

Chapter 5.06 Implications, Especially about Jesus

This chapter points out implications of the previous chapters, and comments on Jesus.

Altruism as Perfect Morality. Contrary to misconception, morality is not all about altruism. Sometimes altruism can serve morality. Morality is about getting along so we can all do well and live decently. We do that when we follow the logic of morality. We cannot live up to the ideals but we can see the ideals and we can try hard. Here is some good advice about trying hard that is often misunderstood and abused. If you don't read too much into it, you get the real point clearly enough.

John 3:16 – 3:17. * God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so everyone who believes in him does not die but has eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world but so that through his Son the world would be saved.” *

John 15:9 – 15:17. * “As God the Father loves me, so I love you. Live in my love. If you listen to me, you will live in my love as I listened to my Father and have lived in his love. I have talked to you like this so that the joy I feel might be in you and so your joy [in life] will be complete. This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. A man cannot show any greater love than to die for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I tell you. I no longer call you servants. A servant does not know why his master does what his master does. I call you friends because I have told you everything I heard from my Father [and now you know why]. You did not choose me; I chose you. I charged you to go out into the world and to bear fruit, fruit that will endure. When you carry out your charge, God will give you all that you ask in my name. This is my [final and highest] command to you: Love one another.” *

Jesus did not say most of this but it does show his intentions and his all-about: Jesus has told us what to do. We now know as much as he does. He took us to the gate and showed us what lies beyond. Now we know to love our neighbors. That is the same as doing to them what we want them to do for us, and “applies equally to everybody”.

Jesus probably did prefer as friends people that followed his teachings about the Kingdom of God and who were otherwise interesting. Jesus did not take as friends only people that did his commands. The early Church invented this restriction so as to divide people into in-group and out-group and thus to maintain in-group cohesion. By 100 CE, when this passage was written down, the early Church was already deciding what Jesus' commands were.

Moral and Natural.

Much of what Jesus advised is moral but not necessarily natural, such as that his mission is more important than family. Too often, especially in the modern world with romanticized ideas of nature, people use the ideas of natural and moral more as tools to influence other people than because they have thought through the issues. To get clear about Jesus' use of morality we first have to get past the misuse of natural and moral.

People like to think that natural and moral coincide completely. When both ideas can be used to judge behavior, people feel the judgment strongly and are likely to go along. If we can label a behavior both natural and moral, then we feel people really should do it. Taking good care of your kids is natural and moral, and you better do it. If we can label a behavior both unnatural and immoral, then we had better not do it. Child molesters die in jail. Intermediate cases are annoying and we would like to exclude them. When an unemployed single mother steals to feed her children, or when an experienced sixteen year old girl seduces an inexperienced twenty year old man, we get edgy. People want to use both ideas together so as to better influence other people.

Although natural and moral coincide much of the time, they do not coincide all the time. If evolution has cases of natural evil, nature and morality cannot coincide all the time. If evolution leads us to see moral ideals but makes sure we cannot live up to ideals, then nature and morality cannot coincide all the time. People on all sides of issues and all hues in the political spectrum like to invoke nature to bolster their positions. People use nature to attack the moral positions of their rivals. The easiest way to get clearer is to see a few confused ideas.

People think nature is always benign but that is not true. Apple seeds contain cyanide. Cancer is natural, although it can be induced by manufactured chemicals. Long-term exposure to sunlight also can cause cancer. Crocodiles and snakes are natural but they can kill you. Poison oak and poison ivy are natural. Fire ants are natural but horrible. Some natural chemicals are poisonous. Chocolate kills dogs. Because herbal tea is natural does not mean it is all good or can't harm you. No tea cures cancer. Caffeine from tea can make you just as jittery as the caffeine in "energy" drinks. Yerba matte tea contains a high dose of a chemical that acts like amphetamines.

Just as not all natural things are good, not all made things are bad. Recorded music is good except when it is abused by people by being blasted out of cars. I love brownies from a mix. Modern people cannot live without smart phones now.

Some people mistakenly think all diseases come from unnatural conditions, and that nature can provide a cure for all unnatural diseases. If we didn't live badly, we would never get sick. If we do get sick, we can always find something in nature's vast benevolent storehouse to cure us. Few people who think like this have in mind that our natural way of life was hunting-gathering. Usually they have in mind a gardening way of life without realizing gardening is unnatural (not practiced by original humans) and agriculture led people to malnutrition, famine, stunted growth, disease, and organized war. People who live absolutely natural pure lives still get cancer and still catch the flu. There is no natural cure for allergies, leukemia, cervical cancer, or prostate cancer. There is no natural cure for depression other than some chemicals we get in what we eat. Postpartum depression can be all natural, and sometimes it is best treated with made chemicals. Whether we get any of the diseases just mentioned seems to depend as much on our natural genes as on what we ate, drank, breathed, wore, or did. Exercise and a balanced diet are more effective at prevention than any "natural" quick fixes.

We label behavior that we promote as natural and moral even though it might not be fully either, such as large-scale interventionist national defense. We label behavior that we dislike as unnatural and immoral even though it might not merit full condemnation, such as drug use or welfare aid to poor people. The biggest problem with natural versus moral comes with behavior that is at issue in the American "culture

wars". People invoke natural and moral together to gain the strongest possible support for their position in the culture wars. People on one side say homosexuality is unnatural and thus immoral while people on the other side say homosexuality is natural and thus moral.

In truth, sometimes we think acts are natural but also think they are immoral and we don't want people do them. We don't want people to steal, especially from us. Sometimes we think acts are moral but not natural and we want people to do them anyway. We want people to help strangers in the city, especially lost children. Natural and moral are not the same. Sometimes we have to choose. It is likely natural for healthy young women to begin having children when they are about 16 years old but it is not responsible to have children until you can fully support them, for sure, all their lives, by yourself, in the real capitalist world, and so it can be immoral to do what is natural. Prostitution, drug use, and gambling are a bit immoral, but mild indulgence is probably natural, and it is more immoral to try to suppress them, so, in this case, natural wins.

We should guard against people who say that natural and moral are the same, and so we don't have to think but only have to do what they advise. This is how both Right Wing and PC warriors approach the question of gay marriage, abortion, drugs, family life, and relations of church and state.

If you want to use nature to assess morality, or morality to assess nature, then you should know enough about both nature and morality. If you know something about nature, maybe it can help you assess what is moral, but, at bottom, you have to decide about morality on the basis of moral logic. You have to give reasons. Then you have to decide what is better, natural or moral. When making the assessment, it helps to recall what other people have done and what the great teachers have said.

Evolution Aims at Sentience, Morality, and Goodness.

Wherever sentience evolves, morality also will evolve, and vice versa. In the future, it will be possible to make artificial sentient organisms, or write computer programs, without morality, or with a different morality than humans have; but it is not possible under natural selection. Both sentience and morality can evolve only in a group made of persons that see themselves as persons and that see other group members as persons and as group members. When the conditions are ripe for one to evolve, the other will evolve as well. I believe morality and sentience are mutually dependent, like the aspects within morality, and so can only evolve together, but I did not make that point in this book.

Because morality evolves, evolves under similar conditions whenever it evolves, and evolves in similar ways, morality will be similar among all evolved sentient-moral beings. All evolved morality will have "applies equally", the Golden Rule, empathy, and respecting similarity and difference. All evolved morality will have moral good, the greater good, rules, should, right and wrong, and rights and duties. The balances need not be all the same for all evolved moralities. If bears evolve morality, they might feel a greater sense of moral good or a greater sense of the Golden Rule than we do. If cats evolve morality, they might have a lesser sense of rules than we do; but they will still have a sense of rules. Science fiction makes a point of the fact that other beings evolve a morality similar to ours but not exactly like ours. Klingon morality is different than Terran morality but also similar enough so we can see each other's moral stances and deal with them. If dolphins and whales have evolved a morality, it will be quite a bit like ours but not exactly like ours. All evolved moral groups will have mixed moral personalities. All evolved moral groups will have the ability to rationalize exploiting other moral groups, just as humans did

among themselves. Let us hope we all go further toward the logic of “applies equally” and the Golden Rule before we all meet.

Evolution “aims” toward the development of sentience and morality, at least in a few species on a planet with the right conditions. Because all evolved sentient-moral beings understand good, seek good, and avoid badness, and all evolved sentient-moral beings are likely to be good more often than bad, we can also say evolution “aims” toward goodness while avoiding badness.

We can say evolution “aims” at sentience, morality, and goodness together; but we should not make too much of this situation. Use it to spark your imagination but don’t make anything too metaphysical out of it. Evolution also seems to aim at predators and parasites, and we don’t want to raise them to demigods. Evolution aims at sentience, morality, and goodness in the same sense that it aims at complexity, five senses, locomotion, sexuality, a central nervous system, mouths, arms and legs, trophic levels, ecological communities, and warm blood (thermoregulation). Evolution aims at any trait in the same way an avalanche aims downhill or a planet aims to orbit around a star. Under the right conditions, that particular trait has a high chance of developing. That is all. Evolution does not aim at any trait in the sense that everything else is a preparation for the trait, the trait is the highest trait, it is the culmination of evolution, it is the culmination of any logical progression, or the trait is inevitable. Sentience and morality were not inevitable on Earth. Even goodness was not inevitable on Earth. Parasitism was more inevitable, and do we really want to say that tape worms are the ultimate form of life toward which God aimed? Maybe sentience, morality, and goodness are only preparations for another coming trait that will be even higher, such as telepathy, the ability to shape reality directly with our minds, or escape from our bodies. Once we understand the danger in saying that evolution aimed at sentience, morality, or goodness, then we can think about how inevitable we see them, how high they are, and how much we can see them as the culmination of evolution and of God’s plan. We can use our imagination without mistaking our desire to raise ourselves to divinity as some kind of logical certainty.

Selective Attachment.

Morality has been perverted to serve immoral ends. To pervert morality, a bad person convinces people to feel moral about acts that most people, under normal circumstances, would consider immoral, such as killing a child. If morality can be perverted easily, then it is hard to argue a link between God and morality. It is hard to argue that God gave us morality through evolution. Instead, morality is just another evolved feeling, like pleasure, that can be attached to acts so as to get organisms to do what needs to be done when other feelings might not be enough. If morality can be attached easily to any act, that fact seems to block any special status for morality, especially any link to God.

I can’t remember who said that, if ants had morality, then killing a rival queen would be a virtue. We can add similar cases: male lions would say killing the cubs of a previous male is a sacrament; tarantula hawks would say stinging a tarantula is holy; and the aliens in the movie “Alien” would say sticking an egg down a human gut is blessed. This is wrong. If ants could feel morality, they would have had to evolve sentience along with morality. Ants are not sentient, so they cannot have morality as humans do. They can have no moral feelings about killing a queen or any organism. If ants did evolve sentience and morality together, then they would understand why killing a queen might not be moral. They might find a

rationalization to do it anyway, but they would understand the moral dilemma. The same is true of lions, tarantula hawks, and aliens.

I accept that morality can be perverted but I don't think this means moral feelings can be attached to just any act, morality has no special status, or there is no link between morality and God. Almost any ability can be perverted. That does not necessarily discredit the ability. It depends on how often and how badly the ability can be perverted. It depends on whether the perversion completely discredits the underlying logic of the ability. In modern America, eating has been perverted. How morality is perverted actually shows its underlying logic, and that, in turn, bolsters the special status of morality, and the idea that God gave us morality through evolution.

Moral feelings cannot easily be attached to any acts such as murder, and they are not usually attached to mundane acts such as a quick lunch at the local counter. Most of the time, moral feelings attach to actions and rules that we want to apply to everybody equally, and that we can do for them as we want them to do for us. When bad people pervert morality, they convince other people that an act is really for the greater good even when the act does not seem good, that an act is something other people would want us to do generally but we just don't know it, or that an act is really an extension of a rule we already accept. People use one aspect of moral logic to pervert other aspects. They cannot attach moral feeling wherever they want or however they want but only in accord with underlying moral logic. When a child, or a political interest group, says "but that's not fair" purely to advance self-interest, still they have to appeal to an underlying idea of fairness. In appealing to the underlying idea of fairness, they actually bolster the idea of fairness, and prepare us for other better uses. The underlying idea of fairness exists apart from particular bad uses of it, and supports other good uses. It is up to better people and better thinkers to expose how bad people misuse moral logic, and to put us on a better track. It is up to better thinkers to use moral logic correctly. Practicality gives rise to morality but does not engulf morality. Morality can only be perverted because it has a deep underlying logic. The fact that morality has an underlying logic does allow it to be perverted some of the time but also keeps it from being perverted the vast majority of the time. The logical drift of morality shows through despite the fact that morality evolved, usually goes along with practicality, and can be perverted. Jesus understood the logical drift of morality, and pushed in the direction of morality's logical drift.

The argument that morality evolved, so moral feelings can be attached to any act, and, therefore morality has no special status, not only undermines any link between morality and God, it also undermines any special status for morality. This argument also undermines moral atheism. If moral atheists want to keep any special status for morality, they have to counter this argument. To counter this argument, they have to resort to the underlying logic of morality. In resorting to the underlying logic of morality, they show the slight gap between morality and practicality. If they want to keep this argument, then they have to explain how moral feelings can attach to any act but morality is still special. I don't think they can do that. I think any attempt to keep morality special leads back to the idea that God gave it to us, and all sentient beings, through evolution.

Evil Does Not Begat Good.

Evolution is messy, ugly, amoral, and sometimes immoral. Sometimes it works through mechanisms that middle class people officially dislike, such as self-interest, nepotism, favoritism, coalitions, conniving,

betrayal, strong people dominating other people, and the weak going along with the strong. Paradoxically, without amorality, sentient-moral beings would never have evolved. Because morality evolved in self-selected groups of good guys, most of us are mostly good. Even so, even among good guys, all of us have some bad in us. We are all mixed. If we did not have to watch out for bad tendencies and bad people trying to invade the good guys, our goodness would not be so strong.

A group of good guys almost invites badness, like a pond of sitting ducks. Bad and evil often are more fun than goodness. These points together raise two questions, to both of which the answer is "no". (1) Are good and evil locked together in some kind of symbiosis, so that we cannot have one without the other? Don't we need evil to create good? In some way, isn't evil the same as good, or just as good as good? Aren't Jesus and the Devil the same? (2) So, isn't it alright to do evil, or at least to do just exactly what I want? By doing evil, or doing what I want, aren't I really helping good? By being an agent of selfishness and evil, aren't I really being an agent of good? This position is a re-assertion of bad ideas from ancient dualism. Variations on this position are used to excuse bad abuses of capitalism; and, amazingly, people accept the excuses.

Evolution gives no excuse for badness, including evil. Amorality is not the same as immorality. Self-interest is not the same as selfishness. Self-interest has served the evolution of morality but selfishness rarely has. Evolution punishes selfishness as much as it punishes too much goodness. You do not serve morality by being persistently selfish. Evil is like unrelenting selfishness. Evolution usually discards evil just as it discards unrelenting selfishness. Without implying anything too metaphysical, it is fair to say: when evolution makes sentient-moral beings, then evolution consistently produces goodness; it endures badness, including evil; evolution only sometimes makes badness as a by-product; and it does not aim at badness. Good and evil are not locked in metaphysical twin-hood. Whether you serve morality by being appropriately self-interested depends on the institutions in which you live. If you want to serve goodness indirectly rather than just do good yourself, then you can work to create the right institutions. Serve democracy. Strive for enlightened well-regulated free enterprise. Strive for enlightened environmental regulation. You can serve goodness by being bad in some cases only because other people are good. Yes, it is possible to be too good in this world. But normal people so rarely make this mistake that you don't have to worry about it. You need not seek to right the balance of too much goodness over badness by being bad yourself. Seek to find the right balance between good and self-interest. Don't raise evil or selfishness to metaphysical principles just for excuses. Evil and selfishness are what they are on their face. So is goodness. This situation might be why God did not want Adam and Eve to learn about Good and Evil while in Eden; just do well naturally and don't cogitate too much; Taoists and Buddhists would approve of just doing good without too much navel-gazing.

Right Response.

We live in a world where we feel morality but we cannot live up to the ideal, and, in the meantime, people suffer. What is the right overall response? The major world religions and philosophers have given us the right response. Jesus gave us the best response. Our parents and grandparents gave us the right response. Novelists, playwrights, TV writers, and movie writers have given it to us. Be useful. Try hard to be honest and to help. Help people and nature. Do to other people as you would like them to do to you. At least, do not hurt them. Pay it forward, more than once. Enjoy life if you can. Strive for justice and against injustice. Be honest in your job, carrying out its full duties, showing no favoritism even to kin, but

showing mercy to the needy. Accept that you will suffer some loss if you are honest. Use your mind to figure out what is the best government. Use your mind to figure out the best use of your time and energy. Work hard for a cause if you feel the urge but be careful with zealotry. Be a good citizen. Don't be selfish. Don't be a fool. Accept your limitations and work around them as best you can. Accept human frailty and put it into contexts where it will do the least damage and the most good. Don't allow institutions to encourage bad behavior. Learn when you can count on human strength. Don't ask more than people can give. Found democracy on good institutions rather than on unrealistically ideal humans. You can add more details. These slogans do not make the problems go away. But we have to start here.

Jesus.

Jesus was not a systematic philosopher so there is no point combing through scriptures looking for quotes to support my ideas about morality, the evolution of morality, or God's role. These points stand out.

Evolution leads us to see moral ideals but cannot get us to act fully in accord with the ideals. Jesus pushes us to act better. He gives us the shove that we need in the right direction of empathy and the Golden Rule. It is not clear if his teachings will be enough to get us to act well enough to save the planet and the quality of human life. If they are not, it is hard to see what would be enough. In combination with realistic practicality and good ideas from other religious teachers, it might be the best chance we have.

Jesus' teachings are effective in getting us to act better because they go along with the deep underlying logic of evolved morality. Jesus completes evolution (don't take this phrase too seriously; see below). It would take too long to go through each of Jesus' teachings, exemplified in passages, to show how they continue the logic of evolved morality. I invite the reader to do that from the points cited in Part Four of this book, and then to go to a New Testament to look further. Maybe a few points here can carry the case. I explained evolutionary moral logic primarily through "applies equally". Many people think of the Golden Rule when they think of Jesus. The Golden Rule is fully in line with "applies equally". "Applies equally" is another way to say the Golden Rule, and vice versa. If we adopt one then we have to adopt the other. If we apply all rules equally to everybody, then we have to do what we want other people to do, and we expect them to act well toward us too. Jesus also preached universal love. If we love everybody then we love everybody about equally, including sometimes ourselves when we need it. Jesus preached the value of the self. If we value our true self more than any power or possessions, and we see other people as like us, then we value them in the same way too. His teachings build on the empathy that is an intrinsic part of evolved sentience and evolved morality. That is what it means to see other people as ourselves and act toward them as we want them to act toward us.

The morality that Jesus urged on us is not completely natural. It is not natural to love your neighbor as yourself or really to treat all people exactly as you would like them to treat you. It is not natural to give away all your possessions in the uncertain hope of attaining the Kingdom of God. It is not natural to put Jesus ahead of your family and country. It is not natural to let another person commit violence against you and your family without trying to protect you and them. It is not natural to let bad people destroy a good society in the hope that God will rebuild another similar good society later when he feels like it. Family values might be perfectly natural but it is not what Jesus was all-about. All these ideas might be an extension of ideas based in evolution but they are not an extension allowed by evolution. Yet some

of us still urge these ideas on all of us, or at least urge us to find a compromise with reality that is more in accord with the ideals than normal. We all have to decide how much we accept of the ideal and the natural, and where to draw the lines.

Jesus was a victim of the greater good, just as Harry Potter was. The Roman and Jewish authorities killed Jesus to prevent public disturbance; they killed Jesus for the greater good. Anybody who reads the Gospels with an open mind can see this is so regardless of attempts by the Gospel writers to blame Jews. Officials acted out of genuine concern for the greater good, acted within their authority, and did what many people considered for the greater good at that time and would consider for the greater good in our time. The Roman and Jesus authorities were as human as we are, and so we likely would kill Jesus for the greater good too. I have met deeply Christian church goers, police officers, soldiers, and government officials who would not understand they would kill Jesus too if he appeared today. Jesus' death is a hard lesson that people use the greater good to sustain their own ideas of order, and that people make miss the mark even when they really mean to do good. A friend told me that Mel Gibson used his own hands to drive the nails into Jesus' hands in the movie "The Passion of the Christ". Maybe our flawed tendency to squash good people in the name of the greater good is one reason why Western people are so suspicious of authority and of people that claim to know the greater good. Jesus' death is a clear lesson that we have to think hard about the moral good and general good so we can salvage both the true moral good and true general good.

Jesus taught a strenuous morality but he was not an absolutist. He appreciated the difference between the moral good and the greater good. He understood that all moral ideas can cause trouble. He did promote the Kingdom of God, and thought it was the vehicle for the greater good in his time. But the Kingdom of God ultimately was to be run by God. I doubt Jesus would have crushed anybody's real moral good or anybody's right in order to achieve the greater good even of the Kingdom of God. Jesus refused dominion over the world, and he insisted on the integrity of each individual. It is not clear from scripture how God would run the Kingdom nor what Jesus' agenda would have been if he had lived longer.

Jesus urged people to do practical and moral good regardless of any connection to the greater good or to any official structure of the greater good. Stop thinking about the Kingdom of Israel; stop waiting for the Kingdom of God. Just help people. Just love. Just treat people as you wish to be treated. Make realistic plans for this world. If you do that much practical and moral good, then the greater good will follow and most rightness will follow. With luck, the Kingdom will follow too. This is what makes Jesus seem naïve but it is also part of his appeal and power.

Usually Jesus pushed in the evolved direction of the underlying logic of morality, including most moral aspects such as good and greater good. The idea of rights and duties seems like a bit of an exception. Jesus wanted us to carry out our duties and to seek rights for all people in accord with moral logic. But he did not want us to insist on our rights, especially if we did not also do our duties, and if we did not feel the correct reasons behind our rights. He did not push rights and duties completely. He would stress duties as much as rights. He would like us to carry out our duties not just because they were duties but because we understood the rightness and goodness behind them. That is not really an exception to following moral logic toward its endpoint but it is a variation that we have to be clear about. As long as we are clear, I don't see any problem. (Some Protestants worry a lot about this point. Despite stressing faith

[underlying moral logic] more than acts [duties], some Protestants seem to have raised duties [acts] to a higher level than other moral aspects and other moral logic [faith].)

Jesus clearly understood the vicious circles that result when we return bad for bad and when we hold a grudge. Jesus understood the evil regimes that result from pursuing the greater good. Jesus understood using good as an excuse to get your way and to undermine the greater good. His teachings help us get out of terrible situations of blaming and revenge. They give people the courage to cut the cycle. They help us ratchet up the levels of practical, moral, greater good, and rightness, and to keep them there. His teachings start a new higher cycle. They help us get into a pattern where good acts sustain good acts and the greater good really increases naturally. His teachings start the ball of "pay it forward" and keep the ball going. Forgiveness is not only good-and-right in itself but creates further good and supports the greater good by erasing bad and by promoting good further along the line. Jesus' teachings will not cure all bad situations by making enough people in them good. If people had that much potential for good, then bad situations would never arise or would be cured easily. Jesus' teachings help us see the situations more clearly and help us do as much good as we can within bad situations.

When we follow Jesus' teachings enough to get us up a level, we feel better about ourselves and others. We feel more comfortable. When we feel comfortable about other people and when we do not fear falling too far backwards, we are better judges of the greater good and of all morality. We do not need as many schemes for the greater good, and we are better judges of the schemes that do come along. When we are comfortable, we can afford to make mistakes because we feel we can recover. We are receptive to plausible ideas about the greater good, as Americans were in the 1960s and 1970s. We are also better judges of what can go wrong with schemes; as Americans were in the 1990s. Jesus' teachings move the good, the greater good, and the right closer together without merging them mindlessly.

A human being cannot strive to meet the ideals of Jesus and still succeed in this world. You have to be too honest and too open to exploitation. Jesus was correct when he told the rich young man to sell all his possessions before the rich young man could follow Jesus into the Kingdom of God. Whether a person can reasonably well follow Jesus and reasonably well succeed in this world at the same time is a matter of debate. Churches and sects gain followers by telling them they can have their world cake and eat their spiritual cake too but the churches and sects are wrong.

Jesus and Evolution Again.

Now I have the makings of a metaphysical theological thriller. We have at least six distinct but related moral qualities (good, greater good, should, rules, right and wrong, and rights and duties) that cannot be reduced to any one quality but need to work together and need to be resolved, like the seemingly contradictory initial evidence in a spy movie. Evolution takes us to the gate but cannot take us through; Jesus points the way. Jesus takes us where mere biological evolution can lead us to but cannot go. Jesus embodies the culmination of evolution. Because sentience and morality have to evolve together, would have the same features wherever they evolved, and would have features much like what Jesus urged us toward, we can say that Jesus is the agent of a principle that is universal in this world. We can see Jesus as a metaphysical cosmological principle and a savior, the embodied force, for our world, of usually-spiritual goodness. He is an avatar of God, and maybe God himself. We could hail Jesus as the greatest Buddha and/or bodhisattva. I could easily devise a scenario wherein Jesus could play this role. We could have a modern pseudo-Orthodox variation on the old stories of Gnosticism and Emanation. We

could even re-introduce the twin-hood of good and evil. While tempting, and while this story would sell more books, it is better to say “no”. Jesus did not resolve all problems with morality although he made us more aware of them and he gave us the right advice so we can carry on with a better life as normal people. He gave us real advice for a real world where all advice is bound to come up short of solving all problems perfectly. What he did is a lot, and enough. It is much better not to sully his real achievement by cranking Jesus up to our imaginary self-serving heavens. If you can make a metaphysical theological thriller out of the story, then go ahead, but it would be better if nobody listened to you.

Before the rise of Darwinian ideas about evolution in the late 1800s, there were ideas about other kinds of evolution, mostly what we now would call ideas about progress: the world moved in directions, mostly higher and better, guided by the invisible hand of a hidden spirit. Every once in a while we can see the spirit behind the plan. The spirit looks like a human person. To “seal the deal”, sometimes the spirit takes on a body and lives among us. For reasons I do not fully understand, people ever since agriculture, including modern people, have felt deeply happy to believe this scenario. Even atheists have a version (great thinkers and the progress of the human spirit). I was infected too but I tried to find some residual truth despite the infection. People feel good to believe they can link up with the guiding spirit, especially the embodied form. People who want to think of Jesus as the embodied culmination of cosmic planning and directed biological evolution are not being guided by a clear idea of Jesus but really are being guided by the older odder need for an embodied spirit of world advancement. Their understanding of biological evolution will be distorted by the need for an embodied personal spirit. That distortion is more likely than that their theological stories are guided by a solid understanding of real biological evolution.

So, the cure is: just say “no” to bad religion and bad use of the imagination. Just don’t see Jesus as a cosmological theological principle. Take him as he is. If you want to speculate, that is good, that is part of human nature. Be sure to get the facts straight first and to stay well-ground in facts. Find out if any hidden ideas from the dim mists of history and human longing are secretly guiding you. Know that any silliness you spout can mislead people.

I doubt it offends Stan Lee to say the X-Men are an example of a good way to think about non-Darwinian evolution, spiritual superiority, and morality. Magneto clearly is a step forward in evolution but he is also a very bad paradigm for Jesus. Evolved talents too often lead to a sense of separation, superiority, and entitlement rather than to a sense of connection and obligation. Even if we have been abused for our talents, as was Magneto and Jesus, we should not let the abuse force us down the dark path. Too many Christians follow Magneto. Dr. Xavier is a better paradigm for Jesus because he does not believe he is entitled and he thinks mutants and normal people (“muggles”) are basically similar. But even Dr. X is not much better as a role model for us because he is obviously super too. We can actually be X-Men, and women, without needing a Magneto or even a Dr. Xavier. All people already are “mutants” because all people already share evolved moral ability. It is a matter of how they use it.

Jesus pointed beyond the limits that natural selection puts on morality toward the conclusions inherent in the logic of morality. He did it not to theorize about better people or a superior ghost world but to get real people to really build a better this-world by really being better. By pointing toward the logical conclusion of (evolved) moral capacities, he expects us to behave more in accord with ideal morality than usual. He expects us sometimes to get beyond the limits that nature put on moral action. He expects us really to act toward everybody else equally as if they were us, to do for them what we would like them to do for us.

That is all. He does not expect us to be supernatural like a Jedi or magician. Any more is too much temptation. He is not the culmination of evolution-as-a-cosmic-principle and he is not the super-natural principle that evolution was seeking all the time. In their ways, great scientists and great artists also go beyond normal human limits by pushing evolved capacities, and we do not extol them as the culmination of cosmic evolution and as gateways to the metaphysical beyond. See Jesus the same way as we see great scientists and artists. Seeing Jesus as a transcendent principle undercuts his main message rather than supports it.

Seeing Jesus as a principle that transcends nature and evolution is dangerous in the bad old way that Christianity has always been dangerous. If Jesus is beyond physical evolution and he is the culmination of cosmic spiritual evolution, then what are the Jews? Again the Jews become the merely physical, merely legal, merely animal, merely natural, the physical dregs that Jesus as Spirit goes beyond. Again the Jews become stooges in a propaganda play. Again they are fall guys and scapegoats. Again we have an excuse to denigrate Jews and hurt them. I do not want Jews turned into Magneto's followers, the partly-holy recidivist force of badness, with Christians turned into X-mas-Men, the fully-holy guiding force of goodness (I know Magneto was a Jewish boy in a ghetto). Jesus' ideas were Jewish ideas. Many Jews shared the ideas even if they did not express them as well as Jesus and did not put them in the context of making a better world. Many people of other religions share the same ideas even if they too did not put them in the context of making a better world and even if other religions did not bring the ideas into world history.

Some Due Credit.

As far as I know, nobody else has treated the evolution of morality as I did, with morality as a bundle of a few distinct but mutually dependent features, and with evolution showing people ideals but not allowing us to live up to them. I do not claim much originality; the idea is not hard. I only want to show that I did not steal any ideas, and to explain why I do not offer citations for this particular idea.

I think James P. Hurd is an orthodox (standard) Christian. I apologize if I am wrong. To my knowledge, James P. Hurd is the first orthodox Christian who both fully understood modern Darwinism and likely had the idea that Jesus completed biological evolution. As far as I can tell, he had this idea without infusions of odd non-orthodox ideas about evolution and progress. He and I had this idea independently, in our own versions. He had it without any prompting from me. He should get some credit for any credit due this idea. His version likely would differ from my un-orthodox version but that does not matter for purposes of giving him due credit. I only know of any of his ideas because of brief talks with him at conferences in the early 1990s. I did not learn the substance of his thought. I do not know if he holds the idea now. I do not know if any of his colleagues also had the idea. Search him on the Internet, especially for his good ethnography on American religious communities. As far as I can tell, the work cited below does not explain the idea of seeing Jesus as completing evolution. James Hurd is a sincere good person who puts his religion into practice. He kindly mailed me a copy of his book for free when I was stuck in the field. I have had ideas stolen from me, and it hurts badly. I do not think I stole this idea from him because I had it independently before I met him, and I knew of non-Darwinian and non-Christian versions too. Hearing him mention it at conferences did spark my imagination and did spur me on to do the necessary thinking out when I had the time. I want him to get all the credit that he deserves. I hope I am doing him justice here. He is not to blame for any of my errors.

Hurd, James P. (editor). 1996. Investigating the Biological Foundations of Human Morality. Continuing Symposium Series Volume 37. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press