P7 – Problems Religions Cause Individuals

Dear: In the previous chapter, I began trying to show you some "sick social policies", derived from religions, and how religious "beliefs" can damage even "the fundamental social unit", i.e., the family. In this chapter I want to begin showing you how religions can cause major problems for individuals within the largest social group with which most people are involved, i.e., their societies. Yet actually, this step (from families to societies) isn't so dramatic as it may first seem, for as Aristotle wrote in his *Eudemian Ethics:*

> [Humans are] not only a political but also a house-holding animal, and do not, [similar to] other animals, couple occasionally and with any chance female or male, but [humans are] in a special way not a solitary but a gregarious animal, associating with the persons with whom [they have] a natural kinship; accordingly there would be partnership; and justice of a sort, even if there were no state… But the friendship of man and wife is one of utility, a partnership; that of father and son is the same as that between god and man and between benefactor and beneficiary, and generally between natural ruler and natural subject; that between brothers is principally the friendship of comrades, as being on a footing of equality… Hence in the household are first found the origins and springs of friendship, of political organization, and of justice.

Further, throughout most of human evolution, the "society" within which most individuals were immersed was predominantly just the individual's "extended family", including a large number of aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on. Such a society (or clan or tribe) was normally very supportive for each member and was usually "governed" by some assembly of "family elders". Thereby, each society developed various moral codes, customs, and laws that, through experience, were found to promote the survival and "smooth functioning" of the tribe.

What each of us experiences in our own society is, in a sense, a descendant of such "primitive" societies – although it's easy to argue that modern societies are actually more "primitive"! That is, tens of thousands of years ago, tribes or clans were probably more supportive of their members than are modern societies. In fact, one of the appeals of religions in our society is to compensate for the "coldness" of the rest of our society, providing some sense of "fellowship" and "extended family". For example, as you well know and similar to many religious groups, fellow Mormons address each other as "brother" and "sister" and generally try to assist one another, thereby attempting to form a "clan" within a larger society.

There are, however, many "downside consequences" of such "clannishness" – as I'll be showing you in subsequent chapters. For this chapter, however, I plan generally to ignore the problems that religions cause our society as a result of divisions into various "religious clans". Instead, in this chapter, I want to emphasize the problems that religions cause individuals, as they try to make their way within the largest social group, i.e., their societies.

SOME QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

Before examining how religions cause individuals troubles in their societies, however, I want to try to make sure that "we're on the same wavelength" by showing you (or reminding you) about some general features of any society, in particular, by taking some care to distinguish between moral codes, customs, and laws, and by inquiring into the concept of social justice. Then, I want to address such questions as the following:

- *What morality is "right"?*
- *Which customs are "correct"?*
- *What laws are "good" and therefore should be "upheld"?*
- *What's the personal morality of accepting public morality, conforming to customs, and obeying laws?*
- *Who gets to define public morality, customs, & laws?*
- *Is "social justice" possible?*
- *What are the prospects for peace and prosperity?*

It'll take me several chapters to address all those questions; in this chapter, I'll address only the first four; below I'll start with the question: *What morality is "right"?* But even before starting to respond to that question, I should alert you to a major restriction for what follows.

Dear: There's "no way" that I can provide "complete answers" to the above questions – and I don't intend even to try! If you want complete answers, then as I suggested in an earlier chapter, start by taking several hundred relevant courses at university! In contrast, for what follows, I want to focus on "only" two aspects of the answers, namely: 1) the (almost always deleterious) influences from religions, and 2) consequences for a certain grandchild. For example, Dear, I won't try to completely answer the question *What morality is "right"?* Nonetheless, I hope you'll be able to see: 1) How religions have so badly "screwed up" ideas about morality, and 2) What morality is "right" for you.

SOME PRELIMINARIES

At the outset, let me try to clear away any potential confusion caused by poorly defined words. In particular, whereas a society's customs and laws generally prescribe most public policies, let me use the following pair of dictionary definitions to distinguish between 'customs' and 'laws':

> **custom 1.** a usual practice or habitual way of behaving; habit **2.** a) a social convention carried on by tradition and enforced by social disapproval of any violation b) such practices, collectively…

> **law 1.** a) all the rules of conduct established and enforced by the authority, legislation, or custom of a given community, state, or other group b) any one of such rules…

Specifically, the distinction between 'customs' and 'laws' that I'll be using is just in enforcement. For example, Dear, you'll likely find disapproval if you violate a custom, but you can be reprimanded, fined, jailed, or worse, if you violate a law.

Next, let me remind you about my definitions for "personal morality" and about some "moral principles" in my resulting "moral code" or "judicial code". In **J2**, I tried to show you my meaning for 'morality', using a simple "limit argument" in which you were assumed to be the only person on Earth. I hope you found that analysis to be simple and its conclusion to be trivially obvious:

> Because "moral value" (as with any value) can be measured only relative to an objective and because our prime objective is to promote our trio of survival goals, the morality of any act is simply a measure of how the act promotes our goals. And because using our brains as best we can is the best way to promote our trio of survival goals, then the act of highest moral value is: *test ideas with data and then decide and act as the data dictate.*   An alternative description of this "act of highest moral value" is just *apply the scientific method in daily life:* obtain data, try to make sense of the data (viz., think!), formulate hypotheses that succinctly summarize the data and that have predictive capabilities, perform experiments to test the predictions, obtain more data, and so on, without end. Some alternative statements of my "judicial principle" or "moral code" are:
> - *Use your brain as best you can,* or
> - *Use your head,* or
> - *Evaluate,* or even just
> - *Think!*

Yet, as I already cautioned you, Dear, the last abbreviation in the above list (i.e., *Think!)* is rather dangerous if (as so often happens) people forget to think about testing their ideas against data! I'll return to this topic in **R**, dealing with **R**eason.

As I already described (in **K** and **L**), I consider the above "moral code" (in any of its formulations) to be better than familiar "moral codes" of our culture, such as "be kind" or "love one another" – not only because, e.g., "use your brain as best you can" contains these familiar "moral codes" of our culture but also because, e.g., "use your brain as best you can" recommends improvements to these familiar "moral codes", such as "be kind but with keenness" and "love one another but with limitations".

PERSONAL *versus* PUBLIC "MORAL CODES"

Now, Dear, in the above, I've been enclosing the words "moral code" within quotation marks because, as yet, I haven't defined what I mean by "moral code". I trust that this hasn't caused you difficulty, because I expect that your ideas about what I mean are as "pretty much" the same as mine! Thus, what most of us mean by "moral code" are one or more succinct statements of our "moral principles" – although if I then define what I mean by "moral principle", I'll probably start chasing my "tale" (as in any dictionary). Instead, let me explain what I mean by developing an example.

As I already repeatedly wrote, my fundamental (personal) moral principle is to try to use my brain as best I can. From this principle, I then deduce other (interpersonal) moral or judicial principles (for dealing with other people) such as "be kind if you can but with keenness" and "everyone has an equal right to claim one's own existence." Similarly, and with the help of other authors, I'm led to other principles such as "reciprocity" or "give equal value for value received." The resulting set of moral principles (which I trust are – and seem to be – self-consistent!) is what I mean by my "moral code".

I hope you agree, Dear, that it's extremely important for you to define your own moral code, carefully. Whereas the morality of any act is a measure of how the act influences your trio of survival goals (of yourself, your extended family, and your values), your moral code is therefore a succinct summary of principles to guide you in the pursuit of your prime goals. Consequently, it's wise to develop your moral code with care. For example, if you adopt a

statement such as "be kind to one another" or "love one another" without giving such concepts sufficient thought, then you'll fail to see that kindness must be applied with keenness and that unconditional love can be a mistake.

Which then brings me to the need to distinguish between "personal morality" and "public morality". Regardless of the definitions in any dictionary, I want to make the distinction as follows: *personal morality* (which I'll write just as 'morality' when I expect no confusion will arise) is decided by an individual; *public morality* (and when I'm referring to "public morality" I'll always include the adjective 'public') is decided by one's society, in whatever way such decisions are made and then enforced (from the coercion of customs to the penalties of law).

Stated differently, (personal) morality is what you decide is "right"; public morality is what your society decides is "right" (*via* its customs and laws). Consequently, because different individuals can have different opinions about what's moral (i.e., they adopt different personal moral codes), individuals (and groups) can disagree about the "morality" of different customs and laws. For example, some people consider it "horribly immoral" that laws permit women to have abortions, while others consider it "horribly immoral" to force women to give birth to children they don't want. In such cases, substantial social strife can (and does) result and questions about "social justice" can (and do) arise.

With this distinction between personal and public morality, Dear, I trust you see my meaning when I say that I consider some of our laws to be immoral. For example, I consider it to be immoral (maybe a –5 on a "morality scale" running from –10 to +10) that there's a law stipulating that our currency is to carry the inscription "In God We Trust". As another example, regardless of the requirements of any law, I swear by the love for my grandchildren that I'll never put my hand on that horrible black book called the Bible and "swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me [giant Jabberwock in the sky]." Thus, Dear, there can be major differences between personal and public morality, i.e., between what an individual considers moral and what society defines to be moral, customary, or legal.

Which then brings me to the need to distinguish between personal *vs*. public moral <u>codes</u>. Even if you lived in the best possible society, Dear, distinctions would probably be necessary between what you consider to be moral *versus* what the majority of the people in the society consider to be

moral (which is what I mean by "public morality"). Thus, even for a society in which all ideas about all gods were just a source of laughter (!), in which all corruptions were eliminated, in which all people were producers, and so on, still there could be significant differences between what you *versus* what the majority of the people consider to be the morality of various acts. For example, you might think that marriage was a relic of the past, whereas the majority of the people might disagree.

But in societies such as ours, polluted with ideas about various giant Jabberwocks in the sky, corrupted by innumerable factions, burdened with a huge number of free-loaders, mangled by an enormous number and variety of power mongers, etc., then there's a very high probability that your personal morality not only conflicts but clashes with many aspects of public morality. In fact, in our society, it's essentially certain that anyone's moral code will clash with the public's, because of what I've called (e.g., in **M2**):

THE GOD-AWFUL MESS OF MUDDLED MORALITIES.

Now, Dear, I admit that the statement that our society (similar to most societies) has a "god-awful mess of muddled moralities" can have several meanings. I mean both that the moral principles of our society are a muddled mess and that most of the source of the mess can be traced to our society's clerics, in particular, to their silly ideas about existence of their gods (and therefore my use of the adjective "god-awful"). In this chapter, I want to emphasize just "the mess" and outline its "god-awful" source; then, in the "excursions" **Qx** and **Yx**, I'll try to show you that, in fact, much (if not most) of the cause of the moral mess in our society (and in most societies) is a mountainous and monstrous "God Lie" perpetrated by various parasitic priesthoods and perpetuated by power-mongering politicians.

Yet, again I should acknowledge that the entire god-awful mess of muddled moralities and resulting social injustices haven't been caused just by belief in various gods. Other sources have been the moral principles of painfully wrong philosophers (such as Plato, "Saint" Augustine, "Saint" Thomas, and Marx) and those of powerful politicians and dictators (in a chain of infamy that stretches at least from Moses and Constantine to Hitler and Mao).

For example, data show that even when religion has been effectively removed from societies (such as in the former Soviet Union and still in China), immoral principles such as the fundamental "moral tenet" of Marx's

communism ("from each according to ability; to each according to need") can cause (and are still causing) enormous harm. Similarly, the fundamental moral tenet of Moses and Hitler (that they were leaders of a "superior race of humans") resulted in atrocities so horrible that one shudders to think that those who were led (i.e., those who chose to follow and obey, rather than to think and evaluate) were humans.

In our society, much corruption has come from excess economic and political power, consistent with the principle: power usually corrupts. Yet, again I would have you reflect on Socrates' assessment *"There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance"* and will suggest that our society (and the world) would benefit from purging the ignorance (and the resulting evil) of both religion and excess power (from wealth – in both politics and religion). But I'm jumping ahead too far and too fast; instead, let me back-up and begin to try to justify my claim of a "god-awful mess of muddled moralities", caused by ignorant ideas about gods and resulting in an absolutely astounding and horrible amount of evil.

Toward my attempt to "justify my claim", I'll begin trying to explain what I mean by a "god-awful mess of muddled moralities" by showing you what I don't mean! Most importantly, I don't mean to suggest that morality must be muddled. If you will use your brain as best you can, if you'll evaluate all your values and then (as best you can) pursue the values you deem best, and if you'll do your best to learn from the mistakes that (undoubtedly) you'll make, then you'll be a "model of morality", a "paragon of virtue"! That's my grandchild! Also, Dear, with the phrase "god-awful mess of muddled moralities", I'm not harping on the old theme of "moral decay" – a theme that brings back memories, from more than 50 years ago.

I don't recall the details; I guess I was 13 or 14 at the time. What I remember, most, is my pride in what my nearest-age brother did. He would have been about your age. Apparently what happened was: someone complained in our local newspaper about the "moral decay" of the then-current teenagers, i.e., us! I don't know why my brother reacted (maybe it was part of an "essay contest" at school, or maybe my brother initiated his production on his own), but the result was that he wrote a letter-to-the-editor, which appeared in the paper's next issue. I don't remember details about his letter, but do recall that he quoted some ancient source to demonstrate that complaints of "moral decay" were very old. Thus, what I

recall clearly is my pleasure that my brother was able to see through the complaints about "moral corruption" so clearly.

As I mentioned, I don't recall what ancient source my brother quoted, but it could easily have been from Hesiod's *Works and Days,* which is one of the world's oldest book (translations of which are at www.classics.mit.edu), written ~700 BCE, ~300 years before the Bible's Old Testament was put in its current form. Hesiod (who seems to have been just a Greek farmer) wrote the following, describing his assessment of the consequence of the "moral decay" in his own day.

> The father will not agree with his children, nor the children with their father, nor guest with his host, nor comrade with comrade; nor will brother be dear to brother as aforetime. Men will dishonor their parents as they grow quickly old, and will carp at them, chiding them with bitter words, hard-hearted they, not knowing the fear of the gods. They will not repay their aged parents the cost of their nurture, for might shall be their right; and one man will sack another's city. There will be no favor for the man who keeps his oath or for the just or for the good; but rather men will praise the evil-doer and his violent dealing. Strength will be right and reverence will cease to be; and the wicked will hurt the worthy man, speaking false words against him, and will swear an oath upon them. [The goddess] Envy, foul-mouthed, delighting in evil, with scowling face, will go along with wretched men, one and all…

Similarly, Dear, if you hear complaints about the "moral decay" of your generation of teenagers, maybe you want to smile (at least to yourself!), say that you understand what the complainer means, and then mention that your great uncle already responded to that criticism, more than 50 years ago. On the other hand, if you're annoyed by such an accusation, you may want to (innocently!) ask the complainer how it could be that any morals are left, when they have allegedly been decaying at least since Hesiod's days (~2,700 years ago) – and probably for at least 10,000 years!

I expect that you'll hear such complaints about "moral decay", because I've heard them almost continuously, during my subsequent 50 years! An example is the recent complaints from Senator Lieberman, which I've already quoted. But again: in his 1997 "Liss Lecture" at the University of Notre Dame (referenced in an earlier chapter), Lieberman complained about not only "moral decay" but also "the moral breakdown of our society", "America's deepening moral crises", and "our moral health at risk". Although I agree with Lieberman that "our ability to acknowledge a common moral code has been fading away…", I strongly disagree with his assessment:

> We have succeeded in too many respects in driving religion from our public life,
> banishing it from our public policy deliberations, and creating a "discomfort zone"
> for even discussing our faith in public settings. In doing so, we have deprived
> ourselves of the best source of better behavior that the human race has – faith in God,
> and the sense of personal accountability and responsibility that goes with it.

In my opinion, there couldn't be "too many" ways to drive "religion from our public [or private] life", because "faith in God" is not the "best" but the worst source of morality – a concept that I've been trying to explain.

But setting that aside for now, let me mention that the common complaint of "moral decay" actually reveals a misunderstanding. To see what I mean, Dear, please think about the following claim: fashions fluctuate, customs change, but a sound morality is immovable.

Thus, Dear, to "old fogeys" who complain about "moral decay" [saying that you shouldn't wear your hair so long or so short, or that your clothes shouldn't be "so form-fitting" or "so baggy", or that your belly button (or whatever) shouldn't be displayed in public, or similar complaints], maybe you want to respond (if you're so inclined – but don't forget "you don't have to answer the phone"!): "Fashions fluctuate!" Similarly, to "old fogeys" who complain about a "moral crises" [criticizing you for associating with and enjoying the company of people of other races, for having (protected!) sex before you're married, for having homosexual friends, or similar complaints], then maybe you want to respond: "Customs change!" And to "old fogeys" who complain about a "moral vacuum", if you choose to respond, perhaps say:

> That's dumb! My morality isn't decaying. There is no moral crisis. I'm still using
> my brain as best I can! Are you? Maybe the vacuum is in your head!

That is, Dear, what Senator Lieberman doesn't see (and what literally billions of others don't see) is the immorality of failing to use their brains as best they can – and, therefore, the immorality of their belief in various gods.

Nonetheless, Dear, I hope you won't be too "flippant" with a phrase such as "fashions fluctuate, customs change, but a sound morality is immovable". When I get to some comments about customs (later in this chapter), I'll try to explain what I mean. Here, let me just urge you to always be moral (i.e., always use your brain as best you can); in particular, realize that many

fashions and customs contain substantial wisdom. For example, most people don't want others to "expose much nakedness" or to wear clothes that are "too form-fitting" because such "fashions" can arouse a viewer's sexual instincts – and most people have trouble enough constraining their sexual instincts without continuous stimulation from strangers!

But, returning to my main point, I admit to the possibility that, with the indoctrination that you've received ever since you were a baby, you may disagree with my assessment that, in our society, there's a "god-awful mess of muddled moralities". Similarly, I wouldn't be surprised if you'd disagree with anyone who suggested that your morals were "decaying" or that you were living in a "moral vacuum". If your indoctrination has been effective, if your religion has "stuck", then (unfortunately) you might respond to such criticism with a comment similar to:

> My morality is the Judeo-Christian-Mormon creed as proscribed in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Mormon's "Doctrines and Covenants"; I obey the Ten Commandments; I practice the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have then do unto you"; and I agree with Jesus: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Well, Dear, I'm sure that all "moral Mormons" would be pleased if your response was something similar to the above, but I'm sorry to report that there's at least one old fogey who would respond: "It's so sad that my grandchild has been brainwashed with such immorality."

My sadness arises from your being indoctrinated with the crazy idea of "moral absolutes", illustrations of which I've shown you in earlier chapters. For example, in the **M**-chapters, I already went through some of the clerics' "moral absolutes", e.g., their "hallowed" Ten Commandments. And I already admitted that at least the last five of these "commandments" are fairly good "rules of thumb" – for people who don't have any fingers! In addition, I already showed you my ideas of some "moral absolutes", contained within such (dumb!) statements as the following.

• The scriptures clearly and consistently condemn all sex relations outside of legal marriage as morally wrong. Why is this so? It is so because God said so. ["Elder" James E. Faust, *Ensign*, May 1987]

- Sadly, we have too often dislodged our morality from its religious foundations, and come to treat the Judeo-Christian ethic as just the work of another group of dinosaurs. [Senator Lieberman's "Liss Lecture"]

- Without religion, there can be no morality, there can be no law. [The Rt. Hon. Lord Denning, in *The Influence of Religion on Law,* 1999]

- The highest moral and ethical values are absolute. Anyone who thinks it sufficient to have merely relative standards… won't see a connection between God and morality… The conclusion stands: without God, anything is permitted. [Professor John M. Frame, *Free Inquiry,* Spring 1996]

What absolute garbage! Dear, I absolutely guarantee you (with, as I showed you in Chapter Ii entitled *Indoctrination in Ignorance*, the probability that I'm wrong being somewhere down near 1 chance in $10^{10,000}$) that no giant Jabberwock in the sky (aka "God") ever "condemn[ed] all sex relations outside legal marriage as morally wrong" (as claimed by Elder Faust) or dictated any "moral and ethical values" that are "absolute" (as claimed by Professor Frame). I similarly guarantee you that morality and law can be vastly improved without religion (claims of the Rt. Hon. Lord Denning notwithstanding), and those (such as Senator Lieberman) who don't comprehend that morality wasn't "dislodged" from religion but is held hostage by clerical con artists are just "another group of dinosaurs."

In the **M**-chapters, I tried to show you the idiocy of such claims (about "moral absolutes" having been dictated by some giant Jabberwock in the sky). For example, I went through the Bible's Ten Commandments, one by one, to show that they're ridiculous, requiring modification such as: Thou shall honor thy father and mother, except when… thou shalt not kill, except when… thou shalt not commit adultery, except when… thou shalt not steal, except when… thou shalt not bear false witness, except when… thou shalt not covet, except when… and thou shall love the Lord thy God, except when he provides details about how to sell your daughter into slavery, how to beat your slaves to death, how to murder those who think differently, how to rape women captured in wars, etc., which only a monster would adopt as "moral absolutes"!

People who make such claims (of being in possession of "moral absolutes" dictated by some god) are claiming to know "the truth", with certainty. Meanwhile, Dear, as far as humans have been able to determine, we don't know anything in reality with certainty – we don't know with certainty even

if that statement is true! As I'll show you in the two "T-chapters" (dealing with "Truth"), 'truth' can be ascertained only for what are called "closed systems", such as games (e.g., in baseball, it's "true" that "three strikes and you're out"), pure mathematics (in which, e.g., $1 + 1 = 2$), and other closed systems, described completely by some arbitrary "rule book", such as all religions, which are defined by their "holy books" – of arbitrary rules!

Reality, however, is an entirely different "ball game"! For reality, we've found (for example) that momentum and mass-energy seem to be always conserved in isolated systems, but we can't "prove" that these "conservation principles" are "true". Instead and at most, "all" we've been able to do (and essentially certainly, all we'll ever be able to do) is perform tests to determine if such principles are wrong. That is, Dear, in general the best that we seem to be able to do is identify various principles that are "falsifiable" but have not yet been falsified (which is known as "Popper's Principle", after the philosopher Karl Popper, whom I'll be referencing later). Yet, in contrast, what the clerics of the world advocate is a bunch of "moral absolutes" that they claim are "true" – a claim that, even by its nature, is either false or an acknowledgement that they're dealing with a "closed system", which is divorced from reality and entirely arbitrary!

Let me try to explain it differently. As I started to show you in **Ib1**, we gain knowledge by observing, collecting data, summarizing the data with succinct hypothesis that yield predictions, testing the predictions by performing new experiments, collecting data, and so on, without end. That's the scientific method. If the predictions of our resulting hypothesis are validated, again and again, never once failing, then most people "give up" performing additional tests and the "hypothesis" is reclassified as a "principle". But, Dear, such principles aren't "true" – they're not "absolutes" – it's just that nobody has (yet!) been able to demonstrate they're false!

So, Dear, if you want a "moral absolute" that's "true", then go to church next Sunday and listen to some dimwit cleric preach such nonsense as "The scriptures clearly and consistently condemn all sex relations outside of legal marriage as morally wrong. Why is this so? It is so because God said so." On the other hand, Dear, if you want a "moral principle" that's falsifiable but that I, for one, haven't yet been able to falsify, then how about this: "Always use your brain as best you can!"

Consider an example of how this "moral principle" (to "always use your brain as best you can") can be used. Thus, Dear, if you plan to have "sex relations outside of legal marriage", then don't worry about any "moral absolute" claimed by any cleric; yet, do be moral: do use your brain as best you can, do take care to conform to principles that are supported by substantial data, that is, do take care to protect and even to promote everyone's emotional health, your and your partner's physical health, against unwanted pregnancy, and so on. And thereby, Dear, I can now offer a response to the first question posed:

What morality is "right"?

Dear, I'm certain that the best moral principle for you, the one that's "right" for you, is to always use your brain as best you can. Yet, some people disagree with that recommendation – and I admit that problems persist, because some people's brains apparently don't work very well. Thus,

- For some people who use their brains as best they can, their moral behavior can be judged by others to be unsatisfactory, leading to recommendation that such people be incarcerated (in prisons or in institutions for the mentally incompetent). But I'm sure you'll never need to be concerned about such possibilities happening to you.

- Your other grandfather apparently disagrees that the best moral principle is for everyone to use their brains as best they can – although: what else can they do?! I haven't talked to him about it, but your father tells me that his father-in-law thinks that the "riff-raff of humanity" needs "moral guidance" with the "carrot and stick approach" (i.e., promises of Heaven and threats of Hell) used in most religions of our culture. In contrast, data (e.g., from all the religious people in jail, from all the nonreligious people I've met, and even from all the "common people" whom I've met – whom others might call "riff-raff" but I've almost always been impressed by their good "common sense") lead me to disagree: I think that the vast majority of people are sufficiently intelligent that, with even just a little education (rather than being brainwashed in the idiocy preached by clerics), they'll easily discern how to behave at least as well as dolphins!

- But data are obviously available to support the hypothesis that some people reject a morality as enlightened as the dolphins' and choose, instead, to be leeches – like clerics. Perhaps such people are too dumb to realize the harm that they cause humanity, but I admit to the suspicion that clerical leaders, in particular, fully comprehend their evil, but they're hooked on the "perks" they collect (money, power, prestige, a plentiful supply of women and children to molest…) from running the world's most enduring con game. For them, incarceration seems appropriate.

But enough of that for now. Next, consider the second question posed:

Which customs are "correct"?

There are, of course, many different customs and laws in different societies, and correspondingly, vast differences in what's considered moral. For example, currently in Islamic societies it's considered moral, it's an adopted custom, and it's quite legal for a man to have many wives. In our society, in contrast, the majority holds the opinion that such behavior is immoral, that such a custom is "bad", and therefore it's illegal – although near here, in Utah and Arizona, there are still many "fundamentalist Mormons" who consider polygamy moral (even though it's illegal) and therefore practice what for them is both "moral" and "customary".

As another example, within our society many people (e.g., most Mormons, Catholics, and other "fundamentalist Christians" or "fundies") consider it immoral for women to have abortions (and therefore seek to make abortions illegal), while other people (e.g., most Humanists) hold the opinion that such practice is moral and therefore should be legal (as it is, subject to certain restrictions). In the case of abortion, therefore, there's neither sufficient agreement nor experience to identify a "custom". In any event and without yet addressing questions about which group's (or which society's) customs are "correct", which laws are "good" and should be "upheld", and how social justice can best be "served" (e.g., by punishing the "evil doers"), let me just draw the obvious conclusion that, when it comes to morals, customs, laws, and social justice, data show that people hold many different opinions.

That the same has been true for a very long time is illustrated with some examples, memorable for me, described by the Greek historian Herodotus (c. 485–425 BCE), who is commonly called "the world's first historian". In a later chapter, in "the excursion" **Yx**, I'll be encouraging you to read his *History* (which you can find on the internet at www.classics.mit.edu). The following are two identified paragraphs from that source, to which I've added some notes in "square brackets" and the italics.

> [3.31] This, it is said, was the first outrage which Cambyses [I think that this is Cambyses II or Kambiz II, the ruler of Persia from 530-522 BCE and son of Cyrus the Great, who (as I'll show you later) is an important figure in the Old Testament] committed [namely, that Cambyses had his brother, Smerdis, killed]. The second was the slaying of his sister, who had accompanied him into Egypt, *and lived with him as his wife,* though she was his full sister, the daughter both of his father and his mother. The way wherein he had made her his wife was the following.

It was *not the custom* of the Persians, before his time, to marry their sisters, but Cambyses, happening to fall in love with one of his [and therefore, Dear, notice that in Ancient Persia, "love" was a "justification" for marriage] and wishing to take her to wife, as he knew that it was an uncommon thing [i.e., violating Persian custom], called together the royal judges and put it to them, "whether there was any law which allowed a brother, if he wished, to marry his sister?" Now the royal judges are certain picked men among the Persians, who hold their office for life, or until they are found guilty of some misconduct [a very enlightened policy!]. By them justice is administered in Persia, and they are the interpreters of the old laws, all disputes being referred to their decision [i.e., their opinion]. When Cambyses, therefore, put his question to these judges, they gave him an answer which was at once true and safe [for them!]: "[We] did not find any law," they said, "allowing a brother to take his sister to wife, but [we] found a law that *the king of the Persians might do whatever he please."*... [That is, Dear, in Ancient Persia it was already established that "morality", i.e., what was "right", was whatever the king said was "right".]

[3.38] Thus it appears certain to me [Herodotus], by a great variety of proofs, that Cambyses was raving mad; *he would not else [or otherwise] have set himself to make a mock of holy rites and long-established usages.* For if one were to offer men to choose out of all the customs in the world such as seemed to them the best, they would examine the whole number, and end by preferring their own – so convinced are they that their own usages far surpass those of all others. Unless, therefore, a man was mad, it is not likely that he would make sport of such matters.

That people have this feeling about their laws [or customs] may be seen by very many proofs, among others, by the following. Darius [I think that this is Darius I, "the Great", who ruled the Persian Empire from 522–486 BCE, i.e., the next emperor after Cambyses], after he had got the kingdom, called into his presence certain Greeks who were at hand, and asked: "What he should pay them to eat the bodies of their fathers when they died?" To which they answered that there was no sum that would tempt them to do such a thing. He then sent for certain Indians, of the race called Callatians, men who eat their fathers [after they had died, I presume!] and asked them, while the Greeks stood by, and knew by the help of an interpreter all that was said: What he should give them to burn the bodies of their fathers at their decease? The Indians exclaimed aloud, and bade him forbear such language. Such is men's wont herein; and Pindar was right, in my judgment, when he said, *"Law is the king o'er all."*

Incidentally, Dear, Bartlett's gives this statement by the Greek philosopher Pindar (c. 518–438 BCE) in the form: "Convention is the ruler of all." Combining the two translations or interpretations, maybe common usage would now render Pindar's statement as: *"Custom is king!"*

And let me admit, Dear, that upon rereading my "notes and quotes" from Herodotus's book, I'm again astounded by his many stories about different customs. For example, here is another that might interest you.

> [4.94] The belief of the Getae [a particular group of people whose modern identification I've been unable to determine] in respect of immortality is the following. They think that they do not really die [similar to some "modern" Christians, Muslims, and Mormons, living ~2500 years later!] but that when they depart this life they go to Zalmoxis [their god], who is called also Gebeleizis by some among them. [Which, Dear, with *geb* a recognized abbreviation for the Greek work *geboren* meaning 'born', *El* and *Ele* common words in the ancient Mid-East meaning god or goddess (e.g., IsraEL), and *Izis* a possible spelling (one of many!) of the name of the "Earth Mother" or "Mother Nature", whom the Egyptians called *Isis*, then "Gebeleizis" may mean "born of the goddess Mother Nature".] To this god every five years they send a messenger, who is chosen by lot out of the whole nation, and charged to bear him their several requests. Their mode of sending him [the messenger] is this. A number of them stand in order, each holding in his hand three darts [or maybe daggers or spears]; others take the man who is to be sent to Zalmoxis [or Gebeleizis], and swinging him by his hands and feet, toss him into the air so that he falls upon the points of the weapons. If he is pierced and dies, they think that the god is propitious to them [i.e., favorably inclined toward them]; but if not, they lay the fault on the messenger, who (they say) is a wicked man [I wonder if they ever blamed their god!] – and so they choose another ["messenger"] to send away [i.e., to his "immortality"]. The messages are given while the man is still alive. [I doubt that Herodotus needed to add that!] This same people, when it lightens and thunders, aim their arrows at the sky, uttering threats against the god; and they do not believe that there is any god but their own [which I guess means they weren't afraid of any thunder god (such as the Greek's Zeus)].

After considering these customs, Dear, and considering that there are thousands if not tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of other customs, please pause to ponder some of the questions I listed earlier: *What morality is "right"? Which customs are "correct"? What laws are "good" and therefore should be "upheld"?* And if you are perplexed by the "correct" answer to such questions, Dear, then first, please recall that the "value" of anything can be measured only with respect to some objective, and then, please return to a concept that I hope will become "second nature" to you, i.e., ask yourself: "What's the objective?"

For example, consider the custom prohibiting a man from marrying his sister, which the Persian emperor Cambyses violated. If you'll search the topic on the internet, Dear, you'll find that essentially every culture has a similar custom against "incest" (literally meaning "not chaste" or maybe

"not clean", but "customarily" meaning having sex with a close relative). I expect that this "world-wide custom" grew, in part, from experience: whereas a prime goal is to have healthy offspring (if for no other reason than the hope that children will help the family survive) and whereas it was probably found that incest could lead to birth defects, therefore, possibly the custom was established that incestuous marriages were "bad" (i.e., detrimental to the objective of having healthy children).

Even animals avoid incest – which then must mean that evolution (i.e., natural selection) has "programmed" the information into all animals (including humans) not to engage in incest (because resulting offspring have less chance to survive and reproduce). But not knowing anything about defective genes, primitive people apparently decided that their gods disapproved of incest, and therefore, the gods "cursed" the offspring with "birth defects". On the other hand, maybe another origin of this custom (prohibiting brother-sister marriages) is that fathers wanted to use marriages of their daughters to build relationships with other tribes.

In either case, though, in modern societies (with a variety of birth-control measures readily available and with other methods for "cementing relationships" among families besides bribery with brides) custom and associated laws against incest could easily be abandoned – at least theoretically and toward the objective of avoiding "congenital" birth defects. But long-held customs typically have a lot of inertia (i.e., a propensity to continue), even after their purpose expires, and for individuals, severe psychological and social problems can result from "violating the law" and "flaunting custom". It may even be that the "custom" against incest is "hardwired" in our brains (or in our DNA). And thus Herodotus concluded that Cambyses was "raving mad; he would not [otherwise] have set himself to make a mock of holy rites and long-established usages."

And therefore, Dear, if one returns to the suggestion from Webster's dictionary (a suggestion that I mentioned in an earlier chapter) that "right" is whatever the King says is "right", then maybe you see the wisdom in Pindar's remark: "Custom is King!" According to Herodotus, even the emperor (or "king") Cambyses should be subservient to "King Custom"!

Further, though, notice the details of Herodotus's statement that Cambyses "was raving mad; he would not [otherwise] have set himself to make a mock of *holy rites and long-established usages."* Thus, even 2500 years ago,

"long-established usages" (i.e., customs) were linked to "holy rites", i.e., each society's clerics had claimed the role of "guardians of the customs". Thereby, in essentially all societies of the past, the "correctness" of any custom has been whatever the society's clerics claimed was "correct" – even when the customs damaged individuals and/or the entire society.

For example, earlier Mormon clerics claimed that polygamy was "correct" – which led to many incestuous marriages, a "custom" (though now almost totally abandoned) whose consequences are still causing many congenital birth defects in Utah (a topic that you can research on the internet). Obviously, therefore, clerics "guard" some customs that aren't "correct" – and therefore, Dear, guess what: you'll need to decide what customs are "correct" by using your own brain as best you can, i.e., by being moral.

But, Dear, be careful. Be aware that, on the one hand, customs generally contain substantial wisdom, collected from centuries (or even eons!) of experiences; therefore, generally, customs shouldn't be abandoned without due consideration. Although custom is no longer king, generally there are good reasons for many customs. For example, there are good reasons for washing your hands before eating, being kind to others (with keenness!) and (an especially important custom) being polite to old people – not necessarily because I have a personal stake in this custom, Dear, but some day, with a little luck, you'll be old, too!

As for other customs (and laws), Dear, I'll leave it to you to decide when they're "correct" and when they're just more relics from the past. I'll even give you a hint about how to "figure it out": use your head, kid – relying not just on reason but also on the best available data. For many customs, although their original purpose has almost (or entirely) vanished, they cause little difficulty – and they do promote some "civility".

For example, upon first meeting someone, it doesn't hurt to shake hands (unless there's germ transfer!) – although, usually there's no longer any need to offer your open hand to show that you aren't concealing a weapon! Men no longer seem obliged to remove their hats indoors, but when speaking with someone indoors, it's "customary" to remove sunglasses, so eye contact is easier. Men no longer feel obliged to wear phallic symbols around their necks (i.e., ties) and women no longer feel the need to display easy availability of their reproductive organs (i.e., wear dresses), but there's little harm (and now, little symbolism) for people to "dress up" in such attire.

On the other hand, Dear, and especially in a "multi-ethnic" culture such as ours (i.e., a mix of people from places with many different customs), care is needed about the customs to observe. A dramatic illustration recently occurred in Los Angeles. In a particular district, many "convenience store" owners and workers were (and are) from Korea, where it's customary not to put money in another person's hand (a custom that may have developed in an attempt to minimize germ transfer – but I don't know its original purpose). But this custom practiced by Korean-Americans apparently infuriated a great number of African-Americans, who (incorrectly) inferred that the Koreans "didn't want to get their hands dirty" (by touching a black person). In the riots that followed (not just because of this clash of customs), many if not most of the Korean shops were looted and torched.

Therefore, Dear, use your head! There's wisdom in the line (possibly from "Native Americans"): "Walk a mile in another's moccasins" (i.e., in this case, try to envision the effect that your practice of any custom has on other people) – although I must admit that I rather like another interpretation of the advice to "walk a mile in another' moccasins": "Then, by the time you see your error, you'll be a mile away – and he'll be barefoot"! But kidding aside, Dear, be careful about the customs you choose to observe. I'd even put it this way: the only custom that I hope you'll adopt without question is the "custom" to use your brain as best you can!

In particular, Dear, before adopting any custom "guarded" by any clergy, please give these customs "due deliberation". Special caution is needed because, as I'll be showing you, clerics are notorious for promoting the *status quo* (i.e., "the state that is" – which of course includes their continuing their parasitic existence, collecting money from the producers of the world).

Examples of resulting horrible consequences of horrible customs promoted by dumb clerics are available from essentially every sect of every religion. In **Yx**, I'll show you a few particularly atrocious examples promoted by ancient Jewish priests and by the Catholic Church during its rule of Europe for more than 1,000 years (which led to Europe's stagnation in "the Dark Ages" and is similar to what is now occurring in the "Islamic world", courtesy their ignorant clerics). But of more immediate concern to me (because of your experiences) are some of the horrible customs "guarded" (and promoted) by Mormon clerics.

To alert you to be "on guard" against customs promoted by Mormon clerics, Dear, be aware of monstrous past errors made by their "infallible prophets" (or better, "profits"). Thus, Joseph Smith, Jr. and fellow conspirators promoted the horrible concept that "black people" carried "the mark of Cain" as "God's judgment". This "custom" – this total absurdity – led to a host of horrible racist practices, violating basic human rights of "black people" and promoting "the purity" of the "white race". Further, Dear, notice that this custom was only recently abandoned by Mormon clerics, an abandonment that was forced on them by the civil rights movement of the 1960s. That is, approximately 130 years after earlier "divine guidance" to the "profits" of the Mormon Church, they received new "divine guidance" that the old "divine guidance" was misguided. Riiiiiight.

Another example of idiocy promoted by Joseph Smith, Jr. arose from his desire to have sex with as many women as possible, leading to his promoting polygamy (which in turn led to his being killed in a gunfight).[1] In spite of the alleged "divine guidance" that promoted this "custom" of sleeping with other men's wives and young daughters (Smith "married" one of his wives when she was only 14), this perversion was abandoned about 50 years after it began – allegedly from new "divine guidance" to a new set of "profits", but in reality because, otherwise, statehood for Utah (which these "profits" desired) wouldn't have been granted.

---

[1] The following is from the web page at http://www.exmormon.org/ entitled "Recovery from Mormonism" written and maintained by ex-Mormons Dennis and Rauni Higley.

> The controversy over polygamy was the underlying reason for the death of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. William Law's wife had confessed that she had an affair with Joseph [who, at the time, was of course married to Emma Smith]. William Law left the Church and started a publication called *Nauvoo Expositor*. One issue was published and the second one was going to print when Joseph found out that William Law was going to print his wife's confession in that issue. Joseph had the press destroyed and the building burned. That caused his arrest and, consequently, his death.
>
> But he did not die as a martyr, as is claimed by the Church. John Taylor, third president of the church, who was in the prison with Joseph and Hyrum at the time, tells the following in the *Gospel Kingdom,* page 360: "Joseph opened the door slightly, and snapped the pistol six successive times… afterwards [I] understood that two or three were wounded by these discharges, two of whom, I am informed, died."
>
> The same account is also in the *History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. XLI and pages 617-618. It was too bad that Joseph Smith was thus killed, but he did not die like a martyr who went "as a lamb to the slaughter" as is claimed by the LDS Church. HE DIED IN A GUNFIGHT, and killed two people before he was shot. Joseph acted as a Mason at the time of his death. John Taylor tells also that Joseph went to the window and made a Masonic distress sign after his gun was empty, hoping that Masons, if there were any among this mob, would rescue him, according to the Masonic oath "to defend one another, right or wrong."

More generally, Dear, a concept that you'd understand better if you'd work more on your education by watching more episodes of "Star Trek"(!): all clerics are the "Klingons" (or "cling-ons") of any culture, always resistant to change. For example, as I type this, Mormon clerics are fighting against recognition of homosexual marriages in California and Nevada (claiming such marriages are "abominations before the Lord"), just as Catholic and Mormon clerics are fighting against abortions (more "abominations before the Lord"), and Islamic clerics are fighting against essentially all "Western culture" (probably because they judge Western culture as "abominations before Allah").

Meanwhile, most Humanists would urge all of them to "mind your own god-damn business" – if we thought such urging would do any good. But it won't, because the prime goal of all clerics is (unsurprisingly) to continue their (parasitic) existence, maintaining the *status quo*, which of course has always included upholding the custom of belief in the clerics' god and the associated filling of the clerics' collection plates. Meanwhile, Dear, for you, please don't wait for racial riots, gunfights, political motivations, or similar, and don't wait for a new "profit" to receive "divine guidance" about any custom promoted by any clergy. Instead, please use your brain as best you can to decide what customs you'll follow.

And by the way, Dear, maybe you'd notice that the question to me from a certain four year old, "How come you don't believe in God?", could be rephrased as: "How come you don't follow the custom of the majority of people in our culture to believe in God?" And my answer to someone more experienced could be not only "Because belief in god (any god) is bad science and even worse policy" but also "Because, instead, I've adopted the custom of using my brain as best I can!"

If you will use your brain as best you can, Dear, I hope you'll come to appreciate what the Greek philosopher Heraclitus saw ~2500 years ago:

   Nothing endures but change. All is flux; nothing stays still.

In particular, customs change. There is a highly desirable, continuous "churning of the social pot" – churning that's always resisted by all clerics, whose prime goal is to maintain the *status quo*.

Let me suggest an analogy to driving my truck – at which you became quite
competent by the time you were ten! Claiming to be the custodians of their
culture's customs, morals, and "holy rites", ignorant clerics in all societies
attempt to steer their societies – while looking in the rear-view mirror! This
works fairly well when backing up (as did Europe during the Dark Ages,
when the clerics were in control, and is currently occurring in Islamic
societies, with their clerics in control). But, Dear, in case I forgot to tell you
when I was teaching you how to drive my truck, it's quite dangerous to try
to drive forward while looking only in the rear-view mirror! While trying to
drive forward in a changing world, it's imperative to look ahead and to
change direction in response to changing circumstance. It's true that, on
occasion, one should glance in the rear-view mirror (e.g., to see if someone
is gaining on you and plans to pass), but otherwise, you should keep your
eyes on the road ahead and act accordingly, using your brain as best you can.

But Heraclitus's concept that "nothing endures but change" leads to the
question: What change is for "the better"? Thus, again the question is:
Which customs are "correct"? Using your brain as best you can, I hope that
you'll first address the question: "What's the objective?" When you
address this question, however, you then stumble onto the root question: if
you accept that the prime objective of all humans is their trio of survival
goals (of themselves, their extended families, and their values), then the root
question is: By upholding their culture's customs, then besides promoting
their dual survival goals (of themselves and their extended families), people
are attempting to promote what "values"?

For example, if people adopt as one of their principle values the promotion
of their particular religious perversion (which, of course, the clerics of their
religion want them to adopt!), then (surprise, surprise) the people will adopt
whatever "customs" their clerics dictate. Thus, if their clerics promote
polygamy or racism or "death to the infidels", then these (and whatever
other craziness their clerics teach) will be adopted as "correct" customs by
their "followers". Such is one of the dangers (and horrors) of all religions,
the root cause of which is people choosing to follow rather than to find their
own way.

In contrast, Dear, if you could agree with the hypothesis (supported by a
large body of data and with a large number of validated predictions) that the
only reasonable basis (based on data) for human values is our dual survival
goals (of ourselves and our extended families), then the "correctness" of any

custom is seen to be a measure (running, say, from –10 to +10) of how much a particular custom promotes one's dual survival goals. Thus, the "value" of the custom of washing one's hands is quite high (maybe a +8), because this custom promotes one's own survival; the "value" of shaking hands is marginal (say a +3, because it suggests friendliness or at least recognition of another person's existence); and the custom of, for example, requiring black people to ride at the back of a bus is a –9, because it fails to recognize that other humans have an equal right to claim their own existence – a failure that can come back to bite anyone who is dumb enough not to recognize such a basic human right. Which then leads me to the next question listed earlier in this chapter:

What laws are "good" and therefore should be "upheld"?

For example, Dear, surely you agree that all the "racist laws" in this country were "bad". Which then leads to the additional question: *"What's the personal morality of accepting public morality, conforming to customs, and obeying laws?"* But before suggesting what actions you might want to take when your personal moral code conflicts with your society's moral code and its laws, Dear, let me try to distinguish between a society's "moral code" *versus* its "legal code".

For any society to endure, the majority of its members must accept some general principles as the society's moral code. Examples include: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind", or "Love thy neighbor as thyself", or "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet", or "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need", or "One nation, under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all", and so on, maybe someday to include, "Everyone: please use your brain as best you can!" From such "fundamental principles" (in most cases, in an astoundingly complex manner), societies develop huge "legal codes".

In the "excursion" **Yx**, I'll sketch a little of the historical development of laws (and how they were so horribly perverted by clerics), but for now, all I want to do is distinguish between society's moral code and legal code.

Again, society's moral code is a few (usually simple) principles with which the majority of the members of the society agree. Its legal code, in contrast, is the huge number of laws that any society develops to prescribe and

proscribe how members of the society are required to interact. For most modern societies, the resulting legal codes can overwhelm most people (and in our society can overwhelm even lawyers, who now must specialize in just small parts of it). As a result, it's desirable (if possible) to simplify these law codes down to a few basic principles, i.e., to the society's moral code, on which society's entire legal structure should have been constructed.

Please, Dear, pause to think about this for a moment. A society's moral code is really quite important, simultaneously being less and yet more than its entire legal code: "less" because its just a brief statement (e.g., "use your brain as best you can" or "love thy neighbor as thyself" or "equal justice before the law") rather than millions of pages of legal text, and yet "more" because it provides a standard to gauge "the morality" of all its laws. Stated differently, a society's legal code specifies "the letter of the law", whereas its moral code encapsulates "the spirit of the law".

Thereby, Dear, you can encounter multiple levels of problems: using your brain as best you can (i.e., being moral) you can be in disagreement with your society's moral code, its customs, or its laws. Further, you might conclude that a society's laws are in conflict with its own moral code! Thus, you can encounter multiple levels of complexity, and become quite perplexed trying to discern what to do, when you try to answer the next question on my list, i.e., ***What's the personal morality of accepting public morality, conforming to customs, and obeying laws?***

I hope you don't consider solving that question and associated problems to be irrelevant, Dear, because I'm certain that, just as people have needed to do for at least the past 5,000 years, you'll need to confront the problem of how to cope with laws you consider immoral. In fact, if your experiences will be anything similar to mine, you'll need to confront the two types of problems already mentioned:

1) When you judge that society's laws are inconsistent with its professed moral code (or codes), e.g., laws that violate "equality before the law", and

2) When you judge that society's laws are inconsistent with your own moral code.

As examples of the second type of problem, Dear: if a law requires you to join the armed forces to fight a war, will you agree with the morality of such a law? What if a law forbids you to have an abortion? What if a law forbids you to have children? What if… and so on.

As you can well imagine, there can be important consequences for an individual who concludes that a specific law is immoral and who decides to be moral rather than to obey the law. In particular, Dear, if you act in a way that you consider moral but society considers immoral or illegal, you can end up in jail – or worse. Therefore, Dear, please be careful and conscientious when you consider developing your own moral values.

Certainly you should choose your own moral values – for you should be your final judge. But as I've already suggested, developing and choosing your own moral values is a nontrivial undertaking. First, it can be very difficult to see through the morass of conflicting recommendations to identify what's right for you. And then, if your moral values suggests that specific features of your society's legal code are immoral or if your moral values differs from society's, then you can have great difficulty trying to maintain your values through the resulting strains and conflicts

Of course, you may not be alone. If a group of people disagrees with the moral and/or legal code adopted by the majority of society, then riots, insurrections and rebellions can result. Further, if a majority of the people in a society decides that some law is immoral, then a revolution can occur – giving the revolutionaries the opportunity to change the law(s).

As just a few examples, the political founders of this country (Paine, Washington, Adams, Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, and many others) decided that the prevailing legal code dealing with taxes was immoral, resulting in America's Revolutionary War of Independence and the writing of our Constitution, i.e., a rewriting of the laws. And although there were major economic causes of America's Civil War, a component was that Lincoln and many others in Northern States decided that the prevailing legal code permitting slavery was immoral, whereas many in Southern States decided otherwise, resulting in a temporary dissolution of the Nation and the 1865 adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment of our Constitution, i.e., a rewriting of the laws to prohibit slavery. More recently, Martin Luther King and others concluded that the prevailing legal code that permitted segregation based on race was immoral – and maybe the resulting rewrite of laws has not yet been fully realized.

Again, Dear, the fundamental difference between "personal morality" and "legality" is that each of us chooses what's "moral" but society decides (or

at least, those who have most power in the society decide) what's "legal". Unfortunately, for a society that's as polluted as ours is with supernatural silliness, the probability is high that any thinking person's moral code will not only conflict but clash with society's legal codes. That is, there can be an enormous difference in moral values derived from a modern individual's thoughts *versus* those derived from the primitive (even "barbaric") thoughts at the foundation of the dominant religions of our culture.

Further, even if a one is so foolish as to accept a moral code prescribed by a particular religion (rather than using one's brain as best one can), then in our society, still there's a high probability for anyone to be confronted by "an immoral law", because our society attempts to accommodate so many different opinions. Thus, some groups (e.g., the Mormons) can agree on some "moral principle" that the rest of society considers illegal (e.g., in the past, polygamy), while other groups (e.g., the Catholics) can agree that some activity that society decides is legal (e.g., abortion) is actually immoral. And of course, consequences of such "blurring" between morality and legality can be horrible, from the infamous massacre by "Mormon extremists" of a caravan of settlers, to the recent murders by "Catholic extremists" of medical doctors who practiced abortion. Therefore, Dear, please don't dismiss as unimportant the differences between personal and pubic morality (and, in turn, legality).

Meanwhile, Dear, I trust you realize that most customs and laws in most societies are quiet "reasonable" (or at least "understandable" – or at least "tolerable"!), such as customs of trying to help one another, driving only on a specified side of the road, paying one's taxes, etc., etc. (sometimes *ad nauseam* and sometimes, it seems, *ad infinitum*). Some customs, however (and in some cases, some laws) are quite silly, such as the custom of men walking on the roadside of a sidewalk (to protect women from being doused by people throwing waste water from overhanging windows!), the custom of people shaking hands when first meeting (to show that they have no weapons – while spreading germs!), and all laws (still "on the books" in many of our states) prohibiting "blasphemy" of the Lord Jesus Christ (laws which are silly, because it's impossible to "defame" what's predominantly a "story-book character").

Most significant, however, is that some laws (such as, in the past, those dealing with slavery, the private sexual activities of consenting adults, and even those concerned with abortion and using "illegal" drugs such as

alcohol) are finally seen to be "immoral" and, therefore, have been (or are being) changed or discarded. As a result, there's always continuous "tension" between those who desire to maintain the *status quo* and those who seek change.

If you decide that a law is immoral, Dear, of course you can choose to refuse to obey the law. Yet, please don't break any law without giving the matter serious consideration. In general, laws deserve respect and should be obeyed – for many reasons.

Perhaps the least of these reasons is that the penalties for breaking society's laws are usually nontrivial. More importantly, generally our laws contain substantial cultural wisdom, not to be dismissed as irrelevant without substantial thought. And still more important, Dear, is that you should show appropriate respect for our laws, because during the past many thousands of years, millions of ordinary people have struggled, and fought, and died so that we can reap the benefits of our laws.

Further, a huge benefit of our laws is that they provide "legal glue" that holds society together. Without such glue, any society can break into anarchy (i.e., a state without law, save for the law of the jungle). Now it's true that this "legal glue" can easily "leak from the cracks" and turn the entire social system into a horrible sticky mess (which is what seems to be occurring in our country today), but such a mess can still be preferable to anarchy.

Thus, Dear, in general, please honor humanity by showing appropriate respect for all laws – indeed, not only to obey the laws but also to defend them. But if, through evaluation of substantial data *via* careful thought, you conclude that a specific law is immoral, then please think through your next step even more carefully – before you decide what to do. That is, not only should you consider the morality of a particular law but also the morality of your possible reactions against what you've concluded is an immoral law. And because I think it's important, Dear, I want to take some time, here, to describe more fully what I mean.

How should you respond to what you consider to be an immoral law?

Again, Dear, in your deliberations about whether to obey a specific law, please think through two steps: 1) the morality of a specific law, and then, if

you decide that a specific law is immoral, 2) the morality of possible actions that you might take in response to your encounter with an immoral law. Below, to try to show you what I mean, I'll go through those two steps in some detail, using the idea of 'morality'' with which I hope that you agree: the moral value of any act is a measure (say on a scale of –10 to +10) of how the act influences your trio of survival goals.

Thus, suppose you decided that a particular law has a "moral value" of –3.5. That is, suppose you concluded that a particular law (banning abortions, or requiring you to register for the draft, or requiring you to paint your house pink, or whatever!) is somewhat damaging to your prime goals (damaging to your own survival, or the survival of your extended family, or to your sense of values). That would be your judgment about the law's morality.

Meanwhile, apparently, appropriate "law makers" decided that the law is "moral" (based on public opinion polls, or on how they thought they could improve their chances for re-election, or whatever the basis for their "morality"). And please notice again, Dear, that (arguments of all clerics and other "moralists" notwithstanding) it's for each individual to decide on "morality" – unless the individual chooses to abandon what makes us human, i.e., our ability to think.

The next step I recommend for you is to evaluate the moral value of each possible action you might take in reaction to your conclusion that a particular law has a moral value (for you) of, say, –3.5. And of course I'm not suggesting that this next step will be easy – but give it your best shot! Let me go through some steps of a hypothetical example.

- If you choose to ignore the immorality of the law and just obey it (e.g., pay some new tax), then the cost to you in dollars might be equivalent to 100 hours of wasted work, which you might decide had a moral value of –1.6. In addition, there'd be the damage to your sense of fairness (one of your values) and to your desire to help humanity (one of your values) – in this case to try to help eliminate immoral laws – in total resulting in the moral value of your just obeying the law of, say, –2.5.

- You could choose to ignore or break the law, i.e., choose to do what you consider to be moral. With suitably weighing the possibility that you would be arrested for not conforming to the law, then you should evaluate the damage to your trio of survival goals caused by your being arrested, paying a fine, or worse (and you should also evaluate the resulting influences on your family and career). Suppose you worked through all such (difficult!) details and decided that the moral value of your violating the law was –4.5.

- And as another possibility (and I don't want to go through all possible actions you might take!), you could work to change the law, which in turn could be done in a huge number of ways: write to your local newspaper, write and/or visit your representatives in government, picket, stimulate news coverage, hold meetings, instigate a petition, stimulate methods to get the law to be evaluated by a judge and/or jury, try to get elected to a position from where you could try to modify the law, and so on. Some of these possible acts would obviously require a lot of work, and each has repercussions. Thus, even if you decided just to write to your newspaper, you could become a target of some gossip or worse. From all such deliberations (which obviously could get amazingly complicated), you might conclude that the moral values (i.e., the influence on your trio of survival goals of trying to change the immoral law) varied from –1.0 (if you just wrote to your representative) to –8.4 (if you choose to change your life's plan and put an enormous amount of energy in trying to be elected to a position in the government from which you might be able to change the law).

Now, Dear, of course I don't expect that you'd go into this much detail and deduce all these numerical values for the morality of each scenario. But it could be done – albeit with difficulty – and I wanted to show you how your assessments of moral values could be made, at least in principle. In practice, the amazing computer that you carry around on your shoulders does the analysis for you and then spits out the answer (literally!): "Nah, it ain't worth it; I'll pay the damn tax, but I'm gonna e-mail that idiot congressman of mine and give him a piece of my mind." And of course it's great that we can make such moral judgments so relatively easily.

But, Dear, please be careful. As I tried to explain to you in an earlier chapter (in **N**, in the part dealing with "No to masks"), each of us has been indoctrinated since childhood with "moral values" that others have chosen (to promote their own trio of survival goals). Therefore, in your evaluation of moral values, you should take care that your evaluations are not inappropriately influenced by moral values derived from indoctrination. Stated differently, Dear, I urge you to use your left brain to analyze your right brain's synthesis of the morality of any action you propose to undertake: why is your chosen act the most beneficial to your goals?

Stated still differently, I hope you see that it can be a "moral mistake" for you to refuse to obey even what you consider to be an immoral law! That is, the question you need to address is: which act (obeying the immoral law or suffering the consequences of not obeying this law) is of greater benefit to your trio of survival goals? Thus, you might decide that obeying an immoral

law is the act of greater morality! And maybe you again see the act of highest moral value (a +10 on a scale of –10 to +10) is: always use your brain as best you can!

Therefore, Dear, the (very old) point that I'm trying to make is the familiar: please plan ahead. Life is a series of choices. Even if we choose to do nothing, that, too, is a choice. Our choices have consequences. With our amazing brains we can run different scenarios. Do it! Look ahead at possible consequences of your choices. Evaluate – and then do what you think is most reasonable, based on your objectives; i.e., decide what action best promotes your trio of survival goals. Again: decide what action has highest moral value, and then act "accordingly", i.e., act morally!

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, Dear, if you stay alert, I suspect you'll be amazed at the number of these "moral choices" that you'll need to make: on average, maybe 10 per day! It's such a huge number (thousands per year, maybe a hundred thousand during your lifetime!), because a "moral choice" is a decision about how best to promote your trio of survival goals.

Fortunately, most of these decisions are quite simple: to eat an apple rather than a candy, to study rather than "goof off", to try to help a friend, and so on. But some of these decisions, especially when they involve confronting some "establishment" (parents, school, church, a business, a branch of government) can be very difficult. Further, some of these decisions (and your subsequent actions) can have a huge influence on the rest of your life – or may result even in your death. Thus, Patrick Henry's moral choice: "Give me liberty or give me death."

Other famous people have made similar moral choices. Two examples (which I'll describe in some detail in the "excursion" **Yx**) are the choices made by Socrates and by Jesus (ben Pandera? – who possibly was both the Gnostics' Jesus and the individual whose life the Christian clerics used as the "kernel of truth" upon which they constructed their fables described in the New Testament and the Book of Mormon).

Below, I'll outline the moral choices made by both of them, and try to explain why I think the choices made by both Socrates and Jesus were morally wrong: in essence, both of them <u>chose</u> to commit suicide.

- The clerics of Ancient Greece colluded to charge Socrates as follows: "Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods in which the state believes, but brings in other new divinities; he also wrongs by corrupting the youth." In a trial that made a mockery of justice, he was convicted and sentenced to death (by drinking poison). If the record (as written by Plato and as I partially quoted in **Ix11**) can be trusted, then Socrates could have apparently escaped either the conviction or the sentence relatively easily, but instead, he chose to conform to and therefore to uphold Athenian law (and therefore to die). I would have advised him otherwise; I think that his was an unwise decision to conform to an immoral law and to the ruling of a judicial system that was a sham, rather than to stay alive and fight the system; the choice to challenge the *status quo* could have been of more benefit both to him and to humanity – although I admit that his "martyrdom" increased his reputation.

- Similarly, if the story written by ancient Jews can be trusted, then the clerics of ancient Israel charged Jesus (ben Pandera) with violating their law that required the worship of Yahweh; this Jesus (i.e., ben Pandera) taught that Yahweh was the "evil god" who controlled matter and not the "good god" who controlled light; he didn't know that light and matter were interchangeable *via* $E = mc^2$! As a Jew, Jesus undoubtedly knew that preaching such "sacrilege" was punishable by death (under Jewish law, as allegedly written by Moses), but Jesus made the moral choice to persist. My conclusion is that, similar to Socrates, Jesus made an unwise choice – not only because he had zero data to support his wild assertions but also because (as I showed you in the previous chapter) both the Gnostics' literature and the New Testament describe that he saw his ideas would cause enormous dissension in the fundamental social unit, i.e., the family. I would therefore have advised Jesus that he could help humanity more (and, almost incidentally, saved his own life) by discontinuing preaching his crazy ideas – although I again admit that his "martyrdom" increased his reputation.

For most of us, though, and essentially always, our moral choices are much more mundane than of Patrick Henry, Socrates, or Jesus: we eat the apple rather than the candy, exercise rather than watch more TV, and so on.

On occasion, though, we do make the moral choice to disobey what we consider to be an immoral law. I wish I could give you an example from my own experience, Dear, but the only entanglement I've ever had with the law occurred more than 30 years ago, when I was given (and paid for) a speeding ticket – and if I had to do it again, I'd speed again: I sped up to pass an 18-wheeler who was weaving all over the road!

[Well, maybe I should add that I still violate, almost routinely, what I consider to be immoral laws that attempt to regulate speeds on our highways. When it comes to driving on our highways, the act of higher moral value (as far as I'm concerned) is not to obey the speed limit but to

drive safely: it's far cheaper to pay for a speeding ticket than for a damaged car or for medical expenses. In turn, I've found that it's generally safest to "go with the flow" of the traffic (whether 40 mph below the posted speed limit or 10 mph above), rather than obey the posted speed limit. There are, however, some exceptions: sometimes when I'm driving on an unfamiliar freeway (e.g., in LA or DC or Boston) I don't feel safe keeping up with the flow when it's moving faster than the speed limit; therefore, I move over to the slow lane and "putt-along" at a speed at which I feel more comfortable.]

And although for most of us, most of the time, our moral choices are quite mundane, yet I'd advise you, Dear, to stay alert to potential or actual immoralities of existing or proposed laws. Perhaps one of the best ways to do this is to financially assist the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): a group of people (mostly lawyers) who stay alert to potential or actual infractions of our liberties caused by overzealous politicians and/or those politicians who have concluded that their re-election is more important than protection of civil liberties.

The great value of a "watch dog" group (such as the ACLU) can be seen from the lessons of Nazi Germany. When the Nazis started their rise to gaining total power over the police, apparently too many people were inadequately aware of their proposed plans against the Jewish people. When the Nazis took the immoral step of requiring Jews to display a "Star of David" on their clothing, ordinary people didn't react. When the Nazis took the next immoral step, confiscating Jewish property, then again ordinary people didn't react adequately. And so on it went, until the Nazis murdered an estimated six million Jews.

My point, Dear, is the need for ordinary people to stay alert and if necessary to fight even what may seem to be a relatively minor "immorality" of any law. The immorality of the Nazis was not that they violated some "sacred principles" that could be found carved in some stone or scribbled in some book; the immorality could be evaluated by anyone judging how best to achieve one's trio of survival goals. Thereby, one can see that the immorality of any law that singles out a particular ethnic, racial, religious or any other group is that it violates what I call one of my fundamental "judicial principles": everyone has an equal right to claim one's own existence.

Thus, Dear, you needn't feel the oppression of a slave to be opposed to slavery, you needn't feel the pain of the tortured to be opposed to torture, or you needn't feel the terror of the Jews to be opposed to genocide. Instead, oppose slavery, torture, genocide, and so on, for yourself: recognize and defend everyone's equal right to claim one's own existence – so you'll have a valid claim on your own!

Aesop saw the same ~2500 years ago and (allegedly) wrote the following (here copied from *Aesop's Fables* available at www.classics.mit.edu).

> A man came into a forest and asked the Trees to provide him a handle for his axe. The Trees consented to his request and gave him a young ash-tree. No sooner had the man fitted a new handle to his axe from it, than he began to use it and quickly felled with his strokes the noblest giants of the forest. An old oak, lamenting when too late the destruction of his companions, said to a neighboring cedar, "The first step has lost us all. If we had not given up the rights of the ash, we might yet have retained our own privileges and have stood for ages."

In horrible contrast to the above, consider what the idiotic clerics of our culture teach. As a first illustration, consider again what I know you've had to memorize and "adopt", as one of the "The Articles of Faith" of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

> 12. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.

Dear, please think of some consequences of such an "article of faith", designed to maintain the *status quo*. If it had been adopted worldwide, then royalty would still rule in Britain and Japan, the U.S. would still be ruled by Britain, there would still be slavery in this country, women would still be prohibited from voting, the Nazis would still be ruling most of Europe, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela would never have been able to lead their countries to progress, and so on. That is, Dear, rather than encouraging you to uphold such an damnable "article of faith", I urge you to always uphold a personal moral code similar to: always use your brain as best you can.

Idiocy similar to the above Mormon "article of faith" is of course taught by Christian clerics, one source of which is the following atrocious statement by "Saint" Paul (*Romans 13,* 1-6) [to which I've added some italics (and exclamation marks!) for emphasis, as well as some notes and questions].

Every person must submit to the supreme authorities. There is no authority but by act of God [How about the authority from "might makes right"? How about the authority of a Hitler or Stalin?], and the existing authorities are instituted by him [God "instituted" Hitler and Stalin?!]; *consequently, anyone who rebels against authority is resisting a divine institution,* and those who so resist have themselves to thank for the punishment they will receive. For government, a terror to crime, has no terrors for good behavior. You wish to have no fear of the authorities? Then continue to do right [i.e., what the rulers say!] and you will have their approval, *for they are God's agents working for your good.* [Hitler, Stalin, Mao… were God's agents?!] But if you are doing wrong, then you will have cause to fear them; it is not for nothing that they hold the power of the sword, *for they are God's agents of punishment,* for retribution on the offender. That is why you are obliged to submit. It is an obligation imposed not merely by fear of retribution but by conscience. That is also why you pay taxes. The authorities are in God's service and to these duties they devote their energies. [And as for the horrible people who instigated the American revolution, then…!!!]

I trust, Dear, that I don't need to urge you reject such idiocy. In **Qx**, I'll show you what I consider sufficient evidence to justify the statement that "Saint" Paul (the real founder of the Christian and Mormon religions!) was criminally insane – and I trust that I don't need to urge you, Dear, to reject the ideas of someone who should have been incarcerated in a more-isolated mental institution than in Christian and Mormon Churches!

And actually, it's even worse for the poor people who, as children, were (and still are) brainwashed into believing the "truth" not only that their law-makers rule by "divine authority" but also that laws are direct from the divinity, HIMself. Thereby, if the poor people try to be moral, if they try to use their brains as best they can, if they begin to question the morality of selling their daughters into slavery, beating their slaves to death, killing infidels, taking the females of their slain enemies as sex slaves, and so on, then they must confront the morality, customs, and laws claimed by their damnable clerics to be direct from the creator of the universe, HIMself.

The stupidity – the idiocy – the evil – of clerics (be they Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Mormon, or whatever) is staggering: if it didn't exist, it's hard to imagine that it could; it's hard to imagine that anyone could be so horrible. As I'll try to show you in the next chapter, clerics of the world continue to resist change and to advocate truly sick social policies. But that's for another chapter. For now, why don't you work at establishing the custom of getting more exercise!