

Yx4 – Basic Errors Borrowed for the Bible

A host of competent investigators have shown that many ideas and stories in the Bible were “borrowed” from the sayings, myths, and writings of earlier people and cultures, especially Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Persian, and Indian. Such “borrowings” appear in the entire Bible, not just in the Old Testament (OT) but also in the New Testament (NT). Subsequently, substantial portions of the Bible were “borrowed” for the Koran (or Quran) and for the Book of Mormon (BoM).

When the “borrowing” was of large portions of earlier text, it’s called ‘plagiarism’, but in many cases (in the OT, the NT, the Koran, and the BoM) earlier writings weren’t copied exactly; instead, as I’ll illustrate in subsequent posts, critical portions of the original text are distorted, typically to change the moral of the original myth or to change the story into one more favorable for the new breed of clerics, whether they were Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Mormon, or whatever. For this post, though, my goal is to comment on an earlier step in the Bible’s concoction (i.e., before entire myths were plagiarized and distorted).

Specifically, in this post I want to comment on some of the basic and erroneous ideas that were borrowed for the Bible and still are used in all four Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism). The three most obvious and basic of these erroneous ideas deal with: 1) gods, 2) sins (and associated prayers and “offerings”), and 3) creation (creation of life, the world, the stars, the universe, etc.).

If errors in those three basic ideas were eliminated, then all the Abrahamic religions would collapse into appropriate rubbish heaps of useless speculations. Further, as I’ve argued elsewhere,¹ if humanity could thereby eliminate the entirely unnecessary problems in the world caused by religions, then we’d have much better chances of finding intelligent solutions to our real problems, with sustainable development, diminished violence, and liberation of the potentials of every human. With those possibilities in mind, consider first the most obvious idea borrowed for the Bible from earlier, confused people: the idea of gods.

¹ At http://zenofzero.net/docs/X01_EXposing_Ignorance.pdf.

1. THE SILLY IDEA OF “GODS”

As far as is known, when Ezra and co-conspirators read their new OT to the assembled Jews in about 400 BCE, not a single person raised his or her hand to say: “Excuse me, Sir, but what’s a god?” At that time, everyone undoubtedly “knew” what gods were. People had “known” about gods for tens of thousands of years – just as everyone in the world today “knows” what gods are: theists (aka unscientific antihumans) “know” what their god is (or their gods are) and those of us who are scientific humanists also “know” what gods are, namely, silly speculations by savages!

In his amazing 1921 book *The Story of Religious Controversy*, which is available at a number of internet sites,² the former Catholic priest Joseph McCabe summarized his investigations into the origin of the god idea. McCabe wasn’t dogmatic about his interpretation of the evidence; he provided his best analysis of the anthropological and archeological data to try to understand how the idea of gods emerged from speculations by prehistoric people. In the quotation from McCabe’s book given below, I’ve added a few notes in brackets, [...], and italicized some of his text.

Before I [McCabe] made this investigation into the beliefs of the lowest [or “earliest”] peoples, I considered that it was probably the sun and moon, the fire and the storm, that first impressed the imagination of early man and begot a religious feeling. *It is clear that this is not so. Before man got wit enough to speculate on the cause of movements in nature, he believed in his own soul.*

And we get a very clear idea why they suppose that there is a part of a man that lives on. Their word for it [what our culture calls a ‘soul’] is commonly ‘shadow,’ or it is a ‘little red thing,’ like a man’s shadow on water. Of the nine peoples I have described [in his book; namely, primitive tribes that in the late 19th Century seem to have had little influence from “outsiders”], three [of the tribes] plainly have no idea of survival [beyond death], two are very doubtful, [and] four (the higher in culture) have an intense belief in it. Of the four who do definitely believe in survival, two call the surviving part of a man ‘shadow,’ and the other two say that it is a red object, though I cannot find the translation of their name for it. We shall see that, even at higher levels, tribes still give the name ‘shadow’ to the soul.

So it appears that there is more meaning than we thought in the phrase “shades of our ancestors”! I do not wish to press any particular theory of the origin as an exclusive and universal fact, but these lowly peoples very clearly suggest that *religion began with a crude speculation of primitive man about his own shadow.*

² E.g., at http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/joseph_mccabe/religious_controversy/.

[Actually, that statement is a good summary of essentially all depictions of ghosts, i.e., they're drawn only in outline, devoid of detail, as "shadowy" figures.]

If we try to put ourselves in the mental atmosphere of a very lowly savage, we can understand it. He is incapable of abstract ideas. His mind is thoroughly concrete. A vague general animation of nature is quite beyond him. *He does not speculate on causes of movements.* But definite concrete things begin to prick his curiosity. The sun and moon are too conspicuous, too solitary in the sky, too striking in their daily movements across it, to be ignored. He begins to have a feeling of wonder about them, though not a definite opinion or speculation. But his own shadow is so near to him hourly, so weird in its movements, so plainly a double of himself, that it would be likely enough to be the first thing in nature he speculated about [just as, as most readers have likely observed, small children seem intrigued by their shadows].

Primitive man at this level had not the slightest idea of the sun's share in the matter. No sun, no shadow, of course; but he had only to look into a pool or river to see it again, an exact duplicate of himself. It drew back into himself, spread out from himself, went with him everywhere. *He must really be two beings: a body and a shadow. This gave him a clue to death. The shadow-part had gone away.*

But it seems likely that dreams intervened here. While he slept on the ground, some part of him was out in the forest or on the river: the shadow-part. We saw [in an earlier part of McCabe's book] that the Brazilians who believed most intensely in spirits were great dreamers; though their word for the soul was 'shadow.' The shadow-part wandered at night. *When a man was found dead, his shadow-part had not returned to the body.* It still wandered, especially at night, when everybody's shadow wandered. The world of the savage became peopled with shadows. So many men died...

The clue to the evolution of gods is... the rise of man to tribal organizations under chiefs. When men become hunters and fighters, the strong or cunning man gets chosen as leader. He becomes a chief. The leadership becomes hereditary. *And, as the spirit-world is a duplicate of the living world,* there are more powerful spirits in the world beyond the grave. Famous ancestors or former members of the tribe rise in the memory above all the ordinary spirits, who are individually forgotten. They are on the way to become gods. But it is a very gradual process, with all sorts of shades of belief, all degrees of "godness", so to say...

We see the rise from a crowd of spirits to a few outstanding spirits which, *under the fostering influences of the priests,* became what we may call gods. We see the nature-gods gradually... rising to importance above deified ancestors. We see rude huts over chief's remains or fetishes growing into carved temples. *We see priesthoods gaining in power, wealth, and organization.* We see the departed spirits gradually acquiring a home, at first in the forest or beyond the hills or in some other vague place, then underground, then with the great spirits in the sky.

We see, in fine, a strong tendency everywhere for one great spirit, and it is very commonly the sky-god, to predominate. The whole story of man's religious evolution lies before us, not in a dead and speculative chronicle, but in living remnants of the various ages through which the [human] race has passed...

The facts give no indication whatever of a religious instinct, an inner sense or urge, or whatever new name one invented. From beginning to end it is a question "of drawing wrong inferences from observed facts" – the shadow, the dream, the nightmare, disease, death, the movements of wind and river, the rain, the sun and moon, the annual birth and death of vegetation. The only urge beyond the subtle urge of priesthoods [to gain power] ... is the curiosity of man...

In time, however, the "urge of priesthoods [to gain power]" became less "subtle". To gain such power, they capitalized upon the real "money maker": the concept of sin – along with the associated concept of "prayers for forgiveness of sins" and the most-important concept (at least, most important from the perspectives of the priests!), payment for "remission of sins" [with payments to the gods made to their "collection agents", i.e., the clerics (and what the gods didn't want, the clerics managed to consume)].

2. THE SILLY IDEA OF "SIN"

Similar to the case with the concept of gods, it probably wasn't the priests but the people who concocted the idea of sin (and associated ideas about "sin offerings"). In turn, people probably developed such ideas from what Nature had taught (and still teaches) each and every person about natural, personal, and interpersonal (or social) justice. Elsewhere,³ I've gone into basic ideas about justice in some detail; here, I'll summarize with the following brief list, including suggestions about how ancient people's (mistaken) ideas about sins, prayers for forgiveness, and payments for remission of sins might have developed.

- Natural justice is "just" the principle of causality: results have causes. Thus, the first fish that learned that it couldn't breathe if it went on land and the first monkey that used a rock to break open a nut learned the "natural justice" of cause and effect.
- Personal justice is "just" the application of natural justice to individuals. Thus, a fish that became beached and the first monkey that smashed its finger rather than the nut with a rock became aware of personal justice, viz., you usually get what you deserve.

³ E.g., start at <http://zenofzero.net/docs/J2JusticeandMorality.pdf>.

- Interpersonal justice is “just” the application of personal justice when dealing not with inanimate things but with other individuals. Thus, the first fish that didn’t swim away from a larger fish and was wounded found that also in some “interpersonal” relations you usually get what you deserve, while the first monkey who cracked open a nut only to have it stolen by another monkey learned that some “interpersonal” relations are unjust: sometimes, you don’t get what you deserve – although, as with most cases in social justice, that conclusion is debatable. Thus, if the monkey had been more careful, his nut might not have been stolen! As Emerson said (paraphrased): “[Social justice is just opinion.](#)”
- Recent experiments with monkeys and other animals demonstrating that they have strongly held opinions about “basic fairness” suggest, however, that Emerson’s cynicism isn’t entirely “justified”: similar to monkeys, humans have adopted essentially uniform consensuses about basic concepts in social justice, no doubt because we all have similar experiences with natural justice (effects have causes) and with personal justice (we generally get what we deserve).
- Yet, with their increased mental capacities compared with other animals, primitive humans were at a huge disadvantage: with so many random and damaging events (fires, floods, droughts, storms, accidents, illnesses, etc.) and with their unfortunate assumption that gods were in control of all such events, the people’s confidence in personal justice was put to severe tests. Unlike cases in which they hurt themselves by doing something dumb, people didn’t see what they had done so wrong that their village was flooded, the volcano erupted, etc. So, people apparently concluded that somehow they must have “sinned” against the controlling god or gods.
- As a result, primitive people (similar to the majority of the people alive today!) apparently turned to their understanding of interpersonal justice, and from their experiences that dictatorial tribal leaders could be placated with “offerings” (as bribes!), the people tried the same with their tyrannical gods. The result was “sin offerings” and associated prayers (for forgiveness, of contrition, etc.).

But speculations aside, from soon after the time that writing was developed (about 5,000 years ago), we have the first records of people’s ideas about their sufferings, their ideas of justice, their assumed sins, and consequences of their actions to try to placate the offended gods (such as the growth of various priesthoods).

Before showing some examples, however, I’d like to insert another idea, hints of which can be seen in the examples of Sumerian literature that follow. Thus, besides searching for solution to “practical problems” (e.g., dealing with survival and justice), ancient people undoubtedly and eventually became curious and sought solutions to various “theoretical problems”: Where did people come from? Where did all the animals come

from? How does vegetation grow? What is this world? What are those lights in the sky? How was everything created? In time, no doubt the vast majority of people came to the erroneous conclusion that everything was created by some “creator god” – a basic error that was later incorporated in the Bible and one that, unfortunately, still pollutes the minds of the majority of the people in the world.

SOME IDEAS BORROWED FROM THE SUMERIANS

Turning to Sumerian written records illustrating some of the above ideas, consider first the following summary quotation, which was considered to be a proverb ~4500 years ago. That is, it was considered to be wisdom from the past – or as stated more completely in the Instruction to Zi-ud-sura from his father, written at least 4600 years ago, it was wisdom created:

In those days, in those far remote days, in those nights, in those faraway nights, in those years, in those far remote years, at that time the wise one who knew how to speak in elaborate words lived in the Land.

The proverb is:

Fear of god creates good fortune. Lamentation absolves sin. Offerings extend life.

As Volney said about similar: “**Fatal mistake!**” That example and a thousand-or-so additional examples (from 4,000 to 5,000 years ago) are available at the tremendous website “The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature” at The Oriental Institute, University of Oxford.⁴

Before displaying some examples of Sumerian literature, however, I feel obliged to add some personal notes to the reader:

- 1) Please pause to consider the age of the following Sumerian quotations. We think that the Bible was written a long, long time ago, and some people may think that, because of its age, alone, the Bible deserves some “respect”. But in contrast to the Bible (which was put in its current form roughly in the time period from 2,000 to 2,500 years ago – and it was reworked, redacted, rewritten, over and over again), the quotations that follow not only are exactly as they were written (in the original cuneiform writing on essentially indestructible clay tablets and cylinders) but also were written in the time period from 4,000 to 5,000 years ago, i.e., they’re twice as old as the Bible!

⁴ At <http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk>.

- 2) It's mind boggling to consider the upheavals through which these clay tablets have endured: through the fall of Sumer, the rise and fall of multiple Babylonian Empires, through Persian, Greek, and Roman invasions, through the invasion by the Arabs and the Mongols, through the re-conquering of "the land of the two rivers" by the Arabs (whose silly religion, Islam, still dominates the region), and more recently, through the invasion by the British and Americans. Through it all, the destruction of even a single clay tablet was (and is) a "sin" – against humanity! – and should be classified as a crime.
- 3) Upon reading at the homepage of "The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature" at The Oriental Institute, University of Oxford that

...funding for the ETCSL project came to an end in the summer of 2006 and no work is currently being done to this site or its contents...

the reader, I hope, is ashamed at humanity. How dare the religious fools of the world (the egotists who cherish their "holy books" because their "sacred scriptures" tell them what wonderful people they are) ignore what their ancient ancestors wrote, two times longer ago than when the Bible was written, three times longer ago than when the Quran was written, and twenty times longer ago than when the Book of Mormon was written. Would that people, worldwide (and I expect that every single person, worldwide, has ancestral roots that pass through the Sumerians) would write to their governments and to the United Nations expressing their desire (even their demand) that funding for such studies of humanity's heritage be forthcoming. Further, would that, as examples, the foolish Saudi Muslims who are spending billions per year constructing mosques worldwide to promote their silly religion and the foolish American and British Christians who fund the Discovery Institute (which promotes the silly idea of "intelligent design") and direct the Templeton Foundation (promoting a silly détente between science and Christianity, viz., between reliable vs. defunct science) would use their money, instead, to fund something sensible, such as translating every single Sumerian tablet that has been and can be found.

But setting that rant aside (yet, with a heavy heart), I'll now provide a few examples of Sumerian literature to illustrate humanity's first recorded thoughts about gods, sins, prayers, and similar – ideas that were "borrowed" for and pollute all "holy books" and "sacred scripture" to this day. Below, also, are examples illustrating that the people suffered terribly from a host of troubles and that, already 4,000 to 5,000 years ago, people had clear ideas about honesty, justice, compassion, etc. In the following quotations, all copied from the Oriental Institute's website referenced above, ellipses (...) are used to indicate lost or undecipherable text, question marks (?) identify translation and other uncertainties, and in some places, alternative translations from other manuscripts ("mss") are given.

* Go to other chapters *via*

The people's awareness of justice, honesty, mercy, compassion:

Letter from Šîn-iddinam to the god Utu:

Say to Utu my lord, the exalted judge of heaven and earth, who cares for the Land, who renders verdicts; just god, who loves to keep man alive, who heeds entreaty, who extends mercy, who knows... compassion, who loves justice, who selects honesty...

The people's fears:

A hymn to Šul-pa-e (Šul-pa-e A):

August... rising flood, storm which approaches mankind! People tremble (?) in prayer before you like frightened birds. Rising... imbued with awesomeness, no one... you. Of terrifying appearance, endowed with fearsome splendor, you are imbued with great awesomeness. You are a hurricane that approaches mankind, a great... that sweeps men down... that... mankind! In the mountains you measure the fields like a... emitted from heaven, without compare... who brings daylight to the mountains... battering... who flashes like lightning.

The people's troubles, lamentations, and prayers:

A man and his god:

The man's god heard his bitter weeping. After his lamentation and prolonged wailing had soothed the heart of his god towards the young man, his god accepted the righteous words, the holy words he had spoken. The words of supplication which the young man had mastered, the holy prayers, delighted his god like fine oil. His god stretched his hand away from the hostile words. He... the anguish which had embraced him though he was not its wife and had... and scattered to the winds the grief which had spread its arms round him. He let the lamentation which had swept over him as if it were a southerly wind-storm (?) be dissipated. He eradicated the fate demon which had been lodged in his body.

The Lament of [the city of] Urim:

Enlil [the sky god, "god of earth, wind, and air"] called the storm – the people groan. He brought [or took] the storm of abundance away from the Land – the people groan. He brought [or took] the good storm away from Sumer – the people groan. He issued directions to the evil storm – the people groan. He entrusted it to Kig?-gal-uda, the keeper of the storm. He called upon the storm that annihilates the Land – the people groan. He called upon the evil gales – the people groan.

The people's ideas about sin, absolution, etc.:

Proverbs: from Urim:

A child without sin was never born by his mother. The idea was never conceived that there was anyone who was not a sinner. Such a situation never existed.

Pleasure is created. Sins are absolved. Life is rejuvenated.

The lament for Urim:

The personal deity of a man brings you a greeting gift; a supplicant utters prayers to you. Nanna, you who have mercy on the Land, Lord Ašimbabbar – as concerns him who speaks your heart's desire, Nanna, after you have absolved that man's sin, may your heart relent towards him who utters prayers to you. {(3 mss. add 1 line:) The personal deity of this man brings you a present.} He looks favorably on the man who stands there with his offering. Nanna, you whose penetrating gaze searches hearts, may its people who suffered that evil storm be pure before you. May the hearts of your people who dwell in the Land be pure before you. Nanna, in your restored city may you be fittingly praised.

A man and his god:

I weep... and... My god, you who are my father who begot me, lift up my face to you. Righteous cow, god (?) of mercy and supplication, let me acquire (?) noble strength. For how long will you be uncaring for me and not look after me? Like a bull I would rise to you but you do not let me rise, you do not let me take the right course. The wise heroes say true and right words: “Never has a sinless child been born to its mother; making an effort (?) does not bring success (?); a sinless workman has never existed from of old.”

My god... after you have made me know my sins, at the city's (?) gate I would declare them, ones forgotten and ones visible. I, a young man, will declare my sins before you. In the assembly may tears (?) rain like drizzle. In your house may my supplicating mother weep for me. May your holy heart (?) have mercy and compassion for me, a youth. May your heart, an awe-inspiring wave, be restored towards me, the young man.

I have set my sights on you as on the rising sun. Like Ninmah, you have let me exert great power. My god, you looked on me from a distance with your good life-giving eyes. May I proclaim well your... and holy strength. May your... heart be restored towards me. May you absolve my sin. May your heart be soothed towards me.

Prayer, Supplication, Obeisance:**The lament for Nibru:**

Išme-Dagan himself stood in prayer to Enlil and offered salutations! When he had begun the lament and spoken the supplication, the prince of all countries treated his body with oil of abundance as if it were the sweetest syrup! And his prayer was heard – Enlil looked upon him with favor, Išme-Dagan whose words bring Enlil pleasure! Enlil's constant attendant, with whose thoughts he agrees! Because the humble one prostrated himself in his devotions and served there, because he will entreat him in supplication and will do obeisance, because he will complete and honor the royal offering and will return, because he will keep watch over everything and will not be negligent, Enlil has promised to Išme-Dagan his dominion of extended years!

Letter from Sîn-iddinam to the god Utu:

{For seven years, in my city there has been no battle and combat, and death (?) has not been imminent (?)} {(1 ms. has instead:) For five years, in my city we have not been extinguished (?) by battle, not oppressed by death}. In the open country the lion {does not diminish} {(1 ms. has instead:)} devouring men. I am {treated} {(1 ms. has instead:) I have been bound (?)} like one who does not know how to entreat a god fervently. I serve the great gods daily with prayers, and my fervent entreaties are sublime.

Rituals of the priests (who in many cases were also the rulers):**A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi B):**

I am a ritually pure interpreter of omens. I am the very Nintur (creator deity) of the collections of omens. These words of the gods are of pre-eminent value for the exact performance of hand-washing and purification rites, for eulogy of the en priestess or for her enthronement in the ġipar, for the choosing of the lumah and nindiġir priests by sacred extispicy, for attacking the south or for defeating the uplands, for the opening of the emblem house, for the washing of lances in the “water of battle” (blood), for the taking of subtle decisions about the rebel lands. After I have determined a sound omen through extispicy from a white lamb and a sheep, water and flour are libated at the place of invocation. Then, as I prepare the sheep with words of prayer, my diviner watches in amazement like an idiot. The prepared sheep is placed at my disposal, and I never confuse a favorable sign with an unfavorable one. I myself have a clear intuition, and I judge by my own eyes. In the insides of just one sheep I, the king, can find the indications for everything and everywhere.

Enlil in the E-kur (Enlil A):

The lagar priests of this temple whose lord has grown together with it are expert in blessing; its gudug priests of the abzu are suited for {(1 ms. adds:) your} lustration rites; its nueš priests are perfect in the holy prayers. Its great farmer is the good shepherd of the Land, who was born vigorous on a propitious day. The farmer, suited for the broad fields, comes with rich offerings; he does not... into the shining E-kur.

A praise poem of Anam (Anam A):

..... excelling in the Land, you pray justly... in its fine... Standing steadfastly in prayer... you determine food offerings. And you... lady, great goddess who goes by one's side, have determined a great destiny until distant times for him who has set up permanent statues in E-ana and E-me-urur... for the man whose destiny will not be spoiled, (1 line unclear) The lady, the nurse Nanaya, who stands there like a great wall at the door of E-ana, has decreed throughout heaven and earth that... and should spend long days in heartfelt joy; and she has fixed life, progeny and luxury as your lot.

Although it's sad to see that probably the vast majority of the poor Sumerian people had assumed that gods exist and that the priests (and priestesses)

could communicate with nonexistent gods, yet, I wouldn't be surprised if the first priests weren't the fools and scheming con artists similar to those who now control the religions of the world. That is, I suspect that the people selected the first priests from among "the best and brightest" of their communities (in contrast to current clerics, who are the dregs of every society). In the case of more primitive people, maybe they selected as their priests those who had special knowledge of "healing powers" (some medical skills, and possibly knowledge about which herbs produced hallucinations). The people probably asked such "leaders" what they should do to placate the gods, and the chosen priests did what they "thought" was best.

In fact, substantial data are available to support the assumption that the first Sumerian priests were "natural leaders" (usually warriors). I don't plan to review such data; interested readers can pursue the evidence themselves; perhaps readers would profit from starting with the cases of Gilgamesh and Sargon the Great. Nonetheless, I'd like to present for the reader's consideration the following summary of the evolution of "the priesthood" as given in Paragraph 91 of an article (by an unspecified author) that's at the website of "The International World History Project 2004".⁵

This article is entitled "A history of ancient Babylon (Babylonia) including its cities, laws, kings and legacy to civilization." And maybe I should add that, although the source of this article isn't specified, I wouldn't be surprised if it's from an older textbook, because elsewhere in the article, some of the dates given for some of the historical figures (e.g., King Hammurabi) seem to conflict substantially with dates given in more recent studies. To this quotation, I've added a few notes in brackets, [...].

The conduct of worship [in ancient Sumer] was no doubt originally the task of the priest. He afterward became king, and carried with him into his royal position many of the prerogatives and the restrictions attending the priestly office. He was the representative of the community before the gods, and therefore girt about with sanctity which often involved strict taboo. But he soon divided his powers with others, priests strictly so called, who performed the various duties connected with the priestly service and whose names and offices have in part come down to us [e.g., in the OT]. Rituals have been preserved for various parts of the service; many hymns have survived which were sung or recited. Sacrifices of animals were made, libations poured out, and incense burned [as in the OT]. Priests wore special dresses, ablutions were strongly insisted upon, clean and unclean animals were carefully distinguished [as in the OT], special festivals were kept in harmony with the changes of the seasons

⁵ At <http://ragz-international.com/>.

and the movements of the heavenly bodies. Religious processions, in which the gods were carried about in arks, ships, or chests, were common [as in the OT]. A calendar of lucky and unlucky days was made. A Sabbath was observed for the purpose of assuaging the wrath of the gods, that their hearts might rest (Jastrow, in *Am. Jour. of Theol.*, II, p. 315 f. [and as in the OT]). Every indication points to the existence of a powerful priesthood whose influence was felt in all spheres of social and national life.

Besides, if readers put themselves in the right “frame of mind”, I think they’d agree that it was “perfectly reasonable” for the first priests to be each community’s “natural leaders”. Thus, if you (and essentially everybody in your community) were absolutely convinced that everything (but everything!) that happened and will happen is under control of “the gods”, then if anyone (such as Gilgamesh, Urukagina, Sargon the Great, Hammurabi...) became a successful leader, it would be obvious to essentially everyone that he (or she) was successful because “the gods” had decided it to be so.

In fact (or at least as far as I’ve been able to tell), all such early leaders claimed that they were in direct contact with their gods; some even claimed to be the son of (a specific) god. Therefore, whereas obviously the gods favored the successful person, it would be “perfectly reasonable” for the people to choose the successful person to be their priest, to speak on their behalf to “the gods”. All of which is a good illustration of how sound logic can lead to ridiculous conclusions by starting from faulty premisses.

Once people gave such power to priest-leaders, then the people learned the hard way that power usually corrupts. As Voltaire said: “A clergyman is one who feels himself called upon to live without working at the expense of the rascals who work to live.” To see some of the resulting corruption, consider a little of what’s called “Urukagina’s inscriptions”, where Urukagina was the leader of what is sometimes described as “the world’s first-known [political] revolution”. It occurred in the Sumerian city of Lagash in about 2350 BCE. There is, however, a problem with the reliability of the following description, because it was written in what is called a “praise poem”. Consequently, it might be useful if I add some introductory comments that provide information about “praise poems”, which I’ve copied from another great website,⁶ created by humanisttexts.org. To this quotation, I’ve added a couple of notes in brackets.

⁶ At <http://www.humanistictexts.org/sumer.htm>.

Introduction

Our oldest written records come from the civilization of Sumer, which arose in around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is now southern Iraq. Documents dating back to 3100 BCE have been found there [incidentally, one of the oldest describes a recipe for making beer!] and a flourishing cuneiform literature in the Sumerian language existed in the centuries around 2000 BCE... The fragments of Sumerian literature that have survived appear to have been written by Sumerian temple scribes and [are] heavily religious. Nevertheless, within a religious matrix it contains an extraordinary picture of the humanistic values of the Sumerian civilization.

Praise poems to kings that challenge the gullibility of the reader... reveal the values that kings wish to be remembered by: leadership, good government, public works (canals, irrigation, gardens, lodges), fairness, humanity, writing skills, ability with languages, musicianship, for example... Extracts from these various types of written Sumerian records are given here. In addition to the material that has been excluded as a result of selecting specific extracts, there are gaps in the original cuneiform records where the complete text has not been discovered. These gaps are indicated by ellipsis dots...

Praise of Urukagina

Since time immemorial, since life began, in those days, the head boatman appropriated boats, the livestock official appropriated asses, the livestock official appropriated sheep, and the fisheries inspector appropriated... The shepherds of wool sheep paid a duty in silver on account of white sheep, and the surveyor, chief lamentation-singer, supervisor, brewer and foremen paid a duty in silver on account of young lambs. These were the conventions of former times!

When [the god] Ningirsu, warrior of Enlil, granted the kingship of Lagash to Urukagina [i.e., when Urukagina became the leader!], selecting him from among the myriad people, he replaced the customs of former times, carrying out the command that Ningirsu, his master, had given him [i.e., what Urukagina does, he does on behalf of his god].

He removed the head boatman from control over the boats, he removed the livestock official from control over asses and sheep, he removed the fisheries inspector from control... He removed the silo supervisor from control over the grain taxes of the guda-priests, he removed the bureaucrat responsible for the paying of duties in silver on account of white sheep and young lambs, and he removed the bureaucrat responsible for the delivery of duties by the temple administrators to the palace.

Now, consider the same “praise poem” to Urukagina but as given as part of “The International World History Project 2004”.⁷ Within the following quotation are included an unidentified author’s addition of notes both in parentheses (probably representing uncertainties in the original clay tablet) and in “squiggly braces” {such as these}; I’ve added a couple of notes in brackets [such as these]; this quotation shows more clearly the corruption of the Sumerian clerics and what Urukagina did about it.

Since time immemorial, since the seed corn (first) sprouted forth, the head boatman had the boats in charge for his own benefit, the head shepherd had the asses in charge for his own benefit, the head shepherd had the sheep in charge for his own benefit; the head fisherman had the fishing places in charge for his own benefit. The incantation-priest measured out the barley rent (to his own advantage)...

The {temple} oxen of the gods plowed the gardens of the ensi [the governor]; the gardens and the cucumber fields of the ensi were in the best fields of the gods; the asses and oxen of the priests were taken away (by the ensi)... barley rations {income} of the priests were administered by the men of the ensi...

In the garden of a humble person a priest could cut a tree or carry away its fruit. When a dead man was placed in the tomb, it was necessary to deliver in his name seven jars of beer and 420 loaves of bread... uh-mush priest received one-half gur {about fourteen gallons} of barley, one garment, one turban, and one bed... priest’s assistant received one-fourth gur of barley...

The workingman was forced to beg for his bread; the youth was forced to work in the a-zar-la. The houses of the ensi, the fields of the ensi, the houses of the enzi’s wife, the fields of the enzi’s wife, the houses of the enzi’s children, the fields of the enzi’s children – all were joined together side by side. Everywhere from border to border there were the priest-judges {mash-kim}... Such were the practices of former days.

When the god Ningirsu, the warrior of the god Enlil, granted the lugal-ship [leadership or kingship] of Lagash to Urukagina, picking him out of the entire population, he [Ningirsu] enjoined upon him (the restoration of) the divinely decreed way of life of former days. He [Urukagina] carried out the instructions of his divine lugal, Ningirsu.

He removed the head boatman in charge of the boats. He removed the head shepherd in charge of the asses and sheep. He removed the head fisherman from the fishing places. He removed the head of the storehouse from his responsibility of measuring out the barley ration to the incantation-priests... He removed the palace official in charge of collecting the il-tax from the priests.

⁷ See http://ragz-international.com/reforms_of_urukagina.htm.

The houses of the ensi and the fields of the ensi were restored to the god Ningirsu. The houses of the ensi's wife and the fields of the ensi's wife were restored to the goddess Bau. The houses of the ensi's children and the fields of the ensi's children were restored to the god Shulshaggana. Everywhere from border to border no one spoke further of priest-judges (mashkim).

When a dead man was placed in the tomb, (only) three jars of beer and eighty loaves of bread were delivered in his name. The uh-mush priest received one bed and one turban. The priest's assistant received one-eighth gur of barley... The youth was not required to work in the a-zar-la; the workingman was not forced to beg for his bread. The priest no longer invaded the garden of a humble person.

Thereby (as stated at the referenced website), because Urukagina “promulgated so many reforms in the interest of the oppressed common people... he has been called the first social reformer in history.” But Urukagina obviously didn't stop the clerics' corruption; he just managed to suppress it a little and for a little while. It continues today, 4,400 years later!

To illustrate how the clerics' corruption continued – and grew – consider some evidence from ancient Babylon, which was the usual capital of various Babylonian Empires (under a variety of Sumerian, Kassite, Assyrian, and other rulers) from about 2100 BCE until it was taken over by Cyrus the Great, the leader of the Persian Empire, in 538 BCE. In particular, consider another quotation from Joseph McCabe's book, which I quoted and referenced earlier in this post and which is available on the internet. In turn, McCabe quotes the book *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* by M. Jastrow. These quotations illustrate how later Mesopotamian priests continued to profit from the “sins” of the people.

As a rule the incantations or exorcisms, the charms or spells with which the priests drove out the devils or combated their influence, are more interesting from the religious than the moral point of view. But some of these incantations are closely allied to prayers. The earliest are mere charms. God is invoked to drive out the devil: the good spirit is asked, in semi-magical formulae, to smite the evil spirit. But as time went on the idea grew that a man's sins had brought the evil upon him, and confession of sin became a condition of recovery.

It is clear from the tablets that the priests came to draw up lists of sins – much like what you will find in Roman Catholic prayer books today – and one of these was read by the priest to the worshiper, so that he might recognize and confess his transgression. They therefore give us the Babylonian moral code. One of them, translated by Professor Jastrow, begins as follows:

Has he sinned against a god?
 Is his guilt against a goddess?
 Is it a wrongful deed against his master?
 Hatred towards his elder brother?
 Has he despised father and mother?
 Insulted his elder sister?
 Has he given too little? [short weight]
 Has he withheld too much?
 Has he for “no” said “yes”?
 For “yes” said “no”?
 Has he used false weights?
 Has he possessed himself of his neighbor’s house?
 Has he approached his neighbor’s wife?
 Has he shed the blood of his neighbor?
 Robbed his neighbor’s dress?

This code, the same entirely as ours, is couched in dry official language. In the prayers and psalms, it so closely approaches ours, or corresponds so wholly to ours, that for use in a modern church very little alteration would be needed. One class of psalms, known as ‘the Penitential Psalms’, and probably recited by priest and penitent when the sin had been confessed, is of particular interest... Lines from one are:

Oh that the wrath of my Lord’s heart return to its former condition!
 The sin I have committed I know not.
 Food I have not eaten;
 Clean water I have not drunk.

This ‘fasting’ of the penitent is very frequently mentioned. It seems to have been a constant religious practice of the “depraved” Babylonians; and the Roman Catholic may find that fact as disturbing as the confession of sins to the priest, the imploring of the intercession of ‘the Queen of Heaven’, or the annual celebration of the death and resurrection of a god.

One of their hymns recalls to our minds the Lord’s Prayer; and it is still more strongly recalled by the following prayer which King Nebuchadnezzar, on his accession to the throne of Babylon six hundred years before the birth of Christ, or in 604 BCE, addressed to the great sun-god Marduk:

O eternal ruler, Lord of the universe!
 Grant that the name of the king whom thou lovest,
 Whose name thou hast mentioned, may flourish as seems good to thee.
 Guide him on the right path.
 I am the ruler who obeys thee, the creation of thy hand.
 It is thou who hast created me,
 And thou hast entrusted to me sovereignty over mankind.
 According to thy mercy, O Lord, which thou bestowest upon all,

Cause me to love thy supreme rule.
 Implant the fear of thy divinity in my heart.
 Grant to me whatsoever may seem good before thee,
 Since it is thou that dost control my life.

Had I the slightest interest in such matters, I would recommend this prayer for the accession-service of the next king of England! Seriously, if these Babylonian hymns and prayers had had the good fortune to be translated into English by the poetic generation which translated the Old Testament, we should hear no more about the superiority of the latter.

There are hundreds of such hymns, scores to Shamash as well as Marduk. Here is one that might have been taken as the very model of the Lord's Prayer, yet the Rev. Professor Sayce, who translates and reproduces it, tells us that it was chanted in the temple of Sin [the moon god, subsequently The God (Al-Lah) of the Muslims] at Ur as long ago as 2500 BCE:

Father, long-suffering and full of forgiveness,
 whose hand upholds the life of all mankind!
 First born, omnipotent, whose heart is immensity,
 and there is none who may fathom it!
 In heaven, who is supreme? Thou alone...
 On earth, who is supreme? Thou alone...
 As for thee, thy will is made known in heaven,
 and the angels bow their faces.
 As for thee, thy will is made known upon earth,
 and the spirits below kiss the ground.

He is the source of all light and life and strength, the creator and merciful father of all. One prayer runs:

The law of mankind dost thou direct.
 Eternally just in the heavens art thou;
 Of faithful judgment towards all the world art thou.
 O Shamash, supreme judge of heaven and earth art thou.
 O Shamash, on this day cleanse and purify the king, the son of his God.
 Whatsoever is evil within him, let it be taken out.

The gods were the 'fathers' of all men, they were full of love and mercy, and so on. Why, then, did they permit these demons to torture their children? The answer was as natural as on the lips of a modern preacher. Men had offended the gods by their 'sins'.

Apparently, then, "the world's first political revolution", led by Urukagina in about 2350 BCE led to little change: the Sumerian priests were constrained a little and for a little while, but they (and subsequent Babylonian, Persian,

and Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Mormon... clerics) regained all the power that had been lost – and then some.

And actually, as I'll outline in a later post, similar occurred at roughly the same time in ancient Egypt (leading to the world's second known-revolution in about 2200 BCE). Its accomplishments, too, were relatively short lived: the Egyptian priests just slightly modified their con game and then continued to fleece the people for their "sins". But because the Egyptian clerics had a different twist in their con game (namely, promising the people "eternal life" if they didn't "sin"), I want to delay describing it until later posts, when I'll outline how the Jewish clerics introduced the "eternal life" concept into their con game (a concept that, of course, was subsequently adopted, with gusto, by Christian, Muslim, Mormon... con artists).

Now, "fast forwarding" about two thousand years (2,000 years!!) from the time that Urukagina temporarily constrained the Sumerian priests, consider again the conspiracy foisted on the poor Jewish people by Ezra and Co-Conspirators (which, as in the previous post, I'll abbreviate to Ezra & C-C). In about 400 BCE, under the direction of the Persians, Ezra & C-C cobbled together the first part of the Old Testament (OT), which promoted the same ruse to entrap the Jewish people that the Sumerian priests had used to entrap the Sumerians, i.e., the concept of "sin".

The concept of sin first appears in *Genesis 3*, which at least in the copy of the Bible in front of me is on page 3. Thereby, it certainly didn't take Ezra & C-C long to "borrow" errors from earlier times: the concept of 'God' (**What's a god?!**) appears on page 1, and the concept of 'sin' ("**a transgression against God's law**") appears on page 3! In fact, in *Genesis 3* (addressed in the previous post), the clerical author(s) set the stage for what, subsequently in the OT, the Jewish clerics claim is the Jewish people's greatest sin (to this day!), namely, refusing to obey the clerics' god – or more accurately, refusing to obey the clerics.

Thus, from the beginning (say the clerics) Adam and Eve "sinned" by refusing to obey Yahweh's order not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The same, silly "original sin" of humanity is used as the foundation of Christianity (and its multiple offshoots, such as Mormonism). In these later con games, their clerics claim that God sacrificed his son Jesus to "atone" for humanity's "original sin" (of eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil), and if the conned people would accept the

ridiculous idea that one's "guilt" (resulting from an alleged "sin" of one's great-great-great... grandparents!) can be "atoned" by the murder of someone claimed to be perfectly pure and innocent (i.e., Jesus), that is, if people would "believe" that punishing the innocent can absolve the guilty (!), then the people would be absolved of their alleged guilt, would no longer need to die, and could live forever in paradise – provided, of course, that for the rest of their lives, the people pay 10% of their incomes to the clerics. One would hope that no one would be so dumb as to fall for such a con game – but apparently, more than a billion Christians have.

That the Jewish, Christian, Mormon... claims are logically absurd apparently doesn't faze "true believers". That the claims are illogical follows because, without being permitted to learn what was good *versus* evil, Adam and Eve couldn't know that it was "good" to obey Yahweh's order and "evil" not to. But true believers apparently don't care that the claim is illogical, because as any con artist knows, "[You can't cheat an honest man](#)" – and religious Jews, Christians, Muslims, Mormons, etc. aren't honest, even with themselves: their greed for a "[land of milk and honey](#)" (either in this life or the next) blinds them to the illogic of their clerics' con games. Meanwhile, no cleric has ever felt constrained by requirements of logic.

THE ILLOGIC OF IT ALL!

The lack of logic, the lack of reliance on evidence, the failure to test predictions of hypotheses against data from additional experiments, in short, the unscientific behavior of so many people in the world today (in fact, the majority of people in the world today) is extremely discouraging – not for the clerics of the world (who make their living selling their snake oil to the gullible) but extremely discouraging for Humanists (who seek to use the scientific method to try to help humanity solve their problems as intelligently as possible). To make progress toward that goal, somehow scientific humanists must get theists (aka "unscientific antihumans") to realize that even the basic ideas in their religions are fundamentally flawed. And as an attempt to make at least a small step toward that end, in the rest of this post I'll address the three basic errors that were borrowed for the Bible, with the hope that maybe at least a few people "out there" will see through their clerics' ruse. I'll address the three basic logical errors in the order: 1) Sins, 2) God, and 3) Creation.

1. Logical Errors with the Idea of “Sin”

First, consider the illogic of the idea of ‘sin’ (and associated prayers). Basically, the concept of sin relies on the logical error called “**converting a conditional**”. In symbolic form, the error is: “**If A, then B. B; therefore, A.**” A simple example of such an error is the following: “**If a person ‘knows’, then he or she will believe; I believe; therefore, I know...** [that God exists, that people have immortal souls, that invisible flying elephants are pink, whatever!].”

To see how the same error arises in the case of sin, suppose a substantial amount of data could be summarized with a statement such as: “**If a person makes a mistake, then on average, there’s a 44.2% chance that the person will suffer for the mistake.**” [Where, of course, I’m using the value 44.2% only for illustrative purposes.] The prime error in the concept of ‘sin’ is to invert that conditional, i.e., “**If a person is suffering, then on average, there’s a 44.2% chance that the person made a mistake.**” [Of course the error is even worse by changing the final clause in the previous sentence from “**the person made a mistake**” to “**the person sinned against God**”, but I needn’t dwell on that idiocy, since already the inversion of the conditional is error enough.]

In reality, a person can be suffering from a host of causes, many having nothing to do with the person having made a mistake: his back might have been broken when a cable on a construction crane snapped, she might have lost her eye when some kid hit her with a rock when she was walking past his house, a tornado might have demolished their business, and so on. The only way to correctly invert a conditional is to obtain another, substantial data set. If that were done, it might be possible to conclude, for example (again using arbitrary numerical values just to make the reading easier):

- a) **If a person makes a mistake, then on average, there’s a 44.2% chance that the person will suffer for the mistake.**
- b) **If a person is suffering, then on average, there’s a 21.7% chance that the person made a mistake.**

In blatant contrast to such an approach of obtaining relevant data, prehistoric people adopted and religious people still accept the data-less speculations:

- a) **If you’re suffering, you’ve sinned, and**
- b) **If you’ve sinned, then to avoid suffering, you must repent for your sins.**

“And for your convenience,” the clerics add, “we now take not only cash and checks but also credit cards.”

2. Logical Errors with the Idea of “God”

Next, consider the idea of a god who’s omnipotent, omniscient, and omni-this-that-and-the-other-thing. According to clerics of the Abrahamic religions, we can now ignore all the thousands of other gods that people previously were certain existed, but we can’t ignore (claim the clerics) the wants of the god for whom they just happen to be the spokesmen.

The illogic of such a claim is blatant. As many others have pointed out,⁸ it’s illogical to assert that an all-powerful (omnipotent) god “wants” anything. A ‘want’ is an unfulfilled desire, a deprivation reserved for those of us who aren’t omnipotent. To claim that an omnipotent god “wants” something is not only illogical, it’s extremely insulting to such a god: it’s tantamount to saying that the god isn’t omnipotent!

Similarly, urging people to pray to an all-knowing (omniscient) god for what they want is blatantly illogical, since an omniscient being would already know. Imagine, for example, how an omnipotent, omniscient, and (so Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Mormon clerics claim) a vengeful god would respond to a request such as: “Oh by the way, God, in case you haven’t noticed it, there’s a tornado bearing down on my house, and if it wouldn’t be too much trouble for you, I wonder if you could...” No wonder tornados do so much damage in America’s Bible Belt!

In the case of Islam, we can at least hope that such craziness has reached its climax. The crazy Muslim clerics not only claim that their “omnipotent” god “wants” something but also claim that he needs the people’s help to achieve his “wants”. He “wants”, so his clerics claim, to be the world’s only god (it of course being totally incidental that a result would be only one ruling priesthood, worldwide, i.e., the Muslim clerics).

Further, so Muslim clerics claim (as given in their holiest of “holy books”, the Koran), to achieve that want, the “omnipotent” god Allah “needs” the people’s help: he “wants” them to attack, subjugate, and as appropriate, slit

⁸ For example, see the article “God and Omniscience” by Anton Thorn at his web page at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Sparta/1019/Thorn2.html>.

the throats of all the horrible “unbelievers” (i.e., those who have a sneaking suspicion that the Muslim clerics are running another con game, this one with the goal of ruling the world). If Allah (or any god) did exist, it’s a wonder he doesn’t say something similar to:

How dare you ant-like creatures say that I (the all-powerful creator of the universe) have an unfulfilled want and need your help! If I wanted what you claim I do, what makes you think I couldn’t make it occur in less than a nanosecond? For your insolence, guess who’s gonna be the most backward people on Earth.

3. Illogic of the Idea of a “Creator God”

Finally for this list, consider the “creator god”, now commonly called just “God” or “Allah” [“the god”]. He could also be called “the designer god” (as in “intelligent design”), but he’s probably most accurately described as “the god of the gaps”, because whenever or wherever there’s a gap in knowledge, theists claim their god’s supernatural intelligence and powers fill the gap.

With increasing knowledge, naturalists have pushed such “gods of the gaps” out of their sacred groves and mountains, out of the avalanches and volcanoes, out of the floods, tsunamis, meteorological storms, and eclipses, out of the sun, moon, and stars, and even out of the universe and out of space and time (a “**transcendental god**”), but theists still claim that their creator god was involved in various intricacies of designing life (e.g., coding information in DNA) and in the creation of our universe (e.g., setting off the Big Bang). If nothing else, one can be impressed with the agility of theists in playing their defensive game: they’re experts in shifting the goal posts backwards!

An amusing twist on the clerics’ approach of shifting the goal posts appears in an article⁹ by (pastor) John Oates entitled “Intelligent Design: Are we fighting against God?” In his article Oates suggests that God has “**intentionally designed the world so that He is not evident through rational inquiry alone.**” In such perverse logic, beyond the weak claim that “**absence of evidence is not evidence of absence**”, Oates claims that lack of evidence for God’s existence is evidence for his existence! The humanness in all of us can hope that Oates is never charged with a serious crime, since by his logic, a total lack of evidence to support the charges against him would be clear evidence of his guilt.

⁹ At [http://douglasjacoby.com/Intelligent_Design -- Are we fighting against God.pdf](http://douglasjacoby.com/Intelligent_Design_-_Are_we_fighting_against_God.pdf).

But that bit of silliness aside, the standard “teleological argument” of theists (where ‘teleological’ is from Greek *telos* meaning ‘end’ or ‘purpose’) is that an infinitely complex being (omniscient, omnipotent, etc., outside space and time), viz., God, created our universe. The argument is, therefore, that our universe is the product of something even more complex than our universe, namely, God. Unfortunately for such an argument, however, it leaves completely dangling (at infinity, no less, and outside both space and time!) obvious questions such as: “How did such an infinitely complex being come into existence?” or in brief, “Who created the creator?”

Illustrative is a story relayed by the philosopher David Hume (1711–76) in his 1757 book *The Natural History of Religion* about the boy Epicurus (341–270 BCE):

We are told by Sextus Empiricus [c.160–210 CE] that Epicurus, when a boy, reading with his preceptor these verses of Hesiod [from Hesiod’s book *Theogony*,¹⁰ written in about 700 BCE]

Eldest of beings, Chaos first arose;
Next Gaia [Earth], wide-stretch’d [or “wide bosomed”] the seat of all...

the young scholar first betrayed his inquisitive genius, by asking, “And Chaos whence?”, but was told by his preceptor that he must have recourse to the philosophers for a solution of such questions. And from this hint Epicurus left philology and all other studies, in order to betake himself to that science, whence alone he expected satisfaction with regard to these sublime subjects.

According to the Oxford American Dictionary, Epicurus did find “satisfaction” in science, “based on Democritus’ theory of a materialistic universe composed of indestructible atoms moving in a void, unregulated by divine providence.”

In fact, “explanations” in terms of “divine providence” (or “God’s will” or “intelligent design”) are worse than useless. As Richard Dawkins recently pointed out,¹¹ theists pursue “explanations” that are (in my words and in the vernacular) “back-ass-wards”. In contrast, understanding is advanced when complicated phenomena are explained in terms of simpler phenomena – not in terms of phenomena that are more complex!

¹⁰ Available, e.g., at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm>.

¹¹ See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-dawkins/why-there-almost-certainl_b_32164.html.

Thus, if a baby's blindness, the generation of hurricanes, and acts of war are "explained" in terms of "God's will", then there's nothing that can be done – save to pay the clerics for running their con games and maybe to argue with them, against their claiming that they "know" the infinite complexity of God's mind (arguments among the clerics' blind followers that have often led and continue to lead to physical violence). In contrast, if a baby's blindness has a genetic cause, if hurricanes are explained in terms of ocean temperatures and wind shear, if wars result from economic problems and ideological differences, etc., then with such understanding, appropriate actions are possible – rather than putting more money in the clerics' collection plates.

Democritus' explanation of matter as containing atoms in a void is, perhaps, the epitome of such simple explanations. Although Democritus' idea has required many refinements, Feynman considered it to be the most important piece of knowledge gained to date. Another example, in some ways more important than Democritus' idea, is Darwin's hypothesis (which also had origins in ancient Greece) that natural selection from among random mutations would lead to the evolution of life most suitable for its changing physical and biological environment.

Such (relatively) simple models have been able to explain an amazing variety of complex phenomena, from properties of matter to chemical and nuclear reactions, and from the evolution of life on Earth to the information content of DNA. Similarly (at least we hope it's similar), relatively simple models are under development to describe the creation of our universe. Certainly, details of such models are complicated, but the basic ideas in such models (and even their mathematical complexities) are relatively simple compared with the unknown and unknowable complexity of a god of unknown origin and "will".

In fact, and in contrast to the theists' creation model from complexity (viz., creation of our universe by an infinitely complex being residing outside the confines of space and time), the new models for our universe's creation start with the simplest conceivable beginning, namely, "total nothingness". [Here and in what follows, I put words such as "total nothingness" in quotation marks to alert the reader that I'm using the words in a way that either strains their meanings or even goes beyond current meanings, extrapolating from known concepts into the unknown.]

I admit that the idea that “outside” our universe “there exists” something best described as “total nothingness” may seem bizarre, but as Einstein said:

Once you can accept the universe as matter expanding into *nothing that is something* [italics added], [then] wearing stripes with plaid comes easy.

Certainly nothing could be simpler than “totally nothing”! In fact, it’s so simple, it’s almost inconceivable. By “totally nothing” is NOT meant empty space or a total vacuum, because as Dirac showed in his Nobel-prize-winning work, what we call “empty space” is actually filled to the brim with negative energy. When a hole develops in “empty space”, we see that hole as an anti-particle – and therefore, when a hole develops in a vacuum, then what we see “through that hole” is “totally nothing”. In a way, then, we can do experiments on “total nothingness”, by investigating anti-particles. For example, the results demonstrating that antiparticles obey quantum mechanics suggest that “total nothingness” conforms to quantum mechanical principles, such as Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle (which, e.g., governs fluctuations).

As for how our universe might have been created from “total nothingness”, it had two obvious “options”: either do something or just sit “there” (which I put in quotation marks because it strains the meaning of ‘there’, since ‘there’ has no meaning in the absence of momentum) and continue to do nothing “forever” (which strains the meaning of ‘forever’, since it implies time, and in the absence of energy, time has no meaning). The fact that we’re here suggests that “total nothing” did “start” doing something: similar to all natural systems, it seems that it engaged in quantum-mechanical fluctuations (consistent with Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle).

As for how such fluctuations could have led to the Big Bang and our universe, I’ve offered some suggestions in earlier posts in this blog and hope to provide more details (especially about Guth’s “inflation model”)¹² in Part 3 of this blog. Here, in the rest of this post, rather than go into details, I want to emphasize some general features and capabilities of the models, such as their suggested answer to the age-old question: **Why is there something rather than nothing?**

¹² See, e.g., <http://discovermagazine.com/2002/apr/cover>.

Maybe the best response to that question is: **The question is wrong: it contains an invalid premiss!** That is, in fact, there's nothing here! If that response seems silly, then the reader is encouraged to consider the following questions and answers.

1) **How much electrical charge exists in our universe?**

Readers familiar with Coulomb's principle of charge conservation would answer:

"Since electrical charge can never be created or destroyed but only separated, therefore, the total electrical charge in our universe is zero."

2) **How much momentum exists in our universe?**

Readers familiar with Newton's second principle of mechanics (written in its relativistic form) would answer: **"For an isolated system such as our universe, the total momentum (both linear and angular) in our universe is zero."**

3) **How much energy is contained in our universe?**

Readers familiar with the first principle of thermodynamics (written in its relativistic form, which recognizes that mass is a form of energy, according to Einstein's $E = mc^2$) would answer: **"Since energy can be neither created nor destroyed but only changed into different forms, then the total energy of our universe is zero."**

As reported in his 1973 article in *Nature* (Vol. 246, pp. 396–7), upon checking that the positive energy of all mass in the universe was approximately equal to the negative energy of space, Edward Tryon suggested:

I offer the modest proposal that our Universe is simply one of those things [that] happen from time to time.

Using the simplest possible mathematics, we can see how something (label it as S) could arise from "totally nothing" (label it as $N = 0$, i.e. zero). Thus, nothingness ($N = 0$) could lead to any something (S) provided that, simultaneously, the negative of that something ($-S$) is also created:

$$N = 0 \Rightarrow S + (-S) .$$

Meanwhile, though, we blobs of positive energy are normally quite convinced that something is here! But as Dirac pointed out, it's an illusion: the sea of negative energy that's everywhere around us (and even in us, as the "space" between and even within the atoms of our bodies!) is totally filled (i.e., a uniform sea of negative energy – save for the positive blobs of energy in the form of electrons, protons, etc.).

Further, being uniform, the sea of negative energy is invisible to us (it's what we have the audacity to call "empty space" or "the vacuum"), except when holes develop in it (e.g., anti-electrons or positrons, anti-protons, etc.). Therefore, we have the impression that something is here (namely all the positive-energy masses) because we're confined to observe (and live in) what I call "the positive-energy side" of reality.

If the above-outlined Einstein-Dirac-Tryon-Guth-Linde (et al.) model of creation is approaching a correct description of reality, it leads to many additional questions. One is: Is our universe unique (where "uni-verse" is Latin for "one-turn") or have other 'verses' popped into existence (or are they now popping into existence) "out there" ("outside" our verse) in "total nothingness"?

Of course we don't know the answer to that question (and quite likely we'll never know, since it seems that it would be impossible to receive communications from "outside" our verse – unless another verse bumps into ours!), but string theory suggests that an absolutely humongous number of such "states" are possible, namely, the mind-boggling number: 10^{500} . Other verses, however, needn't have been derived (and almost certainly wouldn't have been derived) from the same type of fluctuation that led to our verse, needn't have the same dimensions (of space and time), etc. Some such verses may even be here, "in" our universe, but in different dimensions.

Such concepts provide a response to the theists' inquiry:

How could it be that so many physical constants have precisely the value needed for life if our universe wasn't designed by an intelligent being, i.e., God?

To start to respond, it would seem reasonable to propose that there are multiverses – since using Ockham's razor, that's the simplest hypothesis (otherwise, as Stenger points out, we'd need an additional hypothesis to try to explain why there's only a single verse, i.e., ours).

In these multiverses (perhaps 10^{500} of them!) all possible values for physical constants (and all possible types of fluctuations, not just in energy but also in fenergy, genenergy, henergy, etc., whatever they are!) would have been tried. Those cases that don't lead to life, didn't; those cases that did lead to life, did – and in some of them, silly beings such as certain people that could be named, finally stood up and said something similar to:

My goodness wasn't it nice of our dear God to design our verse so perfectly for us good people!

We can hope that a companion to the clown in that other verse who said the above responded:

Ya gotta be kidding - nobody could be that stupid!

Thereby, we can at least hope, con artists called clerics never came into existence in that other verse. But meanwhile, here in the pathetic, almost irrelevant little verse of our own, scientific humanists apparently have a lot of work to do, to try to rid our verse of clerics, thereby improving chances for more sustainable development, decreased physical violence, and increased opportunities for all people to achieve their potentials.

For example, maybe we could make progress if we could get theists (aka unscientific antihumans) to appreciate the nature of the creator god concocted by our prehistoric ancestors. There's zero evidence that "He" was an omnipotent, omniscient, omni-this-that-and-the-other-thing being, beyond space and time, who communicated messages to various "profits" (messages now recorded in various "holy books" and "sacred scripture"). Instead (and I think highly appropriately), our ancestors' god, the one whom theists still worship, was (and still is) "total nothingness"!

But whereas my experience has been that theists refuse to accept such a depiction of their God, maybe we could get them to examine estimates that "total nothingness" could have bypassed the creation of our verse and instead, proceeded directly to popping their God into existence. I provide such an estimate (or better, "guesstimate") elsewhere,¹³ concluding that the chance that the original nothingness could have pulled off such a stunt (to create the theists' god) to be somewhere in the range from 1 chance in 10^{200} to 1 chance in $10^{1,000}$ (or more), depending on just how powerful and wise God is assumed to be – and if theists persist in assuming that omnipotent and omniscience means infinite power and wisdom, then I'm afraid that the chance for such a god is 1 chance in infinity, i.e., none!

But taking for discussion purposes that there's 1 chance in 10^{500} that "total nothingness" could pop such a powerful being into existence, then if there

¹³ At <http://zenofzero.net/docs/IIndoctrinationinIgnorance.pdf>.

really are 10^{500} other verses “out there”, that means that there’s a fairly good chance that, in one of them, there is such a god! However, the chance that such a god is here, in our verse, is again back down to the 1 chance in 10^{500} .

From all of which an important conclusion is readily available. Descartes concluded that he certainly existed:

I think; therefore, I am.

Unfortunately, however, he erred: his conclusion should have been, “*I think; therefore, I am thinking.*” That is, in reality, we all may be just simulations in a gigantic computer game

Yet, as I detail elsewhere,¹⁴ if each of us tests predictions of the hypothesis “*I exist*”, then from the resulting evidence, each of us can conclude that the proposition “*I exist*” is certain to within about 1 part in 10^{25} (i.e., the probability that each of us exists is about 0.999999999999999999999999). That’s especially remarkable, I think, given that the probability that each one of us could have ever come into existence seems to be somewhere in the range from 1 chance in 10^{100} to 1 chance in 10^{200} – which, of course, points to our amazing good fortune to be alive!

The statement “*I exist*”, however, is not the most nearly certain statement that each of us can make. Given that there’s zero evidence that supports the proposition that God exists, then the probability of God’s existence is best estimated using the probability that such a being could have come into existence (i.e., very roughly, 1 chance in 10^{500}). So, that means that the most nearly certain statement that each of us can make is not, “*I exist*” [with probability of about 0.999999999999999999999999] but in fact is, “*God doesn’t exist*” [with the probability of that statement being true, about 0.999999999999... {continue on for a total of 499 9s} ... 9]!

And in contrast to what has happened in our unexceptional “uni”-verse, in a run-of-the-mill galaxy, going around a typical star, in our pathetic (but precious) little world, think how much better our world could have been if someone had convinced Ezra & C-C a few simple facts about reality. For example, whereas far more reliable than the “fact” that we exist is the “fact” that no god exists or has ever existed, and whereas a “sin” is defined to be a

¹⁴ At <http://zenofzero.net/docs/IIndoctrinationinIgnorance.pdf>.

transgression against some god (which with astounding certainty we can say doesn't exist and never has existed), therefore, there's no such thing as a sin! And without sins, no priesthoods! It's enough to stimulate me to create a bumper sticker:

MISTAKES... SURE. SINS... NEVER!

People have been making mistakes ever since there were people. One of their biggest mistakes was to assume the existence of gods. That basic error, foundational for the Bible, can be clearly seen in another piece of “Sumerian Wisdom” available at the University of Oxford website (in which I've kept their identification scheme):

UET 6/2 251: A man without a personal god does not procure much food, does not procure even a little food. Going down to the river, he does not catch any fish. Going down to a field, he does not catch any gazelle. In important matters he is unsuccessful. When running, he does not reach his goal. Yet were his god favorable toward him, anything he might name would be provided for him.

That same nonsense has been preached continuously by the foolish and con-artist clerics of the world during subsequent millennia. In fact, the last clause in the above quotation is essentially identical to what's in the New Testament of the Bible.

But even in ancient Sumer, apparently, not everyone bought into (or maybe better, “paid into”) such nonsense. For example, my final example of “Sumerian Wisdom” demonstrates a sparkling gem of wisdom, a glorious inheritance for each and every human and preserved perfectly for posterity:

UET 6/2 253: A man without a god – for a strong man it is no loss.

The only way that one might want to try to enhance that wisdom is to modernize its translation:

A person without a god – for a strong person it is no loss.