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### **Values and the Super Natural Again; You Can't Completely Make Up Your Own Values**

I just finished Sean Carroll's "The Big Picture". He is a scientist, an avowed atheist, and he has a heart. He says there are no obvious values in the amoral naturalistic universe but that people can-and-should make up their own, and can-and-should deeply believe in the values that we make up. He does not spell out his values but it is clear enough that he holds the standard humanistic basically Liberal values. He can hold these values even if he is politically right wing. I suspect nearly all the people who say people can-and-should make up their own values in the amoral universe of modern science hold similar values. You don't have to be an avowed atheist to take a stand quite similar to that of Carroll.

I like the values. I agree with them. I do not argue with the values. I wish all my neighbors really held these values instead of only paying lip service.

I disagree that we can hold those values in the way that all these people want us to hold values and not also open the door to the super natural, including God. When we deeply hold values, we open the door to the super natural. When we open the door to the super natural, we have to take another look at all values. We give good values a deeper better foundation.

My argument here is not new. See the chapter on atheism in my book "Religious Stances". Because this stance is so chic now among the educated middle class and upper middle class, I feel I should spell out where I disagree and why.

I do not describe the values. For that, see my book "Jesus for Most People" and the first two chapters of my book "Religious Stances".

#### **PART ONE**

(A) The basic issue is simple. Carroll, people like him, and me, all want our values to be "real VALUE values". We want our values NOT to be a hidden expression of self-interest or of the workings of the amoral universe. We want our values to be deep genuine guides to real acts. That does not mean we disdain self-interest or strategy. It does not mean that our values did not arise in our past out of self-interest, as happened during human evolution. It means we put self-interest and strategy in their proper place behind morals and in service to morals, whenever we can given that we are evolved and fallible humans.

If values see beyond naturalistic strategy, even if values arose first entirely out of naturalistic strategy, then they cannot be confined to the naturalistic universe. Real VALUE values are super natural, or at least they point truly to the super natural. As long as we want our values to be real VALUE values, they

cannot be only natural, even if they arose in a completely natural universe. I do not here have to explain how a sure pointer to the super natural arose in a completely naturalistic universe.

If you wish to make values completely natural, they cannot be real VALUE values. If you wish to allow people to make their own values, then their values must be merely completely natural, and their values cannot be real VALUE values. There is no alternative way out.

If we make our values an expression of self-interest and strategy, then values cannot overcome strategy and self-interest in the way that we wish and as consistently as we wish. They are not real VALUE values. They are a means, disguise, and subterfuge. They undermine real values and are another source of badness. We don't want all our values to be like the person who makes a public display of giving to a charity, even giving a lot, so that really giving is a disguise for getting.

I think Carroll and people like him don't see that this cannot be done in an amoral merely naturalistic world. They want to have the cake of naturalism, making up values, and choice, and eat the cake of real VALUE values too. Values that are real VALUE values, that sometimes override strategy and self-interest, are not simply natural. They are super natural. Again, there is no getting around this point.

So, we have to go after values that are deeper, at least in vision and hope if not consistently in action. For that, we have to accept the super natural.

Honestly, I am a bit miffed at having to make this point in the year 2017. The point was made clearly enough by Socrates and Plato, and know well enough by philosophers at least until the Renaissance. In his own way, David Hume made the point in the late 1700s. Immanuel Kant burned it into philosophy in the early 1800s. GE Moore stated it succinctly about 1920. Stephen Crane wrote a good short story on the subject called "The Open Boat". The point is known well enough by a lot of people even now. We should and do know better, and we should not forget.

People who wish to undo this truth by saying values are only a reflection of natural selection, power, or social relations, simply do not pay attention to the Western tradition, are a bit foolish, or have their own agenda. It is true that considerations of success, evolutionarily based success (reproductive success and inclusive), wealth, power, social organization, glamour, sex, and other factors, can influence particular renderings of values and can even undermine true values. But that does not mean there are no true values and that we do not seek true values.

Saying that our values are super natural does not mean we have to accept Christianity or any religion. It does not mean we have to accept God, the Tao, Heaven, or Dharma. It does mean we have to think about values and about why we want those kinds of values. When we think about that, eventually we do wonder about God, Tao, Heaven, and Dharma.

Anytime anybody stresses a value or principle so that it become superior to other principles and values, in effect the person makes that value-principle super natural, whether he-she knows it or not. We do

not only have to glimpse the super natural through morality. We say that people worship wealth, power, cleverness, fame, glory, duty, family, business, glamour, order, activism, political correctness, conservative ideology, the Church, ambiguity, self, or even sex. We say academics worship reputation, the Nobel Prize, or the Fields Award. This way of speaking is not always an exaggeration. People really do worship these things as super natural when they make them the core focus of life. Of course, these things are not truly super natural; they take the place of the truly super natural. If we are to have a core focus, we make that core focus super natural, in effect we worship that core focus, and that core focus can lead us to God or to evil, then we are much better off having a good core focus that leads us to good, and we are much better off knowing what we do.

Scientists can-and-should assume that all values are simply naturalistic and that all values are used as tools for evolutionary success, success, wealth, power, social organization, etc. Scientists can-and-should limit themselves to the merely naturalistic view. But Sean Carroll did not write as merely a scientist no matter how much science is in the book, and other people like him do not wish to be mere scientists even if science is their profession. As humans, Carroll and people like him need to use both points of view, need to know when to merge them or subsume one in the other, and need to know when to keep them apart.

If you fully understand these points, you don't have to read further. People can intellectually get the points but not really get them in their heart where it matters. I hope you read on even if you feel that you do understand the points.

(To get at this topic, even if they would not agree with me, David Hume and thinkers who followed him would stress the difference between "is" and "ought", between a practical judgment and a moral judgment. This approach is useful but it breaks down when pushed because people reinterpret "ought" as disguised practicality, as disguised "is". Rather than argue on the level of philosophical concepts and argue over modalities, I prefer the argument I offer here.)

(B) Sean Carroll is not alone in wishing to make up values against an amoral all-natural universe. He is a thoughtful person. Among thoughtful people, many are like him in wishing to make up values against an amoral all-natural universe. I would bet much of my life savings, meager as those are, that they share at least 90 percent of their values. Why do they share so many of their values? And why do they share those particular values rather than some other values? A scientist or historian can-and-should refer to evolution, history, adaptation, and social relations to offer answers. But a human seeking values to live by, real VALUE values, cannot rest with those evolution etc. Understanding why we human share these particular values in common also directs us to the super natural. This result too is unavoidable.

(C) We cannot make real VALUE values out of an amoral all-naturalistic world. This problem is harder because of evolution. Carroll accepts evolution and presumably nearly all naturalists who also seek deep values also accept evolution. I do as well. We evolved the basis for our values. Our values arose and were sustained as a way to serve practicality and strategy, to serve natural selection and inclusive fitness. We evolved to think of our values as super natural. We evolved to have moral fervor. We

evolved to see fervor as a sign of the super natural. We evolved the capacity to think about values apart from strategic behavior even while we use values strategically. We evolved to fool ourselves about many things but likely values in particular. We evolved a basis for thinking about values.

Even so, the fact that our values have an evolved basis does not reduce them to mere practicality, does not reduce them necessarily to anything, and need not reduce them. "Having evolved" is not the same as explaining away. We have to judge our values apart from their evolved basis just as we judge mathematical assertions and scientific assertions apart from the fact that we evolved the basis to make them and to be fervent in our support for them. On that basis, I judge that sometimes our values show us the super natural.

We can still think about real VALUE values apart from their practical strategic use. We can use our evolved basis to think about values to really think about real VALUE values. We can overcome our ability to fool ourselves. We can use nature to glimpse the super natural. But we can't do it willy-nilly. We can't make up values for ourselves. We have to be cautious about the diversions and traps that evolution sets for us. We have to pay attention to logic and the history of thinking about morality. We have to pay attention to what other people do for good and for bad. We have to think about what we have in common and not on common. We can do all this and we do do all this.

Seeing values this way helps us to understand values. It also makes it much harder for people, like Carroll, who insist only on a purely natural world, to rise above the purely natural world to the kind of real VALUE values that they want - whether they admit that is what they want and whether they see that basing the start of values in natural selection compounds the problem. People like Carroll have a real problem when they see values as having an evolved basis and only that way. Even avowed moral atheists such as Richard Dawkins usually don't see what a problem evolution raises for their desire to have real VALUE values. Somewhat ironically, seeing that values began in natural selection makes it easier for people like me, who accept some super natural, to see how values might point to the super natural and guide us to sometimes rise above pure strategy and self-interest. I do not here explain how seeing values as evolved helps my view; I do that elsewhere.

## PART TWO

What follows is elaboration on the above points. It is not a full blown hard argument. I have found that such argument does little good. If you get it, then you will get it from something like what follows.

(1) The values that most people wish to see prevail, such as the Golden Rule, did not come from nowhere. We evolved a tendency toward these values. The values evolved out of self-interest and strategy. We also evolved tendencies toward other kinds of behavior, including such as stealing and sexual profligacy, but we do not see those as values.

(2) We have to think of what it means to evolve the basis for a value rather than evolve the basis for any pattern of behavior or any non-value behavior. We evolved a capacity for morality. We have to think what it means to evolve a capacity for values.

(3) The fact that we evolved a tendency toward these values does not mean the values are universal, deep, and true. It also does not mean they are ephemeral and false. We have to assess the values in whatever way we think best. We can use the fact that we evolved a basis for the values to help in the assessment but we need not let that fact dominate the assessment either way.

(4) The evolutionary base for these values did not specify them, or elaborate them, nearly to the extent that Carroll, and most of the modern world, ideally holds them. It is one thing to feel vaguely “we should be fair to our people” and quite another to firmly believe we should apply the Golden Rule to all people whether they are in our group or out of our group.

(5) For the right specifying and elaborating, we needed many prophets in several religious traditions and we needed the Western philosophical and political tradition. The thinkers and doers in these traditions gave us the modern widespread version of these values such as the Golden Rule, the idea behind the Good Samaritan, and “all rules apply equally to all people of similar condition, with no special favors for class, gender, wealth, etc.” Nearly all the people who did the specifying and elaborating did so on the basis of their religion. A few modern thinkers have specified and elaborated according to their strict reasoning, such as Kant, but their work does not undermine the previous contribution of religion. I do not elaborate here on what to make of this fact that we need to specify and elaborate and I do not consider how best to do so.

(6) Jesus was the most important player in this development of values. I do not explain more here.

(7) The evolutionary base for morality is practical. People evolved the capacity for morality because it served practical needs. In the right context, people who were moral enough, in the right ways, and were not too moral, did better than people who were not moral, not moral enough, moral in the wrong ways, or too moral. People evolved the capacity for morality because our ancestors who showed the capacity to learn appropriate morality did better in their reproductive success and their inclusive fitness than other people who did not have the capacity to learn, did not learn enough morality, learned the wrong morality, or learned to act too morally. If morality had not served practicality it could not have evolved.

(8) Even when morality leads us to do some things that seem impractical, such as not steal when we could not get caught, still, overall, in the long run, among a group of kin, morality was practical.

(9) I do not here explain how morality was practical and still usually is practical.

(10) Because the world now (industrial and post-industrial capitalism with large states) is not the world in which the capacity for morality evolved (gathering and hunting in small groups), morality now can seem highly impractical sometimes. We should not understand morality on that basis.

(11) Because the capacity for morality evolved, part of the capacity is sometimes not doing immoral acts even when we would not get caught, such as stealing and sex outside marriage. I do not explain how not doing such apparently beneficial acts could work to our benefit in the long run. Part of the reason is that it protects other moral acts such as sharing and pair-bonding (marriage). Because the capacity for morality evolved, part of morality is doing things that seem impractical such as sharing food and defending children that are only dimly related to us. I do not explain how doing such acts could work to our benefit in the long.

(12) Because the capacity for morality evolved, moral fervor is part of morality. We evolved not always to think objectively about morality. We evolved to commit to morality as when we do not do acts for which we would not be caught and we do acts that seem impractical. We evolved to think of morality as a special kind of action different from other kinds of acts and more important than other kinds of acts. We evolved to wish others would act in the same way as we do, according to our particular moral code. We evolved to think our codes are objective VALUE values and are REALLY IMPORTANT. We evolved to make our values important especially when we don't do things even when we would not get caught and when we do things that seem impractical. We feel moral fervor in ourselves and for ourselves even when nobody else knows. We are also happy to relate our good conduct to others and have them share our moral fervor and moral success.

Now, here comes the part that is important in my disagreement with Carroll and with other people who think we can make up real values in an amoral universe.

(13) What kind of values does Carroll hold? Are they values rooted only in our evolutionary capacity for values? Are they merely another evolutionarily-based skill such as astute shopping, baseball, fashion sense, mixed martial arts, academia, or telling stories? Or are they more than that? Are they really VALUE values? Are they something about how the world works and how humans should act-and-be or are they merely something of the way the world works and how people do act?

(14) If the values are only evolutionarily-based values, they are not nearly as much as Carroll wants. If the values are more, they open the door to the super natural and God. There is no other choice.

(15) Unfortunately, this is a case of either you see it or you don't, and people who wish to believe they can make up values in an amoral universe tend not to see it. I don't know if they really don't see it or if they suppress seeing it because to see it undermines their position.

(16) To get people to see this dilemma, it is useful to refer to situations in which we don't do things that would benefit us but are bad even though we would not get caught. Again unfortunately, because we evolved the basis for at least sometimes doing bad things when we would not get caught, it is not easy to come up with scenes that are definitive. I do what I can. See below.

(17) People who want their values to be real VALUE values, and not just something foisted off on them by evolution, their religion, culture, group, politics, socio-economic class, gender, etc., tend to take fervor and commitment as marks of truth. We think that our values are really real, even when we make them up. That is just what evolution wanted and mostly still wants. So we can't take fervor and commitment alone as markers of VALUE values, of values that are really real. We can put fervor and commitment into the assessment but we have to be careful.

On the other hand, evolutionists who are sure no value is real and all values are evolved delusion insist that all fervor and commitment is only a part of that delusion. No fervor or commitment can be taken as a mark of real values, even if fervor and commitment lead to death, and even if believers have strong reasons behind fervor and commitment. The deaths of Socrates and Jesus, and the lives of great atheists such as David Hume and Carl Sagan, were only sad episodes in predictable evolutionary dramas. We want to see this extreme stance clearly but we don't want to commit to it yet. People who believe we can make up our own real VALUE values cannot take this position to its full extent. They have to give criteria for when this position applies and when it does not.

(18) In my experience, most people take apparent sacrifice as a mark of real VALUE values. If we don't have to sacrifice to follow a principle, then it isn't a real value. If we do have to sacrifice, then it is a real value. If we don't have to sacrifice much to donate 10% of our income to charity, then more likely giving is a ploy to gain recognition and approval. On the other hand, if we have to sacrifice a lot to make sure the children of the neighbors get a regular meal, however small the money cost of the meal, then our value is a real VALUE. This reasoning can play a part in assessing if values are real VALUE values but we should not rely on it. Many cases of what seem sacrifices in the short run are not really such in the long run. Darwinists who study humans have been adept at showing how apparent sacrifices really pay off over the long run, especially if we consider not only self but also kin and social coalition partners. Also, the basic idea is suspect. A person can genuinely act on real VALUE values even if to give 10% of income is not much sacrifice. I do not much use sacrifice as a criterion here and I advise caution using it.

(19) Likewise, we should not use benefit to group as a reliable criterion. A value is not necessarily a real VALUE value if it benefits the group and a value is a false value if it does not seem to benefit the group. This conflict is the lesson of much classical Greek drama and it is an underlying theme in much American pop drama. Just because the Emperor brings peace and order to the galaxy does not mean he acted according to real VALUE values.

(20) Much more often than not, practicality and real VALUE values are all mixed up. A person can look at the same situation in both ways and be at least partly right both ways.

(21) It is possible to use formal criteria, in particular logical form, to help sort real values from values that likely serve other interests more than morality even if they seem like true moral rules. That is what Immanuel Kant did with his "categorical imperative", which I usually render as something like "all rules should apply to all similar people equally". If you say "no stealing", that is a moral value. If you say, "People in my group may take from people in other groups, that is not 'stealing', but nobody else in any

other group may steal from us”, that is not a real moral value although it can sound like one. If this criterion were fool-proof, life would be easy. But there are other criteria, both formal and non-formal. We take as values ideas that do not fall into this formal view and we use reasons that have little to do with formality. “Do not hurt innocent creatures” does not really fit the moral pattern, especially given that we often eat innocents in order to live. It is not worthwhile here to sort out all of these issues, so I don’t consider them. If push comes to shove, use your intuition.

(22) There is no certain mark for when values are real VALUE values versus when they are merely, no certain mark that I know of. There are some criteria. It is best to let the criteria emerge through looking at scenarios rather than to state them abstractly.

### PART THREE

(23) Here are some scenarios:

(A) We share food with our children. This activity is strategically sound, might show we have values, and might show that we teach values.

It is hard to separate motives, and to decide which motive dominates. It is hard to decide if sharing food with our children indicates a strategic self-interested action or indicates real VALUE values. Usually it is both all mixed up. Much the same is true for all the scenarios.

Because “usually it is both all mixed up”, people like Carroll can switch between stressing naturalism or real VALUE values (super natural), to suit current argument needs, without always knowing that they switch, and without the reader being aware of switches. Likewise people who stress the super natural grounding of values but want to show how they go along with human nature, such as most teachers of religion, do the same kind of switching.

This scenario might help us see how a moral value might have arisen out of practicality but, once having arisen, is not anchored to practicality and need not serve merely as a tool of practicality. Yes, sharing with children helps them and serves our reproductive interests, but sharing is more than that, at least in the ideal.

The point is not to demand purity of motive – that rarely exists – but to see that we see values and we yearn for values, often even in situations that are heavy with biological self-interest.

(B) We teach our children to share food with each other, and even with their parents.

(C) We share food with our nieces and nephews, and we teach our children to share food with their cousins.

(D) We share food with our neighbors, with whom we are on good terms.



(E) We share food with our neighbors, with whom we are not always on good terms. Sometimes we share with them when we have a lot of food, sometimes when we do not have much but they have even less. Sometimes we invite them to a barbecue.

(F) At the office, we give to a charity, and everybody knows we give. We feel good about ourselves.

(G) We give to a charity, and nobody knows we give. We feel good about ourselves.

(H) At the local public swimming pool, we save a child obviously in trouble.

(I) We have ten children. We are very poor. We could sell five children into sex slavery. We would not be caught by authorities and punished, and we would not be found out and stigmatized by neighbors. With the money we make from selling five children, we can make sure that the remaining five live to get some education and get married.

We still know something is wrong here. What? To make the point, I had to use a crime more serious than merely embezzling without getting caught, the usual example.

(J) I have ten children. My wealth status does not matter. I sell all ten children into sex slavery. I cannot get caught or stigmatized. With the money, I do whatever I want: donate some to my church, donate some to an orphanage, buy drugs, buy booze, buy sex, take a vacation, or have more children.

(K) I have a business buying and selling children for sex slavery. I cannot get caught or stigmatized. With my money, I do whatever I wish. I have no children of my own. I was not abused as a child.

(L) Assume your mother is alive and somewhat elderly. Whether I am a professional mugger does not matter. One night, I catch the old woman alone on the street, drag her into an alley, rob her, beat her, and make her go to an ATM where she draws out as much cash as she can. I use her credit cards until they can't be used any more. I cannot get caught and I don't get caught. I don't feel bad at all. Does it make any difference if she recovers fully and gets all her money back? Does it make any difference, if, through this experience, she learns to be smarter on the street?

(M) I am a member of an ethnic, religious, or gender minority. In the past, we were victims of hate, violence, discrimination, and oppression. Times are much better now; although, as in any diverse large democracy, not everybody loves everybody else; and people still naturally use race, religion, and gender in assessing other people. I deny that my group can ever show prejudice or can discriminate. I am sure everybody else still hates us and all the problems of my group are due to bias. None of our problems are due to our culture, social roles, or attitudes. None of our problems are due to our inability to see a better way in the modern world. I am as prejudiced as anybody from any other group who ever was prejudiced against me and my people. I hate all other groups but have rationalizations for my feelings so that my feelings, to me, are not hate or prejudice. Mostly I rationalize by blaming all other people

except us. I don't see at all that I hate and I am prejudiced. My group frequently organizes and acts to gain special consideration. We stress our rights but avoid our responsibilities.

Everyone who reads the above paragraph will think I am talking about his-her group, or a group he-she dislikes, but I am not.

(N) An academic steals an idea from a student. The academic uses the idea to make a name for himself, get grants, special grants, and a position. He-she helps students, and launches careers. Although he-she never makes any brilliant contributions, he-she does good solid work. This work might never have gotten done, and the students might never have been helped, if the academic had not made a name for him-herself early and gotten a good position. Nobody remembers what happened to the student.

(I) I understand morality. I am pretty good at deciding moral questions. I know when people act morally and when they do not. I understand their rationalizations. I understand moral fervor. I have seen a lot of hypocrisy so I understand that too. Although I see morality, I don't care a whit about it. I use it to my gain and to the loss of others. I use their morality against them. I don't care when they lose as long as they don't get so angry at me, and they have to the power, to hurt me. As long as I gain more than I lose, morality is only a tool. When they might get angry at me, I remind them of Compassion and other moral hindrances. I am a happy taker. I lie when it is useful and I can get away with it, and I never think twice. I am not a compulsive liar because I know that attitude can cause more loss than gain. I am quite successful at what I do, especially in a city where I can move from source-of-gain to source-of-gain with little fear. I do not see sources of gain as victims. My attitude toward morality does not hinder me at getting other human satisfactions. I know what it is to have a girl friend or boyfriend, and I know that I have to be nice to him-her often enough, deeply enough, and in the right ways, to get what I need. I know I cannot hurt him-her too much. I have friends. I did well in school. I do well at sports, especially sports where it is me against the field such as golf. I can hold a job. I could hold public office. If it was not a lot of trouble, more than it is worth, I could go to church. Church provides contacts for more gain. I don't feel that I have lost out on anything, and I don't feel that I would gain much if I were to really act morally instead of merely using morality as a tool.

(J) I am much like the person above. I have discovered that people are much happier, more off their guard, if they feel that you have religion and morality, especially if your religion and morality are like theirs. So I have learned how to read their religion and morality so that I can imitate close enough to please them and get them off guard. I have learned how to make up religions and moralities, or at least variations on religions and moralities, so that I can fool other people better. Of course, I might be even more adept if I believed my own fantasies but that is too dangerous and too much effort. I can do well as long as I know I am only pretending.

(K) I am pretty much like the two persons above except I don't really get morality, I don't understand it, and I don't feel it. I have tried to participate in the religion and morality of others but I don't do as well as I would like. I have more success in making up a single simple credible religion and morality that I can stick to as long as it doesn't bind me too much, and which I use as a façade to placate others so they will

leave me alone to do as I wish. I try to have my made-up religion sound like the formal religions of the people around me so people feel as comfortable around me as I can make them. I also have learned not to fool myself too much. I don't really believe in my religion or in any morality. I succeed less than the two persons above, likely because I have fewer tools because I lack a feeling for morality and religion. Sometimes I wonder what the world would be like if there were a lot more people like me, and we didn't have to fake morality and religion just to get along with all the moral and religious people, who are mostly hypocrites anyway. Of course, all us people who don't feel morality or religion would all try to take from each other, but open taking might be more tolerable than putting up with all the fake morality and religion.

(L) I am part of a family and Sean Carroll is part of a family. One day, I meet Dr. Carroll on the street. I see he is well-dressed and likely has some wealth, so I beat the crap out of him, take his wallet, take his credit cards, and take anything of value. He is lucky I leave him alive. He tells his family and I tell mine. His family raises a row with my family. Fortunately, my family is tough and well-trained. After a few skirmishes, of which my family wins all, his family leaves us alone and shuts up when we are around. They do grumble behind our backs. I get tired of all this hassle so I make up a religion and a morality to defend what I did and what my family did. My family, because we represent Greeks and in particular represent Cretans, are better able to use resources such as cash and credit cards than can other people. We know what to buy. We know where to invest. We know what to leave alone. We know what art is really worth keeping and what are merely passing fads. Because we are more adept at using wealth, we have a right to more wealth. We have a right to take the wealth of others to use for ourselves and so to serve the public good. By using their wealth as our wealth, we help the whole much better than if they had kept their wealth. They are part of the whole, so they are better off if we take their wealth than if they kept it themselves. I, and my family, have a duty to take the wealth of others and to use it as we see fit. We have a duty to take the wealth of others and so make the whole better off and make all the others better off too. This is what God and Jesus meant when Jesus told stories about people who steward vineyards for the benefit of all. This is what Jesus meant with the stories of feasts. This is what the Church meant when it encouraged all the people to share their stuff. God and Jesus approve what we do. So shut up and give.