

**On the Birth and Death of God.
The Ascendance of Virtue and Ethics.**

In respect of the evolution of Mankind the arrival of the Self Conscious implied the arrival of “Awareness”

In particular; Man had a growing awareness of what was going on round about him. Being a Hunter Gatherer he groped his way towards an understanding of the processes of the natural world on which his survival depended. He gradually become aware of; the changing seasons, the annual migrations of; beasts, birds, fish and the fruiting patterns of the seasons; in short he had to develop a relationship with Nature over which he had no control; but upon which, by force of circumstance, he had to reflect. In effect Mankind began to “Wonder.” In particular he began to wonder about the natural events which impinged upon his survival.

He noted, reflected upon and remembered, the regular patterns of Nature and doubtless wondered who was responsible for the regularity that sent the Caribou, the Salmon and the Geese on which is his very survival depended? Who sent the seasons of spring, summer and winter? Who generated the wild; Berries, Plums and Nuts? Who sent the Sun, the Moon and the Stars on “their” fixed courses?

In the above setting Mankind had a major anxiety. He was not in control of the patterns of nature. The natural fluctuations of nature had serious implications for his survival. As in the present; late frost killed blossom and the prospect of fruit. Disease caused the Salmon population to crash. An extension of summer temperature meant the Caribou would be late.

In course of time Man slowly attempted to grow food only to find that his anxieties increased: A Storm destroyed his crops. A flight of locusts ate it in a day. Disease blighted it. The failure of the rains saw it wither in the field. In short Mankind was beset by anxiety because he had no control over the vagaries of nature.

If we try and project ourselves into the psyche of early Man; we find the first Species in whom the Self Conscious has developed to the point where he lives in a permanent state of anxiety. He is desperate to obtain control over Nature and he fetches about for some means which will provide it.

Anthropologists, Archaeologists; and Scholars tell us with some assurance that Man turned to the gods. The evidenced based assumption is that man did not ask the question: What caused the arrival of Caribou, the Salmon and the Geese; he asked who caused the arrival of the Caribou, the Salmon and the Geese.

The arrival of the Self Conscious not only implies an awareness of Nature it also implies “An Awareness of Others”. That is to say, that while Man’s relationship

to Nature was absolutely critical to his physical survival. It was also some thing that occurred in the equally critical context of relationships.

Early Man needed Others. The mutual assistance of each other in the hunt and gather was essential to survival. The successful conduct of relationships with others was a necessity. He was acquainted with the cut and thrust of relationships. He helped and hated, was cooperative and contentious, fickle and faithful, greedy and generous, pleased and displeased. In short, Early Man had a Persona; he had dynamic personality.

As Early Man did not ask what was the “cause” of events, but who caused events he immediately attributed Personality to the “cause” and the gods are born; possessing all the dynamics associated with personality. In doing so Mankind projected the features and the dynamics of his own persona on to the gods: his gods have personality. As outlined above, like him they help and hate, are cooperative and contentious, fickle and faithful, greedy and generous and could please and displeased... when for example we look at the gods of the ancient Greeks we realize we looking at nothing more than human beings invested with a little more than a modicum of supernatural power and capricious with it.

The arrival of the self conscious personality gave birth to the gods. The gods did not make man in their image; man made them in his! Indeed, as he could only “create” out of his own Psyche, he could do no other than create gods like unto himself even down to their physical attributes.... “Ethiope gods have Ethiope lips.....”

Man was not made in the image of the gods. The gods were made in the image Man. Further as Man moves from polytheism to monotheism the same notion held true .That is; Man was not made in the image of God. God was made in the image of Man. In a word the self conscious “gave birth” to God: God as human construct was born. In respect of the developing self conscious, evolution “created” God.

At the same time the evolutionary process “created” something else. I have suggested above that early man needed the mutual assistance of each other. The successful conduct of relationships with each other became a necessity. In the cut and thrust of those early relationships trust, mutual assist, sharing in the kill and the gather, saw the birth of ethics. The twin points I want to make here are these:-

- The relationship with nature saw the birth of the gods,
- The relationships with each other saw the birth of ethics.

I would also want to suggest that the development of religion was speculative. Where as the development of ethics was experiential, rational and directly derivative of the harsh realities of daily life: The true source of ethics is not religion; it is social interaction

Religion was used to reinforce ethics. The failure to behave “ethically” in the given social context of a particular culture brought the displeasure of its gods.

Indeed, in modern times in the West, the loss of heaven and the fear of hell were used, to reinforce social control. As Emile Durkheim said, in a stroke of insight that was reflective of his time, and now much less true than it once was “Religion is the worship of society”...

Living as we do in an age where religion is dying and ethics is practiced, well or poorly, every day, in the life of every human being and religion is not; it is worth noting that the ethical requirement, indeed demand, remains. In the western world we do not long for God. We long for Justice, Transparency and Honesty. In a word, we long for ethics and the practice of Virtue.

Ethics has survived religion! While it could be argued that it had an evolutionary role to play in sustaining cultures over many centuries religion has now become a malign influence which diminishes mankind. The difference between early man and modern man is that early man asked the question; Who was responsible, whereas, modern man asks; What is responsible.

This differentiation alone has almost single handedly led to the death of God. The spirit of scientific enquiry has killed theism. God is dead. Human kind is on its own. Its future is in its own hands and completely dependent on the moral nature of its behaviour.

Ethical man has been born. He is increasingly aware of the responsibility that lies at his door. We hear the call to ethics and virtue from many quarters. For example in his book Beyond Religion the Dalai Lama tells his readers... “...humans can manage without religion but they cannot manage without inner values”

It appears that Human Kind increasingly feels the allure of higher and better things for humanity. We are observing the Ascent of virtue.

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