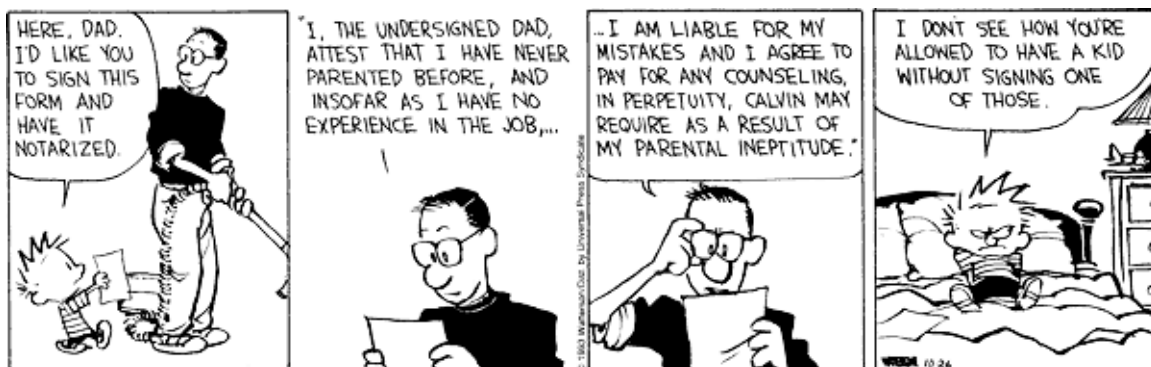
³⁴ Recall Calvin's: “What kind of sicko would brainwash [kids]?”

Then it is too late for rational thinking, as far as religious matters go, the mind of the adult is firmly set in the form that the ecclesiastic has fashioned for him in his youth. It is impossible for the adult so taught to reason clearly and rationally concerning his religion; the mould is too strong, the clay has set, reason cannot penetrate into that hardened form. That is why it is almost impossible for the adult who has been exposed to this mental molding from his infancy to break away from the fears and superstitions learned on his mother's knee.

If Christianity, Hebrewism [Judaism], Mohammedanism [Islam], or any other creed is true, its truth must be more apparent at the age of twenty-five than it is at the age of five. Why does the ecclesiastic not leave off his advances until the child reaches a mature age, an age when he can reason? Then, if theism is true, he can accept it with a reasoning mind, not a blindly faithful mind. The theist realizes, however, that belief is at one pole, reason at the other. Belief, creed, religion, are ideations of the primitive mind and the mind of the child; reason is the product of mature thought. Schopenhauer remarked that, "The power of religious dogma when inculcated early is such as to stifle conscience, compassion, and finally every feeling of humanity."

The ecclesiastic has from earliest times taken the standpoint that the masses of people are of crude susceptibility and clumsy intelligence, "sordid in their pursuits and sunk in drudgery; and religion provides the only means of proclaiming and making them feel the high import of life." [Schopenhauer] Thus the theist is led to the conclusion that the end justifies the means.

Indoctrinating children in any religion is the depth of immorality; it's evil; it should be prosecuted, not only as a crime against individual children, but as a crime against humanity. Thankfully, clerics are now in jail and their organizations have been sued for raping children's bodies. Surely it won't be much longer until similar legal actions are taken against clerics for raping children's minds – and as Watterson suggested, maybe people should take legal actions against their religious parents, holding them liable for damages:



* Go to other chapters via

Suing parents for indoctrinating their children in religious balderdash is one possible way to try to exterminate the god meme. Earlier in my book (starting at Chapter **X15**),³⁵ I already devoted 20 chapters (!) to investigating other possible ways. In the next post, I'll provide some closing comments on progress already made rejecting the God Lie.

³⁵ At http://zenofzero.net/docs/X15_EXpanding_Education.pdf.