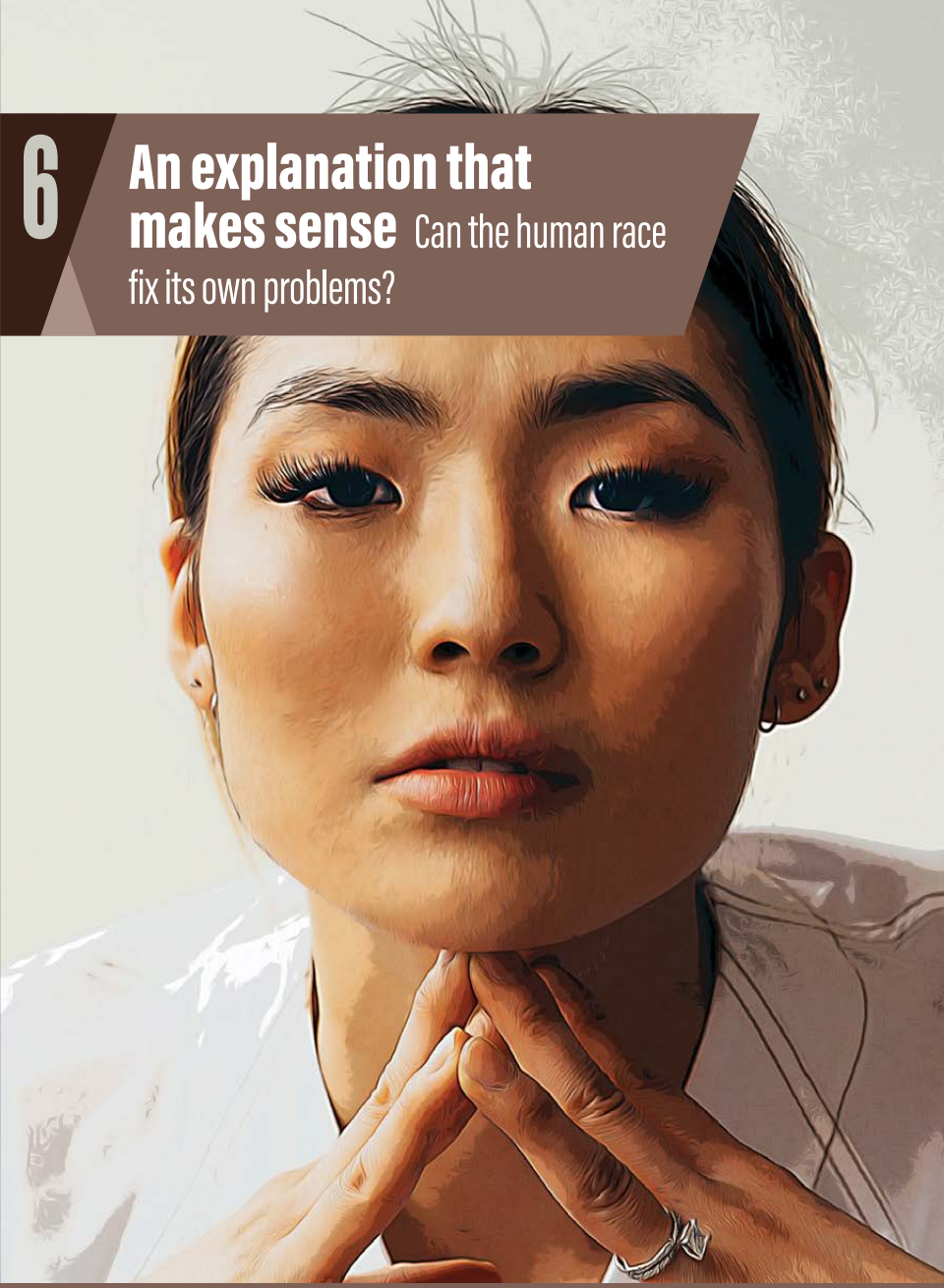
6 An explanation that makes sense

Can the human race fix its own problems?



BOOKLET 6

An explanation that makes sense

Can the human race fix its own problems?

Why Christians believe Christianity to be true

A simple and authentic explanation of things you might not otherwise hear

A Shining Lights Trust (NZ) resource
By Dave Mann © 2023

ISBN 978-0-473-66803-7

Thanks to family and friends for your love, and Heather whose husband I am privileged to be.

Thanks to all who gave feedback on draft booklets during their writing — especially including Dr Mark Keown and Apologist Lew Meyer.

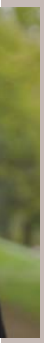
Regarding this particular booklet, thank you to the late Chuck Colson, whose books and weekly commentaries I benefitted from for many years.

Thanks to Katie Rickson for proofreading, Beau Spicer of Spicer Design, Freddie MÜller of Inspire Films, RightNow Media and Mike Taylor of Shining Lights Trust.

www.WhyChristiansBelieve.nz

DAVE MANN, AUTHOR

Can the human race fix its own problems?



Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky asked,

"Can man be good without God?"

It is a surprisingly powerful question — and isn't asking what many think it is at first. Any person can potentially do 'good', but what is 'good', and what will make us choose it rather than the alternative? For example, imagine you were offered a new car and house as a bribe. How big or small a lie would you be willing to tell to get them?

Join us on this journey as we consider four big questions and their massive implications.

1. Are human beings naturally good?
2. What is 'good'?
3. Can we save ourselves without God?
4. How can we be made good?

Answering these four questions is about finding a way to explain life that actually makes sense of our realities!

"We will make your world better!"

Many leaders have claimed to have the answers to our world's problems.

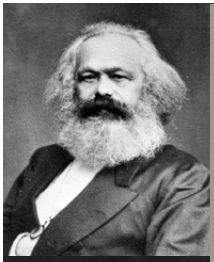
Typically, their response goes something like this.

A promise: For example, I will liberate the people from oppression.

A problem: The misguided economic policies of a ruling class, and crime-ridden streets.

A bargain: Give me the power (so me and my friends can replace them as the new ruling class), and I'll give you a better life!

Whether we're talking about communism (like Karl Marx's teachings as applied in Russia, or Chairman Mao's in China) or fascism (like Hitler's Nazi Germany or Mussolini's Italy) or potentially even capitalistic freedoms, democracy and the welfare state; they can all become the same in this one thing: *They are human attempts to fix human problems.*



They all start with a promise, define the problem, and make a bargain with us.

The warning is this: If we identify the problem incorrectly, the solutions we come up with are unlikely to work — and might even backfire!

An illustration

Imagine you're sick and I'm a doctor. However, your true sickness is emotional. Your body is only sick because you are deeply depressed and highly anxious. I could give you all manner of treatments to fix your physical symptoms but will fail to truly heal you because I'm addressing your health at the wrong conceptual level! My medicines and treatments won't fix the problem. In fact, they might even leave you worse off!

Religion's crucial question is not which 'solution' looks best, or even what makes us feel the best about ourselves or the world, but instead: What actually needs fixing?

What is the key problem here on our planet — really?

1. Are humans naturally good?

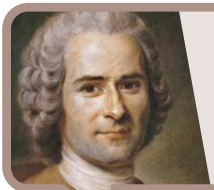
John Lennon of the Beatles had a belief that many in our world today share. He believed our basic human nature was capable of sustained good. With a hopeful attitude he said, *"We all have Hitler in us, but we also have love and peace. So why not give peace a chance for once?"*

The question is: How much of the 'good' and 'bad' is in us, and which has the greater power?

Until 200 years ago, the West believed human nature was essentially 'corrupt'. The idea came from our Christian heritage. In short, the idea is that we humans are *not* naturally good. Instead, whether children or adult, we are naturally inclined toward selfishness.

To counter this natural selfishness, the 'civilising' (training/shaping) structures of our cultures, like family, church, state, and society, were believed to be important. These helped to moderate our otherwise naturally selfish behaviour. The cultural practices imparted values that guided behaviour. They gradually trained us to be good and to make right and selfless decisions. Without these we might abandon our morals and justify our selfishness — hurting ourselves and others.

Then a mid-eighteenth century Swiss-born[1] philosopher named Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) suggested that human nature was at its best prior to this cultural training. He suggested,



"that people are naturally loving, virtuous, and selfless; and that it is society, with its artificial rules and conventions, that makes them envious, hypocritical, and competitive."[2]

It was a radical idea. Could humans be naturally inclined towards good rather than evil and selfishness?

Rousseau believed so, and suggested that what corrupted people was the power-hungry, controlling, land-grabbing mentality within *society* — and specifically in their leaders.

He said, *"Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains"* Humans needed to break free from these oppressive restraints! If the institutions that managed the society were overthrown, he believed *"Each citizen would then be completely independent of all his fellow men," "and absolutely dependent on the state."* And he thought this would be good.

These ideas gave birth to the modern concept of revolution — which we will give examples of soon.

Following the three-pronged format I introduced earlier, Rousseau's idea looked like this:

The promise:	To set humanity free
The problem:	The restraints of civilisation — like the rules, customs and traditions, imparted through the institutions and religion.
The bargain:	Give me power so I can set you free.

His ideas filtered their way through his culture.

A few decades later, in 1793, the French Revolution put the ideas into practice — and in case the details escape anyone, the results were not good!

What went wrong? Cultural commentator Chuck Colson[3] explained how, when we take the idea of a 'God' out of the picture we have *"no basis left for*

saying the state must treat its citizens justly instead of unjustly, and there are no moral limitations on the state's use of power."[4]

Put simply, without God, morals become flexible, undermining restraint on that thing we call 'evil'!

The French Revolution was later named the 'Reign of Terror'. It used force to bring about change, executing all who opposed the new order. It resulted quickly in the imprisonment of 300,000 nobles, priests and political dissidents, and the death of well over 18,000 citizens in the first year alone. They then killed hundreds of thousands — because not everyone agreed with the revolution. Descending into chaos, the nation needed a 'saviour' — which set the stage for a shift in power. Napoleon Bonaparte arose, promising to restore peace and make them great. Their dictator was found. Millions then died in the Napoleonic wars that followed.

When ‘God’ was removed from the picture, and human nature assumed to be good, it didn’t work!

Rousseau had said (to repeat), *“people are naturally loving, virtuous, and selfless; and that it is society, with its artificial rules and conventions that makes them envious, hypocritical, and competitive.”*

But what if Rousseau was wrong?

A long history of revolutions has since followed, following the same template, and they didn’t deliver on their promises either.

To quote Chuck Colson again, in practice the revolutions have involved,

> *“killing off those who resist, those who remain committed to the old ways, or those who belong to a class judged to be irredeemably corrupt (the bourgeoisie, the kulaks, the Jews, the Christians).”*[5]

The promises of Karl Marx (Communism)

Karl Marx continued in this same train of thought. He was influenced by various philosophers — significantly including the German Philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (as also revered by Hitler). Marx also suggested humans were ‘good’ by nature. To him, morality was nothing more than an idea used by those in power for economic benefit. It wasn’t actually real. Nothing was actually ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

Like Rousseau, he saw the problem as being the ‘rich oppressors’.

The promise: A better life.

The problem: The educated and wealthy who have power.

The bargain: Give me the power — and I’ll put you in their place.

The result was communism, which was responsible for the murder of well over 90 million people in the 20th Century alone[6] — and it is noteworthy that it did not fulfil its promise of improving people's lives.

What went wrong?

The 'bait' was the idea of equality (or equity), but it became something of a 'bait and switch'. With no God in the picture, the health of the State (Government) is seen as the greatest good. The State then cares for the people. To quote the philosopher Hegel — 'the State is [like] God' (a view also held by Rousseau) — and the value of individuals is therefore measured by their usefulness to the State! In other words, people aren't as valuable as you might hope. So, while the idea seems at first to be about helping people, without the idea of a transcendent God it falls over. Gradually, 'the end will justify the means'. This idea gradually gives increasing permission for any 'evil', if that action (or evil) benefits the State.

This is exactly what has happened in history and many times over.

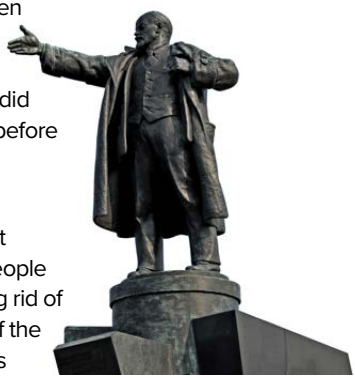
For example, it was claimed that the class system would end, and people would be equal. In reality, the class system was merely replaced — and it is true that the people did become equal, though only in their poverty, suffering and death.

While there might be various suggested reasons for communism's failure, a key problem is its denial of human nature.

For example, communism (as applied by Vladimir Lennon in Russia) sought to pay everyone the same wage for a day's work, no matter what they did. The problem is that this meant that working hard is of no personal benefit. Why give years to studying and working hard in pursuit of a particular career if there is no reward? It was a view of humanity that didn't match with reality!

Additionally, if someone works hard and takes risks to innovate and create new things — including new employment for others, but they are then criticised and punished for being the 'rich oppressor' as a result, why bother? So, innovation, and the appetite for risk, were undermined. (As business innovation suffers — productivity and the creation of good jobs suffers — the economy suffers — and well-being therefore suffers.)

Another denial of human nature was in the assumption that, if some of the poor (working class) were placed in power, they would be different to the ruling class who they were replacing. It was assumed that they would somehow be 'good' because they had been poor. This wasn't the case. Once in power they used that power like most people do — for their own benefit. However, they did so with less mercy or restraint than those before them!



The monument to Vladimir Lenin (St. Petersburg)

The result of Marxism being applied was unimaginable suffering in the decades that followed, including millions of their own people dying of starvation both as a way of getting rid of people, as well as because of the failure of the economy and food supply as their systems broke down. They had assumed humans were naturally good and selfless — but we are not!

To be fair to Marx (and Lenin who then tried to apply his teachings to bring good), he was looking for ways to solve significant inequalities in wealth and power — to help the poor. But who isn't? Could it be that he misunderstood the actual problem with humanity, therefore creating a solution that not only failed to address the problem, but also backfired?

Over 50 nations fell to communism last century. Their tales of suffering are significant. There are six communist nations in the world today.[7]

What if humans are naturally 'evil'?

Lord of the Flies is a 1954 novel by Nobel Prize-winning author William Golding about a group of British boys marooned on a deserted island. They tried to govern themselves but with disastrous results, including cruelty and death. It digs at the question: Is human nature good?

Golding's story is the same view of reality that the Bible presents. It explains how human nature became corrupted. The Creation started perfect, with humans created into that world. Then the Bible introduces what it suggests is the single biggest problem: Our human pride and selfishness ('sin').

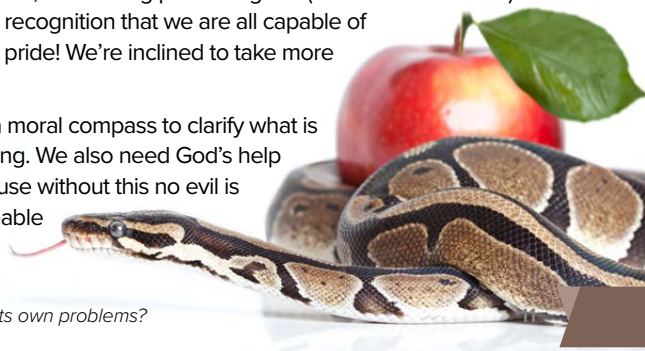
This pride caused us to want to live independently of God. Adam and Eve were tempted to mistrust God and used the free will they had been given to disobey a single small rule God had given, which was not to eat the fruit of one specific tree. (For clarity, they were given only one small, specific boundary.)

They made a choice; the rest is history. The Bible explains how, because of this, our very nature was corrupted. Since then, selfish thoughts and motivations have come naturally to us.

The Bible then gives a selection of historic accounts (Genesis 3-11) to illustrate how the scale of this evil grew, causing ever-greater suffering.[8] The selected stories make the point that, without God's help, we are incapable of becoming truly good.

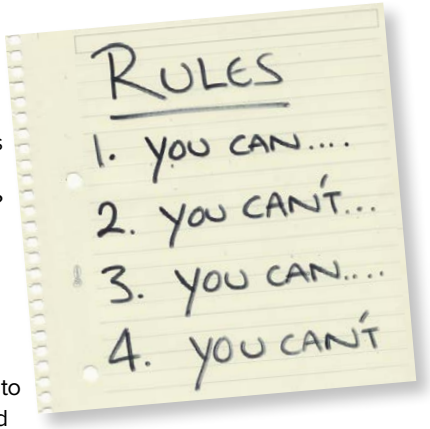
To make the world better, the starting place for good (in the Christian view) is therefore a humble recognition that we are all capable of great selfishness and pride! We're inclined to take more than we give.

Therefore, we need a moral compass to clarify what is actually right and wrong. We also need God's help to do that good because without this no evil is beyond us; we're capable of anything![9]



Can the human race fix its own problems?

2. What is 'good'?



How then are we to define what the words 'good' and 'evil' mean? Is there an actual 'code' — or is it more of a personal choice?

This booklet started with a quote from the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. *"Can man be good without God?"*[10]

To clarify again, his point was not to question whether an atheist could do 'good' things. The point was instead that, if we reject the idea of 'God', there is no basis left to define what the words 'good' and 'bad' mean. Morality (right and wrong) becomes nothing more than a matter of opinion!

Where, then, does a society's morality come from — if there is no God? Eventually those with the most power will force their opinion on everyone else, and that will become the 'moral code' of your nation or culture. But what if those with power are selfish or 'evil'? What if they create one rule for themselves and another for you?

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche made this now-famous statement,

"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves?"[11]

Nietzsche was not suggesting that God has somehow been killed. Instead, the idea of 'God' had been killed. As an atheistic society, they saw those who promoted the Christian faith as 'the murderers' because they believed their rules and values inhibited freedom (where Christians would suggest these values create a context for freedom). The problem was, in killing off

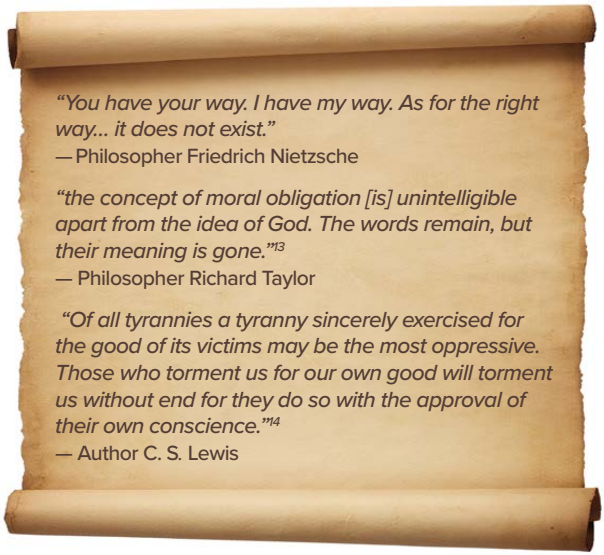
the influence and values of the Christian faith, how would they now define what was right and wrong?

Put differently, if we can't even define what 'right' or 'wrong' or 'evil' are, what hope do we have of ever limiting that thing we call 'evil'?

In fact, if there is no God, why can't we do 'evil'?

Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky answered that question with the statement,[12] *"If God is dead, anything is permissible."* The horrors of the Gulags and torture chambers showed the results — and truly do not bear mention. (I am disturbed for having ever read about what people become capable of doing to others when 'moral restraint' is removed.)

So, is murder actually wrong, and on what basis? If we're just advanced animals and they can kill each other — why can't we? Animals also kill off inferior species — so why can't we? (Why is racism wrong — if morality is just personal or cultural opinion?) If it is about 'survival of the fittest' why not get rid of the less fortunate, the physically disabled, and maybe even a couple of billion people if we think the world is overpopulated?



3. Can we save ourselves without God?

(The dangers of rejecting a belief in moral absolutes)

Whether we like it or not, beliefs always eventually lead to behaviour. That's why, in this section, I'll give some more examples of how the belief that there is no God plays out in reality.

I will then finish this booklet by showing the Christian view — because it is different, and makes amazing sense of the way we are 'wired' as humans (meaning our software, the way we think, psychologically).

If the theory of evolution really does explain everything, its believers (like Paul Copan, Richard Dawkins, J. L. Mackie or Michael Ruse, quoted in booklet 1) openly recognise that the idea of 'good' and 'bad' is nothing more than an adaptation. It's no different to the existence of our hands and feet. This means that the idea of ethics (the belief that some things are actually right and others wrong) is not even real — even though we all seem to need to live as if it is.

Twentieth-century philosopher Richard Taylor explained the hypocrisy that follows.

"Contemporary writers in ethics, who blithely discourse upon moral right and wrong and moral obligation without any reference to religion, are really just weaving intellectual webs from thin air; which amounts to saying that they discourse without meaning."[15]

If there is no 'God' nothing is actually right or wrong. It's all down to an individual's choice, or their community's combined choice — or the person who gains the most power.

The promises of Adolf Hitler (Fascism)

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) reasoned that, because there was no God, the idea of sin was logically just a human invention used by rulers and priests to manipulate the masses. To note the implications, he rejected Christian virtues (ideas) like kindness, forgiveness, humility, obedience and self-denial as being things for the weak. To him, Biblical values and morality were nothing more than life-killing. He instead looked forward to a world that would grow beyond these to something better. Specifically, he looked to the evolution of a race of superhumans who lived by an ethic (value) of power.

A short while later the Nazis, who held Nietzsche's teachings in high regard, decided to create that super race.[16]

With Charles Darwin's ideas of the 'survival of the fittest' in the mix, Hitler also believed in the ethic of power — not love. He said, *"Only force rules. Force is the first law. Unfortunately, the world stresses... democracy and the majority instead of the worth of the great leader."*[17]

Hitler also believed that humans were essentially good by nature.

Chuck Colson comments regarding the Holocaust,

> *"It is paradoxical indeed that such horrors flowed from the idealistic-sounding philosophy of innate human goodness."*[18]

Why couldn't 'good' German leaders stop Hitler?

Hitler's Germany murdered more than 6 million Jews, not to mention many others (black people, homosexuals, the physically and mentally disabled, political opponents etc.).[19] Most (though not all) of the German people eventually supported his leadership and ideas.[20]

So, it is noted, the Nazi death count is nothing on that of communism in Russia, which applied Marx's ideas, with Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) killing millions, then outdone by his successor Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) who — as an example — in a single planned famine killed more of his own people than Hitler's Germany did in total!

However, Hitler (1889-1945) added many more deaths to that if we count the 40 to 50 million who died in the war against him (World War II, 1939-1945).

So, why wasn't Hitler stopped by Germans if he was so 'bad'?

The Holocaust was not stopped from within because the actions of the Nazis were logically consistent with their beliefs — based on the teachings of philosophers like Nietzsche, Hegel and Darwin. This bore itself out in the 'Nuremberg trials', where Nazi leaders from World War II were tried for crimes against humanity. Many defended themselves saying they had done nothing wrong and that they were merely obeying orders.

The lesson is very simple. Beliefs eventually lead to behaviour — and this is why beliefs matter!

"...far from being contemptuous of ethics, the perpetrators [of the Holocaust] acted in strict conformity with an ethic which held that, however difficult and unpleasant the task might have been, mass extermination of the Jews and Gypsies was entirely justified...

...the Holocaust as a sustained effort was possible only because a new ethic was in place that did not define the arrest and deportation of Jews as wrong and in fact defined it as ethically tolerable and even good."[21]

— Peter Haas, Professor of Jewish Studies, author and academic

"Only from a transcendent [God-like] vantage point which stands above could such a critique [of the Holocaust] be launched,"[22]

— Philosopher William Lane Craig

"Without religion the coherence of an ethic of compassion cannot be established. The principle of respect for persons and the principle of the survival of the fittest are mutually exclusive."[23]

— R. Z. Friedman, Philosopher of the University of Toronto

"As sociobiologists have so persuasively argued, if humans are a product of natural selection, then even the most caring acts are performed, ultimately, because they advance our own genetic interests. Kindness is a disguised form of selfishness." "well-meaning secularists can show compassion, give generously to charities" but "have no rational basis for being compassionate, they act on solely subjective motives — which could change at any given moment."[24]

— Chuck Colson, Cultural Commentator

History repeats itself

(The promises of modern social scientists)

If humans are merely advanced animals, it follows that not only our physical bodies came about as the result of a series of physical accidents. Our psychology (thinking) also came about as the result of a series of random accidents — but this time in the chemistry of our brains, somehow giving us consciousness and the ability to think. Somehow the possibility of emotions and thoughts and memory were 'created' by accident.

They were then somehow 'selected' and kept, becoming so real to our experience that you (the reader) genuinely think you are reading this booklet right now (consciousness) — and that you are thinking free thoughts (free will).

These 'matter-to-man' evolutionary ideas then led social scientists to believe that each accidental improvement in our intellect or perception must have somehow given an advantage to our survival, which is why it was preserved — with ever increasing complexity 'created', again and again.

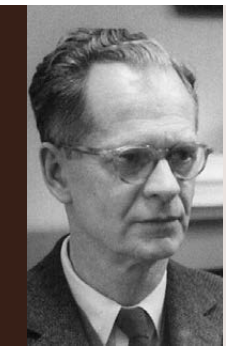
Our consciousness is therefore actually an illusion of sorts — existing randomly, and accidentally, with no purpose or reason, even though we really do feel that we exist and that there must be a reason for this.

The assumption that this had happened all by chance led social scientists to conclude that it must be our environments that shape our beliefs and behaviour — rather than our moral choices. The implications are truly significant! For example, free will (volition) doesn't actually exist — because our every choice must be the product of either our DNA, or our prior experiences!

"Your genes made you do it!"

Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), suggested we humans were just complex animals. This was the natural result of his belief in 'matter-to-man' evolution — with no involvement whatsoever from any 'God'.

Other social scientists continued to develop this train of thought, like Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), who is famous for his behavioural experiments with dogs, and Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904-1990), who is famous for his behavioural experiments with rats, conditioning their behaviours through positive and negative stimuli.[25]



From B. F. Skinner

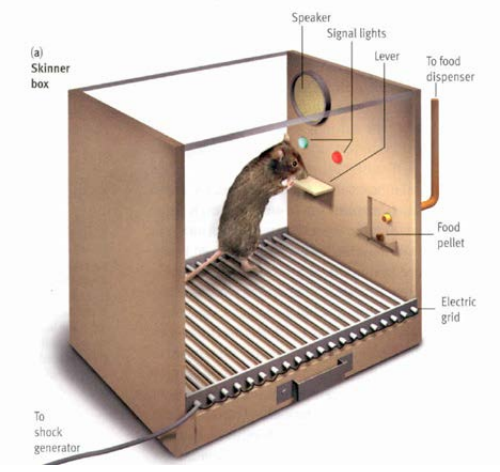
"Freedom is an illusion, but a valuable one."

"What is love except another name for the use of positive reinforcement? Or vice versa."

"The real question is not whether machines think but whether men do. The mystery which surrounds a thinking machine already surrounds a thinking man."

Social scientists concluded that all our thoughts and reactions are purely biological and scientific. We merely respond to our environments — like animals do. Our thoughts and feelings are programmed chemical reactions in our brains.

So, there is no real individual thought, or moral conscience. Free will does not actually exist. Our convictions, love, compassion, hope — and



even the illusion of rationality itself — are all nothing more than chemical responses; they're neither real nor rational.

The problem

The problem is that all these things seem very real to us. That's the tension here. You think you're reading this booklet and can think freely and rationally to make your own conclusions. This does not, however, change the fact that, if these social scientists are correct, it's all part of a truly remarkable, entirely accidental and meaningless illusion!

(The question is, are they right — or wrong?)

Here is where the implications for daily living begin. Social scientists have therefore said that it is pointless to teach morality (right and wrong). The real need is instead to condition people to think and behave differently by controlling their environments.

To be clear, they are suggesting that the world's great problem is outside of us, not inside of us. Just like farm animals we can be 'herded' in beneficial directions. This is the 'scientific way'.

This therefore leads to another transfer of power to the 'elite', because they could control our environments to carry out various social and educational programmes for our good through our schools, public media and more.

Let's again look at the three-pronged format I introduced earlier — but this time with modern social scientist's beliefs in mind.

The Promise:	To improve our societies, to make us happier, to lessen crime and to end poverty.
The Problem:	Environments have shaped people's thinking to produce certain behaviours.
The Bargain:	Give us power so we can control their environments, to make the world a better place.

But what if this is yet another incorrect diagnosis that sounds good on the surface, but which fails to correctly identify the real problem? Might we end up with another 'medicine' forced on us that won't work?

The belief that morality is relative to the individual is... *"resulting in more harm to the society in general than anything else in my lifetime. It is unutterably destructive. How's that working for you?"*[26]

— Glenn Sunshine, Professor of History

"Denial of sin may appear to be a benign [harmless] and comforting doctrine, but in the end, it is demeaning and destructive, for it denies the significance of our choices and actions. It reduces us to pawns in the grip of larger forces: either unconscious forces in the human psyche or economic and social forces in the environment."[27]

— Chuck Colson, Cultural Commentator

"I am very doubtful whether history shows us one example of a man who, having stepped outside traditional [Christian] morality and attained power, has used that power benevolently."

— Author C. S. Lewis

Is a human really just an advanced animal to be 'herded' towards certain behaviours, or are we created by God and given free will?

Is morality really just an illusion — or do moral choices actually exist?

Is the problem outside of us — or inside of us?

Can conditioning our environments fix us — or might we actually need God?

4. How can we be made good?

An explanation that makes sense

Here, in four quick points, is the Bible's explanation of good and evil, the existence of suffering, our wrongdoing — and about salvation and hope.

For clarity, the purpose here is not merely an explanation of the Christian understanding. It is instead to point out ways in which this understanding makes sense of our everyday experiences in life — with awareness of the comparisons.

#1 Human beings have been created special — and are fundamentally different to the animals.

> *"So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.'" — Genesis 1:27-31*

The Bible accounts tell us that human beings were the pinnacle and goal of God's creation. Everything else in the creation was created as the context for us. We were uniquely made in God's 'image' — referring no doubt to the way we think, including our free will, moral choice, rational ability, creative ability, ability to love and more.

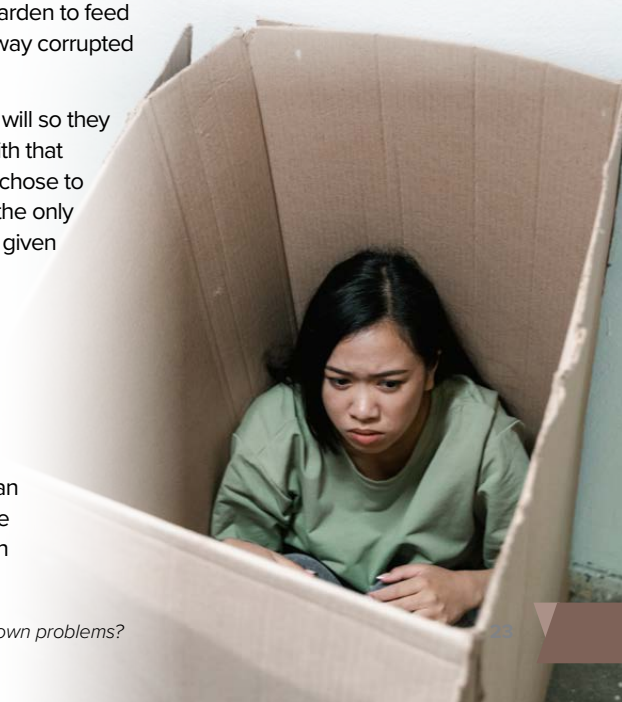
We were then given 'dominion' over the Earth to care for it.

This explanation of life makes sense in several ways. For example, it doesn't take much to see how different our thinking is to that of the animals. It also doesn't take much to see that we're uniquely able to steward, or manage, our planet. It is an explanation that makes sense of what we know to be real.

#2 The problem is within us — not outside of us

Modern theory (which we discussed in the prior section) suggests we are morally neutral, and that the problem is in our *environments*. In contrast, the Bible suggests the problem is *inside* of us — and specifically in our hearts. The 'heart' in this context refers to the core of our being, from which our choices and motivations come.

The Bible tells of the first humans — Adam and Eve. They were placed in a perfect world with a garden to feed them. They were in no way corrupted by selfishness.



However, they had free will so they could love — and it is with that same free will that they chose to mistrust God, breaking the only moral boundary he had given them.

With that choice, sin entered both the world and the very core of their being — and ours.

The problem (as Christian faith views it) is therefore in our hearts, from which

come our wrongful choices and selfish motivations. We choose to live independently from God. We reject boundaries he has given for our safety and well-being. We live selfishly, bringing suffering and inequality into the world!

> *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory [radiant perfection] of God* Romans 3:23

Could we fix the problem ourselves? Unfortunately, this selfishness and pride has a strong grip on our hearts. It's like a disease. Even if we really try, we still cannot become perfectly selfless! The Apostle Paul explained his experience of this challenge with these words.

> *"I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. ...it is sin living in me that does it."* Romans 7:18b-20

This is surely an explanation that makes sense of our reality. There is a 'selfish gene' within us all. We make bad choices — and think bad thoughts, and these create bad outcomes affecting ourselves, our relationships and our planet.

#3. It is our sin, combined with God's removal of his hand of protection, that enabled suffering, while God promises to eventually put an end to sin and suffering

Logically, if there is ever to be hope that good will triumph evil, God needs be both good and separate from evil. To clarify again, God cannot be responsible for evil, must be separate to evil — and powerful enough to end all evil.

All these factors exist in the Bible's explanation of reality.

Here are 5 short sub-points, to consider the rationality of the explanation.

1. There was a perfect creation

This included perfect relationships, with no sin and suffering — as covered in point #1 above.

2. Sin and suffering came into the Creation through wrongful human choice

This is to say, God was not responsible for sin and suffering, even though he gave us free will which created its possibility — as covered in point #2 above.

Note, free will is needed for there to be love.[28]

To complete the picture...

3. God didn't destroy what we damaged because he has a good plan

The Bible explains that God is allowing this world to continue in its broken state, though only for a limited time.[29] Human life was limited to about 70 years to limit the evil we could do.[30] God is doing this because he has good purposes in mind — and with a much longer-term view.[31]

4. All sin and suffering will one day end — at God's hand[32]

God will not allow the sufferings we've created in this world continue forever!

5. God alone is able to put things right

Eternity is ahead where there can be reward for good and just punishment for evil. True justice for all wrongs done by all people in this life can therefore exist![33]

> *"sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned"* Romans 5:12

> *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* Romans 7:24-25

This explanation makes sense of a lot of things that are true to our experience of life (even though every person alive wishes there was no suffering or evil).

#4. God's solution to the problem needed to ensure justice for wrongdoing — because genuine 'good' would not exist otherwise

A simple logic again sits before us. Because God is love, his creating of a way to save us was always the goal.[27]

An immediate consequence

Our selfishness and wrongdoing are like crimes against God. The Bible explains that this is what broke our relationship with God, disconnecting us from the experience of his love and help — even though he still sees and knows us. (We no longer truly know him.)

The wider implication: A good God cannot ignore evil

The logic here is not good news for us — but it is sound logic.

If we are guilty of 'crimes', God would not be good if he let us off. For example, we all understand that a good judge must make sure criminals get just consequences. God likewise must see that the requirements of justice are fulfilled — *or he's not good.* This is a very important point when considering whether this faith could be rationally true.

Also, if our 'crimes' aren't paid for (justly punished) here on Earth somehow, we enter eternity unforgiven. This is called the 'second death' in the Bible, referring to Hell (which is a place of separation from God beyond this life).

What God did — because of love

God therefore did the unthinkable. In Jesus he left the comfort of heaven to be 'restricted' to a human body. He then allowed sinful humans to falsely accuse and kill him. Having done no sin, God decided that Jesus' death was sufficient to pay for the sin (crimes) of all people who have ever lived.

To follow this logic, if the requirements of justice were paid in this way, the fact that God is good remains true — while we can potentially go free!

In big words it's called 'substitutionary atonement'. Someone pays for the crimes of someone else (as their substitute). What is surprising in the Christian belief is that God himself, in Jesus, became our substitute!

...But, in all this, God will not overrule free will in a way that forces our choice!

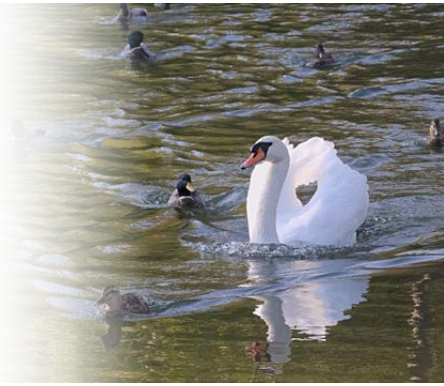
The logic is again consistent (which is the point here). With the requirements of justice now met through Jesus, God extends an offer of forgiveness to all who would receive it and follow him. We each get to choose — and this tests our hearts.

This is again an explanation that makes sense of how there can be a good God while also (concurrently) suffering on earth, and yet also free will, justice and hope.

So, which explanation makes sense?

(Three illustrations)

The Ugly Duckling



A children's story by Hans Christian Andersen tells of an egg that found its way into the nest of a duck. When all the eggs hatched, one bird didn't fit in — and was considered ugly. Suffering rejection, the bird couldn't work out why he was so different and useless, big, clumsy, and always picked on. But then one day when he had grown a little, he saw a flock of swans flying by — and realised he too was a swan.

The young swan knew something was wrong. It was living out of sync with reality, as if it were a duck — when it was not.

Every day we live as if our lives matter, and as if we have free will. To note the logic, if there is no God, that is not logical. If there is no God, free will is an illusion — which renders words like love, rationality, creativity and moral choice meaningless.

To summarise the same thoughts from atheistic philosopher Richard Dawkins again, if there is no God there is:

> *"no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pointless indifference" "We are machines for propagating DNA... It is every living object's sole reason for being".*[34]

Does this description really fit with the reality of our psychology, hopes, dreams, thinking and experiences?

The ‘overdesign’ of your software

If we consider our bodies to be like the physical hardware of a computer, and our thinking and psychology like the computer’s software programmes, it is not hard to see that our human ‘software’ is far more developed than is necessary for mere survival!

This concept is called ‘overdesign’. We are far more complex than evolution would ‘make’ us if survival and natural selection were the process.

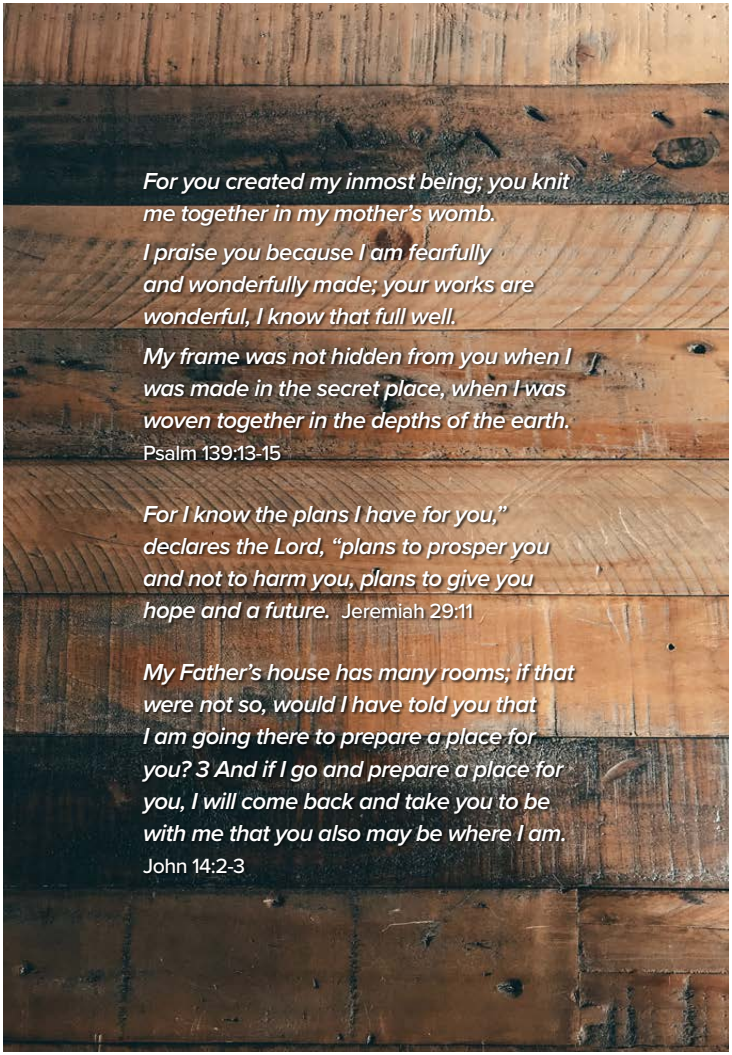
For two simple examples, consider the fine movements that our hands can do when making things — and then compare to a monkey (who cannot do the same). A full quarter of the part of our brain that controls body movements is devoted to our hands, and another quarter to our faces — which is why humans are capable of so many amazing and telling facial expressions! We are ‘over designed’ in these areas, giving us the ability to both imagine and then create amazing, beautiful and detailed things with our hands — while our unique control of our faces enables us to communicate quickly and with remarkable emotion and meaning. None of this is needed for mere survival. So which explanation makes the best sense of the reality of this? Accident, mystery or planned?

The Sports Car

Imagine we are sitting in a race car parked at the beginning of an 'off-road' (four-wheel drive) track made of dirt or sand. We're told we're here for a race over obstacles and through swamps — while everything about the car we are in tells us it's built for speed on a flat road! We attempt the track, but we lack grip. We scrape on every bump. We get stuck.

If humans are just advanced animals, why do we instinctively feel like we were created for so much more — like the sports car 'crying out' to say, 'bring me a flat road so I can show you what I'm capable of'? Why do we have hopes and dreams? Why do we love and long to be loved? Why do we recognise these things we call good and evil and instinctively believe they are real and that good should triumph over evil? Why do we feel there must be a reason for our lives greater than mere survival and the passing on of our genes — doing all manner of things to 'inject' into our lives?

Every idea above reflects something that's real to our experience, and that makes complete sense if there is a good and loving Creator God — and little to no sense otherwise!


For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Psalm 139:13-15
For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11
My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.
John 14:2-3

So, what is the problem on our planet really?

In summary, if there is no God, power is what counts, not love. Moral good and evil don't actually exist — even though they seem real. The way to make the world better is to control people and taking control of their environments is a logical place to start.

In contrast, Christianity says that love is what counts — rather than our pursuit of power, possessions, or prestige. Moral good and evil are real things — as are human consciousness, free will, rationality, moral choice, beauty and love. The problem is in our hearts — not our environments. Fixing what is in our hearts is exactly what Jesus came to do!

Which explanation makes best sense of the reality we live within?

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior.

Max Lucado — A Best-selling Christian author

These are reasons Christians believe Christianity to be true.

Coming up next

We have one booklet to go — and it was saved until last because it's probably the main reason people choose this faith: Beyond making sense rationally, when they tried it, it worked!

So, what do the 'rational' and 'experiential' evidences say when they are brought together? It is a very important final test!

IMAGE CREDITS

Cover:	Photo by Dziana Hasanbekava on Pexels.com
Page 5	John Lennon – Image by Stuart Hampton on Pixabay.com
Page 12	Fyodor Dostoevsky – Public Domain Friedrich Nietzsche – Public Domain
Page 14	Adolf Hitler – Credit – Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1990-048-29A – CC-BY-SA 3.0
Page 15	Auschwitz shoes – Photo by Nur Yilmaz – Pexels.com
Page 17	Glasses from prisoners, Oswiencim, Poland ©Thiago Figueredo Lopes – 123RF.COM
Page 21	Texture by Milo Textures on Pexels.com
Page 29	Image by Zhu Bing from Pixabay.com Richard Dawkins, Photo by Steve Jurvetson CC BY 2.0
Page 31	Sports car: © virtosmedia on 123RF.com
Back Cover	Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, photo from the Nationaal Archief, the Dutch National Archives, donated in the context of a partnership program. CC0 1.0

Endnotes

1 He was from the French-speaking city of Geneva.

2 Chuck Colson, How Now Shall We Live (Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), p170.

3 Chuck Colson (1931-2012) was Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon. He became caught up in the Watergate Scandal, serving time in prison as a result. Admitting his wrongs, he changed direction in life. He founded Prison Fellowship International, which has since reformed how prisoners are treated around the globe. He later became a noted cultural commentator, particularly regarding his own culture and civilisation.

4 Colson, p171.

5 Colson, p172. For definitions, the Bourgeoisie were the ruling class who owned the businesses and factories in Russia. The Kulaks were independent rich farmers — painted as the enemy of Communist Russia.

6 Find more on the death count ('black book') of communism at wikipedia.org

7 The following nations fell to communism last Century: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Benin, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Congo, Cuba, Croatia, Czech Republic, East Germany, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Herzegovina, Indonesia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Mozambique, Nicaragua, North Korea, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somali, South Yemen, Syria, Tajikistan, Tibet, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen, Yugoslavia. Today there remains China, Russia, Cuba, North Korea, Laos and recently, Venezuela.

8 Referring to Genesis 3 to 11, in which the text communicates that evil increased from basic pride to disobedience (Adam and Eve eating a fruit — Gen 3), to murder (Gen 4), to unrepentant murder (Gen 4), to worldwide immorality and violence (Gen 5-9), to a united worldwide rejection of God — from which no evil (against other people) would be impossible (Gen 10-11).

9 Genesis 11:6

10 Colson, p374. See also The Brothers Karamazov at Wikipedia.org

11 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p125.

12 1821-1881. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, trans. C. Garnett (New York: Signet Classics, 1957), bk. II, chap. 6; bk. V, chap. 4; bk. XI, chap. 8.

13 Richard Taylor, Ethics, Faith, and Reason (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p83-84. As cited in an article previously at www.reasonablefaith.org

14 C.S. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," God in the Dock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p292, as cited at Colson, p183

15 Richard Taylor, Ethics, Faith, and Reason (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p7. Also, in reference to various articles by William Lane Craig at www.reasonablefaith.org including 'No Good God? No good" at bethinking.org/morality/no-god-no-good

16 Colson, p173.

17 Speech at Essen, Germany, Nov. 22, 1926.

18 Colson, p173.

19 Data on the Holocaust and Nazism is readily found at Wikipedia.org

20 Sometimes called a 'fatal attraction', the general population were grateful to Hitler for bringing them out of a period of significant economic recession, and for restoring their sense of nationhood after a season of significant humiliation following Versailles (a Treaty that placed various ongoing limiting 'conditions for peace' upon Germany for their part in WW1). This created a strong sense of loyalty, reflected in the determination and unfailing morale of their people in the face of overwhelming Allied mass bombings and eventual advance.

21 Peter Haas, Morality after Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), as quoted in The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality, by William Craig Lane at reasonablefaith.org

22 William Craig Lane, The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality, Article at reasonablefaith.org
The words '…ideas and ideals…' are simplified from '…relativistic, socio-cultural mores…'.

23 R. Z. Friedman, "Does the 'Death of God' Really Matter?" International Philosophical Quarterly 23 (1983): 322, as at reasonablefaith.org

24 Colson, p137.

25 He made significant contributions to behaviourism. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behaviorism

26 Doing The Right Thing (6-part exploration of ethics), The Chuck Colson Center, 2011.

27 Colson, p183.

28 It is also likely that if a created being is ever given free will, they will eventually use it to make wrongful choices. The experience of suffering we're going through might therefore be unavoidable if God is ever to create beings capable of love.

29 Acts 1:11, Revelation 20:11f.

30 Psalm 90:10

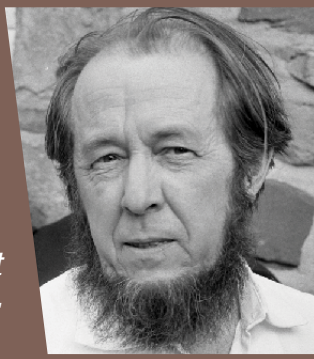
31 We cannot understand all those purposes. Still, it's certainly possible that there are things learnt from our history — like regarding the devastating consequences of our wrong choices, that might have a benefit or purpose in eternity. For example, the history recorded in the Bible shows firstly just how terrible the results of mistrusting him become if we choose that path. The help given in the first approximately 1,000 years (Genesis 3 to 11) shows the evil we are capable of — with no help from God. Specific help was then given to Israel (Genesis 12 through the Old Testament), and then even more help given to the Church (the time of Jesus until now — knowing Jesus' teachings, and with the indwelling Holy Spirit to help). In each new season, God has helped more — and our ability (as humans) to hurt others has continued to be well demonstrated. However, with God's increasing help, God-followers have brought increasing effort (with success) to enable equality, prosperity, charity, and freedom to be lifted to levels higher than any era prior — just not enough to ever get close to stopping evil. The lesson (for our eternal awareness) might therefore be when God says, 'don't eat from that tree' (Genesis 2:17), it's worth trusting him because he knows what he's talking about.

32 Revelation 21-22

33 1 Corinthians 2:9 "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."

34 A patching together of Dawkins' views cited by Lewis Wolpert, Six Impossible Things before Breakfast: The Evolutionary Origins of Belief (New York: Norton, 2006), p15 — further discussed in section 3.2 William Lane Craig, "The New Atheism and Five Arguments for God". reasonablefaith.org

I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our Revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous Revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: Men haver forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.



— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

ISBN 978-0-473-66803-7

shiningLIGHTS TRUST

A simple and authentic explanation of things you might not otherwise hear