

## *Yx29 – Clerical Quackery 9 – Greek Influences on Judaism as illustrated in Ecclesiastes & Daniel*

This is the 29<sup>th</sup> in a series of posts dealing with the history of what I call “the God Lie” and the 9<sup>th</sup> in a subseries of posts emphasizing Clerical Quackery. In the prior four posts, I tried to show some of the ideas developed in ancient Greece. In this post, my goal is to at least outline how some of those Greek ideas impacted and further transformed Judaism, as illustrated in two Old Testament (OT) books: *Ecclesiastes* and *The Book of Daniel*.

Such transformations were beyond those aspects of Zoroastrianism that were incorporated into Judaism during the approximately two centuries that the Persians ruled the Jews, from 540–332 BCE. The Greek-induced transformations occurred after the army of Alexander II of Macedonia (356–325 BCE) conquered the Persian Empire and the Greeks began their approximately two-centuries rule over the Jews. In future posts, I’ll try to show how further transformations of Judaism led to Christianity and Islam.

The resulting, Greek-induced transformations of Judaism led to what can be called *Judaism 4.0* (or more accurately, *Zoroastrianism 4.0*), according to the following scheme:

- “**In the beginning**” *Judaism 1.0* was similar to other tribal religions in the Middle East, with a warrior god Yahweh along with his consort (the mother goddess, “queen of heaven”) Asherah. Yahweh allegedly protected Abraham’s little tribe, whose members certainly didn’t consider Yahweh to be the only god that existed; i.e., *Judaism 1.0* wasn’t monotheism but monolatry.
- During the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, the high priest Hilkiah proclaimed *Judaism 2.0*, following his alleged discovery of the “**the book of the law.**” Under Hilkiah’s tutelage, Josiah (who became king of Judah in about 640 BCE, when he was eight years old) banned the goddess Asherah, specified Abraham’s tribal god as the national god, and claimed that an alleged “prophet” of Yahweh, Moses, dictated “**God’s Laws**” (which, unsurprisingly, claimed that the clerics were in charge of Jewish culture).
- After the Persian emperor Cyrus the Great conquered the new Babylonian Empire, the Jews were permitted to return from “captivity” in Babylon to their homeland (now a part of the Persian Empire), and sometime during ~450–350 BCE, Ezra and co-conspirators (Ezra & C-C) created and documented *Judaism 3.0* as the first part of what most Christians call the Old Testament (OT). In the process, Yahweh was transformed into the sole god, a universal god of righteousness and justice, modeled

after the similar Persian (Zoroastrian) god Ahura Mazda. Thereby, *Judaism 3.0* could also be labeled as *Zoroastrianism 3.0* (which went through its own evolutionary phases, after *Zoroastrianism 1.0* was concocted by Zarathustra and then subsequent Zoroastrian priests introduced their modifications to Zarathustra's scheme).<sup>1</sup>

- And after the army of the Greeks (or, in their own language, “the Hellenes”) defeated the Persians, then during the subsequent two centuries of cultural “Hellenization”, *Judaism 4.0* emerged, which incorporated still more of Zoroastrianism – but this assimilation of additional Zoroastrian ideas into Judaism wasn't directly *via* the Persians, but indirectly *via* the Greeks, especially by adopting the Zoroastrian-inspired ideas of the philosopher and would-be playwright Plato.

In later posts, as I already mentioned, I plan to at least skim the next phases in the evolution of Zoroastrianism: a few centuries after *Judaism 4.0* (or *Zoroastrianism 4.0*) was adopted, *Judaism 5.0* (*Zoroastrianism 5.0*) emerged as Christianity, and about six centuries still later, *Judaism 6.0* (or *Zoroastrianism 6.0*) emerged as Islam.

Actually, though, and as might be expected, such transformations weren't so “cut and dried” as the above scheme suggests. For example, in reality a number of “updates” to *Judaism 4.0* were introduced (*Judaism 4.1*, *4.2*, *4.3*...) by different Jewish sects (the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes...) adding varying amounts of additional aspects of Zoroastrianism (angels, Satan, predestination, judgment after death, a coming messiah, an end-of-time apocalypse, paradise for the believers, etc.). Similarly, the number of “updates” to Christianity (*Zoroastrianism 5.0*) and Islam (*Zoroastrianism 6.0*) that have been and continue to be promoted boggles the mind – especially when they're all make believe, without a shred of data to support them, and all promoted by clerical quacks primarily for their own profit.

But setting all that aside for now (even though humanity desperately needs a new “operating system”, namely, **Humanism 1.0**), my plan for this post is to list and briefly illustrate some of the ancient Greek ideas that had varying degrees of influence on ancient Jewish culture. I'll start with a group of Greek ideas (all labeled with the letter ‘O’ for “Other Influences”) that seem to have had relatively little direct influence on Judaism (although some did have profound influence on the creation of Christianity), and then, I'll turn

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, if historians someday agree on where Zarathustra got his ideas, then the numbering system used here will need to be revised, e.g., with Zoroastrianism 1.0 becoming equivalent to Mithraism x.x or Hinduism y.y or some appropriate number of some ancient Egyptian religion!

to a group of ideas (all labeled with the letter ‘P’ for “Philosophy and Psychology”) that were incorporated directly into the “sacred scripture” of Judaism.

But before starting on those tasks, perhaps I should insert something, especially for people (such as I) who, in general, “**don’t give a damn**” about Jewish history or about how the Bible and other “holy scripture” were concocted (out of thick, clerically polluted, hot air). My insert is the suggestion: there might be some value in my trying to show how the abomination known as the Bible came into being, because (as horrible as it is to contemplate) the Old Testament (OT) has probably been the most influential book ever written.

In particular, without the OT, the abominations known as Christianity and Islam (and other damnable religions such as Mormonism) would never have been concocted, and today, approximately two billion people wouldn’t have had their minds’ damaged by believing that its lies are “true”. Consequently, if by my trying to continue to show how the OT was fabricated, someone (especially some youngster) will get to an “Ah-ah moment” (an epiphany), realizing something similar to, “**Wow, all this god garbage is nothing but a pack of lies**”, then my efforts will have been worthwhile.

## OTHER GREEK INFLUENCES ON JEWISH CULTURE

Although, as already stated, the goal of this post is to illustrate some of the ideas of the ancient Greeks that were incorporated into Judaism, I should at least mention some of the many developments of the ancient Greeks that, to varying degrees, also influenced Jewish culture (if not Judaism).

Immediately below I’ll try to illustrate what I mean, but for readers who desire more details, I recommend that they dig into them on their own. In that regard, a good place to start is with the topic “Hellenism” at the Jewish Virtual Library,<sup>2</sup> which in turn is from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.<sup>3</sup> To dig deeper, the reader might want to explore the 18 volume (!! ) set of books (partially available at Google Books) entitled *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* by Salo Wittmayer Baron, with the first volume published in 1937 – and he was working on Volume 19 when he died in 1989, at the age of 94. Here, I’ll just skim over a number of topics, listed below.

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<sup>2</sup> At [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0008\\_0\\_08708.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0008_0_08708.html).

<sup>3</sup> The 2006 edition is available at GALE CENGAGE Learning for a mere \$2,725 – and that’s not a typo!

## O.1 Greek Science

As I tried to illustrate in the previous four posts, the ancient Greeks developed many ideas. *Judaism 4.0* incorporated only some of them. For example, as far as I recall, there's not a single comment in the OT dealing with the concept proposed by Anaxagoras (c.500–428 BCE) that the Sun was a “red-hot stone... larger than the Peloponnesus” or with the ideas developed by Democritus (c.460–c.370 BCE) that “nothing exists except atoms and empty space...”

In fact (at least as documented in the Bible), Jewish science, mathematics, medicine, and engineering even into the Christian era were more than six centuries (!) behind Greek developments in those fields, and yet, surely some of the developments were adopted by some of the intelligent Jewish people. Stated differently, one shouldn't expect any “holy book” to accurately describe what actually happened, since all “holy books” were written, not by historians, but by clerical partisans.

## O.2 Greek Law & Associated Politics

As described by Will Durant on p. 297 of his 1939 book *The Life of Greece*, Greek law went through three phases:<sup>4</sup>

The earliest Greeks appear to have conceived of law as sacred custom, divinely sanctioned and revealed; *themis* meant to them both these customs and a goddess who (like India's *Rita* or China's *Tao* or *Tien* [or Zarathustra's *Asha* or Egypt's *Ma'at*]) embodied the moral order and harmony of the world. Law was a part of theology, and the oldest Greek laws of property were mingled with liturgical regulations in the ancient temple codes. Perhaps as old as such religious law were the rules [were] established by the decrees of tribal chieftains or kings, which began as force and ended, in time, as sanctities.

The second phase of Greek legal history was the collection and co-ordination of these holy customs by lawgivers (*thesmothetai*) like Zaleucus, Charondas, Draco, Solon; when such men put their new codes into writing, the *thesmoi*, or sacred usages, became *nomoi*, or man-made laws. In these codes law freed itself from religion, and became increasingly secular; the intention of the agent entered more fully into judgment of the act; family *liability was replaced by individual responsibility* [italics added], and private revenge gave way to statutory punishment by the state.

The third step in Greek legal development was the accumulative growth of a body of law. When a Periclean Greek speaks of the law of Athens he means the codes of

<sup>4</sup> At <http://www.scribd.com/doc/7351192/Will-Durant-The-story-of-civilization02-The-Life-of-Greece>,

Draco and Solon, and the measures that have been passed – and not repealed – by the Assembly or the Council. If a new law contravenes an old one, the repeal of the latter is prerequisite; but scrutiny is seldom complete, and two statutes are often found in ludicrous contradiction. In periods of exceptional legal confusion a committee of *nomothetai*, or law determiners, is chosen by lot from the popular courts to decide which laws shall be retained; in such cases advocates are appointed to defend the old laws against those who propose to repeal them. Under the supervision of these *nomothetai* the laws of Athens, phrased in simple and intelligible language, are cut upon stone slabs in the King's Porch; and thereafter no magistrate is allowed to decide a case by an unwritten law.

In contrast to such developments, *Judaism 4.0* remained stuck in the first phase of the development of law and associated politics (just as most of Islam is still stuck today, approximately 2500 years behind the Greeks), with the people indoctrinated with the balderdash that their laws were dictated by some giant Jabberwock in the sky (who just happened to have prescribed a set of laws permitting clerical parasites to leech off the people).

### O.3 Greek Crafts and Economics

I'm not going to try to summarize Greek advances in the crafts and economics. Instead, I'll try to make just the single point that, although most Jewish clerics resisted such changes, many Jewish people apparently relished them, incorporating them into their economy. For example, as described by Andrew Benson in his book *The Origins of Christianity and the Bible* (partially available on the web):<sup>5</sup>

The Greeks influenced the people of Palestine even before the Hellenistic era. Excavations have shown that during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries BCE Greek art was highly prized in Palestine. All important excavations of 5<sup>th</sup> century sites have yielded Greek pottery and other Greek objects. Wealthy Phoenicians buried their dead in marble sarcophagi that had been carved by Greek craftsmen.

The Greeks invented money; coins. Sometime before 450 BCE the Persians abandoned their means of exchange (by precious metals) and adopted the Attic [Athenian] standard of making coins. By the middle of the fourth century the Persian satraps and local rulers of Cilicia, Syria, and Palestine produced coins that imitated the Greek coins. Judea received permission to strike its own silver coins, which were imitations of Attic coins. The biblical archaeologist Professor William Albright wrote that Alexander's conquest of Palestine in 331 [332?] BCE only intensified and organized the Hellenistic movement that was already well under way. This Hellenistic movement transformed Judaism and eventually brought about Christianity.

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<sup>5</sup> At [http://www.jesushistory.info/cultural\\_background\\_of\\_christianity.htm](http://www.jesushistory.info/cultural_background_of_christianity.htm).

## O.4 Other Aspects of Greek Culture

As for other Greek cultural influences on the Jews during their two-and-more centuries of Hellenization, again there's "no way" that I can do the subject justice – nor do I want to even try! Historians have spent their professional lives focusing on (and arguing about!) the subject. Yet, interested readers might want to glance at the article by Lester L. Grabble entitled "The Jews and Hellenization: Hengel and His Critics", which references many historical books and articles, including several by the historian and theologian Martin Hengel (1926–2009). Grabble's summary point is the following:<sup>6</sup>

Although there are many points to be debated in current study, Hengel's dictum is becoming more and more accepted: one can no longer talk of Judaism *vs.* Hellenism nor of Palestinian *vs.* Hellenistic Judaism. To do so is to create an artificial binary opposition and to reduce an enormously complex picture to stark, unshaded black and white. It is also to treat a lengthy process as if it were a single... event – as if conception, pregnancy, birth, childhood, and adulthood could be simultaneous.

The only points that I would make (because not only did I find them interesting, but they're relevant to material in this post) are the following.

### O.4.1 Greek Literature

One of the stunning achievements of the ancient Greeks was, of course, their literature, from Homer (or whoever wrote *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*) to poets and playwrights such as Aeschylus (535–456 BCE), Pindar (c.518–c.438 BCE), Sophocles (c.496–406 BCE), and Euripides (c.485–406 BCE). I know of no ancient Jewish literature of comparable quality, perhaps because of my limited education, but I suspect because the Jewish clerics tried hard to control both their culture and their historical records. Yet, the article on "Hellenism" at the Jewish Virtual Library states:<sup>7</sup>

The most obvious instances of Greek influence are to be seen in Jewish literature of the Hellenistic period. In Palestine, even Ben Sira, whose opposition to Hellenism before the Maccabean rebellion is manifest, has a number of aphorisms which seem to be derived from Aesop, Theognis, and Euripides. The *Testament of Joseph* and the *Book of Judith* show Greek influence in the introduction of erotic motifs found in Greek romances. Similarly, the *Book of Tobit*, composed either in Palestine or Antioch in the second century BCE, shows Hellenistic influence in the form of its romance...

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<sup>6</sup> From <http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Doc8/hengel.doc>.

<sup>7</sup> From [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0008\\_0\\_08708.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0008_0_08708.html).

Among the most obvious instances of Greek influence on Jewish writers are Philo the Elder's epic poem *On Jerusalem* (c. 100 BCE) in Homeric hexameters, and that of his presumed contemporary Theodotus, a Samaritan, on the rape of Dinah. Ezekiel the poet, at about the same time, composed tragedies, of which a portion of one, *The Exodus*, is extant, a veritable exercise in Euripidean trimeters.

Among Apocryphal books the *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, dating from perhaps the second century BCE, uses a number of technical terms drawn from Platonic and Stoic philosophy; and such a view as the preexistence of the soul is apparently drawn from Plato. It and its presumed contemporary, *IV Maccabees*, are reminiscent of Cynic-Stoic diatribes. Furthermore, the latter shows Greek influence in its presentation of the *Torah* as teaching the four cardinal virtues; the arguments are pervasively Stoic, and the form of the disputation is modeled on Plato's *Gorgias*.

Of Philo it was said already by Jerome (*De Viris Illustribus*, 11), "Either Plato philonizes or Philo platonizes." That his Hellenization transcends mere language can be seen in his description of Moses' education, which is presumably held up as an ideal. His Egyptian instructors are said to have taught him arithmetic, geometry, harmonics, and philosophy (*De Vita Mosis*, 1:23–24), the very subjects which constitute the higher education of Plato's philosopher-king (*Republic*, 521c–535a), while his Greek teachers are said to have taught him the rest of the regular school course – presumably, grammar, rhetoric, and logic. In his profound debt to Platonism Philo is similar to the author of *IV Maccabees*, his presumed contemporary.

The nearest to "great literature" that the Jewish clerics did preserve (and then, only after substantial arguments among themselves) is what many (including me) consider to be the best book in the OT, namely, *Ecclesiastes*.

Later in this post, I'll include several quotations from *Ecclesiastes*; here, therefore, I want to insert a few general comments about it. The word 'Ecclesiastes' is derived from the Greek word *ekklēsiastēs* meaning "member of an assembly" or "speaker". When "the speaker" (identified in the text with either the name or title Qoheleth) lived or who he (or she?) was is unknown. The opening line of *Ecclesiastes* claims that it was written by King Solomon, but I doubt if there's a single biblical scholar who accepts that claim. As the Wikipedia article on *Ecclesiastes* states:<sup>8</sup>

Most critical scholars suggest that *Ecclesiastes* was written around 250 BCE [about 700 years after Solomon lived!].... The latest possible date for it is set by the fact that *Ben Sirach*... repeatedly quotes or paraphrases it...

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<sup>8</sup> From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiastes>.

There are suggestions<sup>9</sup> that *Ecclesiastes* wasn't accepted into the "holy book" of the Jews (as "canon") until the time period 70–90 CE. I expect that it wasn't accepted until some cleric (or group of clerics) added the following two conclusions (*Ecc. 12, 9–14*) as a "postscript" or "postface":

Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also taught knowledge to the people; he carefully evaluated and arranged many proverbs. The Teacher sought to find delightful words, and to write accurately truthful sayings. The words of the sages are like prods, and the collected sayings are like firmly fixed nails; they are given by one shepherd.

Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. There is no end to the making of many books, and much study is exhausting to the body. Having heard everything, I have reached this conclusion: Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole duty of man. For God will evaluate every deed, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

The above, however, is NOT what *Ecclesiastes* is about. To my mind, further, there's no doubt that the above wasn't written by "the Teacher" (Qoheleth), not only because its content conflicts with much of the text but also because it obviously was written to inform the reader (or the son of the writer of the postface) about "the Teacher".

I suspect, therefore, that some cleric (or group of clerics) added the above postface to *Ecclesiastes* and that the majority of the Jewish clerics accepted *Ecclesiastes* into their "holy book" only after such a "disclaimer" was added to what Qoheleth had written. As given in the assessment in the already-quoted Wikipedia article:<sup>10</sup>

*Ecclesiastes* is accepted as canonical by both Judaism and Christianity. However, in the first century AD, literal interpretation of the work led to debate over whether it was to be included in the Jewish canon. The House of Hillel and the House of Shammai debated its inclusion, with the Hillel school arguing for it. Its inclusion was decided when Eleazar ben Azariah was made head of the assembly... Arguments against its inclusion were alleged opposition to statements in *Psalms*, internal incoherency, and heresy (Epicureanism). It was accepted because of its attribution to Solomon, and to the orthodox statement at *12:12–14* [i.e., the above-quoted "postface"].

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh>.

<sup>10</sup> At <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiastes>.

And I'm stimulated to add that it's "interesting" to learn about the method that clerics thereby use to decide what is and what isn't their god's words (or at least, his "inspiration")! As I intend to illustrate in later posts, similar clerical silliness (and skullduggery) prevailed to decide what was to be included as "holy scripture" in the New Testament (NT) and the Koran.

But anyway, returning to the literary quality of *Ecclesiastes*, for now I'll ask the reader to consider just how Qoheleth expanded so beautifully on Homer's line (*The Odyssey*, Bk. XI, Line 379):

There is a time for many words, and there is a time for sleep.

In *Ecclesiastes*, Qoheleth wrote the familiar (*Ecc. 3*, 1–8):

For everything its season, and for every activity under heaven its time: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to pull down and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh... a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

#### *O.4.2 Greek Theater*

The creation of Greek theater was, of course, a momentous achievement in the history of the world, an achievement that continues to have major ramifications to this day. There are some indications that some ancient Jewish writers attempted to utilize what was then new art form, yet Salo Wittmayer Baron writes:<sup>11</sup>

... our information on the influence of Hellenistic music and theatrical arts on the Jews is very limited and can at best be conjectured...

Two such conjectures (to which I'll return in later posts) are:

1. That *The Book of Daniel* was actually written as a play (it's certainly not history – even though a large fraction of Christian fundamentalists consider it to be "true") and
2. That essentially the entire story about Jesus was simply a play – or more like a series of skits!

And most unfortunately for humanity, the skit about the birth of Jesus in a manger (the "Nativity of Jesus") is still put on by Christian children throughout the world, brainwashed into believing it's "true, and the skit

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<sup>11</sup> From p. 9 of Volume II of the Second Edition of Baron's *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, partially available at Google Books.

about Jesus being killed on a cross (“the Passion”) was recently produced by the blood-and-gore expert Mel Gibson, a film that grossed in excess of \$600 million, from Christians brainwashed into believing it’s “true”.

### *O.4.3 Greek Sports*

Still another of the innovations of the ancient Greeks was the instigation of competitive sports, most notably the Olympics. The “old-guard” Hebrew clerics resented the spread of such sports among the Jews, a resentment expressed in the apocryphal (hidden) book *II Maccabees*. Thus, as described in the book by Andrew Benson already identified:<sup>12</sup>

A staunch Hellenist Jew named Jason became the high priest [of Judaism] from 175 to 172 BCE. His name originally was Jesus, but because of his love for the Greek culture he changed it to Jason. He transformed Jerusalem into a Greek city, with Greek schools and gymnasiums where traditionally young athletes exercised nude (a Greek athletic practice). Even some of the young priests at Jerusalem took up the Greek language, athletic sports, and manner of dress: “...he [Jason] founded a gymnasium right under the citadel, and he induced the noblest of the young men to wear the Greek hat. There was... an extreme of Hellenization and increase in the adoption of foreign ways...” (*2 Maccabees 4:12-13 RSV*) During the heyday of Greek influence the priests of the Jerusalem temple would sometimes leave the sacrifices half-burned on the altar to rush off to a stadium to compete in the Greek games: “...the priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar. Despising the sanctuary and neglecting the sacrifices, they hastened to take part in the unlawful proceedings in the wrestling arena after the call to the discus, disdainingly the honors prized by their fathers and putting the highest value upon Greek forms of prestige.” (*2 Maccabees 4:14-15 RSV*)

And thus, as has re-occurred so many times, probably many youngsters adapted to (and even relished) change, while old fogeys resisted. Similar occurs today, most dramatically in the Muslim world but also in the West, almost invariably with the clerics worrying that change will diminish their perks and their power and with the young thinking that they have little to lose but their chains.

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<sup>12</sup> At [http://www.jesushistory.info/cultural\\_background\\_of\\_christianity.htm](http://www.jesushistory.info/cultural_background_of_christianity.htm).

## GREEK PHILOSOPHICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Whether they liked it or not, the Jewish clerics (and therefore Judaism) were eventually profoundly influenced by Greek philosophy and psychology. Below I'll try to illustrate some of the resulting influences, with the illustrations organized into various subcategories (identified in subsection titles); for each, I'll try to at least suggest resulting variations in opinions, since as was quoted above:

To do [otherwise] is to create an artificial binary opposition and to reduce an enormously complex picture to stark, unshaded black and white. It is also to treat a lengthy process as if it were a single... event – as if conception, pregnancy, birth, childhood, and adulthood could be simultaneous.

### P.1 Skepticism vs. Authoritarianism

It may be a safe generalization to claim that all social change starts with skepticism of the *status quo*. For example, skepticism of existing “authority” (commonly claimed by a culture’s clerics) initiated philosophical and scientific progress in ancient Greece. Similar occurred elsewhere, e.g., the progress made by Confucius, the Buddha, and Zarathustra.

On the other hand, skepticism of the value of change can be a bulwark to maintain the *status quo*! An example is the forceful statement by the Athenian orator and statesman Demosthenes (c.384–322 BCE), famous for his speeches urging resistance against expansionist plans of Alexander’s father, Philip II of Macedonia. Demosthenes urged:

There are all kinds of devices invented for the protection and preservation of countries: defensive barriers, forts, trenches and the like. All these are the work of human hands aided by money. But prudent minds have as a natural gift one safeguard which is the common possession of all... What is this safeguard? Skepticism. This you must preserve. This you must retain. If you can keep this, you need fear no harm.

A safer generalization may therefore be that skepticism abounds.

Consequently, in investigating any case of skepticism, one would be well advised to examine what people are skeptical about and, following the scientific method, put all ideas to experimental tests. In the previous four posts in this series I provided illustrations of the skepticism of some ancient Greeks. A few illustrations follow:

- Skepticism of Greek mythology as recorded by “the authorities” (Homer and Hesiod) was rampant, including the saying of the Seven Sages that “Hesiod might as well have kept his breath to cool his pottage” and the fragment from Heraclitus (c.535–c.475 BCE): “[Homer] should be turned out of the lists and whipped.”
- Skepticism of the gods include the statement by Xenophanes (c.570–c.480 BCE) that “If cattle and horses, or lions, had hands, or were able to draw with their feet and produce the words which men do, then horses would draw the forms of gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make the gods’ bodies the same shape as their own” as well as the honest, agnostic statement by Protagoras (c.485–c.415 BCE): “Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not or of what sort they may be, because of the obscurity of the subject, and the brevity of human life.”
- Skepticism about the ideas of physicists (from the Greek word *phusis* meaning ‘nature’) started with skepticism of the idea of Thales (c.624–c.545 BCE) that “Water is the cause of all things” and continued for essentially every theory proposed during the subsequent three-and-more centuries.
- Skepticism even about humans’ ability to know anything with certainty was admirably illustrated by the statement by Xenophanes (c.570–c.480 BCE) that’s as valid today as it was in his day: “But as for certain truth, no man has known it, nor will he know it – neither of the gods nor yet of all the things of which I speak. And even if by chance he were to utter the final truth, he would himself not know it, for all is but a woven web of guesses.”

Unfortunately, however, ancient Greece also had its authoritarian mystics who were skeptical of the skeptics’ ideas, who didn’t test their own ideas against data, who didn’t appreciate Xenophanes’ wisdom, and instead foolishly claiming that their knowledge was “certain”. Examples included Pythagoras, Plato, and the Stoics. And unfortunately for the world, Jewish clerics (and subsequent Christian and Muslim clerics) also failed to appreciate Xenophanes’ wisdom; as a result, their mystical mumbo-jumbo still pollutes the world.

In contrast to the case in ancient Greece, little skepticism is recorded in “official Judaism” (e.g., in the OT). That is, similar to Greek clerics and mystic philosophers, Jewish clerics were certain that they knew “the Truth” – just as do today’s Christian and Muslim clerics, without knowing even what ‘truth’ means!<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See [http://zenofzero.net/docs/T1\\_Truth\\_&\\_Knowledge.pdf](http://zenofzero.net/docs/T1_Truth_&_Knowledge.pdf).

Nonetheless, there are hints even in the OT that some skepticism did creep into Judaism. An example is the following from *Ecclesiastes* 7, 14–16:

In times of prosperity be joyful, but in times of adversity consider this: God has made one as well as the other, so that no one can discover what the future holds. During the days of my fleeting life I have seen both of these things: sometimes a righteous person dies prematurely in spite of his righteousness, and sometimes a wicked person lives long in spite of his evil deeds. So, do not be excessively righteous or excessively wise; otherwise, you might be disappointed.

With his statement “**no one can discover what the future holds**”, the author (Qoheleth) thereby discounted all “prophecy” (just as Homer had Hector and Telemachus discount prophecies, as I illustrated in an earlier post).<sup>14</sup> Further, with his statement “**sometimes a righteous person dies prematurely in spite of his righteousness, and sometimes a wicked person lives long in spite of his evil deeds**” (which is consistent with Jobs’ experiences), Qoheleth promoted skepticism of the Jewish clerics’ claim of God’s righteousness and justice.

## P.2 Cynicism vs. Naiveté

Skepticism can lead to cynicism. For example, the skepticism of the Greek philosopher Pyrrho (c.365–c.270 BCE), who is usually credited as being the first Skeptic philosopher (and who, by the way, traveled with Alexander all the way to India), led him to the cynical conclusion:<sup>15</sup>

Against every statement its contradiction may be advanced with equal justification.

Meanwhile, though, I’m skeptical that Pyrrho should be credited as being the first Skeptic philosopher (all philosophers are skeptics, and Xenophanes seems to have been more skeptical than Pyrrho) and I admit to being sufficiently cynical of Pyrrho’s quoted statement to say that, if it were so, if “**against every statement its contradiction may be advanced with equal justification**”, then all science would be destroyed and, for example, this computer wouldn’t work! Stated differently, skepticism is healthy and cynicism is a common consequence of skepticism, but to make progress, new hypotheses must be proposed and their predictions tested. Otherwise, similar to recent experiences with the global warming problem, skepticism and cynicism can lead to just a bunch of mindless denials.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Yx25 or <http://zenofzero.blogspot.com/2009/11/clerical-quackery-5-physics-versus.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyrrho>.

For example, currently in the U.S., conservative Republicans seem intent on denying every new idea, from the possibility of global warming to improvements to health care, and from the need to regulate the financial industry to the American citizenship of Barack Obama! Yet, most of them naively cling to the authority of the Bible's fairy tales!

But returning to the cynicism of ancient Greek philosophers, another illustration appears in one of the stories about Heraclitus (c.535–c.475 BCE):<sup>16</sup>

Heraclitus was once asked to write a constitution for Ephesus, but refused. He used to play at knucklebones with children by the temple of Artemis. When adults came to gape, he replied: “Why should you be astonished, you rascals? Isn't it better to do this than to take part in your civil life?”

Consistently, one of the fragments from Heraclitus' writings is:<sup>17</sup>

Ephesians might as well hang themselves, every man of them, and leave their city to be governed by youngsters...

The most famous cynic among the ancient Greek philosophers was, of course, Diogenes the Cynic (c.412–323 BCE),<sup>18</sup> who “was the only man to mock Alexander the Great [to his face] and live.” An oft-repeated story about Diogenes is that he went about Athens with a lantern, claiming he was looking for at least one honest man. In an earlier post, I provided an example of his debunking Plato's idea of Forms; a more famous example of the trouble he caused Plato was that, after Plato defined ‘man’ to be a “featherless biped”, Diogenes plucked a chicken, brought it to Plato's Academy, and said: “This is Plato's man!”

Describing anyone as a cynic, however, isn't very illuminating: the object of the person's cynicism should be specified. In the case of Diogenes the Cynic (also called Diogenes of Sinope), “his life was a relentless campaign to debunk the social values and institutions of what he saw as corrupt society.” His disdain for the Eleusinian Mysteries is clear in his following statement, as reported by Diogenes Laërtius:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.pantheism.net/paul/heraklit.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> From <http://www.pantarei.org/about/>.

<sup>18</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diogenes\\_of\\_Sinope](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diogenes_of_Sinope).

<sup>19</sup> From <http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/diogenes/dldiogenes.htm>.

“It will,” he replied, “be an absurd thing if Agesilaus and Epaminondas [or, we might say, if Abu’l-Ala-Al-Ma’arri, Omar Khayyam, David Hume, and Spinoza] are to live in the mud, and some miserable wretches, who have been initiated, are to be in the islands of the blest.”

Diogenes Laërtius also reports:

...that when in the course of his life he [Diogenes the Cynic] beheld pilots, and physicians, and philosophers, he thought man the wisest of all animals; but when again he beheld interpreters of dreams, and soothsayers, and those who listened to them, and men puffed up with glory or riches, then he thought that there was not a more foolish animal than man.

He was also called “Diogenes the Dog”,<sup>20</sup> apparently for multiple reasons. One reason is that the “the terms ‘cynic’ and ‘cynical’ are derived from the Greek word *kynikos*, the adjective form of *kynon*, meaning ‘dog’.”

Diogenes, however, was not cynical about virtue and about friendship, famously saying: “Other dogs bite their enemies; I bite my friends to save them.”

Meanwhile, if any of the ancient Jews were cynical, little of their cynicism was recorded in the OT, as might have been expected – at least by those of us who are cynical of the intellectual honesty of any cleric! Nonetheless, some cynicism appears in *Ecclesiastes*. Further, it seems likely that the author knew of Diogenes the Cynic, since at *Ecclesiastes* 7, 28, Qoheleth wrote:

What I have continually sought, I have not found; I have found only one upright man among a thousand, but I have not found one upright woman among all of them.

The above variation on the familiar story about Diogenes makes me wonder if the misogyny of many ancient Semitic cultures (and even “modern” Muslim cultures) stimulated Qoheleth to include his insulting comment about women. On the other hand, perhaps he never knew his mother!

More famous skepticism and cynicism in *Ecclesiastes* appears in its opening lines, which have been translated in many ways:

- Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!
- Utterly senseless, everything is senseless!

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<sup>20</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diogenes\\_of\\_Sinope](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diogenes_of_Sinope).

- Utterly absurd, everything is absurd!
- Meaningless of meaninglessness! All is meaningless!
- Futility of futilities, all is futile!
- Absolutely pointless! Everything is pointless!

That's about as cynical as one can get – about everything! But Qoheleth's philosophy wasn't so coherent as was Diogenes'; for example, Qoheleth obviously decided that writing *Ecclesiastes* wasn't “pointless”!

### P.3 Pessimism vs. Optimism

From my own experiences and with the help of my dictionary's definitions, I suggest that skepticism (from Greek *skepsis* meaning ‘doubt’) and cynicism (from Greek *Kunosarges*, the name of the gymnasium where the first cynic, Antisthenes, taught, but popularly taken to mean “doglike, churlish”) commonly lead to pessimism (the belief that this world is as bad as it could be or that evil will ultimately prevail over good). A few examples of pessimistic statements by ancient Greeks are the following (in the main, taken from *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*).

Until he is dead, do not yet call a man happy, but only lucky.  
[Solon, c.630–c.555 BCE]

In Greece wise men speak and fools decide.  
[Anacharsis (fl. c.600 BCE)]

[Anacharsis] laughed at him [Solon] for imagining the dishonesty and covetousness of his countrymen could be restrained by written laws, which were like spiders' webs and could catch, it is true, the weak and poor, but easily be broken by the mighty and rich. [From Plutarch (c.46–c.120 CE), *Parallel Lives, Life of Solon*.]

The best of all things for earthly men is not to be born and not to see the beams of the bright sun; but if born, then as quickly as possible to pass the gates of Hades and to lie deep buried. [Theognis, fl. c.545 BCE]

Skepticism and cynicism needn't lead to pessimism, however. For example, in response to someone who said that it was a bad thing to live, Diogenes the Cynic responded: “Not to live, but to live badly.”

In general, subsequent to the Babylonian exile, pessimism didn't seem to permeate Jewish society – although, as I showed in an earlier post, there is pessimism in *The Book of Job*, whenever it might have been written. The reason why the Jews seem to have remained optimistic is presumably because Ezra & C-C's "redaction" of the Jewish "holy book" infused the Jews with thoughts that their god was in control and, after his petulance was assuaged, he would look after them. Although (as I illustrated in earlier posts) that idea appears so frequently in the OT that it can drive the reader to distraction, yet once again in *Ecclesiastes*, more cynical, pessimistic, and even fatalistic ideas appear, e.g., at *Ecc. 9, 11* (with italics added):

Again, I observed this on the earth: the race is not always won by the swiftest, the battle is not always won by the strongest; prosperity does not always belong to those who are the wisest, wealth does not always belong to those who are the most discerning, nor does success always come to those with the most knowledge – *for time and chance may overcome them all.*

As a general rule, I expect that, to suggest (as in Homer's books) that "time and chance" is overall – in particular, over the authority of some god – is about as close as one can come to denying the god promoted by any group of clerics and still have them include your ideas in their "holy book"!

Such cynicism and pessimism (consistent with Qoheleth's "all is pointless") seems to be the common, dead-end conclusion of religions that don't offer a fictitious paradise after death – and as the following quotations show, in *Ecclesiastes*, Qoheleth makes his opinion abundantly clear that, when you're dead, you're just dead:

For the fate of humans and the fate of animals are the same: as one dies, so dies the other; both have the same breath. There is no advantage for humans over animals, for both are fleeting. Both go to the same place, both come from the dust, and to dust both return. Who really knows if the human spirit ascends upward [as Plato promoted], and the animal's spirit descends into the earth [with which Pythagoras disagreed]? So I perceived there is nothing better than for people to enjoy their work [as Epicurus recommended], because that is their reward; for who can show them what the future holds? (*Ecc. 3, 19–22*)

But whoever is among the living has hope; a live dog [Diogenes?!] is better than a dead lion [Alexander?]. For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything; they have no further reward – and even the memory of them disappears... Whatever you find to do with your hands, do it with all your might, because there is neither work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave, the place where you will eventually go. (*Ecc. 9, 4–10*)

The light of day is sweet, and pleasant to the eye is the sight of the sun; if a man lives for many years, he should rejoice in all of them. But let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. Everything that is to come will be emptiness. (*Ecc. 11, 8*)

As suggested by the notes added to the above quotations, Qoheleth apparently adopted some of Epicurus' ideas, but he missed the most important ones, namely, to forget about gods and any "afterlife". Further, as Epicurus wrote in his *Letter to Pythocles*:<sup>21</sup>

It is unwise to desire what is impossible: to proclaim a uniform theory about everything... Rather than committing to explanations based on unwarranted assumptions and dogma, we may only theorize as far as the phenomena allow. For our life has no need of unreasonable and groundless opinions; our one need is untroubled existence.

So, if one is satisfied (as he should be) with that which is shown to be less than certain, it is no cause for concern that things can be explained in more than one way, consistent with the evidence. But if one accepts one explanation and rejects another that is equally consistent with the evidence, he is obviously rejecting science altogether and taking refuge in myth.

In particular, starting with the silly assumptions that gods exist, that humanity started in paradise (and has been degenerating ever since), and that death is the end of one's existence, Qoheleth reached the inevitable conclusion that life is pointless.

Of course, the sensible resolution to that philosophical predicament is to reject the data-less assumptions that gods exist and that humanity started in paradise and, instead, to adopt the data-rich, testable hypothesis that humanity has evolved – and will continue to evolve, so long as we help one another and rid the world of clerics! But ignoring that realistic, atheistic, and optimistic resolution, Jewish clerics (intent on feathering their own nests) eventually adopted Zarathustra's data-less (yet, optimistic) speculation that, after people die, they're judged and, depending on their behavior during life, are rewarded or punished appropriately – of course with glorious rewards for those who obey the clerics and terrible punishments for those who think for themselves.

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<sup>21</sup> At <http://www.epicurus.info/etexts/Lives.html>.

Thereby, Jewish clerics began incorporating into their fictitious scheme not only additional aspects of Zoroastrianism but also some elements of Greek (and Zarathustra's) individualism. Below, I'll try to illustrate my meaning, but I feel the need to provide some background information, which I'll do with the following section and its subsections.

#### **P.4 Individualism vs. Collectivism**

The topic of individualism vs. collectivism is huge, both historically and psychologically, and it's as important for us today as it was for the first human tribes, a hundred (or so) thousand years ago. Today in the U.S., arguments rage over ideas about collectivism promoted by liberal Democrats vs. individualism promoted by conservative Republicans, and today in the world (with the collectivism of communism of diminished concern), arguments rage over the collectivism of socialism vs. the individualism of free enterprise and over the collectivism of Islam vs. the individualism of the West.

In the West, an individual's challenge is to decide how much to help others while still looking after oneself. In Islam, in contrast (and as was the case in fascist countries and as is still the case in communist countries), as Hitler said, "...we understand only the individual's capacity to make sacrifices for the community...", or as Khrushchev said, "We must abolish the cult of the individual decisively, once and for all." For example, A.K. Brohi (1915–87), Pakistan's Law Minister in both the 1950s and 70s, chillingly maintained (to which I've added the italics):<sup>22</sup>

Human duties and rights have been vigorously defined and their orderly enforcement is the duty of the whole of organized communities and the task is specifically entrusted to the law enforcement organs of the state. *The individual if necessary has to be sacrificed in order that that the life of the organism be saved.* Collectivity has a special sanctity attached to it in Islam... [In Islam] there are no 'human rights' or 'freedoms' admissible to man... in essence the believer owes obligation or duties to God, if only because he is called upon to obey the Divine Law, and such human rights as he is made to acknowledge seem to stem from his primary duty to obey God.

No doubt the resulting strife between individualism and collectivism will continue – so long as we seek to survive (even thrive) as individuals and yet, as members of a community, our survival depends on the prosperity of our society.

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<sup>22</sup> From [http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm?frm=3766&sec\\_id=3766](http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm?frm=3766&sec_id=3766).

In turn, the prosperity of any society commonly depends critically on the accomplishments of especially competent individuals, e.g., one Steve Jobs accomplishes more than a million of the rest of us – and one Einstein, more than a billion of us. The challenge is to appreciate that, as Heraclitus said approximately 2500 years ago:

The opposite is beneficial; from things that differ comes the fairest attunement; all things happen by strife and necessity. People do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself. It is an attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and the lyre.

Now, tracing the history of the attempt to find “an attunement of opposite tensions” between individualism vs. collectivism, even in just ancient Persia or Greece, or just among the ancient Jews, is far too great a task for me to even try to undertake – even if I were a historian! Instead, in the following subsections, I’ll simply list a few topics (each of which is probably already the subject of multiple Ph.D. theses!), provide a few examples to try to illustrate what I mean, and then try to steer the whole toward showing how (and maybe why) some ancient Greeks and Jews adopted martyrdom, a crazy idea still practiced by far-too-many “modern” Muslims.

For a very few martyrs (such as Socrates, Mattathias, and maybe Jesus – if he existed), perhaps their martyrdom was for their perceived good of the collective, but for the vast majority of Jews, Christians, and “modern” Muslims, their martyrdom was (and is) a deluded, egotistical, extreme form of individualism (seeking eternal bliss in some fictitious paradise).

#### *P.4.1 Individualism vs. Tribalism*

Every culture has its myths and stories, which to a large extent define its culture. In the past, most such myths and stories involved “the gods” and therefore defined each culture’s religion. Also, usually incorporated in such stories are anecdotes that stimulate each culture’s adoption of specific policies from among the continuum of policies between individualism and collectivism. Literally hundreds of examples could be given.

Some examples from the ancient Sumerian, reviewed in earlier posts in this series, include:

\* Go to other chapters *via*

- The Sumerian story about Adapa<sup>23</sup> (a precursor to the story about Adam, of Adam and Eve fame), who declined the offer from the gods for eternal life;
- The Sumerian story about Ubar-Tutu or Utnapishtim<sup>24</sup> (a precursor to the story about Noah), who with the help of his god saved his family from the flood; and of course,
- The Sumerian's famous story about Gilgamesh or "Gilga the Hero".<sup>25</sup>

Adapa was a loner, Utnapishtim was a family man, and readers who have treated themselves to the version of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* written by Sin-leqe-unnini will recall Gilga's transformations: from a loner ("like a wild bull"), to his friendship and adventures with Enkidu, to his despair at the death of his friend, to his lonely but egotistical search for eternal life, and finally, to his discoveries of meaning in friendship, family, and producing something of lasting value for his community:

Choose to live and choose to love; choose to rise above and give back what you yourself were given. Be moderate as you flee for survival in a boat that has no place for riches... even if I were to fail... all future clans would say I did the job.

Relevant stories are also available, of course, from ancient Egypt, India, and Persia, but to move this post along, I'll jump to Homer's stories from ancient Greece.

In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Homer's messages about individualism vs. collectivism are complicated and confusing. In contrast to the case for patriarchal groups (such as the ancient Persians and Jews and "modern" Muslims), Homer tells us little about the fathers of his heroes. Further, in some cases it's difficult to know who Homer suggests are heroes:

- Agamemnon (the most powerful Greek king) is depicted sometimes as a bully and a bungler;
- Hector is depicted as a hero of his own collective (the enemy), e.g., with his "There is one omen, and one only – that a man should fight for his country";
- Achilles (the most famous of the Greek fighters) is depicted as a whiny brat, whose vulnerable tendon seems really to be his individualism: refusing to fight (until his best buddy is killed), because of Agamemnon's personal insult, and then horribly dragging behind his horse the dead body of Hector.

<sup>23</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adapa>.

<sup>24</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utnapishtim>.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., <http://zenofzero.net/docs/Ix06Gilgamesh.pdf>.

In *The Odyssey*, similarly, one wonders if Homer is describing Ulysses as a hero for his individualism (and trickery) or as a despicable character. Maybe the only hero in the tale is Ulysses' wife, Penelope, in part for her individualism (and trickery), but also for her commitment to her husband. Perhaps the only lesson to be gained from Homer is, not about what he advocated on the continuum between individualism and collectivism, but that, on such matters, great authors only lead their readers – and let them decide for themselves.

And then there are the stories in the first part of the OT, which in general weren't written by great authors. Again and again, the same stupefying messages are relayed:

- Never mind fraternity (e.g., Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, etc.),
- Women must obey their husbands or masters, since otherwise, women just cause trouble (e.g., Eve, Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca, Tamar, etc.), and
- Always but always, fathers know best (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob...) – provided that they obey God (aka the clerics) and thus don't behave as Adam did.

In the ancient Jewish stories, then, there is short shrift for individualism (unless the individual obeys the clerics); instead, there's unremitting emphasis on patriarchy, tribalism, and obeying the damn clerics (which continues in Islam to this day).

#### *P.4.2 Personal vs. Collective Honor & Dishonor*

In communal cultures, honor is defined not by the individual but by the group; as a consequence, individuals (e.g., in “modern” Muslim countries) usually aren't concerned about guilt but about shame. An example from ancient Greece of such “collective responsibility” is in Hesiod's *Works and Days*: “Often an entire city has suffered because of an evil man.” Similar, silly ideas of “communal guilt” are contained throughout the OT and, for that matter, also throughout the NT, e.g., the ridiculous claim that we're all guilty, because Adam ate the apple! [I'm not; I have a perfect alibi; I wasn't even alive at the time!] Yet, in a particular example, recall that Abraham's sense of justice was more advanced than God's: Abraham managed to talk God out of destroying Sodom if first 50 and then finally at least 10 “godly people” resided therein.

For hierarchical societies, those in power define ‘honor’ (for others!) as those behaviors that protect the power structure. Thus, patriarchs demand that their wives be ‘honorable’ (especially, not to engage in adultery, because their husbands don’t want their resources consumed by some other man’s child). Similarly, tribal leaders and clerics define honorable behavior in war as courage, because it protects their privileged positions. As a result, claims such as the following were common in the tribal days of ancient Greece:

If to die honorably is the greatest part of virtue, for us fate’s done her best. Because we fought to crown Greece with freedom, we lie here enjoying timeless fame.  
[Simonides, c.556–468 BCE, *For the Athenian Dead at Plataia*]

We did not flinch but gave our lives to save Greece when her fate hung on a razor’s edge. [Simonides, c.556–468 BCE, *Cenotaph at the Isthmos*]

Fix your eyes on the greatness of Athens as you have it before you day by day, fall in love with her, and when you feel her great, remember that this greatness was won by men with courage, with knowledge of their duty, and with a sense of honor in action.  
[Thucydides, c.460–400 BCE]

As I’ve illustrated in earlier posts in this series, the OT is loaded with similar nonsense, but in ancient Greece, ideas of honor as defined by individuals began to emerge. In part, the sense of personally defined honor seems to have come from the Olympic games, the first of which apparently occurred in 776 BCE (about the time of the writings of Homer and Hesiod).

It’s clear that citizens of the Greek cities took collective pride in the accomplishments of their athletes, just as citizens of cities and nations, today, (childishly) take collective pride in the accomplishments of their athletes. Thus, the home cities of winners of the Games typically “voted them free meals for the rest of their lives, or set up statues in their honor.”<sup>26</sup> But simultaneously, winners at the Games almost certainly took pride in their individual accomplishments. Similarly, individual artists and tradesmen in ancient Greece were “honored” for their accomplishments, and thereby, new ideas about individualism and individual honor emerged.

In addition, Greek philosophy bred individualism. For example, essentially every new idea was identified with the individual who proposed it, and still

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<sup>26</sup> From <http://etymonline.com/columns/Olympics.htm>.

today, we can be overwhelmed by the names of so many individuals – such as Thales, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Protagoras, etc. In addition, there were individuals such as Socrates, whom some ancient Greeks considered to be so dishonorable that he was sentenced to death, and yet, “the Socratic method” is honored to this day – and should be taught to all children, to help them learn critical thinking skills!

As well, there were such individuals as Diogenes the Cynic, whom some described as dishonorable (and beat him like a dog for his behavior), and yet, Alexander the Great reportedly said:

If I were not Alexander, then I should wish to be Diogenes.

Subsequently, the individualism practiced by Socrates and Diogenes became the foundation of Stoicism, which later infused both Judaism and Christianity with ideas of individual honor.

Below, I’ll provide some illustrations of the influence of Greek individualism on Judaism as illustrated in *Ecclesiastes*, but for now, consider the following quotations taken not from *Ecclesiastes* but from *Ecclesiasticus* (33, 19–22 and 37, 13), also called *Sirach*,<sup>27</sup> which seems to have been authored by Ben Sirah in about 180–175 BCE:

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

It’s easy to understand why *Sirach* isn’t included in the Jewish *Tanakh* and why most Protestant clerics refused to accept it as “canonical”: to advocate that individuals rely on themselves and trust their own judgment is to promote Humanism and, therefore, the end of clerical quackery!

#### *P.4.3 Individual Rights vs. Collective Responsibilities*

Under the topic “individual rights” I mean to include various “freedoms to” and “freedoms from”, including any individual’s rights to define and pursue virtue and happiness. By collective responsibilities, I mean to include multiple topics dealing with justice and laws. Clearly, then, the topics in this subsection constitute a huge area of study, but here, I’ll just gloss over the topics, again trying to focus on how Greek ideas seeped into Judaism.

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<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sirach>.

It's commonly accepted that humans have freedom to think as they want, but actually, the majority of humans don't (and apparently can't) exercise such freedom: their thoughts are unfortunately restricted by their childhood indoctrination in religious balderdash. When a few ancient Greeks had the mental ability, courage, and intellectual honesty to overcome their religious indoctrination, they found that freedom to express their thoughts about nature and "the gods" was severely constrained.

As examples, in about 450 BCE the Athenian legislature (no doubt stimulated by Greek clerics) made it illegal to teach "new theories about the things on high", Anaxagoras was imprisoned for teaching that the sun was a red hot stone, the Athenians burned Protagoras' book *On The Gods* and exiled him, and Socrates was put to death for "not believing in the gods in which the state believes..." The poignancy of a statement by Diogenes the Cynic is then clear. As Diogenes Laërtius reports:

On one occasion he [Diogenes the Cynic] was asked, what was the most excellent thing among men; and he said, "Freedom of speech."

Later in this post, I'll briefly comment on the other side of this freedom vs. constraint divide, specifically, as it appeared among the Jews when they were prohibited by the Greeks from worshipping Yahweh, resulting in the terrorist activities (by religious Jews) known as the Maccabean Revolt.

Although speaking against the gods was prohibited in ancient Greece, people were apparently free to discuss how to live "the good life". Thus, as I briefly addressed in the previous two posts, philosophers such as Democritus, Socrates, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno the Stoic, et al. labored to define and pursue 'virtue', 'honor', 'happiness', etc. Similar freedom seems to have been just barely permitted by the Jewish clerics, one result of which was *Ecclesiastes*.

As I already suggested, the philosophical competence of the author of *Ecclesiastes* (Qoheleth) wasn't comparable to that of the Greek philosophers mentioned in the previous paragraph. His philosophy wasn't coherent. For example, his ideas about fate and chance (quoted earlier in this post) are inconsistent with the conclusion of *Ecclesiastes*:

Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole duty of man. For God will evaluate every deed, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

But then, as I also already mentioned, clearly the final two paragraphs of *Ecclesiastes* wasn't written by Qoheleth (just as the final verse of *Deuteronomy*, describing the funeral of Moses, obviously wasn't written by Moses). Instead, the final two paragraphs were obviously written by someone telling the reader who Qoheleth was and what he did:

Not only was the Teacher [Qoheleth] wise, but he also taught knowledge to the people; he carefully evaluated and arranged [not “created”] many proverbs. The Teacher sought to find delightful words, and to write accurately truthful sayings [presumably created by others].

More specific criticism of the incoherence of Qoheleth's philosophy (rather than criticism of the incoherence of *Ecclesiastes*) is that his ideas about happiness are inconsistent with his “vanity of vanities” theme. Thus, conflicting with his assertion that “all is meaningless”, he wrote (*Ecc.* 3, 12–13 and 9, 9):

I have concluded that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they live, and also that everyone should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all his toil... Enjoy life with your beloved wife during all the days of your fleeting life...

Furthermore, the above certainly aren't original ideas (consistent with the concluding remarks in *Ecclesiastes* that “the Teacher... evaluated and arranged many proverbs... and truthful sayings”). Thus, the above quotation is essentially the same as what Sin-leqe-unnini wrote more than a thousand years earlier in his version of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*:

What is best for us to do is now to sing and dance; relish warm food and cool drinks; cherish children to whom your love gives life; bathe easily in sweet, refreshing waters; [and] play joyfully with your chosen wife.

And from at least the same time as Sin-leqe-unnini (but perhaps 1,000 years earlier), the ancient Egyptian *Song of the Harper* contains similar ideas:<sup>28</sup>

Seize the day! Hold holiday!  
Be unwearied, unceasing, alive.  
Let not your heart be troubled during your sojourn on earth,  
Grieve not your heart, whatever comes  
Recall not the evil...  
But have joy, joy, joy, and pleasure!

<sup>28</sup> From <http://newsblaze.com/story/20081130045902zzzz.nb/topstory.html>.

Nonetheless, in spite of such incoherencies (and plagiarisms) in *Ecclesiastes*, it seems clear that, during Hellenization, Greek-enhanced ideas that people should, by themselves, explore both virtue and happiness seem to have seeped into Jewish thoughts, undermining the clerics' con game.

Once again, however, the Jewish clerics were disingenuous. Recall the earlier quotation in this post that “arguments against inclusion [of *Ecclesiastes* as canonical] were alleged opposition to statements in *Psalms*, internal incoherency, and heresy (Epicureanism).” The above quotations from *Ecclesiastes* show, however, that although Qoheleth's arguments did suffer from “internal incoherency”, his assessment “that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they live, and also that everyone should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all his toil” is not “Epicureanism”, since on the one hand, it's derived from sources at least a thousand years earlier than when Epicurus lived, and on the other hand, it has little to do with Epicureanism. Thus, as I tried to show in the previous post, Epicurus didn't promote hedonism; therefore, by disingenuously associating hedonism with Epicureanism, the Jewish clerics were almost certainly just continuing their campaign against Epicurus' recommendations to refuse to live one's life based on “unwarranted assumptions and dogma” about “the gods” and “life-after-death”.

### P.5 The Psychology of Martyrdom

The reason, of course, why people seek pleasure and avoid pain is, first, because (as Spinoza said):

Pleasure and pain... are states or passions whereby every man's power or endeavor to persist in his being is increased or diminished, helped or hindered.

Second, if to Spinoza's insight is added Maslow's and additional analyses of the meaning for “persist in [one's] being”,<sup>29</sup> then one can begin to understand people's behavior. Thus, for example, one can understand why today's Humanists seek to help intelligent life continue, and as a contrasting example, one can see why today's fundamentalist Christians and Muslims do whatever their clerics decree, including engaging in “holy wars”: they do so in the brainwashed belief that, thereby, they'll “persist in [their] being” forever, in paradise.

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<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., <http://zenofzero.net/docs/EvaluatingEndeavors.pdf>.

One can similarly uncover reasons for the clash between ancient Greek and Jewish cultures known as the Maccabean Revolt,<sup>30</sup> but the reasons are buried beneath multiple layers of laws. Thus, as I've outlined in earlier chapters (e.g., start at Chapter **J2**) and in earlier posts in this series (e.g., start at Chapter **Yx14**), no law ever came from any god but from our animal instincts: all life “knows” that life is “good” and death is “evil”, and from that fundamental distinction between good and evil, as well as from the fact that the survival of relatively vulnerable humans is enhanced through in-group cooperation, all ideas follow about justice, morality, customs, and (at least for humans) laws.

As I outlined earlier in this post, by ~500 BCE the Greeks had moved beyond early speculations that gods dictated laws (first accepting Solon's laws and then forming the first democracy, in which the people prescribed the laws). When the Greeks conquered the ancient Jews, however, the Jews (similar to “modern” Muslims) were still stuck with the silly belief that their god dictated their laws. The consequence was (as it is today, between the West and fundamentalist Muslims): terrorism and war. And I'll add that, what makes investigation of the Maccabean Revolt still interesting is that, in it, the (Jewish) terrorists won – at least temporarily.

Actually, though, in ancient Greece for centuries after it was clear that laws were made by men (e.g., Solon, c.630–c.560 BCE) and not by any god, yet irrational opinions about “the law” continued. Illustrative is the fragment from Heraclitus (c.540–c.475 BCE): “**The people should fight for their law as if defending the city's wall.**” Perhaps by ‘law’ he meant his imagined *Logos* (an imagined “moral order” of the universe), but in any case, if people are urged to fight, it would be better to urge them to fight for justice, not for their laws. Thus, as I quoted earlier in this post, Anacharsis laughed at Solon, himself, “**for imagining the dishonesty and covetousness of his countrymen could be restrained by written laws, which were like spiders' webs and could catch, it is true, the weak and poor, but easily be broken by the mighty and rich**” – a cynical view of a reality that, still today, persists throughout the world.

As another example, as wise as Socrates (469–399 BCE) reportedly was, it's easy to argue that he made a fool of himself (and a dead fool at that) defending Athenian laws. The trumped-up charges against him, “**Socrates is**

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<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maccabees>.

guilty of not believing in the gods in which the state believes, but brings in other new divinities; he also wrongs by corrupting the youth,” seem to have been perpetrated by three accusers:<sup>31</sup>

- 1) Meletus (possibly because he was a religious fanatic, possibly because Socrates criticized his poetry, and possibly because he was just a puppet of Anytus),
- 2) Anytus (from a family of tanners whose son Socrates advised not to continue in the tanning business), and
- 3) Lycon (who may have blamed Socrates for a homosexual relationship between a friend of Socrates and Lycon’s son).

When the jury convicted Socrates and his friends prepared a way for him to escape, Plato reports (in *Crito*) that Socrates stated his own objection to any escape with:<sup>32</sup>

...but will there be no one to remind you [Socrates allegedly said to himself, about the place to which he might escape] that in your old age you violated the most sacred laws from a miserable desire of a little more life?

Plato states that Socrates added (speaking to himself):

Now [if you drink the poison] you depart in innocence, a sufferer and not a doer of evil; a victim, not of the laws, but of men. [Happiness is imagining that you’re a victim!] But if you go forth [i.e., escape], returning evil for evil, and injury for injury, breaking the covenants and agreements which you have made with us, and wronging those whom you ought least to wrong, that is to say, yourself, your friends, your country, and us, we shall be angry with you while you live, and our brethren, the laws in the world below, will receive you as an enemy; for they will know that you have done your best to destroy us.

I like to think, however, that such poppycock reflected Plato’s and not Socrates’ ideas: it isn’t evil to resist injustice, it isn’t immoral to refuse to comply by unjust laws, and it isn’t wrong to reject a mob’s mindless, unjust verdict. Instead, people should hold covenants with their society only so long as their society’s laws are just. And the idea that laws are from “the world below” (or above) is complete nonsense.

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<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/socrates/accusers.html>.

<sup>32</sup> From <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/crito.1b.txt>.

Still worse (at least, if the following ideas are Socrates' and not Plato's), in *Phaedo*, Plato attributes the following words to Socrates just before he drank the hemlock:<sup>33</sup>

We can and must pray to the gods that our sojourn on earth will continue happy beyond the grave. This is my prayer, and may it come to pass.

If those were Socrates' words, then Socrates had convinced himself that he possessed an immortal soul and was therefore the first of the fools (or, at least, the first famous fool) who willingly became a martyr for a cause, "thinking" that he would live forever – the same foolishness later told in the story about Jesus and repeated by every subsequent, crazy Christian martyr and maniacal Muslim *mujahideen*.

Within Greece, the first person whose behavior ridiculed Socrates' decision was apparently Diogenes the Cynic. He flouted not only Athenian laws but even customs, for example by masturbating in public, reportedly saying: "If only it were as easy to get rid of hunger by rubbing my stomach." According to Diogenes Laërtius, he "[deferred] all things rather to the principles of nature than to those of law; saying that he was adopting the same fashion of life as Hercules had, preferring nothing in the world to liberty." Outside of Greece, the first of the famous maniacs who followed Socrates' foolishness were members of the Maccabee family (also known as the Hasmoneans).

Before the Maccabean Revolt, the ruling Jewish clerics (the Sadducees) rejected Egyptian/ Hindu/ Zoroastrian/ Pythagorean/ Platonic speculations about life after death. I illustrated that statement in earlier posts (e.g., in **Yx24**), as well as with earlier quotations in this post from *Ecclesiastes* revealing Qoheleth's opinion that, when you're dead, you're just dead.

Associated with the Maccabean Revolt, however, Judaism changed dramatically: Jewish clerics known as the Pharisees adopted the Egyptian/ Hindu/ Zoroastrian/ Platonic scheme that people possessed immortal souls, they adopted the Egyptian/ Zoroastrian scheme that people would be judged after death and their eternal fate would be appropriately decided, and they adopted Zoroastrian ideas of an approaching "end of time", after which a "messiah" would rule the world in "paradisiacal glory".

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<sup>33</sup> From <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedo.1b.txt>.

Those changes in dogma appear in the OT's (canonical) *Book of Daniel*. This book is the first in what became a series of ridiculous "apocalyptic" literature (*apocalyptic* is a Greek word meaning 'revelation'), predicting the destruction of the world. Later examples are the bizarre (drug-induced?) *Revelation of Saint John the Divine* in the NT as well as similar silliness in the Koran and the Book of Mormon.

Further, it's interesting (at least to me) that *Daniel* is (as far as I know) the only book in the OT whose date of composition is amazingly reliably known: claims of the (unknown) author and claims of religious fundamentalist notwithstanding, it wasn't written during the Babylonian exile (during the sixth century BCE) but between 167 and 163 BCE. Substantial confidence in this narrow window for the composition of *Daniel* is appropriate, because as shown in detail by, e.g., Chris Sandoval:<sup>34</sup>

Actually, it is not a question of philosophical presuppositions, but a question of hard evidence and inference to the best explanation. Daniel's "predictions" of events up to the desecration of the [rebuilt, Jewish] Temple in 167 BC and the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt substantially came true – yet its predictions of a new invasion of Egypt [ruled by the Greek dynasty called the Ptolemies] by Antiochus [the name of the eight, Greek rulers of the Seleucid Empire, spanning from Syria to parts of today's Pakistan] and the Resurrection of the Dead soon thereafter totally failed. The author correctly "predicted" the rise of Alexander the Great, and the history of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings, but he fared far worse in his predictions that God would supernaturally slay Antiochus Epiphanes, raise the dead, and inaugurate the messianic age in 163 BC. The most likely explanation of this strange pattern is that these prophecies were first composed just before the time they started to fail by an author who had no genuine talent for predicting the future.

Details of such crazy "predictions" of glory for the believers are available at *Daniel 12*, 1:

At that time Michael, the great prince who watches over your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress unlike any other from the nation's beginning up to that time. But at that time your own people, all those whose names are found written in the book, will escape. Many of those who sleep in the dusty ground will awake – some to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting abhorrence. But the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavenly expanse. And those bringing many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.

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<sup>34</sup> From [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/chris\\_sandoval/daniel.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/chris_sandoval/daniel.html).

Thus, although the “holy warriors” of the Maccabean Revolt (“**those bringing many to righteousness**”) weren’t offered Muhammad’s 72 virgins (or, correctly translated, 72 white raisins) for their martyrdom, they were offered the ancient Egyptian and Platonic ideal of being “**like the stars, forever and ever.**”

If readers are interested in historical information about the Maccabean Revolt and subsequent events, they might want to start with Chapter 29 entitled “The Period of Jewish Independence” of the thorough, on-line book *Old Testament Life and Literature (1968)* by Gerald A. Larue.<sup>35</sup> Here, I’ll just present and make a few comments about the following stimulating analysis<sup>36</sup> published in the 11 December 2009 issue of *The New York Times* and written by the competent, Jewish, op-ed columnist David Brooks.

### The Hanukkah Story By David Brooks

Tonight Jewish kids will light the menorah, spin their dreidels and get their presents, but Hanukkah is the most adult of holidays. It commemorates an event in which the good guys did horrible things, the bad guys did good things and in which everybody is flummoxed by insoluble conflicts that remain with us today. It’s a holiday that accurately reflects how politics is, how history is, how life is.

It begins with the spread of Greek culture. Alexander’s Empire, and the smaller empires that succeeded it, brought modernizing ideas and institutions to the Middle East. At its best, Hellenistic culture emphasized the power of reason and the importance of individual conscience. It brought theaters, gymnasiums and debating societies to the cities. It raised living standards, especially in places like Jerusalem.

Many Jewish reformers embraced these improvements. The Greeks had one central idea: their aspirations to create an advanced universal culture. And the Jews had their own central idea: the idea of one true God. The reformers wanted to merge these two ideas.

Urbane Jews assimilated parts of Greek culture into their own, taking Greek names like Jason, exercising in the gymnasium and prospering within Greek institutions. Not all Jews assimilated. Some resisted quietly. Others fled to the hills. But Jerusalem did well. The Seleucid dynasty, which had political control over the area, was not merely tolerant; it used imperial money to help promote the diverse religions within its sphere.

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<sup>35</sup> Available at [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/gerald\\_larue/otll/chap29.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/gerald_larue/otll/chap29.html).

<sup>36</sup> From [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/11/opinion/11brooks.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=Hanukkah Story&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/11/opinion/11brooks.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Hanukkah Story&st=cse).

In 167 BCE, however, the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, issued a series of decrees defiling the temple, confiscating wealth and banning Jewish practice, under penalty of death. It's unclear why he did this. Some historians believe that extremist Jewish reformers were in control and were hoping to wipe out what they saw as the primitive remnants of their faith. Others believe Antiochus thought the Jews were disloyal fifth columnists in his struggle against the Egyptians and, hence, was hoping to assimilate them into his nation.

Regardless, those who refused to eat pork were killed in an early case of pure religious martyrdom.

As Jeffrey Goldberg, who is writing a book on this period, points out, the Jews were slow to revolt. The cultural pressure on Jewish practice had been mounting; it was only when it hit an insane political level that Jewish traditionalists took up arms. When they did, the first person they killed was a fellow Jew.

In the town of Modin, a Jew who was attempting to perform a sacrifice on a new Greek altar was slaughtered by Mattathias, the old head of a priestly family. Mattathias's five sons, led by Judah Maccabee, then led an insurgent revolt against the regime.

The Jewish civil war raised questions: Who is a Jew? Who gets to define the right level of observance? It also created a spiritual crisis. This was not a battle between tribes. It was a battle between theologies and threw up all sorts of issues about why bad things happen to faithful believers and what happens in the afterlife – issues that would reverberate in the region for centuries, to epic effect.

The Maccabees are best understood as moderate fanatics. They were not in total revolt against Greek culture. They used Greek constitutional language to explain themselves. They created a festival to commemorate their triumph (which is part of Greek, not Jewish, culture). Before long, they were electing their priests.

On the other hand, they were fighting heroically for their traditions and the survival of their faith. If they found uncircumcised Jews, they performed forced circumcisions. They had no interest in religious liberty within the Jewish community and believed religion was a collective regimen, not an individual choice.

They were not the last bunch of angry, bearded religious guys to win an insurgency campaign against a great power in the Middle East, but they may have been among the first. They retook Jerusalem in 164 BCE and rededicated the temple. Their regime quickly became corrupt, brutal and reactionary. The concept of reform had been discredited by the Hellenizing extremists. Practice stagnated. Scholarship withered. The Maccabees became religious oppressors themselves, fatefully inviting the Romans into Jerusalem.

Generations of Sunday school teachers have turned Hanukkah into the story of unified Jewish bravery against an anti-Semitic Hellenic empire. Settlers in the West Bank tell it as a story of how the Jewish hard-core defeated the corrupt, assimilated Jewish masses. Rabbis later added the lamp miracle to give God at least a bit part in the proceedings.

But there is no erasing the complex ironies of the events, the way progress, heroism and brutality weave through all sides. The Maccabees heroically preserved the Jewish faith. But there is no honest way to tell their story as a self-congratulatory morality tale. The lesson of Hanukkah is that even the struggles that saved a people are dappled with tragic irony, complexity and unattractive choices.

The only quarrels I have with Brooks' article arise from his claim: "The Maccabees [like today's Taliban] heroically preserved the Jewish faith." Thus, on the one hand, no one (including Socrates, the Maccabees, the Jesus described in the New Testament, Christian martyrs, Muslim *mujahideen*, etc.) is "heroic" who "thinks" that eternal life in paradise follows death: such people aren't heroic; they're bonkers. Further, the Maccabees didn't preserve "the Jewish faith"; instead, their actions precipitated the conversion of Judaism to Zoroastrianism, yielding Judaism 4.0.

My own skepticism and cynicism lead me to summarize that the Maccabean Revolt provides additional prime examples of clerical quackery: clerics promote killing people to preserve their "sacred" dogma, but if elements of their dogma should impede their con game (i.e., constrain their power), they'll relatively quickly identify convenient revisions to maintain their privileged, parasitic positions, preserving their own useless carcasses by maintaining control over the imagination (and therefore the purse strings) of the people. Thus, if what clerical quacks need is some crazed "holy warriors" to do their fighting for them, they'll offer the deluded fools eternal life in paradise, and if they need their "holy warriors" to kill also on "the Sabbath", then certainly they're willing to jettison some of "God's" Ten Commandments (as they did during the Maccabean revolt).

And the reason why religious dogma can nevertheless be so "flexible" (when convenient for the clerics) is obviously because, not only is it all just make believe, but as Salman Rushdie said:

Fundamentalism isn't about religion; it's about power.

In addition, my pessimism suggests that humans will need to endure at least another century of such insanities – should humanity manage to survive that long.

During the most recent few centuries, Humanists have managed to constrain most Jews and Christians from indulging in such insanities, but far-too-many Muslims continue to indulge in such madness, as is illustrated with the following statement, one of hundreds if not thousands of similar examples that are readily available, this one made by the former Lebanese minister Elie Al-Firzli and aired on Hizbullah's Al-Manar TV on 17 February 2010:<sup>37</sup>

Religious ideology, the doctrine of faith, the yearning for martyrdom... I cannot see any justification for this longing – and to such an extent – other than the belief in a future in a world other than this. The yearning for martyrdom was one of the reasons for the qualitative leap in the conflict with the Israeli enemy... We have to believe that all the blood that is being shed in the name of martyrdom for the sake of the great victory is the gateway to the true life – the gateway to a life of glory, nobility, and honor... The road to life passes through death.

Would that such fools would see that the most commonly traveled road to insanity runs through organized religion.

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<sup>37</sup> From <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4022.htm>.