

PART 5: Evolution, Morality, and God

Chapter 5.01 Moral Atheism

This chapter does two things. First, it lists the main points for this part of the book. Second, it presents the arguments of moral atheists and my counter-arguments. I do not argue that the capacities for religion and for morality evolved. I take it for granted that those capacities evolved, and then assess the implications. I focus on morality. I wrote more fully about the evolution of morality elsewhere; I will put that work on the Internet.

PART 1: Main Points for this Part of the Book

-Evidence from the history of the universe and the evolutionary record points to a God behind it all. This book gives a taste of the evidence. The evidence is suggestive only; it cannot be used to prove the existence of God.

-The cosmic and evolutionary record is full of chaos, violence, badness, and even some natural evil that is not caused by people. So, the same record that indicates a God also makes us wonder about his-her character.

-Atheists use the evolutionary record to argue against a planner God. They correctly point out that everything can be explained using natural laws, including morality. At the same time, they insist on following morality. I show why the evolutionary of morality is strong (but not conclusive) evidence for a planner God.

-Morality is not one thing. It is a bundle of distinct but still mutually dependent qualities, like the various components in the sense of taste. The components include good, greater good, should and should not, rules, right and wrong, and duties and rights. We cannot see how morality works without also seeing that it is both one and many at the same time.

-Morality very often, but not always, follows practicality.

-Even though morality often follows practicality, morality has its own logic apart from how it might have evolved and how it serves practicality. This logic holds together the components of morality. The logic is based on the idea of "applies equally to everybody including me and my kin". It is also expressed in the Golden Rule and in loving your neighbor as yourself. The logic of morality makes morality feel objective, not something we make but something outside of us that we apply to ourselves. Natural selection can put into us a feeling that a system is outside of us, and can put us in touch with a logical system that is outside of our subjectivity.

-Evolution gave us the capacity for morality. By the same process, evolution insured that we could not be perfectly moral. We can see moral ideals but we cannot live up to them. No harangue can make us perfectly moral. Jesus' message goes along with the inner logic of morality as that logic

developed through evolution. Jesus pushes us to be better even if he does not expect us to be perfect. Jesus completes the direction in which evolution began us.

-Morality and sentience evolved together in the context of group life. Whenever sentient beings evolve, they would also evolve morality, and it would be morality much like ours. Whenever moral beings evolve, they also have to be sentient. Morality, sentience, and group life always go together. This book focuses on morality.

-Because morality and sentience appear together in group life, people (not usually Darwinists) mistakenly think the group created morality or the group determines the content of morality. That idea in turn often leads to moral relativity. Evolution works through individuals. I see no evidence from evolution for moral relativity. We need to feel how morality and sentience evolved together in the context of group life so we can be clearer and avoid relativity.

I borrowed ideas from major Western thinkers on morality, including Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, G.E. Moore, and John Rawls. I do not credit their specific ideas. I do not give their works in the Bibliography. Their works are often collected and are readily available.

I boil down various scenarios about how morality evolved to the one scenario that morality helps moral people to succeed in group life.

I do not repeat in detail arguments about the evolution of religion and morality that you can find elsewhere. I do explain the arguments, and give you enough so you can read other books. What I say using Darwinism is my version, and should not be taken to represent science in general. I do not distinguish between having genes versus learning. I do not distinguish between trait, ability, capacity, behavior, sentiment, feeling, emotion, attitude, intent, intellect, idea, quality, etc. I do not distinguish between God, Dharma, Tao, or the Universe; "God" covers all.

PART 2: Skepticism and Moral Atheism

Atheists are more than neutral or uncertain about God; they are sure there is no God. I use the term "militant atheists" for people who are not only cautious about belief but also attack religion. "Moral atheists" say we can get rid of religion entirely but still keep morality. Usually they are not clear why we should be moral, whose morality they have in mind, and why that morality. Most atheists I have met are moral atheists. Some moral atheists are not militant but most tend toward militancy when engaged, as religious people do. I think nearly all militant atheists are also moral atheists. As far as I have seen, moral atheists are indeed moral. Atheists seem more moral and honorable than the average.

Some atheists use Darwinism as a tool to undermine religion. They say religion is only an evolved delusion, and a dangerous delusion. They do not say why morality is not an evolved delusion, another dangerous delusion. Among famous atheists, Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett represent Darwinian militant atheism while Christopher Hitchens and Bill Maher represent militant atheism that is not overtly Darwinian but is similar in spirit. I admire much about them but I cannot agree with their intense dislike of all religion. References to their work are in the Bibliography.

Militant moral atheists often see themselves as skeptics. From staunch skeptics, militant moral atheists borrowed arguments that undermine all belief. They apply the arguments to religion. Militant moral atheists lie between strong real skeptics and theists. To put both moral atheists and theists in perspective, we have to look first at skeptics.

People think of skepticism as the attitude of “show me”, as debunking what annoys us what is silly. I see that kind of mild skepticism as a useful hobby. Real skepticism is much stronger. A real skeptic believes and disbelieves almost nothing about anything. Real skeptics are scarily value neutral. In contrast, almost all of us believe much for which we have no evidence and no good arguments; even staunch atheists do so. We all take stances that are not based only on empirical evidence. For example, most of us believe in morality although we cannot sense morality and cannot prove it is valid. Every stance means we believe in more than the simple obvious material world; we believe in the supernatural (metaphysical or transcendental). Valuing morality means you believe in the supernatural. Moral atheism is such a stance too. So, moral atheists believe in the supernatural even if they do not believe in a god. Clear minded Buddhists understood this conclusion. This section only hits highlights of the issues. I put a longer version of the dilemma on the Internet.

“Everything means less than zero”. A strong skeptic does not privilege any action over any other action, any person over any other person, even him-herself, or any value over any other value – not without a strong reason. What is, is. People do what they do. There are no absolute values or judgments inherent in the world, in human action, or in one person rather than another. There are values. We impose them all the time. That is one of the things that people just do. But no value is ultimately any better than any other value. We have no ultimate warrant for imposing any values, not in morality or evolution. Giving your spouse a nice card and some flowers on Valentine’s day is no different than killing her and eating her. Feeding orphans is no better than eating them for dinner – for which example I thank Jonathan Swift and the Irish famine. To burn my fingers on the stove accidentally is the same as if I made and ate a tasty omelet. My pleasure, pain, morality, or power is no more important than those of the bum on the corner; and his-her are no more so than mine. A moral act is no better than an immoral act, and vice versa. For my neighbor to hit me on the head with a golf club is no better than if I were to hit him or if he were to give me tickets to a good concert. A tiger is no better than a tape worm. A human is no better than a tape worm. A strong skeptic does recognize that pain hurts and pleasure feels good but denies any intrinsic reason to think one better or mine more important. This position is hard for most people to imagine. I doubt that most moral atheists have worked their way through this position. Sometimes Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism use a position like this for instruction.

“I, me, me, mine”. Most people can understand the following position even if they think it bizarre. Call it the “selfish” skeptic. I am. What I want is what I want. I and my wants are all that matter. There is no intrinsic reason why I am better than anybody else; but I am not anybody else; I am me; I cannot know other people; I can know me; what I know is what I want; and so what I want is what I want. Even if I can have sympathy for other people; still what I want is what I want. There is no intrinsic reason why some things are better than other things; but still I want what I want. There is no intrinsic reason why I should respect either morality or immorality. The existence or non-existence of other beings does not matter except as I care about it. They have to prove their value to me; that is their existence. If I want to work hard for a comfortable retirement, fine. If I want to race motorcycles and die in a painful crash while I am

still young, fine. If I want to eat healthy wholesome tasty meals, tasteless crap, junk food, or poison, that is what I want. If I want to give to charity, fine. If I want to rape, torture, and murder, fine. I can watch a child drown in a pool or I can lower my hand to pull him out. If other people want to be moral, that is fine as long as they don't get in the way of what I want. If they do want to get in my way, the stronger will win, and that is all. I will be moral when I want and immoral when I want. This is skeptic's version of "the pursuit of happiness". Sometimes movies and TV portray characters like this.

The selfish skeptic takes a supernatural stance when he asserts he is a single integrated person, with clear wants, is more important than others, his wants are important, and his wants somehow define him. It is a parody of the economic view of the person. Another version of selfishness is when society defines our identities and wants; social scientists are prone to this error. Buddhists, Hindus, and Taoists use the strong skeptic position to attack the selfish position in both personal and social forms, and to attack complacency about everyday life.

Most Westerners think of the following mild skeptic as the paradigm of all skepticism. This position is what some people think of as "rationalism" or what I call "determined rationalism". It is near moral atheism: Do not believe in anything supernatural. Believe in only what is objective and what can be tested. Everything can be explained by natural laws if only we look hard enough. If we look hard enough, we can debunk any claim based on God, gods, or the supernatural. Also, at the same time, we can be moral. We should try to do good. We should use our rational knowledge of natural laws to do good including stewarding nature and governing well. The use of nature to debunk religion and superstition is why this group is called "skeptics". These mild skeptics usually are proud of their intellect, rationality, and disbelief in religion.

In fact, though, the belief that everything can be explained by natural laws, and the act of adhering to morality, are not rational. They cannot be tested and they are not objective in the same way that an eclipse of the moon is objective. Still, most rationalists go along with them and most people think they are part of rationalism. I too go along with them but not as easily. I accept belief in natural law and I accept morality but I see that they are outside of rationalism, they are supernatural (metaphysical or transcendental), and I accept the results of that as well.

When we see that belief in natural laws and in morality lie outside of rationalism, we are forced either to fall back on a stronger skeptical position or are forced to accept some supernaturalism. Not even a moral atheist wants to fall back on a stronger version of skepticism (although some flirt with namby-pamby forms of Libertarianism). At the same time, they refuse to accept supernaturalism. So they get murky, and they tend fall back on attacking religion as a way to really feel rational. They try to have their moral cake and eat their skeptical rational cake too. I accept supernaturalism but I try to keep it as much in line with rationalism as I can. I don't know if what I do is trying to have my cake and eat it too. The rest of this chapter explains.

Some forms of supernaturalism are generally accepted although most people don't see them as supernaturalism. Most people, including moral atheists and myself, adhere to some standards other than simply what is and other than themselves and their wants. Most people recognize virtues such as bravery, recognize beauty, recognize the public good, and recognize morality such as helping other people.

Most people recognize self-interested practicality. People recognize that many things can contribute to practicality such as friends, good food, a lover, power, financial security, and hobbies. They know that each of these separate goals can take on a life of itself, but, at the same time, they know the separate goals must be balanced so as to contribute to self-interested practicality and not to undermine it. A little hard work helps practicality but too much hard work cuts us up. Movies and TV commonly present characters that are out of balance and that pursue some goal very efficiently but oddly; serial killers are a strong type of this character.

Eventually, I will define “self-interested practicality” as “evolutionary success”, but, for now, we can work with an intuitive understanding of practicality.

Practicality differs from virtues, beauty, and morality in that we can pretty much evaluate how well we are doing when we pursue it, the standards for practicality are pretty much public, and the standards are pretty much the same for most people. In contrast, it is hard to compare different beauties, different virtues such as bravery and temperance, different acts even of the same kind of virtue such as bravery, and different good things. It is hard to say if good is more important than beauty or virtue.

When somebody takes a stand on practicality, we can still say that they stand in this world. We can evaluate their performance according to what we can see, hear, and measure. People can objectively evaluate practicality. We can evaluate how well a person reaches a particular practical goal such as comfortable retirement and we can evaluate how well a person reaches general all-around practicality – in most cases a happy and healthy family.

In contrast, when somebody takes a stand on virtue or beauty, we can't do that. We make judgments that can't be directly sensed, can't be measured, and about which people can't fully agree. Yet virtue and beauty are there. We feel they are objective to some extent. Even if we feel beauty and virtue are objective, and even if somehow they really are, we can't fully capture it. A lot of people think this about morality as well, that it eludes direct sensation, measurement, and objectivity.

Virtue, beauty, and morality are not in this world in the same way rocks and trees are in this world, and in the same way that what is done, practicality, what I want, and I, are in this world. Virtue, beauty, and morality require judgments. The judgments require the judge to take a stance not on what can be sensed or measure and objective, that is, on something not in this world.

Morality probably does elude direct sensation and measurement but there is a way in which it is objective. Morality follows the ideas of the Golden Rule and “applies equally to everybody including me, my kin, and my stuff”. (Those two ideas are really the same idea, but most people learn them differently, and so it is useful to refer to both.) If we want somebody to do something, then we have to do it ourselves. If we want all people to tell the truth, then we have to tell the truth too. If we want people to always be fair, then we have to be fair ourselves. If we want all people not to do something, then we have to not do it. The rule “do not steal” applies not only to other people and their stuff but to me, my kin, and my stuff too. If we want them not to steal, I have to not steal. This is objective. This situation can be reasonably clearly seen and reasonably clearly evaluated. If it could be perfectly seen and evaluated, and was perfectly objective, we would not need courts; but it is close enough.

The skeptic who says “what I want goes” is not necessarily impractical. If her goal is to do what she wants, and she has to take into account what other people will do just as she has to take into account how long it takes apples to ripen, then she can be just as selfish as ever. The relation between selfishness, self-interested practicality, beauty, and virtue is less clear. It seems not to make sense to say that a person is selfish and brave at the same time but some people do argue that we are brave as a way to show off, get admired, and get other people to help. Here is not the place to dispute this topic.

The relation between selfishness, self-interested practicality, and morality also is not entirely clear. There is overlap between the three. Selfishness and morality do not go together well. Contrary to popular opinion, practicality and morality do go well together and are closely related. Here is not the place to go into this problem either. Here I only say that, even if practicality and morality go together often, they are not exactly the same. Morality has its own distinct logic, given above as the Golden Rule and “applies equally to everybody”. Sometimes we do not do what is self-interestedly practical when we act morally, even if overall we do act practically when we also act morally. When we accept morality, we accept its logic, its objectivity, and that it is not entirely in this world. We accept something supernatural.

Most people would much rather accept that virtue, beauty, and morality are supernatural than to accept the fall-back positions of the extreme skeptic or the selfish skeptic. Yet when we accept one thing as supernatural, we necessarily open the door to wondering about other things supernatural. We do not have to accept other things as supernatural, but we have to wonder about them, and we have the right to wonder about them. We can think about gods. We do not have to accept that God gave us morality, what is good is only what God says, God and morality are the same, God is entirely good and we are entirely bad, or any other dogma. We do have the right to wonder and it is hard to not wonder.

It does not matter that any of these abilities evolved. It does not matter that skepticism, selfishness, self-interested practicality, virtue, beauty, or morality evolved. It does not matter how they came into this world. It matters only that they are in this world now and yet that some human capacities – for beauty, virtue, and morality – are not entirely of this material world. To me, to say the abilities for beauty, virtue, and morality evolved, makes even stronger the argument that they are not entirely of this world. What is important is not how they came about but how we evaluate them and what we do with them. It does not matter how morality came about but only how we are moral. It does not matter how belief in God came about but how we evaluate the belief.

The strong moral atheist says this:

-We cannot prove the existence of any god. We can explain everything, including all human behavior, by natural laws. Therefore we do not need to refer to god. What we do not need for clear thinking, we should avoid.

-Religion on the whole is necessarily bad. Sometimes religion does some small good but the small good never makes up for the overall bad. Sometimes religion causes real bad, such as burning books, allowing one ethnic group to slaughter another, and in justifying slavery, suicide bombing, and vast differences between the rich and the poor. Yet even if a religious person is usually moral and does not do anything obviously crazy, religion clouds the mind, limits us, and so is necessarily bad.

-We can be moral without religion. Morality is, by definition, good and not crazy.

-There is no supernatural. Nothing points to the supernatural.

-Morality and religion evolved. They were not given to us by God. Morality and religion can be explained entirely by natural laws. We do not need God to explain morality or to explain religious belief. Assuming God exists and using God on that basis to explain morality and/or religious belief only clouds our real understanding of how nature works, and clouds our real understanding of religion and morality.

-Therefore we should get rid of religion but keep morality.

-Religion is an evolved delusion, like thinking we personally can be a great sports hero or top model, or thinking we personally could run the country better than any leaders now. Religion is an especially bad evolved delusion, like the need for more and more money and power. We can overcome delusions, especially if we know they are only evolved. We should overcome the evolved delusion of religion.

-Morality can be explained entirely by natural laws, like religion, but we should not get rid of it, unlike religion. Morality evolved too but it is not an evolved delusion. It is probably not a delusion at all except when distorted by religion. If it is a bit irrational sometimes, it is still a good delusion, like believing in ourselves so we work harder and succeed in the end.

All this makes a lot of sense. I agree that we can explain everything by natural laws, and we cannot prove the existence of God. Religion and morality evolved. Sometimes using God to explain religion and morality does cloud reasoning and lead to error. Religion sometimes leads people to do bad. On the other hand, religion does not have to be a bad delusion and we should not try to get rid of it. Religion does not have to be a source of great bad. We should use morality and all our abilities to lead us to better religion. We should use all our abilities to debunk and reject bad religion.

I have six responses to the argument of the moral atheist.

First, if we accept morality then we have to accept its supernatural status. The fact that morality evolved does not mean it does not have supernatural status. The fact that it has a special logical structure that makes it seem objective (Golden Rule and “applies equally to everybody”) does not mean it has no supernatural status. The fact that morality is usually practical does not mean it does not have supernatural status. If we accept supernatural status for morality, then we have to be cautious about trying to get rid of religion just because it is obviously about the supernatural.

Think of the strong skeptic and the selfish skeptic. If we make any distinctions between items, or between actions, on grounds other than “that is the way it is”, then we are not a skeptic and we accept some supernatural status. If we say apples are better than pears for reasons other than “that’s what I like”, then we impose a supernatural structure on the world. If we say being kind is better than being cruel, then we impose a supernatural structure on the world. Any judgment, including “I like morality” starts us down the supernatural trail. If we have to go down that way, then we better bring a lantern, and we might have to accept animals other than morality.

Second, the moral atheist cannot use evolution to debunk religion unless she also does the same to morality. If both morality and religion evolved, then there are no grounds within evolution to say one is different than the other or one is better than the other. We have to think about them in similar terms, and we have to judge them in similar ways. If we think about them differently and judge them differently, we have to say why in terms entirely within evolution and in terms that do not imply the supernatural. Both eyes and ears evolved. What, in evolution alone, makes eyes better than ears? If we cannot say why in terms of evolution alone, then we cannot say one is better. If we use evolution to discredit religion then we have to use it equally to discredit morality. If we use evolution to discredit religion but not morality, then we say morality is better than religion, and we give morality a supernatural status.

Suppose morality is more practical in some way than religion. That does not necessarily make morality better than religion; it only makes it more practical. If we want to say morality is better than religion because it is more practical, then anything that is more practical than religion is better than religion, and anything that is more practical than morality is better than morality. Sometimes food and sex are more practical than religion or morality, but that does not make them better, it only makes them more practical. Sometimes conniving business strategies are more practical than morality or religion but that does not make them better. When we say morality is better because more practical, we really only say it is better while using practicality as a cover for not having another reason. We should just say morality is better and accept the implications. When we say morality is better, we use a frame, and we judge, in ways that are not accessible to the senses, are not measurable, and are not objective. We make morality supernatural.

The facts that morality and religion evolved, and morality often is practical, make the case for the supernatural status of morality even stronger.

Third, just because religion evolved, it is hard to get rid of. Religion is natural, and it is big and important. Trying to get rid of religion would be like Prohibition. The liking for alcohol is based on evolved chemistry of the body and brain. The sociability that often goes along with alcohol is based on evolved chemistry of the body and brain. We might not like the abuse of alcohol but trying to get rid of it leads to worse results than all the abuse. The same is true of fatty foods and bad political opinions. The same is true of sex. From time to time, some religious groups try to get rid of sex or try to govern it in ways that go against its evolved underlying basis. The results are horrible. The same is true of religion. If we try to get rid of religion, it will be like trying to get rid of sex. The fact that religion evolved does not mean we can get rid of it.

Fourth, people do bad things without religion. People do more bad things, and worse things, without religion. Some of the bad things are really bad like child prostitution and mass murder. When people do bad things in the name of religion, usually they would have done the bad things anyway; they only use religion as an excuse. Religion does make an effective excuse. Because religion evolved and it is in our nature, it is hard to do really bad things without finding a religious excuse, such as kill off all your neighbors of a different ethnic group. But terrible evil without religion has been done, and will be done again. Even when religion is used as an excuse, it does not cause the badness, it only goes along with it. Stopping religion would not stop badness. Stopping religion would not end very much badness, and it would cause some more of its own. Stopping religion would not even end much of the badness that is

done in the name of religion. It would only lead to badness without an excuse or, more likely, finding another excuse to do badness, such as politics or ideology.

Sometimes religion does cause direct badness, as when people withhold medical care out of stupid belief, or when people camp out in the woods waiting for God. But so does politics, booze, sex, drugs, and rock and roll. The trick is to sort out the bad from the not bad, not to suppress anything that might lead to badness.

Fifth, not all evolved perceptions (“illusions”) are delusions even when they are not a perfect mirror image of the world, and not all delusions are really bad. Most perceptions involve a little illusion. The distortions are usually for our benefit. We are not nearly the coherent individuals we think we are, but we need to feel that way to get things done. Other people are not coherent either but we need to think they are to interact with them. We better think of a leopard as a coherent purposeful entity if we are to survive. We are not nearly as important as we think we are, but feeling important often helps us succeed. As physics teaches us, solid objects are not really solid. But we see them that way, and our illusion serves us. Even some delusions are useful. Love is a terrible delusion, but most of the time it turns out well, and sometimes it turns out really well. Not all evolved illusions are delusions; we cannot say religion is a delusion just because it is an evolved illusion. Even if religion is a delusion, whether a delusion is bad or good does not depend only on whether it evolved but mostly on other criteria; we cannot say religion is a bad delusion just because it is an evolved delusion. Of course, it is good to know the world “as it is” as much as we can, and good to think we can overcome delusion when we have to. It would be good to be able to strip away bad delusion from religion when we should. But those are other questions. They apply to all delusion, not just to evolved illusion, delusion, and religion. The ability to believe stupid political ideology evolved, and we need to be able to undo that. Simply knowing that the ability to be fooled by politics evolved might help a little, but what really helps are calm persistent doses of the truth.

Sixth, suppose we can get rid of religion but still keep morality. Whose morality do we keep? For example, ideas about how much women should cover themselves are not just religious, they are primarily cultural. If we get rid of both Christianity and Islam, I suspect people with a formerly-Christian (European) heritage will allow women to uncover about as much as women dare while people with a formerly-Muslim (mostly Semitic with some Indo-European) heritage will insist that women cover as much as possible. As far as I can tell, there is no purely logical-moral basis to settle this dispute. It would be great if we could all live by the Golden Rule, love our neighbors as ourselves, never commit violence, see the whole world in ourselves, and see ourselves in the whole world. But we can't. It is not practical, and it goes against the grain of human nature. Some nasty people would try to hurt our families, and then we would fight back. We have to choose some other more specific moral code even if we look to “applies equally to everybody” and an ideal. As far as I can tell, most outspoken atheists, such as Bill Maher and Christopher Hitchens, are not pacifists, and enjoy when bad people get killed, as when American soldiers killed Osama Bin Laden. In theory, it might be possible to construct a high moral code of actual behavior out of a combination of the ideals of the major religions with reality, but I have never seen this done, and I do not hold out hope. I work toward this goal, but, along the way, I had to accept that I had to start from the teachings of Jesus, even if I later brought in ideas from other religions. That is why I wrote this book. Moral atheists need to be much clearer about their moral basis and the relation of their moral basis to the great religions and philosophies of the world.

Here is bonus point that moral atheists do not make (as far as I can tell) but is important generally and for this book. The argument is a little “airy fairy” but it is not too hard to follow. Morality (1) has its own logic, and (2) the logic makes it objective. Religion has no such logic and does not feel objective in the same way as morality (religion feels objective in its own way but that is not as powerful as the objectivity of morality through logic). Does this make morality not supernatural? Does this give enough reason to keep morality while dumping religion? On the other hand, if this does give reason for keeping morality while getting rid of religion, does the fact that both morality and religion evolved weaken this basis for separating morality and religion? Immanuel Kant thought up the argument about the logic and objectivity of morality, in the late 1800s. He did so against real skeptics (the “straw” David Hume), and he did so in part to give us grounds for keeping morality regardless of what we did with religion. He was religious in his own way, and also tried to develop a more solid basis for religion.

This argument about the logic and objectivity of morality makes me think God planned evolution so it would turn out this way, so it has the opposite effect on me that it might have on a moral atheist. The argument is good grounds for preferring morality to religion, and for making sure that religious belief does not lead us to do anything that goes against universal morality. I take it that way. The argument is not necessarily grounds for dumping religion while keeping morality. A moral atheist might push it in that direction. I do not. The fact that both morality and religion evolved does weaken using the logic and objectivity of morality to keep it while dumping religion, but not fatally. Somebody who wants to keep morality but dump religion still has to explain why morality is so special just because it has its own logic and feeling of objectivity. He-she has to explain what it means that evolution can develop an ability (morality) with its own logic and sense of objectivity. I am sure that some Darwinian moral atheist someday will combine the argument with evolution and push it that way. I doubt I will be convinced.

Summary.

The correct attitude toward religion is not to debunk all religion but to follow our senses of wonder, joy, and awe, and to discredit bad religion. We need to make religion follow good morality. We can do that better if we think about what good religion is. The same can be said for all ideologies. This book tried to understand Jesus in terms of how own best moral teachings, and tried to take him as he was as much as possible. Most people, including me, really can't make do without some religion, so let us have it but make sure it follows the best ideas of the best prophets.