

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.

10 Undermining, Picking Apart, Bolstering, and Emptiness

From Donovan Leitch, from a phrase taken from Zen Buddhism:

'First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is...
Oh, Juanita, I call your name'

The song "My Bucket's Got a Hole in It"

Sung separately by Hank Williams and Rick Nelson

Attributed to Rufus Payne, and sometimes to Clarence Williams

Probably "Traditional" through Rufus Payne to Hank Williams and Nelson, and now Public Domain:

CHORUS:

'Yeah ('Cause) my bucket's got a hole in it
Yeah my bucket's got a hole in it
Yeah my bucket's got a hole in it
I can't buy no beer.

Well, I'm standin' on a corner with a bucket in my hand
I'm waitin' for a woman that aint got no man.

Chorus

Well, I went up on the mountain - I looked down in the sea
I seen the crabs and the fishes doin' the be-bop-bee.

Chorus

Well, there aint no use me workin' so (damn) hard
When I got a woman in the boss man's yard.

Chorus

Well, me and my baby, we just bought a Ford
And now we sit together on the running board.

Chorus'

This chapter and the next three, four in all, defend the common sense view, especially the common sense view of the self. They are needed as defense so we don't fall prey. This material includes puzzles from when you still wondered what makes the sun the sun or makes water wet. Although the chapters do not

use technical language, they are about philosophical issues. I think they are fun. If you have no taste for these issues, go directly to the chapter on badness, about chapter fourteen.

In all that follows, I consider ideas as “things” or as “objects” unless noted. I do not distinguish between things, persons, ideas, sensations, impressions, images, notions, etc. as objects. Sometimes I refer to our evolutionary heritage. I do not imply that whatever evolved is correct and best, or whatever did not evolve is superior to simple biology. We have to use our evolved minds to decide cases. I use the term “thinker” to include any proponent of ideas including philosophers, theologians, and biologists. I include as “thinkers” people in non-theistic religions such as Buddhism and some Taoism.

Deliberate Distortions: Picking Apart and Bolstering.

Thinkers undermine common sense things in two ways. In the first way, they pick apart a thing until there is left only what the thinker wants to remain, sometimes nothing. In the second way, they bolster a thing so that it is realer, stronger, more enduring, and more idealized than in real life.

The two ways are related. Usually thinkers cannot bolster every aspect of a thing, so they pick apart what they don't want and then bolster what remains that they do want. For example, if we wish to use an oak tree as a symbol of eternal life, we abstract away withered leaves, exposed roots, squirrel nests, etcetera until we get what we do want such as very long life, large size, strong wood, ability to withstand storms, and coming to life again in spring after winter. Although the methods go together, some thinkers favor one method more than the other. Some religions, such as Buddhism and Zen, seem to favor one method over the other but all religions use both.

Technically, “picking apart” is called “analysis”, “reduction”, “deconstruction”, “relativizing”, or “sublation” while “bolstering” is called “reifying”, “hypostasizing”, “essentialism”, “holism”, “repackaging”, “process thought”, “reconstruction”, “embedding”, or “contextualizing”. I do not use technical terms here.

Since the 1970s, bolstering, especially essentialism, has been out of favor publicly in academia even while thinkers have become adept at various kinds of picking apart. Even so, thinkers still bolster after they pick apart. The same thinker condemns essentialism while at the same time reifying embedding in a system of relations.

Different thinkers use these methods to argue with each other. The first thinker reduces some aspects and bolsters other aspects of a thing while his-her opponent reduces other aspects of the same thing and bolsters other aspects. Sometimes the first thinker reduces some aspects and bolsters others while his-her opponent reduces what the first thinker bolsters and bolsters what the first thinker reduces. This kind of bickering is common among philosophers, critics of art, literature, and pop culture, and critics of gender roles. In another way, it happens when anthropologists assess fossils in human evolution. Some anthropologists discount some features (this hole for blood vessels, that muscle attachment) and stress other features (these back teeth, this foot bone) while other anthropologists discount the same stressed features and stress the same discounted features.

When “deep” thinkers argue, this kind of battle can be quite confusing, as we will see in arguments about the self in a later chapter. A Buddhist might discount the importance of a comfortable little backwater by

showing how it comes and goes with the rains while a Taoist might see the same backwater as literally heaven on Earth for exactly the same reasons. When deep thinkers argue like this, ordinary objects and ordinary people tend to disappear in the crossfire.

Sometimes it does help to question the common sense ideas of things. We need to think about who we are, what we do, and why we do it. We need to be clear about what things there are, how they work, and how they relate. We need to be clear about natural and moral laws. This is part of science, law, and dealing with everyday life. In the long run, honest questioning strengthens common sense. But common sense things have to survive long enough for the questioning to benefit rather than hurt.

It should be easy to see how picking apart can undermine common sense ideas about the world. It might seem that bolstering could only help the common sense idea of a self but that is not true. A strong sense of things undermines the common sense idea because it creates expectations that cannot be met. When expectations are not met, people fear all things have been undermined. Usually a strong version of any thing is abstruse, like an idealized heaven or an idealized orange. The real world is not usually abstruse. A strong sense cannot be built out of all the normal parts of things. We have to pick some that we like, reinforce those, pick others we don't like, and let go of those. At the least, that seems odd. When people find they have to let go of something that makes a lot of sense to them so they can keep something abstruse, they get confused, and feel as if they must lose this whole thing and all things.

Much of this chapter is about showing:

-Most normal common everyday things survive picking apart.

-Bolstering a thing usually does not make it better, and bolstered things tend to fall apart.

-We have normal common sense evolved techniques for dealing with the fuzziness in things. We can deal with picking apart and bolstering.

Picking Apart One: General.

By picking adeptly at anything, you can undermine anything. I cannot explain all the ways to pick apart something. I only give examples for some of the ways that are most important for this book.

What is a car? For about 20 years, after 1990, the US imported small vehicles that looked like a car in the front but had a small open compartment in the back like a little tiny truck bed. They often had roll bars, and they were marketed as sports vehicles. Technically they were not cars but tiny trucks. Most of the buyers did not know this. The "cars" were legally labeled as trucks to take advantage of import laws. What if a car has three wheels, two in the front and one in the back? To me, that does not look like a car but like a toy, especially since most don't go fast or far. What if a car has three wheels, one in the front and two in the back? How does that differ from a motorcycle with a sidecar? In Thailand, where three-wheel vehicles are open like carriages, they are used as short range urban taxis. I disliked riding in them, and I never considered them a car. Is an "El Camino" really a car or really a truck? Is an all-electric car really a car? For many years, "car people" refused to accept it as a real car.

How smudged is a shirt before it is dirty? How wet does a t-shirt have to be to qualify for a wet t-shirt contest? How tall is a person before she is tall? How well does a person have to speak a language before he-she speaks the language? At what exact second does a storm begin or end? What is the exact difference between a jar and a bottle? Which version of a song is the real version? Which recipe for a cake is the real recipe? How much can you change a song or a recipe before it is a different song and a different recipe? What is the right process (way) to build a tree house? If we raise a child the wrong way but he-she still turns out OK, is he-she still a person? If a girl acts like a tomboy, is she still a girl? Is there up without down? I dislike those small yippy animals that have a long genetic continuity with dogs, and don't consider them dogs. Dolphins share a long genetic continuity with horses but that doesn't make them horses. People share a long genetic continuity with apes but that doesn't make us exactly the same. People are more like apes than people-and-apes-together are like monkeys but that still does not make people the same as apes.

When is a river a river, and when is a river the same river? What if a drought lowers the water level to a trickle, as with many rivers in 2012? What if the water has been diverted so that some occasional mud remains, as with the Los Angeles River and the Colorado River? What if the river floods; is the overflow flood water part of the river? The river changes from minute to minute. Is it still the same river? Is it still the same river even though every molecule of water in it is different now than it was last week? Is it still the same river if it erodes its bank and makes a major new channel? Is it still the same river if it erodes its bank, merges with another river, and becomes a smaller tributary to the other larger river?

We can pick apart anything but that is not the real point. The real point is that we still have a sense of real things, and we get by anyway, often despite picking apart. When we need to decide what a car is, or when a river is a river, we use known criteria, modify them, or make new criteria. We can deal with fuzziness for most cases for the practical needs of those cases. We do not always agree, but dispute shows as much about human self-interest as it does about innate fuzziness. Below, I hint at how we deal with the problems but I do not here focus on how we deal with them.

If identity depends somewhat on human agreement, does that mean no thing has identity in itself but that all identity is only a matter of arbitrary convention? The simple answer is "no". It would be hard to turn a car into an orange, or a river into a train. It would be hard to turn an ape into a human although we might grant apes some sort of lesser personhood. Scientific method is not superstition even if many scientists follow it like superstitious old folk. Just because all boundaries might be fuzzy does not mean there are no qualitatively distinct things, nothing has integrity, and all identity is a matter of convention. If that were true, then there would not be any convention either.

Picking Apart Two: Particular Weaknesses.

The point of this section is not to master these techniques for picking apart but to recognize them, and to get a sense that a thing can survive them. There is no particular order.

Most things, such as rivers, are composite, made of parts. Not all parts have to be material stuff. Ideas often are composite when they refer to things like rivers that are composites. Even when ideas do not refer to composite objects, they are often composites of several ideas. The idea of fairness requires that

we think of benefit, cost, comparison, distribution, etc. Anything that is composite, including ideas, can be picked apart.

We expect a certain amount of consistency in a thing before we can call it a thing. If we drop a rock on the sand and it survives the fall, we expect it to do the same next time. If we drop a rock on the sidewalk and it breaks, we expect the same next time. If a toy helicopter flies this time, we expect it to fly next time. If the Republican Party opposes national health care this time, we expect it to do so next time; or else we want to know why. If an animal likes to eat meat this time, we expect it to like meat next time. On the other hand, if the first time we gave the animal only meat, then this time we give it a choice of meat or fruit, and it picks fruit, that does not lead us to wonder about the consistency of the animal. We can often find conditions that vary enough so that a thing behaves differently but we can't figure out the connection between the conditions and the thing, and this leads us to pick apart.

A river is not just a certain quantity of water; the river is water in a process. The process is a part in the identity of the river as much as the material water. Processes are much easier to pick apart than simple material stuff like water. The relation between material stuff and a process is easy to pick apart as well.

The pool at the bottom of a waterfall not only is made up of water but it also swirls. The swirl is a process like the river but it is also a process with a definite form. The identity of the pool is not just a quantity of water but also a form. Forms can be hard or easy to pick apart depending on the form, but the relation between material stuff and its form is notoriously easy to pick apart.

Things change over time. Things change not only as part of the process that is part of what they are but in other ways too. The water in the river changes completely every week but we don't mind that. The river also dries out, changes course completely, or gets dammed, and we do mind those changes. When a cute bear cub grows into a nasty grizzly, we understand it is both the same thing and something else. We are not sure if it is completely the same thing. Big rocks split into littler rocks but the littler rocks are still rocks. Eventually the little rocks split into sand grains, and then we are not sure if they are still rocks. Almost all living things die, not all living things die. Some microbes, and some slime mold, might be potentially immortal. In that case, when a living thing dies a "natural" death, is it still the same thing or is it now a different thing?

Suppose we magically moved the pool of water at the bottom of a waterfall from the northern hemisphere to the southern, where the water would swirl the other way? Would it still be the same pool of swirling water? Changes in form make a difference. Parts fit together in different ways. Suppose I took a group of Lego blocks and made a little man of them, then took exactly the same blocks and made a little woman of them. Are the man and woman the same?

Two objects can be the same in some ways but different in others, and then we are not sure what they are, how similar they are and how different they are. I have already mentioned cars, trucks, and little three-wheeled vehicles above.

No two things are the same in all ways even if they are supposed to be the same kind of thing. We have to pick the ways that count and the ways that don't count. Sometimes we are not sure. Does the size of

a cat count as to what kind of cat it is? Does the number of wheels count as to whether something is a car or not?

Things change not only every once in a while, as when a chip falls off a rock, but change constantly, as when a river flows. How can something that changes constantly be one thing?

Things are usually bundles of features. Even a rock is a bundle of size, shape, composition, hardness, sharpness, brittleness, etc. In what sense is a bundle of features a thing? This is a stronger way of asking about composite things and about consistency.

Sometimes we can abstract away from a bundle of features until no thing is left. Sometimes we can subtract away until one feature is left in this case but only one other feature is left in another case. For example, we can abstract away the features of a rock until only hardness is left. Or we can abstract away until only brittleness is left – they are not the same. Then what is a rock all about? It seems the most important feature of birds is flying but some birds can't fly. Then what is being a bird all about? We can do the same with mammals and cars. When we do this, it seems that nothing is left at the heart of any bundle of features. It seems like the center of any thing, and all things, is emptiness.

We tend to think people, animals, cars, rivers, trees, and many things have a deep inner self, what they are all about, what lies at the heart of the bundle, what old philosophers used to call “essence”. Suppose they do but we can't get certain access to it, just as we can't know the deepest heart of a person. Does it make sense then to say they have a deepest heart, and the deepest heart is what they are all about? If we can't find the deepest heart, then does it make sense to say the thing still coheres and is one thing?

Animals have behavioral tendencies, which I call here “appetites”, as for example appetites for sex, getting food, and conflict. Even though the appetites are different, we like to explain the appetites by saying they all serve one goal. Americans tend to call that goal “survival of the fittest”, “benefit of the species”, or “the survival instinct”. Yet sometimes conflict the appetites conflict, and sometimes they conflict so much that it is hard to see them all in terms of the same goal. Male adult lions kill all the cubs when they “take over” a pride. Adults fight to the death. Cubs wrangle and spit at each other. Adults fight over sexual access. If it is not obvious how the various appetites can be made to fit together, then how can an animal be one coherent thing?

Since the 1930s, evolutionary biologists have put all the appetites-and-abilities of organisms under one goal, which I have called “evolutionary success” in this book but which they more often call “reproductive success” or “inclusive fitness”. Suppose the appetites can all be bundled together under one goal. Still, they are qualitatively distinct. They are not just expressions of one goal. They are things in themselves. The same ability can play a different role in different animals, as when “running” means “running away” for a gazelle and means “running after” for a lion. “Eating” means “grass” to a gazelle while it means “gazelle” to a lion. If an animal is composed of qualitatively different appetites-abilities that can serve different purposes in different circumstances, how is the animal one coherent thing even if the various appetites cohere in this particular case?

Sometimes things, especially complicated things, behave erratically. Sometimes a healthy heart skips a few beats for no apparent reason, even to the point of causing serious distress or death. If so, then how are things consistent enough to be integral things?

Even when a thing has some identity of its own, on its own, usually it gets its real full identity only in the proper context. A wolf is only a wolf in the context of a pack as a child is only a child in the context of a family. Even fundamental physical particles such as photons and electrons vary their apparent identity according to context: they travel as waves but arrive and depart as particles; they are one thing when bound with other particles, or when bound in a field, and quite another thing when travelling freely; and now they need other particles (the Higgs boson) even to have mass. We all know the word "red" but it changes meaning according to context: red leaf, pencil that is painted red, pencil with a red lead, an embarrassed person, a Communist, or a state that votes Republican. Politicians complain correctly about their remarks being taken out of context to mean something other than what they intended. If something has to be embedded in a system of relations to be a thing, or to be its true thing, in what sense is any thing really an integral thing?

A strong version of the idea of relational identity arises with people and empathy, when we feel that we are just like other people, other things in the world, and like the world itself. See next chapter.

A drill bit depends not only for its use but also for its identity on the drill and on the person who uses the drill. A tree depends for its sustenance on the whole forest, soil, water, the weather, and the sun. We don't think about food until we are a little bit hungry. What food we think about depends on our cultural background and on our personal experience. "You don't miss your water till the well runs dry". The life and death of a car depends on a lot of things. Every physical thing has a life and death, and the life and death depend on a lot of other things. What music is in style now depends on technology, politics, the economy, weather, and particular acts by a lot of particular people. When some thing depends on other things, the identity of the first thing is not distinct and enduring even if the first thing is a simple material thing like the drill bit – and most things are not simple material things. Even ideas such as styles of art, and sensations like hunger, depend on other things, and come and go with other things. Everything that depends on other things, is fuzzy, and can be picked apart easily. If everything depends on everything else, then everything can be picked apart, and nothing has an enduring identity. Hinduism and Buddhism stress this situation.

Scientists deal with problems of fuzzy through statistical coherence. For example, they define a storm by a set of statistical features that come in a bundle, such as windspeed and rainfall. This works in practice but it is not very satisfying. We don't want to know that most tropical storms have winds in excess of 50 miles per hour (I am guessing), we want to know what is a tropical storm for sure. We don't want to know that oak forests can be defined as having at least 50% oak trees; instead, we want to know what gives an oak forest the spirit of an oak forest.

Not only are things fuzzy, but the ways in which they are fuzzy are fuzzy too. Not only are things made fuzzy by situation embedding, but situational embedding is fuzzy in itself. Thinking about the fuzziness of fuzziness leads to some fun mental games. I hope to look at this problem someday in another piece of writing.

Sometimes things disqualify themselves and even negate themselves. The law is supposed to serve justice but sometimes the law creates injustice. Kindness is not supposed to smother. The vegetation that comes in after a fire in the forest creates the conditions that allow other vegetation to come in later to take over from the original pioneering vegetation.

We can pick apart almost any thing but that is not the real point. This is:

-We see things as integral long enough and well enough to get along.

-We allow for variation and still allow that one thing is one thing, at least for a while.

-We allow one thing to become another thing when appropriate.

-We can put things into categories according to situation. Thing "A" can be grouped with "B" sometimes and with "C" at other times.

-Some things naturally have similarity and go into categories, such as all robins or the hammers. We can shuffle the categories for these things when we have to but they tend to go back into their natural categories.

-We know enough to leave sticky cases alone unless we have to deal with them.

-We can deal with cases well enough to get along for now and not to worry about absolute solutions.

Bolstering.

Thinkers have looked a long time for things, including ideas, that are hard to pick apart. Because it is easy to pick apart composite things such as rivers, thinkers search for things that are of one "stuff", that are not composite, to prove there is identity in the world, and to have an example by which to judge the identity of other things such as persons. That is why thinkers want to think of the soul as one simple non-composite "stuff". Thinkers look for simple homogenous stuff to make up real worlds composite things. Real things can borrow absolute identity from the underlying simple homogenous building blocks. That is one reason why physicists search for the basic building blocks of matter-energy-time-space.

I can't give anything that is absolutely proof against being picked apart. Even simple elementary particles such as electrons and photons can be picked apart if we think of their identity in terms of a cloud of virtual particles; and time and space are not what they used to be since the ideas of Mach and Einstein.

By stressing things that are simple and eternal, bolstering undermines real world things because real world things are not homogenous and eternal. It is hard to go from simple eternal things to real world things, even when simple eternal things are the building blocks. Bolstering undermines real world things by stressing some aspects over others and leading to disappointment. To show the weaknesses of bolstering and how it undermines things takes a long time. So here I present the usual suspects for simple basic building blocks of thing-ness, and request that you use your imagination to see how it leads to undermining.

For millenia, thinkers took mathematics as the paradigm example of something that was absolutely clear and identical. “1” is “1”. “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” certainly means something clear in the right mathematical system, the one we are used to. There are systems in which “ $2 + 2$ ” does not equal “4”. If you know music, think of how to count intervals: “ $2 + 2 = 3$ ” or “ $3 + 3 = 5$ ”. Two thousand years ago, there was no number “0” but now there is. Two hundred years ago there was no square root of a negative number but now there is. Not even numbers are necessarily simple and have a foolproof identity. Mathematics is not as good an example of strong coherent identical stuff as it used to be only 200 years ago but it is still a good enough example. The problem is we can’t generalize from mathematics to cases that are important to people. We can’t use mathematics as a general pattern for identity and for selves. We can’t treat court cases, or cases of being a decent person, as if they were like “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”.

Thinkers have used ideas such as decency, honor, justice, goodness, and love as something that can be nibbled at but can’t be undermined. We can quibble about cases of honor but we can’t say there is no honor at all. Even if some horrible dictatorship eliminates all honorable people from this world, honor will have existed at some time, might exist on other planets, and is part of the universe. I think this is all true but cannot alone be used as the basis to make integral people. People are not composed of one integral idea, not even an idea like goodness.

Thinkers offer some experiences as things that cannot be undermined. We can bicker about the exact shade of red of my jump drive but we cannot say I do not see red or that there is no color red that I could see. We might argue whether people have the same subjective experience as I do when they look at my jump drive (what they see I might call “blue”) but we cannot normally argue whether they do have some experience and that the experience involves some object and some color. Again, this is true, but we are not sure what to make of it. It is hard to build consistent unified persons of the kind we want out of these experiences.

Thinkers look for persistence through change as a way to show at least some coherence and identity, and to use that as the basis for arguments. The river certainly persists despite the total change in water every month, and that is one kind of identity. The planet Earth changes a bit every day but not much. Each orbit is nearly identical to the previous orbit. The tiger in her forest does not change so much from day to day that we are willing to go tease her, and that is enough persistence to make identity. Individual tigers come and go but the species “tiger” persists. The species “tiger” persists through several generations even though natural selection is always at work in the wild. None of this achieves absolute persistence but it is enough persistence to argue for using identity as an idea. Even persistence through one change is enough to make us think about identity.

The use of persistence as a criterion of identity has an interesting history in biology and social science. It is the basis for classical ideas of society being more powerful than individuals (false) – people come and go but particular societies and cultures live on - and for the systems theory that underlies most ecological analysis (mostly true).

A real physical mountain or river is not impervious to change and not absolutely identical all the time but an ideal mountain is. Even though real things might not have absolute identity, ideas can have absolute identity, even ideas about physical things. The idea of a mountain is one coherent whole that persists

through time even though no real mountain does. So is the idea of “straight” or “circular”. Sometimes a painting teacher tells students not to paint any real tree but to paint the idea of a tree. Asian artists paint ideas of dragons not “real” dragons. When using ideas as the examples of absolute identity, you can always think of the idea in a way which is not composite, even when it is an idea of a composite real thing such as a mountain. With ideas as the example of identity, philosophers can think of the soul-person as like an idea, and can think of any valuable aspects of the world that they wish to keep as like an idea. They also discard aspects that they wish to discard as not like ideas. If philosophers think sex is not worth holding on to, then sex is not like an idea. This method lends itself well to keeping personal qualities such as tendencies to justice and giving.

While any particular instance of a type, such as a particular tiger, might not be integral, enduring, and real, the type might be. “Tiger” might be enduring and real. In that case, a particular individual thing does have status by being part of an enduring type (being a “token” of a “type”). No particular real triangle is fully a triangle but idea triangles are one thing and do endure, so particular real triangles borrow some of that status.

While any particular thing might not be integrated and real, the interdependent net within which it “lives” might be enduring, integrated, and real. A particular tree might not be integrated and enduring but the forest, ecosystem, biosystem, and world in which it participates might be. The particular speaker of a language might not endure, and his-her sentences spoken over a lifetime pass away, but the language endures. Thinkers after World War Two especially stress this kind of bolstering.

This sequence goes back to Aristotle, and it is important for the next chapter: A rock is integral in that it is mostly one kind of stuff, all in one place, and does not change much over time. A card from a deck of cards is one thing. A deck of cards is together in that all its parts, the individual cards, are clear, and we can use the identity of parts to make clear arrangements as in a poker hand. A model of a suspension bridge is one thing, in which the parts depend on each other. A car is one thing in that its parts depend on each other and the parts have to stay together in one particular arrangement for the car to be able to move around. An airplane is the same as a car, and it controls itself while on autopilot. A plant is like an airplane but it also recreates itself. An animal is like a plant but it also can move itself. Some animals also have intentions such as tigers and orangutans.

We tend to think of animals with intentions as integral selves, although this classification is in dispute. We think of people as selves. To be a self, it seems as if you have to be one integral thing. It is not clear that we think of people as selves because they are integral in the ways listed above plus they have intentions. We would like to think that people are selves because not only are they integral in the ways listed above but they also have a kind of coherence-identity that none of those other ways have. It is not clear what part having intentions plays in this extra integration that selves have. It is not clear that the other kinds of integration are needed for the particular integration of a self.

Whatever this particular integration of self is, if we could think of selves entirely in terms of this integration, then we would have the one homogenous strong “self stuff” that philosophers seek. Most philosophers in the West have thought of this special self stuff as rationality-and-goodness although Romantics think of it as creativity-beauty-emotion.

It is good to see that selves use some of the ways of coherence noted above, and to see that selves are distinct in their coherence from any of the ways listed above. It is misleading to seek a special self stuff to explain their coherence. It is better to say we usually recognize a self when we have to interact with it, and that other ways of coherence contribute to selfness. We can use other ways of coherence to decide selfness in particular cases.

I go further than some philosophers. I think there are such things as trees, rivers, species, selves, good people, and bad people; they are real; they are real despite being composite and fuzzy; and their reality does not depend primarily on convention. I think not only ideas about them are real. The things are real. Ideas and qualities such as the color red are real. I understand we can pick apart most of these things but I do not require absolute proof against picking apart. If I allow that “dog” is one integral thing then I do not have nearly as much trouble allowing that human beings are persons.

Appropriate Technique; the Middle Way.

This section simply asserts that we handle issues of integrity and self, and illustrates. We can overcome picking apart and bolstering. This section does not offer a foolproof argument. It does not list all the ways that we use to overcome undermining. You can get a sense of the ways by looking above at how we undermine and then thinking how you would reverse that way.

You get up in the morning, and you find your favorite cereal for breakfast, granola, is out, empty, and nothing. Luckily, like Seinfeld, you have a dozen alternatives. You compare corn flakes to bran flakes and decide you like corn flakes better. You compare corn flakes to wheat flakes, and decide you like wheat flakes better. You compare wheat flakes to shredded wheat, decide you like shredded wheat better, and eat that. None of this means granola is empty, unreal, has no identity, and cannot be relied upon in spiritual matters. All this does not mean that shredded wheat is more integral, realer, and better than other kinds of cereal.

You get up on Saturday to go to the store only to discover that your car has a flat tire (empty, nothing). You do have a full sized spare kept in the garage, from an old car, but it is not quite exactly the same as the tire in your new car. It will do in a pinch, like this situation, but you don't like it. You do have one of those little spare “doughnuts” in the trunk but you don't like to that either. Eventually you decide to use the old full-sized tire until you can get to the tire store. None of this means that the original tire has no identity and is unreal. None of this means tires in general have no identity and are unreal. The doughnut replacement is not more real than the flat original.

You find yourself on the “Antiques Road Show” with a vintage Rolex that you picked up in a pawn shop in Asia. The appraiser has a real Rolex of the same model and year, and, point for point, shows you how yours is not a genuine Rolex but a fake. It is a great fake. The quality is as good as a Rolex (if that is possible). But it is still a fake. It is not “real”. That does not mean it is about to drift apart like the imagined dragon in a cloud. It means we have a particular idea of identity and reality for this case, and we use it. Here the opposite of “real” is not “unreal” but “fake”, “not from the authorised maker”, or “of bad quality”.

An old oak tree has stood in place for about 200 years. It has been surrounded by original oak forest, farms, secondary beech forest, mixed hardwood forest, a vineyard, a housing project, and a school. Its identity has depended on each of those neighbors. Does that mean the oak has never had an identity, it is not real, there is no such thing as oak trees, there is no such thing as trees, and there is no such thing as anything? Does it mean the oak tree is not real but the forests, farms, and suburbs within which it has been embedded have an identity and are real?

Ordinarily we do not seek an absolute bolstered standard of identity and reality. We have provisional standards. We compare the players in this situation with our provisional standards. We modify our standards if we have to. We decide the case according to what we want. We decide abstractly and ideally if we want to do that for fun. What follows in this section is restatement of this idea.

Over time this real mountain wears down. No real mountain lasts forever. We cannot bolster a real mountain, and would be misled if we tried. A million years from now, we can argue whether this mountain is a hill or still a mountain. Yet today the mountain is still there, and I still have to climb it to see the view from the top. There are other mountains besides this one, and they are much like this mountain. The river does not cohere in the same way as the mountain, but that is where I go if I want to go fishing rather than climbing, and, almost all the time, the river is still there. There are real fish in this real river. Except in quantum mechanics, real mountains do not turn into turnips and real fish do not turn into toads; for a fun version, see "Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy". When the real morning bus does not show up on schedule one day, I still know what to do. I can walk, hire a taxi, wait for the next bus, or call in late. We understand integrity. We know different kinds of integrity. Integrity varies with different things. . We can handle both persistence and variability most of the time. Sometimes we even have fun doing it.

Heraclitus (about 535 to 475 BCE) said we can't step in the same river twice because it changes all the time, so the river cannot be any one integral thing, and so there is no real river or any real thing. Cratylus (400s BCE) said we can't step in the same river even once because of constant change. Heraclitus meant to discredit this normal world so that he could advance an unchanging world of ideas, and Cratylus pushed his argument to the limit. They got it wrong.

Whatever a river is, it has to be river enough to step in once or we could have no idea of a river at all, we could have no rivers at all, and we could not have any ideas of anything either. We would have nothing in the real world that we could call real and that would make any world a real world. This river is this river, and remains this river, long enough to step in it once. That is what it means to be a real river. If we grant that an ever-changing river is the same river right now this time when we step in it once, then we have some working idea of identity despite change. Then we can understand what it means to be a river for more than an instant, and we can indeed step in the same river twice and many more times too. We can extend this idea of identity to the river at other times until common sense tells us it is no longer the same river. We can correctly use this idea in other cases such as mountains, cities, persons, and natural laws.

If we could not think like this with real objects like rivers, then likely we could not come up with the ideas that make up the ideal world that Heraclitus and Cratylus wished to live in. Without the ability to sustain real objects, we could not have ideal objects. If ideal objects depend on the same abilities that allow us to make real objects, we might as well live with the real objects.

David Hume in the late 1700s pioneered modern critiques of the self. Despite his usual logical rigor, he once contradicted himself, and his mistake is relevant. To pick apart the self, he wanted to show that the integral self was only a bundle of sensations; to do that, Hume said we cannot imagine anything of which we have had no prior experience. We can recombine elements from experience into new combinations but, strictly speaking, that is not something really new. We can imagine a unicorn only because we have seen a horse and have seen other animals with horns, and can put them together. Yet, then he pointed out that we can imagine shades of color that we have never seen, and we can locate them in our scheme of colors. Suppose we look at two cards that are colored sky blue and cobalt blue. We can imagine shades that lie between these two shades, and still think of the imagined shades as blue, even though we have never seen these shades and we do not have an ideal vision of blue. What shade of blue is the one single master shade of blue that we could use as a standard for all blue? We do not think of color in that way, and do not think of other things in that way either. The human self has imagination. With it, among other mental tools, we can extend ideas of belonging to cases that we have not experienced. We can extend coherent identity as appropriate to circumstances. We can do this without mistakenly thinking identity is only social convention. We have ways to recognize and use identity of things. So, we also have ways to recognize selves and interact with selves. We can imagine a person we have never met, and still think of that as a person. We can accept new people as selves until we have compelling reason to think they might not be selves such as that they cast no reflection in a mirror. We use similar criteria for a self that we use for color or for a river. This way avoids the pitfalls both of picking apart and making too strong, and it is enough. Keep this in mind for the next chapter.

Adapted to Deal.

Tactics to undermine the common sense world so as to influence other people are not just from priests, academics, and connivers over the last 5000 years. I would be stunned if these issues had not appeared in the human mind during the formative years of our evolution, at least 100,000 years ago, and as early as 5,000,000 years ago. We have had people trying to undermine our common sense idea of the world so as to manipulate us for as long as we have had a common sense view. We have had techniques to deal with them and to keep us on the right track just as long too. That is part of why we have these questions and why they are so much fun sometimes. We start out at birth with some naturally evolved abilities such as “grouping and ungrouping”, “pointing at (ostending)”, “isolating”, “comparing”, “finding similar and different”, and “finding features”. We start out with some naturally given categories such as “category”, “isolated thing”, “group of things”, “individual in a category”, “solid thing”, “plant”, “animal”, “sentient being”, “over time”, and “up and down”. I think about all this when I think about the evolution of people.

Personal Historical Note.

When I was young, in the 1950s through 1970s, smart progressive thinkers revolted against analytic type thought (picking apart) in favor of holism and process-based thought (bolstering). I loved picking apart. Without picking apart, there is no science and there are no fictional detectives such as Sherlock Holmes. There is no exploring the environment, no learning, no putting back together, and no stories. There is no holism. I got hammered a lot for enjoying science and analysis. When I went to graduate school in the 1970s and 1980s, picking apart (scientific style analysis) was worse than voting Republican. You could only do it if you called it “deconstruction”.

It was impossible to get across the idea that we have to do both, both are natural, and that neither alone fully gets at what is going on. Both together don't fully get at what is going on either but both together are better than one alone. You have to be able to do both at the same time without going crazy and without believing either one alone gets at the full truth. This is what Douglas Hofstadter called "reductoholism" in his popular book "Godel, Escher, Bach". You also have to be able to do both together without believing that both together get at the full truth although both together are better than either alone. You have to go beyond analysis, holism, and both analysis and holism, to the simple truth of reality, which includes some qualitative realities that are not always best described either analytically or holistically. That is a lesson of Taoism and Zen. To rest in picking apart, and in process thought, are both instances of what Hindus call "Maia". To rest in both together can also be an instance of Maia although I do not want to push the point here. I do not need to define the term "Maia" here other than as "illusion". Bolstering, holism, process-thought, post structuralism, and post modernism, are as much illusions as the hardest most mechanical of mechanistic analytic reductionism. We should learn to enjoy our illusions, and use them wisely, but not live in them.

Emptiness.

The idea of "emptiness" is important in Buddhism and Hinduism. The term does not mean "not a thing", a vacuum, nothing is there, nothing, or nothing done. Instead, the term intends to get across something positive. (A) The usual way of getting across what is positive is the image of the wheel with a hub, axle, spokes, and rim. To do something useful, the wheel has to turn. The wheel turns on the axle. The axle is mounted into a hole in the center of the wheel. If the hole was not there, the axle could not enter the wheel and the wheel could not turn around the axle. The hole in the center of the wheel is the emptiness at the center of the wheel that allows the wheel to be what it is, get things done, and be useful. (B) It is possible to make a wheel as a solid piece from hole-in-the-center to rim. Likely, wheels started that way. Children still build wheels that way; I did as a child. It is more efficient not to build a wheel that way but instead to cut out some of the material from the center to the rim. The wheel does not need all that material to be strong enough. The material adds dead weight that makes the wheel harder to turn and defeats the purpose of the wheel. Heavy wheels get stuck in ruts even if the wagon carries no cargo. The stuff that gets cut out leaves spaces. The spaces are the emptiness that lets the wheel work even better than before. The stuff that is left over eventually became spokes. (C) Along the same lines, the Eiffel Tower was not build just to be beautiful, although it is. The Tower was built to prove a point that was contentious in architecture at the time, in the late 1800s. Not all the material in a wall, pillar, or post carries weight. The weight runs along lines. A wall, pillar, or post is just as strong if you have strong material only along the lines of force. The other material adds useless weight to the wall, pillar, or post, and so actually makes them even weaker than if the other material is cut out. When you cut out enough, leaving only the load-bearing skeleton, you have the Eiffel Tower. What is taken out is the emptiness that lets the Tower do a better job and also makes it beautiful. (D) A spider's web would not be as effective if it was all filled in. Insects need to feel the air move through the web and need to feel they can fly through the web. The space in between the threads is the emptiness that makes the web stronger and more effective.

Emptiness is not nothing but instead emptiness is something positive that allows other things to develop and allows beauty to flourish. I like to understand the idea this way. (I am aware of research about how

we use mental images, paradigms, etc. but that is not important here.) Think of the term “tree”. The term does not stand for any particular tree or any type of tree such as oak, elm, spruce, pine, fir, etc. The term stands for a class of things none of which in particular is “tree-ness” in itself but all of which are somehow trees. If we find that something we once thought is a tree is not really a tree, such as, maybe, Manzanita, then we can take it out of the tree category and we can still use the tree category well. If we discover a new species of tree in a rain forest, we can include it in the group of trees without shaking up all the other trees. Sometimes we do have to revise our categories but that is another issue. The term “tree” is empty but it is also full. By being none-specific, the term is more useful than if we have a particular separate term for every species of tree. At the same time, we know a tree is not an elephant. The term is empty but not totally empty. Its mostly-but-not-entirely emptiness is what allows the term to be so useful and productive. Think of the terms “dog” or “dwelling” in the same way. That is the sense of emptiness. It fills our minds and it fills the universe.

We get to emptiness most easily by picking apart. Try picking apart the idea of a car or a motor vehicle to see. Getting at emptiness is a big part of the job of picking apart in Buddhism and Hinduism. Sadly, it is easy to abuse picking apart when picking apart is used to lead us to emptiness, and, paradoxically, easy to use picking apart to bolster a false idea of emptiness. Buddhism and Hinduism both do this much too strongly. I do not here explain how and I do not explain it in later chapters on Buddhism and Hinduism. I merely offer the warning here so that, when the times come, you will be warned and perhaps inoculated.

11 Philosophical Interlude

This chapter picks up some questions suggested by the previous chapter. All the questions support stances. It answers all the questions in favor of common sense.

Finite Source of Badness

When rationalism prevailed among serious thinkers, between the Classical Age and the Enlightenment, God was infinite, totally rational, and totally good. Badness came from the free will of irrational and finite beings. Badness came from not having the full bounty of God. Badness need not be horrible, but some badness was inevitable in finite beings. For example, humans cannot have the full infinite compassion of God, and we cannot rationally figure out how best to use what modest compassion we do have, so we are a bit selfish, and inevitably we do some bad things, as a result.

After Romanticism, the spirit is creativity. Badness comes from lack of creativity and from opposing the spirit. Irrationality and finitude do not matter as long as they serve the spirit. A bit of badness arising from finitude and irrationality might even be better on the greater stage. True badness is opposing the spirit even when you know it is the spirit, or true badness is deep commitment to false creativity; the two often go together. Other things take the place of infinitude and rationality, as we will see.

Common sense is finite. It is not always classically rational although it is usually biologically rational. Just because humans are confined to finite-sometimes-irrational-common-sense does not necessarily make us good, bad, or prone to either. Badness does not come from finitude or irrationality as such. Badness does not come from lack of creativity or from opposing the spirit. Badness comes because some bad behavior succeeded in our evolutionary past, we are mixed beings, and some situations promote bad behavior now. Luckily, we seem more prone to good than bad, and common sense more often promotes good than bad.

Common Sense and Science

Common sense is not foolproof. We have to use science in addition to common sense. We have to get help from other people sometimes so as to think right. We can see a lot of science as the determined application of common sense, but, still, common sense and science are not entirely the same. Common sense calls a dolphin a "fish", for good reasons, but wrongly. Common sense says herbal medicines can give us the vitality of the forest and the source plants, when, in fact, sometimes herbal medicines can kill us. Common sense tells us to eat big plates of burned fat when that can kill us too. Outside a few such problems, science and common sense go together well.

Common Sense and Ordinary Language Philosophy

Especially after Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was active between the two World Wars, a philosophical school arose, called "ordinary language" philosophy, which stressed the ability of ordinary language to handle all philosophical issues; undermined and devalued issues that ordinary language could not handle; avoided

all “metaphysical” questions; and felt it could achieve full clarity by using ordinary language precisely. Whatever was important, they could solve using ordinary language alone; whatever they couldn’t solve, wasn’t important; if something was important and they couldn’t solve it, nobody could solve it, and, in fact, nobody could even talk sense about it. Ordinary language philosophers do not think language is all about accurately describing the world but is more about getting people to act appropriately, although accurately describing the world sometimes is a necessary part of getting people to act appropriately. Language is a game rather than a picture. We do not say “friend” to describe but to offer help, ask for help, or tweak a relationship. Each language is part of a distinct way of life, just as football, golf, tennis, and most games are mutually distinct. The French language goes along with French life just as computer-speak goes along with geekiness. The rules of any way-of-life-with-its-language make full sense only within that way of life, like the rules of a game make sense only within the game. The value of an ace depends on the card game; the meaning of “mother” depends on the way of life. We can appreciate a way of life only within a way of life; but, if we are willing to enter a way of life, likely we can learn to appreciate it. We do not explain ways of life in terms of scientific laws like we explain eclipses. We only explain ways of life inasmuch as we describe their rules and we use art to get across glimpses of what it is to live there. If we really want to know what is going on, we have to enter a particular way of life and participate in it. For ordinary language philosophers, “game” is the new rationality while “way of life” is the new morality and the new spirit. Ordinary language philosophers are not clear if what they do is only a limited relative way of life and therefore applicable only within their community.

My stress on common sense has some points in common with that school, such as avoiding jargon, but my stress on common sense is not the same as that school. I am not nearly as relativistic. Ordinary language philosophers seem to dislike modern biology when it is applied to people. Modern biology stands outside of any particular way of life, and so they disallow that it applies to people. They over-bolster the role of convention. They tend to think that most (nearly all) games are mutually cooperative, and all ways of life are mutually beneficial to the people in them. In making this evaluation, they stand outside all ways of life, but they do not make that point clear. They do not allow that a way of life can be bad because that would require standards outside any way of life. They over-bolster the ideas of a “game” and a “way of life”. They are not fully sensitive to all the ways that people have of dealing with picking apart, bolstering, and the fluctuations of life, especially ways that might have evolutionary roots. Some issues that they try to explain away are real issues after all, or are important issues to regular people who are not philosophers, such as facing God and what is the best moral life. Ordinary language does not solve everything and does not lead to full consistency and clarity. Normal people can’t achieve perfect consistency and clarity while living an ordinary complex and contradictory life. Some confusion can’t be explained away because it is in life. Going into more details would not be useful here.

Really Real.

Indo-Europeans link thing-ness and real-ness in a way that leads to confusion. Until we clear away some of the confusion, we can’t ask interesting questions such as about the reality of God. All through this section, where I use “real”, “good”, and “God”, you can substitute “dharma”, “karma”, “Heaven”, “Tao”, and “yin and yang”. The results are the same.

We want to think that goodness and reality are tightly linked: the more real you are the better you are; and the better you are the more real you. We use this connection to argue for what we like and against

what we dislike. To argue that something is better, we argue that it is realer; to argue that something is realer, we argue that it is better. Phony is bad, genuine is good. Rock-and-roll is more real than swing; the blues is more real than pop; gritty is more real than comedy; football is more real than baseball.

This technique works pretty well but it does have problems. (A) Not everything artificial is bad while not everything genuine is good. Cartoons are artificial but some of them are excellent. Poison mushrooms are real. (B) To say something is realer than another thing, we have to compare realness, which is hard to do, and sometimes is incorrect. We cannot always assess things in terms of more real and less real. (C) To compare realness, we need standards of realness. Standards of realness are not easily available. People disagree about standards. Ideas about standards change from time to time; the Enlightenment had different standards than the Romantic era. The West does have some deep persistent standards of what is real but those standards are not useful for all important things and all interesting questions. (D) To set up standards, often we choose one thing as a paradigm. This technique often is indispensable, and works well, but it does not work in all cases, even when we choose well. Too often we choose badly and carry out the technique badly. (E) To make comparisons, we extend ideas of goodness and realness from one case to similar cases. For example, we see that a bird is real and extend the realness of a bird to the realness of a cloud. This technique also is indispensable, and often works well, but can work badly even when we use it well, and too often we use it badly. We have to stop sometimes when we apply ideas of realness and goodness to ask how we got to apply them in this case, and if we might apply them better. (F) Thinkers use the issues of reality to further their own ideas. Thinkers combine picking apart, and bolstering, with issues from reality to further their own ideas. We also have to look for all that when we encounter disputes about the reality of God or about the priority of the mutually dependent relations over the things they determine.

Not only do we link goodness and realness, we also link integrity, beauty, enduring, love, empathy, deep self, logical priority, fullness, independence, freedom, importance, satisfaction, interesting-ness, creativity, simplicity, homogeneity, symmetry, consistency, cumulative-ness, and other features that I cannot think of now. Not all these features are compatible if we do not previously link them to reality and goodness and find ways to make them compatible. Having so many features, some of which are inconsistent, opens the door to abuses and manipulation. In the same way, we link the opposite of these features to badness and not-real-ness, and that opens more doors.

It is hard to use the whole list at once. Instead, we pick a key feature, establish the presence (realness) of that one key feature, and then argue from that one key feature to the realness and close links to the other key features that we like. For example, we argue that the idea of a gene is simple, so genes must be real, and so biological evolution is what we can make of it. We argue that "game" is the key to human interaction, so games are real, so interactions based on games are real and good, and then we make of the other features what we can. In a famous case, in the early history of quantum mechanics, physicists argued for the theory because it was beautiful and symmetric without worrying about its reality or about evidence. Later evidence proved the beautiful symmetric theory correct. From those quantum effects, we got validation for effects at other levels such as in chemistry. This does not happen often. We will see examples that are not so successful.

The following examples illustrate only possibilities that are relevant. They do not amount to a rigorous philosophical argument. You will recognize some of the techniques of picking apart and bolstering; I do not point them out.

In a sense, everything in the world is real: toasters, fleas, ideas, illusions, shadows, etc. In a sense, that is true, but it is not useful. It is not how we use the idea “real” and it is not how we think of the world. We really do distinguish between real and not-so-real. We accept that a cat is real but we think the smile of the cat might not be real; it might be only something we project on to the cat. We call a magician’s trick “only a trick, not real”. The question then becomes whether we think of God etc. more like the cat or like the smile on the cat.

We accept that clouds are real. We are not sure about illusions that we see in clouds. Even if we accept that the illusion is real, we do not accept that the thing we see in the illusion is real. We accept that the illusion of a dragon is real but we do not fear that a dragon will come sweeping down on us. We do not want God to be the dragon in an illusion, but, more than that, we don’t want God to be an illusion even if we accept the reality of illusions.

Suppose we take as a-paradigm-example-of-what-is-real a rock made entirely of one mineral, like a big chunk of quartz. As the rock wears down, it turns into tiny little rocks. We call a pile of little tiny quartz pieces “sand”. Each tiny little piece of the rock is as real as the big rock but is the pile of sand as real as the rock? Is a group as real as a material thing? Suppose we slowly separate the sand crystals so that eventually they are scattered all over the floor with space in between all of them. Is this group of crystals still a pile of sand? Is it still sand? We tend to think that groups with an identifiable persistent form are real, perhaps as real as material objects.

Go back to the quartz rock. We throw it against the ground to shatter it, so we can get smaller crystals to make things, including fire. The simple material object is real. Is the event of shattering real? An event is not a material thing. It might require material things but might not require the same material things. We can shatter glass, rocks, and ice. Most people think events are real but not in the same way as rocks. If events are real but not in the same way as material objects, are they as real as rocks? This situation makes people uneasy. Most people think shattering a rock or a glass is real but are not sure if falling in love or watching a TV show is as real.

Now suppose we have a sand storm in the desert moving along at 50 miles per hour. As the sand storm moves along, it kicks up first the sand here, then the sand there, then the sand even further along, and so on. It does not kick up the same sand all the time. It kicks up different sand grains as it moves along. So the material composition of the storm changes all the time but it keeps roughly the same form. Most people say the sand storm is still real. Most people say that some processes, like a sand storm or a river, are real, and are as real as material things. Anybody who has ever been caught in a big storm thinks this way.

We have extended identity-and-realness from rock to event to process. This is legitimate extending. This extending is not only a question of convention although convention can play a role.

Is God real more like a rock, an event among material objects, an event among ideas, or a process? This question makes people uneasy. They are not uneasy because they think God is not real and because we cannot ask about God's reality but because we are not asking in a way that makes sense. Even if we cannot find a way to ask about God's reality that is rooted in questions that we ask about things in this world, people still feel it makes sense to ask.

It is fun to find conundrums about reality, figure out how they work, how they go right and wrong, and how they relate to questions about God and morality. There are many examples. I don't give many more. The end results are the same. It makes sense to ask the question about the reality of God and morality even if how we ask is not quite the same way as we ask about things in this world. It is a lot of fun, and it is only human to ask. After a while, though, when we see we cannot get definite answers, it is better to ask questions about things that make a difference in this world.

The rock is a lump without much discernable form. But the quartz crystals in the rock do have definite form. Maybe God is like the crystals, in that God is a form of material stuff and events in the world but not necessarily any of the particular stuff and events. Sugar and salt also have forms but different forms. A gas does not have much form. God might be the form not of any particular stuff in the world but for the whole world. Thus it makes sense to ask about forms, and so it makes sense to ask about God even if we do not ask in exactly the same way as we ask about any of the stuff in the world. This answer is along the lines of the traditional answer descended from Greek philosophy, and living in the West in different ways such as in Thomas Aquinas and Baruch Spinoza.

Say we have twenty versions of a traditional English-American song, which happens often enough. Which version is the original real version? It is not necessarily the oldest of which we have any evidence. If the song changed during its history, and a particular version became the root of all later versions, that version might be the original real version afterwards. Not all the songs can be the original real version. Some of the songs are artistically better even though they came later. Should we consider those the real version of the song? People accept that a performance of a version might be real all the time that what is being sung might be a bad imitation and so not quite as real. Bad versions of "When I'm 64" abound, and they seem not as real as the original. People tend to pick one kind of version and think of that as the original real version even though it might have come later and even though other versions might be good in their own right but different. People think that "Franky and Johnny" sung as a straight blues is more real and better because it is a straight blues while versions sung as production numbers are phony and bad even if well done. In all these cases, we know something real is going on but we are hard pressed to say exactly what. This is like when we ask questions about God. God might be the original real version of the "song of the world" to which we no longer have direct access. Tolkien offered an explanation much like this in "The Silmarillion", which takes place as a "pre-quel" to "The Lord of the Rings".

Species persists even if individuals come and go. We can form an idealized version of a species, such as robins, even though individuals vary a lot. We tend to think a species is realer, better, deeper, and more interesting than any individual. The species "tiger" is realer than any particular tiger. Sometimes this way of thinking can be useful. But jumping to the conclusion that a type is more real than the individuals that make it up is often misleading and false. A powerful version of this fallacy is in the social sciences where a society-culture is taken as more real etc. than any individuals that make it up, and controls individuals within it.

Try to find an idea of “real” that applies to all cases in the real non-supernatural world. Try to find an idea of “real” that applies to many cases but does not extend at all to supernatural issues such as God and morality. Try to find an idea of “real” that applies to many cases, and applies without any “stretching” to supernatural issues. Most ideas of “real” do not apply to all cases even in the natural world. Most ideas about “real” stretch to supernatural cases even though the “fit” to supernatural cases is not exactly the same fit as any natural case.

The Good Part.

The importance of these issues might be more apparent with morality than with God. A couple of examples are all we can do here.

This situation too comes from Aristotle: Fannie is foolhardy, Bonnie is appropriately brave, and Kathy is cowardly. Is Bonnie more integrated and real than Fannie or Kathy? Because Bonnie is appropriately brave, sometimes she is as foolhardy as Fannie and sometimes as cautious as Kathy. So her identity is more mixed than either Fannie or Kathy. It is easy to undermine mixed personalities. That does not mean we say Bonnie is less integrated and so less real. What Bonnie does depends more on her world than what Fannie or Kathy do. Does that mean Bonnie is more dependent, and therefore less real? Most people would say “no”. Maybe Bonnie is more in tune with her world because she better adjusts herself to situations, unlike Fannie or Kathy, who tend to act in stereotyped ways. Bonnie is more integrated into the interdependent net of the world that determines her actions, and thus more real. Again, most people would say “no”. Being caught up in an interdependent mutually determining net does not necessarily make something more real. We can apply ideas of integration and reality to Fannie, Bonnie, and Kathy only in some strained and unusual ways. It just does not make sense to say that any one is more real than the other two. It can make sense to say one is more integrated than the others but we have to clear what we mean. It can make sense to say one is better than the others but again we have to be clear about the situations and the overall long term. We like to think there is a connection between integration, morality, independence, and realness but that is not necessarily so.

Is suffering more real than happiness? If we do not pursue either happiness or suffering, then likely we will meet more suffering than happiness, and it seems suffering is constant and enduring while happiness is irregular and fleet. So suffering should be more integrated and real than happiness. Buddhists came to that conclusion. But that seems odd. Unless we want to personify and integrate suffering, it is not an integrated thing. We are asking the wrong questions because we are asking them about things to which they do not apply. The same problems come up with good and bad.

We are beset with problems about thingness and reality. Reality always has a hole in it, and that keeps us from getting to the heart of some important questions. Even so, we carry on with life, and can find some satisfaction.

“My bucket’s got a hole in it, I can’t get no beer
 What’s the use of working so damn hard when I got a woman in the boss man’s yard?
 My baby and me bought a brand new Ford, and now we’re standin’ on the runnin’ board”

Bolstered Interdependence

In the classical era, rationality and infinite-ness were good while finitude and irrationality were the sources of bad. Since World War Two, overcoming subject-object dualism has become the new rationality while living in an interdependent net, within which subject-object dualism has been vanquished, has become the new infinite. Disconnection and subject-object dualism are the new sources of all evil. Don't worry if you don't know what that means yet.

Classical thinkers were wrong to find badness in emotions and finitude, and modern thinkers are wrong to find badness primarily in isolation and subjectivity.

According to stereotypes of interdependence, nothing is self-sufficient, nothing has an essence, nothing has an identity by itself, everything comes to be only in relation to other things, everything maintains only in relation to everything else, and the net of interdependence is realer than any particular thing in it. The net of interdependence is the only truly real thing. Individuality is only an illusion. These ideas show up in many schools. The modern versions that I have in mind appear in "Structuralism", "Postmodernism", "Deconstructionism", and "Phenomenology". Interdependence is allied to schools that focus on process. I do not treat process schools.

The ideas of interdependence came out of some good motives and good insights. No living thing by itself makes full sense. We can't understand a living thing except in the context of its normal way of life in its normal ecosystem, full of other living things, and dealing with the weather. Even the weather is subject to variations in the sun. We can't understand a wolf primarily by killing it and cutting it up on a table. We have to go out, live with wolves, and see how they live. We can't understand an amoeba without seeing it engulf food and then run from other small animals that want to eat it. "Kill, tag, bag, and cut up later" is not how to know most of the world. We don't understand a person unless we know something of his-her family life and work life. We don't understand the military in the United States unless we know something of its history and about how the United States works. Even an apparently obvious word like "food" doesn't make full sense by itself. We have to know that some people consider hamburgers the only food group while other people think they are poison. We tend to see whole scenes rather than an isolated part of a scene; we tend to see the cat-in-the-tree rather than the isolated cat or the isolated tree. "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts". To repeat for physics buffs: even basic particles such as electrons, photons, and quarks can be understood only in the context of their fields and in the context of the virtual particles that exist all around them all the time.

Interdependence is a good correction against bad habits of isolating and reducing. The problem is that interdependence goes too far. It picks apart the parts and bolsters the interconnected net. It overlooks any autonomy of the parts and the fact that the whole is often made up out of the interaction of the parts. Often the whole is not greater than the sum of the parts but is only the sum of the parts if you also take into account interaction. Identical twins raised in different environments do act much more alike than the average two people, even if their different family lives made a difference. Your stubborn little sister might be stubborn even if you treated her differently; she does have her own personality, as so many TV ads make sure she knows. An electron is an electron; you can't turn it into a photon without doing something drastic to it and without having some leftover parts. When an electron flies through a magnetic field, it changes the field. If you took a tiger out of India and put it in the wilds of North America, it would not

suddenly become a vegetarian or turn into a wolf. A car can be turned into a petunia planter but mostly it is still a dead car. A red light can mean anything we want it to mean but a big open outstretched hand with palm against us usually means “don’t”. A shaking fist is pretty clear even if a particular tradition might alter the meaning in limited contexts. The orbit of the Earth is influenced slightly by the orbits of all the other planets but mostly it is an affair between the Earth and the Sun. All individual academic proponents of interdependence (except maybe the Bourbaki School of mathematics) insist that they are really smart individual people, and deserve their high salaries; they have earned their respect and their ability to influence student minds.

The modern version of interdependence developed partly as a critique of capitalist ideologies: everyone can get rich; all rich people are self-made; all rich people have more talent than other people; social and political connections play no part in success; the system arises entirely out of individual effort; the system is best run by individuals selfishly pursuing only their own desires; the system automatically leads to the greatest welfare for everybody through selfish pursuit; workers are not capitalists because workers are too lazy or are too cowardly to invest, not because they never had a base from which to launch further investments; there are no socio-economic classes, only different levels of ability and effort; etc. I do not have to spell out the errors in this ideology. As a corrective to this kind of self-serving ideology, the idea of interdependence is necessary.

As with the other good motives listed above, interdependence goes too far in its critique of capitalism. It refuses to recognize the good that does come out of the system (along with the bad), see the freedom that individuals do have in capitalism compared to alternatives, and see the importance of individuals in making the system work. In going too far, I fear that proponents of interdependence support the fascism that they think they criticize.

The idea of interdependence sounds like the Hindu of “you are that”, for which see the next chapter on the Self. I have not seen much sympathy of academics who promote interdependence for traditional religious ideas. Mostly they are skeptical and critical (scornful) of traditional religion except when they use it to denigrate modern capitalist life. The idea of interdependence appears in many traditions, including elsewhere in Indo-European traditions other than in modern Western academia. I do not know enough to make further discussion along these lines worthwhile.

To any common sense person, the balance lies somewhere in the middle between analysis and holism, between total self-determination by individuals and total domination by the system. Individuals have their own innate dispositions. Those innate dispositions are shaped by the system. The individual in turn shapes the system; and so on. There is nothing surprising about this, although the outcomes can be mysterious for a while. Many of the same techniques that common sense people can use as defense against picking apart and bolstering, they can use to figure out the proper relations between parts and wholes. Just as we evolved to fight back against undermining, we evolved to find the most effective way of looking at parts and wholes.

Few modern scientists advocate “kill, tag, bag, and cut” anymore. Even skilled anatomists are acutely sensitive to the limitations on what they can learn that way, and usually are modest in their claims. We do still need skilled anatomists. Nearly all modern scientists recognize the interplay between part and whole. The modern study of animal life is an amazing beautiful exercise in appreciating animals in their natural

lives, working back-and-forth between seeing animals as individuals striving for evolutionary success, seeing the interplay between individuals, and seeing how it all takes place in an ecological context. The best corrective to ignorant ideas about interdependence is to read some of the material that has come out on animals since the 1960s. Since the 1970s, several scientific fields have grown up that are almost devoted to questions of individuals-and-interactions, with catchy names such as “complexity theory”, “chaos theory”, and “fractal geometry”. One of my favorites among these new fields studies how separate things acting individually can come into “synch” such as the glow of fireflies, the roar of frogs, or the tick of clocks.

Dependent Origination.

“Dependent origination” is an idea in Buddhism, and so predates by over two thousand years modern ideas of interdependence. It is similar to interdependence but stated in another way. I do not know the historical relations between the two ideas.

Nothing in the real natural world comes into being by itself and persists in being by itself without any help from other things and despite other things. Nothing is self-subsistent and fully independent. Everything is subject to natural laws. Everything is entirely determined by natural laws. Everything is the sum total of the natural laws that have acted on it through its life history. The Buddha included karma, dharma, right, and wrong as natural laws. As we will see again in the next chapter, the Buddha argued for dependent origination to correct wrong ideas about the soul and the self, that the self is eternal, self-originating, and ultimately autonomous from the illusory external world. The next chapter on the self describes these ideas in more detail. For now, think of it like this: If there is an immutable eternal soul, then it cannot change, and it cannot decide to be better and to strive for spiritual enlightenment-release. Only if the self can change does Buddhism make sense – in fact, only if the self can change do most religions make sense. If the self can change, then it has to be subject to natural laws. Accepting that the self is subject to natural laws makes us less egotistic and makes us more amenable to correct thinking about morality and seeking spiritual release.

If everything is subject to natural laws, and natural laws pervade the world, then everything is connected to everything else through natural laws, and we arrive at something like interdependence. Dependent origination need not necessarily imply full interdependence because it does not specify in advance the relations between quasi-autonomous things. It only says they are connected and that nothing is fully autonomous. It does not rule out quasi-autonomy. The sun is the sun but the sun is not the neighboring star or any other star; the sun is subject to gravity from the neighboring star and all the other stars.

In modern terms, we might express the same idea through a focus on individual decisions: individual persons have to decide, only individuals can decide, we are the source of all our decisions, we have to consider external things but external things don't make up our minds for us, we have to bear all the rewards and punishments of our decisions, and we have to live with what happens for all eternity. It is the idea that we have an eternal soul with free will.

For non-persons, for all-natural objects, there can be no doubt that dependent origination is largely true for the same reasons listed above for interdependence. Even the sun is not eternal and self-subsistent. The universe came into being with the Big Bang about 14 billion years ago but the sun is only about 5

billion years old, and will live for only about 5 billion more years. Every living thing on Earth evolved as a result of natural laws. Every living thing on Earth was made through a process in which many things contributed to its being made. The sea is an ever-changing thing that is the result of rain, evaporation, running water, sediments, below-surface volcanoes, sunlight, etc.

Unfortunately, thinking that the self can change and that the self is subject to natural laws leads to another set of problems, similar to the problems with free will and determinism in Western philosophy; I do not solve those problems here. Buddhists want people to be able to make good decisions such as to act morally and to strive for spiritual release-enlightenment while at the same time they say all decisions are conditioned (determined) by previous events operating under natural laws. You can't have it both ways. I don't think the Buddha was irrational in teaching dependent origination but I have to say a bit more before explaining why I don't think so.

Even in the modern form as "the decider", we can see problems, especially with persons. I always found it strange that people who stress the individual as the source of decisions also stress the consequences of those decisions on family members and society. It is as if we have to make decisions but other people cannot make decisions, so we do it for them when we make decisions for us. I have heard parents talk to their children about the importance of making decisions and about the impact those decisions will have on their siblings (meaning, of course, "don't have sex or take drugs") while at the same time the faces of the children show that they see the contradiction. "If I have to decide despite all the influence from the rest of the world, then why can't my siblings do the same thing, and why don't they have to do the same thing, no matter how I decide; why do I have to be responsible for them as well as me?" This is a problem in dependent origination too.

With the Big Bang, we can see a point of origin. Someone who insists on determinism in the Western sense can, at least in theory, trace it all back to the Big Bang. Buddhists taught dependent origination before anybody knew about the Big Bang, and so they don't have that option. Either there is a starting point about which we don't know or else everything goes back forever to a mysterious nothing. In either case, there is no role for people making good decisions.

Buddhists want people not to obsess about things. They want people to focus on acting correctly and on seeing how the world works. Part of the purpose of the idea of dependent origination is to get people off ideas like heaven, hell, forever, essential immutable me, and how immutable me changes. In that sense, dependent origination is correct. On the other hand, Buddhists do not want people to obsess over questions of free will and determinism, the ultimate beginning of the chain of dependent originations, and over possibly infinite chains of determinate origins. That second obsession is the danger in getting rid of the eternal changeless me. It is a question of lesser evils at the time, and of which chance you want to take so as to get people to act better and to focus on the right things. For his time, the Buddha's decision to focus on beneficial change, and away from the eternal me, was correct.

I doubt the Buddha thought we could not make independent decisions and that we are locked in infinite chains of determination, like a drop of water constantly moving between evaporation, rain, river, and ocean. Although "dependent origination" is an English phrase, the name gives a clue to the intent of the Buddha. "Origination" can mean that things do originate, even if they also depend on their surroundings when they do originate, as an orange tree creates oranges even when transplanted but the soil affects

the taste in particular locations. We can decide on a new course. I think the Buddha meant the idea of dependent origination to argue against both the eternal changeless soul and rigid determinism.

In this version, dependent origination does not differ too much from common sense. Common sense accepts that we make decisions that are not entirely determined by our surroundings. We can decide between apples and oranges in the grocery store without worrying whether some amazing long chain of determining causes led us to the “choise”. At the same time, we also accept that our situations influence our decisions, that we are not entirely free, and that the past still influences us now. I once had a good experience with German Jewish immigrants and that experience still colors my views. Living in the American South now, I have to try hard not to let my experiences of several races and social classes get under my skin and make me prejudiced – sometimes I fear I am losing. The great comic Lenny Bruce had a monologue about tough guys who thought they could withstand any torture, and challenged them to take “the hot lead enema”. Astute military commanders know that anybody can be broken in time. At the same time, even in prison camps, or in the middle of racial hate, people act with empathy, and they reach out to do good to the other side. We have a fairly accurate sense of how much pressure people can take, are happy when people exceed our expectations, but we don’t expect it, and we don’t hold it too much against them when they don’t. Long experience improves our sense of how it all works and what kinds of people there are. Scientists can proceed as if the will were determined without worrying for now if it really is or not. Some scientists can specialize in trying to figure out this problem – sometimes I enjoy their books. Legal people can proceed as if we were almost free. We can appreciate events of the past that made us better people and can struggle against events that made us worse. We can decide to be better people and to focus on important topics. Exactly how all this works, I do not know. Nor do I offer any theories. I cannot offer foolproof arguments against either determinism or eternal changeless me. I just go along with how it seems after reasonable consideration.

Subject-Object Dualism

The topic of subject-object dualism also is like the Hindu idea of “you are that”. It has always played a part in Western thinking but did not become prominent until the rise of Romanticism. It is closely related to interdependence. I don’t know the relations between all three ideas.

A “subject” is a being who knows about the world, and usually acts on the world. An “object” is a thing in the world. Subjects know about objects; subjects act on objects; objects act on other objects. An object is not a subject when it acts on another object. Whether subjects act on other subjects can be a matter of debate. These ideas partially line up with familiar distinctions in grammar: A subject is like the subject in a sentence; actions are like verbs; and objects are what gets acted on. When an object acts on another object, it can be the subject in a sentence, but we should not confuse gramamtical usage with the status of the object in the world. When “the rock hit the window”, the rock is the subject of the sentence but it is not a subject as in “Jack threw the rock” or “Jack understands about rocks”. An animal can be an object, and an idea can be an object.

Keeping a strong distinction between subject and object can lead to problems in both understanding and behavior. A strong idea of the subject can bolster the idea of the eternal autonomous me, against which the Buddha warned. We get confused, think we are more than we are, and act like it too. We think we are properly in the world if we merely intellectually understand the world. We forget we are in the world

too, and we have to interact with other things that are in the world. We forget that other things affect us, often more than we affect them. We forget there are experiences, and that some experiences are very hard to put in terms of subjects knowing objects. We think that a subject can take in the whole world, and forget that any one subject is finite and so cannot take in the whole world. We think we own the world, and can do with it what we want.

If we think everything that is not us is an object, we treat other things improperly and badly. We take as our example of an object something that reduces the features and complexity of most objects, such as a rock or a crystal. We see everything as if it were a simple inert rock, waiting to be broken apart to be understood and used. We see only isolated parts within which are more isolated parts. We “objectify” and sometimes “demonize” too. We forget about interdependence and relations. This attitude reinforces the idea that we own the world, and spreads the attitude to include every particular thing in the world. We cut up animals. We reduce ecosystems to sources of energy. We cut up the economy, thinking we can cure all problems with tax breaks for the rich or massive spending financed by debt.

Whatever is not us, we treat as “an other” or an “other”. Whatever is not like us is altogether foreign and cannot be treated as we treat ourselves and as we wish ourselves to be treated. We cannot apply the Golden Rule to what is not us. What is not us can be known from the outside, and can only be known from the outside, because it does not have a real inside like us. We treat people of other groups as if they were objects and “others”. We treat people of other groups as things, and as hostile things too. As the sole subject in the world, we feel isolated. We cannot make up for the isolation by interacting with others because they are no real others. So we acquire objects to make up for the isolation we feel; we indulge in mindless consumerist spending. We go into crazy debt. Nearly all the problems of capitalism can be seen as manifestations of a strong subject-object duality. Nearly all the social, economic, and ecological problems of the world can be seen as variations on a strong subject-object duality.

Subject-object dualism is the new irrationalism at the heart of darkness.

At least some of this analysis is true, although it is strongly overstated. The overstating makes normal people overlook the true part, and leads them to retreat back into the comfort of the false part.

What can we do about subject-object dualism? The only consistent answer I have ever read is that we should use “the dialectic” from European philosophy instead of analytic reasoning. This is not possible, for many decisive reasons that I do not go into here. It is not clear what thinkers who invoke the fear of subject-object dualism want us to do. It is not clear if they want us to merge into our world, our objects, and our others, so as to make everything one grand unity. It is not clear if they merely want us to stress the dualism less, and how they want us to do that. It is not clear if they want us to stress interaction more, and how they want us to do that. They are good critics, but being a good critic who does not offer a solution is really another manifestation of subject-object dualism. In stressing subject-object dualism without offering a cure, they actually bolster subject-object dualism. Critics do not tell us what the right balance is, and they do not tell us how to get there from here in any realistic way that normal people can follow. They do not improve on the good common sense that we get from friends and doctors. Quit eating junk food, get up off the couch, get into nature, learn, get out on a golf course, or get out into the garden, and do things instead of just watching them on TV.

Sometimes it works really well to see the world not in terms of one merged subject-object but as distinct things that we can know intellectually, as distinct things that interact, and as distinct things that gain more from the interaction that they would if they merged. We can't become the rock. We have learned a lot from post-mortem dissection. Sports are a lot more fun when we have an opponent who is not us, even if the opponent is a material thing like a golf course or a mountain. If we try to see an ecosystem as one big unified subject-object, we miss the interaction between predators and prey, and between plants and animals. A sportsman becomes one with his-her opponent for a while; but not really. A good driver becomes one with his-her car or bike for a while; but not really. A swordsman becomes one with his-her sword, but not really, and only for the short time needed to use it; otherwise, the sword is best left in the scabbard.

In "Star Wars", the interaction that good humans have with machines might represent the good merging of the subject-and-object. The interaction that bad humans have with machines represents this idea taken too far, especially when machines take over from the organic. When Anakin Skywalker interacted with his machines, he was better off. When Darth Vader became more a machine than a person, when the machine and the human tightly merged, he was worse off. General Grievous was really an organic being that had been taken over by a machine, to the point where machine and organism were entirely merged, and he became evil as a result.

Bolstered Subject-Object Dualism

This section is dedicated to "Pale Fire" by Vladimir Nabokov.

The opening line from Donovan's song is:

"First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is..."

The line is adapted from Zen Buddhism. It is usually attributed to Ch'ing-yuan Wei-hsin:

"Before a man studies Zen, to him mountains are mountains and waters are waters; after he gets an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, mountains to him are not mountains and waters are not waters; but after this when he really attains to the abode of rest, mountains are once again mountains and waters are waters".

(From David Mcmahan, *Empty Vision*, New York: Routledge, 2002, page 43. Quoted from D.T. Suzuki, "A Sense of Zen", in *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*, William Barrett, editor, Garden City, NJ: Anchor Books, 1956, page14.)

The version of Ch'ing-yuan Wei-hsin reminds me of Heraclitus and Cratylus. A simple interpretation is: "At first, we naively think there are mountains just like what we see without knowing how much we add even to simple perceptions. Then, through study of the dharma, we see that nothing is as it seems, so there can be no such mountains. Finally, through more study, we see that undermining is not better than naïve reality, so we accept the world as it is, and with a better attitude."

This interpretation is pretty good if it stays simple like this, although it can be a mistake to add the ideas about perceptions and naïve reality right away, and to refer to dharma study right away.

The problem is that the interpretation doesn't stay simple. It gets sophisticated, half-right, and therefore totally wrong. Annoying theoreticians complicate things and make unsolvable problems by interjecting their theories. One sophisticated interpretation says the enemy of right thinking is subject-object dualism. We are wrong in the first phase because we are the victims of subject-object dualism. We improve in the second phase because we overcome subject-object dualism. In the third phase, we return to chastised subject-object dualism as a way to get along but we are a lot wiser about it.

The sophisticated interpretation introduces a point-of-view-and-problem where there is none. It is another way of interjecting a bolstered self. Humans seem desperately to need idealized explanations, especially ones that go back ultimately to their own bolstered self; and sometimes we have to allow it; but, if we can avoid it, we might as well do so. There is no need to invoke subject-object dualism only to overcome it. To do so only bolsters subject-object dualism, and thus adds another problem on top of the problem of how to deal with the world properly. Rather than allow our minds to range over all the issues that might get in the way, and to overcome them naturally as they arise, invoking subject-object dualism forces our minds to focus on the non-central problem of subject-object dualism, and so prevents us from finding natural action. If subject-object dualism is one of the intrinsic problems that get in the way, we will meet it and deal with it when it arises, as long as we are not primed to obsess on it.

If you think in strong subject-object dualities, even if your intent is to overcome them, then you have mired yourself in subject-object dualism (undermined and bolstered yourself), even if you think you will escape at the end. You bring the problem of subject-object dualism to the question of mountain-no-mountain and water-no-water, and then are amazed when you still find issues with subject-object dualism. If you bring subject-object dualism to simple moral questions such as "should I help my neighbor with the groceries?" then you and the neighbor never help each other.

The correct attitude is not to get trapped in any ideology at all. Just accept that first there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is. Accept what we do to make mountains, unmake mountains, and remake mountains every day. Accept what we do to make ourselves, unmake ourselves, and remake ourselves, every day. Accept what we do to make other selves, unmake other selves, and remake other selves, every day. If later you wish to put this ability into ideological terms as a way to have fun, and maybe to help the intellect, go ahead. If later you wish to use dharmas and sutras, the Western study of perception and evolution, or the ideology of subject-object dualism, to help you understand the ability and to put it in various contexts, go ahead. But don't expect everybody to follow you.

12 Self

This chapter defends the common sense idea of the self. This chapter assumes a common sense idea of the world to go along with the common sense self but does not defend it. I use “person” and “self” to mean the same. I continue to use “thinker” to mean theologian, priest, monk, philosopher, critic, biologist, psychologist, anthropologist, etc. Please see the chapter on codes, in particular the section on “Pascal’s Wager”.

If we face God after we die, there has to be a self that faces God. That self has to be like the self of common sense. If there is no self, or the self is unlike what we think it is, then facing God doesn’t make the same sense. If there are decent people, then there have to be people, and people have to be like the selves of common experience. If our self should be true to a code, then we have to have a coherent self. If we work to make the world better, then we need to know what makes human selves better off. If we want to reward good people, and we need to punish bad people, then people have to be the kind of self that it makes sense to reward and punish. If we hold life in general, and sentient-moral-aesthetic life in particular, to be valuable, then we need to know why human selves are valuable. We need to know why we should not enable bad behavior in human selves. On the other hand, if our self is not like these ideas of a self, we need to know how and why, and what that implies.

Ideas of Self and World.

The idea that our common sense self faces God is also an idea about the world. For a common sense self to get along in this world well enough to face God, this world has to be much as it seems. This world has to be close to a common sense world. We can’t expect people to act decently where decency makes no sense. We can’t hold indecent people to account when indecency doesn’t matter. We can’t expect people to work hard to make the world better if their actions don’t help at least some people. It takes a lot of space to show how an idea of the self and idea of a world go together, so I omit that topic, and stick to simply describing selves and worlds separately.

Various ideas of self-and-world are not all compatible. Different religions hold different views. People, and religions, usually hold multiple ideas of self and world, often contradictory, without reconciling them. This topic also takes much space so I don’t go into it. Two later chapters describe ideas about worlds.

My American Common Sense Version of the Self and the World.

My version of the self-and-world is pretty much the standard American common sense version, including my ideas about facing God and working to make a better world. The standard American common sense idea of the self-and-world is good enough, and true enough, for nearly all important needs. The standard American version is mostly shared by other cultures but not fully shared by all. Cultural differences are important but are too much to account for here.

My version of the self differs from simple empirical common sense a little. There is nothing in ordinary experience that makes us believe we face God after we die, and believe it is important to work to make the world better. My extension of the simple empirical common sense vision of self-and-world is not much of a departure, it is compatible with that view, and it is what many Americans, and many people of the world, believe too.

What the Self is and is Not; Opponents in this Chapter.

Most argument now against the common sense idea of the self comes from a mechanistic idea that the self is nothing but a bundle of electrochemical reactions. This view borrows from modern Darwinism, and it has much truth to it. It shares ideas with religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. Modern scientific psychological mechanists are our version of ancient religious adepts who let their cleverness mistakenly dissolve the world.

Too often, to undermine the commonsense idea of the self, ideologies set up an unrealistic “straw” self which is easy to undermine. When they have undermined it, they assume they have vanquished all other views, and so their non-commonsense view must be correct. To counter this tactic, it helps to explain what I do not think about the self.

It is not hard to get people to consent to an idealized self that they don't really believe in, as apparent in their actions. Their actions show that they believe in a self different than the ideal self. Ideally, a self is completely consistent, has no contradictions, is fully integrated, never indulges in self-deception, is fully conscious of all it does or could be fully conscious of all it does, completely controls the body, acts only rationally to achieve goals, can exert “will power” to counter all temptation, and can exert “will power” to withstand hardship and torture. Even if the surface everyday self seems inconsistent and contradictory sometimes, the deep soul-self is fully consistent and meet all the points of an ideal self. The deep soul-self is not entirely physical but is some kind of spirit. As a spirit, the self can escape some constraints of the material world, such as disease and torture.

No normal person actually lives this view of the self. What normal live, and therefore what normal people believe even if they don't say it, is that there are degrees of selfhood depending on the situation. We are integrated enough in particular situations so we can assume then that selves have desires and intentions, and will act with intent to achieve their desires, as long as they are not thwarted by duress. We allow for weakness, lapses, duress, contradictions, and self-deception. We do not assume those flaws completely undo the idea of a situational-self-as-needed-and-as-possible. People accept that a self can be totally destroyed through torture or disease, as in the novel “1984” or with Alzheimer's dementia, but that fact does not undermine the situation-variable situation-adequate self of normal life. The totally autonomous spiritual soul-self is an unrealistic ideal, and it is a useful shorthand way to think about the self, but it is not what people really expect. People are not sure how free we are from materiality and constraint, and what any freedom from materiality and constraint implies for a soul-self. This situational-self-as-needed-and-as-possible is the view of the self on which our laws are actually based, not the idealized soul-self.

The situation-variable situation-adequate self is what I defend. I do not defend the idealized self. It does not matter if the situation-adequate self is a mere machine or is a super organism that sometimes can

escape the laws of physics. What matters is that this self is interesting to God, this self can take personal responsibility in enough situations, and God will talk to this self some time.

Mechanists point out correctly that the ideal self cannot be true, and, from that, conclude that the self is nothing but an evolved delusion; a human organism is nothing but a bundle of chemical reactions with a delusion of selfhood. Critics ignore the situation-specific self or see it as a variation of the idealized soul-self. As we will see below, there are good evolutionary reasons why people might say they believe in an idealized idea of a self but act on another basis. These reasons do not make the idea of the situation-adequate self into a delusion. The real situation-adequate self might be a bundle of chemical reactions but that does not mean it is nothing but a bundle of chemical reactions.

It is easy to produce a theory of the idealized totally free soul-self, or to produce a theory of the totally mechanistic un-free deluded robot self. It is hard to make a theory of a self that appears to be partially free and to have some intensions according to situation, but that is what is empirically true. It is harder to produce a good theory of the real self if we begin from either extreme. If we are to have a correct theory of the self, we need to respect what we actually see, and we need to develop a theory accordingly. We cannot twist what we see to fit a preset theory about the world as spirit or as machine. At this time, I don't have a good theory of the situation-variable and situation-adequate self.

Exploring Character versus Undermining the Self.

The self is one of the easiest things to undermine by picking apart and bolstering. I do not assess here the many ways in which the self is undermined. You can get a sample from the suggested readings, and I might put some examples on the Internet.

People have different reasons for undermining the self. Probably the biggest reason is to control other people. People have different reasons for wishing to control other people, usually bad, sometimes good. People both undermine different aspects of the self to go along with their particular reasons, and they have particular methods that go along with the particular aspects of the self that they wish to undermine.

For example, suppose a thinker wishes people to feel guilt. A thinker can pick apart our ability to judge moral situations, or a thinker can point out how we fail to act appropriately even when we can see moral truth. A thinker stresses our tendency to blindly follow the teachings of authority figures, especially the authority figures of a religion. The self is morally inadequate.

Rather than undermine the self, I use picking apart and bolstering to explore human nature and to explore the character of people in particular societies. I want to know about character so I can assess if people are up to the job of citizen in a modern democracy on a planet that is fast being laid waste. I think there is a big difference between picking apart so as to promote ideology versus exploring character.

As an example of exploring character, we expect a certain level of skills and amount of consistency in a person before we can call him-her a common sense person, and can relate to him-her as a person for the needs at hand. In a democracy, we expect some good sense. Suppose a man spends a lot of money on a golf club because he thinks it will magically improve his golf game, when he knows the real problem is his swing, knows the club alone cannot do much, and he already has bought six others just like it before.

Suppose a woman buys a cream to magically make wrinkles go away, and make boys fall at her feet. She does not check the ingredients to find they are exactly the same ingredients as in all other creams, and the same as in the generic cream she could have bought for one-tenth the price, because she wants not to know that. Both the man and the woman want to believe in magic. Can we reasonably expect either person to cast his or her vote wisely in the next election? What skills are needed of a person in a democracy, and how much integrity is required?

The Self.

Most of these ideas were given previously in Chapter Two on evolution. Sorry for the technical jargon but it is needed in case any scientist reads this.

-A self (see below) recognizes that the world has distinct units even though the units interact.

-A self (see below) recognizes that it is one of the distinct units.

-Units come in natural kinds. The exact nature of the kinds that are recognized by selves likely varies a bit with the particular evolutionary history of a self, but that does not matter here.

-The natural kinds have their own distinct attributes. Selves tend to think in terms of essences. You do not need to understand the idea of essences now.

-The units within a natural kind are not all the same. Sometimes the differences matter, and sometimes they don't. I do not take up these issues any more here.

-Some kinds are passive (rocks); some kinds are active but seem to have no intentions (the wind); some kinds seem to interact but have no intentions (soil, and juices from trees); some kinds are alive; some kinds are alive and adaptable but fairly passive (plants); some kinds are active but not too smart (animals like snails); some kinds are active and obviously learn (animals like cats); some kinds have memories, and the degree of memory varies with kinds (cats again); some kinds are active and have intentions (animals like robins); kinds that have intentions usually also have good memories (elephants); some kinds recognize that they individually have intentions and memories (horses); some kinds recognize that other kinds have intentions, memories, etc. (dogs); and some kinds can read the intentions and memory of other kinds quite well (humans, and some other animals such as baboons and orangutans).

-No evolved kind, or unit of a kind, perfectly models the world in its perceptions, mental operations, and actions. The gap between the exact world versus perceptions and act can be more advantageous than an exact fit, as, for example, flight and fight.

-Evolved kinds that are adept with intentions and memory have the following features:

=They can manipulate other units based on their understanding of the abilities of other units.

=They can send signals aimed not at giving information but at manipulation. That is, they can lie.

- =They have lively imaginations. They tend to see the world as lively.
- =They come born with an ability to generate natural categories (units, types of units, left, right, lively, “has intentions”, etc.) and to build other categories on the basis of the original natural categories. See above.
- =They use essentialist thinking, especially when building on natural categories. See above.
- =They can use their imagination to think of living units that are not confined to a bodily state.
- =They deceive themselves in some ways. Usually they are not so self-deceived as to be immobilized or psychotic.
- =They live in groups of similar units.
- =They can tell apart individuals of the same kind (not all dogs are one dog) and even tell apart individuals within social groups (not all wolves in this pack are the same).
- =They recognize that situations get complicated along with an increase in the number of inter-actors. Two is more complicated than one; three is much more complicated than two; four is horrendously complicated, and so on. The evolved natural ability to deal with complicated situations tends to stop at about four but might go as high as six.
- =They recognize that other actors have histories, and that what actors do depends partly on the type of the actor and partly on their history.
- =They put actors into types. They types are based on natural categories and learned categories.
- =They have “short cuts” and “rules of thumb” that they use to deal well enough with complexity.
- =They internalize and use their imagination to “play with” the intentions, memories, abilities, and histories of other units.
- =They have sympathy and empathy for other units.
- =They handle complicated situations by lumping together the other members of their group into a kind of big unit with its own intentions and memories. Following a tradition, I call this the “generalized other”.
- =They internalize the “generalized other”.
- =They have at least two distinct identities in their self-awareness, which they use as tools in dealing with situations. Following a tradition, I call these two parts of us the “I” and the “me”.
- =They have internal contradictions such as the desire to both love and hurt a spouse. They are also pretty adept at handling these contradictions.

=They can make up counterfactuals (“might have been”, “if”, “suppose”, “imagine”, etc.). Counterfactuals are useful in understanding histories, types, situations, etc. Counterfactuals can cause confusion and manipulation. They are fairly adept at resolving problems with counterfactuals.

=They have logical contradictions, some of which come from lying and counterfactuals and some of which just arise out of logic. Examples include the “liar’s paradox”, or self-contradiction such as “I am a liar”, the ability to think both in terms of reduction (picking apart) and holism (bolstering), to think also in terms of qualities apart from reduction or holism, and to think of a time traveler disturbing the time line. They are adept at dealing with logical contradictions.

=That is, all in all, they are “sentient”.

=They appreciate beauty.

=They have a moral sense.

=They feel emotions. Emotions are not necessarily irrational. Emotions are often evolutionarily rational. There is not a simple dichotomy between rational and emotional. I do not explain further here.

=They have commitments to other units (love) and even to large parts of the world (ecosystems), ideals (justice), or the world as a whole.

=They use language.

=They have consistent ideas (theories) about selves and about the world.

=They tell stories. Stories are important in how they see selves and worlds, and manage selves and worlds.

=They feel as if they have free will in many situations but not all situations. They understand constraint and allow for it.

-Units of kinds with all these features recognize themselves as selves. It is not clear if an evolved self might be able to recognize itself as a self with fewer features than those listed above. We do not yet understand the interdependence between features.

-Evolved units that have a sense of self do not have a fully accurate sense of self. They have an overly strong sense of their own self, a distorted view of their own self, and a distorted view of other selves.

Any unit that displays all of these features is a self. This is what it means to be a self.

It does not matter if a self evolved or is made, but, as far as I know, I have met only evolved selves. I doubt we can make selves unless we make them feel contradictory, face conflicts, feel commitment, use counterfactuals, face paradoxes, have a generalized other, have an I and me, feel beauty, tell stories, etc. We are a long way from doing that, but I think we will get there.

It is extremely unlikely any artificial self could have all the other necessary attributes to be a self but did not also feel as if it were a self.

Brief Early Rejoinder to the “Mechanistic Bundle” View of the Self.

As far as I am concerned, any unit that has all the above attributes is a self, even a machine that follows deterministic natural laws. No evolved self has perfect free will. All evolved selves have imperfect ideas, and delusions, that serve evolutionary success, including some distorted ideas about their own selves. None of these conditions make a self any less a self. Just because a self feels as if it is a self does not mean it is deluded. Just because a self evolved the feeling of being a self to serve evolutionary success, and the feeling is partly distorted, still the feeling could be largely true. Selves that feel as if they are selves could really be selves. When we have clear criteria a self, other than the criteria for the ideal unrealistic “straw” soul-self, then we can decide if we are selves despite our inaccurate ideas of our own selfhood.

Mechanists need to construct the strongest idea of the self from the points listed above, and see how to deal with that. Mechanists need to do more than attack simplistic myths about the self, even ones that have a strong evolutionary basis. Selves cannot be explained away just because evolved selves have a tendency to over-stress their selfhood. The mechanist misses the point by stressing mechanism. It is not about whether selves are machines. It is about some qualitatively distinct kinds of machines with unusual interesting attributes and with personal histories. Selves can think both deterministically (mechanistically) and qualitatively, without going crazy. The fact that selves can do this seems to me to strongly validate that selves are qualitatively distinct and interesting.

Self and Soul.

I want to distinguish self from soul because I don't like ideas about the soul in most major religions. I want to make sure I am not committed to any of their ideas. Religions tend to take the ideal “straw” self as the basis for their ideas of the soul, and I want to make clear I don't do that.

As far as I can tell, you need a self first to have a soul, but you don't have to have a soul if you have a self. The common sense idea of the self does not require a soul, which might be why we are not clear about the soul. Americans often think animals have selves but are much less clear about whether they have souls. Even if the self implies a soul, the common sense idea of the self does not imply any kind of soul, as for example the abstruse soul of Christianity or Hinduism.

I do not know what attributes of the self would entail having a soul or having a particular kind of soul. I know we don't have our body when we go to meet God; so I say that our bodiless self goes to meet God. If a bodiless self is a soul, then my view might imply a soul. The attributes that I have when I meet God are the same ones I have as a self now or it wouldn't make sense to meet God in the way that I expect. How this self is able to not have a body, I do not know. I don't know what good it does to call a bodiless self a “soul”. It can do harm if the term “soul” commits us to ideas that are harmful.

Free Will.

This chapter does not address problems of free will. Like most people, I want to have my cake of free will and eat my cake of deterministic science too. What I say in this chapter does not depend on settling the question of free will. See the next chapter; it doesn't settle the problem of free will either.

The following starred sections explain some major views of the self.

***Autonomous, Immutable, Eternal I-Me.**

I don't think the idea of an autonomous, immutable, eternal me is innate. There is no point in trying to review in what kinds of societies, and in which cultures, the idea shows up, so we can decide how innate it is and how derived it is. It is common in most of the major world religions, but not all; see below. I think there are innate ideas of selves, of myself, and of the fact that my self persists despite changes. All three aspects of the idea need not come together. The self-soul could be eternal without being immutable, and so on, but it seems the three aspects do often occur together.

The question for here is how true it all is. Because of the Big Real Risk, and because of what I have seen of people, I doubt the self is autonomous, immutable, and eternal in the way that many people believe it, especially if they get the combined idea from traditional religions. The self was made by God, so God can end the self, and he likely does end many selves. The self is not necessarily eternal.

If the self were immutable, there would be no Big Real Risk. If we could not change, we could not turn bad or good, there would be no risk, and there would be no gain. If the self were totally autonomous, then we could withstand any temptation, any stress, and any bad thing that happened. We would not change. We can withstand a lot, more than we usually think, but not everything. We cannot withstand indefinite torture. We are not all-powerful.

Try thinking of the various kinds of worlds that would go along with an eternal, autonomous, immutable self-soul. Not all of them are appealing. Some are boring.

***Christian-Muslim Idea of the Soul.**

I think the Jewish idea of the soul from the Tanakh is fairly close to my common sense idea of the self, so I don't treat it here. I don't know enough about Talmudic and post-Talmudic ideas, and the topic seems complicated, so I don't treat it here.

The Christian and Muslim views of the soul are similar enough so that I treat them together here. Muslim and Christian ideas received a lot of input from Classical philosophy, so, indirectly, I treat that here as well.

Classical philosophy emphasized a distinction between the external superficial changing perishing self versus the deep unchanging eternal soul. This distinction was part of other dualities such as between matter-spirit, nonbeing-being, becoming-being, illusion-reality, mundane-sacred, etc. I do not guess which duality might have priority and how they all hang together. Other worldviews, even non-Western worldviews, suffer from most of the same dualities. The Christian-Muslim view inherited the Classical view.

The true inner soul seeks God. It does not necessarily seek ecstatic union with God but it does seek to be close to God and to please God. It seeks God's grace. It seeks nothing else. If it did seek other things, it would be mutable, not autonomous, and not rational. It is willing to submit its will to God's will. In fact, whenever it knows itself, it has already submitted to God and subordinated its will to God. That is its nature. When we die, we shed the external self and come before God, to be judged, entirely as our true inner soul.

On the other hand, if we come to God to be judged, only as our true inner self, then the true inner self must have made some mistakes about right and wrong, and so it must be mutable, not autonomous, and not fully rational. Otherwise there would be no point in being judged; we would force God's grace just by existing; and God's grace cannot be forced.

I don't think there is any way to reconcile the choices that we make in life, the fact that we change, and the people we become, with a simple traditional Christian-Muslim idea of the soul. There is no way to reconcile the external half-good self with the true deep inner soul. Even deep true selves vary within themselves and over time, and not all deep true selves center on goodness, rationality, submission, and grace. We are mixed beings. Because I am not defending the traditional Christian-Muslim view, I do not try to figure it all out.

***Upanishad Hinduism: "You are That"**

The "Upanishads" is a group of short sacred documents that were compiled in India from about 500 years before Jesus to the time of Jesus. The ideas are often beautiful and profound. They are one important source for the ideas of the Bhagavad Gita. Some ideas in the Upanishads are similar to Buddhism and Jainism, and some are ideas against which the Buddha protested. I do not give the source of particular ideas below from a particular Upanishad.

By the time of the Upanishads, at about the same time as Socrates, Indians (not yet Hindus) had an idea of the self similar to the Greek philosophical idea of the self, and similar to later Christian-Muslim ideas of the self. This material world is potentially corrupting, but the self-soul can see through the delusions of this world to spiritual enlightenment. There were various ideas of enlightenment, which I do not go into here. The enduring self is called "atman".

The Upanishads altered the basic idea of essential enduring selves to say that we are all very deeply connected, so deeply connected that it makes little sense to think of ourselves as isolated individuals. We are still individuals but we are not separate individuals. The idea is given through the phrase "that thou art" or "you are that". If the idea were limited to feeling togetherness with other humans, modern Americans might say it is a very strong version of the feeling of "there but for the grace of God go I". The idea is not limited to other people but includes togetherness with all sentient beings, often animals, and sometimes plants, microbes, stars, things such as mountains and dust motes, and events such as sun sets and laughter. The idea "you are that" can have several meanings. The meanings can support each other. They can also contradict, depending on the stress and "spin" given to any particular meanings.

(A) We are all manifestations of the same creative force and so we are not distinct at the deepest level. Not only are we the same as other people-animals-plants-things-events in our deepest being, also we are all the one-and-only real God in our deepest true selves. Our deepest selves are all the same self.

(B) We all depend on each other to get along and to progress. I cannot be anything at all without you, and you cannot be without me, so we should respect each other and get along.

(C) The hope of all beings is spiritual realization (enlightenment). We should achieve realization together. If we are connected, then I cannot achieve realization unless you achieve it as well. If I am temporarily more advanced than you are, I will teach you, and wait for you, until we all achieve realization together. I trust you will do the same for me when you are more advanced.

(D) Although we are all from the same deep spiritual force, we are somewhat distinct, because that is how creativity works. The distinctiveness in this present world might not be ultimate but it is what this world is all about. To go along with distinctiveness here is another way of going along with ultimate union at the deepest level. This way of thinking preserves the enduring autonomous atman.

(E) As a distinct entity, I sometimes have to displace other entities. When I do displace others, I hope I do so respectfully, and in line with my deep nature as part of the same creative force (an idea in the Bhagavad Gita). When I do displace others, sometimes I have to do it forcefully. Change sometimes requires pain.

(F) When one being displaces another temporarily, really there is no deep trauma because we are all part of the same deep underlying spiritual force (an idea in the Bhagavad Gita).

(G) We all should, and can, feel joy at our deep unity and at the creativity that produced us.

(H) There is no reason why knowing “you are that”, or why spiritual realization, should stop creativity and joy as long as beings continue to know that they are of each other at a deep level.

(I) It is not clear if “you are that” removes all distinctions between separate selves, or reinforces it, does each depending on the situation, or if the question makes sense.

Christians should recognize ideas of mutual love and dependence.

“You are that” is a way of picking apart the self by eliminating aspects of the self that are not compatible with “you are that”, and of strongly bolstering the self by giving it a clear identity and rationale. I do not here explain how proponents of “you are that” pick apart aspects of the self that they do not like such as striving for fame, success, material goods, and power.

To a Darwinist, “you are that” seems like normal evolved empathy gone crazy. Normal people can’t live in full accord with the empathic spirit of “you are that”. Under normal circumstances, nature would select against people who felt this way, and would find a balance between selfishness versus identification with others. “You are that” can only be a delusion based on pressing an evolved ability.

Yet the fact that “you are that” is an extension of an evolved ability in a way that could not be sustained in normal human life does not mean “you are that” is wrong, is worse than the normal common sense way, really is a delusion, or that people who think like this are not selves. It might mean that evolution led us to the point where we could see what is most true even if most people could not consistently live in what is most true. You have to decide this question on its merits.

Assume there is a difference between the external surface self versus the deep true self. The surface self goes through many changes, and suffers from both hardship and gladness. Assume the deep true self of everybody is the same deep true self. It does not go through real changes. It is eternal, immutable, and autonomous. It does not suffer any real pain and hardship although it knows of the surface pain. It does feel joy from the ever-changing surface selves. It feels joy whenever a surface self is true to the code of the life that the surface self happens to be in at any particular time. This is the resolution found in the Bhagavad Gita.

***Buddha's Bundle.**

The Buddha's name was “Siddhartha Gautama”, spelled in various ways. Siddhartha sought release from suffering and sought spiritual enlightenment. Enlightenment brings release from deep suffering even if it does not end all common suffering such as a hungry belly. The major source of suffering, and the major impediment to enlightenment, is ensnaring commitment to this world, including in this world the circle of religious seekers. The Buddha had to release himself from false ensnaring ideas, both from the mundane world (love, wealth, power) and the world of spiritual adepts (magic power through suffering). He had to wake up. The term “Buddha” is a title; it means “awakened”. A “Buddha” has “awoken” and so is free from delusion, is enlightened, released from ensnaring commitment, and released from the hard snare of suffering.

To Siddhartha, among the false ensnaring ideas were all then-current ideas of the self, including the self as soul-self, the picked apart self as a simple mechanism, and the bolstered metaphysical self of “you are that” from the Upanishads. The Bhagavad Gita came well after the Buddha. The Buddha would have considered the self of the Gita as a bolstered false idea of the self. The Buddha had to construct an idea of the self that was neither too much picked apart nor bolstered, and was not the naïve soul-self of common sense. The Buddha had to make an idea of the self that took account of rebirth but did not mire the self in rebirth.

The Buddha argued that the self is best understood as a bundle of abilities-and-desires or of abilities-and-effects (“skandas”). For example, we have abilities for seeking sex, food, and fame. We have an ability to make up “objects” that help us along, such as houses and myths. There is no self apart from the abilities. There is nothing metaphysical behind the bundle. There is no underlying metaphysical self that acts, there are only the acts.

False ideas of a strong self are the result of a particular ability (or a few). The false idea of a self comes from one particular “this-bundle-is-a-self” ability that helps other abilities to succeed and is, in turn, supported by other abilities when they succeed. The mental ability that makes the self does so by raising illusions about the self and the world, like constantly seeing the same image in clouds. The idea of the self is the result of deluded bolstered mental abilities like the false strong image we have of ourselves as

a “winner”. When any other ability temporarily succeeds, as when we succeed in sports, business, or sex, that particular other ability conspires with the self-ability to validate false ideas of the self. When we succeed in business, we think we are “hot shit” and a winner who will never lose again; we think we are realer than we really are. When we succeed spiritually, even in good endeavors such as charity or yoga, we make the same mistake.

When we no longer depend on our collection of abilities, and no longer depend on any illusory idea of the self, we might be open to better ways of seeing our self and the world. The term for the bundle after all delusory ideas of the self have been removed is “no self”. The term for “no-self” is “anatta” or “anatman” or “an-atman”, which means “no-atman” or “no-self”.

Some Buddhists take the Buddha to mean that there is nothing like a self at all. This has become the standard Buddhist view. This view is probably a mistake. It accuses the Buddha of completely picking apart the self, a mistake which he did not wish to make. Saying there is no self at all is like saying there is no reality at all, like saying there are no apples because we can undermine the idea of an apple. There might be no metaphysical absolute enduring delusory apples but that does not mean there are no apples at all. To deny what is in front of your eyes is a form of clinging just as strong as to bolster what is in your imagination. I think the Buddha might have allowed a weak form of the common sense everyday self like he might have allowed a weak form of everyday common sense apples. To insist on “no-self” actually is to bolster the self, to focus the ability that creates the idea of the self on the no-self instead of on the soul-self, and to falsely cling to the no-self as the object of an ability just as we used to cling to the self. That is as bad as clinging to a strong idea of the self.

As with the strong empathic form of “you are that”, a real-world biologically evolved self cannot live by the Buddha’s teachings in the normal world, and the Buddha did not expect followers to do so. As with “you are that”, this fact does not mean that either the Buddha’s idea of a self or the common sense idea of a self is better. If you want to live in the normal evolved world, it is strategically better to adopt a common sense normal view of the self. If you can accept living outside the normal world, and perhaps even dying, then you might seek an idea of the self and the no-self through the Buddha’s teachings.

I have a stronger view of the self than in standard Buddhism but weaker than that of people who strive for the satisfactions of this world. The common sense idea of the self can mislead us. It is also a good base from which to learn better, just as common sense is a good base from which to begin science. I do not believe the standard Buddhist view of the self can be reconciled to the common sense view. I am not sure if a Buddhist view that allows a weak form of reality can be reconciled to the common sense view; but I hope so. I do not believe an advanced Buddhist should expect to live other than as a monk. If you really hold the Buddhist view of the self and the world, you cannot live as a normal person in the normal world.

***Hume’s Bundle.**

David Hume, in the late 1700s, duplicated many ideas of the Buddha without, I think, knowing of them from Buddhism. Hume doubted traditional Christian religion and doubted the idea of the soul in traditional Christian religion. I do not know if Hume developed his ideas of the self so as to undermine the idea of

the soul in traditional Christianity, as the Buddha developed his ideas of the self in part to undermine the Hindu idea of the enduring atman self.

Hume (thought that he) showed all activities of the human self could be understood in terms of particular mechanisms: perceptions, ideas, rationality, emotions, and the responses that go along with particular clusters of these. Most human activity, including mental activity, can be seen in terms of perception and ideas. Nearly all ideas can be understood in terms of perceptions. Hume showed the role of perceptions in thought and action. He showed how some ideas can be rendered in terms of clusters of perceptions. Sometimes he wrote as if all ideas could be rendered as clusters of sense perceptions but I am not sure he meant that.

Once we understand the various mechanisms that go to make up the self, we understand the self. There is no reason to add anything to the various mechanisms to make up the idea of the self. To add anything other than the various mechanisms only adds something that has no explanation, is mysterious, and tempts us into metaphysical confusing thinking. So, the self is nothing but a cluster of sense perceptions, ideas-based-on-sense-perceptions, rational manipulation of ideas, emotions, morality, and subsequent acts. It is not the coherent rational soul-self of Enlightenment ideals. It cannot be the soul of traditional Christianity. It is not clear if Hume wished to do away with the common sense self but he certainly did undermine standard religious and philosophical ideas of the self.

Hume had many of the same insights as the Buddha but I think he went too far and he fell to a mistake the Buddha wished to avoid. Hume explains away the self as “nothing but”. Hume picks apart the self until there is nothing left, and there is no rationale for why various mechanisms of the self hold together.

Hume anticipated modern scientific reductionist ideas of psychology, philosophy, and the self. I think it is easy to go directly from Hume to modern evolutionary ideas of the self. I am not sure modern Darwinists appreciate their debt to Hume.

Unlike as in Hinduism and Buddhism, Hume did not expect normal people to fully accept an undermined self and live in accord with an undermined self. Hume expected people to live in a common sense world aided by good thinking. In this way, like the Buddha, he did not rest on the picked apart self, but, unlike the Buddha, he was not explicit about what he was doing, and he had no rationale for the self that was left over after being picked apart. Hume expected people to live in accord with morality and to use reason to improve the world when they could. He was still a child of the Enlightenment in those ways. He simply accepted a gap between what he wished people to do – act morally – versus the loose self-as-bundle that he had analyzed. He lived his own life with morality and zest.

***Emptiness.**

When we undermine any thing completely, all that is left is a bundle of maybe-features surrounding a hollow core, as with Hume’s idea of any thing or of the self. All that is left is emptiness. This is not necessarily so bad. If the same emptiness is at the center of all things, including selves, we can say that the same emptiness generates all things, including selves. Hindus, Buddhists, and some Taoists say this. It is not clear how the same emptiness can generate many different things but that can be kept as a separate issue. When Buddhists say this, they have to be careful that the emptiness at the heart of all

things is not the same as the great universal Being, or else they reconstitute the enduring eternal self that they wish to get rid of. Thus the exact nature of emptiness can be a point of contention between various thinkers who rely on emptiness.

Thinkers who use emptiness point out the role that real observable emptiness plays in the identity and operation of many real world things: A wheel is useless unless there is a hollow at the center around which it can turn. A water glass can only hold water because it is empty inside; the hard stuff on the sides and bottom exists only to help the emptiness. The vast majority of an atom is empty space. Players can only play basketball, football, and other sports because there is emptiness on the field to go to. If the field were full of all-star great players, nothing could get done. It would be like sardines in a can. The wind has to blow through something. We can tell the difference between an eagle and a wren by what each one is not compared to the other as well as by what each one is in itself.

The same approach works on the self. As with the Buddha and Hume, we can undermine the self until nothing is left but emptiness. That does not make the resulting bundle useless. That kind of bundle might be more useful because it is easier to accept change in a bundle with nothing at the core than to see how a permanent eternal simple changless essential soul-self can change.

This way of looking can be inspiring, sublime, and great; but I think it is wrong. It is not the common sense view of the self. That it is not the common sense view of the self does not make it wrong, useless, or less useful. It is wrong because it feels wrong and because it doesn't really explain anything. It tends to elevate nothingness to the magical metaphysical principle that the Buddha and Hume avoided.

***The Modern Darwinist's Bundle.**

People like to think the self is rational, in particular that their own self is rational. There are three ideas of rationality. (1) Evolutionary rationality, in which an ability is rational if it efficiently served evolutionary success in our past (in comparison to alternatives). It was rational to have a spouse because that is how we best passed on our genes. Most acts and abilities are still rational in this sense although not all continue to be rational now. It is now irrational to kill the neighbor because he-she flirts with your spouse. (2) Classical rationality, which has no single definition. It means roughly: able to critic and offer argument according to logic, amenable to reasons and evidence, trying to serve welfare and justice, and avoiding harm and injustice. (3) Economic rationality, in which actors efficiently strive for their own goals, whatever those goals might be. The usual goals are profit and satisfaction (utility or welfare). Satisfaction includes all the goals of normal humans, such as wealth, power, fun, spouse, and children. This section describes evolutionary rationality and its view of the self. This section does not describe relations between the kinds of rationality.

Think of most particular activities such as eating, having sex, or playing a game. They might share some aspects in common, but, really, at bottom, they are distinct activities that go along a track of their own. We can switch from one to the other. Usually we can't do both at the same time. Derailing one need not much affect the others. We can be adept at one but inept at the others. This is how modern evolutionary scientists think of the mind and the self, as like a bundle of activities-abilities, much like Hume and the Buddha thought of the mind and the self.

Each tendency in the self-bundle is largely mechanical, governed by laws of chemistry and biology. If we provide the appropriate input to a bundle, we get predictable output. Modern science provides a horde of examples, all of which are plausible. See the suggested readings.

(1) My favorite example is regularity in marriage because I studied how people seek spouses under different conditions and how one asset can substitute for another when conditions change. People marry other people of their own category of age, wealth, prestige, education, family size, and family background. People stress one factor over another depending on which factor might help reproductive success at the time. People would not act like this if they had entirely free choice based on accidental love alone.

(2) My next favorites examples show how children do not learn about space, time, intentions, and morality all-at-once but learn in stages. (A) Take a shiny toy and put it in a big glass jar in front of a child less than a year old. The poor child will wear out its tiny hands trying to reach directly through the jar. Wait until the child is two years old, and it knows to get into the jar somehow before trying to get something out. (B) Leave a child alone in a room with a cupcake and tell the child not to eat the cupcake. Then leave the room. Usually they eat the cupcake. Before about the age of three, a child will lie if it thinks you were not around to see him-her eat the cupcake. Usually they say another child ate the cupcake even though the child knows that no other child has entered the room. By the age of four, usually they know that you can figure out what is going on even if you were not in the room, and that lies do no good. (C) Even at an early age, some children are able to resist temptation while others give in. The ability to resist shows up in different performances throughout the entire school career of the child. (D) Before about age seven, children can automatically learn languages and speak like natives. After about age ten, children have a much harder time and sometimes retain accents.

(3) Ideas of brain operation have now entered the mainstream media, not perhaps as scientists might like, but in ways that would make sense to them. On Friday 12 October 2012, the popular TV show "America Now" aired a segment on the "emerging science of the chemistry of love". They offered tips on how to use the chemistry of love to speed the process along. The tips seemed to be aimed at women who were narrowing down the field. Presumably the new gurus also have tips on how to use the chemistry of love to thwart the process in case you don't like the suitor.

The parallel between Buddhist bundling and the modern mechanistic view goes further.

(A) It is not necessary for an ability to exactly mirror the real world to be most effective and therefore most evolutionarily rational. Our fear does not always accurately mirror our danger but it does get us decisively out of harm's way. A bolstered inaccurate idea of the self might lead to success.

(B) Although the ultimate unit of evolutionary action is the gene, for practical purposes, the individual is more useful. Biologists understand evolutionary rationality through individual reproductive success and individual fitness.

(C) So a feeling for being a distinct autonomous self-activating self would help human genes to succeed and would help human evolutionary success. Our feeling of being a self is another ability-activity in the bundle that is our looser evolutionary self, like the desire for sex or for a good meal.

(D) It is useful to think of other animals and people as selves with intentions etc. If it is useful to think of them that way, then we almost have to think of ourselves that way too. We think of ourselves as selves because we think of others as selves, and vice versa.

(E) The evolved feeling of being a self is partly true because we are a bundle, but it is not likely to be an accurate representation of our self-hood. It is likely to be too strong a representation of our self-hood, in accord with the need to act as a unit, much like a military group has to have a strong esprit de corps (literally "spirit of the body") to act as a coordinated self-unit, much like we fall in love despite the small flaws of our spouse, and much like we crave fatty foods. Not only do we have an evolved sense of self, but we have an evolved sense of self that is not an accurate representation of how tightly we really are integrated. We are deluded because it works.

(F) The idealized soul-self is only an evolved delusion.

The apparent conclusion is that there is no self at all. Modern evolutionary biology picks apart the self until it is gone, much as did Hume and somewhat as did the Buddha. I have already said that this idea misses the point. It will be easier to see below how this idea misses if we see here how it hits.

Think of the flight and fight responses. Once one of these responses engages, it takes over, and it has little to do with the other response. We can't do both at the same time. It seems these are two distinct abilities-activities. Precisely because they happen in the same situation but cannot happen at the same time, some other thing has to decide which to activate at any given time. Something else has to control the switch from red to green in a traffic light. We are tempted to think of this over-ability as the classically rational self, or some kind of idealized soul-self, but that need not be so.

Flight-or-flight cannot be willy-nilly. If we flee from a kitten but fight a bear, we die. Something has to make sure we play with kittens, fight robbers, flee bears, or ignore robins. Whatever thing regulates the switch from flight to fight has to gauge situations. We have to fight some dogs but not all dogs, flee some bears (momma grizzly) but not all bears (teddy bear), or do nothing. So it seems there is a rational self at the core of the evolved self, behind all the disparate activities-abilities, that regulates everything.

Now think deeper. Something has to flip the switch but whatever flips the switch need not be classically rational. It need not be the idealized soul-self. The mechanism need only be a way to make a decision, and it has to decide in accord with what serves evolutionary success. So, we do not necessarily have a rational self or a soul-self at the core, behind all the activities-abilities, that regulates everything. We just have more mechanism. The mechanism can, and does, vary a lot between people, so that not everybody does the same thing in every situation. It is still an evolved mechanism rather than a simple deciding rational self or a soul-self.

Most people fear snakes. The fear is not classically rational because most snakes are helpful (they eat rodents) rather than harmful, and most snakes avoid people. The fear is evolutionarily rational because one hundred encounters with a timid good snake don't help us much but one encounter with an angry bad snake ends our reproduction. Whatever controls the switch for fear cannot be classical rationality; but it can be evolutionarily rationality. The same is true of strangers, loud noises, loud objects, and erratically moving objects.

We can learn to overcome fear of snakes etc. We can learn to adjust our flight and fight response so that it takes better account of situations; that is what martial arts training is for. So we are tempted to think that, above all the mechanisms of evolutionary rationality, there is a mechanism of classical rationality, and this mechanism of classical rationality is closely tied to the self. There are higher-order mechanisms, probably several overlapping layers. But it is not likely that all are under the control of one classically rational self. It only matters that it all works when it has to work.

So we have: a bundle of abilities-mechanisms around a core body; the body is a key unit in evolution and so coheres; the core has a mechanism to think of the body-and-all-that-goes-with-it as an integrated self; the evolutionary self is not quite as integrated as the self-mechanism thinks it is; but the evolutionary body-self behaves like a semi-cohesive self according to the situation. This is not far from my common sense view of the self. I can live with this.

***The Composite, Largely Functionally Integrated, Self.**

I have already said the self is not one simple thing, we can change, and I don't know how it all holds together, so this section does not repeat those arguments. I merely point out that some cultures have ideas of the self based on important component parts; the fate of the parts can differ, especially after death; and the assemblage of parts and their fates can be important in religion. It takes much too long to explain a theory of a composite self from a different culture, so instead I give one of my favorite examples of a theory of selves from American culture; it is not quite the same thing, but it is close enough.

Contrary to popular opinion, the unit of American society is not the individual or the family but the team. A team is a functional unit composed of complementary parts, and, as a whole it is much greater than the sum of its parts. An ideal individual would be an individual whose personality tendencies were made up of the best kinds of individuals in American society, and who blended them perfectly. The individuals that make up a team represent various potential parts of individuals. Comic books give us our best examples of teams and idealized parts of individuals. Military units are teams in this sense. Maybe the most famous team-with-idealized-parts-of-people-represented-through-particular-characters is the command team of the Starship Enterprise, in all its various versions. In the original version, there is a rational part (Spock), an emotional part (Bones), instrumental part (Sulu), communicator (Uhura), nurturer (nurse Chapel), technical part (Scotty), and command executive part (Captain Kirk). There might also be a slightly unruly, slightly comic, activator-of-adventure part (Chekov). There might be a routine part that has to be given up to make progress, the always ready-to-die anonymous crew member. All together, these parts-represented-by-characters make one full and effective person. It is not clear what happens to the person and-or parts after death. The most important parts are the rational, emotional, and executive. Some Americans think the command executive goes to heaven while other people think the emotional part goes to heaven. Only theologians and philosophers think the rational part goes to heaven.

It is unlikely that the parts of a self in any given culture correspond closely to the "modules" in current evolutionary theory of the self, modules such as "find a mate", "find a sex partner", "support your kin", "support your allies", and "detect social cheating". Evolutionary theory does indirectly support the idea that cultures can make selves out of composite parts and might provide some of the raw ingredients for parts of the self in different cultures. I do not comment further here.

***Other Interesting Selves.**

The above ideas about selves are important for the purposes of this book but they are not necessarily the most interesting ideas about selves. Almost every enduring human type can be a type of self. For the rational self, think of Mr. Spock and Sherlock Holmes; for the emotional self, “Bones” McCoy and John Boehner; for the intuitive self, Deanna Troy or Robert Redford in “The Horse Whisperer”; for the conniving self, Lucy Ricardo and any soap opera; for the integrated commander, Captain Kirk or the “Master and Commander” series; for the artist, Kirk Douglas as Vincent Van Gogh or Ed Harris as Jackson Pollock; etc. Other cultures have these same selves but see them differently, and they have other selves not in American culture.

Distinctive Identity of Bundles; Reconstituting the Self.

This section explains why I think “bundle” ideas of the self miss as well as hit, and what is better.

In David Hume, Buddhism, some kinds of Hinduism, and modern biology, an apple is a bundle of features with nothing at the core (sorry for the pun). So are a rock, whale, hurricane, theory of physics, theology like Hinduism or Christianity, sutra, person, scientific method, Beethoven sonata, Picasso painting, and your child. Yet contrary to undermining, there are qualitatively distinct coherent things in this world. All those things listed above are examples. Even if the various things are “merely” bundles of features, the bundles are qualitatively distinct packages; the apple-bundle is distinct from the whale-bundle. Bundle types are consistent between different instances; particular delicious apples stay what that way, The bundles consistently differ from each other; I cannot imagine an apple-whale hybrid even if they once had a common ancestor. What gives the bundles their identity and distinction? This has been a long-time serious question in Western and Indian philosophy. I do not answer this question. I only say that the obvious identity of some qualitatively distinct bundles is enough on which to base the common sense view of the self and the world.

Someday we will have fairly complete descriptions of toadstools as bundles. Even so, I don’t think being able to give that kind of explanation explains away toadstools. Suppose, though, that it does. Is the human self enough like a toadstool so we could explain away as with a toadstool? The question is not one of complexity but of similarity. I don’t think the human self is similar enough to be explained away in the same way as a toadstool. The toadstool does not have abilities to deal with intent, levels of intent, group life, art, contradictions, etc. Even when we can explain those abilities in the human self, we will have a different problem in explaining away the human self.

Before modern evolutionary theory, this problem was less vexing. It became more confusing because Darwinists have another way to explain away: historical contingency. When a Darwinist has to consider how it is that some bundles such as human beings have a self, the Darwinist can say, “Well, that is just how it is. These particular bundles came together due to the historical accidents of evolution on this one planet. It could have been otherwise. Different features could have come together. We might have had three-eyed fish. We might have had morality that tells us to kill our best friends. We might have had selves without a sense of ‘I’, ‘me’, and the generalized other. There is nothing more than that.”

Yes, there is considerable latitude in how features come together, the exact course of evolution does depend on historical accidents, and many other life forms might have arisen even on the same planet. Still, it is not possible for all things to come together willy-nilly. For example, there has to be at least one basic life form at the bottom of the food chain that converts energy to biological forms. There has to be predators and prey. In particular, it is not possible for human-like selves to come together willy-nilly. At least on planet Earth, a human-like self has to come together in the context of all the features listed above under the description of selves. A human-like self could not lack a sense of morality; it could not have a morality radically different than it does have; it could not lack a sense of "I", "me", and the generalized other; and it could not lack contradictions that it can mostly deal with. Human-like selves cannot include some features that other animals have such as extreme hostility and eating their own young. Human-like selves are unusual. Humans are a selection among possible abilities. They are qualitatively distinct. The line between these selves, other selves (orangutans and wolves), and living not-selves (slugs and amoebas) might be blurred but qualitatively distinct human-like selves line still exist. Anybody who wants to say human-like selves are merely a bag of unrelated abilities has to explain why these abilities have to come together, what their coming together means for the idea of a self, and what their coming together means for the idea of any qualitative thing including such qualitative things as chimpanzees, cultures, science, etc.

A star is not only a big bunch of hydrogen atoms; it is a big bunch of hydrogen atoms arranged in some particular ways so that particular reactions do go on, and other reactions do not go on. So selves are a bunch of abilities but they are a particular selection of abilities out of all the possible abilities and they are arranged in a particular way. Mechanists need to be clearer on the idea of the self before they start to explain or explain away. They need to do more than construct a "straw" self that they can explain away. Mechanists need to explain why the features of a full self come together, and what it means for the such bundles to come together into full selves.

I have no doubt humans have a distorted exaggerated sense of self. I have no doubt all human-like selves would have a distorted sense of their self and likely would have a stronger sense of self than an objective observer would assess. We think a lot of our selves, our power, and our integrity. I have no doubt this is because we evolved. Still, that does not mean we are wrong about being selves. It just means we misunderstand ourselves, which is not at all surprising. A male lion quite likely has a distorted self image but that does not mean he is not a lion and not a kind-of self.

In the future, probably we will make artificial selves, and we might be able to make artificial selves without the same mixture of sentience, morality, aesthetic sensitivity, humor, sense of generalized other, etc. that go together in evolved human-like selves. I am not sure what abilities can be made to stand on their own, and what has to occur only in sets along with other abilities. I am not sure if all selves, including artificial selves, have to entail some contradictions so as to achieve real sentience. The fact that the future will see some artificial selves does not invalidate what I have said here about evolved selves and the reality of selves.

A determined mechanist rightly says: "A machine is a machine is a machine. It is determinate no matter how complex it is and how possibly contradictory it might be. Some machines might be more interesting to creatures with a finite mind (cars are more interesting than little red wagons) but to God with an infinite mind, all machines are equally simple and equally uninteresting because they are all equally determinate.

To God, we are all like “Rube Goldberg” machines with chutes, ladders, springs, and loops; once you drop the little ball, you know the toaster will pop up no matter how many steps are in the middle. It does not matter if a machine is rigid like wooden blocks or probabilistic like dice and small particles (quantum mechanics) as long as it is determinate. Machines are selves only because they evolved to feel they are selves. To God, you are about as interesting as a rock. You are nothing special. God did not make the universe to cure his boredom. In fact, there is no need for God, so probably there is no God.”

I don't know what to say. I wish I knew the mind of God as well. If there is a God, not everything can be equally the same to God or equally boring to God. If it were, I guess God would not have bothered to make the universe as it is. I think God does care about machines that have all the attributes of a self. Here is my rejoinder to the mechanists:

I can think in both ways without going crazy. The ability to think in both ways is an important part of what makes persons qualitatively distinct and interesting. Any machine that can think in both ways without going crazy is certainly qualitatively distinct and interesting, and is a good candidate for being a self. The fact that people can recognize the issues (think both ways at the same time without going crazy) thus tends automatically to decide the issues in favor of the existence of a qualitatively distinct interesting thing called “persons”.

My argument does not refute Darwinism. I am a Darwinist; I don't want to refute Darwinism. I think my answer supports Darwinism. My argument shows how evolution can create qualitatively distinct things including selves. Even if human-like selves are entirely subject to natural laws, they are still human-like selves, and they are as they are because they evolved. I think this is more than enough to support the common sense idea of the self.

Donovan, Mountains, and Juanita.

Recall from Donovan Leitch:

“First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is...
Oh, Juanita, I call your name...”

When we pick apart and-or bolster any thing, we undermine that thing and lose that thing. We dissolve the world in the pride of our intellects. Smart-aleck advanced religious adepts riding the crest of their first insights, and modern scientific adepts with similar abilities and character, tend to make this mistake – one of the textbook definitions of Maia. Yet if we undermine a thing in the right spirit of common sense, often enough we can recover that thing again in a better way. This applies to selves. When we have the right sense of the self and of our own self, then we recognize other selves in the right way, we can reach out to them (call their name), and they can reach out to us. That is part of what good selves do.

13 Free Will

The question of free will is not settled, it is confusing on its own, and nearly all discussions of free will add to the confusion by promoting agendas. I cannot straighten out ideas of selves and free will here but I might say enough so you don't fall prey to any added confusion, including what I add. Horses, apple trees, cardboard boxes, computers, running, TV shows, a song, scientific method, and many things are qualitatively distinct things for practical purposes. Likewise, the self is enough of a thing, in the sense of those things, so we can treat it as a qualitatively distinct thing. Free will is not as clear-cut as the other things. Free will is more like pretending, telling a story, and evaluating a movie. That does not mean free will is not real but it does mean free will is more open to confusion and argument.

Selves.

Please see Chapter Three on evolution and the previous chapter on selves. Qualitatively distinct things do not have to be absolutely distinct from the rest of the world. It is hard to draw a line between justice and mercy but that does not mean there is no justice and no mercy. It is hard to draw a line between love for friends, love for spouse, and romantic love, but that does not mean there are not distinct flavors of love. It is hard to draw a line between non-living things versus living things but that does not mean there are no living things. It is hard to draw a line between non-selves versus selves but that does not mean there are no selves.

A rock does not have a self. A worm likely does not have a self. A bird might have a self, especially a smart bird like a crow. A deer might have a self. Wolves, monkeys, some cats, and some dogs likely have selves. Chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans likely have selves although not as developed as a human self. Normal common people do not expect a sharp line between non-selves versus selves, and normal people expect selfhood to come in degrees.

We expect evolved selves to have the following evolved abilities. We grant selfhood to a thing to the extent the thing has more of these qualities and-or shows them to a greater degree.

-Recognizes that other beings come both as discrete beings, as individuals, and as types. There are both individual beings, and there are also plants, roses, badgers, chimpanzees, mothers, chess players, and thinkers.

-Recognizes that other individual beings have needs, goals, attitudes, emotions, etc.

-Recognizes that some other individual beings have intentions, and that intentions go along with needs, etc.

-Recognizes that the needs, intentions, etc. of other individuated beings often go along with the type of that being, but sometimes the expression of the needs, etc. is particular to that being. Almost all robins

like to eat worms; some robins prefer worms to bugs while other robins prefer bugs to worms; some particular robin might prefer chocolate chip cookies.

-Recognizes that some individual beings might have completely individual tastes.

-Recognizes that other individual beings differentiate themselves from their environment. They have a sense of "me" and "not me".

-Recognizes that other individual beings with intentions differentiate themselves from other individual beings with intentions. They have a sense of "me" and "those guys".

-Recognizes that it's self is an individuated being with intentions, similar to other such individuated beings with intentions. "I have a sense of myself apart from other things".

-Recognizes that it is like other sentient beings and they are like it. "I am like one of those guys who act with intent and self-knowledge. Those guys who act like that are like me".

-Recognizes that some other individuated beings with intentions recognize it as such too. "Some of those guys who act with sentience see me that way too".

-Expects to enter into relations, or deny relations, with other individuated beings on the basis of the intentions, needs, etc. of other individuated beings with intentions. "I can be friends with some of those guys who act sentient".

-Sentient beings often come in groups. I feel a part of a group with some other sentient beings, and might feel distinct from other groups. Evolved selves have a sense of "us" and "them".

-Evolved selves have a sense of the generalized other, that is, has a sense of the feelings, ideals, rules, actions, expectations, and attitudes typical of us.

-Evolved selves have a sense of morality, and appreciate art.

-Evolved selves have a sense of empathy.

-Many of these items imply free will, such as intentions, but do not absolutely require it.

Situational Free Will.

I do not know of any good analysis of the will in Darwinism, other science, philosophy, or theology. I did not look hard in philosophy or theology. Some Hindu and Buddhist treatises are specifically on the self and the will but I am not familiar enough with such work to comment.

Just as normal people do not expect a sharp line between selves versus non-selves, and allow degrees of selfhood, so also normal people do not expect a self to have totally free will in all arenas, and do allow a self to have varying degrees of free will in various arenas. Selves could only evolve with some limits on

their free will. A self need not have totally free will. Not having totally free will does not disqualify a being from being a self. A being with totally free will likely would not be a self as we know it, and certainly could not have evolved. The fact that freed will comes in degrees according to arenas does not undermine free will. We have enough free will to do most jobs that need doing. If the human self did not have some free will, we would have to pretend it did, as we do now sometimes. I think we have enough free will to sustain the justice system. I doubt enough people have enough free will, and are astute enough, to make modern democracy work.

While I believe people do have a lot of free will, I also believe in the reductionist scientific research program that seems to undermine all free will and might undermine the common sense idea of a self. I cannot reconcile these points of view at this time. I hope future thinkers make progress on these issues.

Ideas of the Will.

“The will” is not one idea. The list below shows various ideas that go into the idea of the will. It is easy to add items, or to reduce by seeing some items in terms of others, but I urge you not to do either quickly. I cannot describe the will without using metaphors, and I don’t want too. I cannot explain here why the fact that I need to use metaphors is important but I do wish to point it out. American English allows overlap between “will”, “want”, “wish”, and “need”. I do not try to impose a system on the language.

1. Strength and Power. “Will power”. The ability to resist torture. The ability to carry through something once begun. The ability to endure. The desire to endure. The ability to control bodily functions and other mental functions. “I will stop coughing”. “I won’t think about her anymore”.
2. Desire. “What is your will, sire?” “Your will is my desire”.
3. Choice. “I will have the eggs over easy”. “Do you want top or bottom?”
4. Creativity. “I will come up with a solution”. “I can see the idea taking shape”. “He willed the project into being.”
5. Denial and Refusal. “I will not”. It is easy to think of this category as a choice between this situation versus not-this-situation but it is not the same. This category represents rejection of this situation whether my rejection puts me into another situation or not.
6. Determination. “I want that job, and I will do anything it takes to get it”. “As a people, we must be free, and we will fight to the last man-or-woman to get freedom, if that is what it takes”. “I don’t care what happens to me, I have to see my work into the world”.
7. Existential Superiority. This point might be a variation of point one. When two beings have a contest of wills, the one that wins is the better, more powerful being, or superior being. The better of two beings is supposed to win a contest of wills. Parents should win a contest of wills with their children, although of course they don’t always. In the “Narnia” series, C.S. Lewis says the battle between the Ice Queen and Aslan the Lion was always a contest of wills at bottom. Aslan, the force of Goodness, wins. The revolt of the Devil against God was a revolt of Pride, that is, a revolt of the will. Good is supposed to win the

contest of wills, that is, to have the stronger will, even when evil is physically stronger. In most mythology, when evil wins the contest of wills, something is seriously wrong.

Despite the fact that the other categories cannot be reduced to the idea of choice, because of how the ideas of strategy and free will have been developed in biology and in current American pop culture, for present needs, it is useful to focus on the idea of will as a choice.

More on Situational Free Will.

Maybe some teenagers and Existentialists dream of being great warriors and being able to withstand any torture for any length of time, but that is not true of any normal person, and it is not what armies expect of soldiers. No normal person can resist torture for longer than a few days. Some people can withstand torture until they die, if they die in a few days. But, if torturers can avoid killing, eventually everybody breaks. In “The Maltese Falcon” by Dashiell Hammett, the hero, Sam Spade, is trapped in a room over night with enemies, and he has important information that they want. Spade makes it clear that, if they torture him, he will force them to kill him soon. So they leave him alone. Ascetics endure great hardship – amounting to torture – in pursuit of truth. The Buddha denied such methods are effective, and instead advocated a middle path of restraint and cultivation. The law recognizes coercion, knows that coercion sometimes cannot be withstood, and defines cases that qualify as coercion. If a thinker demands that the will be able to withstand anything in order to be free, then we do not have true free will. But I do not think course that is reasonable.

We are walking across a street when we can see that a car is not going to stop for the red light, and will hit us. So we jump out of the way rather than stand on our rights as a pedestrian. This does not mean we do not have free will.

Every personal relation involves negotiations and involves giving up some things. The movies and TV make fun of people who refuse to give up anything to sustain a relationship. The fact that we have to make compromises in relations does mean we do not have perfect freedom of will but does not mean we have no freedom of will at all. If your “significant other” loves vegetarian lasagna, then you learn to eat vegetarian lasagna. If your autocratic boss likes a cigar after lunch, you might have to learn to put up with cigar smoke on the restaurant terrace.

You are driving along through town when suddenly you are struck with the desire for a soda. You stop at the local convenience store, only to find it does not have your favorite flavor of organic Swedish raspberry sweetened with Cuban natural brown sugar. To get that, you would have to drive another half-hour to a specialty store. You don’t feel like making the drive today, so you buy a cherry coke here instead. This compromise does not mean you do not have free will.

The cat will not eat dry food every night. We have to give the cat wet food at least two nights a week, or we feel guilty when the cat goes hungry. The cat has more sense than we do. This does not mean the cat has free will and we do not. It does not mean the cat has a greater will than we do or that the cat is morally and existentially superior. Parents go through the same battle with children over vegetables. Parents do not win every case. Little Suzy gets ice cream despite some leftover broccoli. Parents have to pick which issues to turn into a contest of wills.

Picking Apart Sam's Free Will.

(1) When we give in to torture, we do not assent or consent. Choice is consenting. We can “hang” the idea of freedom of the will on this difference, and, to some extent, American law does this. A woman's consent is the difference between having sex versus rape. We use consent as a marker of free will. We use it even in situations where do not expect perfect freedom of the will.

(2) Modern biological argument about free will hinges on seeing that behavior conforms to a system that is governed by a rationale. The rationale is evolutionary success. The system can be any of our abilities such as looking for food or looking for a mate. We act to serve evolutionary success. Thus there is no free will at all; free will is only an illusion.

The modern biological argument is the latest (and best) version of a general argument about conforming to a system with a rationale. Any explanation of human behavior that shows how we conform to a system with a rationale can be used to undermine free will; the system does not have to be natural selection with evolutionary success as the goal. If we can explain behavior in strategic terms, or if we can find a system in which the behavior makes sense, then we can say have completely accounted for the behavior without invoking free will or consent. You will see what that means in the examples below.

In modern biology, the argument about conforming to a system with a rationale has considerable power because of natural selection. Organisms (people) who do not conform to the system (natural selection) and seek its goal (evolutionary success) are eliminated. Only people who do conform to the system with its goal live and propagate. The people who do live and propagate must have something “inside them” that gets them to conform to the system and to aim at its goal. Because of the mechanisms inside us, we have no free will.

The following examples work through these ideas. The examples use varying degrees of freedom in different arenas to show that absolute ideas of free will or no-free-will do not work very well, and do not accord with common sense. The examples show how the common sense idea of varying free will in varying arenas is enough for most purposes, and goes along with the common sense idea of the self.

Sam goes to a garage sale, where he sees two bicycles priced the same. One bike originally came from the local huge chain department store and is of modest quality while the other bike is from a small maker in the Pacific Northwest with high-quality parts and a great design. Leaving aside moral considerations as to whether the seller will be cheated, Sam naturally decides to get the high-quality bike. Buying the other bike would be stupid. Has Sam acted freely? Sam would not buy without his consent. Sam acted to get the best buy; Sam acted according to financial wisdom, which is a system of thought outside of him; Sam acted strategically; Sam acted according to the rules of economic so as to maximize the value for his money, and to maximize his utility. Did financial wisdom compel Sam? In a way, it did. Sam's behavior is predictable according to the rules of economic logic. If financial wisdom did, in a way, compel Sam, can we say he is not free? Contrary to any ideology about free will, there is no easy answer, and freedom of the will comes in degrees. I think Sam did act freely. Most people would agree but would not want to waste time arguing about it. A biologist might reasonably disagree with me. An economist would

not care as long as Sam is predictable. In arguing for Sam's free will, I would use the idea of his consent, but I am not sure his freedom of will has to hinge on that alone.

Sam has \$200 to spend at the grocery store. He allocates the money to get the most satisfaction for his money (technically, he allocates the money to get the greatest utility from each marginal penny). Sam buys 5 pounds of hamburger, two loaves of whole grain bread, a bag of cherries, a variety of melons, carrots, milk, yogurt, and lots of breakfast cereal. Did Sam act freely? Did Sam's desire for the greatest satisfaction for the money somehow constrain him to act according to a system, a rationale, and so take away his freedom? Most non-biologists would say he acted freely. Now suppose Sam is diabetic, and he chose his food so as to control his blood sugar and so as to alleviate the symptoms of diabetes. Did Sam act freely? Sam acted with less freedom of the will but he still had considerable freedom within the limits of his budget and his disease to act freely. He could have chosen more whole grain pasta and less whole grain bread with the same result on his disease.

Sam has only \$20 and has to feed his whole family of five. Sam has to choose carefully what food yields the best nutrition and fullest bellies. Same has less freedom, maybe, in reality, little freedom at all. He is constrained by a system and a rationale. But we still think he acted freely. Largely we think he acts freely because he consents.

Sam now has \$200 again, but this time Sam refuses to choose any food colored white, such as white flour, white bread, pastries made with white flour, white rice, etc. He is free in his other food choices. Sam refuses to buy food colored white because he thinks refined food is bad for us, and white is a good criterion for refined food. I still think Sam mostly has free will, although some people will think Sam has given up a portion of his free will to a food fad. If you agree with Sam, likely you think he still has as much free will as ever, given the issues raised above about operating efficiently. Set aside whether you agree with Sam. Now Sam operates under not only the constraint of efficiency but also under the constraint of a system with a rationale. If you think that one erodes free will while the other does not, what is the basis for the difference? If you believe both erode free will, does operating under the constraint of any system with a rationale erode free will? If we always operate under the constraint of some system with a rationale, then we cannot have free will.

Now Sam refuses to buy food that is colored reddish, such as apples, carrots, some peppers, and even some lettuce. Sam is acting under a compulsion, yet still a system, for which there is a clear consistent rationale. Sam consents to his choices in this system. In this case, some people would say Sam is not free, even the people who previously said Sam was free when he chose not to buy white food. Consent alone is not quite enough to make for free will. The kind of system-with-constraint seems to matter in whether we say that we have free will. The effect of the system on consent seems to matter. There are no clear criteria for resolving these issues. A biologist would say Sam is not free in any of these cases because Sam acts under a system with a rationale.

This situation annoys philosophers and theologians. Sam can spend \$20 out of his \$200 in donations to the local food bank. Sam knows this is absolutely the right thing to do. There is no question. So Sam gets the food, and gives it to the food bank. Morality compels. Morality is among the most compelling of systems, with its own obvious rationales (good, greater good, rules, etc.) even if people do not completely agree on the rationales. Does Sam act freely when he acts morally? Yes, Sam could have chosen not to

act morally, and many people do choose not to act morally; but, when Sam feels the call of morality, and follows it, does Sam act freely? Maybe people who have a less keen sense of morality have a freer will - that opinion is in line with Romanticism and modern moral ambiguity. Keep in mind that we evolved a sense of morality, and usually following morality helps us to evolutionary success. There is no definitive answer. Again, a biologist would say "no". The answer has implications for what we consider a self, for the justice system, and for religion.

This situation annoys romantics. Sam falls in love. According to the prevailing romantic myth, Sam has no choice in the matter. Love chooses us, we do not choose love. When Sam falls in love, does Sam have free will? Is love like torture? If Sam has no choice in this matter, then why does Sam have free will in other situations in which he acts toward a rationale?

In fact, biologists can show that Sam is very likely to fall in love with particular kinds of people. If Sam is a boy, then Sam will fall in love with a girl who is likely to bear healthy children, and to rear the healthy children to their own evolutionary success. Sam and the girl are similar in socio-economic status, race, religion, intelligence, school record, and job history. Similarity in these factors, and others, contributes to evolutionary success. Large differences in these factors hurt evolutionary success. In that case, it is not that love chooses Sam; it is evolutionary success that chooses Sam. This is the general argument from biology. Sam operates under a system that guides his actions toward a rationale. Sam has little, or no, freedom of choice. Within the category of acceptable mates, Sam might choose Sally or Sue, but, in the words of a blues song, "there aint much difference between the two". If the difference is enough to Sam and Sally feel as if they have free will and are free selves, then fine; but that is only a convenient illusion that helps the drive to evolutionary success.

Recall the flight-and-fight response once again. When faced with a coyote, Rocky Raccoon fights about 60% of the time. When faced with the same coyote Timmy Raccoon fights about 40% of the time. They have to do one or the other, but they don't have to do one particular one, and they don't have to do it in any particular ratio. It seems as if there might be a system (that is questionable) but no obvious rationale. Does the variation mean that Rocky and Timmy have free will? Not necessarily. Natural selection will choose which one lives most of the time, and goes on to have children that act more like him. With many Rockies and Timmys to choose from, natural selection can choose the most effective ratio of flight to fight. We need not specify an exact brain mechanism, and we need not conduct extensive investigations to prove this is so, although biologists have in other cases. There is a system and a rationale, and Rocky and Timmy operate closely under its direction.

So, what looks like free will in the case of Sam falling in love or Sam choosing groceries might not be so free. Natural selection (system) gets rid of all the Sams who do not choose groceries most efficiently so as to maximize evolutionary success (rationale) whether or not, right now, we can specify a mechanism in their brains that leads to the right choices. There is no need to evoke free will; evoking free will does not help explain; evoking free leads to confusion; so there is no free will. Consent is irrelevant as long as Sam follows a system with a rationale. Consent might help Sam to maintain the illusion of his self-hood, to fool himself, better fool others, and so act more effectively. This conclusion too is the position of the modern deterministic biologist, and this is where deterministic biology, deterministic chemistry, and deterministic physics meet.

I do not have a rejoinder yet I continue to believe in enough free will in the common sense way. I only point to the instances above where we allowed Sam some degree of free will, and used consent and choices as criteria.

Interlude: Biology is Not the Real Problem; Physics Is.

Modern biologists have shown clearly that people act along the lines of evolutionary success, as, for example, by picking suitable sex partners, marriage partners, friends, allies, jobs, living situations, etc. We act and think according to what would have worked in our evolutionary past, and what still largely works today. That constraint makes it seem as if we have no free will. In fact, though, biology allows a lot of leeway in the implementation of strategies, and it allows a large scope for learning, especially among people. Think of it like this: biology directs us to choose from among a category, so in that sense we are not free; but within the category we have a lot of scope for choice, so in that sense we are free. We don't make friends with violent thugs but we still do have a lot of choice in who we actually pick as friends, and we learn a lot about what kind of people make good friends for us as individuals. That leeway is enough room to squeeze in enough free will to satisfy most of my needs. The fact that we are biologically constrained not to befriend a violent thug but instead we are biologically constrained to make friends among a thousand other people from our culture, socio-economic class, and interests, is enough to satisfy my needs for free will. The fact that we are biologically constrained to marry within our set but can still choose from among hundreds of potential spouses in our set is enough to satisfy my needs for free will. The fact that the cat is designed to eat meat instead of vegetables but prefers salmon over stew beef is enough to satisfy my idea of free will in cats. In the future, there will be argument over how large this window really is, but, for now, it is enough for me.

The real problem is the underlying determinism of physics and chemistry. Suppose not choosing Sam the violent killer as a friend is explicable directly in terms of biology but choosing five particular people among a hundred other much nicer possibilities for a friend is not explicable directly in terms of biology. Still, when I make up my mind, I also make up my brain. My brain chemistry is at work, and so is the physics of my brain chemistry. Change happens in my brain physics when I decide to hang out with Bill instead of Bob. That change in brain physics is determined by natural laws. Even within the category, we do not choose as we think we do. That seems incompatible with free will. Our brains are determined by physics, and so are our wills; so we have no free will, and we are not selves in the sense that I want. I cannot resolve this issue in a way that definitely leaves room for common sense free will and the common sense self.

It might seem as if there are two levels (physics and biology) each with its own kind of determinism, and that there is more possibility for free will at the "higher" level (biology); but really there is only one level with one kind of determinism and no free will. Biology is part of physics, and the determination of physics applies to biology as well. Apparent differences are only due to convenience in thinking, and apparent free will is only an illusion arising from convenience in thinking. If choosing Bill instead of Bob is a matter of brain physics, then so is not choosing Sam (biological level). If choosing Mary as a spouse is a matter of brain physics, then so is choosing among women who are in our age, cultural, religious, and economic categories (biological level). Biology could be rendered in terms of physics if biologists were thorough enough. So determination at the level of biology is only another aspect of determination at the level of physics. It is all determinate and it is all determination of the same kind.

This idea is likely true but not very useful. It is just too hard to turn all of biology into physics. It is easier to think in terms of the “higher” level of genes, individuals, strategies, reproduction, natural selection, types, and outcomes, just as it is easier to think in terms of a higher-level computer languages such as Pascal, Java, or Perl than to think in terms of “1” and “0”. That is what biologist do. The convenience of thinking at a “higher” level than physics, such as biology, opens the door to confusion. When we argue at a “higher” level, we seem to leave open a window for free will. It appears as if we have some freedom. But this conclusion is not necessarily so. It only seems so because scientists have not reduced biology to physics in a way that makes it easy to do biology. This idea has become a dogma in modern science. In this situation, all I can do is to re-assert I think we are free enough, and self enough, despite the apparent determinism.

Some thinkers, in particular anthropologists, have argued the opposite way, for a separation of levels, and so that higher levels dominate lower levels. The determination of physics-and-chemistry does not apply at the level of biology, the determination of biology does not apply to mind, and the determination of mind does not apply to culture-and-society. Each level has its own laws, which the laws of lower levels cannot explain. The laws of any upper level dominate the laws of any lower level. This argument is a mistake. There is no good reason why the laws of a lower level should not apply to a higher level, and many good strong reasons why they should. There is no good reason each level has its own laws that automatically supersede the laws of lower levels. Culture has to obey mind, mind has to obey biology, and biology has to obey physics. Often it is convenient to think in terms appropriate to each level without worrying about relations to other levels, as biology does with physics, but that is not the same as believing each higher level is independent of all lower levels. Despite some good intentions, on the whole, the argument for the power of higher levels is an attempt to escape science, and should be fought. Moreover, the autonomy of higher levels usually leads to no free will at all. When culture-and-society dominates biology, it leaves no room for free will.

Biologists and other thinkers sometimes mix up the determinism that is clear in biology (avoiding the violent thug, or marrying a nice person of the same kind) with the determinism of physics (every act is a matter of brain physics). In their own minds, thinkers likely make the distinction, but they do not convey it well in their writing, and so sometimes they confuse people. When you read about free will or culture, figure out what level the thinkers are writing about, the kind of determinism that might apply at that level, and the relation of determinism at that level to the basic level of physics. Because, so far, not everything has been reduced to the laws of physics, if you think you see some freedom at higher levels, you are free to choose to go on believing it.

Absolutely Godfrey.

We have now cut off Sam’s free will. It might help to put the situation in perspective if first we look at the opposite person, a being with absolute free will. Then we can reverse the process by starting with a Sam who has little free will and gradually giving Sam more free will.

The name “Godfrey” comes from the movie “My Man Godfrey”. Godfrey has absolutely total free will. When most people think of absolute free will, they think it means a self can do whatever the self wishes without restraint and without regrets. If Godfrey wants to eat ice cream until he pukes, he can. If he

wishes to get up early everyday to do schoolwork, hold down a job, and go to church twice a week, he can. In fact, having absolutely total free will means more than this. The results are not always what we expect. The results are more like the absolute skeptic than like a really good guy with a lot of stamina.

Godfrey can withstand any torture, if he wants. Godfrey can also tell the torturers whatever he wants, if that is what he wants. Godfrey can be moral if that is what he wants, or immoral. Godfrey is not subject to any system or any rationale. If Godfrey were subject to any system or any rationale, Godfrey would not have absolutely free will. Because Godfrey need not follow any system, we cannot tell what Godfrey is doing or why, unless he feels like telling us. Godfrey need not have any reason. He need only will to do it. In fact, if Godfrey does have a reason, and he feels as if the reason compels him, then he is does not have absolutely free will. If Godfrey walks around the street shooting puppies, he does not have to tell us why, and he does not have to have a reason. If he does have a reason, he need not follow the reason for any longer than he wills to follow the reason. Suppose we have heard there is an outbreak of rabies, and we think that is the reason why Godfrey is shooting puppies. But it might not be the reason, and we need never find out.

Godfrey is not a self as we think of a self. Godfrey is more like a demon or a strange God than any self we could possibly be comfortable with. Godfrey could never have evolved. If Godfrey can create worlds through his will, I am not sure I would like to be part of those worlds. I am not sure I would like to live in a world with Godfrey.

When we think of a being with a lot of free will, we do not think of Godfrey. We think of a being that can engage in common activities to the extent that he-she wishes, and of a being that has the characters listed above. We understand that working within an activity restrains the free will of the being but we do not hold that very much against the free will of the being. Arthur is such a free being. Arthur works hard to promote morality. Arthur wants friendship and love to work, and works hard to make them work. Arthur understands the modern economy, and works hard to make that succeed. Arthur has learned to have patience with people who do not understand as much as he does. When Arthur gets ill, he endures the pain and discomfort. He does not complain, and he does not cause discomfort to his friends and loved ones. Arthur certainly works under systems with rationales but we do not think of him as less free.

For an attempt to merge Godfrey and Arthur, and for many interesting comments on the will, see the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, especially "The World as Will and as Representation" and some of his essays. Schopenhauer mistakenly thinks a being with absolute free will would will a world much like what we see, but he makes a lot of interesting points along the way.

Rocky Raccoon: Variability, Consent, and Freedom.

It helps to work upward from simple cases of free will to more complicated cases, this time to see if we can sustain (bolster) freedom of the will rather than pick it apart. I do not argue for absolute freedom of the will but for a limited kind of freedom that some people will not consider freedom of the will at all. This limited free will is based on the fact that much variation is normal in nature, and that natural selection does not always restrict our behavior. Natural selection leaves a window within which variation shows, and within which we can be limited-but-practically free even if not metaphysically free. The first ten items

in the list below try to find some “wobble room” for free will within the limits of a system with a rationale. The eleventh point asserts that “system with a rationale” is irrelevant. The twelfth is a bonus.

Rocky Raccoon fights 60% of the time against a coyote while Timmy fights 40% of the time, George fights 80%, and Frank fights 20% of the time. There is no intrinsic right and wrong here. There is only what works over time in natural selection, and how natural selection finds a way to get descendants of Rocky, Timmy, George, and Frank to react most effectively. We might expect that natural selection would eliminate all this variability so that, eventually, all raccoons would fight about 50% of the time, but this is not true. (Technical Note: The following is based on multi-person games with probabilistic strategies, and on results from decision rule theory.)

1. For reasons that are too hard to go into here, natural selection can sustain situations in which people vary in their abilities as with the raccoons. The population in general does not gravitate toward 50% but remains in a mixture with some individuals at 80, 60, 40, and 20 percent.
2. Rocky and the other raccoons really are not determined in particular cases, and so are not really determined at all even if, overall, there is a stable ratio in their alternatives. The fact that Rocky fights in 60% of cases means that we cannot predict for sure that Rocky will fight in any particular case. Rocky, and every other individual raccoon, has a lot of internal variability.
3. Internal individual variability comes, at least in part, because of population variability, and vice versa. Rocky is like a mix of George (80%) and Frank (20%). Timmy is like a mix of Rocky (60%) and Frank (20%). Because Rocky and the other raccoons fight in mixed proportions, the population stays mixed too; because the population stays mixed, Rocky and the other raccoons fight in mixed proportions.
4. Many abilities (traits) are like this, such as the search for a mate. They are the end result of some variability and mixture. Even simple things like eye color can be the result of mixed tendencies.
5. All organisms that might be selves have an incredible number of traits with an incredible mixing. By “incredible” I mean “incredible”. The number of possibilities in any normal human being is more than the number of atoms in star.
6. Rocky has to assess each particular coyote before fighting or fleeing. If Rocky and all raccoons could perfectly assess all coyotes, then Rocky, and all other raccoons, would not have a flight or fight response at all. They would not need one, and so would not have one. Rocky, and all other raccoons, would fight or flee according to the coyote. The fact that they act in some mixture means the situation with the coyote is fuzzy. There is probability in the flight or fight response, and in many traits, because there is some fuzziness in nearly all situations. When there is fuzziness, what we do is not a determined response to the particular situation but is a guess. A guess is like a choice, it is like an exercise of free will. The choice in each particular situation is like an exercise of free will in that particular situation even though there is an overall pattern to the choices over time. The fuzziness and guessing inherent in all situations interacts with the above factors to reinforce them.
7. Usually almost any choice is better than no choice. Rocky just has to get on with things, especially when faced with a coyote. The worst thing Rocky can do is just stand there. Even if flight might not be

better than fight in this case, both are worse than nothing, and so flight is better than nothing. Rocky has to choose even on the basis of poor information and uncertainty. Natural selection does reward making some choice over not making any choice, and so Rocky is part of a system with a rationale. But, in this case, natural selection does not reward either choice so much as any choice, and need not reward either choice strongly. Some choice is important, and it need not be any particular choice, as long as it is not a really stupid choice. So, Rocky has some leeway in how he acts within the system with a rationale.

8. This point is a variation on the idea that any choice is better than no choice. People face situations more complicated than “fight or flight”, such as whether to marry Sue, Mary, Jane, Sally, Tiffany, or any of a hundred other possibilities. Not choosing, or choosing very late, is worse than not choosing the one absolute best. So we choose the best that we find within a range within a time. We exert our will to make a choice of practical best when the absolute best is not obvious. Biologists have developed a system with a rationale that can explain many of the choices that organisms, including people, make under these conditions. So biologists argue that free choice plays no part. The system-with-rationale does not explain all choices, but I do not wish to base my idea of free will on discrepancies between the system with actual choices but rather on the fact that we choose under uncertainty. Even if we have a system to make choices under some uncertainty, we still make choices under uncertainty, and we still deal with uncertainty, and that is a kind of free will.

9. A biological reductionist also can explain away the following source of free will but I like it anyway. Often we have to judge people (and machines such as cars) not on the basis of obvious appearance or recent performance but on the basis of the quality that we think underlies mere chance. The ability to make this judgment is what makes a good sports scout. This distinction fuels battles between teenage girls and their parents over boyfriends. Financial market consultants make their reputations by pointing out the cases like this where they succeeded, and by overlooking the cases like this where they failed. The really good guy in a cowboy movie looks scruffy. If there were no signs at all of underlying quality, then there would be no basis to take a chance. If the signs alone were enough, then there would be no judgment, and people would not vary much in their ability to assess signs. Of course, natural selection picks people who consistently make the right judgments on the smallest of signs, so a biological reductionist can argue that free will and judgment play no part. I think enough uncertainty prevails, and the cases are important enough, so that we do make judgments “out of the blue”, that is, with free will.

10. All important systems-with-rationales are incomplete and inconsistent: morality, marriage, the law, medicine, sports, business, friendship, etc. The fact that natural selection controlled the evolution of a system-with-rationale does not mean that the system is complete and consistent. Biologists argue just the contrary; they argue that we are a pastiche of distinct ad hoc mechanisms. Anger is inconsistent within itself. Anger is inconsistent with affection. Emotions are inconsistent with social rules. Morality is not consistent; good often varies with the public good. These problems within and between systems cannot be straightened out, yet we have to act anyway. We have to choose. Often we must choose. Not all the choices that we make out of the misty borderlines are cases of free will but some probably are, and this misty land of indeterminacy is fertile ground for free will.

(Technical note: some thinkers refer to the fact that all systems, of the most important kind [Russell-Whitehead], must be incomplete, an idea that developed in the work of Kurt Godel. They argue that no systems are determinate, thus there is no single overarching system-with-rationale that governs human

action, and so there must be free will. That is not the point I am making here. That point does not need to be made here. That point deserves to be argued, but to do so here would only confuse issues. I am arguing that all evolved real systems that we do have, such as morality and emotions, are in fact incomplete and inconsistent, whether or not they have to be in theory.)

11. The standard explanation in Christian theology of the relation between goodness and free will is that we freely choose to act well. Goodness does not compel us to act well just because it is a system with a rationale. This explanation is not necessarily contrived mumbo-jumbo. Just because we go along with a system that has a rationale does not mean we do not freely choose to go along. We obey traffic laws even when we don't have to, partly out of habit, but partly out of free will. We decide to have sex or not. We decide to go along with a "wave" at a sporting event. We decide to go with our friends to a bar. We decide to join a flash mob. We decide to testify against a violent criminal even when we fear retaliation. Especially when a system-with-a-rationale is beneficial, as with traffic laws, it is hard to tell if a person goes along because of an inner compulsion to follow the system-with-a-beneficial-rationale or because of free will. Here biology invokes its argument that natural selection eliminates people who do not go along, rewards people who do go along, and there has to be some mechanism "inside us" that makes us go along, so there is no free will. We "choose" to act morally, because in our evolutionary past, acting well succeeded, and the mechanism that caused our ancestors to act well lives on inside us. The biologist disagrees with the theologian. There is no way to settle this argument.

12. People change, hopefully for the better, sometimes for the worse. One day Phoebe is a stockbroker. The next day she is a professional masseuse who sings "Smelly Cat" badly in the local bar. One day Barney wears all natural organic fiber clothes and tries to save the planet. The next day he wears tailored suits, works for Goliath Bank destroying the planet, and exploits women as much as he can. I hope we all "see the light" at least once in our lives, even if it is only a small light, and even if the light fades quickly. It is easy to rationalize changes in terms of a system with a rationale, and so to explain away free choice. Part of the fun in watching Phoebe and Barney is to see how they switched from one artificial system to another while search for satisfaction. To use the same explanation for both the before and after seems contrived and circular. Sometimes the easiest explanation is just the obvious common sense explanation that people do choose to change.

Probability, mixtures, guesses, huge numbers, systemic contradictions, making a choice even if it is not the one best choice, and changes, do not by themselves do not get around reductionism and they do not guarantee freedom of the will. But they all help. They leave space for free will.

When Rocky decides to fight in any particular case, he is not always sure beforehand (determined by a system with a rationale) and we are not sure. Rocky decides when the case comes up. The fact that, over many cases, Rocky fights 60% of the time does not determine that he will fight in this case. When Rocky fights, he feels as if he decided to fight, and that he consents to his decision. Not only does Rocky feel this way, but the other raccoons that see Rocky fight feel this way, and Rocky feels the assessment of the other raccoons about him. Whether he acted freely in any absolute sense is not as important as the fact that Rocky feels fairly free in his decisions about fighting, Rocky feels as if he can give consent or withhold it, and that the other raccoons feel the same way about Rocky and about themselves. That is the easiest way for an evolved self to handle this kind of issue.

Rocky does not exercise his freedom of the will generally and absolutely, like Godfrey. Rocky does so in kinds of situations, within limitations inherent in the situations, such as fighting, foraging, courting, and walking along having a good time. The situations are typical of raccoon evolved nature. The amount of free will that Rocky has in a particular situation depends on the situation. Rocky exercises various degrees of free will in various situations according to raccoon evolved free will. This is like Arthur, and this is how we think of Sam and other humans.

Back to Sam.

Sam likes the color blue more than the color orange. There are few consequences to his evolutionary success due to liking blue more than orange, and so we can say that Sam exercises free will in his choice. There might be some deep underlying genetic-brain-or-learning reason why Sam prefers blue to orange, but we need not care, and likely we will never find out. We can accept that Sam freely chooses blue, and that he consents to blue.

Sam likes bananas better than apples. Sam likes golf better than football. Sam likes films noir more than romantic comedies. Sam picks some of his friends on the basis of shared tastes. The same comments apply.

Sam will not fall in love with just anybody but he is not thereby limited to only a few best mates. Even in the category of “right” mates, Sam has thousands of candidates. Biology cannot determine the one single best mate for Sam. Sam has to choose. Sam has to choose somebody even if it is not the ideal perfect imaginable somebody because eventually time will run out, and some choice is better than no choice. Sam can even stray outside the box a little, as, for example, marrying a plumber or marrying a princess instead of marrying a young professional woman with a degree. When Sam chooses “the one” among the large range of possibilities, he feels as if he has chosen freely, and he feels as if he consents to his choice. Because there were many possibilities, he did choose. This might not be perfect freedom of the will but it is free enough.

Sam has to choose in the market to get the most for his money, but, even within that constraint, there are a lot of choices. I know it can seem as if the market is one dreary aisle after another but compared to most alternatives, there are a lot of choices. Sam has to choose within a time frame, even if he does not choose the absolute best item that he might possibly have found if he had time to check every item in this store and in all competing stores. Sam has to buy cereal, and he chooses to buy generic cornflakes at \$2 a box even though there is a slim possibility he might have gotten a better deal on generic raisin bran at another store. Within the need to use his money most effectively, Sam really does make choices, and really does consent to the choices that he makes. Sam makes choices with consent even if he makes pretty much the same choices over time, even if he acts within a system according to the rationale of the system, and even if he is somewhat constrained.

Back in 2002, when Apple introduced its line of small electronic consumer goods such as the iPod, Sam bought Apple stock even though, overall, the company had recently suffered losses. Sam held on to his stock through the series of iPhones and Tablets, and did very well. Sam congratulates himself on his judgment and his free will.

Sam has a small garden in his back yard. Sam and his wife dearly love their raspberries. Sam saw the small child of a poor family stealing raspberries from the garden, and stealing other food that was more for nutrition than for taste, such as tomatoes and corn. There is no absolute system-with-rationale to guide Sam here. Sam has to choose.

Sam likes to play folk tunes on the guitar. He plays them too fast, but he likes them that way.

As selves, we understand the situations and actions of other selves, at least somewhat. We assess the degree of free will according to situations. We are happy to see Sam as acting freely at the supermarket or in the mate market. We also know that, if somebody kidnapped Sam's daughter, that Sam would not have the same freedom of the will. We would not hold that against Sam, Sam's free will, or free will in general.

Enough Free Will, One.

Situational partial free will is consistent with evolved selves, or at least with the evolved delusion of free will. We expect people to assert free will when they can (or to assert the evolved delusion of free will), to assess how free they can be in particular situations, to evolve the ability to assess situations according to how much free will they can assert, and to assert it in those situations. We expect people to evolve not to assert free will when they likely cannot, and when they might be punished for trying. The biologically-based reductionist idea that people have no free will at all goes against the idea that people have of their selves. It goes against the evolved idea of a common sense self. That does not mean it is false – people delude themselves even on major issues – but it does set up an awkward issue in which people without free will usually defend their legal rights. It makes us think in terms of absolute free will versus no free will at all, and I think that dichotomy confuses the issue so that it is insoluble. It impedes correct Darwinian understanding both of free will and of the illusion of free will.

I don't want absolute free will for humans. I don't want us to be like Godfrey. I want varying degrees of free will in the activities that people normally engage in. I can't assess if we are totally determined at the subatomic level. Even if we are, I don't see how to get from that level of determinism to the kind of action and assessments that we have to do as evolved selves in the normal world. Free will remains a practical mystery. We have to assume free will until we can absolutely explain it away. Until we can show how a shift in a quantum state determines my preference for pomegranates, we have to assume some free will. We still have to act well for the sake of our loved ones, people in general, and for the sake of goodness. For our life, we can safely assume the degree of free will that we do assume.

I don't know if situational free will is enough to satisfy theologians or enough to refute reductionists, and I don't care. I care that it is enough so I can continue to feel like a self, and it is enough so we can carry on with the usual needs of life.

I think situational free will is enough free will so we can face God when we die. We have enough free will in cases of morality, empathy, and working hard to build a better world; and those are what count most with God.

I don't know if people in general have enough free will to make modern democracy succeed. Some of us do. Many of us do not. Many of us are too easily manipulated by selfishness, jealousy, political parties, media, peer pressure, fear, and advertising. I can think of ways to separate the likely competent citizens from the likely incompetent citizens but here is not the place to argue the issue. To argue this issue requires accepting that a lot of people just are not competent, and so it means eroding one of the ideals of modern democracy in order to make the rest of modern democracy succeed. It does not mean giving up the idea of situational free will or giving up the idea of personhood.

Situational free will is like the freedom to compose music or play music within a musical system-with-a-rationale such as the Western twelve-tone system with a tonic key ("key of B flat") or even without a tonic key. The composer-or-player cannot choose any note to follow any other note or to go along with any other note. The choices are quite restrictive, and the rules can be elaborate. Yet even within the system-with-a-rationale, there is tremendous freedom of will and creativity. If there were not, we could not have the almost infinite amount of music that we have. Within a restrictive system-with-a-rationale, Johann Bach and Thelonius Monk both can create. Other arts are similar. What adds much to the interest of any art, and gives any art much of its character, is not the absolute freedom of the artist, but the play between the limits of the medium and the striving of the artist's will within the medium. Telling a story is not just relating events. In the long run, mathematical intuitions have to be proven. That does not mean novelists and mathematicians are not free.

Enough Free Will, Two.

Suppose we are only a bundle of traits without any free will in the sense that ideally most of us hope for. Suppose we are ultimately deterministic, that is, we are ultimately machines. Not only that, we are self-deluded machines, and often self-contradictory machines, too. Even in this situation, I see a role for what I think of as free will.

Imagine we are a machine like this: Most choices, in most arenas can be made directly with rules, such as, for example, in the eating arena, to eat an apple but not eat a stone. Other choices in other arenas are made by first generating a set of possibilities, then evaluating the possibilities by the best rules that natural selection can provide. For example, when meeting a new person for the first time, first we have to think up possibilities for what to do, then evaluate them, and then do something. Inside us, we have a random possibility generator. We might have a distinct random possibility generator for various distinct arenas such as social events, foraging for food, mate hunting, etc. That is not relevant here, so imagine we have one general-purpose random possibility generator for any arena. The random possibility generator is not the same in all people. The random possibility generator likely is not really random but is governed by a set of rules, like the pseudo-random number generator in a computer. That also does not matter for here. The evaluation rules also vary between people. All this is like a composer plinking away at a piano until he-she finds a set of notes with promise, and then develops them. As far as I care, this situation is enough free will.

The fact that we are self-contradictory machines opens up a giant set of possibilities for spaces in which free will might operate. This issue is similar to the fact that all important interesting systems must be incomplete. The topic is too big to go into here.

Even as machines, we are complicated, variable, interesting, nearly-unique bundles. Despite that we might be machines, or maybe because of that, God is still interested in us and in how we turn out. Especially we might be interesting if we have various unique random possibility generators, various unique sets of possibility evaluators, and big holes opened up by self-contradiction. It is like the interest that a “motor head” shows in his-her cars and in how the owners drive them, or like the interest that a programmer has in his-her games and in how people play them. When we die, the ideas expressed through the physical shell still remain, just as the program still remains even though the computer is turned off, and just as the program still remains even though it is erased from this computer. As long as the idea of the program remains in the programmer’s head, the program remains. God will still evaluate us after we die. God will evaluate how his handiwork turned out. The illusion of free will is one of the abilities that he gave us. God will evaluate what we have done, and how we have used our illusion of free will. If, in the end, that is all it turns out to be, that is still enough selfhood and free will for me.

Robot Free Will.

This section restates a situation that computer scientists call the “Turing Test”, after the great computer scientist, Alan Turing, who first devised it. A human interacts with another being by means of computer terminal. The other being might be a human or a computer. If the human can’t tell the difference, then there is no difference. The computer is as much a person as the human.

Imagine a robot. The robot does not have to look like a human; it does not have to be an android; it can be like R2D2. The robot can solve all problems about as well as a human, can tell individual humans apart, can tell individual machines apart, has personal tastes, and can seemingly choose within limits. Within those limits, humans cannot tell what constrains the robot’s choices. For example, the robot might prefer to interact with cars rather than heavy equipment but, within the category of cars, the robot has idiosyncratic preferences such as for electric cars rather than fuel cell cars; and we can’t tell why. The robot has some contradictions. For friends, it prefers cars to heavy equipment, and prefers heavy equipment to standard computers, but prefers standard computers to cars. It likes early Impressionistic painting, such as Turner, to German Expressionism, and likes German Expressionism more than Gothic, but prefers Gothic to Impressionism. People can carry on a conversation with the robot for as long as either party wishes to carry on the conversation.

As far as I am concerned, even if the robot is entirely determined at the level of physics, the robot is a person, has some free will, and would be somewhat interesting to God. This is the quandary posed by the great movie “Blade Runner” and by more science fiction works than I can count.

14 Badness

This chapter describes the problem of badness, and the responses that people have to it. This chapter does not solve the problem of badness. I cannot explain why there is so much badness, why there is such strong badness (strong evil), and why there is so much strong badness (strong evil). I deal with the problem as best I can. I am pretty sure nobody else, nor any religion, can explain either.

The problem of badness is a theme in all important world views. Sometimes the problem of evil is called the problem of "theodicy" ("god justice") but I avoid the term here. As of August 2012, you could find good summaries on the Internet, especially in Wikipedia, by looking for both "the problem of evil" and "theodicy".

Evil is worse than bad, and the two are qualitatively different. Usually we can deal with bad. Often we can reverse "bad effects", as in setting a broken arm. In contrast, usually evil cannot be reversed or fully remedied. Evil cannot be undone. Most clear instances of evil are carried out by sentient moral beings (people) but some things in non-human nature are so bad that I can only think of them as evil, such as parasites. As I was writing this, Ivan the gorilla died. If you would like an example of evil, search him for what was done to him. In this chapter, I lump all this together as "badness". I do not define bad, evil, or badness. Here I focus on people.

What we consider badness varies by our society, culture, history, economy, political situation, etc. This does not mean badness is only a convention and does not really exist. It is real. What we consider a song, bird, river, mountain, scientific method, philosophical method, or person varies according to our society etc. but that does not mean there are not birds, rivers, mountains, scientists, thinkers, or people. We can pick apart and bolster anything. I do not consider this question further here.

The problem of badness consists of several closely related problems, such as badness that comes from the bad will of sentient beings, from neglect, accident in nature, the inevitable mix-up of the evolutionary process; whether badness can be corrected; what difference it makes if badness is done to innocents or to people who should know better; etc. I don't sort them out here. I consider the items below to be the worst kinds of badness. Unfairness as such is not necessarily too bad. It depends on the degree. The world is unfair, and we have to deal with it. That is part of being a moral being in the real world. What matters is how we respond to unfairness.

- The exploitation of innocents, such as innocent children for sex slavery or the destruction of nature.
- Some people live in such bad conditions, or are afflicted with such bad physical or mental conditions, that they almost doomed to fail spiritually.
- Betrayal of a moral public trust, such as of a priest, academic, or politician.
- Strong oppressing weak.

- Not giving people a chance to succeed or fail, such as when children get cancer.
- Extended intense suffering, as with some kinds of cancer, burns, mental disease, or emotional coercion.
- Deliberate use of ideas that we know to be false and detrimental, such as bad religion, such as religion that leads to terrorism.
- Unfair play when fair play is possible.
- Indecency.

This chapter is easier to understand if you have already read the previous chapter on decent people. This chapter repeats a little from that chapter but not much.

Explanations.

The following ways of thinking about badness overlap. People combine ways as part of how they think about the world and respond to the world, that is, in their religion. People are not always consistent but they are more consistent than we might expect. I reject the Devil, so I omit explanations of badness that rely on the Devil. I do mention him for completeness. Some of these ideas try to explain badness, some offer comfort with which to endure badness, and some suggest what to do in the face of badness or after badness without necessarily explaining badness. Often the ideas are all mixed up. I don't try to sort it out here with each idea.

Unexplainable. Badness is unexplainable. Learn to deal with it if you can.

Random. The world is very largely random. Bad things happen to good people, and good things to bad people, because the world has many random events. The world is not a large person with whom we are in a moral relation so we should not expect the world to make sense in terms of badness and goodness. We try to correct the badness according to our own moral character.

Mixed Moral Beings. Evolved sentient-moral beings are inevitably mixed moral beings, and so do some bad things.

Inevitable in the Evolutionary Process. To evolve sentient-moral beings with the capacity for good, it is necessary to use a process that allows for the evolution of badness, the persistence of badness, and the recurrence of badness. If this explanation is combined with Deism, it implies limits on God's ability. We can get around the limits by arguing also that some badness is necessary for the full development of sentient-moral beings, and God set the level of badness at about that level. See below. This addition is not fully satisfying in cases of terrible badness to innocent beings who cannot recover and learn.

Badness is an Illusion. Badness is merely a judgment from the point of view of an evolved being. It is not an absolute attribute of any acts or events. Beings that had evolved differently than the people on this planet would have different judgments about badness. Within a particular evolved moral system, beings

do make judgments of good and bad. But we should not mistake those judgments for anything more than a feeling within a particular context. Anteaters would say ants are delicious. Lions think killing a beautiful gazelle is a beautiful thing in itself. This point of view does not take fully into account the logic of good, bad, and evil.

God's Will. That there is badness is simply God's will. The degree of badness, and on whom it falls, is also God's will. There is nothing we can do about it. We deal with it if we can. To people who do not believe in God, this response seems like a variation of "unexplainable", but it does differ to people who believe in God. To explain why badness is part of God's will, believers have to go to some of the other explanations for badness.

Bad is Part of God Too. Nearly all deists agree that God is mostly good. God might be part bad as well. The badness that we see is as much an expression of God's character as the good. Good depends on bad, and bad depends on good, because they are part of God's character. This idea does not insure that goodness prevails over badness, or that there is more goodness than badness. Most people who argue for a link between goodness and God, or even between badness and God, also take for granted that goodness prevails. People who argue that both aspects are in God's character nearly always assume that the good side prevails.

Free Will. Badness results from freedom of the will. Beings with free will can choose to do bad things, and sometimes do. This response is a problem for scientists who do not believe in free will. It is a problem for people who believe in God because then they have to be clear about why having truly free will means being able to choose badness. It is not clear if badness is a by-product of free will or it is an intrinsic part of free will. For a cutesy statement of this explanation, along with the inevitable evasion, see the charming movie "Time Bandits".

Necessary for Morality. We could learn some morality without badness but a real sense of morality can only grow if we encounter true badness. Of course, we have to survive the badness, both physically and spiritually; but most people do survive and do grow. This point of view implies a being who planned the degree of badness so that it would be at the right level. People who think badness is simply an illusion cannot use this argument. This issue is so important that it gets another section of its own below.

God Provides Badness to Teach Lessons. This explanation does not differ from "Necessary for Morality" except in two ways: It explicitly mentions God as the source of the lessons. It implies that God might tailor the lessons to the abilities and needs of particular people: "God does not send us anything more than we can stand". Of course, sometimes the world does send us more than we can stand, and does break us. Deists have to explain that additional problem.

Good Exceeds Bad. This idea is not so much an explanation as a comfort. It can be in an explanation when combined with other ideas, such as below. If we could quantify good and bad, we would find that good exceeds bad, probably by quite a bit. Except for a few people in miserable situations, life is worth living even if it is not fair.

God Converts Bad. God might have had to tolerate some badness in the world because of free will and to use the process of evolution, but God also provided means for people to overcome all the badness and

to convert it to good. Moreover, the total sum of good gained through allowing sum bad far exceeds the total sum of badness needed to achieve the good. Once we see that the total sum of good exceeds the total sum of bad, then we see that God did not tolerate badness but anticipated and used badness to make even greater good. This elaboration on the idea that God converts bad is a bit dangerous because it implies that good depends on badness to become fully good, and that God depends on badness to achieve full goodness. It lends strength to the idea that badness is a part of God.

Collective Punishment. God punishes and rewards collectively. Collective punishment by definition can't fall selectively only on the people who deserve it. Some of us suffer because of the bad deeds of others. In the end, if we all correct our behavior, we are also rewarded, and the reward more than makes up for the punishment that we suffered. Even if we personally do not live long enough to reap the reward, our families do. If we go along with God, the total good is greater than the total bad, although it might not seem that way when we are going through a bad patch.

Mutual Healing. I include this category largely as a matter of person inclination and because of the case of Ivan the gorilla. See the movie "Bennie and Joon" and an episode of "Star Trek TNG" called "Tin Man". Among a long string of babysitting movies that feature mutual healing, the 2011 movie "The Sitter" has a man in his twenties and three children healing each other and a few friends along the way too. Badness wounds people. Sometimes people are just born wounded or develop wounded. Wounded people can heal each other. Sometimes only another wounded person can heal this wounded person. Sometimes wounded people are better after mutual healing than they would have been if not wounded in the first place. Badness does hurt but it also provides the opportunities for healing and for being a better person than otherwise.

Non-Autonomy. People are not autonomous but we often mistakenly think we are. "No man (person) is an island". Because we are tied to people, and better off tied to people, we suffer badness. We suffer when they suffer, and we suffer because we are connected to other people who do bad things. Without some badness, we would never learn the important lesson of being connected, and never fully develop into personhood. Hopefully, the gain from learning our personhood exceeds the loss from badness.

Tests. God allows badness so as to test us. It is not clear if God is testing us so God can find out about us, we can find out about ourselves, other people can find out about us, as part of teaching us lessons, or all the options.

Materialism. Badness results because this world is made up of material stuff rather than spiritual stuff. This explanation is not always clear about why material stuff is more likely to lead to badness, and why some spiritual beings are bad. See later chapters.

Finitude. Badness results because all beings in this world are finite, finite beings must choose among limited alternatives, and finite beings cannot express the great (or infinite) heart needed to be truly good. This argument can be combined with materialism because material beings are necessarily finite.

Absence of Good. We think of badness as a positive thing-in-itself such as killing an innocent animal or imprisoning Ivan the gorilla. This is a mistake, and leads to further mistakes. Badness is a lack of good. It is emptiness, and leads to emptiness, such as the isolation we feel from other people when we have

done something wrong, especially when we have hurt them. This explanation was important in Medieval philosophy, and was combined with finitude and materialism, when God was considered infinite and full. This explanation is not very important now.

Become Like Me. Badness comes of wanting to make the world into your own image, or wanting to make the world something you are comfortable with. This idea is related to the idea that Satan (the Devil) fell through the sin of pride, and that humans do the same. This idea still lives in modern fiction but in a different form. Badness comes of people working too hard, people wanting to surround themselves with stuff that reflects their narrow tastes and makes them comfortable, and people hanging out only with other people like themselves. In the movie series "The Matrix", the Devil, Agent Smith, wanted to remake the world into something he was comfortable with. In the end, he wanted to remake the world entirely into his own image.

Justice Comes after Death. Badness exists in this world but it will all be corrected after we die, when good people go to heaven, bad people go to hell, and some people go to purgatory. This account by itself is not an explanation for badness, it only makes badness more tolerable. Sometimes that is all we need from an explanation.

Due Reward Does Come in this Lifetime. We dwell too much on cases of badness and do not pay enough attention to cases of just reward. People with talent and who work hard are rewarded. Even people who have suffered badness can be rewarded if they work hard enough and if they develop their talents. Think of the inspiring stories of handicapped people and wounded soldiers. People get what they deserve. If a person has not gotten much, that is because he-she has not tried hard enough and so doesn't deserve it. Before dismissing this account as self-service for rich people, consider how true it often is. It is important in the development of the work ethic and of some forms of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.

Devil's Rebellion. Badness came because an extremely powerful supernatural agent decided to put himself ahead of God's plan, thereby disrupted God's plan, and corrupted the intended state of affairs on this planet, and maybe on other planets. Each element in this explanation is doubtful, but I do not go into a critique. Even in religions that are not simply theistic such as Christianity and Islam, variations of this argument can be used when a supernatural being "goes against" the major religious goodness, as in the stories of the enemies of the Buddha(s) and bodhisattvas.

Human Rebellion and Poor Choice. This explanation is more than that free will sometimes leads to bad choices. At some time, people made a bad choice that somehow tainted the entire situation on this world and for all the people on this world for a long time. The bad choice of people sometimes can be linked to the bad agency of the Devil, as in Christianity and Islam. Again, each link in the logic is doubtful but I do not critique it here.

Karma, Exact Version with Reincarnation. If we are confined to this lifetime, it is hard to make sense of badness. If we are reborn, it is much easier. Karma has become such a common idea in the West that I don't define it here. I say more about it in a later chapter on Hinduism. The idea of karma elaborates on the basic idea of "what comes round, goes round". There really is moral justice and social justice. If we act badly now, it will come back to (haunt us) later. Likewise if we act well now, we will eventually get a

reward. Sometimes the reward or punishment returns sooner, sometimes later, sometimes in this life, and sometimes in the next life.

The most powerful use of karma for explaining badness comes when it is combined with reincarnation. What good we do affects our next lives, so we might be poor now, but, if we suffer badness well and do good, we can be reborn rich and able to help other people in the next life. If we do bad now, we can be reborn as a poor person or a mangy dog in the next life. This account is partly an explanation for badness, and partly, like the idea of heaven, it is a way to give comfort so we can endure badness. It is an explanation because the badness we encounter in this life is the result of badness that we did in past lives. In the rigid account, karma keeps a ledger in which each deeds moral quality, and its degree, is recorded, and rewarded exactly.

Karma, Poetic Version. Poetic justice is often better than exact justice. We would not necessarily learn about life, and become better people, if the acts of our previous lives put us in a horrible situation in this life. We could not get over badness if somehow karma did not lead us to see how to overcome badness. Karma would just perpetuate whatever good or bad was already in the world. Karma can lead us to situations that not only expiate our previous bad acts, or benefit from our previous good acts, but also to learn. A rich abusive person might be born into a family of church people devoted to community service or might be born into a poor family exploited by rich people. A good person might be born where he-she can see how good acts do help people, such as in a family of successful civil servants. In this version of karma, the world as a whole might be getting better continually.

The two versions of karma have a distinct flavor and imply distinct mechanisms. The exact version is like a natural deterministic mechanical law from physics, and does not require any high spiritual being as a judge. What you do has results, and that is that. But the exact version is hard for people to accept, even in religions like Buddhism. The poetic version does seem to require a high spiritual being to carry out but this being need not be God.

Almost all versions of karma take for granted that the universe (Dharma) is moral and makes sense. What happens to us according to what we do is based on good and bad. If karma did not have this base in morality, it would not make sense as a response to badness. It would not be much of an aid for making sense of the universe. The universe need not have a thinking moral personal god for karma to be based in morality. Morality runs according to rules, strict or poetic. As long as what happens to us according to our deeds follows morality, then karma can work. Religions that take morally-based karma for granted do not usually explain why the universe is intrinsically moral. Keep in mind that karma and reincarnation require that the universe be intrinsically moral; the idea is needed for the later chapters on Buddhism and Hinduism.

Even though logically karma does not need an intelligent agent behind it, people still think morally-based karma works better with some intelligent agent. I think a desire to link karma with a moral agent persists because our sense of morality evolved along with our sense of persons.

Karma could be based on rules other than morality, and people could have multiple lives not based on karma but on other principles or on no principles at all. In these cases, karma offers little as a response to the problem of badness. No major religion accepts these alternatives. So I leave them alone here.

Playful Illusion. This account is related to the kind of cosmic mythology found in the Bhagavad Gita. This account can be related to the scientific idea that badness is an illusion, and to the Medieval Christian idea that badness is a deficit of goodness, but I do not do those exercises here. This account requires the idea of multiple lives. Badness does feel bad when it happens, it can change this life, and badness feels absolutely bad when we are suffering it. But that need not be the case. It might be that we encounter serious badness now in this life but encounter serious goodness in the next. It might be that the badness and goodness balance out, or that goodness is actually much more than the badness. We need the badness to appreciate all the goodness. Badness is a relative illusion in the overall scheme of things even if it is real enough now in this life. The true overall situation is joy to the world. This account can easily combine with the explanation through karma.

Not Important 1. Goodness and badness do exist, they are not illusions, but they just are not important. They are not nearly as important as most people think they are. They are not nearly as important as most religions make them out to be. A lot is going on in the world. Goodness and badness don't apply, or apply only weakly, to the vast majority of what is going on. If we look for goodness and badness first, then likely we will miss what is really important. For example, I probably make too much of natural evil, and thereby might miss the way that behavioral interaction evolves. All the "Not Important" ideas are relevant to Taoism and some forms of Buddhism.

Not Important 2: Stop Dwelling. Goodness and badness are real but we need to stop dwelling on them, even when we have been a victim personally, and even when we have a good case. You do not need to invite other people to use you as a doormat. Simply stop thinking about it and get on to better and more useful activities. In evolutionary terms, morality is not the only thing going on in evolutionary success. If you dwell on morality, or on any one aspect of evolutionary success, then you will likely get out of balance and fail, even if you are technically correct on this point. Seek the overall balance. Seek grace. Don't be primed to look for morality.

Not Important 3: No Government Policies. In particular, don't base government policies on moral issues. Don't make many rules. Rules focus attention on specific aspects of relations and do not allow the flexibility that people need to find the best balance, grace, and evolutionary success. A state based on morality is bound to fail. A state that does not seek to promote morality is likely to lead to the best living and thus to the best morality. However, we should not seek to minimize the role of morality in the state so we can indirectly achieve greatest morality. That is only to shoot ourselves in a big circle. We should just simply minimize formal morality, and trust in the outcome. We should minimize formal morality even if, at first, the outcome does not lead to greater moral action. Not to stress morality is not the same as saying "anything goes" or "there are no rules for people 'in the know'". To use non-stress as an excuse for indulgence is another kind of stress and another morality in disguise.

Badness is Temporary and So Slightly Less Real.

The material in this section belongs in the list of explanations for badness but it takes so long to explain that it is best by itself. The material here is important for a better understanding of karma and rebirth.

Suppose God wants us all to be good decent people but he wants us to choose that way through our free will. Few of us choose this path right away. Most of us have to learn decency and goodness. While we are learning, we cause badness. We can only learn by encountering badness. We learn best when we encounter badness that is strong but not so strong as to break us right away. Some of us don't learn in one lifetime. Some of us get broken in this lifetime, and so can't learn.

If God is fair and consistent, he has to keep giving us chances until we choose to be good decent people of our own free will. The situation is like the movie "Groundhog Day" in which Bill Murray keeps waking up to the same day over and over. At first, he acts selfishly and badly; as long as he acts that way, the bad and selfish world keeps repeating itself. Eventually he gets bored with being a jerk, and begins to act well. He helps people and improves their lives. When he finally chooses selfless helping of his own free will, then he stops repeating the same day, and he can go on to his normal life. Some people get the idea in this lifetime, and so do not need to be reborn. If necessary, some people keep getting reborn until they do get the idea. They people who do get it might not cease being reborn. They might get reborn so as to help the people who do not get it yet, and because being reborn can be fun.

Badness is real but it is not permanent. It lasts only so long as we do not choose to be good decent people, and only so long as we are reborn into a struggle against good and against bad. When we finally realize that we will act well, then badness is no longer important, it is no longer as real as it once was. It is still real, but not as real. It has its own less reality, like bad but not like evil.

The beings who stay to help us, or who come back to help us, are like the saints in Christianity or like the bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism.

Goodness and Badness (Good and Evil) Need Each Other.

This section belongs in the list of explanations but is best raised to stand by itself. This section expands on a topic mentioned above. The main point is to see how people use the coming together of goodness and badness to excuse evil, and that the argument is weak.

We can say that goodness and badness need each other in four ways:

(1) As a matter of plain fact, both goodness and badness exist together in this world. We never find one without the other. Even if we do explain their presence together through evolution (item 2), we do not explain away their presence together; and so we are still stuck with the fact. Just because goodness and badness evolved together does not mean it is an accident without meaning. We just don't know what to make of the meaning. Before modern evolutionary theory, their presence together could not be explained except "metaphysically" (item 4), and could not be explained away. I do not consider this point much in this section. I take it up below in my response to badness.

(2) The ability for morality (goodness) could not evolve without the ability for immorality (badness), and vice versa. The process of evolution leads to badness as well as to sentient-moral-aesthetic beings. I explained how this is so in Chapter Three on evolution, and so do not explain again here.

(3) Nearly all of us have to learn to be good. We learn to be good by facing badness. By this logic, the harsher the badness that we face, the better that we learn to be – at least as long as we are not broken. Goodness that is good without going through the fire of badness is not the highest good. Goodness only becomes the highest truest good by rising above the flames of badness. A lot of badness that would seem to sour the world is turned into even greater good through the efforts of good people or through the efforts of people learning to be good. True goodness always manages to turn badness into even greater goodness. God always manages to turn badness into even greater goodness. The presence of badness leads to even more goodness than if there were no badness at all. This is an idea that people often use to excuse evil.

(4) The idea of goodness implies the idea of badness, and vice versa. If we can think of one, we can think of the other, and we have to think of the other. The reality of one implies the reality of the other, the being of one implies the being of the other. Goodness and badness are “metaphysically” bound. In myth, this idea can be expressed by having the symbolic good deity and the symbolic bad deity as siblings, as Jesus and the Devil are sometimes portrayed as siblings, both sons of God. This is another idea that people often use to excuse evil. This is the idea that people often have in the back of their heads when they think of evil as a presence.

Just as I use circumstantial evidence to conclude that God exists and made this world, so a reasonable person might use similar circumstantial evidence to conclude that goodness and badness need each other. Even more, God foresaw that goodness needs badness to be truly good, and put the right amount of badness into the world to get the most goodness out.

While appealing, I am scared of this idea. I dislike the idea that God creates badness for any reason. I dislike the idea that good and evil imply each other and are bound together. This attitude raises badness to a metaphysical force. It turns badness into goodness. It allows people to take the side of badness, and to do bad things, while excusing it as really good or “really like God”.

As a matter of another fact, good does not always need evil to be good. (A) An old couple befriends a child who is not related to them and who might not advance as far without some help. Their help allows the child to grow intellectually, socially, and athletically. The child would not have suffered without their help, except in a theoretical way from comparative deprivation of what he-she might have been, so there was no active bad. Still, their help is a positive good. (B) When a strong storm comes, volunteers help the victims, and people donate to charity to help the victims. The hurt is badness but it is not usually evil. The goodness arises in response to the badness but the badness does not cause the good. The same can be said when people get cancer or get bitten by a poisonous snake.

Badness and evil can occur without a response from good. Examples are not needed. In a social group, many kinds of badness have to be met with goodness or the group could not cohere, but that fact does not mean good and bad are mutually dependent. (C) Good people have to protect innocent people from harm, or the group would fall apart, but that need does not mean good guys and bad guys are somehow mutually dependent. If the bad guys would stop hurting innocent people, good guys would still be there. (D) If bad guys stopped stealing, honest people would still be there, and would find other ways to express their honesty, such as by generous sharing.

People do overcome some kinds of badness, and thus make even more good out of situations than might have been without the badness, but not always. The point of evil is that it cannot be undone. When a bad parent kills a good parent, what can be done to overcome the evil to make the situation even better than if no evil had asserted in the first place? Good people can step in to help the children but that is not the same as making goodness even greater than if the parents had lived. We can learn to be at least somewhat good without confronting evil by responding properly to scenarios such as A, B, C, and D above. We do learn to be even more good when dealing with evil, such as when trying to make up for child abuse and war. The fact that we learn to be better does not necessarily make up for the child abuse and the war. We should not start evil so we can learn to be even better. We should not murder the parents of the family next door, but spare the children, so the neighbors can respond with kindness that the neighbors would not otherwise know was in them. Even when good responds to bad and helps as much as it can, it does not make the total sum of goodness exceed the total sum of badness. Even when good people learn very much from badness, and do some great things, that does not necessarily make the total sum of goodness exceed the total sum of badness, and it does not excuse the badness. Because of his horrible experiences in the concentration camps of World War 2, Eli Wiesel stepped up to begin great acts; that does not excuse the Holocaust, and it does not mean the total sum of goodness exceeded the total sum of evil when Wiesel and other good people learned and stepped up as a result. I am not sure which cases count as God making good out of evil, leading people to learn to be even better as a result of evil, and making the total sum of good exceed the total sum of evil. Maybe sending Jesus or another prophet counts as such a case, as the Christian apologist C.S. Lewis argued. Even if it does, I am very unhappy arguing that we are better off as a result of evil such as child abuse and war, and I am even unhappier arguing that God sent child abuse and war so that we would be better off by overcoming them.

If we wish to make a person better by being bad to him-her, how would we do it so as to get the best results? Who can gauge what to do? Even in the Book of Job in the Tanakh (Old Testament), Job was not beset with evils to make him better but to test a man who was already very good. For the average Joe, should we put him out of work, put him in a car accident, break his arm, give him herpes, give him cancer that takes years to cure, or give him incurable cancer? Can we give his children cancer as a way to make him better? What if we put so much on him that he breaks, and we end up with worse evil than before? Using evil to make good does not make sense even if sometimes people do make good out of evil.

It is realistic, and a sign of maturity, to accept that goodness and badness, including evil, appear in this world, and often appear together. It is a blessing when you can see how a good response can make a silk purse of goodness out of a sow's ear of badness. When you think goodness and badness are spiritual siblings, we can do even greater good by doing some badness, or God sends badness so we can learn to be even better, then you have veered into weirdness, and likely veered into illness. It is good to think about these issues, but keep to common sense, dignity, and humanity.

When combined with other ideas, the idea that we can get more goodness through badness can be quite bad. The other ideas include reincarnation, life is a game, the badness that is in each of our hearts, and symbiosis between good guys (decent people) and bad guys (indecent people). I discuss this situation later in the book.

There is an exception to avoiding the idea that we can get more good through evil. Art, including movies, TV, and literature, should explore this theme. It does us good to look at and get over it. This theme is fairly common now in drama about serial killers and criminal masterminds. Sometimes it is combined with the idea that the bad guy and the hero secretly want the same thing, at least for now, and what they want is more than a bit bad; this is a version of symbiosis. For example, to better chase the bad guy, the hero might want to get a dedicated good police officer out of the way, and the bad guy kills the police officer so that the two might be locked in more pure combat. The Joker sometimes helps out Batman with a little bit of “hanky-panky” so the Batman is free to devote his attention to the Joker.

All Good is from God; All Badness is from Us.

I have heard people in all the major theistic religions repeat this “slogan”. I understand it, but I am also boggled by it. It doesn’t make sense. Clearly people originate some goodness and badness. Because God made the world, and the world is overall good, it makes a kind-of sense to say that all good comes from God; but it can make no sense that every good act comes only from God. To say this implies that people are bad, or evil, in a way that goes against the clear evidence of our senses and against the idea that God created us with the capacity for good. It implies a depravity that goes against common sense and against the idea of God’s creation.

To believe this slogan goes against the idea of free will. It denies a gift of God. If we can do only bad, and we must rely on God for every good act that we do, then we have no free will. We cannot be judged. We cannot be sent to heaven or condemned to hell. Even if our only act of free will is to consent to let God work through us, still we need at least that much free will. That much free will implies more free will. Either you accept that we have free will and that we can do good on our own, or you deny that we can do good, deny that we have free will, deny the grace of God, and deny the creation of God.

Too often, people who repeat this slogan use it to avoid personal responsibility and to make other people feel confused, guilty, and weak so they can control other people. Even when they say they personally cannot do good, only God can do good, still they personally can see what is good-and-from-God while other people can’t see what is good and can’t sense the will of God. As a result of their superior insight, the people who repeat this slogan have a right to tell other people how to behave, and, in fact, they are better than other people. By restricting good to God, and having the only access to God, they also have a monopoly on what is good and what is of God. The more they deny in theory that good cannot come from people but only from God, the more they manipulate other people in practice, and the more they expose their hypocrisy. Thankfully, other people rarely believe them.

I understand the piety that goes into such a slogan, at least for some people. In this case, piety is not an affirmation of God but is an effective denial of God and his gift of free will and responsibility. This kind of piety is really blasphemy by the standards of most theology, although inadvertent and well-intentioned blasphemy. Sometimes we have to rise above one kind of piety to accept the gifts of God, in this case the gifts of free will and responsibility, so as to achieve another higher kind of piety.

Beyond Good and Evil.

This section is optional, and is a bit of self-indulgence. This section explains an attitude toward goodness and badness, an attitude associated with the thinker Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote in the late 1800s. The attitude lingers in the background of disputes even when we don't recognize the attitude. It is at the heart of what people fear about modern science, especially Darwinism, and modern philosophy. People fear this attitude erodes all morality. The attitude is coded in the slogan "might makes right".

When people face the facts that badness is an intrinsic part of this world, and that goodness and badness often go together, they get uneasy. When people see that other people use goodness as a tool of their own self-interest, they get annoyed with the whole idea of goodness, and the whole idea of good versus evil. The vast majority of life is run without reference to strong ideas of good and evil. When we invoke good and evil, usually something even worse is about to happen. It makes sense to think of a situation beyond both good and evil where people can just get on with their lives.

The title of this section is also the title of a book by Nietzsche. When most people hear the phrase, they think of something sinister, and usually should. In the first Harry Potter book, "The Philosopher's Stone", Voldemort, Tom Riddle, tries to win over Harry by saying there is no real good and bad, there is only power. Good and bad are illusions. In Western literature, this idea is a common delusion of bad guys. In the case of Tom Riddle, power clearly was on the side of badness. So, the message is not really "beyond good and evil" but "lay down your sense of morality so as to act badly without feeling bad". Whenever anybody talks about "beyond morality" or "beyond naïve simpleminded good and bad" usually it ends up serving bad. Good people do not try to soar above morality.

(1) Nietzsche meant the phrase in other ways. Nietzsche protested against simple minded morality that wants black and white "goody goody" ideas of good and bad. Nietzsche was not a simple relativist, and he would not excuse people who used relativism to their own advantage. He would not enable users. He demanded some intelligence and awareness in human life. Unfortunately, Nietzsche has been used by "bad guys" to excuse their bad behavior; Tom Riddle was echoing the misuse of Nietzsche.

(2) Nietzsche argued against using morality to serve other ends in disguise. The middle class and upper middle class use morality when they are smug in their success and their moral superiority. The poor use morality when they invoke morality not because they really think it is correct to help them but because they want stuff, they want people to enable their reproduction, and they want other people to enable their irresponsibility.

(3) Nietzsche argued against morality-in-disguise that hurt society by enabling bad behavior, protecting people who should be weeded out, and diverting resources away from people who deserved more. Helping the poor often enabled bad and weak people to carry on at the expense of good smart people. Ideas about morality did not often come from strong successful people but from weak failed people who wanted a tool to use.

(4) As a special case of three, Nietzsche called the morality that came from the lower classes "slave morality", and said Christianity propagates slave morality. Nietzsche thought of all simple-minded morality, and all morality used as a tool, as slave morality. Even the middle and upper classes acted as slaves when they used the idea of good-and-evil in self interest.

(5) As a consequence of all the points so far, Nietzsche rejected the distinction between good and evil but did not reject the distinction between good and bad. There is bad but there is not necessarily evil. Evil is not a useful category and might be an illusion foisted on us by people that wish to promote slave morality for their own sake. The distinction between good and bad is much like the distinction between practical versus impractical or useful versus wasteful. Substituting “evil” for “bad” changes the perspective. It makes contrasts deeper and creepier. It makes it harder for ordinary practical people to argue against a position. It forces a moral perspective out of something that should not necessarily be argued in moral terms. It raises simple minded morality into a cosmic force.

(6) Nietzsche saw another kind of behavior which he far preferred to simple minded morality, slave morality, or the morality of good versus evil. It is the behavior of noble heroic people. Although Nietzsche did not call it morality, he clearly had in mind that kind of behavior as “true morality” as opposed to slave morality. Heroic people think in terms of good and bad rather than in terms of good versus evil. People should seek heroic morality. People cannot seek heroic morality as long as they are duped by appeals to simple minded slave morality. People cannot seek true heroic morality as long as they are caught in the trap of good versus “evil”.

(7) Although Nietzsche came before the modern theory of evolution, he understood that the sense of morality must have arisen somehow out of other needs. In particular, morality must have arisen out of manipulating other people. Power plays a role in his ideas similar to that of natural selection. If morality came out of power, then power is older and deeper than morality. Power is what it is all about. Power is what we should pay attention to.

(8) Because it so often does happen in real life, we think power automatically leads to bad behavior. But, for Nietzsche, unlike for Tom Riddle, this need not be so. Power is power. It can promote other ends, including goodness. “Guns don’t kill people, people kill people”. Power is a tool. The struggle for power led to the birth of heroic behavior. Heroic morality could not arise in any other way. Nietzsche wanted to make sure that the search for power led to the cultivation of heroic morality rather than slave morality.

I admire Nietzsche but I dislike the misuses to which he has been put. I dislike anybody using morality as a tool and I dislike slave morality. I dislike whining and I dislike enabling. I admire heroic morality, and I think heroic morality approaches the ideal morality of “do unto others” and “applies equally” that Jesus taught, tempered with empathy for the down-and-out and the excluded that Jesus also taught.

My response to the idea that “might makes right” repeats my argument from the evolution of morality. If it were simply true that “might makes right”, then there would be no need for “right”, there would be no need for morality, and there would be no morality. Morality would be redundant. It would be an irritating middle step between having power and getting what you want. Even if morality were an additional tool of power sometimes, it would be a greater burden to power at other times. Powerful people would not need it, and it would not arise. There would be only power. The capacity for morality would not have evolved.

Whining people on the lower end of society (slaves) can get away with using morality as a tool often, too often, but they should not be able to get away with it forever. In full morality, responsibility comes along with rights, and the people who use morality as a tool to get enabled eventually have to come to grips with responsibility. The people who get cajoled into enabling eventually wake up to full morality including

responsibility, and stop enabling, not only because it is hurtful to them but also because it is hurtful to the enabled people and it is the wrong thing to do.

Powerful people and rich people are not necessarily good people. Being successful is not a sign of moral status. Nietzsche did not make this mistake but many people promote the ideology of “success is a sign of God’s grace and our moral superiority” as their way of using morality as a tool. They combine this idea with a hatred of slaves and slave morality, and define all opponents as slaves with slave morality. The idea that success indicates moral superiority is as wrong as slave morality. It is a kind of slave morality in reflection. Living in the Romantic era, we should not be susceptible to this mistake but the evolved allure of success is so strong that we do make it anyway. We like to think that successful people are also better people, and that we are one of them.

Once we allow that morality is real, we have to see that it has its own logic, the logic of “do unto others” and “applies equally”. Power, and slave mentality, can make use of the feeling for morality and can twist it, but they cannot change the root logic and they cannot get rid of it entirely either. Once we have morality and develop a feel for the root logic of morality, then morality does not simply serve might or serve slaves. Might does not make right. Whining does not make right. Right makes right even if right can be twisted and misused.

I am not sure how Nietzsche would respond to my response. Because I think true morality and heroic morality go together often, I hope he would be sympathetic.

My Response to Badness.

I do not offer a comprehensive explanation of badness. I only repeat what I said before.

Regardless of the questions above, the overall response is the same. Right here, right now, you strive to act well and to avoid acting badly. Whatever the metaphysical background, this is the only consistent response. Even if you believe that goodness and badness need each other, or if you strive to get beyond good and evil, still you do good right here and right now, and don’t obsess about it. This answer is so simple that there is no point elaborating on it. As for the details, I can offer some opinions:

God does not test us. God did not put extra badness into the world as a test.

Some badness is inherent in the evolutionary process, and some badness necessarily arises because we have free will. We have enough free will to choose good too.

I don’t know if there is more good than bad in the world, or if the world is better overall because there is some badness. I don’t know if God put just the right amount of badness into the world to make sure the sum total of goodness is greatest. I doubt it very much.

God created the world knowing there would be some badness. I am not sure if this implies a limit on God’s powers. I do not know if God could have created the world so there would be more badness than there is now or less badness. If God could have chosen a different level of badness, I don’t know why he chose this level of badness.

The badness in the world allows us to learn to be better. There is enough badness in the world already for us to learn to be better without adding any more badness. We can help others deal when they face badness, and should.

God foresaw that we could learn from the badness that is an intrinsic part of the world. God allowed the world to have some badness so that we would learn from the badness and so be even better people. I do not know if God put just the right kind and amount of badness in the world, or put too little or too much. I do not know if God feels responsible for the badness that breaks people.

Sometimes we feel that we encounter incidents of badness, or bad people, to teach us in particular, as an individual, lessons, and so make us better. We feel as if God steers badness towards us so that we will learn and so be better, rather like a teacher tailors lessons for particular students. This scheme is not the same as God testing us. This feeling is likely false, although it might be true in some very small number of cases. God set up the world so that it would automatically teach all the lessons that we need. There is enough variety in the world, including enough bad people and bad incidents, so we can learn to be good without God having to micromanage our lives.

I doubt we keep getting reborn until we are all good decent useful people. Maybe some people who got a really raw deal in this lifetime do get another chance. Most people learn a little goodness but not a lot of goodness, and they just disappear when they die.

When we think about goodness and badness, we have to keep in mind free will and the real riskiness of the world. If God tailor-made a plan for everybody so that everybody would eventually learn to be a fully decent good person, that situation would not quite defeat free will and the real risk of the world, but it almost would. If everybody were kept around long enough so that eventually everybody learned to be a good decent person, even through their own choice, that situation would not quite defeat free will and the real risk of the world, but it almost would. If we know it will last long enough until all of us are as good as good can be, then there is no real free will and no real risk. This outcome is comforting, and it might be what a Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva would like, but it is not consistent with what I think about how people are and how the real risky world is. If badness is just an illusion, then there is no free will and there is no real risk to the world.