

09 Atheism

This chapter argues against modern atheism. This chapter does not review arguments for God or against God. This chapter gets at issues through morality. Commitment to morality opens the door to the super natural and it makes responsible belief in God legitimate. I do not defend all belief, only good belief. All people should criticize stupid, silly, hurtful, or overly zealous ideas whatever the roots.

The world won't "turn atheist" soon. Modern confused avoidance of formal religion is not atheism. Nearly all people still believe in something super natural but don't have anything to commit to: "spiritual but not religious". So why bother with atheism? Smug atheists annoy me. People who are fine as individuals become annoying as atheists. Atheists make fun of simple belief. They assume all believers are crazy or are weak fools, desperately needing comfort and willing to sacrifice mind to get it. Atheists wrongly think they are skeptic freethinking rebels led to the lonely truth by their superior intellects. In fact, atheism is now one of the big default conformities for non-thinking. Atheism can be dogma as much as religious belief. Atheists misuse physics to deny God and misuse biology to say belief is merely a nasty evolved reflex like a bad temper. Despite pride in their morality and acumen, atheists have not worked out the implications of a commitment to morality. Atheists say we can stop bad politics and terrorism by rejecting God. Atheists think rejecting God makes all people give up all superstition, makes us ideally rational, makes us adept citizens, and so would save democracy and the world if we all did it. In their zeal to make us all rational in their image and so save us, they are like Prohibition, the War on Drugs, or calls for sexual abstinence outside marriage - another branch of the PC thought police. Atheists are like simplistic anti-abortion or pro-nature crusaders. They tout a policy that cannot prevail but their stance lets them feel good while not doing much good and not exposing them to much harm. I am also annoyed at rejoinders to atheism by believers. They think arguing against atheism proves their own version of Christianity. Atheism gives theists an excuse for superficiality. By arguing cogently against atheism, I might lead theists to "up their game". We can do better with both religion and reason.

I offer the same argument five times, twice in Part One and once each in Parts Two through Four. Read Part One entirely. Part Five is comments. I only restate what you should have learned in college from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Hume, and Kant. Don't worry if you didn't go or didn't learn. It's not hard.

Supposedly in White Crane martial arts, the goal is not to thrash the opponent but to not get hurt. That is what I seek here. I don't wish to thrash anyone. I wish to show curious sincere people that religious belief is sane and reasonable. Religious belief has a strong foundation in Western tradition. Belief goes along with how we see morality, reality, the world, the super natural, and God.

Optional Technical Point: Arguments similar to the one that I make here through morality can be made through other ways including: the world's intelligibility, rationality, or formal organization, through the fact of persons, through the increasing complexity of life, the increasing centralization of life, the success of mathematics (logic) for studying some aspects the world, the failure of mathematics for studying other aspects, and the validity of scientific method. Kurt Godel gave an argument based on perfect attributes, similar to the ontological argument of Anselm. I do not cover any of this. The argument from morality is

the best. If you accept it, others are “frosting on the cake”; but, if you cannot accept this argument, others are not likely to convince. NO argument, including one based on morality, is proof of God. Nor are denials of the arguments proof against God. I don’t think there is any conclusive argument for or against God, we don’t need such proof, and likely we are better off this way. Think about what “faith” means and how to have faith without being foolish.

Skeptics, Theists, Agnostics, Moral Atheists, and Amoral Atheists.

Atheists see themselves as “skeptics”: people who don’t simply believe what everyone else believes; put reason above belief; doubt accepted ideas such as “capitalism is fair” or “capitalism is unfair”; and doubt politicians, priests, professors, and artists. Skeptics make up their own mind. Since 1500, skeptics have been the self-styled “bad boys and bad girls” of Western intellectual life.

Mild skeptics question “the Beatles were the best band ever” and “politicians in a democracy often put the country above their own interests”. Modest skeptics doubt “romantic love is real” and “God”. Strong skeptics doubt “love is good”, “act morally”, or “the Earth goes around the sun”. Full skeptics doubt “good is good”, “I”, “you”, “I am”, “avoid pain”, “seek likes, avoid dislikes”, “follow logic”, “something exists”, and “consistency”. People take the pose of a skeptic so as to feel astute and important. Almost nobody is a full skeptic. All agnostics and atheists that I know of are only modest skeptics at most.

A “theist” is a “religious person”, a believer in God, or, sometimes, a believer in an equivalent such as the Dharma, Heaven, or the Tao. “The” is from Greek “theos” for “god” or “God”. Since the Enlightenment (about 1700 to 1820), a “deist” is a person who believes in God but thinks God has intervened in the world little, or not at all, since he started it. Deists do not feel abandoned by God but want people to use their minds to make the world better instead of falling back on divine intervention. “De” is a variation on “theos”. A “theist” usually believes God intervenes much more. Most people do not hear the difference between “theist” and “deist”, and are not sure what kind of believer is meant when either term is used. Here “theist” and “believer” include “deists”; I do not deal with deists directly. I fall between Enlightenment Deists and the usual religious theist believer.

An “agnostic” “not knows” about God and prefers not to take a stance (“a” is “not” and “gnos” is “know”). These days, an agnostic view implies disappointment with formal religion. Mostly, agnostics avoid conflict while carrying on. I don’t blame them. Agnostics seem not to have clear ideas about moral stances and what having a moral stance implies for God or any super natural. Technically, I am an agnostic because I think we can prove little about God but I differ from most agnostics in that I believe in God, follow Jesus, and have thought out the implications of my moral stance for the super natural.

An “atheist” actively says “no god” (“a” is “no” and “theos” is “god”). Atheists actively assert there is no god. They offer proofs against god just as theists offer proofs for god. Atheists say: “Everything (that can be explained) can be explained without referring to god, so there is no need to refer to god, so there is no god. Accepting god usually causes more harm than benefit; so we are better off rejecting god; so there is no god. Human ideas of god can be explained away as merely evolved; and there is no scientific basis for human ideas about god; so, we should reject god. By rejecting god, automatically we also reject all superstition and nearly all bad ideas; so we become almost perfectly rational. People thus made highly rational are the only hope for democracy and the world, and are enough. This is the only way we

can be made rational enough to be good enough citizens.” Atheists see themselves as rebel crusading skeptics holding the line against evil emotional chaos and tyranny – “except for that silliness about “the Force, we few atheists are Jedi while all those believers are Sith”. But most atheists that I have met, read, or heard are not rebel crusading skeptics except in self-indulgent Romantic terms.

Roughly, atheists come in two varieties. The first, “amoral atheists”, doubts not only any god but also the validity of any morality. Few adult atheists do this. Rigorous doubt about morality is hard to keep up.

The second variety, “moral atheists”, commit to morality. They commit in the same way that everybody commits – see below. Their commitment to morality is not qualitatively different. Almost all atheists now who promote atheism say they are moral atheists. They are proud to reject God yet still be moral. They deny any arguments linking God and morality. Morality can stand on its own and does not need God to explain its origin or to back it up through punishment and reward. As examples, and as proof that people can reject God yet be moral, they offer famous moral atheists of the past such as David Hume, or offer themselves. They feel their superior rationality also results in better moral thinking and acting. Yet few moral atheists think out implications of any moral commitment for the super natural and. Moral atheists think they are bad tough guy realist rebel freethinking strong skeptics but rarely are.

I do not know any deliberately immoral atheists although some immoral people do deny God. Atheists do sometimes act badly just like all of us. Among deliberately immoral people who deny God, the immorality comes first and the denying God is an excuse. I don't know of any cases where reasoned doubting of God came first and led to deliberate immorality. Bad people sometimes use doubt about God to seduce victims into immoral behavior but, in those cases, doubt about God is not a cause but a tool. I doubt that atheists are more immoral than people in general although atheists sometimes flaunt naughtiness as part of a self-styled bad boy bad girl image. Indirectly, a deliberately immoral person asserts that morality is important – the Joker in Batman and naughtiness as part of a bad boy bad girl image. So, a deliberately immoral atheist can be classed in with moral atheists, and to argue against moral atheists argues against deliberately immoral atheists too.

Atheists usually allow that people do have moral feelings and that moral feelings are distinct from other feelings such as love or anger. People make moral judgments about right and wrong and moral judgments are qualitatively distinct from other judgments such as “painful”, “cheap”, or “beautiful”. But amoral atheists, and sometimes moral atheists, do not allow that moral feelings and judgments refer to anything distinct, real, or important in itself. Moral feelings and judgments are illusions, delusions, and-or roundabout ways to get something else, usually my self-interest. Because people in general share these delusory feelings and judgments, we can use the feelings, judgments, and use other people, to get what we wish. For example: when I declare someone stole my pudding out of the shared refrigerator at work, and I get upset about this venal trampling of goodness, really I am much less upset about the assault on goodness than about the loss of my pudding now and about the high chance that, if I don't scream now, it will happen again; so I yell about justice to get my office mates on my side and against the thief. If I am a conniving person as moralists often are, I even accuse my office rival, whether he-she did it or not. People in general have an uneasy feeling that manipulation goes on a lot but we don't call it each other because we want to use the tool when it comes our turn.

Before the rise of neo-Darwinism after about 1960, there were no good explanations for how people got the moral feelings and judgments, why we were so conniving, why we often went along with morality, and why we went along with using morality as a tool. Now there are good explanations. Without going into detail, we evolved the abilities because they helped us to succeed in our evolutionary past and we keep them because they help us now. These abilities are coded into our genes. That they are coded into our genes does not make them true, valid, real, or false, invalid, and delusory. That these abilities are coded into genes can be used to explain away morality as “nothing but”, and often is. The combination of doubt about morality plus a biological explanation for how morality serves success can be powerful.

The attitude (stance) of moral atheists confuses me. When moral atheists defend their own morality and particular moral judgments, they insist morality cannot be explained away as nothing but delusions based on our genes, and insist they do not use morality as a tool. They do not think evolution undermines their personhood and moral validity. Their moral judgments are valid and compelling. Yet when they attack the morality of others, in particular theists, they attack morality as a delusion, as based in our genes, and therefore nothing but a reflex like craving sugar; they say believers use morality as a tool to frighten and control others; and they think evolution undermines the idea of a person that is needed for the morality of believers and for belief of believers. This contradiction features in my argument against moral atheists. Moral atheists need to be consistent in how they see morality and commitment to morality, and need to see what a commitment to morality by anybody implies, including them.

This chapter ignores skeptics, agnostics, amoral atheists, and deliberately immoral atheists to focus on moral atheists including self-styled sometimes naughty bad boys and bad girls. Moral atheists do not see that to accept morality also is to accept some super natural. To accept some super natural allows other people to believe in God legitimately.

Interjection: Take-Home Message.

This take-home message is an interjection. It does not result directly from arguments that belief in God is sane. It comes from thinking about evolved beings living in the modern world. This message is what we come to after we are done bickering over theism and atheism. This message is not needed for argument below but please don't skip this message.

Quit bickering. Instead use your big intellect and zealous energy on deep practical problems.

Harangue by religious people, moralists, atheists, academics, activists, conservatives, feminists, or hip-hop artists cannot make people fully moral, good, not superstitious, and adept enough citizens. Trying to do so is like Prohibition, the “War on Drugs”, or total chastity outside marriage. People evolved not to be fully rational. People evolved to believe in something. Regardless of what we personally believe or not believe, we have to accept this situation and do the best we can with it. We can help people to the best ideas given evolved human nature.

Figure out and accept what you care about, what is really important to you, what really matters to you. Think about what is real. Besides persons like spouse and children, likely you care about moral issues. If you care enough about theism and atheism to read this chapter, then you care about something and likely you care about morality. Morality is real. Think out the implications for caring about morality, committing

to morality. What does what you care about imply for what is real in the world? What does all that imply for the way real people live in the real world? You don't have to be a "good two shoes" annoying hyper moralist to commit to morality, and, in fact, some human playing around usually makes us more genuinely moral otherwise.

If you reject God because you think that stance is correct, and not from chic cleverness, fine. Be ready to calmly state reasons. Don't force your opinion on anyone or think atheism will save us all. If you believe in God, Dharma, Tao, Heaven, etc, fine. Be ready to explain calmly and to describe what people should do out of belief. Don't force your opinion on anyone or think belief in God etc. alone will save the world.

Along with atheism or belief, we need other values from Western ideas of the person and the state such as described in Chapter Two, and we need a realistic view of human nature such as from Chapter Three.

Give good hard thought to what will make the world better without corrupting us.

Ideas do influence behavior and can lead people to do good or bad. People can be both led astray and helped by ideas. Sometimes we need to fight bad dogmas, such as racism and terrorism, before people can act well enough. But ideas alone rarely cause much good or bad without previous deep reasons for good or harm such as economic inequality, poverty, and political repression. Debunking ideas alone, such as theism or simplistic scientism, will not cause people to act well if we do not also work on deep problems. Working honestly and effectively on deep problems can lead people to act better even if we don't clear away all bad ideas first. People can still act well if they believe in God, Dharma, Tao, Heaven, etc. or if they actively disbelieve. If you enjoy bickering over odd metaphysical issues, and you do no harm, then go ahead. See Part 5.

Most people are good enough, often despite bad ideology, to respond when they see others working hard on real problems. They will "pitch in" too. We can count on this goodness for a while if we work hard on deep problems and we make progress. We don't have to make everybody conform to any belief system for them to act well. I don't know how long this door of goodness will remain open in the modern world of overpopulation, pollution, promising but flawed capitalism, and bad politics, but I doubt for long.

Atheists, and people who follow religion, should condemn bad ideas such as: we are good while others are evil, we are victims while they always gain, people not in traditional gender categories are evil, God wants us to terrorize, and the world is just fine as long we get ours. Do not wait for a priest, monk, rabbi, imam, holy person, teacher, or politician to condemn bad ideas. You personally must do it.

To help, all religions should teach good ideas, teach religion that is compatible with as much reason as possible, that inspires evolved human nature without forcing us into contradictions in our nature, and that promotes the values of Chapters One and Two. Religion should avoid stupid hurtful dogma and should condemn it. Religions should teach people to look for, understand, and work to solve, deep problems of economy, society, and ecology. All major religions can do this. You should look at your religion to make sure it does this, and, if not, you personally should change it. You personally are responsible. You may criticize other groups if you feel they teach anything hurtful – that is what good atheists want to do without being condemned by irrational theists.

Rather than try to talk people out of religion – like trying to talk us out of booze and sex – atheists should help most people toward good religion, largely by directing people to teachers of good religion. Atheists should attack bad ideas. Atheists should stop glamorizing their stance and stop feeling smugly superior. Atheists should lead in looking at, knowing about, and working to solve, deep problems.

It is ridiculous to think atheism alone would make people rational enough to deal with all the issues of the modern world. It is ridiculous to think any religion alone would make us good enough and adept enough to deal with all this. Neither religion nor atheism alone will save the world or damn it. What will?

PART 1: Moral Stances, the Super Natural, God, Physics, and Evolution.

-Nobody can prove either that God exists or does not exist.

-Where an idea comes from doesn't matter. It doesn't matter that the idea has a strong basis in evolved human nature and we have the idea largely because we evolved the capacity for it. What matters is how true and useful the idea is. Among other ways, an idea can be useful in imagination as long as we don't abuse imagination. I repeat often that the source does not matter. Please be patient.

-Learn about bad use of "nothing but" explaining away, and don't do it. Argue properly to the case.

-Morality does not need God to support it through rewards and punishments. Do good for itself. Act well for the right reasons. You can still believe in God and God can still take part in your life.

Synopsis.

(1)

-The standard view of morality sees morality as important, as "really important". Morality "really matters".

-Morality involves feelings and judgments. I do not say much about feelings. I subsume judging under the moral logic of the Golden rule, below, and so I don't get into it any more than that.

-Morality is the proper eventual judge of most cases in human affairs. Few things judge morality. Morality is what matters because it is the proper final judge in most cases.

-Morality has its own logic and follows that logic. The logic of morality follows the Golden Rule and "applies equally".

-The logic of morality is added evidence that morality is the judge of most human affairs.

-Morality requires persons (agents) with some free will. Morality is not done by stones, trees, robots, or machines. The will does not have to be absolutely free. I do not argue about how free the will has to be; a little is enough. Humans ordinarily think we do have enough free will. Persons need not have a soul as in the Christian-Muslim sense or a lesser sense, although most humans do think persons have souls. I do not say anything about souls.

-When I say morality is important, I include: feelings and judgments, is the proper judge of most affairs, has the logic of the Golden Rule, and morality requires somewhat free persons. I include all this without usually pointing out that I include it.

-Morality is non-material. Some people think morality is more important because it is non-material but not everyone agrees that being non-material makes something important, more important, or less important. Here I merely say morality is non-material and being non-material adds to morality's importance without implying anything about non-materiality and importance in general.

-Morality is important, is a high judge, done by persons, follows a logic, the logic of morality is that of the Golden Rule and "applies equally", and morality is non-material. All this is evidence that morality is real even though morality is not material. The simple fact that morality is important in its way is alone firm evidence that morality is real. The contributing points make the case fairly strong.

-The standard view of morality is that it is important, the proper judge, involves feelings, involves judging, involves persons, has logic, and is real. I add to the standard view that morality is non-material and that the logic of morality is the same as the Golden Rule and "applies equally".

-Although most people cannot explain the standard view, they hold that view, including my additions. I agree with the standard view including my additions.

-Due to all the ideas above, morality "points to the super natural". Morality is a fairly clear instance of the super natural. Morality makes a strong case that the super natural exists. I accept that morality points to the super natural. The idea that morality points to the super natural is in the standard view too although most people can't explain.

-Accepting the super natural for one arena, morality, allows people to accept the super natural in other arenas, God. Accepting the super natural in one arena, such as morality, does not require that people accept the super natural in any other particular arena such as God. The relevance of the super natural still has to be argued for particular arenas. Accepting the super natural in one particular arena, such as morality, does make the case easier for people who want to see the super natural in other arenas, such as God. This does not mean you must believe in God if you commit to morality. It only means you can-and-may believe in God without being an idiot, fool, dupe, sub-rational, irrational, criminal, desperate for solace, or mindless zombie of the common herd – as long as you are reasonable and responsible - just as you can commit to morality without being any of those.

-The world as a whole makes more sense if we think a mind is behind it all, that is, God.

-From the results with morality and with making sense of the world, I judge that God exists. My judgment is not a proof. It is sane reasonable warranted often-useful belief.

-This much might not seem a like a lot but it is enough.

-Wondering about more can be fun.

-Trying to prove more causes trouble and usually comes from prior mindset rather than from evidence and good argument. Arguing against this much usually is based on wrong “nothing but” and usually comes from prior convictions rather than evidence and good thinking.

(2A)

-Physics and biology do not undercut my conclusions. Science does not support or oppose commitment to morality, belief in the super natural, or belief in God. Science is neutral.

-Some things are real but not material such as freedom, justice, love, math, science, scientific method, morality, persons, and the idea of God. Some non-physical things are not real, as we wish to think of real, even if ideas about them have real effects, such as ideas of self-grandeur and ethnic destiny. We have to decide what counts as real and not real for our purposes. We have criteria to help us do this.

-The fact that we decide on what counts as real for our purposes does not mean reality is mere social convention. Reality is real despite human opinion. Real reality can intrude and force us to change our decision about what counts as real. The fact that we decide means we are finite imperfect beings who have to get at reality as best we can. Learn to live both with “reality is real” and “we decide what counts as real for our purposes”.

-Science can explain aspects of how non-material real things are used in real life, for example, how the real legal system administers abstract justice. Science can help us decide that some non-material things are not real such as unicorns and racial destiny. Science cannot explain away as “nothing but” all non-material real things even when science can explain how people use them. Morality, ideas of God, joy, persons, love, justice, and honor are non-material ideas that are not false, are likely real, and cannot be explained away as “nothing but”.

-People can be misled about which ideas are real, have real objects, and-or point to the super natural. We are misled by religion, evolved predisposition for liveliness and to attribute realness, confusion about science, social convention, simplistic scientism, ideologies, pop culture, academia, conservative dogma, feminism, etc. We can overcome bias through consideration.

-We have to decide: (1) what is real or not; (2) which non-material things (ideas) are real or not; (3) which ideas have objects that are real or not; and (4) which ideas and-or their objects point to the super natural or not. In all this, we have to be as consistent as we can.

-On the basis of the evidence, and by using the public criteria that I know, morality is real.

-The fact that morality is real supports the idea that morality points to the super natural.

-Knowing that morality is real and points to the super natural lets me legitimately speculate about other things that might be real and super natural.

-Knowing morality is real and it points to the super natural helps me to judge that God is real too.

-Although science can explain almost everything without using God, that fact does not make the ideas of morality or God empty, useless, or bad. Morality is still real and God could still be real. Morality and the idea of God can be true (not false) and useful.

(2B)

-Morality, belief in gods, and belief in God, have a strong basis in our evolved nature. We have ideas of morality and religion largely because evolution made us predisposed to have such ideas. I do not argue the roles of learning versus an evolved basis. Just because we evolved the basis for morality and religion does not mean morality is merely an evolved reflex or the idea of God must be null. That morality and the idea of God evolved does not mean they are necessarily delusory, crazy, or bad. Some ideas with a firm basis in evolved human nature are best seen as illusions such as fairies and witches. Other ideas are best treated as real or as having a real object. The idea of a dog has an evolved basis but the object of the idea, dogs, is real. The idea of dogs likely does not point to the super natural. The idea of justice has an evolved base but is not a delusion, justice is real, and usually the idea of justice is good. I think the idea of justice points to the super natural.

-So, I conclude again that morality is real and points to the super natural.

-On the basis that morality is real and points to the super natural, and on the basis of all the argument above, I judge that God is real.

(3A)

-Most people commit to morality, and commit in the standard way, tacitly if not explicitly. They commit to the ideas that morality is important and real. That is what I take a commitment to morality to mean.

-The usual commitment to morality also strongly implies accepting the super natural.

-Most people do tacitly accept that morality has something to do with the super natural, and that morality supports the super natural including especially God; but they are not able to say it well.

-To be a person, you have to commit either to morality or not morality, and you have to say so.

(3B)

-Moral atheists are committed to morality pretty much in the standard way that everybody is committed to morality. They accept that morality is important. So they accept that morality is important enough to be real although they might not know that they do so.

-Because moral atheists accept that morality is important and real, they tacitly accept the super natural in one arena. Moral atheists might dislike this implication of commitment to morality but it is true anyhow.

-Because moral atheists commit to morality, and thereby accept the super natural in one arena, they also open the door to adept guesses about God, and they have to allow other people to believe in God. To make morality important makes speculation about God and belief in God legitimate.

-(a) If moral atheists refuse to accept that morality is important and real, (b) for example if moral atheists claim morality is simply an evolved reflex like craving sweets, (c) if they explain away morality as “nothing but”, (d) then moral atheists don’t commit to morality in the usual way, (e) so they are not moral atheists as people usually understand “moral”, and (f) they lose credibility. They might be atheists but they are not really moral even if they act morally. They seem self-deluded or like clever posers.

-(a) If moral atheists want to be moral in the usual way, (b) if moral atheists say they really feel morality in the way everybody does, (c) they want to be credible, (d) and they want moral atheism to appeal, (e) then they have to accept the super natural and (f) so have to accept that belief in God is legitimate, at least for some people. Moral atheists might be moral but they are not atheists as they wish. If moral atheists do not accept any super natural but still want morality to be important and-or real, they have to explain.

(4)

-If you commit to morality, you have to accept all that the commitment entails. You have to explain your morality. You have to decide why morality is important; what importance means and implies; if morality is real; if real, how it is real; and if morality implies the super natural. You have to decide whether implying the super natural allows people to believe in God.

-If you use morality to support your belief in God, then you are obliged to be sane and reasonable in both your morality and your belief in God. You should explain your morality and belief. Using morality to support your belief in God is a privilege for which you have to pay with responsibilities.

-If you claim to be moral, and you are an atheist, then you have a privilege for which you have to pay with responsibilities including well-reasoned stances on the above issues.

-Morality can work with practicality and other values. See Chapters One and Two.

(5)

-All this argument, including “pointing to the super natural”, does not prove that morality is real, morality is super natural, anything is real, anything points to the super natural, or God is real. It does offer a good case that morality is important, real, and points to the super natural. I deliberately did not say much about “pointing” to the super natural or pointing to anything. All this argument does not prove God set up the world and evolution so some beings would see morality, non-material reality, and the super natural. All this argument does not prove God set up the world and evolution so some evolved beings naturally seek and find God. It does not prove God intervened in evolution to give us morality and religion – in fact, it says God did not need to intervene and so did not. These are other debates that begin after we feel the above arguments, after we accept or deny the force (importance) of morality.

-All that the above says is: some ideas with an evolved basis cannot be explained away as merely evolved; morality is one of those; if you accept the importance of morality, accept that morality judges affairs and affairs do not usually judge morality, then you accept the reality of some non-material things, accept that morality is real, see that morality points to the super natural, and see that allowing any super natural allows legitimate speculation about God. If you accept the force of morality, then: you cannot explain away morality as merely evolved even though you can explain away some other ideas as merely evolved, and you must accept the results of not explaining away morality including that morality is real and points to the super natural. If you deny the results of this reasoning then you also have to deny the force of morality and the force-and-reality of most other fun ideas. You have to say why justice, society, power, science, scientific method, this one Douglas fir tree, the species of Douglas firs, trees, forests, storms, logic, math, love, your country, red, etc. are real or not. You have to be ready to explain away all of them or you risk again allowing the super natural and God. If you are not ready to explain away those, then likely you cannot explain away morality, and you must accept the results of real morality including the implied super natural and legitimate speculation about God.

-The link between morality, reality, and the super natural is old wisdom in the West. Evolution has little to do with the core issue except that evolution opens another arena to argue about explaining away and not explaining away. Evolution gives more tools to argue about what is real, what is not, why, and how. In our day, the old argument has to be restated and it has to consider evolution.

(6) See argument below, toward the end of Part One about ideals, unusual people, unusual situations, and morality.

The synopsis is over, and more expansive presentation begins. The order below corresponds to the order above but there is no precise correspondence of sections and points. I do not repeat the issues raised in items (4) and (5).

Honesty about Your Stance.

-As a person, you have to commit to morality or to not morality, and you have to say so.

-You must make clear if you take any position below, and have to explain, including any implications:

=My view, as stated above, and as explained throughout the book.

=You deny morality is important.

=You deny morality is real.

=You deny that morality is the proper judge of many activities.

=You deny that a commitment to morality points to the super natural.

=You accept that morality is important and is the proper judge of human affairs but you deny it is real.

=You accept that morality is important, the proper judge, and real but deny that morality points to the super natural.

=You are committed to morality in a way different than almost everybody else.

=You are committed to morality in a way different than everybody else but still think everybody should follow morality (everybody should be committed in some way to some morality).

- =Your morality differs from most everybody else, and still everybody else should follow your morality because your morality is better in general.
- =There are different kinds of morality for different kinds of people.
- =Morality is merely convention, is nothing but convention, and can be explained away.
- =Morality is merely responses based on evolved capacities, is nothing but evolved responses, and can be explained away.
- =Morality is merely a mix of convention and evolved responses, is nothing but that, and can be explained away as that.
- =Morality can be grounded in reason alone. You have to show how.
- =We need more than reason for morality. You have to explain what it is and how we get it.
- =Your own version of morality is important but its importance does not imply that morality is real and does not imply any super natural.
- =Morality is merely an evolved response, or is merely an evolved response mixed with convention, BUT morality still is important and everybody still should follow morality.
- =God intervened directly in evolution to give us the genes for morality and-or religion.
- =Morality and religion could not possibly have evolved, so God gave them to us directly; whether God used genes to give them to us is not relevant.

-It is very close to a contradiction to say morality is merely an evolved response and-or merely convention AND to say morality still is important and we still should follow morality. You have to explain. You cannot say we should follow morality because to do so is a practical strategy given irrational evolved human nature and given that you have to live and work with irrational evolved humans. You have to come down on one side or the other: merely evolved versus important and real.

-People who commit to morality need to see they imply that morality is real, and need to see that morality points to the super natural.

-Similar points can be made about belief in God by substituting "God" for "morality". I do not spell it out here. Please do that yourself, and see below.

-You need to think what your stance on morality implies for the super natural and God.

Morality as Judge, Moral Logic, and Morality as Important.

Anyone who has endured "but that's not fair" from a young person or interest group knows that morality is important, has a logic, the logic can be twisted, and morality can apply to almost all human affairs. I am amazed at how broadly people apply "fairness". Juries are easily swayed by fairness. Morality does not apply to all human affairs. Usually we don't think about right and wrong when we buy a bag of apples or go watch a game. We do make compromises between morality and practicality. We are clever at twisting moral logic when it suits our self interest. The Golden Rule is not the only logic in morality although it is the most important. All this qualifying is much less relevant than that morality potentially applies to nearly all human affairs, we know how it works, and we respect it. In other writing, I say more about morality as judge, moral logic, and the importance of morality. For now, intuitive feelings are enough.

Morality and Persons.

In a piece on morality and the evolution of the capacity for morality, I would have to explain what I assert here. Now, I only assert. Even if you disagree with some points here, you can still appreciate the force of “morality is important, real, and super natural”. I do not stress the material here after this section.

Morality pertains to relations between person-agents and pertains to relations between person-agents and nature as in how humans treat tigers and gorillas. (When people feel morality toward nature, they tend to treat nature as a person, and feel a sense of “noblesse oblige” or sense of serving our better, sometimes both.) Morality does not appear among rocks, rivers, plants, and most animals. Some crude morality does appear among some animals but that does not affect what I say. Full morality appears only among humans. People evolved. Wherever sentient beings evolve rather than are made all-of-a-piece, morality and personhood always go together. In the future, it will be possible to make computers, robots, planned chemical-based organisms as in the movie “Prometheus”, or other artificial life that is sentient but does not have sense of morality or a human sense of morality. When that happens, someone might have to revise what I say here.

Morality and persons go together. If you undermine one, you undermine the other. If you support one, you support the other. It is not necessary to think people have stereotypical souls for this connection to hold well.

The idea of a person points to the super natural. Regardless of whether a person can be reduced to a mechanism, still, a person is not like a rock, forest, avalanche, river, or even galaxy. A person is more complex and convoluted, and has a sense of self and other selves that even great non-person processes don't have. Sentient self-awareness, the ability to appreciate others, and the ability to interact with other similar selves, are all awe inspiring. This awe points to the super natural.

When the idea of a person combines with morality, the two together point strongly to the super natural. If you support morality and the idea of a person, you also support pointing to the super natural.

If you reject morality so as to avoid the idea of pointing to the super natural, you also reject the idea of a person. Most atheists, moral or otherwise, would not reject the idea of a person. If you reject the idea that morality points to the super natural then you also risk rejecting the idea of morality and rejecting the idea of a person.

When people in one group wish to de-personalize, dehumanize, demonize, and discourage people in another group, often they first accuse them of immorality or amorality. “They are like animals. If they don't have morality, they can't be persons; and, if they are not persons, but act something like persons, then they must be demons.” When we wish to see other people as people like the people in our group, we notice how they have many of the same moral feelings and judgments that we do, as, for example, they value fairness. If they appreciate morality and their morality is like ours, then they must be persons and they must be persons similar to us.

Part of the desire not to reject morality is also the desire not to reject personhood for members our group and members of other groups. In these days of PC, anyone who rejects morality and personhood for members of other groups will be called a bad person and risks being considered a not-person demon. I

think moral atheists know of this need to keep personhood and morality for propaganda purposes but, more importantly, also they feel it genuinely and deeply. Still, they do not appreciate that accepting the self and morality opens the door for the super natural and God.

See the chapter in this book on free will and see other writings. I do not fully understand arguments that can have selves, determinism, and free will. For me, “free will versus determinism” remains a problem for which I have no easy solution. We do not have absolute categorical free will, that is not necessary, and nobody with any real world sense expects it. We are free enough to be persons and to do morality. We are free enough so our personhood and moral ability both point to the super natural. We are free enough so our modest degree of free will supports arguments below that physics and biology cannot explain away morality as “nothing but”. Further details about free will are not useful here.

Realness, Physics, and Ideas.

-Many things are real but not everything is real in the same way. Some real things: electrons, gravity, space, time, energy, atoms, molecules, pebbles, planets, stars, galaxies, orbits, apples, fruit, varieties of apples, dinosaurs, bluebirds, red, blue, color, math, science, scientific method, logic, art, bad art, stories, imagination, rules, good, bad, right, wrong, should, should not, smiles, joy, sadness, and morality.

-Non-material things can be real. Ideas can be real. The objects of ideas can be real.

-I do not deal with the issue of reducing everything to matter and energy, to physicality. I use the term “event” so as to sidestep the issue. That issue is not relevant here, and I don’t want people to use it to distract themselves.

-Sometimes people say things are “more real” or “less real” but it is confusing to think about degrees until you have a grasp of qualitatively different realness. Some people sort reality into levels, and assert that a higher level controls lower levels. This approach is common in sociology and anthropology. While there might be levels, any simple sorting is not accurate, and higher levels do not simply control lower levels. Physical scientists like to look at reality from the bottom up, seeing things in terms of parts and interaction of parts. I prefer this approach but it too is not always accurate. Nothing I say depends on looking at reality in terms of more and less, higher and lower, control, parts, or wholes. So I ignore these issues. We do have to accept that non-material things can be real.

-Almost everything that can be explained in the world can be explained by physical laws. The ideas that people have of God and morality are events such as rain falling, a tree growing, a fox chasing a rabbit, a mother cat teaching kittens to kill, hunting, rivers, belief in river spirits, science, scientific method, love, and kindness. This result tempts us to explain away all non-physical realness, ideas, and belief, including all commitment to morality and all belief in God, but we should not do so.

-Just because an idea such as knowing the recipe for a cake is an event similar to the coming of Halley’s Comet does not mean the idea must be empty, full, true, false, silly, profound, likely true, likely false, or anything else. We do not judge scientific method by the fact that carrying it out requires a series of events in our brains. We judge ideas by truth and utility regardless of origin.

-Just because an idea is an event does not mean the idea is a mere event and we can explain it away by saying it is a mere event. Just because the idea that planetary orbits are ellipses is an event does not mean it is a mere event and that we should not check if planetary orbits are ellipses. Just because the idea of amoebas is an event does not mean it is a mere event and does not mean amoebas are mere fictions. Just because we have ideas of art does not mean art is real or unreal, our ideas of art are empty or full, our ideas are true or false. We cannot use the idea that ideas are events to explain away ideas. This kind of “explaining away” is not allowed. We have to use various criteria to assess ideas. For some ideas we can say they are “mere ideas” but for some we cannot.

-Just because an idea is an event does not mean the object of the idea is necessarily illusory or real. We have ideas about the Sun but that in itself does not mean the Sun is real or unreal. We have ideas about rabbits but rabbits are still real. We have ideas about parabolas, and, although there are no perfect ideal parabolas in nature, what is represented by our idea is still real enough and useful enough. We have the idea of a unicorn but it is not real. We have ideas about geometry, geometry is real enough, and some of its ideas are real too such as the Pythagorean Theorem in Euclidean space or the ratio of the diameter to the circumference of a circle in Euclidean space, also known as “pi”.

-For over 2400 years, Westerners have developed criteria for when ideas are true and useful, and when the objects of ideas are likely real, real in what way, and how real. We should learn this history, learn the criteria, and use them. We use various criteria in various arenas. We judge the usefulness and reality of apples differently than hyperbolic geometry.

-Sometimes we can use the fact that the capacity for an idea evolved to cast doubt on an idea, as with ghosts, terrorism, and bad selfish economic policies. Ideas from physics and evolutionary theory will add to our stock of criteria and will lead us to re-assess some criteria. They will not cause us to re-assess all criteria; they will not cause a revolution. We should be careful using physics and evolution simplistically to discredit morality and religion through explaining away, “merely”, and “nothing but”.

-The most pressing issue often is not whether an idea is real or its object is real but (1) whether some people believe in a true real idea for weak reasons such as blind faith and-or (2) some people “believe” in a true real idea even for bad reasons such as to use the idea to abuse other people, as with religion and terrorism. In those cases, we are tempted to kill the idea so as to end the badness; and, to kill the idea, we say the object is not real: God is not real because the idea of God is a mere event or merely evolved, so all religion is false, so people must believe in religion only for bad reasons, so all acts based on faith are necessarily bad, so stop doing it. Although the motives in these cases can be good, the technique of rejection is faulty and can be as bad as the original abuse. Think about saying the same of morality, love, or justice. People abuse the court system all the time but the best response is not to deny there can be any real justice. The best response in these cases is to forget about abuse for a while and instead focus on truth regardless of why people believe. Then we can help people to believe for good reasons and to act well on the basis of their good belief for good reasons.

-The criteria for the realness of an idea and-or its object, and the use of criteria for morality, religion, and evolution, are topics too big for here. It is enough that we cannot use physics or evolution simplistically to discredit ideas.

-By the criteria and the facts that I know, I judge: We have realness in different ways. Not everything is real in the same ways that stones, apples, art, and even geometry are real. Some ideas are useful and their objects are real even if the objects are not material. Because some ideas point to real things, the ideas are effectively real and they are useful in themselves. Ideas can be real. Morality can be real. God can be real. I do not spell out how I came to the conclusions. The conclusions are reasonable even in a world of events.

-In addition, because some ideas help with my imagination, those ideas are important.

Morality as a Real Idea and-or as an Idea with Real Object.

From above, I judge that morality is important and real. Morality uses the logic of the Golden Rule and “applies equally”. It is the judge of most things; most other things do not judge morality. These facts point to the super natural. This situation implies that the super natural is real. I do not spell out how I came to the conclusions. My conclusions are in line with the standard view of morality. These results are what moral atheists have to come to grips with, even if only to deny. As the reader likely has guessed, all this is good evidence that the idea of God is reasonable and that God is real; I say so explicitly below.

To assert that all this implies more, such as a detailed plan by God, is not useful. Do it with caution. In fact, I don’t think these points do imply a detailed plan although they imply some plan.

Evolution, Ideas, and Realness.

-Biology rests on physics. Most of our ideas have an evolved basis. I do not argue about the roles of learning versus an evolved basis. It is only necessary that an evolved basis plays a role. Ideas with an evolved basis include morality, spirits, gods, God, religion, ceremonies, sacraments, rituals, love, group alliances, group competition, friendship, family, music, math, science, and scientific method.

-The specific power of biology to explain evolved abilities, and to explain ideas rooted in evolved abilities, such as morality and religion, results from the general power of science to explain natural events.

-In the end, the results are the same in the specific case of biology as in the general case of physics but we have to go through evolution to get there. Just because the basis for an idea evolved does not make the idea empty, full, real, unreal, true, false, useful, harmful, profound, or silly. Just because the basis for an idea evolved does not make the object of the idea unreal or real. We evolved to sort nature into types such as rabbits, trees, species of trees, rocks, yellow stars, red stars, neutron stars, etc. Sometimes our ideas of types coincide with natural types and sometimes not.

-Some dubious evolved ideas: Sometimes we can say, because the capacity for an idea evolved, (a) the idea is merely evolved, (b) not important even if it seems important, (c) need not be taken seriously, (d) does not point to the super natural, and (e) the object of the idea is not real. Seeing illusions of water over desert roads is based in an evolved capacity for seeing, and we can dismiss the illusions as merely evolved, as not saying much about reality, and as not saying anything about the super natural. The same is true of fairies, witches, most superstition, and “the Force”. We have to argue about particular cases.

-Some good evolved ideas: Besides empty ideas, we can assert that some other ideas are not empty, and have real content, even if they too rest on an evolved base. The objects of the ideas are real, in their ways. We evolved stereoscopic vision (accurate depth perception) but space is still real. We evolved the ability to make ideas about types of animals and trees but the types often are real anyway. We evolved the ability to do algebra, and its results are real enough so we can see it as real too.

-Why we need to be calm and look at particular cases: Self-interest has a rock-solid basis in our evolved nature. Self-interest can lead to good ideas and bad. The self-interest of bourgeois merchants drove the American Revolution and shaped the American Constitution. Self-interest by Nazi Party members led to World War Two and the Holocaust. Self-interest can lead to good capitalism and bad capitalism. Self-interest often is grounds for doubt about ideas but even blatant self-interest can't always discredit an idea. A new mall, sports stadium, or back-to-nature park actually can be good although some people offer them out of self-interest without regard for the interests of others or of the whole. We should assess ideas and results on their merits and not primarily on the role of self-interest.

-Our capacity for reason evolved. That does not make reasoning always accurate or always deceitful. Our capacity for art evolved; some art is good, some is poor, and most is mediocre. Whether a capacity evolved is not key to assessing ideas. Whether ideas came from a capacity that has an evolved basis is not key to assessing ideas. We can use that information but it is not key.

-We cannot casually use the fact that an idea has an evolved basis to explain away the idea as "nothing but" or as "merely evolved". We can do this only if we are careful. Most people, including moral atheists, social scientists, and too often biologists, are not nearly careful enough.

-The same comments above about ideas as events (physics) apply to ideas as something for which we have an evolved basis (biology). We have been developing criteria for ideas and things for 2400 years, and we should learn to use those criteria.

Morality as an Idea with an Evolved Basis but still Real Idea.

-Keep in mind these points:

(1) The common stance: morality is important, the proper judge, has its own logic, is real, and is more than mundane.

(2) The common stance includes that morality implies the super natural.

(3) Ideas cannot be discredited just because their basis evolved. We have to assess them on merits.

-Just because we can explain human abilities for kinds of ideas by evolution does not mean morality is necessarily empty. Morality need not be merely an evolved delusion. Morality need not be false. The objects of ideas in morality (good and bad, right and wrong, should and should not) need not be false delusions. Morality need not be important or unimportant, real or unreal. Morality can point to the super natural or need not point to anything.

-We cannot use “merely evolved” to explain away morality, or to explain away that morality is important, is real, and points to the super natural. We cannot use “merely evolved” to explain away morality, or explain away that morality is important, real, and points to the super natural.

-I judge morality to be important, real, and point to the super natural; even though morality evolved; and even though we also evolved to make morality feel important, think morality is real, and think it points to the super natural. Sometimes evolution does not lead us astray but it leads us to the right place.

-For the case of morality, either: (a) you don't get it, and there is little more I can say; (b) you do get it but you don't accept it, mostly because you don't want to accept ANY super natural; or (c) you do get it and do accept it. I fall into category (c). All I can do is state the obvious negative arguments.

-The ideas that morality is important, is the judge of other activities, morality is real, and morality points to the super natural, are in the common stance about morality. Even if morality evolved and the supporting ideas evolved, morality and the supporting ideas are part of the common stance. If you deal with normal, evolved, mere humans, you have to see that this is what they think and they will respond to you on the basis of your attitude toward these points of their thinking.

-Besides evolving to act morally and to see moral logic, we evolved to think morality is important, morality is the proper judge of affairs, morality is real, morality is real in ways other than how material apples are real, and to think this kind of important realness points to the super natural. That we evolved to think all this does not matter. That we evolved to think all this does not make it all merely an evolved response, empty, an illusion, or a delusion. Evolution cannot be misused to explain away as “nothing but” the fact that we evolved to think that morality is important, the proper judge, real, and points to the super natural, without “gutting” morality.

-There is a jump from saying morality need not be unreal to saying morality is real. We do not make this jump by relying on anything in science. We cannot be stopped from this jump by anything in science as long as we hold to common ideas about the importance of morality etc. We have to use the established criteria of Western thought to help us decide.

-I judge that morality is real even if evolved. If algebra is real then morality is real. If scientific method is real then morality is real. If freedom is real then morality is real.

-There is a jump from saying morality is important and real to saying morality implies the super natural. This idea too is part of the common stance. We cannot be stopped from this jump by anything in science. We have to make this jump using the established criteria of Western thought.

-I judge that morality points to the super natural even if morality evolved.

-It is a mistake to go much further than this. It would be a mistake if theists used this result to argue for God's glorious plan to make us inevitably see morality and lead us to him.

-Without going too far, it is still fun to guess. I think God set up evolution so all this would happen. God set up the world so we would evolve morality, would evolve ideas that point to the super natural, and we

would think about the super natural, including thinking about God. God did not set it up so we inevitably come to the one truth about the one God. He set it up so we could think about many things, use our imagination, use judgment, and come up with some pretty good ideas. If God did this, then we owe it to him to use our minds well including using both our reasoning and imaginations well.

-You don't have to follow me in believing God set up the world this way. You have to decide about the realness of morality and the super natural, including God.

Confusion because Morality Varies and Morality can be Studied.

-There is a difference between the scientific study of morality versus commitment to morality. There is a difference between looking at morality from the outside versus commitment to morality from the inside. Scientists study morality from the outside: who thinks what, differences between groups, bias in use of the Golden Rule, etc. Commitment to morality is not needed in science. You need not be moral to study morality any more than you have to be an insect to study insects or a woman to study women. Scientists who study morality need no opinion about moral issues such as the death penalty but people committed to morality do need opinions. Scientists who study morality do not have to decide if morality is real but people who commit to morality need to see that their stance implies morality is real. Scientists who study morality need no opinion about the super natural but people committed to morality must form opinions about the super natural. The fact that some moral thinking varies by group does not mean morality is objective or merely conventional, true or false, real or made up, important or unimportant, super natural or merely natural. It does not mean that morality is profound and so true or that morality is silly and so false. People differ on abortion, and differences follow religion, gender, ethnicity, age, and class. That does not mean all abortion is simply bad or simply good, or morality is irrelevant and ultimately empty. We have to decide for ourselves. (I do not say the beliefs of a scientist may not direct work and cannot improve work but I do say belief in morality is not essential to study morality and need not get in the way either.)

-It is easy to think that, because we can study morality from the outside, and morality follows patterns of social life, morality is entirely a matter of convention, a matter of subjective belief, or morality is entirely a response based on evolved capacities; so morality is not real in the same way that rabbits and logic are real. This conclusion might be true of belief in ghosts but it is not true of morality. We should not make this mistake. If you commit to morality, you commit to something more than mere convention, subjective belief, or a response based on evolved capacities.

-Morality can be studied scientifically but commitment to morality, morality itself, is not part of science. Even so, the fact that morality is not needed in science does not mean there is no real morality. Morality is not an illusion. Morality is real and it affects how we act. Moral atheists think, and nearly all of us think, morality is important, morality is real, and we still should act morally anyway even if science does not say morality is real in the same way science says an electron is real. We are committed to morality. We have to decide if commitment to morality implies morality is real and implies the super natural. I think it must.

-Morality evolved in people. We did not get morality whole, all at once, and perfect. Whenever morality evolves, it must evolve among other forces such as bias towards family, friends, and allies, and against rivals. To be fully formed, morality must evolve in a context of society and culture. Morality cannot evolve as a self-contained perfect mechanism. If it came that way, it would not be evolved, and we would know

something was amiss in our physical world. The basic principles of the Golden Rule and “applies equally” would appear wherever morality evolved but how they are used would vary from situation to situation and from society to society. We should expect different styles of morality and biases in how morality applies. The fact that styles and bias occur is not evidence that morality is merely evolved or merely conventional but evidence for how real biological organisms must get morality in a real physical world. The fact that humans come so close to the pure morality of the Golden Rule and selfless love is more of a wonder than the fact that we don’t reach morality perfectly. These two facts are a cause for much wonder and joy: (1) We can see the logic of morality fairly clearly, and (2) we can act mostly morally but don’t have to act like prudes and we can act happily in other ways mixed with morality. Sometimes evolution really does do a good job and really does bring us to something real, good, and not material.

Confusion about the Unthinking Adoption of Morality and about Conventional Morality.

-Most people do not think through morality and most people merely follow the conventional morality of the group that they got socialized into recently. I do not talk about the relation of conventional morality to the moral logic of the Golden Rule and “applies equally”. Conventional moralities can become outdated, and look silly. People cling to their morality for selfish reasons. But basic principles cannot become outdated and silly. People who criticize conventional morality think they debunk all morality but they don’t. Often critics of morality are quite moral themselves; they simply want a better morality than what prevails. They want people to think. It helps to return to basic principles. If you fault conventional or contrived morality, make sure you are moral. Think what principles your morality rests on. Think about the implications of any morality and of your particular morality.

-The issues of (1) morality is important, (2) “morality is real” and (3) “morality implies the super natural” are not merely issues of social convention or language. They are real issues that we have to decide.

-If we commit to morality, what principles guide us? What specifically is right and wrong? How do we get past convention to something deeper?

The Confusing Stance of Moral Atheists.

-(1) Moral atheists use these ideas in confusing ways and often self-serving ways: physical laws underlie everything including evolution, the capacities for morality and religion evolved, all things that can be explained by physical laws are not real, all that can be explained by physical laws can be explained away as “nothing but”, all capacities and ideas that evolved are merely evolved, all things that evolved can be explained away as “nothing but”, the distinction between scientific study of morality versus commitment to morality, and conventional morality. Other groups abuse these ideas too but I focus on moral atheists.

(A) When moral atheists stress their own moral quality, they act like committed standard moralists who have made up their minds on particular moral issues and who have unique moral authority. They seem to take the standard stance that morality is important, a judge, and quite real, and points to something real other than what is merely physically real, the super natural.

(B) When moral atheists attack religion, they act like scientists with a secret agenda who use data mostly as a way to treat both belief and the morality of believers like the mere fall of a pebble or mere belief in

ghosts. Morality is not real and is not as important as physics, evolutionary theory, or scientific method. Moral atheists explain away religious belief as mere false conventional superstition built on a mere shaky evolved base built on mere matter and energy. Moral atheists dismiss the morality of believers as merely another layer of mere convention-and-evolved reflex stacked on top of mere contrived evolved belief in unreal spirits. Morality only seems important due to convention.

When considering the morality of believers, moral atheists attack morality. When it comes to their own morality, moral atheists defend morality. When convenient, moral atheists stress morality and stress their particular morality. When convenient, moral atheists undermine all morality as contrived, built on evolved responses, and especially they attack the particular morality of believers. Moral atheists use physics and biology in the attack. Moral atheists take credit for their commitment to morality and their moral judgment but deny credit to believers. Moral atheists discredit the morality of believers as a way to bolster their own moral stance and their stance against belief.

(C) This approach is typical of groups that say “our morality and way of life is great but their morality and way of life is perverse even if it resembles ours in some details”. Fundamentalists use this tactic. This ability to twist ideas has a firm basis in evolved human nature.

(D) The facts that (a) this approach is typical, (b) this approach is often used nefariously, and (c) the ability to use it evolved, do not necessarily (d) make this approach wrong! We have to consider cases. Remember that origin is not a good reason. In this case with morality and religion, the attitude of “have your cake and eat it too” is not allowable. You should be able to see why.

-(2) If moral atheists want to be taken seriously as moral people, to be taken seriously by normal people who are not yet atheists, then moral atheists have to present themselves as normally moral, that is, they need to make clear that they take the standard stance that morality is important, real, and points to the super natural. At the very least, they have to say that morality is important in a way that little else in life is important. At second least, they have to say that the importance of morality makes it real in a way similar to scientific method and physical laws. Then they have to be honest about the implications for the super natural. When they do all this, moral atheists open the door to God. To gain moral credibility, moral atheists cannot be typical atheists.

-(3) To deny the super natural, moral atheists say morality is not real and is merely an evolved reflex. In that case, they lose credibility with normal people, the people they wish to convert. They also undermine their own morality and undermine arguments that anybody should follow their morality or any morality. When moral atheists say morality is merely evolved or merely convention, we may stop listening to them about right and wrong. If a police officer is not near, we may hit them on the head and take their money. If moral atheists say morality is important but moral atheists deny that morality is real or points to the super natural, they have to explain. They still lose credibility. To be atheists, moral atheists cannot be moral in the standard way and so cannot be moral atheists. They have to be amoral atheists, and so not credible to most people.

-(4) Moral atheists might say: “We act morally like everybody else. We are not sure why we act morally and what our actions imply. Maybe we are moral robots programmed by evolution just like religious believers and everybody else. But you can rely on us to act morally. So you don’t have to be afraid of us.

So you should take what we say seriously, including that God is not needed. So God is not real.” I think this is what moral atheists effectively do say but don’t come right out with. If so, this message might be some comfort to people who fear atheists but it is not an argument against belief in God. To be charitable to moral atheists, David Hume said much the same when amazed by his own moral life in the face of his arguments questioning morality and religion. Because I hold David Hume in high regard, moral atheists may take my remark as a compliment.

-(5) Moral atheists cannot both (1) have the cake of real morality with full moral credibility, and (2) eat the cake of morality-as-merely-evolved-reflex, as explained away “nothing but”. They cannot say: the morals of other people are merely convention because those people are religious, so that other people are mere religious dupes, while the morals of moral atheists are always better. They cannot be morally credible to most people and still deny credibility to religion. They could be morally credible to a small group of like-minded people in ways that I do not write about here and that are not important.

-(6) You can be as reductionist as you wish and be perfectly consistent. You can reduce the world to matter and energy. You can reduce all structure and all action by all organisms to the residue of natural selection. But you cannot take a fully reductionist stance and be a normally moral person too. So you cannot take a fully reductionist stance and be a moral atheist too.

-(7) All intellectual abilities evolved. The ability for atheism evolved. If atheism requires added intellectual effort, if only to stifle religious passion, then that ability for added intellect evolved. If “merely evolved” can automatically discredit religion then it can also discredit any intellectual ability and so discredit atheism, including any added intellectual power claimed by atheists. We need to consider how some ideas are valid while other ideas are invalid. Crediting and discrediting does not depend on evolved or not evolved. “Evolved” might play a role in discussion if is used wisely. Western thinkers have developed criteria for assessing ideas and objects, and we should rely on those criteria. By those criteria, neither believers nor atheists can unilaterally simply prevail.

(A) Is there is a difference between morality, religion, and atheism, one that allows “merely evolved” to discredit religion and the morality of believers but not to discredit atheism and the morality of atheists? What are the criteria for valid ideas about the world, morality, realness, and the super natural? If moral atheists try this task, likely they will find that morality is fairly valid and a is good candidate for real. So, moral atheists have to face commitment to morality and its implications. If atheists find criteria that make moral atheism more valid than bad religion, likely they will find the same criteria make good responsible religion as valid as moral atheism. If atheists discredit to morality so as to show their mental superiority and better grasp of criteria, then likely they have to discredit moral atheism too. If atheists discredit ideas about God, they might undermine other intellectual effort including their claim to superiority. Use morality to get a feel for what argument about real, super natural, and God should be like.

(B) Here is where battles between theists and atheists go awry. Each camp pushes criteria based on its ideas of science so as to make inevitable that we need God to explain the world or we do not need God. Theists assert a version of the “argument from design” (complexity of the world). Atheists incorrectly offer as proof that God does not exist the fact that physical laws can explain almost everything. I think the role of physical laws can be in the mix for discussion but it is not key. What matters is what is important and real. I used morality to get at that. If you accept morality as important, accept commitment to morality, so

think morality is real, but still deny God is real, then it is not likely the wonders of the world will convince you and it is likely you will use science to back up your denial. If you think God is real, then you will see each pebble and each good act as evidence. Both sides use science to support convictions held for other reasons. Neither side actually gets its convictions from science. I get to the best "other reasons". With that issue of other reasons clear, then I can use science properly, not as a mere tool. See Part Five.

-(8) Moral atheists need to be clear on the importance and realness of morality, especially to themselves. If they think morality is important, or is not important, they need to say so clearly and say how. The same is true of realness. If moral atheists think morality is important but not real, and so morality does not point to the super natural, they need to say how morality is important but not real. They might have to accept that some non-material things are real enough. If they think morality is important and real but does not point to the super natural, they have to explain. Atheists need to explain why we should follow morality if their view of morality is true. To clarify issues and their thinking, moral atheists might focus on comparing morality to scientific method. They are both similar and different in ways that bear on this discussion but that I can't go into here.

Implications.

-The evolved capacity for morality is NOT a case where the idea is empty and the object is not real. It is not a case where the idea can be explained away as nothing but evolved and-or conventional. Morality is a case where the idea has merit and the object is real even though the ability for the idea evolved and even though morality differs between groups. (Think of the objects of morality as acts, judgments, rules, and taking people as persons). Morality is evolved but not merely evolved. Morality is important although its basis evolved. Morality is real although its basis evolved. Morality points to the super natural although its basis evolved.

-Moral atheists must agree with the above if they wish to be moral in the normal way that they present themselves. They cannot assert that morality is important, the appropriate judge of most activities, or real but only merely evolved.

-If your commitment to morality is legitimate then so is the honest commitment of other people, with all that a commitment to morality entails. You and others will not agree on all points of morality but, if you hold a moral stance, you cannot discredit the right of others to hold a moral stance. If the commitment of other people is legitimate, so is their speculation on the links of morality to the super natural and God. If their morality is all merely contrived convention built on evolved responses then so is yours.

-Evolution sometimes leads us to have abstract ideas that are still real and-or have real things as their objects even if the things are not real in the same way carrots are real. Evolution led us to do math, logic, science, and love. I believe evolution led us to act morally and to have accurate ideas of morality and moral logic. This is a good thing, and usually enjoyable.

-My conclusion does not imply that: the Golden Rule is all there is to morality, everybody is fully moral even if they don't show it yet, everybody agrees on all points of morality, or that the role of evolution in bringing us to morality is conclusive evidence of God. There is more to morality that I have not written

about here, but here is not the place to go into it. Nothing that I left out alters any results. The argument here allows us to guess about God but does not prove God.

Similar Arguments Apply Directly to Belief in God.

-As with morality, belief in God is a real fact about human life that scientists can study but God might be real or might not. A scientist need not believe in God or disbelieve in God to study belief in God.

-As with morality, just because God is not needed in science does not necessarily make the idea of God empty, false, useless, stupid, and harmful. The fact that God is not needed in science does not imply that believers must be basically irrational. The fact that a scientist can study belief in God without believing in God and without rejecting God has no bearing on whether God is real or not. God might be real even if we don't see God clearly. The sun is real although it seems to us that the Sun goes around us. The idea of God can be useful like the idea of a field in physics. We can accept physics and still believe in a mind behind it all. Belief in God helps us see and belief can be done well. Belief in God can go with science. Science does not automatically discredit morality or God.

-Just because we can explain belief in God as resting on evolved abilities does not mean God is not real or the idea of God is empty. We can accept evolution and still believe in a God behind it all. Although the capacity to believe in God evolved, the idea of God need not be merely evolved, mere illusion. God need not be mere illusion. We can accept evolution and still believe God set up the world so sentient-moral-aesthetic life would evolve. Evolution does not automatically discredit God.

-When asserting that morality is not merely evolved and that morality is important even if evolved, we also imply the super natural. Even when we accept the evolution of the capacity for morality, a commitment to morality points to the super natural.

-We can argue the same about the capacity to believe in God. The capacity evolved but the idea of God is not merely evolved, it is important, and it arises legitimately when we accept that morality implies the super natural. Moral people can believe in God without being stupid, foolish, or insane. They still cannot prove that God exists, and they don't have to.

-A moral atheist tacitly asserts that the capacity for morality evolved but morality is not merely evolved, and morality is important. A theist argues the same for God. It is possible, but hard, to argue for one but not the other. To assert (a) morality is important and evolved but morality is more than merely evolved and (b) the idea of God is only merely evolved and CANNOT have a real object, is close to asserting a contradiction. It is even harder to assert one without the other when we see that morality points to the super natural and opens the door for God. To say this without contradiction requires hard careful thought of the kind that I have not seen among moral atheists or among theists.

-Once we accept that belief in God is sane, and usually tied to morality, then we can argue whether God is real and in what ways God is real. Then we can apply the criteria and arguments that have grown up over the last 2400 years. I do not do this here. I like thinking about the topic but not disputing it because people are not adept in how they think of "real", "nothing but", "not nothing but", and "good".

-There is a gap between saying the idea of God need not be stupid versus saying God is real. Even if we allow that morality points to the super natural, there is still a gap between allowing the idea of God versus actually believing God is real. I accept the gap and step over it.

-Based on all that I know including the fact that the idea of God evolved, I judge that God is real. The status of morality as important, real, and pointing to the super natural, supports my belief.

-I said above that evolution led us to act morally and to see morality. It is easy to say the same about God, and to think God planned all this, but I am cautious. In fact, I do think that, but I don't want to argue it much. There is no obvious "logic of God" as there is "logic of morality". Evolution led us to be able to guess about God, even to guess adeptly, but it did not lead us to the same clearness about God as we can have with morality. I am glad this result is thus. Theists should not "go bonkers" and abuse evolution to say it led us to God, and so is solid proof of God. God wants more spirit and imagination out of you than that. Atheists should be a tolerant of theists who read too much into evolution. They should sternly again remind those theists that evolution gave us the basis for racism, religious war, ideas of unicorns, bad politics, and atheism.

Further Comments.

-The fact that God and morality often go together does NOT mean that God is needed to enforce morality through rewards such as heaven or punishments such as hell. See Chapter One and Part Five. People do not need God to be moral. Religious people are not usually more moral on average than non-religious people or atheists. Atheists are not more moral than average. Religion does not necessarily cloud minds and atheism does not necessarily clear them – and vice versa. I do not discuss relations of morality and God other than to say morality leads to the super natural and allows belief in God. See Part Five.

-I have no idea, and it is not relevant here: if God made morality, morality stands on its own, or morality made God. I do not know if God must conform to morality. I am pretty sure he (she) does.

-If you wish to argue these questions, then you should learn how people in general, and Indo-Europeans in particular, use and misuse the ideas of "real", "moral", and "good".

-Regardless of what you decide about morality, the super natural, and God, you should accept that belief in gods (God) has a firm base in our evolved nature, like sex, booze, and bad politics. People want to believe in gods (God) and they will believe in gods (God) regardless of arguments. To browbeat people not to believe in God is to force us against a big part of our evolved nature. That hurts us. People won't stop believing and-or searching. Asking them to stop believing is like American Prohibition or campaigns against sex outside of marriage and not in "missionary position". Forcing them to (try to be) hyper-rational in an anti-religious way leads them to be more irrational in general. Whether you believe in God or do not, it is better to guide most people to good belief. Good belief cannot include merely civic ceremonies and patriotic slogans but has to include ideas about morality, the super natural, and God. Paradoxically to atheists, good belief actually leads people to be more rational overall. Once people are calm about the super natural and religion, then you can review cases for and against particular ideas from religion, for and against God.

-Maybe the simple person who tries to act well and help people, and believes in God, has got it right even though he-she acts on a strong genetic base while you use your keen evolved intellect to overwhelm the evolutionary drive to religion. Sometimes other people really are correct even when they are not as smart as you are. I am not giving you platitudes; I am giving you the results of my empirical observation.

-I am lucky because I can commit to morality, accept the super natural, and guess about God without going crazy. I can accept easily that evolution led us to: think well sometimes, conform to morality most of the time (act well), commit to morality, see moral logic, think about realness, think about the super natural, think about God, accept God, and make adept guesses about God. I am lucky because I think good religion, good morality, good thinking, imagination, and variety can come together.

(6) Ideals, Morality, Unusual People, and Unusual Situations.

See chapters One, Two, and Three. The label (6) continues from the Synopsis of Part One.

Morality is an ideal. We have abilities to see ideals and work with ideals. Ideals and our abilities for them can be rooted in our genes, and usually are. This does not mean genes specify abilities for any particular ideal such as calculus or ballroom dancing. Genes do specify our ability for morality. What we learn for other ideals can apply to morality even though we have genes specifically for moral ability.

Even as an ideal, morality can mix with practicality and usually does. Usually morality and success help each other – but not always. How well we do, how closely we approach the ideal, depends on us and on situations, in particular on human-made institutions. No human is perfect; none of our institutions are perfect; we should not expect that; and God does not expect that.

We have to reject two mirrored mistakes: (1) The first mistake is a version of explaining away as nothing but. Nothing rooted in our genes can be real in itself. Ideals can't be real ideals. They are only apparent, and are only a means to practical ends. Ideals are only convenient illusions. The fact that we think some ideas are ideals is part of self-delusion that allows us to think in useful ways, manipulate ourselves, and manipulate others in the service of our success. (2) Many ideals take us out of the normal physical world entirely to something else, something more exact, truer, and better. We can transcend our merely physical nature, and we do so through ideals. This something else we rightly can call the super natural or the world of ideal forms.

We have to reject the mistakes as they apply to morality: (3) Morality is explained away as with any ideal, as nothing but evolved behavior, really an indirect means to practical success, so necessarily morality is not a true ideal, is not real as we wish ideals were real, and morality does not point to the super natural. (4) Morality is so clearly super natural that it proves the super natural and God, and morality shows that humans totally transcend our merely physical evolved base even though morality originally came from that base. Any institution or society based in God-given morality must succeed and must succeed better than any society based merely in human ideas.

Here we need a dose of simple empirical observed reality. In a separate work, I would justify what I say but here I merely state it. We do have ideals. Our ideals are based on genetic abilities. We can have ideals even though we are genetically based organisms. We can have ideals even though they came out

of practicality and still intertwine with practicality. As of 2016, nobody knows for sure how this happens but it does happen. How it happens might not be the same for all ideals. We have ideals even though we don't live up to them. We have ideals even when some of us fall far short. I am not sure what it means to say our ideals transcend physical reality but I think it does not happen as some philosophers and religious writers say. It is unlikely that our ideals describe any separate distinct better, cleaner, realer world. The fact that some people almost live up to ideals does not mean ideals simply transcend this world or that another better world is real or realer. Even so, ideals can point to the super natural. That still does not mean they point to an ethereal alternative world. I have no definite idea of relations between ideals, the super natural, and any ethereal alternative world.

We have ideals of: peacetime; ethnic relations; stories; traffic patterns; a spaceflight to Mars; worship of God; enlightenment; meditation; teacher; student; family love; spousal love; romantic love; and a ballet. We might be wrong, and disagree, but we can still form ideals, and the ideals might even correspond to some best that could actually occur but almost never does.

Some ideals come directly from our hunter-gatherer past, but not all. We made up some new ideals to respond to new situations. Here are some ideals that certainly have roots in our evolved history, but did not play much of a role in our hunter-gatherer past, yet do play a role in other life: ideal Justice, ideal golf game, ideal multi-course meal, ideal rock song, the great American novel, ideal symphony, ideal baseball game, grand theory of everything in physics, most fields in mathematics, honor, ideal business firm, and ideal academic department.

Because we have the ability to see ideals and deal with them, for here think of ideals in terms of abilities. Some of our modern ideals-abilities seem so far removed from hunter-gatherer life that we don't see how they could have any basis in any genes selected for in that life. It makes sense that hunter-gatherers need to count, add, subtract, and maybe even multiply. But how could that modest ability possibly serve as the basis for calculus and hyperbolic geometry? Hunter-gatherers could hum tunes and, I think, had musical instruments even hundreds of thousands of years ago. But how could that be the basis for Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Babbitt? Hunter-gatherers had to run after rabbits and step carefully among the weeds for berries. How is that activity the basis for ballet or even martial arts? Hunter-gatherers debated fairness but they had nothing like the overly-elaborate American legal system with rules of evidence and testimony. Without further argument, I assert it is all so. Whatever abilities that we evolved as hunter-gatherers, they serve as the basis for the abilities and ideals that we have now, however much elaborated on the basis of our original abilities. Keep in mind that most of our skill, and much of how we understand ideals, was learned, and was built up in increments over a long time by unusual people. All that regular people had to understand was what the smart people said; and we can do that. God did not reach down to give us the ability for calculus, ballet, or the blues. The same is true of morality.

What of unusual people such as the musicians mentioned above, and including mathematicians such as Newton and Gauss, or physicists such as Newton, Einstein, and Dirac? How could their abilities, insights, and the ideal worlds of beautiful simplicity that they invoke possibly have roots in genes that evolved so people could chase rabbits, pick berries, and connive for spouses? Again, without argument, I assert it is all so. All the abilities, ideals, and hinted-at ideal worlds that we see now are based on genes evolved by about a hundred thousand years ago for lives different than now. To paraphrase what Newton famously said, even great minds see further only by standing on the shoulders of giants.

What of people who are inept at math, music, justice, dance, etc? There are so many mediocre people and there are even too many people who are downright inept. One night at a karaoke bar will convince any doubter that many people have no idea what a song is all about. Doesn't that prove that genes from long ago are barely enough for average performance, and could not be enough for ideals and good performance? Not at all. I repeat that whatever abilities evolved over one hundred thousand years ago were enough. Almost everybody can hum along with a tune well enough so that other people recognize it even if few people hum along exactly and even fewer can write a good song.

Which ideals are real in the way that ideals can be real? Which point to the super natural? Those issues are something that we have to work out ideal-by-ideal. Some of the ideals are real and do point to the super natural, including morality; and that is enough for here. Most of them don't.

The two opposite mistakes, noted above, about morality, show up even in (A) everyday life with its mix of ideal and practical; but show up more clearly: (B) when people are unusually good; (C) unusually bad; and (D) persistent living situations are unusually good, better than we might expect among our hunter-gatherer ancestors. The same issues can show up in (E) persistently bad situations, but I don't go into that option here.

(A) Even when striving to be moral, perhaps especially then, we rarely get beyond our evolved nature, we rarely act against the better interests of our selves, family, friends, and group. Morality usually serves practicality. This limit does not mean we do not see an ideal, there is no ideal, the ideal is not real in the way that ideals can be real, and the ideal does not point to the super natural. This limit does not explain away morality as nothing but. It also does not prove morality somehow has found a way beyond physical limits to a spiritual realm or morality has found a way to bend mere physical reality to serve greater spiritual needs. It only means we have evolved to see an ideal, even if we cannot live up to it fully, and that this ideal points to the super natural.

(B) Sometimes people do approach the ideal and do act against their own apparent better interests as with good priests and monks (not Cardinal Richelieu). Biologists can offer plausible explanations based on traits that would have been useful while we were hunter-gatherers, especially to give benefit to our kin, but can be distorted now, as when humans teach geese to guard a human house. In fact, in real life, the kin of priests often do well, and, so, by evolutionary standards, the priests indirectly do well too. I give no details. I accept the biological explanations for most cases.

Sometimes people do approach a moral ideal and there is no plausible biological account, as with saints such as Mother Teresa. Biologists see such people as rare "mistakes" that would have been ended by natural selection in our past. Whether these people somehow transcend our genetic base cannot be determined and is not a relevant issue even if fun to guess about. Most likely, they result from a bizarre accumulation of genes coupled with odd childhoods. Mostly I agree with this biological view. Still, though these people might have been mistakes in our past, they can also serve as inspiration now if we don't expect to do as well and don't fear God will punish us for not doing as well. Even mistakes can point out an ideal and can help normal people to see how to blend ideal with practical.

Biological rejoinders do not undermine my account, that morality is an ideal, is real in the way that ideals are real, and points to the super natural. On the other hand, an occasional Mother Teresa also does not mean we overcame biology and so we validate the spiritual. All that an occasional Mother Teresa does is to offer some support that morality is an ideal that points to the super natural.

(C) Sometimes people act quite badly, and our selfish nature is revealed. People ignore morality or act with deliberate immorality such as the infamous tyrants of fascism, communism, and even capitalism – Hitler, Stalin, and take your pick of a robber baron. Again, this fact does not undermine that morality is an ideal, has genetic roots, and yet still points to the super natural. Sometimes even a good natured dog bites its child, some dogs are nasty by nature, and almost any dog can be taught to be nasty. Usually, though, self-interest leads the dog and child to get along so morality and self-interest coincide. Likewise, the presence of some bad people does not confirm metaphysical evil and so in a roundabout way confirm the super natural. The presence of some bad people does not mean that practicality-and-genes have given us only illusions of ideals. Both strong bad and good are extensions of an evolved human nature. The bad extensions can tell us what not to do and can tell us what mixes of self-interest and morality seem to work out in the short run but don't work out well in the long run.

(D) Sometimes people act consistently well in some particular situations, beyond what we might expect in most situations in our hunter gatherer past or in most situations now. People in general can act well in Christian churches, Buddhist villages, and real-enough American middle class suburbs. Good institutions can raise us closer to the moral ideal, above what we might expect, and keep us at a higher level. So we find it hard to understand how the basis for sustained human behavior, that supports such situations, could have evolved in our hunter-gatherer past, where such good situations could not be built. This problem can seem more urgent than the case of unusual adept individuals, or good individuals, because it changes the behavior of a lot of us "average Joes" and so cannot be attributed to the accidental accumulation of genes in "outlier" individuals. Even so, this outcome does not prove that morality is super natural and so we can transcend our biological roots. People can do better than average for a long time under good institutions, and that is where most of the credit should lie. Even when people do better in these special conditions, people do not do all that much better. People don't all become full-on saints. Discord mars even the best Quaker, Mennonite, and Hutterite communities, and Roman Catholic monasteries. This outcome also does not prove we merely have evolved selfishness, selfishness that can be used almost any way, and so we can never see beyond narrow selfishness. We can see these nice situations as extensions of human nature but not only as modified selfishness. A group of dogs can be taught to live happily with a human family and a house full of cats but that does not prove morality is real and morality can uplift even dogs and cats to transcend their genes. It also does not prove that the human owners who taught them to live together did not have harmony in mind besides the narrow self-interest of a quiet peaceful house with watchdogs and rat catchers. As with unusual good individuals, unusual good situations teach us that there is an ideal, we can see the ideal, and what are the conditions that might bring us closer to the good ideal.

The facts that some of us can do calculus, play Bach, build skyscrapers, or survive long glides in flight suits (bird suits) do not mean humans have transcended our biological roots. They also do not mean we are never inspired by our biology to see ideals, strive for ideals, and mix ideals with practicality.

All good and bad behavior, good and bad institutions, and great human achievements, are built on our natural evolved abilities rooted in our biological past; and I am fine with that fact. I don't need actual proven transcendent sustained moral acts, good or bad, to accept that morality is important, real, and points to the super natural.

PART 2: Same Subject but Even More Talky.

The two numbered sections here are phases of the same long argument. Commitment to morality entails accepting some super natural, and accepting some super natural allows people to guess about God and to believe in God. I do not repeat points from above about the outside study of morality versus the inside commitment to morality. I do use those ideas and I do make the same points in other ways. If physicists can believe that fields and non-Euclidean space are objectively real, then, with only a small stretch of the imagination, I may believe in morality and guess about God.

(1) The Implications of Morality for the Super Natural; No Physics or Evolution Yet.

For now, don't think about whether natural science can explain everything, and don't think about the fact that the capacity for any ideas or preferences evolved, such as the capacity for morality, ideas about God, or desires for fatty food and sex. Just think that we have ideas and preferences.

It is not possible to prove either that God exists or does not exist. It is possible to show we do not need God to explain almost everything that happens in the world, and we do not need God to explain human abilities and ideas. We can explain almost everything important through science. That is not the same as proving God does not exist. Even the TV comedy "The Big Bang Theory" knows the difference between where an idea comes from versus the truth and value of the idea. Sheldon the physicist defended the truth and value of James Clerk Maxwell's ideas, as ideas, from the attempt by Amy the neurobiologist to reduce Maxwell's ideas to brain operation (mere events).

If anybody holds anything to be really important, he-she raises that thing to the level of the super natural whether he-she knows so or not. Think about what the term "really" implies in the following cases. If John thinks morality is really important, then John makes morality super natural. If John thinks amorality or immorality is really important, John makes that super natural. If Jane thinks power is really important, Jane makes power super natural. If Joe thinks wealth is what really matters, Joe makes wealth super natural. If Susan thinks family is really important, Susan makes family super natural. If Steve thinks pleasure is really important, then Steve makes pleasure super natural. If Anna thinks success is really central, Anna makes success super natural. If Bob thinks coolness is really cool, Bob makes coolness super natural. If Sally thinks "the Force" is really real, Sally makes the Force super natural. If James thinks a person is not the same as a stone, and that people really matter, then James makes "person" super natural. If Joy believes in love, Joy makes love super natural. If Frank thinks the Church is really important, then Frank makes the Church super natural. If Molly thinks reason is really central, Molly makes reason super natural. If Richard thinks science is really important, then Richard raises science to the level of the super natural. If Richard thinks scientific method is really important and privileged above other ways of thinking, then Richard raises scientific method to the level of the super natural. If Bertie thinks logic and-or math is really important, then Bertie raises logic and-or math to the super natural. If Alfred thinks process is how the world works, then Alfred raises process to the super natural. If Emile

thinks society is really important, Emile raises society to the super natural. If Ray thinks myth explains what the world is all about, Ray raises myth to the super natural. If Vern thinks cultural ideas explain what the world is all about and determine the reality of the world, then Vern raises culture and ideas to the super natural.

It is not correct to say we worship everything that we make super natural but it might help to get the full force of the idea “make super natural” to think that people do worship all the things listed above when they make them important. I have seen people worship wealth, power, fame, and success. I have seen academics worship reputation and success, and covet power to the point of worship.

Nearly all of the things listed above are non-material but some straddle the border such as “person” and “church”. Some we think of as real such as morality and love. Some take on the illusion of realness but we wish not to make them real such as “coolness”, “power”, and “success”. Some we would accept as judges of other activities, such as love; but some we don’t want to be judges, such as power. Imagine more items for this list. It is a good exercise to go through a list to decide which items are material, which abstract, and which straddle the line; which we want to be judge and which we want to be judged; which are important and which not; which we want to be real and which not. Then decide which items point to the super natural.

The ideas that (1) important things imply the super natural, and (2) we should use morality as the way to best review-and-access the super natural, were known in the West 2400 years ago. Modern people forgot. These ideas were maybe the main message of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Christianity leaned on them usefully. David Hume made points about the realness, or not realness, of morality; morality as judge; and how people feel morality. Immanuel Kant made important points about moral logic, morality as judge, and how morality appeals to people.

Interlude: What does it mean to “point” to the super natural or make the super natural “important”? Does accepting the super natural contradict the idea that science can explain almost everything in the world? Probably it does not. These are valid long-standing questions. I cannot go after them here. I don’t have to answer them to go on with what I need. I see no contradiction in the fact that morality – or things that we consider important in this world – point to the super natural. This comparison might help: The super natural plays the same role in religion and morality that the ideas of law, rule of law, order, fairness, and justice play in our legal system. Lesser ideas, such as the rules for evidence, are important in our justice system if they point to defining basic ideas. A particular case should use ideas that in turn point to ideals such as “fairness” and “due process”. Any particular case need not be decided by direct reference to an important ideal. Any particular case can be decided by particular laws that apply to the case; and those in turn point to ideals. That is what we mean by “pointing to”. The interlude is over.

Whether there is a problem between “pointing to the super natural” versus “science explains all” does not matter in the dispute between moral atheists versus theists. Moral atheists believe in morality the same way that everyday people do including theists. Moral atheists make morality important. Moral atheists make morality important in a way that entails morality is real. Moral atheists believe in morality in a way that points to the super natural. If moral atheists deny that morality points to the super natural then they are not moral atheists in the way that nearly everybody knows morality and as they present themselves. If moral atheists wish to believe in morality in a different way than everybody else, a way that makes

morality important and real but does imply the super natural, moral atheists have to explain. If they wish to believe in morality in a different way that makes morality important but not somehow real, they have to explain. If they think morality is important and real for them, yet does not point to the super natural for them, and morality is merely a convention response built on an evolutionary base for everybody else, they have to say so, and have to say how. They have done none of this. So, I take moral atheists to believe in morality in the same way that most people do, a way that makes morality important, real, and points to the super natural. That is all I need here.

For brevity, “making something super natural” can mean “making something point to the super natural”. “Raising something to the super natural” can serve to mean “seeing that something is so important that it points to something super natural”.

A person can raise more than one thing to the super natural, and usually we do. Think of the examples given above.

Making anything point to the super natural does not necessarily imply any details about the super natural. We don't know much about the super natural. People who think morality is important have different ideas about the super natural than people who think power is all. I don't go into this topic here. It is enough to know that we think of important things as somehow more than ordinary things.

If we make anything super natural, potentially we allow other people to make things super natural. At the least, we allow other people the right to make the same thing super natural. If Steve believes in love he cannot deny Mary the right to believe in love. We strongly imply that other people have the right to make things other than what we believe point to super natural. Steve has a hard time denying Jim the right to believe in duty. Opening any door to the super natural opens that door fairly wide.

We cannot allow people to make anything super natural willy-nilly but we cannot deny them entirely and cannot limit them only to what we think is super natural. If we think morality is important, then we have to allow other people to think reason is important. If we think morality is important, we have to allow other people to think power is super naturally important even if they are wrong.

We do not have to agree with them that what they think is important, real, and points to the super natural is important, real, and points to the super natural. We don't have to allow that shopping, football, politics, and power are super naturally important. We can review our lists of the super natural, and the lists of other people, to decide what is really on the list and what is not. We will agree and disagree.

Everybody has to give reasons for why he-she thinks a thing is so important and why he-she thinks other things are not so important. We should be amenable to reasons. We should accept some reasons and we can deny other reasons. I do not go into reasons or into when and why we should be swayed.

Usually when we think something is really important we imply that it is really important not only for us but for people in general. When we think morality matters, it matters not just for me but for everyone. When we think honor matters, it matters not just for me but everyone. When we think power matters, it matters not just for me but everyone.

People who think anything is important should think out the implications of their idea for what the world is all about, how the world works, what people are in that kind of world, and what relations between people should be. People who think anything matters should think out the implications for the super natural, and for the world, people, and the relations of people. People don't usually go to this trouble but still the fact that people do think some things matter implies these issues. Even when people don't bother to think it out, the way that they act on the basis of their beliefs implies things about the super natural. People who believe honor is important act differently than people who believe power is important, and the differences in their behavior imply differences in ideas about the super natural whether they know it or not.

Believing that a thing is important opens the door to the super natural in general and invites speculation about the super natural. We take a stand on the super natural whenever we think something is important even if we don't know that we take a stand. We might as well take the best and most consistent stand that we can. The criteria for saying things about the super natural are not easy. It is hard to come to firm conclusions. That is why most people don't do the work. But because thinking about implications for the super natural is hard does not mean it is impossible, demeaning, or scurrilous. It can be fun. Don't force your conclusions onto other people. Accept that other people can come to reasonable ideas about the super natural that differ from yours.

People naturally wonder if there is one set of right ideas about what is important and about the super natural. They wonder how we can know. These questions are reasonable, and they are the subject of theology and philosophy. I can't go into them here, and it is not important to answer them to go on with the issues here.

In the case of morality, it is almost impossible to think that morality matters, and not to think it matters for everybody, and not to think it matters strongly. When morality matters, it matters for everybody. We don't agree on all points of morality: people differ about when to lie versus to tell all the absolute truth. But the general idea of morality matters to everybody, and people do agree on all major points. People agree in principle on telling the truth but vary in particular applications.

So, when people think morality matters, then they think it matters for everyone, and they imply it is super natural even if they don't know they imply that.

The best way to get this idea across is face-to-face by challenging a deeply held moral view so a person feels how much the view really means to him-her and how he-she appreciates at a level that takes him-her above this normal world. People hold views that they think are not mere convention or merely bases on evolved abilities. When we see on the news that bad extremists raided a school, killed the teachers, took the women and girls captive, forced them to convert, and sold them in the market, are we really only upset as when our yogurt spoils? If a person beats your dog, are you really upset only about the hassle for us and the harm to our property?

People should think out the implications of their belief in morality and think about the implications that morality matters to everybody. Why is morality so important? Why is it important for everybody? What does that say about the world? What does that say about any possible world? What does it mean that only people can be moral agents? What are people?

If some people think morality matters, and matters for everybody, and so they have to think about the super natural implications of their stance, then other people who also believe in morality can think about the super natural implications of their stance and can come to their conclusions. People can come to conclusions that are reasonable, rational, and fairly forceful. People who think morality matters should be open to other people's ideas about why morality matters and what that fact implies for the world, people, and the super natural.

People who are not theologians, philosophers, or moral atheists can get confused when trying to take the step from knowing that morality matters to explaining its ties to the super natural. "Lay" people can get confused trying to give a good account of morality and the super natural. I certainly get confused. So we excuse "lay" people if they don't do this job strictly or if they accept the teachings of a church.

We cannot allow moral atheists the same excuse. Here, they are like theologians and philosophers. As moral atheists, by definition, they stress the importance of morality and they combine it with an organized strong stance about the world. So they have to give us a pretty good account of the super natural (if any), and of ties between morality and the super natural (if any), and have to argue against the accounts of other people such as theists.

Moral atheists rarely do this. They would rather avoid the super natural. If they allow the super natural, they don't give a systematic account. They don't like to give a systematic account of the super natural because it is easy to slide over into ideas about God. Yet any account of the morality in "moral atheism" inevitably requires some account of the super natural.

Instead, moral atheists point out that science, especially evolution, can explain a lot, including the evolved basis for our ideas about morality and god. They invoke this knowledge to explain away any connections of morality with the super natural and explain away everything about God. They do not understand that this kind of knowledge cannot explain away morality if we are committed to morality and cannot explain away God if we are committed to God. They try to explain away morality to defeat theists without seeing they defeat themselves as well. They use science and evolution selectively against others but not against themselves.

If atheists think morality is important and so we have to consider the super natural, they have to allow that theists can think morality matters and theists can bring in their ideas of the super natural too. That is only fair. As people who also believe morality matters and so believe in the super natural, theists can bring in God. There is nothing wrong with bringing in God as long as theists are not crazy. If the idea of God can make sense of the super natural status of morality as well as atheism can make sense of that status of morality, then atheists have to be patient with theists. The same is true of theists. They have to listen to atheists who make super natural sense of morality. In contrast, theists are not obliged to listen much if moral atheists deny any super natural implications for morality in general and their morality specifically but still insist that morality is really important.

It is possible to offer a good case that morality is important, and to give an account of super natural ties to morality, without bringing in God. I don't explain how. I do not find the case convincing. In other material apart from this book, I will look at in this approach.

As far as I know, the first important recent Western thinker to try this task was Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza in the late 1600s. Even in his ideas there is a single God but not a personal God. Like Dharma systems (see below), the world, including all the apparently diverse things apparently in it, is really one thing and is really quite moral. The details don't matter here. Immanuel Kant from the late 1700s and early 1800s strongly supports morality, makes morality point to the super natural, and can be read so we don't need God. But God can be found in Kant's system. I don't discuss Kant's own beliefs. Romantics combined Kant with Christianity to imagine "the Spirit". In the 1800s, thinkers such as Ludwig Feuerbach, used Kant to argue that morality and God were merely human constructs; ideas of God and morality are best explained by culture, history, economics, and society alone; and therefore God, and maybe morality, are not really real. Then thinkers such as Karl Marx argued: not only is God unreal and morality relative; but ideas of God and morality have to be empty; and ideas of God and morality are often harmful. Artur (Arthur) Schopenhauer, using Kant and Dharma-like ideas, offered something like morality-that-points-to-the-super-natural-without-God. Schopenhauer was never influential and is not likely to affect modern thinking and moral atheists due to his pessimism and his views of women.

Dharma systems, as in Buddhism and Hinduism, can make morality point to the super natural without God-as-I-(Mike)-think-of-God. In those systems, the universe, being in itself, is intrinsically moral. Nature is intrinsically moral. Morality is among the laws of nature, like physics. That is why "what goes round come round" is always true if we wait long enough. Natural and super natural are one. The Dharma is all-of-the-natural-and-super-natural. Dharma systems have gods but gods do not make morality. Morality is part of the Dharma, and the Dharma makes gods. The gods are subject to the Dharma and its morality. The Dharma is not personal. Dharma systems almost always come with the paired idea of karma, which I do not describe. Karma supports Dharma-based morality with rewards and punishments. I said morality does not need rewards and punishments for support (to evolve, morality did need rewards and punishments – but that is a separate issue). That is another reason why I do not like Dharma-karma systems. Even when wise people in Dharma systems see a distinction between morality versus rewards-and-punishments, still the idea of karma-punishment-reward is intrinsic to the Dharma system, and so not desirable.

In China, the idea of Heaven might be morality-without-God but the Chinese think of Heaven much as Westerners think of God. So I see Heaven in Chinese thought as morality-with-God. I do not discuss Taoism in this regard here.

I doubt moral atheists have studied much of this material deeply; it does not appear in their work much or well. So these alternatives are not relevant here and I don't write of them anymore.

I don't know of any moral atheist who wants to say that morality is important and so accept that morality implies the super natural. So I don't know of any moral atheist who gives a good account of the relation of morality to the super natural. So I don't know of any moral atheist who accounts for the importance of morality so as to include the super natural yet gracefully exclude God. Moral atheists simply say they are moral and do not go into implications, including implications for the super natural. If they allow the super natural, they avoid God. This stance allows moral atheists to attack the belief and sometimes the morality of believers but not undermine their own morality. I do not find this evasion at all convincing. Go directly to their writings.

Although logically possible, I reject that morality entails the super natural but we can avoid God entirely. I don't reject this stance because I need God to explain morality or to fortify morality with hope of heaven and fear of hell. I reject the stance because it stifles my imagination and because God helps make sense of a big package that includes morality and the grandeur of it all. God is in a set of ideas that goes with morality. God is in a set of ideas that gives scope for my imagination. I bring in God because I find it hard to think of morality, the super natural, and the grandeur of the world without also thinking of God. I have the right to bring in God when I accept ties between morality and the super natural and because I am sane when I use my imagination. Moral atheists have to allow other people to guess about morality and the super natural which means they have to allow other people to guess about God.

If moral atheists could prove that God did not exist, then they could say that people may not speculate about God regardless of the status of morality and the super natural – but they cannot prove that God does not exist. Moral atheists can argue that we don't need God to explain anything but that argument is not the same as proving God does not exist. Even a strong argument that we can explain everything without God is not an argument for denying people the right to speculate about God.

I like imagination in general and I like it even about the super natural and God. I bring in God along with my belief in the importance of morality and with my joy in guessing about the super natural. I fear any giant systems that control behavior and that allow some people to control the behavior of other people. I know about bad ideas and bad religion. I know how to imagine without wandering off into those other traps. I resent people who limit my imagination.

(2) Now We Get Physics and Evolution.

Now we can think about these facts: (1) Almost everything that can be explained can be explained in terms of physical laws, and can be explained in terms of biology and evolution that are based on physical laws. (2) All this evolved: our capacity for ideas, our predilection for some particular ideas such as the ideas of gods and the super natural, our ability to make some ideas feel important, and our ability to make some important ideas point to the super natural.

Briefly, the above facts are not key. We can overlook them if we wish. Even if we take them into account, we come to the same conclusions as above. We have to assess ideas on merits as best we can. We have to accept that we make morality important, real, and make it point to the super natural. From there, theists have a right to think about God and believe in God. Although the above facts are not key, still they are misused and misuse does lead people astray. This section tries to correct a few errors.

Assume it is possible to explain whatever happens in the world through the use of physical laws without alluding to the super natural or God. Assume this reduction applies also to all evolved traits such as the capacity for morality and the ability to think of gods. To account for the world in terms of physical events only also reduces morality to physical events and reduces the idea of God to physical events. Feeling morality is like feeling pleasure at seeing an well-formed almost-naked person of the relevant gender or feeling sorrow when your team loses the national championship. I reject this view for both morality and God. I do not reject this view for some ideas such as animal spirit companions and contagious magic.

There is a difference between saying the capacity for an idea evolved, and so we can dismiss an idea as merely evolved, somewhat illusory, not important, and not pointing to the super natural versus saying the ability for the idea evolved but the idea is still important, real enough, and might point to the super natural.

“Evolved ability”, “real or illusory”, “important”, and “super natural” can vary somewhat apart from each other, and we have to assess each factor in each case. We evolved an ability to respond to sudden loud sounds but should not fear thunder and Thor does not make thunder. We see the rainbow because of how we evolved sight; but the rainbow is still fairly real; yet the rainbow does not imply a pact between Noah, humans, and God. We evolved to feel beauty but beauty is somewhat real and beauty is quite important. We evolved the ability to feel the grandeur of the world, the world is in fact grand, and I think that says something.

The capacity for morality evolved. Yet we do not see morality as we see rainbows, water over a desert road, or ideas of unicorns. We see morality more as we see apples, a forest (real but not in the same way as the trees that make it up), hot to the touch, fear, danger, momentum, or the theater.

David Hume, in the middle 1700s, led us to appreciate this: (a) A lot of what we see in morality we put into it. We don't just read right and wrong, should and should, directly from obvious facts. (b) Morality is somewhat independent of facts. Facts do not simply fix morality. Even when we know most of the facts, we still add a judgment which is not set by the facts. (c) What we add is a judgment. When we apply morality, we judge, and we judge facts. We do not simply see right and wrong as when we see a rose that is clearly red. We make a “judgment call”. We assess, evaluate, pronounce, extol, and condemn. (d) We shape facts as we judge them. We make perceived reality. We see according to how we judge as well as judge following what we see. (e) Moral judgment has force like emotion (passion), emotion that we add to situations as part of how we respond to them, shape them, and shape how other people act. The emotional force of morality is like how a “huggy” person over-responds or an always-angry person over-responds. (f) Emotional force is added to moral judging. Judging by itself does not get us to act. We act because we feel the force of passion. Without this force, we would be like watcher gods seeing human affairs from on high without participating. (g) Judging, feeling, and acting make us participants in human affairs. (h) We do not only judge others, feel, and act toward others; but they judge us, feel, and act toward us; and we judge ourselves, feel, and act toward ourselves. (i) Judging- feeling-and-acting is reflexive. It is not only toward others but toward ourselves as well.

For example, (1) A child takes an apple from a bin in a store and bites the apple. We don't know what to say until we know how mentally old the child is, if the child is hungry, the parents already paid, the child doesn't know what it does, or the child belongs to the manager. Morality is not in bare events themselves but also in context and how we see events including context. We get more upset if we think the child is old enough to know better, the parents didn't teach the child, and the parents do not control the child. (2) From a famous case in ethics theory (updated): Frank borrowed Bob's gun. Bob is furiously angry at Joe. Frank refuses to return the gun until Bob cools down completely although Frank has no legal right to withhold the gun. Did Frank: take an item; borrow an item; steal an item; or prevent a more serious crime through a less serious crime, which makes Frank's act no crime at all?

(3) On the other hand, once we know the facts of cases (1) and (2), we can more accurately decide the morality. Moral judgments depend on a mixture of attitude and fact. I do not try to separate attitude from fact here. People discuss incessantly what really happened, who did what, and why.

(A) The issues in the labeled paragraphs that follow are tricky but doable. Moral decisions are not simply triggered by facts but are partly the result of what people put on to facts. It seems people are a bit “above facts”. If people are “above facts” then something else is going on. People decide and choose. Thinkers have seen Hume’s lesson in various ways including the following. Thinkers have mixed the various ways. The details are not relevant. You don’t have to remember much of this. Focus on the style of explanation that uses evolution.

(B) The “something else that is going on” could be super natural. (1) Moral judgment is part of how we see the world and how we impose our view of the world on the world. Moral judgment cannot be simply in the world if moral judgment is how we see the world and organize the world. (2) People are souls with free will. (3) People represent the universe, Dharma, Tao, Heaven, etc. (5) People represent the world, Dharma, etc. doing its work through them. (4) People are one aspect of the Will of the world. (6) People represent a Morality that has rules and that imposes its rules on bare facts through people.

(C) (7) People are products of their society-culture. Society-culture has its own identity and will. Society-culture imposes its identity and will on people and on nature through people. Morality is one of the most important ways in which society-culture imposes its identity and will. Society, each and every particular society, and only society, gives all people a sense of morality. The sense of morality does not come from an evolved human nature or from any other kind of individual nature. Each distinct society gives to its members the particular rules (content) of their particular morality. I do not here say why or how society does any of this. (8) People are products of particular situations such as that they raise cattle or grow rice for a living. Situations lead people to see the world in particular ways and to have distinct particular styles of morality. Situations shape society-culture, which then shapes people. (9) The moral effects of society-culture and-or situations can change over time.

(B) and (C) again. (10) The changing effects of situations and of society-culture are part of an adventure in which the Spirit that made the world expresses itself in the world and imposes itself on the world. The adventure could be directional through history, cumulative through history, and-or progressive; or not. This is the Romanticism that I described in an earlier chapter.

(D) (11) People evolved. Judging, deciding, and choosing all evolved. What people impose on facts is evolved judging ability. People are evolved judging instruments. People are not above facts if we include evolved human nature among facts. Nothing is going on apart from natural processes. We cannot see all that goes on as we see colored pebbles, so it appears that something is going on other than facts, but that is not so. We should not assume anything other than nature without a strong case. This is how a working natural scientist takes the situation and how moral atheists take the situation when they wish to undermine theists and the morality of theists. We can use examples that show how an evolved ability to judge explains the situation pointed out by Hume. For example, in practice, moral judgment is biased in ways that we expect of an evolved self: by self-interest and by interest for kin and friends. The ability to impose interpretation of the facts, onto other people, by using morality, would be powerfully supported by

natural selection, and appears to have been powerfully supported by natural selection so that it is part of our evolved nature now.

(E) The fact that we have to follow logic when we use morality (The Golden Rule and “applies equally”) can be used as evidence in many ways. I do not go into this issue fully here. I do as needed.

(F) Rather than review arguments, I state my conclusion here and repeat it below. Moral judgment differs from other judgments such as “beautiful” or “hot”. It is another way that people see the world, act in the world, and be in the world. When we impose our moral judgment on facts, we shape facts to fit evolved needs and we follow moral logic. Yet other people will not go along with us in shaping facts if we stray too far from moral logic, from the logic of the Golden Rule. We do not have total freedom to say anything about facts. People will not feel the fervor that we wish if they too cannot see the facts with pretty much the same logic. When we all can pretty much agree on the facts and the logic, then we all feel fervor and act accordingly. The acting usually goes along with evolved goals such as family welfare.

(G) Although our ability for morality evolved, I do not think morality can be dismissed as merely a set of evolved ideas, often illusory, and not really important in the sense of transcendent, such as “I like vanilla better than chocolate” or “momentum is the key to football games”.. I do not think morality is merely an emotional force that we impose on situations to manipulate people to benefit us as in “making a scene”, although there is manipulation and mutual manipulation. Morality mixes logic, emotion, and strategy. Still, we cannot see it as merely emotion or strategy, even evolved emotion and strategy.

(H) Morality uses logic, depends on a consensus of people guided by logic, imposes a kind of reality on facts, and evokes strong emotion that makes people act. I think, as a combined result of those features, morality is important, real, and points to the super natural. Most people agree with me. Most people think morality is real, important, and implies the super natural. Moral atheists think morality is important, are not clear on how real morality is, balk at the super natural, want to have morality be merely evolved when that suits them in putting down theists, but also want that we respect them because they are moral, and want that we follow their moral view because it is moral and correct.

(I) The fact that moral ideas and acts have to conform to the Golden Rule (moral logic) in the long run is evidence that we face something apart from mere facts and emotions. I am schizophrenic on this point, as with “inside” and “outside” above. As a scientist, I overlook the super natural status of morality. As a person, the super natural matters a lot to me. I do not think we evolved to conform exactly to the super natural and its logic – if we did, human life would be better. I do not think we are merely tools of the super natural that works its will through us – in that case too, human life would be better. I do not think we are mere tools of society or economics – if we were, human life would be really bad. We evolved the ability to see the logic of morality and to act morally much of the time. The fact that we can see moral logic means that we escape mere facts sometimes. But the fact that we EVOLVED to see moral logic means that we don’t escape much. We stay grounded in the competing self-interests of physical reality. We catch glimpses of moral logic. Fortunately, moral action and strategic self-interested action coincide very often (“honesty is the best policy”). For my purposes here, this is enough.

(J) More is going on in the evolution of morality than evolving to conform to moral logic as in the Golden Rule, evolving to interpret moral logic to suit our needs, and evolving to get people to go along with our

interpretation so that we can get them to do what we want. That is not relevant here. I take up the issue in other writing.

The fact that moral action and strategic self-interest coincide often is enough for me here because I don't have to dwell on how far the ability to see moral logic raises us above facts or how closely moral logic takes us to the super natural. All I need do is point out that moral atheists see morality much as do we ordinary people – when moral atheists are not using science-like arguments to denigrate the moral and religious claims of rivals. Morality is so important that we take it as somewhat outside everyday life. Ordinary people, including myself, see morality as real and as pointing at the super natural. I think moral atheists take it as real although they won't say so. The importance and realness given to morality by moral atheists implies the super natural although moral atheists would deny that.

Not only did we evolve to make moral judgments, we evolved to see morality as important, see it as real, and see it as pointing to the super natural. We really did evolve as judging machines. Even so, I stick to my opinion. Even so, the crux of the matter for here is not the depth of the evolutionary argument but the fact that moral atheists don't take the evolutionary point of view when they argue as moral people. I say more about the fact that we evolved to make things important, real, and point to the super natural below and in Part Five.

Pretty much all the arguments that were used to place morality in the natural world of physics and biology apply also to the idea of God. Because there is overlap, I only briefly run through arguments.

Likewise the capacity for the idea of God evolved. What we make of that fact depends. We should not try to make too much or too little of it. I do not put as much emphasis on the fact that we can have the idea of God as that we can have fairly clear ideas of morality and moral logic that are consistent across most cultures, and in many times and places. I hold the idea of God as something that goes along with the super natural that is implied by morality but I don't want to stress much more than that here. If we take morality seriously, we have the right to wonder about God and believe in God but we can't do much to argue people into similar belief. We cannot base strong arguments for bad acts, such as terrorism, on this idea of God.

Unlike other ideas such as “gravity” or “apple”, it is hard to tie the idea of God to a particular physical thing, event, or relation. It is impossible to tie the idea to anything that can be measured. It is hard to assess the idea of God and we have a right to suspect the idea of God, as we do ideas of “the Force” or “the mountain spirit”. Ideas about gods might be a useful within an evolutionary strategy but are not likely true in the way that most people think them most of the time.

This remark is not necessary to the main argument but is useful: In my view, this situation is entirely as it should be. God did not litter the world with clues to his existence and solutions to moral dilemmas. He set up the world so sentient-moral-aesthetic life would evolve. He set up the world so we could learn and grow if we will. He wants us to do as much as we can on our own. He wants us to learn to do the right thing for the right reasons. So, in this situation, the world should be explainable almost entirely in its own terms as physical events. We see meaning through physical events, not directly in them. If we insist on not seeing meaning, we can do that, but we will lead impoverished lives of little imagination. Now back to the main thread.

In the next few paragraphs, I ramble, not so much to make a point as to get you comfortable with the fact that the idea of God has an evolved basis, and to let you feel where you might “sit” on issues.

By the standards of practical life and science, the idea of God is less likely true than the idea of an apple (thing), hurricane (process or event), danger (situation), or morality. If God exists, our ideas of God are not likely accurate. Still, the idea of God is not clearly false and it has a fair shot at being partly true. The idea of a field in physics is about as abstract, ethereal, and weird as the idea of God but eventually the idea of a field proved useful enough to be considered true. I doubt the idea of God will ever prove useful enough for most of us to consider it true in the same way as a forest or a field in physics but we cannot dismiss the idea out of hand. We can speculate about God, and the idea is useful.

The facts that (a) the idea of God is less accurate than the idea of an apple, hurricane, or field, and (b) the capacity for the idea of God evolved, do not allow a moral atheist to say: morality is important but we can forbid the idea of God. A moral atheist cannot say: even if we allow that morality implies the super natural, we can still deny everybody the idea of God and any other super natural, we can still forbid them to guess about this idea. That our idea of God likely is less accurate than the idea of curved space does not allow the moral atheist to draw a line between the super natural and God.

The capacity for morality evolved. Even so, assume morality is not merely evolved, is more than merely evolved, is important, and real. In that case, I can say that the idea of morality implies the super natural. The idea of God evolved. In contrast to morality, assume that the idea of God is merely evolved, God is definitely not real, an illusion, unimportant, and the idea of God implies nothing about the super natural. It is possible to hold these stances both at the same time but not easy. It is pretty much a contradiction to hold that “did evolve” does not discredit morality but “did evolve” does discredit God. If we want to give one status despite having evolved, then we pretty much have to allow the other some status despite having evolved. If we deny one status because the capacity for it evolved, we pretty much have to deny the other status because it evolved. I think moral atheists who rely on evolution to discredit belief in God are caught in a contradiction, and I see no easy way out.

“Atheists” means “moral atheists”. (1) On the one hand, atheists use the reductionist view including the assessment that God likely does not exist and that the idea of God is merely evolved. (2) On the other hand, atheists think morality matters but they do not offer an account of how morality matters if it is only another evolved feeling. (2A) In one arena, when they argue with theists, they stress that the idea of God is merely an evolved idea and is likely not true. When they argue with theists, they overlook that morality is merely an evolved capacity. (2B) In another arena, when they insist on their own moral abilities, appeal to the public, and promote atheism among the public, they stress that morality is important and forget that morality merely evolved. When they insist on their own moral abilities and they appeal to the public, they stress how people can act morally, yet still not believe in God, and they overlook the view that capacities for both morality and God evolved so that both ideas are merely evolved feelings.

I am not sure how moral atheists would argue against somebody who stresses that morality is important and morality points to the super natural although the capacity for morality only evolved. I am not sure how moral atheists would argue against somebody who said morality is important and points to the super natural and allowed that the importance of morality also allowed speculation about God. I guess they

would wobble and evade. If moral atheists allow that morality is important although it is evolved, they would try hard to avoid ties to the super natural. If they do allow that morality is important and so must have some ties to the super natural, even though the capacity for it merely evolved, they would try hard to disallow that the super natural can be used to argue for God. They allow in whatever of the super natural suits their needs and only that much. Moral atheists disallow that other people can admit much of the super natural even when other people admit the capacity for morality evolved and is important. They insist other people can't allow in any God even when other people admit that the capacity for morality evolved, is important, and implies the super natural.

The fact that our capacity for morality evolved does not discredit morality any more than that we evolved to feel weight discredits gravity. The fact that our capacity for morality evolved should have only little bearing on the importance of morality, its truth, and usefulness. We assess it on its own, not according to where it came from. The same is true of the idea of God. The idea of God is harder to evaluate because it lacks clear ties to any specific physical events but, in theory, we can find ways to talk about it.

The fact that the capacity for morality evolved is not relevant to the importance of morality and so to the fact that it points at the super natural. How an idea becomes important is not relevant to the fact that it is important. Suppose some people consider power important. The fact that the desire for power evolved does not make power less important to them. If they consider power that important, then power is cosmically important to them, that is, power points to what makes life important, what makes life to be life, and what makes us to be us; and so power points to the supernatural. The same is true of morality but this is really true of morality while it is not really true of power. We have to be able to offer reasons why we think one is real and points to the super natural while the other is delusory and does not point to the true super natural. If we consider love important, the same is true of love and morality. Where we get the idea is not as important as that we have the idea, it really matters, it points to the super natural, and we can offer reasons. The reasons have to be cogent but not definitive. You either get this or you don't.

Why do moral atheists insist morality is important but merely evolved? They want to have their cake and eat it too. They do want to be moral good people. They want to appeal to the public. But they don't want the crap that comes along with bad ideologies and bad religions. They want morality but not religion; to keep out religion they keep out God; to keep out God they keep out the super natural; to keep out the super natural they dance around the fact that morality is important even though the capacity for morality evolved. In some cases this is bad faith because they sense what they are doing and do it anyway. In some cases it is understandable exasperation. Either way, we don't have to go along with it. We should be able to make up our own minds and make our own cases for what we believe.

If we accept that morality is really important even though the capacity for morality evolved, then we can't keep out speculation about the super natural and we can't keep out speculation about God. Evolution is irrelevant. I like speculating about God even though I am sure the capacity for morality evolved. I see no contradiction.

I doubt that allowing speculation about God predisposes me to act more badly than I would otherwise. Even if speculation about God predisposes some people to act badly, stifling the imagination so people don't think about God at all does more harm than letting people think about God. The best response in general is to guide people to likely correct thoughts about morality and God.

The fact that we evolved to have the idea of God should make little difference in the truth and usefulness of the idea of God. We should evaluate the idea as best we can by using the best criteria that we come up with. We treat the idea of God as we do ideas of gravity, electrons, ether, fields, dark energy, and beauty. In doing so, we have to take into account that we believe in the super natural and that our ideas of the super natural bear on our ideas of God or not God.

Luckily or unluckily, it is impossible to prove God exists or doesn't exist. This means that it is even harder to speculate about God as we do about morality, power, duty, gravity, or the ether, but does not invalidate speculation about God or good ideas about God. It just means we have to be open and honest about our ideas and our motives. I hope that is what I have done.

I return to a previous topic. We need one last layer to the cake. Not only did we evolve capacities for morality and religion, we also evolved the capacities for, and tendencies for, (1) feeling some things are really important and (2) using the feeling that something is important to point to the super natural, and (3) linking what we feel is important and super natural to gods (or God). We need important things in our lives. Important things help to organize lives. We evolved the ability to think about important things in our lives as super natural. Because we evolved these abilities, it is tempting to dismiss important things and the super natural as "merely evolved". To make morality important is merely a way to say "I like meat more than spinach" – "I like honesty more than lying" - and that is all. To make morality point at the super natural is another way to say "I will use my life hunting meat and having a close relation to game animals while not thinking much about vegetables" – and that is all.

While it is true that the abilities evolved to make things important, to make important things point to the super natural, and to link important things to the gods, that fact does not mean important things are not really important and does not mean they don't point to the super natural. The ability to see birds evolved but that does not mean birds are not real, not even if we don't see them accurately. The ability to think that the path of a light ray around the sun points to the curvature of space evolved but that does not mean space does not curve even if we can't see curved space directly. We have to accept that our abilities to think about importance, the super natural, and ties to the gods evolved and then we have to think whether importance and the super natural are relevant anyway. We have to think about what we can fairly reliably know about them anyway. We have to be willing to talk to people about them anyway.

Skeptics cannot automatically say "our abilities to make things important, make important things point to the super natural, and tie it all to the gods, evolved so there is nothing at all to importance or the super natural". Skeptics can use the fact that our abilities evolved to make us think better but they cannot use the fact to impeach our ideas of importance and the super natural entirely.

Moral atheists cannot say "our ability to make things important evolved so important things are not really important, and morality is evolved but morality is really important anyhow". If moral atheists want to be really moral, they have to make morality important in a way that "merely evolved" does not allow. They have to say "our ability to make morality important evolved but morality is really important anyway". If they say other than this or less this, they lose any appeal to the general public. Moral atheists cannot say "our ability to think important things point to the super natural evolved so we can say morality is really important but it does not point to the super natural". They can use evolution as a way to make us think

better about the relation of important things to the super natural but they cannot use evolution to say there is no relation at all – if they want to hold that morality is important.

So moral atheists have to allow that morality is really important despite the fact that our ability for morality evolved, we evolved to make some things important, and evolved to link important super natural things to gods. Moral atheists have to allow that important things such as morality might really point to the super natural despite the evolved basis.

If moral atheists have to allow all that, they have to allow me to speculate about God too. They don't have to go along with me but they can't merely dismiss me. That is pretty much all I want.

Rational Response of Atheists to the Habitual Near-Hysteria of Common Theists.

Keep in mind my disparaging words about atheists at the start of the chapter. Here I reverse track.

Until recently, atheists were criminals on a par with national traitors. It was dangerous to be an atheist. In Auburn, Alabama, as late as the 2000s, the Unitarian Universalist Church, which is not atheistic, has been picketed by supposedly moral and broad-minded Christians and its members have had stuff thrown at them by supposedly moral and broad-minded Christians. Isaac Newton believed strongly in God but did not believe Jesus was God, and Newton hid his belief all his life because he feared public outrage and he feared he would lose his job – even after he was the most famous scientist in the world and was thought almost on a rank with the archangels. Theists can be nuts. Theism does not cause people to go nuts but it can enable acting nuts.

When atheists arise, theists attack them as if atheists carried the plague. Christians feel that atheists are harbingers of the antichrist and are a clear sign of the End. Christians are sure that, if people deny the reality of God, people will all immediately become amoral and then immoral. Morality needs God to back it up. Morality needs God to inflict punishment and give rewards but mostly to inflict punishment. Without punishment and reward, people must become less than animals. So the idea of God must be protected. I cannot recall where I heard that, in America, over several hundred years, as many sects of Christianity came to live together, people cared less about which sect you belonged to than that you belonged to some sect. Better any God than no God at all or society turns into burning hell. There are good reasons from evolution why theists might think this way but I don't go into them here.

All this is part of why atheists consider themselves Romantic rebel heroes. It is also why moral atheists stress the moral part of their identity.

In reality, theists, including Christians, need not fear atheism causing the collapse of morality and society. Even where people see supposedly amoral atheists walking freely among us without being struck down by God's lightning, people in general do not turn to amorality and immorality. Amorality and immorality are too much trouble and they don't turn out well in the long run. People want to succeed. People want families as part of success. To have a good successful family, you have to get along with other people. To do that, you have to act morally. Even if your morality is only a cover to seek success, still you have to act morally, and your morality-at-that-level is good enough for most other people and for society most of the time.

Evolution made sure that most people both act morally and believe in some kind of god. The example of a few atheists will not change that. It is in our character and our genes.

Evolution tied morality and belief in spirits (animism) together but not hard-and-fast. Morality would carry on even if religion somehow disappeared. Even if atheism managed to erode all belief in spirits including all the gods and the one God, even if people did not fear God would punish and reward, people would still act mostly morally. They would act morally enough so they could get along, raise families, do business, and continue society.

Atheism does not cause modern problems any more than theism causes them. The loosening of society, the gap between the haves and have-nots, selfishness, greed, and harmful zealotry were not caused by atheism any more than they were caused by Protestantism, Islam, Zen, New Age, or the return of Roman Catholicism. Those idea systems might have contributed to problems or contributed to good solutions, most likely both, but they were not the primary causes.

Maybe because atheism is now a basic stance for academics, hipsters, Hollywood persons, or Romantic rebels, people can cover the source of problems by blaming ideologies rather than seeking the true deep root causes. "The movies make us do it". If Christians would stop wasting energy worrying about atheists maybe Christians would turn energy onto curing problems at their roots.

The best advice I can give to theists that are worried about atheists is to stop. Figure out what you really believe and why. Find good reasons. Be honest about not-good reasons. Be ready to talk about what you really believe and why, or, in the case of atheists, what you really don't believe in and why. Don't talk if other people don't want to. Make sense and be tolerant. Think about what really causes problems and put your energy into curing real problems. Trust in God.

Pushy Question.

If ever a "Bible Bumper (Thumper)" annoys you, you can ask him-her to explain passages from the Old Testament (Tanakh) that call for such things as burnt offerings and stoning people who do not observe the Sabbath rigorously enough. Why don't Christians still do this?

If ever a moral atheist annoys you, you can ask him-her whether he-she thinks morality is really real and really important, or merely a convention based on evolved tendencies, like the convention to have some meat at most meals. If he-she says "really real" then ask what makes morality so. It helps if you have already thought out for yourself ideas about persons, souls, and the super natural. If he-she answers that morality is a mere convention based on evolved reflexes, I would suggest you punch him-her in the nose but that is illegal.

The Scope of the Word "Almost".

In other parts of the book, I write about divine providence, miracles, God interfering in the world, and God coming down into his creation, so I don't repeat myself here.

If there were never any violations of physical and biological laws so that absolutely everything could be explained by natural science, that still would not necessarily disprove the reality of God or destroy the usefulness of the idea of God. The triumph of science would not stop morality from pointing to the super natural. If science explained everything, I would be delighted. I would “chalk it up” to God’s planning. If science explained everything, that situation would discredit some churches and maybe some religions such as Christianity but that is their problem.

If there were obvious demonstrable gaps in what science now can explain, that result likely would mean science is not yet complete and has work to do. It would not necessarily undermine the power of science. If there were obvious breeches of natural law that could not possibly be explained by future advances in science, that is, if there were clear miracles, then I leave it up to theologians to argue whose religion and church those support most. I doubt anything they say will undermine this book.

Most possible breeches are small and inconclusive, are annoying to discuss, and don’t affect my basic stance, so I don’t write about them here.

Maybe the most likely breach of science is that God helps us as individuals in small ways. I have written about this issue elsewhere, and it is not worth going into here specifically.

To me, the most likely scenario is that God planned the world well and then the world carried on almost entirely by itself. We have to do all the work of taking care of the world including good self-governing and taking care of nature. God’s plan included lots of “plums” to help us such as good people, ideas, books, music, nature, science, art, institutions, government to work on, moral dilemmas to work on, etc. We can mistake these aids for direct intervention to guide us personally. I have no interest in saying for sure if these items signal good planning by God or small direct interventions by him. I don’t care about miracles small or big.

Why Bother with Super Natural Morality and God?

This issue covers ideologies that include the super natural but do not include God although I don’t sort out this sub-topic.

Suppose science completely explains absolutely everything including our ideas of morality and our ideas of God. All miracles have been explained away. The large majority of people behave morally. We can devise education and institutions to make sure the large majority of people continue to act morally enough so that society gets along well. Suppose further that God exists and God cares about morality, that is, the super natural exists and morality is part of it. Yet, although the super natural exists, we can’t learn about the super natural by the standards of scientific learning, and the super natural is irrelevant for scientific account or explanation. You can say the words “morality points to the super natural” but that phrase is essentially meaningless. So, under the conditions of this world, the super natural is irrelevant. It might as well not exist at all even though it does exist.

Some atheists seem to believe we already have this situation but disallow that morality is super natural or God exists. Because the super natural is irrelevant, atheists assume they can assert the super natural doesn’t exist at all. Given the above “supposes” nobody is sure how to argue against them.

Why then should we care about the super natural? Even if morality is super natural and God exists, why should we care, and why should we bother devoting time or energy to thinking about the super natural?

Here are a few answers, not all desirable:

Although society now works well enough without much reference to the super natural, this might not always be the case. People evolved to want super natural. The idea of the super natural helps control people. We should keep the super natural around as part of the control mechanisms.

People evolved to believe in the super natural. They get restless without the super natural. Even if we can keep the lid on without referring to the super natural, we will find it easier if we use the super natural. This is like the relation between machines and humans in the movie series "The Matrix". It is easier to let humans believe in the Oracle and the One.

People evolved to believe in the super natural. Trying to avoid belief in the super natural likely requires trying to suppress belief in the super natural, somewhat as China is trying to do with "Fulan Gong" and other practices based on the idea of "chi". That is like American Prohibition all over again. It is better to provide people with socially useful ideas of the super natural than to try to repress it. Not everyone is a chic academic self-styled free thinker liberated from all conventions.

We never have rights without responsibilities. I have a right to think about whatever I want to think about. Nobody has the right to tell me not to think about it. I have a responsibility to think ably and not to cause unneeded harm with my thinking. They have a responsibility to leave me alone to think.

On the one hand, moral atheists enjoy this situation. On the other hand, moral atheists don't enjoy this. They want other people to commit to morality, they want to seem like good guys, and they want to commit to morality too. Yet they are not sure what to say about their commitment to morality. They want to have a strong commitment to morality but not have it point to the super natural.

Truth is Truth. Truth has value. I like Truth. A lot of science is based on the search for Truth because of Truth's intrinsic value. If the super natural is True, I want to know about it. I want to be able to talk freely with other people who want to search for the Truth including the Truth about the super natural. Because it is not possible to test for the super natural (natural laws explain all), we will have much trouble finding any Truth about the super natural and making sure of any Truth about the super natural but we want to try anyway. Not to let us search for Truth about the super natural probably will stifle the search for Truth in other arenas including science.

Even if truth is not spelled with a capital letter, I want to know about truth. Practically, it does not matter a jot if my toaster works because of electricity or if inside there is a team of gremlins with hibachis. I still get my toast. But I like to know how things work, what is up, and what is what.

Thinking about the super natural takes effort and skill. Practice thinking about the super natural is good practice for thinking in general.

I like my imagination. I like the imagination of other people. Imagination leads easily into thinking about the super natural. I cannot limit thinking about the super natural without seriously distorting my fantasy. Thinking about the super natural is fun. I like fun. I can exercise my imagination, including thinking about the super natural, without going crazy and without falling into zealotry.

If God and the super natural might exist, I want to know about them as much as I can. God and the super natural are important. Even if I can't know anything for sure about the super natural (science can explain everything), the super natural is still interesting and still something important about the world. It is worth a little time and energy to do what I can.

PART 3: Belief in God is more than Superstition.

This part argues that belief in God need not be superstition and need not bring along with it a lot of silly superstition. Even though the capacity to believe in God and the capacity to believe superstition both evolved, the two beliefs are not the same, or don't have to be the same. Atheists treat all belief as if it were irrational anti-rational superstition on a level with "step on a crack and break your mother's back" or "black cat crossed my path". If they know evolutionary theory, atheists treat belief in God as a way to work on people's irrational anti-rational emotions so as to control people for the benefit of the manipulator. Belief is purely and only emotion, and necessarily anti-rational. All belief makes us susceptible to bad ideas. All belief is bad belief. There is no good belief. Believers are weak-willed indulgent idiots and-or conniving manipulators. I don't like that.

No direct logical argument can prove that God does exist or does not exist. If atheists were agnostics, and they accepted that the debate can't be settled, then I would have little issue with them. But atheists want more. Superficially, they want to prove that God does not exist. More deeply, though, arguments with atheists are not about God, they are about behavior. Atheists don't like bad behavior, they blame religion for the bad behavior, and they blame God for religion. Atheists argue against God as a way to subvert religion as a way to end bad behavior. This tactic won't work. You can't get rid of religion by proving God does not exist, and you can't get rid of bad behavior by getting rid of religion. Trying to get rid of God to get rid of religion to prevent bad behavior is like American Prohibition. Instead, atheists should point out causes of bad behavior in human nature, economics, society, history, politics, ideology, poverty, power struggles, socio-economic class, and, yes, some bad religion.

Some few atheists are atheists for purely logical reasons. This chapter is not about them. Most atheists are atheists for the same reasons that children say "no" at a young age and for the same reasons that teenagers whine and argue. The issue is not really about the obvious subject – existence of God – but about dominance, who has the debater's high ground, and about scoring points for "I know better than you". Most atheists use logic selfishly, not because it leads to any valid useful ends.

Even that conniving I would not mind except that, in denying God, atheists squelch my imagination. They limit how I think and wonder. When we hurt a big part of how we wonder, we hurt all wonder, imagination, and creativity. We stifle ourselves. Part of my natural wonder is thinking about God and about "what it all means" in light of God. When atheists cut that off, they hurt my whole sense of wonder and whole feeling as a person. I can think well, I can be quite rational, even about God, without turning off my imagination. I am more rational when I accept the likelihood of God than when I try to stifle myself.

There is good religion and bad religion just as there is good atheism and bad atheism, good ideology and bad ideology, good uses of ideas and bad uses. Bad religion is a kind of bad thinking. Bad religion does lead to more bad thinking, bad imagination, and bad action. Atheists should point out how bad thinking of all kinds leads to bad acts, and rest there. Atheists should point out ways to nurture imagination and to use it well even when it leads to speculation about God. Theists should do the same.

Because direct argument cannot prove or disprove God, instead of direct argument about God, we have to use other arguments. We use circumstantial evidence. We treat the question of God as we do other similar issues such as court cases and some scientific questions. By those arguments, I think the case for God is fairly good.

Imagine a set of "idea circles" with the widest circles mostly including the inner circles.

In the widest circle are magic, most of the supernatural, and morality, but not nothing (-ness). Traditional Christians rely on God-the-supernatural and rely on the magic of Jesus-as-God, his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Hopefully, they also accept the moral message of Jesus and really do act on it. They say the incarnation, death, and resurrection magically save believers. Their belief in the magic and in God-the-supernatural allows them to carry the message of Jesus.

In the second, smaller, circle are morality and some of the super natural but not magic or nothing. I rely on the super natural but to a lesser extent than do people who believe in magic and superstition. We can get rid of almost all the magic of the incarnation, death, resurrection, and mysterious salvation. We can rely only on God and on Jesus as his prophet (among others), and can keep the moral message. If we don't need the magic, we might as well dispose of it as long as we keep the message. Drawing the line this way is hard for normal evolved humans who need some magic, but many can do it.

I also say we should act well for the sake of acting well and not because we fear God. We should do the right things for the right reasons. If we can act well for its own sake rather than from fear, it seems we do not need God either. Yet I hold to this much supernatural out of wonder, because it makes sense in light of the evidence, and because of my evolved nature. I do not feel self-contradictory.

In the third circle is morality alone. Atheists try to dump magic and all of the supernatural while keeping morality only. They try to rely only on morality. If we don't need magic to keep morality, then we don't need the supernatural either. If we can keep morality while getting rid of both, then get rid of both. They stress that we should do well for its own sake rather than from fear of God; they say I contradict myself; and say I cling to God as magic no different than the magic of traditional Christians or silly people who fear ghosts. I say, it is hard to get rid of all the supernatural while still keeping morality, much harder than getting rid of magic only. I can keep the supernatural without using it as magic. To give morality the privilege that atheists wish to give it opens the door to legitimate speculation about the supernatural even while it does not open the door to magic.

The fourth circle is a little dot on the outside labeled "nothing". True skeptics take the logic above to its conclusion. They get rid of magic, the supernatural, and morality. They rely on nothing, no ideologies, not even nothingness. This is very hard. There are few true skeptics. Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, and

Zen adepts are not true skeptics. No atheist who believes in morality is a true skeptic. Almost no atheists are true skeptics although they romanticize themselves as such. This chapter overlooks true skeptics.

This game is not limited to Christianity, God, and Jesus. You can make similar scenarios with magic, the supernatural, and morality in other religions. You can use dogmas in place of the supernatural and magic in case of ideologies that claim to have none, such as atheism, naïve scientism, and Marxism; they often use dogmas much as religion uses magic and the supernatural.

Which circle do we live in, and why? What do we let into our circle, and why? What about people who live in different circles? I am happy to let people live where they want as long as they act well and do not impose their ideas on me. I can get along with traditional Christians, moral atheists, people of most religions, and even people who believe in ghosts, witches, and voodoo as long as they act well and do not force their ideas on me. I say nothing about true skeptics. "Acting well" means acting according to the blending of Jesus' ideas, Western values, and practicality, even if other people do not see those as the sources of their acting well. I do not think I impose on other people when I ask them to act well along the lines of these ideas.

Atheists say: (1) natural laws alone can explain everything and there is no need for God. (2) The idea of God is nothing but an evolved delusion like the ability to believe in witches or an evolved compulsion like the desire to eat fatty meat. (3) The idea of God causes a lot of trouble. (4) Therefore God must not exist. (5) At the same time that atheists wish to get rid of the evolved idea of God, they strongly support the evolved capacity for morality.

(1) Just because there is no logical need for something does not mean that thing must not exist. Just because we can explain a lot about a thing using natural laws does not mean that thing does not exist and has no identity or integrity. There is no logical need that I had a mother but the evidence is reliable that I did, at least at this early stage of bio-engineering. Natural laws can explain everything about the self, so there is no need for traditional ideas of the self, but most atheists are sure they have a self and it is important. Natural laws explain everything about apples, but that does not mean apples don't exist and don't taste good. Natural laws can explain sunsets but that does not mean sunsets do not exist and are not beautiful. A "field" in physics is a made-up idea, like a "net" of forces around an object. We cannot see fields directly but only through their effects. That does not mean fields don't exist and are not useful. The idea of a field helps explain the movement of matter and energy. An electrical field helps explain your cell phone. The idea of a gravity field helps scientists keep in orbit the satellites that allow your cell phone to work. Other fields explain how atomic nuclei work and so how stars shine.

(2) Just because we evolved the capacity to perceive something does not mean that thing does not exist; in the same way, just because we evolved the capacity to think something does not mean that thing does not exist. Elephants evolved but they still exist. A rainbow is the product of an evolved mental ability interacting with specific external atmospheric conditions but that does not mean rainbows are delusions and do not exist. The ideas of fairness, scientific method, morality, and beauty evolved but that does not mean there is no fairness, scientific method, morality, or art. Just because something evolved does not mean we can explain it away or that it is "nothing but". Just because we evolved so that we can easily form ideas does not mean the ideas that we form are necessarily delusional and the things about which we form ideas are necessarily not real. The fact that we evolved to be able to make ideas about horses

and unicorns does not mean that either horses or unicorns necessarily exist or do not exist. The fact that we evolved to have an idea of God means nothing about whether God exists. The idea has to be evaluated on its own merits.

(3) Just because an idea causes trouble does not mean its object does not exist and we can get rid of the idea to avoid trouble. For dictators, the idea of freedom causes a lot of trouble, but, still, freedom is real, and I hope the “thought police” never get rid of the idea. Not only intoxication itself but also the idea of intoxication causes trouble, but we can’t get rid of either the fact or the idea by banning alcohol, other drugs, advertisements, and peer example. We cause more harm than good in trying. The idea of God can cause trouble, some of it very bad. It also causes some good, some of it very good. The capacity to believe in God is natural like the capacities to follow morality, enjoy alcohol, and enjoy sex. People will believe in God. We cannot get rid of the idea of God without making the same mistake that Americans made during Prohibition and without causing more harm than good.

(5) Rather than argue directly about God, it is better to go through morality. The capacities for religion and morality both evolved. Atheists wish to give morality a special status but they refuse to allow that status to religion. The special status for morality necessarily implies the super natural. Atheists open the door to the super natural with morality. When atheists open the door to the super natural for morality, they cannot entirely close the door for religion. Even if they do not allow any proof of the existence of God, they have to allow other people to wonder about God and to believe in God.

(5A) If morality were merely another evolved capacity like the desire to eat fatty meat, then atheists could not stress morality and stress how moral they are. There would be no difference between drinking water and following the Golden Rule. Yet atheists insist people act morally, and insist atheists can act morally despite no God. The existence of morality is not like the existence of apples, and following morality is not like picking apples. The existence of morality necessarily implies something about the world that apples do not. Morality is about something else. All people who sincerely follow morality, including atheists, give morality a special status. The special status that atheists give to morality cannot be found in nature. The special status that atheists give to morality is super natural.

(5B) If the fact that morality evolved does not discredit morality then the fact that religion evolved should not automatically discredit God. If we won’t say “morality is nothing but an evolved delusion” and thus give morality the status of merely picking apples then we have to be careful saying “God is nothing but an evolved delusion” and thus give to wondering about God the mere status of thinking about sweets. If you allow the existence of morality and the something else of morality, then you necessarily open the door to the something else of God and the possible existence of God. It is hard to keep morality but dump God. If we keep morality, we open the door to wondering about God. If we keep morality, then evidence from physics, cosmology, and evolution does not automatically discredit God, and it can support God. We do not prove God exists or prove God does not exist, but we allow the sanity of speculating about God and we allow the reasonableness of belief in God. If you want morality, you have to allow that people can have God even if you don’t accept God.

(5A again) Atheists do not realize (or they deny) that they open the door to the super natural when they insist on morality, when they insist on giving morality privilege over wringing your neighbor’s neck to get his-her cash and spouse. In an amoral all-merely-natural world, when you give any aspect of the world

special privilege, including morality, you open the door to the super natural. When you say respect for the individual is “GOOD”, you make a super natural claim. If you cannot see this idea in terms of morality, think about giving art privilege over everything else including morality. “Art is great and art is enduring while acting morally is merely like having a big piss.” That is not a natural judgment; it is a super natural judgment. When you say art is better, you allow other people to wonder how it got to be better, and then they may also wonder about morality and God. If you can’t get this idea with morality or art, then think about power, wealth, logic, mathematics, or natural law.

If the idea of God is reasonable, and we can’t get rid of it, then the best response is to make sure people believe in the right things, that belief in God goes along with the best morality. Luckily, I am sure correct ideas about God go along with the best morality, so we do the right thing by pursuing the truth about God and everything else. This stance is not new with me. The ideas in this stance have been around since Classical Greek thinking, and were well developed in the Middle Ages.

PART 4: Ideas of God and No God.

Morality opens the door to the super natural and to guessing about God; but so what? If all we have are silly ideas then the door opens on a cage. To think adeptly about God requires thinking about ideas and evolution. Thinking well about God is the task of theology. I don’t like theology. This part is not theology. As I have said often before, where an idea comes from doesn’t matter. What matters is truth and usefulness. We need criteria to assess ideas that have an obvious evolved basis such as morality and religion, criteria that help avoid bias. This part cannot fully supply the criteria. This part gives a feel for how to work with ideas that have an evolved base. Mostly we use the same criteria that sane rational helpful people have used for 2500 years. On that basis, belief in God is reasonable.

Irrelevant Personal and Cultural Considerations.

People believe or disbelieve in God for personal and cultural reasons such as how they were raised, good experiences with believers, bad experiences, fads, need to belong, and wanting to think of yourself as an outlaw. None of these reasons are relevant. Unfortunately because argument about God is not decisive, we do fall back on experience and culture. Still, we should try to get around experience and culture for a time to look at other reasons. The best reasons are: I see a mind behind the world, the mind is moral as well as logical, I love to wonder, and God works with my wonder.

God as a Dubious Evolved Idea.

Atheists use aspects of the idea of God to weaken the possibility that God exists; see the list below. This kind of argument can discredit some ideas but I think it is wrong in the case of God.

- The idea of God came only as a by-product of evolution.
- The idea of God has no natural object, particularly because it is only a by-product of evolution. There is nothing the idea of God stands for like the idea of “dog” stands for something.
- The idea of God is strongly urged by our evolved nature regardless of facts, like belief in ghosts.
- The idea of God is not needed to explain anything.
- The idea of God has no value.

- The idea of God is inaccurate.
- The idea of God is used to manipulate other people and ourselves.
- We evolved not only to have the idea of God but to believe in it and to defend it vigorously.
- The idea of God is an illusion at best but more often a delusion.
- We evolved to get comfort from the idea of God.
- People cling to the idea of God as a comforting delusion.
- The idea of God causes more harm than good.
- By getting rid of the idea of God, we can get rid of the harm. Getting rid of the idea of God will not cause more harm than good.

Ideas and Things.

We use the same language to talk about God as to talk about material objects, so we tend to think of God as a thing. It is misleading to think of God as we would an ordinary material object such as a broom. It is even misleading to think about ordinary objects as if they were simple unchanging uniform material stuff in the same way a chunk of limestone is made of crystals. A hurricane, jet plane, chunk of limestone, electron, and nation all exist but not in the same ways.

God, and material objects, while not simply ideas, can be like ideas. They are not ideas like $2 + 2 = 4$ but they are still like ideas. Sometimes it is easier to talk about the idea of God, idea of a dog, hurricane, or jet plane than about God, a particular dog, hurricane, or plane. Imagine Fido the dog over his entire life. He changes over his life so he does not look the same from puppy to gray-back, and not even from one day to the next. He replaces all the atoms in his body every few years. We still talk as if Fido were one material thing like a chair. It makes more sense in some ways to talk about the idea of Fido. Rather than assess whether God-the-pseudo-material-thing exists, often it makes more sense to assess the idea of God, how we come to believe in the idea of God, and how we use the idea of God.

Yet to think of God as an idea, as a subjective idea, even as the same idea shared by others, also leads to mistakes. We tend to devalue God when we think of God as an idea. We think of God as merely an idea, a delusion, like a superstition or like a secret scheme for getting rich quick on the stock market. It is easy to dismiss God as a delusory idea when we think of God as merely an idea. When atheists argue against God, they devalue our idea of God, often by devaluing how we get the idea. By looking more calmly at God as like an idea, we can overcome this mistake.

The Value of Ideas.

We naturally tend to assess an idea according to where it comes from. This attitude likely evolved, and it is usually reliable. We believe the weatherman about upcoming storms more than we believe the arthritic toes of our cranky old neighbor. We believe a brother more than strangers with candy. For here, though, we have to stop assessing ideas according to their source. Where an idea comes from has no bearing on value. We have to assess ideas on their intrinsic value alone. A classic example gets the point across. Many chemicals in living tissue are based on a "carbon ring", which is six carbon atoms linked in a circle, like ball bearings in a ring, loops on a crocheted doily, or lobes of a snowflake. In the late 1800s, nobody had yet thought of this idea. One night, a chemist took some hashish, and came up with the idea. That the chemist was stoned has no bearing on the value of the idea. It does not matter if your drunken sister

or the veterinarian figured out the dog got sick from chocolate. What matters is that you stop the kids from giving it chocolate.

Truth makes an idea valuable. If it were easy to prove all ideas true or false, we could easily decide value. But it is not. Instead, we compare ideas. One idea is more valuable than another if it is truer, more useful, more accurate, more beautiful, the thing to which it refers is more real, it explains more of the most important data, is less likely to be wrong, has not been proven false, and fits in with other ideas that we already think are true. Although we cannot often prove an idea is true, sometimes we can prove it is likely false. Usually we can dismiss an idea if we can prove it is false for at least some facts. After the astronauts landed on the moon, we knew it wasn't made of green cheese. After the rise of quantum mechanics in the early 1900s, we learned that the idea of the carbon ring was not fully accurate, that it was only a close approximation. Still, the original idea of the carbon ring is beautiful, easier to use than the complex ideas of quantum mechanics, more accurate than other simple ideas in explaining results, and has proven useful in making many compounds.

We need to assess the idea of God, ideally without worrying where it came from. It does not matter that we evolved to believe in gods and then God, to think our belief important, to think our belief points to the super natural, and to defend our belief; it matters only that the idea of God fits the situation. We need to settle on the proper criteria to assess ideas like the idea of God. Unfortunately, there are no criteria that everyone accepts for assessing ideas like God. So we have to fall back on circumstantial criteria, ideas from the first three chapters of this book, and the standards used in this chapter. Atheists try to undercut God by undermining the source of the idea. They disparage God by saying the idea of God is only an evolved comforting delusion. Atheists confuse everybody when they do that.

Evolved Urges.

For here, I include with ideas the acts that we can conceptualize. All ideas have a basis in our evolved nature, however near or remote from an evolved base, including morality, writing music, craving pizza, projective geometry, making the world lively, and believing in spirits. This view of ideas does NOT mean all ideas come directly from genes. Almost all ideas need some learning, including something as bodily as toilet training. I don't fret over this issue here. This section explains how we assess ideas about God; later sections follow up on some of the points made here including repeating some points.

Some ideas are closer to our evolved base, and require less learning, than others. Hunger is more tightly under evolved guidance than watching TV even if we watch TV more minutes per day than we eat. Apparently around the world, young men think of sex every few seconds while young women think of it only a few times a day. Religion and morality clearly have an evolved base and are not far from it.

We have a dual view about ideas that are closer to our evolved base. On the one hand, we see them as gifts given by God (Dharma, Tao, the Universe, Heaven, etc.) through nature, as we do of Love, Charity, morality, and even Patriotism. On the other hand, we see them as base, animal-like, merely physical, merely bodily, and merely emotional in the bad sense. Examples include lust, greed, desire to show off, desire for power, and even patriotism. In which camp we put an idea depends on our general point of view and on situations such as culture. Sex can be dirty ugly lust or can be the physical embodiment of

Love. (By “we” I mean all people. I base my view on Indo-European culture but I have not read of any culture that does not have a dual view.)

To condemn an idea, we put it in the group that is physical and bad, and give it no redeeming graces. Superstitions are “base”, unthinking, and emotional. Sex perverts are slaves of their bodies and their low lusts. We call a man a “bastard” and a woman a “bitch” thereby stressing their low animal material nature over their identity as a human being or a social being.

To extol an idea, we don’t mind that it comes through our bodies as long as we can link it to highness too, for example love. Political activism can be low physical greed or high service with self-denial. Women take as evidence for male base physical nature that men think of sex so much and commitment so little while men take as evidence of women’s contrary physically-based nature that they think of commitment so much and of sex so little even in a relationship to which sex is basic – see “Annie Hall”. In Christian mythology at least since the Middle Ages, purely mental activity (ideas), such as logic, is high, but not as high as mental activity that comes through the body and transforms the body, such as love, morality, and art. Angels have merely mind; humans have body and mind. We are above the angels. God likes us better than he likes the angels.

To link an idea, thing, person, or social group to the low physical set or high transcendent set is a way to assess the idea etc. by referring to its origin. Rather than think about an idea, we say it is merely based in material animal nature and so ugly, wrong, and bad. Referring to base origin is a way of using “nothing but” to condemn and dismiss, as for example when we say American football is nothing but the desire to kick the crap out of someone temporarily played out on a field. To repeat: This practice is what I argue against. It is a wrong use of “nothing but”. We should assess according to truth and usefulness but it is much easier to assess by linking to bad-low or good-high.

We do not have good criteria for when an idea belongs in one set or the other. We use criteria but not very well. This section looks at some of the criteria.

A modern way to say an idea is merely based in our bodies and so wrong is to say that it is closely tied to our evolved nature. We point out that it requires little learning and is widespread not only in a culture but across cultures such as belief in some kind of spirits. We condemn superstition and “us versus them” in this way. We mock belief in “the Force” this way. “Closely tied to our evolved nature” is now another way to say “mostly merely physical and animal, and so low, ugly, and bad”. People who dislike homosexuality condemn it this way. The fact that an idea-or-act is rooted in our evolved physical nature and so almost obligatory might be an explanation but it is not a justification or an excuse to condemn an idea.

Sometimes we extol an idea in the same way, by saying it is closely tied to our evolved nature and so is an indirect gift from God etc. This way of extolling an idea is not very widespread yet. I am interested to see if it becomes more widespread as ideas about evolution and genes become more widespread. As of now, some people extol Love, Loyalty, Art, and Morality this way. People who champion homosexual rights (gay rights) explain and justify homosexual behavior this way even if they don’t know much biology and even if they don’t explicitly link it back to God: homosexuality is a loving variation on nature.

Following the best scientific accuracy, and following political correctness as well regardless of scientific accuracy, it is wrong to use “close to our evolved nature” as a way to condemn or extol. We should not misuse science and evolutionary theory this way. It is another bad use of “nothing but”. Yet people usually don’t care about scientific accuracy when they borrow an idea from science to lend weight to how they like to think. They use what they can. Still, people have learned that referring to our evolved nature sometimes causes PC anger and backlash, and they so are careful for that reason alone.

In the bad old days before political correctness, at least in circles that did not extol emotion, superstition was base (animalistic) and bad. It was part of our low bodily nature. It was our bodies hurting our minds. The fact that superstition was so widespread was evidence of a basic flaw in human nature. People said our “animal urges” often misled us. In the bad old days, atheists attacked belief in God and religion the same way, as merely-and-always like lust or superstition.

When modern atheists attack belief in God, they still treat it as a bad superstition in that old sense, as a flaw in human character, as an idea tied to our lower base. In our enlightened times, atheists cannot say outright that widespread belief is evidence of a flaw in evolved human nature. Still, they do say religion has deep roots in evolved human nature, so imply that religion is merely a bodily idea, so imply religion is merely-and-always like lust and superstition, and so say religion is always bad. Religion is a widespread weakness and evolved character flaw. It is like opiate addiction if opiates were widespread. Fortunately, we can use our higher abilities to overcome it.

If religion did not have a base in our evolved nature, it could not be so widespread and so similar across situations and cultures. Unlike anthropologists, atheists tend to see the similarities across situations and cultures rather than the differences. If religion has strong roots in our evolved nature, and is so close to its evolved roots, then it must be bad.

I try not to use the fact that religion has strong roots in our evolved nature and is close to our evolved nature as a way to extol religion. I try not to make the opposite mistake to atheists.

So, I conclude: (1) Try not to think of an idea as good or bad because it has roots in our evolved nature and seems close to our evolved nature. (2) Likely we cannot eliminate ideas that have deep roots in our evolved nature no more than we can stop sex and drinking booze. To try hurts us. (3) Instead, guide people to good ideas about God and religion. Guide people away from bad ideas. (4) Can we make an idea better if it has strong roots in our evolved nature and is close to our evolved nature? We can. (5) For reasons given below, we also have to consider if an idea can still be useful if it has obvious roots in our evolved nature, does not refer to anything sold, is abstract, refers to spirits, is hard to argue about, and hard to decide. I think it can. (6) It is sane to believe in God.

Moral thinking is under evolved control. Morality has strong roots in our evolved nature and is close to our evolved nature. I do not take this fact about morality to be a problem and I don’t dwell on implications for morality in this section. I do in sections below. The idea of God is more of a problem so I dwell on that here.

Because morality is close to our evolved nature, it could be low and bad yet most people, and especially including moral atheists, consider it high and good. Most people would argue that morality is one of those

things (ideas) that works closely through the body but transcends the body. I am not sure what moral atheists would say in this particular regard.

It seems we could look at religion the same way, and I do that, while always keeping in mind that we are evolved beings. But moral atheists cannot look at religion the same way as morality. Despite that both morality and religion evolved, and both being close to an evolved base, morality makes it to the high-and-good while religion remains among the low-and-bad, a superstition or bad habit. Moral atheists need to explain why. I repeat this point a few times in various ways here and more in the sections below.

We need to look at some of the ways in which we decide if an idea that has strong roots in our evolved nature is good or bad. Some ways are useful and valid while some are not.

We have ideas of our particular mother, mothers, our father, fathers, siblings, other kin, friend, neighbor, a particular dog, a particular dog breed, dog breeds, dogs in general, nearby un-dangerous animals such as raccoons, far-from-human dangerous animals such as crocodiles, deer, coyotes, wolves, birds, squirrels, mountains, valleys, water, rain, snow, rivers, trees, forests, air, the sky, weather, tools such as a stick, tools such as a ball peen hammer, tools such as a telescope or an x-ray machine, Justice, Honor, good, bad, Freedom, and Loyalty.

The nearness or farness of any of the ideas from an evolved base can be debated. All the ideas can be important but are not necessarily important. Some ideas are concrete while others are abstract. We take as real nearly all the things to which the ideas refer but not all the things to which the ideas refer are real in the same way or to the same degree. It is easy to talk about some ideas and to assess them such as whether it is snowing or raining. It is hard to talk about and to assess some ideas such as parental love, and parental love versus patriotism. Some of the ideas are likely to occur wherever there are people but some depend on the situation. We use importance, concrete-abstract, ease of talking about, widespread, dependence on situation, and degree of realness, to assert that ideas are near to our evolved nature and so are good or bad. People mix these tools for assessing and labeling in bewildering ways, mostly not very accurate or useful.

The importance of "realness" in assessing things and ideas, and the use of more real or less real, is tied to Indo-European philosophy (Greek, "te on"). The practice involves many problems. Leaving that aside, still people do think in terms of realness and of more-and-less real. I avoid issues about realness except when I have to mention realness. I don't like "realness" debates.

We tend to think of material objects as definitely real, things that might have a material base but are not material as less real, and to think of abstract things (including ideas) that have no material base as unreal even if we can have clear ideas of them and we think they are important. We know a particular tree is real but we are not sure about forests, species of trees, a genus of trees, or fantasy movies in which trees have spirits.

On the other hand, we often think that non-material abstract things are more important, more real in their own ways, and better, than limited material things, for example love. Over his-her lifetime, a hunter can forget a lot of individual trees but he-she has to know the ways of the forest. The same is true of the city dweller and buildings. To a dog breeder, a breed is more important than individuals and effectively more

real. While a lawyer must dwell on each particular case, we hope that ultimately justice is as real and more important. A style of painting such as cubism can be more important and more real than any but the best paintings in the style. The momentum of a flying football is important and real but the momentum of a football game might be even more important and just as real.

Unluckily for any simple account of human nature, many important things come up often in our lives and so they might be fairly near an evolved base in the same ways a young man thinks of sex rather than as a father thinks of loving his children. We don't like to think of them as near our "animal instincts" but there is no real reason to think of them as far from our evolved nature. Nearly everybody understands the ideas of a person, Justice, Fidelity, and Love and I think they have a firm evolved base. Nearly everybody can reason some so likely basic reasoning has a firm evolved base. While the substance of art varies much, art itself recurs often. All cultures have music, graphic arts, and crafts. Recall from the chapter on human nature that we see our world as lively. We see it as livelier than a robot or computer might see it. As a result, we not only see a tree, we see a spirit of the tree; not only oak trees, also a spirit of oaks; not only a forest, also a spirit of the forest; not only a spirit of this forest or this kind of forest, also a spirit of all forests. We see not only a person but the spirit of a person. We see the spirit not only while the person lives but also after he-she dies. The spirits can be more important and more real than the physical, quasi-physical, or non-physical entity they represent.

Ideas about spirits are notoriously hard to argue about and to disprove so it is hard to definitely assess their merits. They are like the boy who builds a fort to keep out tigers. "But there aren't any tigers around here. See, the fort works." They are like the Arkansas fiddler with a leaky roof. He can't fix the roof when rain falls; and, when rain doesn't fall, the fiddler doesn't need to fix the roof.

We often call "superstitions" the Ideas that are not concrete, come up often in some form, seem to be near an evolved base, are hard to assess, and often lead to wasted energy or to bad results. We don't want those.

Yet we do not wish to cut off all ideas that are abstract, non-material, come up often, seem to be close to evolved human nature, and are hard to assess, because those ideas have led to some good and useful results. If we could not imagine a forest as well as particular trees, and could not imagine the spirit of the forest too, we would never have developed the science of ecology. What about Love again?

We cannot reject an idea simply because it refers to something quasi-material or abstract, people think of it as linked to a spirit, and it might have a firm base in our evolved nature. We cannot call all ideas like that mere superstition. This is a bad use of "nothing but". If we did, we would have to call art and the idea of integrity mere superstitions. The movie "Avatar" is an orgy or Romanticized superstition but that does not mean ideas of the forest, spirit of the forest, and links in the forest including to the spirit, are all stupid, silly, mere superstition, and of no value. We have to sort out value from silliness. In reviewing the movie I might say "nothing but" yet in real life dealing with real ideas I should be more careful.

People have a long history of sorting out good ideas from bad ideas. We have criteria. I do not go into the criteria. It is enough that we have them and you can learn them.

The idea of gods does not refer to a material thing, it is abstract, depends on the imputed liveliness of the world, and refers to spirits. The idea of gods arises often almost regardless of particular conditions. The idea seems pushed by our evolved nature. The idea is hard to contradict and to argue over. To verify or deny the idea is almost impossible. The fact that the content of the idea of gods varies by conditions but the idea persists anyhow underscores the role of both conditions and an evolved base. The idea of gods seems more like superstition than like the Theory of Evolution or the Theory of Relativity – accepted facts now. It seems more elusive even than the ideas of Justice and Honor.

Atheists are correct to doubt (but not deny) the idea of gods or God. Atheists who also know evolutionary theory officially say “there are no simple reflexes”. Yet in practice they treat the idea of God (or gods) as a simple evolved reflex that brings out the worst, like hating “other people” or hating powerful bad spirits and witches. Atheists treat the idea of God as something strongly dependant on an evolved base and so is bad for that reason alone, like lust for power. The fact that the idea of God does not refer to anything that can be measured and does refer to spirits makes the matter worse. Atheists treat the idea of God as “nothing but” silly superstition with a strong near evolved base, like fear of the dark. At best the idea of God is an evolved superstition that leads us astray.

Moral atheists do not sort out good ideas that have strong evolved roots, are abstract, and hard to test, from bad ideas with the same features. They do not sort Justice from ghosts or morality from religion. They condemn the idea of God as a merely evolved reflex superstition when that suits them yet they also cling to morality. They do not say what stance we should take, and why, toward art, justice, reason, love, fidelity, honor, ghosts, animal spirit companions, or cracks in the sidewalk. They do not say why we should take any attitude toward any idea.

The idea of God often is like a superstition but doesn't have to be, and often the idea of God is better than any superstition. It can be better. It can refer to something real and it can lead us to good acts. Although our evolved nature pushes us to the idea of God it does not fill in all details. Nor does society fill in all details. We can accept or reject what society offers. We can fill in the idea with good points with good results. It is fairly easy to reject the ideas of the mountain spirit or demon but harder to prove or reject the idea of God. To people already against the idea of God, that character makes the idea seem more like superstition. To me, it makes the idea seem less like superstition. It makes the idea of God much more than mere superstition grounded in our evolved nature. The fact that the idea of God is hard to reject and hard to argue over might say something about how cleverly the idea works in evolved brains but it also might say that the idea actually is plausible and useful.

We feel morality, morality is abstract, morality is not material, morality works through evolved bodies, morality refers to relations between evolved beings, it is hard to pin down exactly to what morality refers, morality is important, morality seems as real as scientific method, and morality implies the super natural. These facts do little to make me believe in superstitions like ghosts, witches, and mountain spirits. They do a lot to make me believe in morality and God.

Almost Accurate Ideas.

We do not perceive the world as it is exactly. We do pretty well. We “mis-see” the world partly because it is hard to see the world just as it is and partly because “mis-seeing” can be more useful than accurately

seeing. Evolution helped us mis-see the world adeptly. If we need to flee or fight now, we can't stop to notice the exact shade of brown of the bear's fur or the exact musical pitch of its roar. It is easier to fall in love with a somewhat idealized person than a fully real person, and most of us need to fall in love to start families.

Our idea of God certainly is not accurate. We likely got the idea of God partly because it is inaccurate, part of a package with lively world, spirits, and natural categories, as a way to get us to act, or not act, even when we were not sure. As many people have pointed out, ideas of God borrow a lot from parents, other authority figures such as kings and wizards, and nurturing figures. The idea of God has both an inherited and learned component.

Just because the idea came through evolution, and is not fully accurate, does not mean it is necessarily false, harmful, bad, or ugly. Like other ideas that came through evolution, and like other ideas that come from anywhere, it has to be assessed on the appropriate criteria, not only on its source.

Assessing Ideas with an Evolutionary Basis Wrongly.

Some inaccurate ideas with roots in evolution do not refer to anything material or "real", if they refer to anything at all. The ideas of friendship and justice certainly have roots in evolution but they don't refer to anything material. Some ideas refer to something we think is very real but is not material. The idea of love, including family love and romantic love, certainly has roots in evolution, and most people think love is real, but love is not material and it is hard to specify exactly what love is.

Some inaccurate ideas give us considerable comfort. We get comfort from the ideas of love, honor, friendship, justice, exchange, tradition, etc. That does not mean that what the ideas refer to is not real, is less real, or is a delusion. Not everything that gives us comfort is a delusion. Some things that give us comfort are delusions, such as our own grandeur. Some delusions do not give us comfort, such as a conspiracy theory. Honor gives me a lot of comfort, and I don't think it is a delusion. Whether an idea gives us comfort is irrelevant to the value and truth of an idea; we have to assess the idea apart from its role in giving us comfort. I refuse to let go of the ideas of friendship and love because they are partly delusions that give me comfort.

With some ideas, we evolved not only to have the idea but also to believe in its importance and to defend the idea. We not only feel love, we think it is important, and we defend it against detractors. We do the same with friendship and art. Just because we evolved to think an idea is important (believe in it) and to defend the idea, does not mean it is not important and cannot be defended on good grounds. Love, friendship, duty, and art are important, and can be defended on good grounds that have little to do with how the ideas originated.

With some ideas, it is hard to pin down what they refer to. What exactly does "love" refer to? The fact that it is hard to pin down exactly what the ideas refer to does not make the ideas less useful or wrong. It also does not make what they refer to less real.

Some inaccurate ideas with roots in evolution allow us to manipulate other people or allow other people to manipulate us. That does not mean the ideas are false, or are so dangerous that we cannot use them at

all and should repress them. The idea of fairness certainly has roots in evolution, children use it to abuse adults, and political groups such as ethnic and gender groups use it to abuse other political groups. That does not mean the idea is false or that we should totally repress the idea of fairness. The idea is certainly true, and often useful. We have to learn how to use it well. We have to defend against bad manipulation based on fairness. We did so in our evolutionary past, and can continue to do so.

What matters is how we assess and use an idea. It does not matter that the idea has roots in evolution, does not refer to anything material, has no simple referent, is inaccurate, gives comfort, allows us to manipulate, or that we evolved to believe hard in the idea and to defend it. What matters is that we can assess and use the idea. Unfortunately, we do not have well-developed criteria for assessing and using ideas like these, and so argue about them a lot.

Morality.

Morality is an evolved idea. Because morality evolved to go along with success nearly all the time, biologists are used to thinking of morality entirely in terms of success, or practicality. Biologists explain morality in terms of practicality. Morality is really practicality in disguise. Morality is really all about practicality. Biologists reduce morality to practicality. Goodness is not really anything on its own; goodness really is all about getting your own way indirectly and promoting the welfare of your family. This way of thinking about morality can be useful when figuring out strategies and evolutionary history but it is not entirely accurate.

More accurately, morality has its own logic, the logic of the Golden Rule and of “applies equally”. Morality is about goodness, right, duty, the greater good, etc. Morality goes along with practicality most of the time because we evolved to be aware of it and use it. Morality cannot be entirely reduced to practicality. We will see this argument again below.

We evolved to use morality, believe in it, and defend it. Morality does not refer to anything material. We can be hard-pressed to say exactly what morality does refer to. Morality gives us considerable comfort. We use it to manipulate other people, and they use it to manipulate us. We evolved to be susceptible to morality (believe in it). We evolved to defend morality, probably in part because we use it to manipulate other people. Morality sometimes can be a delusion, give us false hope, and serve as a tool that does more harm than good. Even so, morality is not necessarily false or useless. Morality is largely true, and morality does more good than harm most of the time. Morality can be explained by the fact that natural selection sustained it. But morality cannot be assessed only by the fact that it evolved or only by its secondary attributes such as that we use it to manipulate. Morality can be evaluated only on its truth, beauty, accord with other ideas, etc. If morality cannot be assessed by these criteria, then no evolved idea can be assessed this way. If morality can be assessed by these criteria, then every evolved idea can be assessed this way and should be assessed this way.

Religion, including belief in God, is an evolved idea. We have to assess it as calmly as we do morality. For historical reasons, that is hard to do, maybe especially in the 2010s. Before we can begin, we have to be clear about moral atheism.

Reminder: Kinds of Atheists.

All atheists actively disbelieve in God. If you only think there might not be a God, then you are more an agnostic than an atheist.

Surprisingly to Right Wingers, the majority of atheists are good moral people. They are “moral atheists”. They believe in morality although they disbelieve in God. Their morality tends to be more PC and “Lefty” than mainstream. Moral atheists likely make good neighbors. Their atheism often arises out of their morality because they think religion causes more harm than good, and they want to do more good than harm. This is the group with which I am concerned.

Super Natural.

Briefly:

-Anything that we make very important, above most of the world, we really make super natural, even if it is also in this world. Not only God is super natural. People who believe deeply in morality, love, wealth, power, souls, democracy, or free will really make those things super natural.

-Whenever we make something super natural, we imply metaphysics to go along with it even if we don't elaborate the metaphysics. If we think persons are really important, we have to explain the place of persons in the world, the relation of persons to each other, the relations of persons to choice, and their relation to aspects of the world such as power.

-To allow any super natural and metaphysics at all is to allow a lot. If you say you can hold something special, such as morality, then other people have the right to hold things special too. Then we have to decide between different sets of super-natural-with-metaphysics. If a person says souls, love, morality, and freedom are special than another person can say power and wealth are special, and we have to decide.

I use “super natural” instead of “supernatural” to make a point. “Supernatural” implies something like nature but outside of nature, and now also implies superstition and mumbo-jumbo. I don't need to imply that much. I only need to show that we go beyond nature sometimes without implying that we go to another magic world outside of nature.

A commitment to morality usually is also a commitment to the super natural. Without realizing it, moral atheists commit to the existence of the super natural when they commit to morality. Because they will not be happy that I say this, I have to use space to make the point. I make it chiefly by contrasting a moral atheist with the amoral neutrality of nature. Moral atheists tend both to believe in the neutrality of nature and to commit to morality.

Assume that the idea of a natural world makes sense. Assume the world is only natural. This idea goes along with the idea that natural laws explain everything. If so, nature is amoral. There is no intrinsically better or worse in nature; there is only what is and what happens. This is the point of the story “The Open Boat” by Stephen Crane, who also wrote “The Red Badge of Courage”. “Stuff happens”. Nature is not immoral; nature does not promote bad things or value bad things. Nature is not moral; nature does not

promote good things or value good things. Nature makes many things. Some things happen to be moral, some amoral, and some immoral. Nature does not favor one over the other. Even if there is a general drift in nature toward good things or bad things, that drift is only accidental.

Not only is nature neutral on morality, nature is neutral on everything. Again, there is no intrinsic better or worse in nature. A mudslide is no better and no worse than a star although a star might be better than a mudslide if we allow that bigger is better. A flea is no less important, or more important, than a galaxy. A tapeworm is no better than an ape. No animal is better or worse than any other animal. Humans are not better than any other thing or species. Humans are no better than a broken pebble or a slug. No ethnic group, religion, way of government, or way of life, is better or worse than any other. Tyranny and slavery are the same as democracy. Except with a measurable property such as "bigger", all evaluations come only from the point of view of a particular organism, and depend entirely on the evolved mental abilities of the organism. To a whale, the open sea is better than the Internet.

Valuing and committing often go together. The fact that people commit to morality shows that they value it in a way that nature does not value it. Usually when we value something highly, we also commit to it, and, we commit to something because we value it. I value honor highly, and commit to it; I value Tai Chi Chuan highly and commit to it. People usually value marriage and try to commit to it. Moral atheists commit to morality and therefore they value morality highly in a way nature does not.

We value things in an all-natural amoral world that does not itself bestow value. In particular, we value morality in an all-natural amoral non-evaluating world. Some of the things that we value, we value in a way that puts us at odds with an amoral non-evaluating world. To value things in an all-natural amoral non-evaluating world put us in one of only four positions.

(1) The value is only a matter of idiosyncratic taste, regardless of how the taste developed. I don't go into this position any more here because moralistic atheists want more than this.

(2) The commitment-valuation is all natural and only natural. It does not point to anything beyond nature. We evolved to have an idea, believe in the idea, value the idea, think the object of the idea is real, defend the idea, defend our commitment, and use the idea to manipulate ourselves and other people. There is nothing more than that. There is nothing special about the logic of this idea or that idea or any idea. No idea is intrinsically any better than any other idea just because we evolved to evaluate some ideas higher than other ideas. Any belief that an idea is better than any other idea is merely an evolved delusion that helps our commitment. Any belief that an idea is better than any other idea is part of delusion that helps us to manipulate ourselves and other people. Morality can be reduced entirely to evolutionary success or to surrogates such as power and sex.

(3) The capacity to have the idea evolved but the idea, the value we place on the idea, our commitment, and the fact that we think the object of the idea is real, really link to the super natural anyway. Although the capacity for an idea is entirely evolved, it can still point to something super natural. The fact that the capacity for the idea evolved in human beings here on planet Earth is only how we got to be aware of the idea. The fact that we might have an inaccurate version of the idea does not undermine the idea. This is how moralistic atheists feel about morality whether they know it or not. This is how many people feel about morality, love, justice, democracy, etc.

(4) The capacity to have the idea evolved but the idea, the value we place on the idea, our commitment, and the fact that we think the object of the idea is real, link to the super natural anyway. In this case, in contrast to position three, the best evidence for the super natural link is not any feeling we have about the idea or how we use the idea but the logic of the idea. The logic of the idea is distinct. The logic of the idea has the features that we associate with moral logic. The facts that we never perfectly follow the logic, and we do not see the object of the logic perfectly, do not undermine the logic. We might not live up to the Golden Rule and we might not see every person in his-her full humanity but those facts do not change that we understand the logic. Position four is the standard modern defense by philosophy for morality as super natural.

The difference between the positions is subtle but important. Philosophers have argued for positions three and four since at least 2400 years ago with Plato. This is a case of “if you get it, you get it, and, if you don’t, you don’t.” If you can see the color red, you can see it. If you already disbelieve the third and fourth positions, I cannot talk you into them. See any anthology on ethics, or read “The Once and Future King”. If you already disbelieve, willingly suspend your disbelief long enough to follow the rest of this chapter.

Moral atheists are ambivalent and often hypocritical. They deny the third-fourth positions when it suits them such as when they argue with terrorists against the role of religion in life. They do not want to allow any excuse for terrorism, so they explain away religion as merely evolved. They accept the third-fourth positions when that suits them, as when they want to push their morality against a different morality such as simple Christianity.

Not only a commitment to morality points to the super natural and makes the positions. If you think love, justice, freedom, clear thinking, decency, good neighborly relations, Dharma, Tao, or yin and yang are intrinsically valuable and/or real then you are not a true naturalistic skeptic as in positions one-two. The idea that the natural world is amoral is not a scientific fact that can be tested but a belief to be evaluated. So, commitment to naturalistic materialism means a person privileges material stuff over subjective-but-entirely-naturalistic-experiences such as righteous justification, and so is not a naturalistic skeptic. If you think matter-and-energy is more real than anything else, including the smell of roses, then you are not a true naturalistic skeptic. On the other hand, if you think subjective mental states exist and are intrinsically valuable, such as love or the smell or roses, then you are not a true naturalistic skeptic either. If you think pleasure really is better than pain, you are not a true naturalistic skeptic.

It helps to use a belief other than morality to make the point. People who believe that all acts, judgments, and commitments are only natural (position two) also tend to believe in scientific method. These two ideas are contradictory. The people who use scientific method do not just use scientific method, they believe in it, value it highly, commit to it, and think it is really real (Position Three). They believe that scientific method has its own logic; the logic is apart from any way that we come to believe in it; and the logic is apart from any particular procedures that we use to carry it out (particular procedures of testing and discovery) (Position Four). They believe scientific method is some thing outside of any particular person. Scientific method is objective. It can be used to evaluate other ideas. Although evolution ultimately gave us the capacities to see scientific method and use it, evolution did not create scientific method. Evolution developed capacities to allow us to mimic scientific logic but evolution did not invent

the logic of scientific method. Scientific method would be the same if it were used on Earth or used by floating aliens on some gas giant near a red star. Scientific method is not in the natural world in the same sense that a rock, tree, dog, or belief that the sun will rise, are in the natural world. Then where is it? If you believe in scientific method, then you believe in the super natural. You cannot believe in scientific method as apart from any particular evolved being and not also believe in the super natural.

Thinkers often use the fact that we sometimes act-morally-despite-impractical-results (altruism) to argue that morality is super natural. Whenever anybody risks his-her life to save a potential drowning victim, people argue that morality is super natural. In contrast, evolutionary theory has advanced to the point where it can account for this kind of behavior fairly easily without invoking altruism. Thus this argument has become a “red herring”, this argument is now largely irrelevant, so I do not explain how evolutionary theory accounts for altruism, and I do not go through the dispute. You can find discussion of it in most of the readings on the evolution of morality in the list of readings.

Following Plato, the early Christian Church clearly understood the idea that, if you privilege anything, you imply something super natural. Everybody privileges something, so everybody also implies some super natural. That idea was fully acceptable to the Church because, the Church argued, once you accept that some super natural is needed, we can prove that our construction of the super natural, our metaphysics, is the one and only possible, and the best, metaphysics. That is why the Church, especially the Western Church, has been so “big” on philosophy and logic – in my opinion, a good thing because we are the heirs of that tradition. Once you accept that some super natural is inevitable, then you have to argue about the best super natural; you have to argue metaphysics. You can still see this idea stated in its pristine clarity in Gilbert Keith (G.K.) Chesterton and Clive Staples (C.S.) Lewis. This chapter dabbles in the battle of metaphysics but does not go into it much. I disagree with the Church claim that they can prove their metaphysics is the one-and-only-best. Hindus and some Buddhists make the same claim, and I disagree with them too. I do not give my full criteria for deciding between versions of the super natural and of metaphysics. This book-as-a-whole does go through that project a bit but not in the explicit philosophical way favored in the Western Church.

Not Reducing Morality.

People like to explain morality in terms of other things. Especially they like to explain goodness in terms of other things. They reduce morality to other things. They say goodness is really only pleasure, power, practicality, lust, order, or success in disguise. Darwinists reduce morality when they say morality evolved to serve evolutionary success, and all moral abilities can be understood by how they served evolutionary success in our past (position one). In “Principia Ethica”, G. E. Moore argued that this way of talking about goodness is completely wrong. You cannot explain goodness in terms of anything else. Moral thinking is qualitatively unique by itself. Morality is a qualitatively distinct idea. We understand good things as good. We do not understand good things in terms of any thing else. When we say something is good, we mean it is good, we do not mean it is really anything else in disguise.

Because good is a qualitatively distinct unique idea, when we believe in goodness, we can really believe in goodness in itself. Even when goodness is mixed with other concerns, as when we tell the truth and enhance our reputation at the same time, we can believe that there is a pure goodness apart from other motives, and we do not have to believe that goodness is only other motives in disguise.

Moore did not say the following but it is an extension of his ideas: In the all-naturalistic amoral world, morality is either directly natural or it can be reduced to only things that are natural. Moore says we cannot reduce morality. That means we cannot reduce morality to anything natural. Because nature is amoral, it seems a bit odd to say that morality is natural even though the capacity for morality evolved. The fact that the capacity for morality evolved does not mean that morality itself is natural. Morality and nature are not necessarily the same. If morality is not simply natural, I think it must be super natural.

I have said often that morality has its own logic. This is my way to say morality is a qualitatively distinct idea that cannot be reduced to anything else. I used the Golden Rule and the idea of “applies equally to everybody” to explain the logic of morality. Saying morality has its own logic can be seen as reducing morality to some thing. I am not sure Moore would approve. I don't argue with his ghost here. I stick with what I have been doing.

Implications.

Once moral atheists accept that morality is super natural, then religion is an open door. Morality evolved, it is used to manipulate people, we gain comfort from it, and it is not a perfectly accurate way to assess behavior. We evolved to believe hard in it and to defend it. All the same is true of religion. Moral atheists who want to dismiss religion because the ability for religion evolved denigrate religion not on its content but on its source alone. If moral atheists want to dismiss religion on the grounds that religion evolved, merely is a comforting delusion, is not fully accurate, etc., then they have to explain why they can use this argument against religion but not against morality. They have to explain why morality is special without committing to any of the super natural implications that saying morality is special must lead to. They have to say why morality is special but religion is not. This is doable but is very hard, and I have never read an account by a moral atheist why it might be so.

Belief in the super natural does not necessarily commit us to religion in general, to any particular religion, or to any foolishness such as fairies, devils, and animal spirit companions. We have to think about what it does imply.

If making moral evaluations necessarily implies God exists, this book would not be needed. Everybody would accept it by now. But the fact that we refer to the super natural when we judge does not prove any of what I believe.

For a while, many Darwinists that I met were also atheists and vegetarians. It is an odd mix. There is no reason why vegetarianism and atheism entail each other. I understand why people might be vegetarians and how they would justify vegetarianism morally. Vegetarians make a moral commitment. They believe in vegetarianism and morality. Yet the moral commitment to vegetarianism is the kind of commitment that usually links to the super natural. Traditional vegetarians, such as some Jains, Hindus, and Buddhists, make this link explicit. There is no reason in nature, evolution, evolutionary history, or Darwinism, why people should be vegetarians on moral grounds. There is little in how morality evolved that would lead us to not eat meat or to think vegetarianism is superior. In fact, there are good reasons why not; why we might think eating meat was practically better and so morally better; but I don't go into them here. If the moral commitment to vegetarianism implies the super natural, then Darwinian atheists need to ask why

they want to be vegetarians. If Darwinian atheists want to deny everything that implies the super natural, they need to give up vegetarianism except for strict reasons of health. I think the moral commitment of vegetarians to the super natural is not logically compatible with atheism, especially with a combination of vigorous Darwinism and atheism.

The super natural link that is implied by any moral commitment might not entail any particular theism but it does entail that we have to wonder. If you want to be moral, you have to think. We have to wonder why we think goodness, freedom, love, duty, and honor are real and are so much better. Whenever sentient-moral beings evolved (like humans) the morality that evolved would be like the morality we have even if not exactly like. So we have to wonder what the pervasiveness of morality means. We have to wonder what it means that the logic of morality is the logic of the Golden Rule and “applies equally to everybody”. We have to wonder why that logic is unique. We have to be amazed that all sentient-moral beings would know that logic. We have to wonder about the laws of the universe being set just right for the evolution of sentient-moral beings on a lot of planets. We have to wonder about a mind behind it all. We don’t all have to agree, but we do have to wonder, and we have to agree what we wonder about. My wonder leads me to a mind behind it all, and to the messages that the mind has given us through his prophets, in particular Jesus.

We know now that we don’t have to discard the idea of God just because the basis for it evolved, the idea is not fully accurate, it gives us comfort, etc. Now we have to evaluate it. On what basis do we evaluate? Because there is no logical proof for the existence or non-existence of God, we have to give up on that, and evaluate on other grounds. After we have evaluated on other grounds, we can come back to decide the existence or non-existence of God. The first other ground is plausibility based on circumstantial evidence of cosmology and on the evolution of morality. On that basis, I decided God likely exists. The remaining other grounds are what this book is about. We look at the various ideas about life, God, and religion, and then we make up our minds. The most important ground is morality. Religious belief has to be in line with the best morality, the morality of the Golden Rule and “applies equally to everybody”. We have to take the real world into account.

This stance is not new. This is the stance advised by the Enlightenment. Sadly, smart people gave up on this stance for about two hundred years. Not everybody can take this stance. The people who can follow this way should follow it, and they should share their results as best they can.

Taking this stance does not guarantee that people will become decent or the state will run as it should. Only if decent intelligent reasonable people can control the apparatus of government without oppressing other people can this strategy help with government.

Any orientation to the super natural automatically implies that this life is not enough and that we have to turn to the super natural to find the full meaning of life. I don’t like this implication but I accept it, and then try to deal with it. How I deal with it has been discussed in previous chapters and will be discussed more in later chapters. This link to the super natural does not commit us to any particular theism and it does not commit us to devalue this human life on this planet. Humans are not depraved and the world is not fallen just because we link to the super natural when we believe in morality. A small amount of the super natural is compatible with the idea that this life is what there is, this situation is what counts, and we should focus on what we have to do now. Religions that teach us to pay attention to what is going on

now, such as Judaism, Buddhism, Zen, and Taoism, also feature some super natural presence although not always deism. The idea that moral commitment opens the door to the super natural does not have to go against those religions or against a commonsense life.

Natural and Super Natural Again.

On the one hand, I said natural laws can explain everything. On the other hand, I said morality points to the super natural. I cannot wriggle out of this contradiction. I don't know how to fully resolve it. Here is the best I can do. Morality has its own distinct logic, the logic of "applies equally to everybody" and the Golden Rule. Evolution helps us to find this logic. Evolution creates the chemistry that approximately models our acts on this logic. Evolution does not create this logic, any more than it creates the logic of scientific method. Evolution is God's way of guiding us to an objective logic of good and bad.

Except for books like this when we have to be clear about the super natural and have to make points about the super natural, pro or con, I prefer not to dwell on it much. I use the naturalistic research strategy and assume that natural laws explain as much as I need for most cases.

More important than deciding exactly what morality implies for the super natural, we need to decide on what principles we will use in morality and to decide particular cases of morality. What principles do we use to decide the morality of what kinds of abortion, and what laws the state should have concerning what kinds of abortion? I have given my principles in the first part of the book and I develop them more when I describe other religions in later chapters.

Religion, Badness, and Human Nature.

This section repeats an argument offered earlier. This material might make more sense now.

Many atheists want to thwart religion because they want to thwart badness. This is a noble desire. Many bad things are done in the name of religion, as they are done in the name of political ideologies. Atheists think, if we got rid of religion, we might be able to prevent a lot of badness. I think, if we got rid of religion, we might prevent a little badness, but we probably could not prevent much badness, and we would cause a lot of other badness that would be worse than what good we did.

Bad things that are done in the name of religion are usually really done for other reasons. People only use religion as an excuse. Stopping Christianity would not have stopped slavery in the United States. Stopping Islam would not stop terrorism by people who fear modernity, hate the West, and hang on to whatever little power they can. Stopping Islam would not prevent Iran from working to develop nuclear weapons. Ending Christianity would not have stopped the Crusades. Stopping Qi Gong will not prevent all Chinese from foolishness. The best way to minimize the damage done by religion is to tie religion to the best universal morality. Most of the world now understands the best universal morality. We need to help people see the tie between their religion and what they already know about morality.

If all religion were eliminated, people would still do bad things in the name of other ideologies. People would use other ideologies to excuse bad things that they want to do for other reasons. People would use atheism as an excuse for oppression.

If all underlying excuses to use religion to do bad things were removed, some few people still would do bad things because of "pure" religion alone and for no other reason. Even if a person had no other motive, he-she would still bomb a school bus because God-Allah-Dharma-Tao-Nature-Heaven-Oogah-Boogah said so. It is not possible to stop all human stupidity and badness. It is not worth trying to stop all religion so as to stop the very little badness that is done for religion alone.

People are born with the capacity for religion, like they are born being able to enjoy alcohol. Trying to stop religion would be like American Prohibition. It is like trying to stop stupid political opinions or the love of fashion and frippery. It is like trying to stop stupid TV game shows, reality shows, and soap operas. It is like trying to stop bad political commentary. It only surfaces again in another way. Trying to stop what people like breeds resentment, hatred of authority, and gangsters. Trying to stop religion would breed the equivalent of religious gangsters, and we have enough of that already. Again, the best thing is not to stop religion but to ally religion with the best morality.

Difference.

I want the best morality to guide religion. I do not fight with other believers over details of content. I learn from all religious teachers. I especially admire Jesus, and I like defending him. God sent prophets to us. I want us to be decent people and to work hard to build a better world. I want us all to do what we wish as long as we don't hurt other people, and, by doing what we wish, make the world interesting. Except for the few references to God and Jesus, my stance hardly differs from moral atheists. Then what difference does it make? Not much. Here is what I see.

Moral atheists are like the religious zealots they condemn. Even when moral atheists make a point of smoking pot, drinking booze, supposedly accepting other people, and accepting Lefty politics, that is not how they seem. They have the letter but not the spirit. They are like PC moralists and religious zealots even when they condemn PC moralists and religious zealots. They are like Prohibitionists but they are even worse because they deal not with substances but with ideas. They romanticize indecent people while putting down simple decent people. They perpetuate the false romantic world view with simple contrasts such as between religion versus morality. They want me to think like them. I don't want to think like them. They want me to shut down my imagination. I don't want to shut down my imagination. They want to take the color out of the world. I like seeing in color.

Religious moderates are like the people that the moral atheists want to be. Religious moderates are like people who take a drink now and again, smoke a little grass (marijuana), and listen to stories from other people. They are happy when other people listen to their stories. They like taking ideas into their minds and playing with them. They are not afraid of the idea of God. They see the importance of morality and religion but also their dangers.

Promote religious moderates. Condemn zealots of all kinds. Do not try to ban religion so as to get rid of zealots. Do not try to discredit religion so as to ban religion. Do not get angry at moral atheists; argue with them when you feel like it and when they make sense. Do not use Darwinism to discredit religion unless your arguments get much better.

PART 5: Atheists vs. Theists: Do We Need God to Be Moral?

This part largely repeats and summarizes. It focuses on the implications for the real world.

The simple answer to the header question is “No. Atheists are moral”. The rest of us can believe in God without feeling guilty or inferior. Belief in God usually is sane and belief can help us. Most of us will, and should, believe. Atheists can do as they wish. Deep problems are more dangerous than ideologies such as atheism, simplistic religion, or bad religion. We should work on solving deep problems.

Note before Main Text: Poor Old Science, Good Old Science, New Science, and Not Science.

The only way to write this note briefly is to allude to ideas from science without explaining. Anybody who has read the excellent recent popular books on science knows enough. At the end of this section, I give some examples from fields other than science.

Atheists who use physics and biology to disprove God look at the idea of God as doctrinaire physicists look at the old ideas of Ptolemaic epicycles, phlogiston, and ether or as doctrinaire “New Darwinism” biologists look at old ideas about “good of the species” and Vitalism. These old ideas once were valid theories about aspects of the world. They were displaced by better theories that took better account of the facts. Sometimes, crucial facts disproved the old theory but worked with the new theory. The classic example of this disproving is the Michelson-Morley experiment that came up with facts that could not be explained by ether but could be explained by Special Relativity.

When old theories are displaced this way, people born into the new generation look on the old theories as not simply displaced but as conclusively falsified and they look on the people who cling to old theories as fools. Old theories, and people who cling to them, are the butt of jokes. Examples include people who denied the atomic theory, denied the enzyme theory, believed in Vitalism despite the rise of biochemistry, couldn’t understand Relativity or QM, just couldn’t accept QM even if they could do the manipulations, and people who clung to “good of the species” and the kind of population biology that presumed good of the species. Even Einstein was seen as foolish over QM.

THIS is how atheists look at God, as an old displaced theory that is now conclusively disproved. When new science can explain so much without reference to God, then God is not only displaced but clearly disproved. The people who continue to believe in God are foolish oldster outsiders who just can’t let go and can’t get on with better ideas and better work. When faced with old ideas and clingy people, the best antidote is to pile on facts of the new world as we now see it. If we can’t save old believers, at least we can save the new generation from being seduced by wrong old ideas.

It helps to know that Einstein never thought the ether disproved. It just had little use. There was no point in trying to directly prove or disprove ether. It is better to focus on what is interesting, beautiful, elegant, and so likely true. Einstein likely did not know of Michelson-Morley when he forged Special Relativity, and, in any case, the experiment did not play a large role.

This attitude that old theories are definitely false and old believers foolish might be valid when aimed at some popular ideas of God and at some doctrines of traditional churches. I don’t go into detail. It is not

accurate when aimed at all scientists and other thoughtful people who believe in God. It is not accurate when aimed at the ideas in this chapter and this book.

I now presume to speak for scientists and other thoughtful people who believe in God. This group does not look at the idea of God like epicycles, phlogiston, ether, Vitalism, and simplistic “good of the species”. This group looks at the idea of God much as working physicists, working biologists, engineers, the space program, and science teachers look at Newtonian physics, classical electrodynamics, population biology, and even QM before quantum field theory (I still don’t understand QFT well). Those old theories make sense. They work. A normal person can get them. They do not require a bizarre leap of imagination or an-odd-for-a-scientist faith in numbers that magically add up. They are easier to use than the complex theories that displaced them. They are more than good enough except when theoretical rigor is needed. All the trips to the moon have been carried out pretty much using only Newtonian physics and classical ideas of light and matter. Yes, the old theories are not complete, but that is no reason to laugh at them or discard them entirely.

Just because another new theory can better explain the same things that this old theory can explain, does not mean we should scoff at this old theory. It does not mean this theory is entirely false and stupid. It does not mean the people who continue to use this old theory when useful are idiots and incompetent. If so, 90% of engineers and 75% of physicists are incompetent idiots.

Besides, the new theories are not entirely correct, they are likely to be displaced, they are not often the most convenient for real world use, and they are as much about beauty as about facts (although they must explain facts and they are subject to falsification). Aspects of the old theories find happy places in the new theories. Nobody thinks quarks are the last word about matter. When new ideas about matter and energy come, it will be fun to see what happens to QED and QCD despite the accuracy of QED numbers. Nobody knows why the calculations come out so well or what is really happening “down there”. There is as yet no quantum theory of gravity, and, when QG comes, it will be fun to see what happens to the theories of Einstein even though the amazingly accurate calculations of General Relativity remain. “Collapse of the wave function” is, in fact, gibberish to cover up that physicists haven’t any idea what is going on with many basic interactions. New Darwinism is more accurate than old ideas of the “good of the species” and more accurate than old population biology (including genetics and ecology), at least for individual organisms, kin, small groups, and mass closely related societies such as hives and colonies. If there was a big full theory of species, populations, and ecology based on the New Darwinism then that is what we should use – if we could. Attempts to model real populations and real ecologies using new ideas of competition, population structure, species, and species interaction are complicated, and so far, have not been very successful or useful. No field biologist would use New Darwinism for a population or ecosystem when old population biology works well enough to save a species and a national park. And, with the coming of recent ideas in biology, which show that variance at several levels is relevant to selection, the old population ideas are not so wrong after all and the New Darwinism is not all correct. New ideas from physics and biology are overall more correct but that is no reason to be smug, rude, and dismissive toward old ideas.

Of course, the idea of God is NOT a scientific theory. I don’t explain why. That difference is part of the point here. Scientific theories, even when they explain so much, still do not discredit ideas like God. If they did, then I could not write this chapter basing my arguments on morality.

Even though the idea of God is not a scientific theory, still, lessons of old and new theories from science can be applied to the idea of God.

We certainly do not understand God very well. We are not accurate. We should not expect to be entirely accurate. We should be happy when prophets increase our knowing a bit. Suppose we understand God about as well as physicists before 1900 knew the world. That is good enough for practical needs. When prophets and thinkers come up with better ideas of God, we can absorb those as well. We need not scoff at old ideas of God or even at atheists. People who scoff now get ridiculed later. It is not likely that any theory, or any simple heaping on of evidence, will get us to the full accurate truth of the world. It is not likely any theory or any simple heaping on of evidence will prove or disprove God.

Despite advances in science, you can hold on to the idea of God, without contravening science, as you can hold on to the Golden Rule or the beauty of Bach, Mozart, and the Beatles.

Thinking of the idea of God as like epicycles, phlogiston, ether, or simplistic “good of the species” gives you a bad attitude toward the idea of God, God, believers, and average evolved people. Thinking of the idea of God as like classical physics or like field biology gives you a better attitude toward God, believers, and average evolved people. Thinking of the idea of God as like epicycles etc. blocks you from seeing that the idea of God is not like scientific theories and it cannot be disproved or proved by an accumulation of facts. Thinking of the idea of God as like Newtonian physics helps you to see that the idea of God is not a scientific theory and helps you see the proper relation between facts, beauty, science, and the idea of God. This stance is a better place from which to see that people do not believe in, and use, the idea of God as they do the science that they learned in high school or grad school. This approach makes you humbler and better able to work with the realities of evolved human nature.

Taking a stance that “old theories are stupid and absolutely false” sets up a bad idea toward new theories and sets you up to be the stubborn idiot when new ideas come along. You become the person that you now laugh at. Seeing that new theories are as much about beauty as about gobs of facts leads you to feel the value of old theories and helps you not to get stuck in the “new” theories that will someday be old theories. Seeing that many old theories are still good working models makes it easier to appreciate new theories and to appreciate what lies outside science. It helps you not become the person you now avoid. You think better. This better overall attitude makes it easier to appreciate the idea of God in human life and the possibility that God might be real. It does not force you to believe God is real.

It would be better if atheists did not look at science as “proving God wrong” in the same way that science proved wrong ideas of phlogiston, epicycles, ether, Vitalism, and good of the species. It might be better if thoughtful believers in God would think out the relation of God and morality, and then think out the role of science in appreciating (not proving or disproving) God.

Atheists see the idea of God like outlandish art and dress styles from about five years ago: not only are they gone, they are dead, and best repressed and forgotten. Thoughtful believers see God like classic clothes that never go out of style. They might not be a hit with everyone, not turn heads, not be suitable for every occasion, but they can't go wrong, you won't look stupid now or in old pictures, you only need improve on them sometimes, and you will have enough fun wearing these. Atheists look at the idea of

God like any simple stupid recurring fad. Thoughtful believers look at God like as classic, enduring, and that gives value all the time, from rock music and jazz to cars. Atheists look at the idea of God as like the latest TV show about cops, doctors, spies, demons, demon hunters, pseudo-epics, or vengeance; it has roots in the human personality, and will always recur, but we can rise above it. Thoughtful believers see God as like the really good shows that come from time-to-time and speak to us. They might not guide us through all of life, and might even be aimed at one gender or one ethnic group, but they are true enough at a deep enough level so we can always enjoy them and learn from them. Atheists look at the idea of God as like all the damn annoying politicians that we always elect and that serve forever in Washington or the state capital. Why people vote for them can be explained by evolved human nature but that doesn't make it right and doesn't mean we shouldn't fight hard to rise above it. Thoughtful believers look at God as like the politicians who shape nations and who make us better such as Jefferson, Madison, Adams, Washington, Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and John Kennedy. Atheists hear the dogma of churches as like the ridiculous spiels of politicians and hip-hop racist sexists – not only seductive and annoying but dangerous. Thoughtful believers try to glean the truth out of long-standing political ideas, church dogmas, and religions. Atheists see groups of believers as like banana republics, dictators, North Korea, Burma before 2016, ethnic groups that cannot self-govern, or America since both Ronald Reagan and the explosion of entitlement. Thoughtful believers see small groups of simple decent people in all major religions striving to do good and to make the world better, guided both by their own character and by the best teachings of their religion.

The chapter now returns to the major themes.

Bad Problems.

The world has real problems such as: kinks in capitalism, some people are not smart enough to make a living in modern capitalism, the agony of nature, the American national debt, abuse of welfare, abuse of state programs for business, bad ideologies such as religious backlash, White racism, and Black racism. Some problems we can work on. Some we can do little about such as chronic unemployment. For those, the best we can do is to manage the symptoms in the most humane way possible. Instead of worrying about theism versus atheism, we should worry about the problems.

We the public, and our leaders, will not face these problems and deal with them. We offer evasions and “band aids” that make problems worse in the long run. Our evasion is as evil as the original problems. Some few smart people have seen the problems and a few have offered thoughtful plausible solutions but the solutions aren't the topic here. No major politician, religious leader, ethnic leader, or gender leader has offered and backed good solutions.

Ideologies, Behavior, and Bad Problems.

(1) Atheists say the world will end horribly if people continue in religious delusion and don't quickly adopt atheism. (2) Theists say the world will end horribly if people do not reject atheism, determinism, materialism, scientism, socialism, etc. and we don't all quickly come to God. Both groups are wrong. All groups that think this way are wrong.

I use “ideologies” and “ideas” similarly. People are swayed by ideologies such as the tough guy code, academic atheism, or “justified by faith alone”. Yet people do not usually behave as well as their best ideology tells them and do not behave as badly as their worst ideology tells them. Ideology and behavior go along and don’t go along. There is a gap between ideology and behavior.

People have a natural stock of mischief, naughtiness, superstition, stupidity, silliness, and some badness, and this mischief can keep us from reaching goals. Usually this is not much of a problem unless other hard issues lead us down bad roads. Bad people use bad ideologies, or twist good ideologies, to push personal mild naughtiness into real collective badness such as terrorism and oppression. Bad ideas can override basic decency. But bad ideas win usually only when used by bad people and combined with hard problems. I don’t focus on these issues here. They require a separate essay.

People also have a natural stock of decency that helps protect us from bad ideologies or bad twisting of good ideologies. The gap between ideology and behavior, and basic decency, mean we don’t have to worry much about bad ideologies unless there are also other deep reasons why people believe bad ideas and act badly. We can overcome bad ideas if we tell the truth and we work on solving deep problems, and only if we do that. I focus on this issue.

We all should: find good ideas, keep good ideas, debunk bad ideas, and expose the bad use of ideas. Theism and atheism in themselves are not bad. Ideas within them, such as “Jesus was a prophet”, are not usually bad. Theism, atheism, and ideas in them, can be used badly. We should expose the bad use of theism, atheism, and ideas in them. It is not often useful to try to debunk atheism or theism as wholes. It is more useful to debunk particular bad ideas or bad uses of ideas, such as “God loves us and only us, so we can do what we wish to others”, or “anyone who believes in God is fundamentally irrational, and so a bad citizen and prone to oppressive violence”.

So we can be religious, or atheistic, as we wish without also being stupid, harmful, and inhuman.

If you understand the above paragraphs and their implications for bad acts, good acts, bad people, good people, bad ideas, good ideas, bad ideologies, good ideologies, and traps, you may skip this section.

The world has bad people both because bad people would be around regardless and because problems lead people to behave badly. People also use problems as an excuse to behave badly even when they don’t understand the problems or the solutions, and what they really want to do is behave badly.

Some problems lead people to feel cheated, trapped, and picked on. Sometimes the people are really cheated and trapped, and sometimes they only feel cheated and trapped because they don’t see the big picture, don’t see how to get out of their situation, and don’t see how much the problems are their fault. Problems in which people feel cheated and trapped cause the most damage whether people are really cheated and trapped or only feel that way. Unemployment and under employment that feed racism, sexism, ageism, and bias based on religion are my favorite case of problems that lead people to feel cheated and trapped.

After about 1500, with the rise of capitalism and Protestantism, the West saw a boom in all kinds of new ideas, some good, many silly, and some bad. This is the start of modern “isms” such as materialism,

spiritualism, capitalism (free-market “ism”), modernism, faith over works, the Bible alone, atheism, etc. This is the start of modern cult-like ideas such as that religion, the state, the market, mysticism, science, emotion, love, reason, art, etc. alone can solve all our problems.

I don't know if silly, stupid, and bad ideas are in the same proportion to good ideas at all places in all times but they seem to have boomed in the West after 1500. I don't know if silly, stupid, and bad ideas before 1500 had more sway over people than those after 1500. Religious leaders descry nearly all new ideas as all bad and as leading us astray from the tried-and-true path of traditional religion that had been well set-up by the Middle Ages. Every “ism” or clever idea leads us into confusion, by itself causes us to act badly, and leads us away from God. I don't guess on the link between capitalism, Protestantism, and silly, stupid, or bad ideas. Roman Catholics and pro-business people have their share of poor ideas.

Bad ideologies by themselves can lead people astray into feeling cheated and trapped and can lead us into bad acts but not nearly as often as we fear, as long as nothing reinforces the bad ideology. The drug culture leads some people astray but not nearly as much as chemistry does, and the majority of people indulge in some drugs without losing their lives. People try cigarettes seeking glamour but stay addicted because of nicotine. People can lose integrity trying to be cool, and many people waste a huge amount of money and time that way. But trying to be cool itself likely does not do too much damage. Bad ideas usually are like women's fashion.

Bad ideologies are a real problem when they work with deeper problems that lead people to feel cheated and trapped (whether really cheated and trapped or not). Then, bad ideologies enable and intensify bad behavior, usually quite a bit. Then, problems intensify racism, sexism, ageism, and bias by religion; those attitudes cause people to act worse; the acting worse intensifies the original problems; and so on. It is hard to get out of these situations once in them, and, sadly, America is in half-a-dozen. Bad versions of Christianity and Islam do not alone cause terrorism, and are not the major original causes of terrorism; but they can work with terrorism when it arises for other reasons, they serve as recruiting tools, bad versions persist even when the original causes have abated, and bad versions can cause terrorism even when the original causes have abated.

When bad people want people to do bad things, they make people feel cheated, trapped, and picked on. They make people feel like victims, and make people wish to lash out. This is how terrorists recruit. This attitude has soured American politics since the late 1960s. When everybody in a country feels this way about his-her situation and about relations to everybody else, the country is in trouble. When people wish to do bad things, they screw themselves up to feel cheated, trapped, and picked on; they convince themselves they are victims and there is no way out other than bad acts. Regardless of any original dilemma, once a person is in this mindset, it is hard to get out. But it is not impossible.

Culture can be a strong reason why bad problems persist, stronger than (other mere) ideologies such as the gangster mystique or the Right Wing Rebel. Culture itself usually does not cause problems as does, for example, unemployment – although it can, as in cultures that are sexist. Yet, once attitudes that bear on problems become part of a culture, the complex of culture-and-problems becomes so entrenched that it is impossible to deal with problems, such as unemployment, without also dealing with the paired culture. So, for here, I don't classify culture as a basic underlying cause or as a mere ideology. This topic quickly

raises issues of PC versus not PC. What aspects of American White and American Black cultures are bad? I cannot go into more details here without going into too much.

People want to behave fairly well unless they feel mistreated. If there were not underlying bad conditions on which bad ideas and bad people could build, there would be much less seriously bad behavior.

To reduce the badness that ideas enable, we cannot simply go after bad ideas alone. We have to go after the underlying bad problems and the links between ideas and bad problems. If we don't also go after bad problems, then going after the ideas alone only makes things worse. We seem like hypocrites. Then bad ideas increase their ability to enable bad behavior. To go after the bad ideas that enable bad behavior, such as racism by both Whites and Blacks, can help with underlying problems. To go after bad problems we need fairly clear heads, and, to get that, we have to clean away bad ideas such as racism as much as we can. But, still, we will make little progress unless we also go after bad problems at the same time. We cannot simply talk people out of problems such as unemployment or bad behavior such as racism and terrorism.

Still, we should not excuse bad behavior because of underlying problems or because of ideologies that lead people astray. People must be responsible for their actions regardless of some bad situations and bad ideologies. People, especially leaders, have to seek out the basic causes of their situations, apart from what ideologies tell them, and people have to act according to basic truth.

Even if we totally eliminated all problems and bad ideas, we would still have enough people who act badly and find excuses. We have deal with bad people. Good people have to control bad people, often with the police and military, and often by personally telling bad people they are bad.

The simultaneous presence of bad people in themselves, bad problems, and bad ideas, makes the whole situation much more difficult but that is what humans have to deal with.

For here, look at religion as if it was an ideology in the above framework. For here, think of atheism as an intellectual quasi-religious ideology. If you don't like thinking of atheism that way, then think of it as an intellectual ideology. Bad ideologies, including bad religion and bad atheism, work with deep problems to lead people astray. We need to seek the truth to get people out of bad religious ideas.

For here, think of morality not as an ideology but as behaviors that are common to nearly all people and that can be evoked during most human interaction. Morality is "instinctive" good behavior, following the Golden Rule and "applies equally", instinctive good behavior that we can call on to counter bad behavior. I know real morality varies by culture and society, real morality has its own ideologies, and people can behave badly using a moral excuse; but overlook those issues for now. Think of it this way: when people behave badly using an excuse, their bad behavior goes against moral logic such as the Golden Rule, and their bad behavior usually is helped by a religious excuse, an ideology. When people behave well, they follow the logic of the Golden Rule, and they would not do so unless training had built on a solid evolved foundation.

Luckily, we have been helped by evolution. If religion (ideology) always exactly dictated moral behavior, then we would be in big trouble when people fell into bad ideology. People would always act badly, and it

would be hard to get them to act well. But people don't do that. A gap lies between ideology and moral action. People can think one way yet act another. Usually people act fairly decently regardless of official ideology. Usually people act badly on the basis of a particular ideology only in particular situations and toward particular people. Religion and morality evolved together, supported each other while evolving, and often support each other now. But they are not identical. They evolved not to be identical. They evolved so people could have one set of religious ideas and another set of actions based on simple morality, and the two sets could co-exist even if they contradicted a bit. People evolved to tolerate gaps between ideologies and actions. People can be nice to members of another race even when their religion tells them to hate those people. People can be bad to members of another race even when their ideology tells them to like those people. We can be moral without being religious. We can be quite religious and yet still act badly. There are adaptive reasons why religion and morality evolved to be close together but not identical, but I cannot go into the reasons here. For here, accept that morality and religion are usually fairly close together but definitely not identical. They run together but with a gap between them. Usually we are nice except when we have reasons to be bad, as when we feel cheated and trapped, and we can use ideology as an excuse.

The sometimes-close tie between ideology (religion) and moral behavior is what intensifies the bad acts of people who feel cheated and trapped. They use religion to explain their predicament and to justify their acts when they want to lash out.

If ideology, including religion, always dominated moral action, then the West would have been in a lot of trouble with the rise of all the strange ideologies since about 1500. The gap between ideology (religion) and moral behavior allowed the West to succeed despite many silly and bad ideas for the last 500 years (I ignore many good ideas). Without this gap, we would have succumbed to fascism, atheism, religious extremism, communism, market worship, or nature worship long ago. Religious leaders forget this.

On the other hand, if religion had not guided moral action somewhat, we would never have had good capitalism, and we would never have had good social movements such as the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, feminism, and care for nature. The tie between good ideology and good behavior is also part of what saved the West.

Because of the gap between religion and moral action, and the fact that people revert to basic decency, we should not expect attacking ideas to do much good if we do not also attack deep problems, ideas such as "they are all pigs". We should not expect attacking ideologies to do much good if we do not also attack deep problems, big ideologies such as religion or atheism. We should be able to attack problems directly without worrying much about bad ideas that feed off the problems. We can mop up specific bad ideas after it is clear that we are working on deep problems and we will make progress. As we work on deep problems, we can attack bad ideas while relying on our basic moral sense to keep us in line long enough to find a better ideology to fit better times – if we work fast. Our energy is better spent on attacking deep problems than on attacking ideologies.

It is a great blessing both that ideology (religion) and morality are not tightly bound together and that they are usually somewhat bound together.

Traditional believers need not fear that people will run amok and society will collapse because a few cranky philosophers had ideas contrary to traditional religion and a few silly people follow. Traditional believers DO need to fear and face deep problems. Traditional religions do need to fear that our leaders will not come to grips with these issues. As long as we do not deal with issues, religions can use bad ideas, such as, from their view, atheism, as whipping boys and scapegoats for social problems – but that is merely another evasion.

Likewise, atheists need not fear that people will run amok and society will collapse because of religious backlash, persistence of religious ideas such as the Resurrection and Eucharist, or rise of new religious ideas such as the gospel of prosperity. Atheists DO need to fear and face deep problems. Atheists do need to fear that our leaders will not come to grips with these issues. As long as we do not deal with issues, atheists can use bad ideas, such as, from their view, God, as whipping boys and scapegoats for social problems – but that too is merely another evasion.

Main Argument.

In the 1800s, especially after Darwin, thinkers pointed out that morality and religion had an evolved basis and so morality and religion were not simply god-given. If morality and religion were not god-given, then they were not special and did not point to the super natural. Morality, religion, and their ideologies, were merely bigger evolved reflexes like reaching for burnt fatty meat and begging for sex.

Traditional Christians in Europe and the United States were appalled, and still are. They marked this idea as among the worst of the bad ideas since 1500. They said: “If people do not believe in God, and they do not fear God, then people have no reason to act morally. Without God, when people die, they do not face heaven, hell, or purgatory, and so there is no reason to act well while alive. If people are not forced to act morally, necessarily they will act selfishly and immorally. If people are not forced to act partly well then necessarily they will act all badly. People are being misled by weird bad ideas such as materialism and atheism. Atheists cannot be moral, and so must be depraved. Society must fall into chaos. Society must fall if atheism spreads.” Note the view of human nature and social life inherent in this idea of what morality is about, why we need morality, and how we get morality. I find it hard to believe people said this but I read it. I do not recall where. Maybe Bishop Wilberforce in England said this. I am sure you can get the same view on TV now.

Atheists responded: “Nobody needs to believe in god to be moral, to act well. As a matter of empirical fact, most famous atheists were quite moral. Personal behavior and society can withstand the demise of God although we might have to change our outlook and values.”

As a matter of empirical fact, atheists are correct about morality and not believing in God. You can be moral and not believe in God. I do not know of a survey of all atheists over history, including non-famous atheists, to see if they were more moral or less moral than people in general; but I suspect atheists are slightly more moral. I think a survey of current atheists would show they are slightly more moral than average, and they take pride in that. People can act morally without fear of God or hell, and without hope of heaven or anything like heaven. Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus need not fear hell as do Christians and Muslims, yet Jews, etc. on average, are about as moral as Muslims and Christians.

Atheists added: "We don't need god to act well. Belief in god causes more harm than good. Believers cannot be fully rational. Society requires citizens who are fully rational. Because believers in religion are not rational, they must be depraved. Society must fall if we don't fully undermine all their stupid beliefs and if we don't eradicate religion. For evidence, look at society now. If belief in god causes more harm than good, then we should stop believing in god. If we all stop believing in god, we all will become more rational, less superstitious, and better citizens; and we will save the world."

I doubt that, if we all became faithful Christians, we would actually behave much better than we do now. History definitely is not on the side of people who think that. We would not become sweeter, kinder, more helpful, more likely to follow the Golden Rule, more likely to build correct political institutions, and better citizens. A change of ideology alone doesn't do the trick.

I am sorry Christians argued that we need fear of hell and hope of heaven to act morally. That is not a good foundation on which to build a good relation with God or from which to find the principles that we need to act well morally.

I doubt that, if we stopped believing in god, we would actually behave much better than we do now. We would not become more rational, less superstitious, better citizens, and better people. Believers can be as rational as atheists and can be as adept at citizenship as atheists.

Moreover, we need good ideology apart from religion, any religion. We also need Western political ideas of the person and the state. We also need the proper intellectual tools to see, attack, and deal with hard problems.

(That atheists are empirically correct that people can be moral without believing in gods does NOT mean that society, or material conditions, give us our sense of morality and our sense of religion (our capacities for morality and religion). Nor do society or material conditions alone give us all the contents of our morality or religion. I am sure our capacities for morality and religion evolved. The contents of morality and religion depend on many factors, including society and material conditions. Here I don't go into what builds the contents of our morality and religion.)

Also as a matter of empirical fact, the atheist argument that we need not believe in God to be moral works both ways. This is the blessing of having an evolved gap between ideology and moral acts. While most atheists might be slightly more moral than average, they do not act all that much better than average, and, of course, some atheists act badly. I cannot give examples of bad behavior for fear of being sued. Freeing ourselves from God does not make us act much better. So there is little point freeing ourselves from God if what we want is for people to act better. Not believing in God also does not seem to make people much less superstitious. I am not sure if atheists give up believing in ghosts but they do seem to believe in equally silly superstitions such as fads in academia, politics, health, arts, entertainment, and science. They can be stubborn in a way that amounts to superstition. They seem to enjoy conspicuous consumption including big houses and cars. They seem to like publicity and asserting their will. They do not seem overall more rational and do not seem overall more adept as citizens. They do not seem better at finding the root causes of modern problems and at offering plausible solutions.

Freeing ourselves from God does not seem to make us generally better. So there is little point freeing ourselves from God primarily as a way to be less superstitious, more moral, more rational, and better citizens, if we don't want to free ourselves from God for other reasons first. Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson believed in God but not that Jesus is God, and they seem about as moral, rational, free from superstition, and adept as citizens, as we can find in normal flawed human beings.

As I said above, neither atheists nor traditional believers need to worry that people will become stupid, irrational, selfish, bad, and depraved on account of atheism or theism alone. Theists and believers need to worry about real problems, and need to worry because we won't face real problems. If we won't face real problems, then undermining theism or atheism won't make any difference. When problems persist, then atheists can use religion as a scapegoat whipping boy while theists can use new ideas such as atheism as scapegoats and whipping boys but both are merely practicing evasion that is as evil as the original problems. We need to take advantage of whatever basic decency remains in evolved human nature before it is too late.

I suspect most atheists wish us to be as little un-natural as possible and most atheists would promote mental health. For most people, atheism is neither natural nor healthy. We evolved to believe in some gods. Repressing a big part of evolved human nature makes us work against ourselves. It splits us in two, like making a "horcrux". It is like denying love, friendship, or loyalty to a good group. Not all naturally evolved traits are good but religion is not usually like stealing, rape, or killing. We have to be careful if we suppress naturally evolved aspects of our character that are not bad, often give us much satisfaction, and help us get along with others. Usually repressing ourselves that way is not good. Repressing ourselves in that way is likely to make us more irrational and harmful than accepting the supposedly irrational parts of our evolved nature and dealing with them well.

Sometimes following our naturally evolved urge to believe in gods (or God) can inoculate us against even stupider sillier more hurtful ideas. Sometimes believing in God can prevent us from fighting our naturally evolved nature and so splitting ourselves in two. Sometimes drinking beer or "pot" tea can prevent us from drinking rotgut whiskey, smoking crack, or snorting meth. Whether religion is good or bad depends more on exactly what we believe and less simply on the fact that it is religion.

The people who need to believe in God are not thereby less human, dignified, moral, or successful as human beings than atheists any more than people who don't drink liquor are better than people who do. Not all people who need a drink of liquor every once in a while are depraved maniacs. People who need to believe in God are not automatically worse than non-believers any more than people who enjoy sex are worse than people who abstain from sex. Of course, the other way around is true too. Again, this issue comes down to separating the source of an idea from its truth and usefulness. Whether people need to believe in God, or need not to believe in God, is irrelevant to seeing the implications of a commitment of morality for the super natural and for legitimate speculation about God.

I doubt atheists are slightly more moral than average mostly because they are atheists. Atheists are like other self-appointed groups that seek to make us better, through traditional faith, PC faith, or despite faith. Those groups too are slightly more moral than average. Atheists are like Campus Crusade for Christ, strong feminists, "back to the Koran" Muslims, "back to the Torah or Talmud" Jews, or Boy Scouts and

Girl Scouts. If atheism itself does not make us more moral but joining a dedicated marginal group does, then maybe the real lesson is to join a dedicated marginal group. We need to select our groups wisely.

Often we need to overlook conventional morality for a while to see more clearly and to find our own better version of morality. The better version need not reject all aspects of conventional morality, and likely will include many aspects. Now, many young people go through this process. If atheism helps some people do that, then so much the better. Using atheism is better than getting snared by a cult or falling into the gangster mystique. When atheists are done reconstructing a better morality, they should think if they still need atheism to keep them safe from convention. Maybe when people are done reconstructing morality, they need to reconstruct their religion and-or atheism too.

I have to confess that I find the whole issue of theism versus atheism beside the point and annoying.

The first real point is to accept real problems and deal with them as best we can. We can deal with bad ideas, such as race hatred, along the way.

The second real point is: Regardless of theist or atheist, morality requires commitment. We believe in morality. We believe morality is important. We believe morality is real. The commitment to important real morality strongly implies the super natural. Commitment to morality opens the door to the super natural. Once we open the door, we can legitimately speculate on God and legitimately believe in God. We don't have to, but we can if we want; and, as long as we are not crazy about it, nobody who also commits to morality can criticize us. Atheists cannot criticize us very much for simple belief. Specific points of belief are another matter. Atheists can criticize specific points with have good arguments. Theists and atheists need to sort out what the meaning of their commitment to morality, and any implied belief in the super natural. Theists and atheists have been inept at doing this.

When people argue in terms of "can atheists be moral, not be depraved, and be good citizens?" or "can theists be rational, not be depraved, and be good citizens?" I find the argument more evidence for how intellectually inept we are than relevant to anything important.

Can We Really "Get Beyond Our Raising"?

We evolved the capacities for morality and religion. We evolved to think morality is important and so real. We evolved to think that anything important and real points to the super natural. Especially we evolved to think that morality points to the super natural and to gods.

Knowing all this, can I still think morality is real, intrinsically important, and points to the super natural? These answers will not please atheists.

(1) Yes. We did not evolve to automatically know the Sun, birds, ecology, patriotism, calculus, hyperbolic geometry, atheism, or the virtues of atheism; but most of them are real and relevant; and we can learn to see them and work with them, using only tools that evolution gave us. We can "go beyond" our evolved roots at least enough to see moral logic. This is a case of either you get it or you don't.

(2) Yes. God gave us the tools that he knew we would need so as to see true morality. God planned evolution so it would bring us to what we need. I don't like this option as well but traditional strong theists likely will.

(3) It doesn't matter (A). Suppose we are entirely limited and cannot get past our evolutionary roots. Still, we do see morality. The morality that we do see is close enough to any (hypothetical or real) ideal pure super natural morality that I don't have to worry about the difference. We can form principles of morality that are close enough to ideal morality so that I don't have to worry about the difference. Engineers and physicists can get the job done even though pure mathematical objects never exist and scientists have to use approximations. Calculus is a giant approximation crutch that works.

(4) It doesn't matter (B). We do not behave well enough whether our moral action is based only on merely evolved capacities or also based on seeing real super natural morality. We don't live up to the ideals of morality even if morality is entirely limited by what merely evolved. When we work on truly acting well, truly acting better, and we have the right principles to guide us, then it doesn't matter if our ideas of morality are only merely evolved or also refer to real super natural morality. We are better off spending effort working on making things better than on worrying about whether we are closely limited by evolution or we can somewhat transcend evolution. If you want to spend a little time, and have some fun, guessing on this topic, then fine, but don't obsess. It isn't worth it.

In the first chapter of this book, I said: (1) We should not do the right things out of fear of hell or hope of heaven. (2) We should do the right things for the right reasons. (3) We should do good for its own sake. At the same time, I also said (A) we face God when we die. It seems the first part of my stance is like the atheist while the second is like the stereotyped theist. I confess to some wanting to "have my cake and eat it too" but I don't feel bad about this. I explained it in Chapter One, and I will not repeat here. I do not feel like an atheist or stereotypical theist in taking this stance. While I do not act well only because God wants me to act well, I do know God wants me to act well, and that is enough. I do not play music well only because I know my teacher wants me to play well but I do know he-she wants me to play well, and that is important. Again, either you get it or you don't.

An evolutionary scientist need not worry about transcendent morality, and shouldn't worry about it, when thinking how morality and religion work in human life and how they might have evolved. Likewise, the fact that morality and religion evolved does not bear on the reality and super natural status of morality or God. In working this way, the scientist does not turn him-herself into a sociopath. In private life, a scientist can believe, wonder, doubt, disbelieve, or an interesting mix. I like off-beat interesting mixes.