

In the Great Mystery

Albert Einstein, when asked if he believed in God, had some hesitation when describing his spirituality. His answer emphasized the humility of one of the greatest minds we have known.

“I believe in Spinoza’s God”

Dutch **Jewish** philosopher Baruch Spinoza was born in 1632 and died in 1677. A great atheist of the Western tradition, he refers to “God” throughout his writings, hence Einstein’s reference to “Spinoza’s God”, and some religious people’s false impression that the great man was indeed a believer. To understand this God. He said...

“The highest activity a human being can attain is learning for understanding, because to understand is to be free”

I guess freedom brings peace, and in Baruch’s words...

“Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, and justice.”

Baruch was excommunicated by the rabbis of Amsterdam but always showed a deep understanding of religious people and a tolerance for their cultures.

This seems the most beautiful of approaches and demonstrates great human insight. None of us are smart enough to know and understand the complete picture of our lives in the universe, and time and time again, with new emerging evidence man finds serious flaws in previously held firm convictions. “God” to the most intelligent of humans is just an acknowledgement that there are things we cannot understand or define simply because we have no sound evidence of them. It is natural, that many, unable to achieve a satisfactory understanding, turn to philosophy and religion without the application of the human gift of scientific reason or any further due thought process.

Lacking in the spirit of true free enquiry, and torn between the natural love for their parents and any dissonance they have with the fanciful stories they are being taught as fact, most simply adopt the religion or the ideas of their parents or teachers. For the multitudes, intellectually and from a relationship point of view this seems to be the easy way out. The revelatory religions do not promote personal investigation or the vetting of their teachings – they preach the absoluteness of their authority, morality and consequential salvation. (or consequential damnation for some). If you believe them you do so with blind faith and for many this is a way of reaching a conclusion to their lack of understanding of life and the universe, allowing them to proceed with their life's purpose with some sense of certainty. This peaceful state often reflects in their confidence, sometimes seen as arrogance.

This intellectual surrender is less justified, armed as we are today, with the knowledge of evolution and other important compelling scientific facts regarding our lives in this universe, and the consequent dispelling some of the pathetic little stories on which previous theories of various deities were based. But it clearly identifies why so many dedicate themselves to the strange conviction of an ultimate reward including everlasting happiness, a pipe dream that is without one shred of evidence whatsoever.

It seems a deep human tragedy that tolerance and respect for the religious beliefs of our fellow human beings leads to the continuation of all the harmful effects these irrational ideas have.

Another great Jewish atheist mind Isaac Asimov was a little less tolerant.

"Imagine the people who believe such things and who are not ashamed to ignore, totally, all the patient findings of thinking minds through all the centuries since the Bible was written. And it is these ignorant people, the most uneducated, the most unimaginative, the

most unthinking among us, who would make themselves the guides and leaders of us all; who would force their feeble and childish beliefs on us; who would invade our schools and libraries and homes. I personally resent it bitterly.”

More humility demonstrated about his own convictions, but anger at the arrogant masses for being so self-assured and for explaining away the vast mysteries of life with such ordinary little fanciful stories. It does seem ridiculous that in the current age of information, so many humans continue to apply such little rigor to the evidence of the spiritual godly realm.

I guess it is the dissolving into nothingness that gets most humans on the religious bandwagon. It is an easy escape from the reality of our mortality and eternal discontinuance, a disturbing and worrying possibility for all life-loving human beings. And so, it is with genuine human empathy (we all face, it seems the inevitable eternity of death) that we endeavour to show respect for religious people and their silly prayers and practices.

But one cannot escape despair of the current state of human rationality. After thousands of years of forbidding its flock to practice birth control the Roman Catholic Pope Francis suddenly and unexpectedly starts urging the faithful to be concerned about climate change making, it seems, no connection between overpopulation, centuries of obstruction to natural birth control, energy consumption, unsustainable global pollution levels, and extreme competition for resources. And so, we march forward to the next world war.

Today we see the rise of religious fundamentalism and activism, with associated discrimination, persecution and displacement of minorities as well as terror and violence. None of this is or has ever been associated with secular, humanist, atheist or pantheist groups. In the same way that religion has intervened and delayed the progress of civilisation, in science, medicine, ethics and the arts, it now stands in

the way of solutions to the world's most serious problems.

The remnants of some great thinking are to be found in what the North American Indian peoples, (now decimated and practically destroyed by the European settlers with their guns and germs), believed and practiced. Looking at their version of the 10 commandments you can see a strong sense of human ethics and an absence of the guilt/punishment mentality of Judea/Christian beliefs.

Native American Ten Commandments

1. Treat the Earth and all that dwell therein with respect
2. Remain close to the Great Spirit
3. Show great respect for your fellow beings
4. Work together for the benefit of all Mankind
5. Give assistance and kindness wherever needed
6. Do what you know to be right
7. Look after the well-being of Mind and Body
8. Dedicate a share of your efforts to the greater Good
9. Be truthful and honest at all times
10. Take full responsibility for your actions

What is clear is their great love for nature, the Great Spirit that is the earth

our home, our mother, the universe and all that they referred to as the Great Mystery. When compared to modern western culture they were ahead of their time. While they seem to have an almost spiritual relationship with the earth, they were atheist in the sense that they did not indulge in ancestor worship, sainthood, idolatry practices, witchcraft, religious rituals, sacrifices or idiotic astrology.

The Great Spirit (in their language referred to et al as Wakan Tanka, Gitchi Manitou) is a non-theistic belief in personal relationship with

the universe itself and all living things resulting in a deep respect and wonder for nature.

How admirable is this great humility that acknowledges the complexity and immensity of the Great Mystery? While our scientists have been conducting staggeringly complex reductionism to explore the universe's apparently fathomless granularity, holism with its crazy philosophies, cruel religions and mystical cults has certainly failed to accurately describe our cosmos in any way. We can safely say that all gods invented by man and his preachers are false and often destructive. So, should our fellow human beings be given the freedom of believing in crazy gods and the attendant philosophies many of which by their very nature are clearly poor at serving the common good of mankind?

And we must deal with the question of people such as Richard Dawkins who like Asimov routinely attacks and maybe insults religious people. Well how many of us crusaders against human irrationality have been burnt at the stake, stoned to death, tortured, silenced, or just murdered like the bloggers of Bangladesh. How many children are being indoctrinated in a religion based on silly little tales mired in inherited superstition.

Unless we have a mind to tolerate female genital mutilation, the stoning of female adulterers, the subjugation of women to virtual slavery, the trade of young virgins in the marriage market of the family and friends' circle of their fathers, we must remain a discerning and critical voice in a world going mad with political correctness and cultural over-sensitivity. Or all will be lost as irrationality kills us all.

Einstein knew that it was stupid to be prescriptive about the existence or otherwise of a God for which there is no clear evidence. The genius was also humble enough to know that we don't fully understand the Great Mystery. He never scorned or attacked religious people, he was tolerant of their stupidity and respectful of their poor deductive logic.

In these times the question must be asked “Can we afford to follow this example?”

The Real Dog

The neurotic, dyslexic, agnostic, insomniac sat up all night worrying whether there really was a dog.

Our society is filled with culture and customs that inhibit true human expression. They come from the deep and dark superstitions of our painfully gradual evolution to a humane and benevolent society. The religious tribes of this world (who without hesitation would indoctrinate their children without respect for their freedom of intellectual capability) have much to answer for – including the subjugation of their women-folk, the patriarchal masochism that rules their families and especially the young daughters. All revelatory religions are guilty of promoting this culture including Christianity, Islam and Judaism. They are the restraining, degrading influence on our march to a better civilisation. Modern relativists would have us muzzled for fear of offending the practitioners of religious insanity. The time has come to fight back with rationality.

If you have a real desire to be loved, develop a capacity to joyfully experience intellectual freedom, promote it to others, especially those that you love. Be wise, be courageous, let them be themselves, not clones of their aging parents. Open your mind and bring others with you especially if you are living within a suffocating narrow-minded religious authoritarian family environment.



Lloyd DeMause writes:

"The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused.

That this pattern has not previously been noticed by historians is because serious history has long been considered a record of public ... events. Historians have concentrated so much on the noisy sand-box of history, with its fantastic castles and magnificent battles, that they have generally ignored what is going on in the homes around the playground."

DeMause's observation has been that there have been six psychogenic modes in the evolution of childcare, with corresponding historical manifestations.

If we look at the emerging science of human development, this just makes sense. There is a biological basis for learning and behavior, and in our previous ignorance about these things, many of our responses

to childhood were in direct conflict with those things essential for healthy mental and physical well-being.

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp12/

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/interactive_features/biodevelopmental-framework/

As a Montessori teacher, I treat children with respect, and provide them with engaging environments... and as a result the more creative, intellectual; responsible, compassionate, independent, courageous, and peaceful they become.

Book Review - *The Emotional Life of Nations*, by Lloyd deMause

"It is no exaggeration to state that human progress is a function of the evolving space between mother and infant. It is the baby who is the wild card in human evolution, the flexible template through which culture has the opportunity to slowly improve itself generation by generation."

"deMause gives us an objective way to measure the psychological health of a given culture, and thus provides intellectual ammunition against the tide of cultural relativism that sees all cultures as equally good and all parents as equally loving."

-- Dr. Robert Godwin

Part of this Review...

In Part III, on Psycho-historical Evolution, the chapter on "Childhood and Cultural Evolution" demonstrates just how far humans have traveled in psychological space since their first

appearance some 100,000 years ago, when we had little more notion of a private self than a chimp.

Most anyone can make a baby, but that does not mean that the baby will grow up to be fully "human" as we understand the term. Rather, a baby requires certain non-genetic experiences with loving care-takers if it is to develop a coherent, flexible, self-reflective mind, and avoid the reproductive cycle of early trauma caused by poor parenting leading to crazy and dysfunctional cultural practices as a psychological defense.

DeMause demonstrates that the human infant -- particularly the female infant -- is the "missing link," the narrow neck we must all pass through on the way to humanness, a bridge over the awesome chasm separating the instinct-bound ape, or merely genetic *Homo sapiens*, from the truly human, which is characterized by a capacity for freedom, love, and creativity. It is the baby who is the wild card in human evolution, the flexible template through which culture can slowly improve itself generation by generation.

The next chapter (the book's lengthiest), The Evolution of Child Rearing, contains abundant, seemingly unassailable documentation of just how poorly children have been treated over the millennia, ranging from child sacrifice, infanticide, and genital mutilation to "lesser" forms of abuse and abandonment, such as beatings, molestation, or being sent out to a wet nurse. Here deMause promulgates a view which is central to psychohistory but completely anathema to the conventional historian (let alone cultural anthropologist): that the achievement of empathy in even a minority of parents is a very recent historical phenomenon, and that most of the non-Western world remains particularly backward and barbaric in their treatment of children.

In so carefully and thoroughly documenting child rearing practices throughout history, deMause gives us an objective way to measure the psychological health of a given culture, and thus provides intellectual ammunition against the tide of cultural relativism that sees all cultures as equally good and all parents as equally loving.

Ultimately, deMause demonstrates that cultures are indeed adaptive -- just not to objective reality. Rather, cultures are adaptations to the unique human problem of having once been a helpless infant completely dependent upon the omnipotent and frequently malevolent beings called parents.

The final chapter, The Evolution of Psyche and Society, ends on a promising note, the operative word being evolution. Again, since the human genotype has remained unchanged for the past 100,000 years, we represent nature's first experiment in post-biological evolution. Indeed, perhaps history is nothing more than the brief (in geological terms) but nevertheless catastrophic stage any species must go through on the way toward full self-consciousness.

History, according to deMause, ultimately comes down to a chronicle of the slow and uneven process of integrating chaotic selves fragmented by childhood trauma into the relatively unified self of modernity. In the past (and in much of the world still), the average individual lived in a hallucinatory, demon-haunted world filled with projected fragments of dissociated psyches, populated by countless gods, devils, witches, spirits, and departed ancestors.

(This is the world of religious indoctrination)

Only in the past fifty years or so have we begun to realize that humans do not begin life with a pre-formed identity, but that

they construct and integrate a self in the "transitional space" between brain neurology and a caring other. The reason why history seems so crazy is that people were crazy; as deMause puts it, people in the past would "switch into their alter egos regularly, hearing voices, having waking nightmares and flashbacks, experiencing loss of time, periods of unreality and deadness, hallucinating persecutors, feeling unalterably dirty, sinful and hopeless, and acting out self-injurious episodes."

Today we might call this a serious borderline personality disorder, and in fact, deMause demonstrates how the DSM is a sort of archaeological road map of various personality types that have emerged through history, from the dissociated, schizoid psycho-class of tribal societies, through the depressive class of the renaissance and reformation, on to the neurotic psycho-class of modern times.

But if deMause is correct, psycho-historical evolution does not end there. Rather, there is a more fully individuated human being at the end of history, one who in my view would have two main features: first, a harmonious integration of the various parts of the psyche, and second, an ability to actualize latent capabilities, talents, and potentials that, in most people, remain stillborn due to a suffocating superego internalized in childhood. Perhaps deMause is utopian in believing that human beings may yet seize the tiller of psycho-historical evolution by teaching more humane child rearing skills to the less evolved psycho-classes constituting the majority of parents. Nowadays we all realize that universal education gives children access to a cognitive world that far transcends the narrow prison house of the senses.

But deMause's mission is to show how being raised by empathic and loving parents gives access to an emotional world no less profound and transformative; in truth, it gives access to the real

world that humans have been so painfully slow in discovering over these past 100,000 years.

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Religious Trauma Syndrome. Reference <http://journeyfree.org/rts/>

Dr Marlene Winell's work on religious trauma syndrome is excellent. The assumption that religion is good for people, especially children, has to be dispelled, and the work being done by psychologists like Dr Winell is showing up the real dangers posed by religious indoctrination. The religions in question in this context are revelatory religions — that is religions that claim to be divinely or supernaturally revealed — so that, even if someone raised in it does not suffer any trauma, he or she is still compromised intellectually by the irrational division of mind into natural and supernatural standards of truth.

All three Abrahamic religions are revelatory and give rise at least to this kind of mental dysfunction, whereby two contradictory criteria for truth (reason and faith) are simultaneously followed. No matter how much love and compassion are preached in them (oddly, the practice of the same is never so rigorous), revelatory religions tend to be authoritarian, dogmatic and controlling, given that they are regarded as coming from an ultimate, supernatural source of reality and authority, so it is no surprise to read here that Dr Winell and her colleagues are very busy with cases of RTS, cases involving not just the compromising effects of cognitive dissonance but all the other pathological effects mentioned in the article.

Revelatory religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism are harmful by their very nature, and it is high time for this to be announced from the housetops. These religions do not deserve the respect they have

traditionally been accorded; they should instead be ignored as unworthy of reasonable people and be mentioned in public only where there is a need to warn people of their dangerous (e.g. child-harming) teachings and practices. Let them be anathema.

Religious Indoctrination deeply affects the intellectual development of the child and the young adult.

I, (Pierre DuToit) experienced indoctrination first hand. I remember the guilt I felt being a non-believer and spending much of my life trying to get over the effects.

It is unsettling to awake intellectually and find out that Santa Claus was BS, but it's a bit more traumatic to find out that the philosophy of your life has been hijacked and the importance of your successful existence as a human being has been relegated to that of a dress rehearsal for an imaginary heavenly afterlife. Downgrading this singularity of your life provides (for many believers) a license to be less than an altruistic, humane and benevolent person. For the deeply indoctrinated this will translate to being willing to perform acts of terrorism against innocent people, while for others imbued with this irrationality, the ability to act out their marginal insanities against children and women and be completely forgiven by the crazy ritual of confession. The milder form of this insanity translates to practices like daily communion where believers are taught that they are eating the flesh of Christ, the incarnate God and drinking his blood. All for the rewards of a fickle creator's post-death's favours.

Love your children more than this, give them some freedom to shape their own beliefs. Teach them to avoid the insanities of the dogmatic revelatory religions. We have seen for millennia, and see all around our world today, the terrible damage they do to our humanity and society. One of the key goals of every human can be the simple but profound idea of leaving this evolutionary journey having allowed,

through wisdom, a little step forward in the advancement of the humanity we inherited.

Peter McNamee, July 2015