

TOWARDS A GROUNDED MORALITY

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If you were given the task of founding a new religion, starting with a clean sheet, what would it be like?

The word 'religion' should not be interpreted here too narrowly -- as a system of doctrine and the ecclesiastical apparatus for preserving and promoting that system. That is not my meaning. In its fullest sense, religion comprehends an adult's entire outlook on living in the world (Peck, 1983). Stripped to its fundamentals, religion is about two things:

- (1) right relations with other people (ethics);
- (2) right relations with the cosmos (divinity).

Logically aim (2) includes aim (1), but for human beings other humans are such a special part of the environment that they deserve a category to themselves.

In this broader sense, religion is about how to live well, and everyone has some sort of religion. Indeed humans are inescapably religious creatures, and have been since the earliest archaeological evidence was deposited. We need religion not only for the spiritual health but also, since 1945, for the survival of the species.

"Right living is no longer the fulfilment of an ethical or religious demand. For the first time in history the physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart."
(Fromm, 1979.)

To put it another way: the most pressing economic, environmental, military, political, social, and even technological problems of our time are, at bottom, religious problems; and consequently they demand religious solutions. In saying this I do not mean to imply that the modern world lacks religion. Far from it. The problem is not that too many people are irreligious: the problem is that too many people have a bad religion. One of the most pernicious, and one of the most prevalent, is the creed that I have labelled elsewhere American Shinto (Forsyth, 1988). Its values have been well summed up by E.F. Schumacher.

"Money is considered to be all-powerful; if it could not actually buy non-material values, such as justice, harmony, beauty or even health, it could circumvent the need for them or compensate for their loss. The development of production and the acquisition of wealth have thus become the highest goals of the modern world in relation to which all other goals, no matter how much lip-service may still be paid to them, have to take second place. The highest goals require no justification; all secondary goals have finally to justify themselves in terms of the service their attainment renders to the attainment of the highest. This is the philosophy of materialism, and it is this philosophy -- or metaphysic -- which is now being challenged by events."
(Schumacher, 1974.)

The metaphysic that preaches the subservience of all other values to the goal of maximizing wealth is the core of American Shinto which is, under any reasonable definition of that word, a religion -- and a very bad one at that. It is bad in two ways: firstly it harms the people who believe in it and those they come into contact with; secondly it is based on assumptions about the world and about human nature which are simply false. If we give it time, the falsity of these beliefs will be amply demonstrated in the catastrophic destruction of a great civilization; but we must not give it time.

In my view, the antidote to this worship of wealth is religious education. Not so much religious education in the sense of teaching schoolchildren about Hindu festivals or Aboriginal legends or the fate of early Christian martyrs, but religious education in the sense of discussion and guidance on the subject of framing a personal philosophy of life.

But why go through with the strenuous effort needed to arrive at a faith of your very own (which could be gravely mistaken) when there are plenty that can be adopted 'off the shelf' (which claim to be perfectly free from errors)? Why bother to write your own bible when the deity has already done the job, once and for all eternity?

1. THE WRONGS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The first person to proclaim "the death of God" in print was Nietzsche, over 100 years ago -- and he was adamant that the deity had been killed not by infidels but by believers. The fact that many thinking people nowadays regard themselves as atheists has much to do with the inadequacies of Christianity and of other religions. In other words, much of the blame for the demise of religion can be laid at the door of the churches themselves. I propose to review their faults under three main headings --bigotry, archaism and arbitrariness.

1.1 Bigotry

"In the year 385 the Spanish layman Priscillian and a number of his followers were executed for heresy at Trier. They were the first people to be martyred for their beliefs by the church, and the first of many, because for the next thirteen centuries Christianity was, frankly, totalitarian."
(Cupitt, 1985.)

Crusades and persecutions have not been the sole prerogative of the Christian churches. Almost all great faiths have, one way or another, instigated massacres. The founders of these faiths saw them as liberating, but once a faith becomes institutionalized, it becomes inflexible. Vested interests come to the fore as religious and temporal authority are mixed. Only a few decades after the founder's death intolerance, dogmatism and authoritarianism are rife -- leading almost inevitably to bloodshed. One refreshing exception is the Baha'i faith, whose followers have not so far persecuted any other faiths (Perkins & Hainsworth, 1980); but it is still too young for us to say that it will remain exceptional in this respect. After all, the Sikh religion was originally seen by its founder Guru Nanak, at least in part, as a way of reconciling Hindus with Muslims. Yet within four centuries it had replaced the traditional two-way conflict in north-west India with a three-way conflict.

Religion as most people understand it -- in the sense of a body of metaphysical doctrine and an exclusive path to salvation -- is, quite simply, a curse on humanity. As Tom Paine said 200 years ago:

"All national institutions of churches -- whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish -- appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind and monopolize power and profit."
(Paine, 1791.)

The bigotry that blights traditional religions has its source in a narrow-minded legalism. The human mind has an uncanny knack of putting the letter before the spirit of the law. All religions have a body

of writing which is held as sacred. Mohammed, for instance, produced the Qur'an, which is considered to have been dictated to him by the archangel Gabriel acting as a messenger from Allah. Thus it is holy writ and cannot be contravened from now till the end of time. A text written 13 centuries ago contains all the knowledge mankind will ever need. Buddha, on the other hand, left no written records; but his disciples made up for that lack: "the [Pali] canon is about eleven times the size of the Christian bible, and this provides abundant opportunity for a variety of interpretations". (Bentley-Taylor & Offner, in Anderson, 1975).

A holy book of any kind is a playground for the legal mind. Once the lawyers set to work on biblical exegesis, they can conjure doctrines out of thin air. People whose talents include a combination of literal-mindedness and acute sophistry appear to gravitate inexorably towards positions of influence within religious organizations, from where they can issue pronouncements with devastating consequences. Huxley (1946) put it succinctly: "'Woe unto you lawyers,' said Christ. The denunciation was prophetic and for all time."

1.2 Archaism

Another way in which religion has contributed to its own demise is by deliberate archaism. Believers find it reassuring to harken back to a supposed 'golden age' of pure faith, and cling to antique ideas which -- divorced from the living context in which they were formed -- amount to little more than superstitions.

"In the early Church there was a very strong sense that this mystical divine experience was being transmitted through the Bishops. But as an organization develops and gets further from the source, it becomes increasingly a more human reality.... What actually happened was the Fathers had this tremendous experience of Christ. They tried to find words to express it, some formula. We need some conceptual form to focus the reality for us. The descendants take over the formula and lose what it's intended to express. And so it gets hardened into dogma." (Griffiths, quoted by Weber, 1986.)

All religions tend to cling to the past. Historical change puts them further and further out of touch with the lives they govern. Instead of gradual adaptation, the tensions build up until a painful reformation is necessary, and indeed inevitable.

Symbols lose their meaning with time. One function of the artist is to invent new symbols and restore aging symbolism to vitality. But the church is suspicious of novelty. It has invested a great store of spiritual energy in forms of symbolic ritual and opposes any attempt to write off that investment. Thus it becomes backward-looking and ritualistic.

1.3 Arbitrariness

Another fault of traditional religions is lack of coherence. This is inevitable if religious teachings are seen as divine revelation. Then every last dot and comma become sacred and there can be no distinction between essential and peripheral beliefs. Followers are not free to pick and choose; either they accept the whole package, or they are out. People who try to be selective undermine the integrity of a monolithic structure.

This rigidity has slightly relaxed in our time, but it is still a major failing of all religions. It makes no sense to ask why there are exactly seven deadly sins (not six or eight, for instance) or why there are nine levels of consciousness on the way to Buddhahood (not eight or ten) or why Jehovah took six days to create the world (not five or seven). Such questions are inadmissible. But to a scientist such 'arbitrary constants' demand an explanation.

With the spread of scientific education, the luxuriant arbitrariness of most religions becomes more and more off-putting. Preachers are not used to justifying their doctrines, except by reference to holy

scriptures; but we know that holy scriptures are historical documents like any other -- full of unstated bias and inconsistency.

Previous religions never came to terms with the necessity for change. In trying to render their basic doctrines immune from revision the founding fathers of the world's churches (as distinct from the founders of the religious movements on which they were based) fossilized what they sought to preserve. Present-day religions are museum pieces. To put it more picturesquely: St. Peter was the rock in which Christianity was petrified.

Christianity today is a tangle of arbitrary and, for the most part, irrelevant doctrines. Other religions are much the same in this respect. Yet the modernist churchmen who attempt to strip away the clutter are so far ahead of their flock that they meet widespread resistance and hostility.

"Whenever I try to describe the impression Jesus made on people I get interrupted at every turn. Sometimes I can hear and see that the questioners are very agitated. My way of speaking has obviously disconcerted them. At first they thought that they were listening to a believer, but what they expected, a clear testimony to my belief in the divinity of Christ, never came, so they interrupted me in order to hear it, if only to discover how to assess me. As the conversation goes on, it turns out that they could not recognize their own idea of the God-man in my description of Jesus."

(Grollenberg, 1978.)

Fr Grollenberg takes Christianity as his starting-point, not his destination. But because his source of inspiration is the historical figure of Christ, he still calls himself a Christian. This is understandable but, I believe, misleading.

What we need is an impassioned, intellectually honest and, above all, open-ended debate about how each person should best conduct his or her life. It would literally be a miracle if the Vatican (or any other religious establishment) had a contribution to make to this process -- other than trying to strangle it at birth.

1.4 Religious Renewal

Despite this, there are moves afoot within Christianity to reform itself. An important minority of theologians are attempting to reform Christianity from within. I have already quoted Lucas Grollenberg; another such is Don Cupitt of Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

"The true God is not God as picturesque supernatural fact, but God as our religious ideal. The view that religious belief consists of holding that a number of supernatural propositions are descriptively true is encouraged by the continuing grip on people's minds of a decadent and mystifying dogmatic theology. In effect I am arguing that for the sake of clarity it should be discarded entirely, and replaced by the practice of religion -- ethics and spirituality -- and the philosophy of religion. Then religion can become itself again, with a clear intellectual conscience at last. Does this amount to saying that God is simply a humanly constructed ideal, such that when there are no human beings any longer there will be no God any longer? This question is improper, because it is framed from the obsolete realist point of view. The suggestion that the idea of God is man-made would only seem startling if we could point by contrast to something that has not been made by men."

(Cupitt, 1985.)

These are strong words. Hallowed beliefs are products of "a decadent and mystifying dogmatic theology". Indeed Cupitt maintains that "the objective God that many people believe in is an oppressive pagan notion, in fact, the Devil".

Grollenberg, Cupitt and others of like mind, have taken upon themselves a Herculean task of cleansing and revitalization (if so pagan a comparison is apt). We can only wish them luck. If they are

right that Christianity can be shorn of doctrinaire mythologizing then it will have shown remarkable powers of self-renewal, and the criticisms levelled here at religion will lose much of their force.

At the moment, however, there is little evidence that the tail of liberal theology can wag the dog of entrenched belief. On the contrary, there are signs of increased fanaticism in Christianity, Islam and Sikhism, to name only three religions. Since Copernicus, religion has habitually retreated into the laager of blind faith under external pressure, and there seems little hope of breaking that bad habit.

That is why I think that a reunion of faith and reason, if it is to come about at all, will have to come from outside any religious establishment. Existing religious systems simply carry too much baggage for the journey that has to be made.

2. THE FAULTS OF SCIENCE

Religion, as most people understand it, has failed and is failing the modern world. It has been unable to survive the onslaught of scientific thinking. Despite admirable efforts by individual believers, no existing religion offers a cognitive structure to which a reflective, scientifically educated person can give full-hearted assent. There are too many arbitrary, and indeed ugly, beliefs to swallow.

If religion were no more than a collection of myths and superstitions then its decline would be wholly welcome. The trouble is that science has made no provision for a post-religious world. For over a century many scientists have been happy to chop at the roots of religion, particularly Christianity, seeing any weakening of faith that has resulted as pure gain. But the dream of steady scientific liberation from superstition coupled with steady technological progress towards human well-being is no longer tenable. Today science faces a crisis as deep as the one it earlier inflicted on religion, for science too has developed fatal weaknesses.

2.1 Instrumentalism

Scientists have their own idols, one of which is the cherished idea of ethical neutrality. Many biologists, for example, are complacent about the fact that hundreds of thousands of animal experiments are carried out each year in laboratories around the world, most of them involving injury and death, as a matter of routine. A bloodbath is taking place behind closed doors. Some species are on the verge of extinction. If a dozen chimpanzees can have their brains cut up, leaving them blind and partially paralyzed, merely to gain a PhD, what sort of ethic are we implicitly endorsing? If our closest relatives in the animal world are expendable, what about us?

A grotesque example has been reported by Veitch.

"Earlier this year a neurosurgeon in Cleveland, Ohio, disclosed that he had swapped the heads and bodies of 50 apes. Half the heads continued to function after they had been hitched by tubes to their new bodies -- the eyes moved, the mouths chewed and they felt pain. But the surgeon, Dr Robert White, couldn't connect the spinal chords so he was left with a set of paraplegic primates all of which died."
(Veitch, 1986.)

Such excesses can hardly be symptomatic of a correct relationship between the human and animal worlds.

"In the end it will lead to a cure for cancer," is a favourite reply of the animal experimenters, but we know enough about cancer to realize that a single cure for many diseases is not remotely likely. In fact, talk about abatement of human misery is largely humbug: the real spur to such research is normally profit for the drug companies, and most animals die to test minor alterations of household

products like detergent or toothpaste. An amoral science is always likely to degenerate into an immoral science under commercial pressure.

2.2 Careerism

Like religion, science has also succumbed to the vices of institutionalization as it has prospered. In the process, knowledge has been compartmentalized, ethics have been marginalized, research has been trivialized, and the original purpose of the whole venture has been lost.

The career scientist is not so much devoted to a search for truth as a quest for professional advancement. More accurately, he or she is an artist who works with an esoteric art-form -- the resumé or curriculum vitae (CV). The vast majority of practising scientists, from the moment they step onto the conveyor-belt of academic life as a raw graduate to the time they drop off the other end into a distinguished retirement, are caught up in a frantic paper-chase. The aim of the game is publication of papers, not mainly to inform colleagues across the world of significant advances, nor even to attract funding for the institute that employs them, but chiefly to have another citation to add to their life's work, the CV. Thus scientific papers are churned out in ever increasing numbers with ever decreasing relevance.

Scientists evaluate each other by counting the number of papers published, not by reading them. There is even a semi-official tariff according to which N published papers are worth one book, which in turn is equivalent to X thousand ECUs in grant-money obtained. If you want to get ahead, number your publications and add up your research grants to make the arithmetic easier for those assessing you.

A colleague who boasts "I have published more papers than the rest of the department put together" may arouse envy and back-biting; but no one seriously questions the assumption on which that boast is made. At some universities it is a standing joke that the way to assess an applicant for a new post is to weigh his or her CV.

The reality is so bizarre as to defy to parody. One can only be glad that a certain amount of genuine research is nevertheless carried out against the background of this absurd ritual.

2.3 Arrogance

By far the weightiest charge against science as an institution, however, is arrogance. Some scientists, it would seem, are drunk with success.

The great achievements of science have been due to a critical attitude of mind, and science must remain critical if it is to remain effective. Above all, it must remain self-critical. Yet many scientists, whose own authority rests on the fact that their illustrious forebears were prepared to criticize the orthodoxies of their day, are quite happy to pontificate. They too easily forget that all scientific truths are provisional, all theories merely hypotheses, all paradigms temporary and vulnerable. They fall into bad habits and expound their over-arching meta-theories as unshakeable verities.

The treatment of extra-sensory perception (ESP) and other 'paranormal' phenomena is an interesting case in point. The best-known early researchers into ESP were the Rhines at Duke university. They played the game according to the official groundrules of science until the statistical evidence for the phenomenon was overwhelming. Most reputable scientists ignored their findings. The general attitude was: ESP cannot exist, therefore the evidence for it is dismissible, possibly fraudulent but certainly unconvincing. More recently, it has been reported that subjects could either influence a quantum process by psychokinesis or foresee that process by precognition, depending on how you interpret the results. The experimental apparatus used was a lamp attached to a random-number generator based on the decay of radioactive strontium. To the best knowledge of modern physics this is a genuinely random, and therefore unpredictable, process. As Schmidt (1969) put it, it harnesses "nature's most elementary source of randomness". Yet some people were able either to foretell or influence that

process by thought alone, at a level of improbability that would rule out chance as an explanation in any other branch of science (Koestler, 1972).

On the whole, the scientific community ignored these findings too. A few scientists wondered whether such extreme statistical improbabilities pointed to a mistake in our conception of randomness and left it at that. Hardly any scientists gave the slightest sign of wishing to modify their world-view because it could no longer accommodate the facts. The results, obtained experimentally and analyzed statistically as laid down in the best textbooks, were consigned to the bottom drawer to gather dust. They contradicted the dominant materialist philosophy which still guides the majority of scientists -- many of whom assert stoutly that ESP and allied phenomena are impossible. This sort of arrogance is not science, but scientism: it threatens the scientific spirit itself.

2.4 The Faith that Dare not Speak its Name

The trouble is that religion just does not wither away. Western scientific culture has succeeded in undermining traditional religions, but the needs they used to serve still make themselves felt. This is revealed in the guru-hunger of our times. Psychedelia may have failed, but plenty of way-out cults still survive. Though the 'counter culture' has gone back underground, bits of it poke above the surface.

Fundamentalist Christianity in many flavours, EST, Gestalt therapy, Primal therapy, Soka Gakkai chanting, T'ai Chi Ch'uan, Yoga and Zen are gaining in popularity. So are numerous other cults too disreputable to mention. Books on Tarot cards, divination with I Ching, the occult, astrology and alien gods from outer space take far more shelf-room on the bookstalls than books about physical science, and generally sell better too. The spiritual hunger of our age is real, but it is mostly assuaged with 'junk food' purveyed by false gurus. Actually it is quite easy to tell a false guru from a genuine one. There are two tell-tale signs:

- (1) the false guru takes financial advantage of (much poorer) disciples;
- (2) the false guru typically takes sexual advantage of his disciples.

For all that they are easy to distinguish from the genuine article, fake gurus keep appearing in our society. This is because they answer a need.

That is the legacy of modern science. It destroys faith and puts nothing in its place, allowing false religions to flourish. The falsest of them all, and the most flourishing, is what I call American Shinto -- an unholy amalgam of materialism and fundamentalism.

3. OF MICE AND MACS

So traditional religions do not deserve revival; and the dream of scientific enlightenment has failed. But the problem of living well does not go away, and will be answered somehow. Where then should we look for guidance?

When I was a student in the early 1970s, it was easy to criticise academic psychology for being obsessed with 'rats and stats', and the criticism had a good deal of force. To be fair, the situation has changed since then, though whether it has improved is open to debate. Twenty years later, psychologists are hung up on 'mice and Macs'. Not rodents and raincoats but electronic input devices and the Apple MacIntosh computers to which they are attached. As behaviourism has waned, cognitive science has gained the ascendant. To put it crudely: psychologists seem to feel happier being deeply knowledgeable about simplified artificial models than being completely baffled by complex real people.

The idea of looking to academic psychology for a revival of the humane spirit might therefore seem so far-fetched as to be laughable. But it is possible to detect signs of hope. The most hopeful sign is discontent with the current paradigm, which is not hard to find among human scientists.

"At the peak of scientific ascendancy in the middle of the twentieth century, there was increasing evidence of a dawning awareness in Western consciousness that scientific progress might not be commensurate with all that is wise or desirable, and that the attempt to understand the world whilst precluding any attempt to understand human nature might be the ultimate in folly."
(Graham, 1986.)

There is widespread dissatisfaction with the prevailing positivist orthodoxy among ecologists, existentialists, feminists, humanist psychologists, psychoanalysts etc. But each group gives the villain of the piece a different name. For example, from a feminist perspective, Eichenbaum and Orbach write as follows.

"We have found that most current theory and practice of psychotherapy is imprisoned within conventional patriarchal ideology and that women are being poorly served by present psychotherapeutic methods and approaches." (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1985.)

Their enemy is patriarchy. Other workers diagnose much the same problem under a different label. If these disparate groups could recognize American Shinto as a common enemy there really might be a dramatic cultural revolution in the human sciences. As with most revolutions, it is largely a question of bringing the dispossessed and underprivileged from the periphery into the central positions. For it is at the fringes of the human sciences that the yoke of materialism chafes most sorely -- among clinicians, counsellors, educationalists, therapists and other 'oddballs'.

Psychological research used to be conducted in departments of 'moral philosophy': I suggest that it is time for psychological researchers to try to live up to that phrase again. For if psychologists cannot be moral philosophers (in both senses) who else will be?

Every autumn, up and down the country, students arrive at psychology departments expecting to learn something (from their courses) about how to live. We spend three years training them to abandon such foolish hopes. Might it not be just as easy to attempt to meet them?

4. VIRTUE IN THREE DIMENSIONS

I have been critical long enough. Let me give a positive example of the sort of thing that a revitalized psychology might concern itself with, by returning to the problem I posed at the head of this essay: how to devise a new religion, starting from scratch.

I begin with the premise that light-heartedness should be emphasized from the outset, since it is far too easy to be overcome by the deadly seriousness of life. I encapsulate this in a slogan:

LIVING WELL = HAVING FUN + DOING GOOD.

Fun may be hard to find, but at least it is easy to recognize when you're having it, so for brevity I leave that side of the equation as an 'exercise for the reader'. The next question, then, is: how do we know when we're doing good?

I only have a few paragraphs to address this huge issue, so let me cut a long story short by saying that I have not been satisfied with any of the three main lines of approach to be found in the literature, which are, roughly speaking:

- (1) divine guidance (e.g. by conscience);
- (2) Kantian or neo-Kantian prescriptivism;
- (3) utilitarianism (act- or rule-based).

My own view is that goodness is largely a matter of helping rather than hindering the great projects that the human race appears to have embarked upon. Three of these spring to mind immediately: the quest for understanding (science); the quest for beauty (art); and the quest for human harmony (religion). Nobody imposed these projects on humanity: they seem to have arisen spontaneously out of the necessities of the human condition. Furthermore, they are the best justifications I can think of for the existence of the human species. If I were called before a cosmic court to plead for the continuation of the human race, I would base my defence on our achievements in these realms. (How would you approach such a task?)

Each of these three human projects gives us a characteristic moral quality, as tabulated below.

Project	Ideal	Specific Virtue
Art	Beauty	Creativity
Religion	Goodwill	Compassion
Science	Understanding	Truthfulness

Thus we arrive at a 3-dimensional moral space with three polarities of virtue: creation versus destruction; compassion versus cruelty; truthfulness versus deceit. In other words, acceptance of these large-scale ideals has implications for the small-scale decisions we make in everyday life. (Note that there are thus three different kinds of evil.)

You may be wondering why, having said in effect that religion is rubbish and science corrupt, I should then set them up as two of my three moral endpoints. The answer is that while organized religion and science (as well as art for that matter) have been hijacked for many unworthy purposes, their central aims seem to me still valuable. Of course, the question of where they derive their value remains open. (I suspect that a case could be made that any rational beings in a universe like ours would have to engage in some such enterprises, but I have not enough room to go into that here.)

I have outlined some of the consequences of adopting this 3D moral space in my book (Forsyth, 1988), but the basic idea is quite simple. It is a morality based on trying to encourage the glories of humanity at the expense of its atrocities. To find 'causes' worth giving allegiance to, we simply ask: what is the human race doing which is worthwhile and which we could conceivably play a part in? The answers to this question lead us to three basic moral preferences:

prefer creation to destruction;
prefer kindness to cruelty;
prefer honesty to deception.

This is only a preliminary sketch, concentrating on the ethical (rather than the spiritual) side of religion. It has not made me a saint, but it has helped me sort out some priorities.

Of course, even in its fully developed form, this ethic is open to objections, of which two are particularly problematic. Firstly, it offers no guidance on what to do when the basic goals conflict. It is possible, for example, to be forced into a situation where to be kind would be dishonest but to be honest would be unkind. Since the three virtues are incommensurable, it is not possible to have a constant rule that kindness always takes precedence over honesty (or vice versa). Nor is there any formula for calculating how much kindness may be sacrificed for what amount of honesty, since neither value is quantifiable. We can always be sure, however, that, given acts equivalent on two of these dimensions, the one that moves further in the right direction on the third is the better choice; and even this limited guidance is helpful in practice. For, although conflicts between incompatible ideals cause real anguish and are the source of much great literature, they are fortunately rather rare. Most wrongdoing is quite blatant.

A second serious problem is that this 3D morality is merely an abstraction. It is not a great help 'in the heat of the moment' even if you agree with the logic behind it. In mitigation I would plead that this age-old problem afflicts every moral code. There are always going to be times when the flesh is weak though the spirit is willing. I would also point out that morality has a public as well as a private face. In modern times, morals have been banished to the bedroom. This privatization of principle has debased the discourse of political debate. In our personal lives we talk of right and wrong. In the political arena such talk sounds old-fashioned and 'unbusinesslike'. An agreed set of moral standards is sadly lacking in the realm of public policy, where it would be valuable for:

- (1) providing coherent principles for a critique, with hindsight, of actions that have caused unjustifiable suffering (to prevent repetition);
- (2) guiding objections (in anticipation) against potentially harmful acts planned by powerful groups.

We must not forget that the worst evils of our century were carried out by large organizations: they were, for the most part, thoroughly pre-planned and discussed by many people in advance. A simple, clearly enunciated and widely agreed morality would change the atmosphere in which such discussions were conducted, providing an alternative idiom to the international language of economic expediency. At present we hardly know how to express ethical objections to proposed policies. We too often resort to making fundamentally moral points (distortedly) in monetary terms, because money is the only measure taken really seriously by our society. Even environmentalists fall back on economic arguments -- for example, when protesting against the destruction of tropical rain forests on the grounds that "they give us valuable products like food, medicine and rubber" (David Gee, 1990). Moral arguments are not merely inadmissible, they are almost inexpressible.

What I have presented here is no more than a set of hints on altering that dismal state of affairs. It is not, after all, a religion, but a request for religious thinking. I hope I have at least persuaded you that the question I began with

"if you were given the task of devising your own religion, what would it be like?"

is neither cranky nor heretical but a succinct summing-up of the demands made by the modern world upon every thinking being. We just have to make a stab at answering this question, whether we like it or not. The pity is that we get very little help from the religious establishment (because of the danger that we might stray from a preordained path as a result) and even less from the academic world (because academics think they can wash their hands of this whole messy business).

Yet by not articulating alternative ethical standards to the prevailing ethos we simply leave the field to the voices advocating rampant commercialism which are loud enough as it is -- and which may soon end all human quests, permanently.

So please, any philosophers and psychologists reading this, don't just tell me I'm wrong. Take up the challenge and do the job better.

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