

Religion as the final architect of humanity

It should be fairly obvious that no religion correctly explains the creation of man. But that does not mean religion played no part in shaping humankind as it exists now.

Religion has clearly acted as a selection pressure in the past and clearly continues to act as a selection pressure today.

Some of the most obvious examples of a religion having acted as a selection pressure are contained within Judaism and its descendants.

Let us briefly compare the likelihood of the average observant Jew passing their genes along with that of garden variety heathen.

Judaism has historically forbidden the eating of shellfish. Paralytic shellfish poisoning has therefore not been a problem for the observant Jew. This is but one example of Judaism acting as a selection pressure. Remember that each time Judaism prevents early termination of a person controlled by Judaism, it also enhances the reproductive success of the blueprints for a brain more “friendly” to Judaism.

The life cycle of the *Trichinella* worm depends on the flesh of an infected animal being eaten by another animal. Once eaten, encysted worms are released into the digestive tract and a new generation of worms is produced. These worms travel to muscle tissue and create cysts to wait for the time when the flesh of their host is eaten by another animal. The digestive tract of the animal that ate the infected flesh releases the encysted worms and the cycle continues. Pigs are particularly prone to being infected with *Trichinella*. However, the observant Jew would not be plagued by this particular parasite. Leviticus 11:7-8 forbids that the observant Jew consume the possibly infected flesh. “And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you. Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch; they are unclean to you.”

Judaism does not hesitate to intrude more directly in reproduction. Niddah 13 of the Babylonian Talmud recommends that the man’s hand that too often visits his genitalia should be cut off.

[There should be further discussion of why Onanism is a sin somewhere in this chapter.]

Jewish women have, throughout history, been subjected to extreme pressure to remain pregnant or lactating at all times. The alternative was to be periodically declared “unclean” and forced to the edge of the encampment. An expectant mother or a nursing mother could avoid the stigma of being “unclean”. At the same time promiscuity was discouraged - often by the most draconian means. Promiscuity would have resulted in infection by a sexually transmitted disease. Infection with a sexually transmitted disease has not always been an inconvenience fixed with a quick trip to the clinic for treatment. In the days before antibiotics a sexually transmitted disease would progress and destroy the reproductive organs. Thus religions which could emphasize procreation and minimize exposure to sexually transmitted disease would confer a tremendous reproductive advantage to the genes which described the brain which could be manipulated by the religion.

[A discussion of eliminating genes for brains not well-controlled by religion should go here - for example when people are stoned to death for defying religious edicts. Typical is the stoning of the adulteress - her genes blueprinted a brain not well-controlled by the dominant religion and those genes were eliminated from the genepool - leaving more resources for genes more “friendly” toward the dominant religion as well as directly skewing the process of “natural selection”]

It should be fairly obvious that the genes which described a mind more easily controlled by Judaism would have a significant advantage in the evolutionary sweepstakes. Recall that an allele giving a one percent reproductive advantage will displace other alleles to virtual exclusion after one hundred generations. Also keep in mind the average life-span was much shorter in the days before the rise Christianity. Women were also considered marriageable and ready for childbearing at much younger ages than today. Therefore it is entirely conceivable that one hundred generations fit into the space of two to three thousand years. There is also no reason to assume the example of one percent advantage in Aaron Lynch’s math. For illustration, let’s assume the average “heathen” woman averaged seven children in her lifetime. Let’s then assume the average Jewess was coerced into bearing one additional child during her lifetime. That would have resulted in a reproductive advantage of fourteen percent! With such an advantage it would obviously take far fewer generations for religion friendly alleles to dominate a gene pool. The advantage is still significant even with smaller assumed differences between the number of children borne by the average “heathen” and the average Jewess. If we assume that on average a “heathen” woman had seven children and that most Jewish women also had seven children but that every tenth Jewish woman was coerced into bearing one extra child during her lifetime then that gives an advantage to the Judaism-friendly alleles of about one percent.

Judaism is hardly alone in its manipulation of the human gene pool. Islam has a set of dietary rules similar to those of Judaism. Many of the same rules apply. Islam calls contact with swine “haram” which means forbidden. Both Judaism and Islam forbid eating reptiles and insects. Judaism and Islam have other dietary laws which are similar. Among these the ritual slaughter of livestock is notable. A key feature of the ritual slaughter is the requirement that blood be quickly drained from the carcass. This would have been particularly important in the days before refrigeration.

The result of the selection pressures is a regenerative feedback loop which operates across the generations. Minds which are more susceptible to control by the memplexes of religion are better represented in each subsequent generation and the memplexes of religion which are best at controlling minds are better represented as those memplexes evolve.

So it is logical to consider the brain and ask which characteristics of the brain make it more susceptible to control by the memplexes of religion. One can narrow the search for clues fairly quickly by considering only those characteristics which are unique to humankind or much more strongly expressed in humankind.

Humankind and other mammals are very interested in finding food. Humankind and other animals are also very interested in finding suitable mates. However other animals do not seem much interested in the origin of things. Humankind appears unique in this tremendous curiosity regarding not only his origin, but the origin of everything. Considered from a strictly Darwinistic perspective one must ask why we would dedicate so much time and energy to satisfy our curiosity when that curiosity does not capture more food or get us more attractive and healthy mates.

Now consider a time before scientific reasoning offered competing explanations. What would have happened to a child with more curiosity? The logical conclusion is that the child’s questions would strongly signal the parent to download the religion of the parent. For example when a child asked why it was dark at night, the parent might respond that the sun god was passing through the underworld. As religion evolved many parents would eventually respond with an explanation of how God had separated light from darkness. When the child inevitably asked about how many generations of ancestors had come before, then the parent might download information about Adam and Eve. The strong signal to download the religion would obviously enhance the degree of control the religion could exert over that mind and therefore the probability that the genes which described that curious mind would be well-represented in subsequent generations.

A little extra curiosity may not seem to offer much of an advantage but one must consider that we are dealing with a function which operates somewhat after the fashion of compound interest. A small advantage multiplied by several generations each century will eventually add up to an overwhelming advantage. As mentioned before, Aaron Lynch has done the math for us. If a new characteristic is introduced into a population of replicators and that new characteristic offers a mere one percent advantage in reproductive success, then that new characteristic will dominate the population to the virtual exclusion of other variations within one hundred generations.

The curiosity of humankind is but one characteristic to consider.

There is our appreciation of music and the ability to feel “moved” by music and works of art. Daniel Dennett makes note of this characteristic in his book *Breaking the Spell*, but does not really question why we have this characteristic. One obvious answer is that we have the characteristic because the characteristic benefits religion. If the sound of a choir or religious works enabled religion to better control some minds then the blueprints for those minds would be better represented in each subsequent generation.

The human brain even seems to have areas dedicated to “spiritual” experiences. Promoters of religion are eager for people to believe that our divine creator placed this capacity for spiritual experience within us so that we could better worship him. All the evidence would instead suggest that “natural selection” in concert with early religions created this capacity for spirituality.

There is one more characteristic of the mind to consider. Earlier we described human consciousness as a manifestation of the dual purpose stimulus sorter which plays the central role in the human mind. In other animals the stimulus sorter receives numerous inputs from the senses and hormones then prioritizes the inputs for response. Some of these stimuli are internal such as signals from the body that food is required or that the body is fatigued and it is time to rest. Other stimuli originate from outside sources. For example sight, sound, or scent may signal the stimulus sorter with information regarding a nearby predator. The stimulus sorter then invokes fight or flight routines.

I would like to suggest at this point that not only is the stimulus sorter in *homo sapiens* different because it processes memes and culture in addition to regular internal and external stimuli, but that the output of the human stimulus sorter is often processed as an additional input.

[A section will go here discussing how a reentrant stimulus sorter would benefit religion - by enhancing the ability of religion to control human minds - and thereby enhancing the reproductive outcomes of the genes that described the mind which was controlled, creating a feedback loop for ever more active and

reentrant stimulus sorters. This is the answer to the question posed by Susan Blackmore in her book *The Meme Machine* regarding why the thoughts never stop.]

Religion need not cause reproduction in every host it controls in order to skew the gene pool toward blueprinting religion-friendly brains. Full time enforcers of the religion are often employed as is well illustrated by ostensibly celibate priests and the Pope dictating reproductive policy to others.

With all that in mind, let us briefly consider an odd irony. If a person were to encounter some leftover primordial soup, they would most likely regard it as foul or malodorous and avoid it. They would most likely not wallow in it. They would likely neither smear the muck on the bumpers of their automobiles nor dedicate their lives to slathering the muck on others. One would certainly not go door to door and expect gifts of primordial muck to be welcomed with open arms - people would not want the ooze tracked all over their homes. People would not form groups to celebrate the ooze or build elaborate shrines to the slime from which we arose. Yet people do all those things with the primordial muck of human culture. Some wallow in their religion. Others proudly display shiny fish shaped bits of the primordial muck on the bumpers of their automobiles. There is in fact an entire industry dedicated to spreading the primordial muck of religion far and wide.

If we are not careful, then the primordial ooze of religion which shaped us will also drag us back down as we fight over which non-existent deity we all must worship.