

# WHY HAVE RELIGION?

CARL RAE



In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. No he didn't. We are also informed that woman was created from the rib of Adam. Not true. In fact, if one were similarly to go through the Bible in an objective, line by line analysis, it soon becomes simply incredible that anyone can actually believe this crap.

Why is it that Salman Rushdie attacked the contents of the Koran rather than any other religious guide book? Quite simple. He'd read it. Yet despite the huge weight of factual evidence, across the world the priests, vicars and witch doctors still manage to pack them in. Many have used this ubiquity of religion as a rather tenuous proof of supernatural existence. However, as world religions vary from the honouring of ancestors to the worship of rocks, stones, plants, mythical creatures, and a god or gods, it is difficult to see a common theme. But this ubiquity is there and must be the result of something fundamental to the human psyche. The aim of this discourse is to investigate this apparent human need.

What are the features of humanity that differentiate *homo sapiens* from the rest of the animal kingdom? Reduced to a purely biological context we are the product of an evolutionary process that struck upon the fortunate combination of a ra-

tional inquisitive brain and a specialised pentadigital hand that allowed us to make use of of this intellect. It is this combination that has given us the edge. There is little point in having a highly complicated and sophisticated mind, attached to a flipper. This is why the RB-211 turbine jet engine was not designed by a dolphin. Similarly a highly articulated hand is wasted if attached to a brain the size of a peanut.

Man is also a social animal. There are undoubted benefits from the collectivisation and specialisation of man's labours. This is a basic fact that has remained undisputed by philosophers since the time of Aristotle. All human societies have some formal hierarchical structure which allows the benefits of specialised labour to be spread throughout the group. At the pinnacle of this arrangement are the law makers and leaders. These people are the ones with political power. These are the minority who tell the majority what to do, how to live, etc..

## SOCIAL DOMINATION

What is the magic that allows for the domination of the many by the few? Answering this question is what philosophy is all about, and over the centuries there have been many answers. The simplest reason expressed for why an individual should obey the state is that : "If I don't they will cut my head off." More developed solutions would include: "I have entered into a voluntary contract with the State." Other conclusions have been reached. Many such treatments of the question bracket religions with the State: "Why should I obey the State/God?" This is hardly surprising as the social status of the "priests" has usually been right up there with the law makers. I would argue that we should not view the religious aspect of this question along with the why, but instead we should realise that it is part of the how. I shall explain.

There are a minimal number of laws/ethics/morals which are essential for any society to func-

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tion. The philosopher Grotius described these as the right of the individual to the fair acquisition of possessions and the right of self defence. I agree. Even such a basic code will only function if it is enforced. I do not accept that if law were not enforced these natural laws would be spontaneously accepted by all. Nice idea, but it unfortunately flies in the face of historical fact. I suggest that an examination of the Wild West would be somewhat difficult to reconcile with the anarchist vision. If you want a modern example, how about Denmark's Christiania? This is a part of Copenhagen that was declared a law-free zone by the flower power hippies of the 1960s. A little over ten years later it had degenerated into a police no go area run by Hell's Angel drug baron types and is described by the extremely liberal Danes as a social experiment that failed.

So, how are these minimalist laws to be enforced and accepted? Forgive me if I digress at this point but my reasons will become apparent.

## **EVOLUTION**

Once upon a time, long, long ago, I attended a lecture at my local church on 'The Case Against Darwinism'. As an open minded kind of guy (or so I like to think) and evolution being my current topic of study I went along eagerly, anticipating a rational debate on the subject. I didn't get one. After the Professor (of hydraulic engineering as it turned out) gave his talk, there was a question and answer session. At this point, with disappointing ease, I disproved and even ridiculed all his points, citing many facts that flatly contradicted everything he had said. His grudging reply was essentially: "God put the fossils in the mountain to test our faith." This was accompanied by a few hallelujahs from the assembled masses. My first experience of faith in action. The congregation were being instructed to ignore the evidence of their senses and to accept the holy word. "Do not think" was the message. I shouldn't really have been so surprised. The most heinous crime against any religion is that its divine facts be questioned (Galileo, Copernicus, the Bishop of Durham ...), for in order to question, one has to think.

We are now getting close to the essence of the religious magic. Man needs to know. He is inquisitive by nature. A nature that compelled him to spread throughout the world and even beyond. I know that some scientists claim that we are on the verge of a breakthrough with the unification field theory that will give all or most of the

answers. It's another great idea, and I hate to be sceptical, but throughout the history of science we've been "on the verge of a breakthrough". Yet when each such achievement is made it merely allows us to redefine our model of the universe and raises ever more questions. Arguably, two of the most successful scientific theories of this century (the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle and Chaos Theory) set limits on knowledge and predict areas of indeterminance.

Religious ideologies artificially resolve this totally human paradox of needing to know all whilst being unable to. When societies initially adopted their division of labour, they did not stop at the manufacture of physical articles, but also the production of ideas. Here is the magic. Once you have accepted the role of religious leaders you have an instant moral framework to your laws. Question: "Why is the law right?" Answer: "Because God says so." Question: "How do you know?" Answer: "The Priest told me." Rationalism is totally excluded from the process and all such laws must be obeyed without question. The monopoly on divine knowledge gives stability to the society.

## **PROPAGANDA**

If you like, religions are the earliest and clearest form of propaganda. Is the propaganda wrong? I dare say that some occasions may justify it, but it isn't truth.

Can we have a stable society without an enforced moral code? Then again, can morals morally be enforced? All religions seem to exist because of some people's absolute conviction that they can and should. As a libertarian I would strongly disagree. But, rather than bleating negatives, it is the duty of others who take my position to suggest alternatives that do allow free will and still encourage stability in a society. The libertarian attraction, for instance, to the philosophy of Ayn Rand is that she did just that. She is attacked for being the objectivist she clearly claimed to be. The libertarians have to argue for a minimal set of laws that establish an acceptable legal framework that does not require "Because God says so" as a justification. We must strive for a society in which free will is an integral part, and laws are used to protect the individual from other individuals and not from our own natures.

When we have created this society we will no longer need religions. This achievement must surely come. It's about time the human race grew up.