The Death of God – A Premature Diagnosis

Is God Dead Yet?

Friedrich Nietzsche famously proclaimed in his book, the *Gay Science*,that God was dead.[[1]](#endnote-1) This was an attempt to capture the gravity of the situation in the late 19th century, as we moved from a theologically-rooted society to a secular one. It has recently become clear to me that Nietzsche, while essentially correct in his observation of the aforementioned transition, was a little hasty in asserting that God was dead. It has turned out that, even more than a century after the *Gay Science* was first published, God still hasn’t bought the farm.

To be sure, He is dying, but his death is being protracted and drawn out by his overzealous followers. There are primarily two groups of people who seem to be responsible for refusing to ‘unplug’ God from the life support system that is keeping Him alive; traditional Christians and a group of people I call neo-Christians.[[2]](#footnote-1)

Traditional Christians are those people who still faithfully believe God exists; they go to church, pray to Him, and thank Him for all the good things in their lives. It is evident that they are prolonging His death because even though our current understanding of the universe has well and truly pushed to the outer limits of plausibility their cherished idea of a benevolent Creator God who made everything in six days and seems to care more about who we have sex with (and how we do it) than how many people we slaughter in pointless wars, they continue to hold to their faith (and it truly is *faith* at this stage), even to the point where they deny scientific facts.

To pre-scientific man, the existence of God was obvious. Who could have put the stars in the heavens? Who could have made the winds blow, the rain fall, the sun shine? Who could have made humans to wonder about all of these things? But post-scientific man is a very different creature indeed. Tearing apart the natural world in which he found himself ‘thrown’, he has painstakingly pieced together a very different picture; one that has no need of the hypothesis of God. Chemistry, physics, evolution... in a word, science, has given us the knowledge to explain our universe to a level unimagined and indeed, unimaginable, by anybody who lived before the Scientific Revolution gripped the Western world.

Sure, we can’t explain *every*thing (and we may never do so) but science has steadily and confidently eaten away at religion’s primitive ‘just so’ explanatory myths until there is virtually nothing left for God to do, except perhaps make a Big Bang right at the beginning. Despite the physical explanations that have flowed almost unceasingly, out of the laboratory, these dedicated and faithful followers cling fast to their beliefs. They tend to deal with these relentless scientific advances in one of two ways; they either flat-out deny them or accept them without so much as a single misstep.

So it was that the church-sanctioned doctrine of the earth-centred[[3]](#footnote-2) *solar* system crumbled before the evidence and despite the vigorous, basic human-rights infringing protestations of the church (anybody remember the trial for heresy of some guy back in the seventeenth century? I think his name was Galileo, or something…), despite the fact that God’s official representatives on earth were completely and totally wrong, the church simply stopped saying the earth was the centre of the solar system, as if they had never fought tooth and nail for it.[[4]](#footnote-3)

This flexibility even extends to such sensitive issues as evolution. While far from being universally accepted among the religious, many intelligent modern Christians realise the futility in arguing with overwhelming scientific evidence and simply amend their ‘theories’ to match (and I do use that term loosely), typically by pushing God back a few steps. “Okay,” they say, “God didn’t actually *make* humans, he just kick-started the process, and maybe fine-tuned it at various points, until we get to where we are today.”

The other way Christians deal with science is to flat-out and stubbornly cling to their myths without giving any quarter. The desperation in this strategy is apparent when we consider the ‘evolution’ of the arguments of those more intractable religious fellows who refuse to accept evolution because “the idea that we come from monkeys” is so ridiculous. First, they claimed half a wing was useless so an entire wing could never have evolved by natural processes. Then as this objection was answered by science, they retreated to the complexity of the eye claiming the same thing, half an eye is useless. But then we discovered animals that possess not just half an eye, but three quarters of an eye, a quarter of an eye, and even an eye and a half![[5]](#footnote-4) Continuing their retreat, the latest place Christians have taken refuge is in a notion called ‘irreducible complexity’ which has as its flagship example, an organ as magnificent and inspiring as the bacterial flagellum. That’s right, we accept that nature can handle the manufacture of wings and eyes but we have to leave the organs of bacteria to God. Talk about a demotion!

Of course, the irony of Christianity’s resistance to one single part of science while happily leaving the rest to the experts, is not lost on us either. What I mean by this is that few Christians challenge the advances made in quantum physics (which have yielded things like lasers and transistors) or plate tectonics or medicine… and why would they? These disciplines are based on solid science and sound evidential reasoning. But *all science is based on sound evidential reasoning*. Evolution by natural selection wasn’t an idea dreamed up by some prophet on a mountaintop or read about in a holy book (only religion distorts reality for us via such methods). The reasons for accepting one branch of science apply equally and with equal force to *all* branches of science. Yet Christians fail to see the inconsistency in their making these obsessive attacks on evolutionary theory while running around taking videos on their smartphones and posting them on Christian blogs and other social networks (all made possible through the same principles evolutionary theory rests on; that is, evidence, observation, logical reasoning, etc.).

Both of these, what we could almost call, ‘coping mechanisms’ (fusing science fact with religious myth or rejecting it outright), demonstrate in no uncertain terms the desperation that fills the modern religious enterprise. The former reveals an ever-malleable doctrine willing to push God (as Creator) further back down the explanatory chain indefinitely until He is doing nothing more than affixing flagella to bacteria, while the latter stubbornly refuses to accept evidence that is sufficient to persuade the entire scientific establishment of its veracity.

As such, both of these strategies reveal themselves as what they truly are; means of keeping God alive for another day.

Now, to the second group fighting tooth and nail to keep God alive; the neo-Christians. What first tipped me off to the idea that God’s death was being prolonged here was the way their claims were becoming more and more grandiose (and less and less plausible at the same time). This immediately struck me as an act of desperation; desperation in the face of a relentless science which refuses to slow down and seems ‘hell-bent’ on leaving no stone unturned in its quest to explain everything without resort to voices in whirlwinds or talking snakes.

Remember the good ol’ days when Christians just used to claim that God was real and He loved you (and you would go to hell if you didn’t believe in Him, of course)? Remember how they used to knock on your door to try and save your eternal soul? We didn’t realise it at the time, but it turns out that that was Christianity at its most modest; back when they only thought they had all the answers and everyone else on the planet was wrong.

Nowadays they aren’t content with such modest assertions; instead they want to lay claim to a whole host of outlandish notions including:

* Christianity ushered in the scientific revolution
* Christianity preserved learning through the dark ages and created what we now recognise as education, through *Christian* universities
* Christianity was a force for good because it built hospitals and looked after the poor[[6]](#footnote-5)
* Christianity led directly to all the freedoms we experience in the modern age
* Christianity was the driving force behind the push against certain attitudes we now declaim as ‘wrong’ like sexism, racism, slavery, etc.

And the most pernicious of all (which actually captures some of the assertions above):

* Christianity provided the foundation that led directly to all our modern humanist values and egalitarian sensibilities so much so that without Christianity, modernity just wouldn’t be as good (fair, honest, kind, etc.) as it is

Such wild and grandiose claims strike me (quite obviously) as the blustering, puffed-up ravings of someone desperately clinging to something and over-compensating in doing so. And what is it they are clinging to? Their beloved Creator God, who is on His deathbed; a fact His followers refuse to acknowledge and one they are in the process of denying, albeit subconsciously.

And as so often happens when people desperately seek to avoid a truth or prolong some unwanted outcome they secretly know is inevitable, the delusional rhetoric gets ramped up, not so much to convince others but to convince themselves that the particular truth is, in fact, not true. Claims that used to suffice (God is real, He will take care of us in heaven when we die, etc.) no longer provide the comfort they used to in the face of God’s protracted death and so they take on a life of their own and swell to unrealistic proportions (Christianity built modernity, spearheaded the Scientific Revolution, etc.).

To my ears, when I hear these ridiculous assertions, all I hear is something like, “Our God isn’t dead, our religion isn’t floundering. If it wasn’t for us our (Western) society wouldn’t be the enlightened one it is and you wouldn’t even be the person you are! You can’t get rid of us, God can’t die; Christianity is in the very fabric from which this era is woven!”

The Most Pernicious Claim – A Few Thoughts

This short essay is a follow-on to a much longer one that asked the question of whether Christianity had been a force for good in the world (and emphatically answered in the negative). Some points covered there will be revisited and treated again here, although in a far less comprehensive manner, but hopefully the brevity sought after here will be balanced by a clarity and ‘cleanness’ that will shine a light directly on the salient aspects of my argument.

With that said, this essay is essentially a focused collection of my most recent responses to all of the neo-Christian claims outlined above but is in particular directed towards what I identified as the “most pernicious” of these claims, the arrogant assertion that Christianity is the foundation our modern age is built upon and supplied the values and ideals we currently hold dear and proudly display to the rest of the world.

In fact, this single “most pernicious” claim was the greatest contributing factor to my realisation that this essay had to be written (this and the realisation that God’s death had been prematurely diagnosed). It also answered a personal question that I had been mulling over for some time; why am I so anti Christianity? At first I thought I was primarily anti-religion and this attitude found expression specifically against Christianity because that is the religion of the culture I was raised in. And this is at least partly true. But it didn’t seem to account for why I was so passionate in my denouncements of Christianity and why it bothered me so much to hear people advocating it like it is the solution to all that ails us.

Then the insight of this “most pernicious” claim supplied the missing piece of the puzzle I had been looking for. The extent of my strong dislike of Christianity stems from the fact that they have duped the entire Western world into believing that Christianity is a synonym for love, peace, and goodwill to all mankind. It isn’t uncommon to hear people, when they are talking about our modern values use the phrase ‘*Christian* love’ as if 1. Christianity throughout history actually provided some kind of example of this (which they didn’t) and 2. Christianity has some kind of monopoly or copyright on love (which they don’t).

Nothing annoys me more than hearing some ignorant or intellectually blind or ignorant *and* intellectually blind person talking about the West’s *Christian* values, as if the very same institution that…:

1. Persecuted the Jews for centuries before Hitler
2. Suppressed women, blacks, and homosexuals
3. Supported and participated in slavery (only of non-Christians, of course)
4. Closed down all institutes of learning in Rome and expelled all philosophers
5. Forced conversions on non-Christians
6. Instigated the ‘crime’ of heresy, punishable in the most serious cases by burning at the stake,
7. Restricted personal freedoms to the extent that they published an *Index of Prohibited Books[[7]](#footnote-6)*, the possession of one of which was grounds for being charged with heresy
8. Knowingly provided shelter and unforgivably supplied victims for hundreds of paedophile priests over decades/centuries
9. Has deliberately obstructed potentially life-saving medical advances like stem cell research and even today continues to preach against using condoms in Africa to control the spread of AIDS, and
10. Gave us such enlightened movements as the Crusades and the Inquisition, not to mention giving us one more reason to kill our fellow men… and women… and children;[[8]](#footnote-7)

(whew! – take a breath)… actually knows anything at all about love or charity. And we haven’t even touched on what makes Christianity Christianity yet, i.e. the Bible and the insane doctrines that flow from it. The former of which endorses everything from slavery to sexism, contains such moral gems as stoning a child to death for disobeying their parents (Deuteronomy 21: 18-21, New International Version) and “it is a shame for women to speak in the church” (1 Corinthians 14:35, King James Version), contradicts itself from start to finish, and is comprised of different chapters written by we know not who, in a time we know not when and compiled by yet more largely anonymous people who also rejected a whole bunch of other writings (on grounds we often know not what) which were deemed not worthy of becoming canonical. While the latter promotes ideas like, our Creator God is a being whose love is so conditional that He withholds it if the creature He so covetously desires love and allegiance from doesn’t love Him first, God needs payment in blood before He could forgive us our sins, we are all inescapably sinful in the first place, punishing a third person somehow erases or corrects a wrongdoing, doing good is something we need to be ordered (and threatened) to do, and we will be punished for eternity in hell if we don’t follow God and His rules.

In spite of all these sometimes shocking, often shameful, and always disappointing facts about Christianity and its chequered past, intelligent people continue to defend Christianity as the source of all that is good in our modern age, revelling in phrases like *Christian* love and *Christian* morals (and not even the beating-your-children kind).

This is the main reason I dislike modern Christianity so much. Not only did they hijack good, honest concepts that apply to and have their origin in our *humanity* (not Christianity), but then they went and brainwashed everyone into believing the exact opposite.

Much of what I have to say in this essay will reveal these less well-known virtues of the faith (hijacking and brainwashing) but let me offer two thoughts that I believe prove the latter by clearly indicating that our intuitions regarding Christianity have been warped to the point where we are no longer able to be objective.

First, the horrific discovery that paedophile Catholic priests have been sexually abusing (certainly hundreds, maybe thousands of) children for decades (at least, but who really knows, possibly centuries). Now, this revelation is shocking to the core and completely abhorrent but what makes it much, much, worse and much more sinister is that ‘upper-management’ not only knew about (at least) some of this, but actively sought to cover it up and even moved some offending priests to new parishes where they were promptly supplied with fresh victims. Sam Harris explicitly notes that there is evidence these heinous crimes were facilitated and concealed at every level of the Catholic Church, right up to and including Pope Benedict who personally oversaw the Vatican’s response to reports of sexual abuse in the Church before becoming Pope.[[9]](#endnote-2)

What is the new Pope, Pope Francis’, response to this? Well, he has finally set up a commission to investigate sex crimes committed by priests but even as late as March this year still sounds surprised and even indignant in his comments that the Church is being attacked so strongly by the UN, which has strongly criticised the Vatican for failing to prevent child abuse within its own walls and covering up what did happen behind veils of secrecy. In an interview, Pope Francis claimed that “no-one else has done more [to root our paedophilia]. Yet the Church is the only one to have been attacked.”[[10]](#endnote-3) Funny that; the Church is the only one to be attacked – it’s also the only one to actively shelter paedophiles and even help them out by relocating them if things get too hot in one parish.

This in itself is damning enough, but for our purposes here what is equally shocking is the Christian/neo-Christian response. What would have happened if we had discovered a multi-national conglomerate had been covering up systematic child abuse by its managers for decades? Would we shake our heads in dismay while continuing to purchase whatever goods this rotten company is selling? Would we make excuses for it? “Well, there’s no need to get rid of the whole company just because a few (hundred) employees are doing wrong.” What if that company had explicitly told (and convinced) us that they were the sole representatives of God here on earth and that they were operating under His authority? Would we continue to support an organisation like this after a scandal as despicable, as *evil*[[11]](#footnote-8), as this was uncovered? Of course not. We would demand the CEO’s head on a platter and not rest until every individual paedophile was arrested and thrown into the deepest, darkest pit we could find and the company was dismantled and its name scrubbed from our collective conscious. And you know who would be leading the charge… Christians, all the while lecturing us on how such a horrible scandal is a direct consequence of the decadence and Godless attitude that pervades modernity.

Meanwhile, what has happened to the Catholic Church? Pretty much nothing. At the time of writing, I think about 400 priests have been defrocked. Defrocked!? For raping children all that happens to these animals is that they lose their jobs?! What will they do now? Probably go off and try to get jobs in kindergartens. Thanks Catholic Church. Meanwhile, Pope Francis is off gallivanting around the world getting his name in the papers and doing a bunch of PR work, enjoying the praise from his followers who seem to think he is (literally) God’s gift to humanity. Now, I don’t mean to suggest that Christians aren’t at all disturbed by the paedophilia in the one place on the planet they thought they were be safe; just that that level of disturbance is woefully inadequate.

“So what, do you want us to give up on our faith just because some bad people got into the Church and abused their positions of power? This is a human failing, not a failing of religion.” Really? So, if it was, say, a multi-national coffee franchise instead of the Catholic Church, would it make sense to say, “So what, do you want us to give up on coffee brand XYZ just because some bad people got into the company and abused their positions of power? This is a human failing, not a failing of coffee XYZ.” Sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it?

Now, I realise that my analogy is pushing things a little far – a religion which has been a central part of many people’s lives for generations is not the same as a brand of coffee – but, it does show just how warped our intuitions can become. Even if you really believe in God, *especially* if you really believe in God, it must be painfully obvious by now that God has long since pulled his support for the Catholic Church. (Of course you have to wonder why He didn’t do anything about this abuse in the first place, but God moves in mysterious (paedophile-supporting) ways, it seems).

If this isn’t the final straw to break the camel’s back what would be? The Catholic Church can be systematically involved in the rape of children for decades (if not centuries) and you spare a moment’s thought for the hundreds (if not thousands) of lives ruined by this disgusting situation before… happily burying your head in the sand and trotting along to church on Sunday.

The only way the Catholic Church can even think about surviving this is because its followers have been so brainwashed into thinking the Church = Goodness, that they have lost the ability to think clearly about it. How bad does the Church have to be before you question that formula that has been drilled into your head from birth and our collective conscious for generations?

Second, our impressions of other religions. We hear that when the Buddha died, his body simply disappeared right out of the clothes he was wearing and all that was left was some kind of gem… and we share a knowing smile with each other. “Sure,” we think. The Qur’an tells us that the moon was split in half and Muslims believe Neil Armstrong found a massive crack when he was up there that proved this.[[12]](#footnote-9) “Funny, I didn’t hear anything about Neil Armstrong finding a crack in the moon, but I’m sure that would have made it to prime-time news,” we comment to ourselves. Hindus recognise and worship literally hundreds of gods. We scoff at that and wonder why they can’t see that they’re just making all this nonsense up.

But of course it’s true that Jesus was born to a virgin, God made man from clay (and woman from one of his ribs), and the Eucharist really is the flesh and blood of Christ. Right?

Now admittedly, this particular argument doesn’t hold much water with our neo-Christian friends who are happy to take great liberties with their Scriptural interpretations and a little more sensible/sceptical when it comes to believing in miracles, but surprisingly, many Christians are blind to this double standard they have against other religions. While they are extremely quick to spot the garbage coming from any other religion, they are just as quick to swallow the same nonsense (in some cases, *exactly* the same) in Christianity.

Why could this be? Is it because Christianity just happens to be the one, true religion and they were lucky enough to be born in a Western country or is it just because they have grown up in a culture which has had this nonsense rammed down its throat for so many centuries that it has lost all ability to taste the crap if it comes packaged in this wrapping we call Christianity?

Christianity has seeped into our culture so deeply that we have lost any and all ability to think rationally and clearly about it. This allows people to make nonsensical statements that they still think make sense like, “I know that this sex abuse scandal is terrible, but the Church is still good.” I once had a co-worker who demonstrated just how closely Christianity has convinced us that it is the epitome of Goodness. She told me that she thought I was a Christian when we first met because I smiled a lot and seemed really friendly and nice. You can see quite clearly how the math works in her mind; Christian = friendly and nice. How did the institution that perpetrated the crimes I recounted earlier (and make no mistake, that is exactly what they were) and promoted such negative, life-denying doctrines, ever come to stand for ‘friendly and nice’? While I’m not really seeking to answer that question in this essay, I *am* seeking to establish it as a valid question, one that has gone unasked and even unrecognised for far too long.

The Most Pernicious Claim – A Little More Detail

What I have called the ‘most pernicious claim’ of Christianity, can actually be analysed into two related but distinct claims. The first is the assertion that Christianity is ALL about love, goodness, charity, and the brotherhood of man. The second is that since we are a Christian culture, everything positive in our culture MUST HAVE come from Christianity.

1. Examining the claim that Christianity is all about love

*The One-Sided Thinking of Christians*

Even a cursory glance at the Bible, the negative doctrines the Church has been espousing for centuries[[13]](#footnote-10), or the extremely chequered history (or even the present[[14]](#footnote-11)) of the Church reveals a Christianity that is quite removed from being ALL about love and charity. Of course, that isn’t to say that Christianity doesn’t have *any* positive or redeeming qualities, it is just to recognise that it isn’t ALL, or even MAINLY, about love and charity (and was even less so in its pre-modern past).

*“But the idea that we all have eternal souls and are all loved by God is a totally positive one.”*

*“Christianity put a stop to infanticide and cruel gladiatorial contests in ancient Rome.”*

*“Jesus preached love and even told us to love our enemies.”*

Sure, but is that all Christianity ever did or said? We all have eternal souls but they are tainted by a sin so heinous that even new-born babies are guilty and will be sent to Purgatory (I think this was the ‘compromise’ the Church decided upon, rather than hell) unless they have some water splashed on them and a few words muttered over them by a priest. Christianity put an end to some things we would call barbaric today but also discriminated horribly against the Jews for centuries, wilfully tortured and burned people at the stake for having opinions that differed to those of the Church. Jesus preached love but he also “did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10: 34, New International Version) and commands his disciples as follows; “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” (Matt 10: 5-6, New International Version).

Of course we can look at only half of the picture (or more like 10-20% of it) and conclude that Christianity was this wonderful, peaceful religion that emphasised goodness and love; we can even deliberately deceive ourselves through creative interpretations of Scripture (“Don’t you know ‘sword’ is a metaphor for the ‘word of God’?”) but when you face up to the facts honestly (without Christian blindness, neo-Christian indifference, or interpretative disingenuousness), not just of the terrible things Christianity (and Christians) have done throughout history but also the negative doctrines that underlie, and often underwrote, these actions, this quickly becomes an untenable position. My central argument here is that **it is no longer acceptable for Christians and their apologists to focus on a fraction of their religion as if it is representative of the whole**. In the end, the Christian Church and Christianity itself, is responsible for too much misery, has too much blood on its hands, and too many sexually-abused children’s skeletons in its closet for us to allow them to continue misrepresenting it like this. It wasn’t ALL bad, but it was very, very far from being ALL good.

It is only now from this ‘elevated’ perspective that we can see what Christians are doing. They have a double-pronged strategy, the result of which turns the all-too-often ugly truth of Christianity into an edifice of glowing perfection, emanating love and peace.[[15]](#footnote-12) First, they take their highlights – isolated incidents when some Christian says or does something good – and turn them into sweeping generalisations that they try to convince us are actually both typical and completely aligned with the doctrine of Christianity.

The second prong involves downplaying, re-interpreting, or just flat out ignoring anything in Church history or Christian doctrine which doesn’t ostensibly uphold what they take to be their lofty ideals. It never ceases to amaze me how flawlessly Christians, particularly the neo-Christian variety, are able to completely disregard the most terrible incidents and perform the most convoluted mental contortions to re-interpret religious nonsense as erudite words of wisdom.

The secret to pulling off this second prong often relies on not looking too closely at the facts and simply letting our warm and fuzzy ‘intuitions’ about Christianity dominate our thinking. The priority here given to a kind of ill-defined, ‘fuzzy’, ‘big picture’ view of Christianity as all about love in the minds of Christians and their ‘neo’ counterparts makes it impossible for them to see the trees for the forest. It is this (often unconsciously applied) strategy that renders them immune to any evidence of Christian wrongdoing. Hearing of all the unthinkable travesties of basic human rights and freedoms the Christian Church has perpetrated in its past doesn’t cause even the slightest disturbance in their faith in the sanctity of the Church and the purity of the ideals of Christianity.

It never ceases to amaze me how Christians (and especially neo-Christians) can be so unrelenting in their faith even in the face of a tirade about the Inquisition, the Crusades, witch burnings, and paedophile priests. You can talk until you are blue in the face listing the crimes of the Church on your fingers (and toes, and even then you will quickly run out of digits) and they will smile as if they have heard all these accusations a hundred times (and as if we are talking about the weather, not the systematic torture, abuse, and slaughter of countless innocent people over centuries) and then, without missing a beat, affirm that Christianity is all about love and charity. The words go in one ear and out the other. What would cause outrage if even a tenth of these facts were true of any other institution, barely even gets a nod of acknowledgement before being completely ignored.

There is a reason for this. They didn’t reason themselves into this idealistic, inflated opinion of Christianity, nor did they arrive at their conclusion by weighing up the evidence, so they cannot be reasoned out of this opinion or swayed by appeal to evidence and facts. This then, raises the question, how did they come to believe that Christianity is ‘all about love’?

The idealist ‘big picture’ answer that considers any honest foray into the facts as ‘bringing in too many irrelevancies’, holds that Christianity’s preaching of a God who loves all of His children equally and holds open the gates to heaven to one and all automatically recommends itself to us. And the many saintly characters who perfectly embody the teachings of Christ set such an example that we almost have no choice but to be drawn to their simple, joyous, love-infused teachings.

That’s enough of the fairy tales. The truth is that Christianity forced itself on us like a rabid, ‘celibate’ priest who won’t take no for an answer.[[16]](#footnote-13) They burned down the temples and places of worship of their competitors, viciously and publicly slaughtered those who refused to love the one and only Yahweh, and outlawed any line of inquiry that could lead away from Christian doctrine.

How quickly we forget.

The last Roman Catholic execution of a heretic by burning took place only three hundred years ago. *They made it illegal* not *to believe in Christianity!* Read that sentence again. How ironic is it that religions never campaign for freedom of religion? They campaign for freedom for *their* religion… and they are only content with such moderate demands when they lack the power to force competing positions out and compel us to follow them. No, there was nothing peaceful or loving about Christianity’s conquest; rather it was a brutal campaign of violence, terror, and threats of eternal punishment waged over centuries on a gullible and largely ignorant populace.

So, why do we think Christianity is so wonderful? Simple. They told us they were. They beat us, stole from us, and burned us at the stake until we ‘realised’ how wonderful they were. And now, like any good ‘kidnappee’ succumbing to the Florence Nightingale effect, we have fallen in love our kidnappers.

This is what I mean when I say **we have been brainwashed and that our intuitive ‘feelings’ about Christianity are no longer reliable**. Christianity created its own story about itself and rammed their lies and half-truths down our throats until we forgot all about what really happened and eventually just accepted their version as the truth. This may seem hard, even impossible, to believe but it is the only explanation that accounts for the reverence we have for Christianity after the centuries of abuse it has inflicted upon us.

*Comparing the good and the bad of Christianity*

Even more than this, I would say the evils that we can lay right at the front door of Christianity (see the abridged list I came up with off the top of my head earlier or do some research and take your pick from what you find) easily outweigh any goods it might have been responsible for. Not only that, I maintain that **Christianity can NEVER make up for the misery, fear, and suffering they have caused over the centuries.**

*“ But Christianity taught us about love.”*

*“The Church built hospitals and cared for the sick.”*

*“Christianity gave us hope.”[[17]](#footnote-14)*

Alright, let’s put this in perspective. The pall of fear people lived under, the torture, forced confessions, and executions of the Inquisition on one hand and some teachings about how God loves us on the other. The slaughter of thousands of Jews in the Middle Ages for the crime of ‘host desecration’, in which Christians accused Jews of stealing consecrated wafers used in the Eucharist (which Christians believe becomes the actual body of Christ) and torturing them versus taking care of some sick people. The teaching that God will send you to hell if you fail to live up to His expectations and the subsequent (inevitable) split this created between the elect and the damned compared to the teaching that God will also grant you an eternity in heaven if you manage to jump through all the right hoops He has set before you (which strangely enough, involves tithing 10% of your gross income to an already filthy rich Church[[18]](#footnote-15)).

Count up the deaths directly attributable to Christianity over the centuries, the wars they sparked, the fear they instilled, the freedoms they suppressed, the discrimination they fermented, the number of people contracting and transmitting HIV in Africa because the Pope advocates against using condoms… and yes, the child molesters they protected… in short, the misery and suffering they wreaked on humanity, and no number of good deeds could ever even come close to redeeming them.

If an atheist organisation committed even a fraction of the crimes against humanity that the Christian Church has or included in its officially stated beliefs even one of the negative, manipulative doctrines that Christianity has it would be (quite rightfully) slammed by so many Christian groups that it wouldn’t survive the month.

Responding to anger over the systematic rape of children and the (also systematic) torture and burning to death of innocent people by saying that the Church also builds hospitals and donates money and aid to charities is an affront to our intelligence and quite frankly equivalent to being flipped the bird by some long-haired, insultingly-tattooed, and aggressively-pierced punk after he royally screws you over.

Let me close this section with an analogy that will hopefully make you think. Imagine if Obama did a bunch of wonderful things; he built hospitals, donated money to charities, founded schools and universities BUT also systematically had murdered those prominent Republicans who disagreed with his policies and was fighting to push a bill through Congress that would make it illegal to publish any material that was anti-Democratic. Would it make any sense on any level to say that Obama was *good*?

1. Questioning the notion that everything good in modernity had a Christian source

*Is Christianity responsible for* just *the good?*

The very first question that this aspect of the ‘most pernicious claim’ raises is why are we beholden to Christianity for *only* the good things that modernity has yielded? This is actually the first hint that something suspicious is at play in this claim. Claiming that Christianity is responsible for all the good and atheism for all the bad (which is what many Christians/neo-Christians *do* actually claim) immediately smacks of an unfounded prejudice.

Neo-Christians typically argue that Christianity was so influential that its underlying principles penetrated the very fabric of our culture in such a way that living in a post-Christian world is not the same as living in a world where Christianity had never existed.

Then, since we know that Christianity wasn’t SOLELY a positive force, perhaps it wouldn’t be hard to find an instance where Christian ‘values’ have influenced modernity in a negative way… and then along came Hitler.

The overriding goal Hitler became famous for was his irrational hatred of Jews and his attempt to systematically wipe them from the face of the earth. Christians typically point to Hitler as a prime example of what happens when a country ‘goes atheist’ and the influence of Christ loses sway, but is this true?

Was Germany an atheist country in the early twentieth century? No.

Was Hitler anti-Christian? This is a hotly contested debate which we may never know the answer to; certainly he affirmed his Christianity in public and his autobiographical manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, but another book, *Hitler’s Table Talk*, which purportedly contains a number of private conversations Hitler had from 1941-1944 (believed to be largely authentic), throws his true religious affiliation into some question. However, whether Hitler was or wasn’t Christian is largely irrelevant; the fact that he at least felt he had to *appear* to be Christian speaks volumes for the people he rallied to his cause.

Is animosity towards any group of people an atheist tenet? No.

Does this even make sense on ‘atheist’ principles (whatever they might be)? No.

On the other hand…

Did Christians write hateful, vituperative treatises against, discriminate against, vilify, persecute, and at times even slaughter Jews? Yes.

All too often we hear Christians pointing to Hitler and Nazism as ‘evidence’ of what happens when a country embraces atheism and abandons good Christian ‘morality’. But the (really quite obvious) truth is that, whatever else Hitler was up to, his anti-Semitism had a long and illustrious history; Hitler was, in fact, just the final chapter in a book Christians had been authoring for centuries beforehand.

Is the Christian worldview a democracy? Or is it a dictatorship?

Now, I know you will immediately scoff at direction this line of reasoning is taking, but why do you have this knee-jerk reaction? I am challenging you to go beyond your social and cultural conditioning and question beliefs you have taken in with your mother’s milk, as it were. Why does this question deserve your scorn? Why should religion (or God) be above the highest ethical standards and goals we set for ourselves? Shouldn’t it (and He) embody them?

So, Christianity is a dictatorship. It is run by one person (even though ‘He’ is God) who makes the rules, rewards those who follow them, and punishes those who disobey. Isn’t it odd that the very ‘political’ structure advocated by God is the one we find most detestable?

*“But humans are fallible and imperfect, God is all good and perfect – that is why it doesn’t work when implemented by humans.*

Maybe. God’s infallibility though, has certainly never been adequately demonstrated and if what He got up to in the Old Testament, the actions of His chosen people, and the policies and actions of His chosen Church (whichever one you care to pick) are anything to go by, He is quite far from anything we would describe as “all good” or “perfect”.

But again, it is interesting to note how complete and total your brainwashing has been. We, almost automatically, strongly recoil from any form of society that has too much power residing in one person, but happily and unconditionally surrender ourselves to this very structure when we are told that some guy called “God” sits at the peak of this social pyramid.

Yet not only do Christians claim credit for our democratic and egalitarian drives, they denounce any earthly power structure based on the one God Himself operates and they themselves happily subscribe to.

The Christian hierarchy is a strictly vertical one that has humanity at the lowermost rung (I assume the Devil doesn’t even make it onto this ladder). The glaring problem with this is that if you can convince people you are a step or two higher up on this metaphysical ladder, you can exert a remarkable amount of influence over them.

And so, priests in the Wars of Religion (which weren’t actually about religion at all, according to religious historical revisionists) convinced soldiers that they were immune to bullets and sent them charging to their deaths, so families in the Middle Ages would pack a lunch and go to the village square to watch the local witch burnt at the stake, so people would give what little money they had to the Church in a vain attempt to reduce their time in a mythical place (Purgatory), to avoid time in another mythical place (hell), and secure swift passage to yet another mythical place (heaven); all because they thought the Church was a little higher up on God’s ladder.

Christianity teaches us that we are all subordinate to God – no, that’s not strong enough according to St. Paul; we are all ‘slaves’ of God – and that means we are also subordinate to anyone God has chosen; God’s elect (which used to be the Israelites but became open to anyone, thanks to St. Paul again). This single belief has caused more madness than most of us realise.

The long and the short of this is that **if Christians wants to even think about claiming that Christianity was so influential that we owe it for all the good we have today; they must also front up and take the blame for all the bad that modernity has produced**. Something as influential as Christianity was, ‘a post-Christian world is not the same as a world in which Christianity never existed’, but also as questionable (in terms of good/bad effects or the tendency to promote a positive/negative outlook) cannot seriously claim to have been the source of everything positive in modernity while dodging responsibility for any of the negative.

Is *Christianity responsible for the good?*

But is it even reasonable to claim that Christianity was responsible for *either* the good or the bad of modernity? Let’s leave the negative that Christianity might or might not be responsible for in the modern age and question their specific claim that they provided the foundation that our modern culture is built on.

We have already seen that Christianity is responsible for many morally ambiguous acts, flagrant crimes against humanity and our basic human rights, not to mention a number of sheer atrocities, (some bordering on the insane, others that would have been impossible to sustain without the warped doctrine that lies props it up[[19]](#footnote-16)) and yet despite all this, they still claim that they are responsible for all that is good in modernity. They not only claim they are responsible for our impulses towards fairness and kindness, mind you; they also claim Christianity built the foundation of, and even launched, the Scientific Revolution.

Let’s see what we can say about this.

1) If it is true that Christianity had anywhere near the influence that it did have in abolishing slavery, promoting women’s rights, starting the Scientific Revolution, etc. then the first question that begs itself is, **why did we have to wait so long for these developmental and moral advancements to happen?** Christianity came to power in the fourth century CE; the Scientific Revolution started in the sixteenth and really got going in the seventeenth century, abolition and women’s rights would have to wait another couple of centuries before they would get their day in the sun. In fact, ***all* social and moral ‘development’ (from our modern perspective, at least) that went into building modernity accelerated in direct proportion to the decline of Christianity**.

As the Church lost its power and influence; that is, as people started to think about the possibility of a world that had no need of the God hypothesis, our society became fairer, we became more humane, and we started to care a little more about our fellow-human’s rights. This is an extremely revealing fact and really does call into question Christianity’s claims to have led us into the modern age.

Although there are still many problems in our modern, Western culture; the truth is **we have never enjoyed more equality, more freedoms, less discrimination, and more ‘enlightened’ moral intuitions than we do today**. But isn’t that strange considering Christianity’s claims that it bequeathed all these things to us? If Christianity single-handedly delivered us from our ignorance, why did we have to wait for it to be in decline before we started to reap the benefits it supposedly held the key to?

2) If Christianity was as essential to modernity as they tell us, **why is it that the Church is often the last bastion for ignorance and bigotry?** The Church actively railed against one of the most important founders of science as we know it (forcing him to recant his theory and placing him under house arrest for the rest of his life – if that doesn’t qualify as an attempt to suppress modern scientific progress, you’ve obviously so biased/brainwashed that facts/truth are wasted on you), placed the writings of almost every influential and important thinker in the last five hundred years on an Index of Prohibited Books with the goal of banning Christians from exposing themselves to their ideas, is still holding out on granting full equality and even fair treatment to homosexuals, still refuses to allow women equality in the Church, refuses to allow abortions even in the case of rape,[[20]](#footnote-17) and is actively campaigning against a medical technique (stem-cell research) that has the potential to be the most important contribution to medicine since the discovery of penicillin.

Are we really supposed to believe that Christianity is leading the charge into a more enlightened modernity, even as it is currently defending outdated, outmoded, and antiquated ideas based on superstition and writings over 2,000 years old?

However, there is one thing we *can* be 100% certain about. When Christians finally accept homosexuals and women as equals, they will proudly tell us not only how truly egalitarian they are but how they were actually the *first* to preach equality for all to us dirty atheists. We will also eventually drag them kicking and screaming into the twentieth century regarding issues like abortion and stem cell research, at which point they will stop whining, turn around, and creatively interpret an obscure quote from the Bible which reveals that, surprise, surprise, God condoned these procedures 2,000 years before we even thought of them! What a great guy!

At the time of writing, Pope Francis has actually taken steps in the direction towards trying to soften the Churches position on homosexuality, saying things like, "Who am I to judge them [homosexuals] if they're seeking the Lord in good faith?"[[21]](#endnote-4) and suggesting that gay marriage should be studied and not dismissed out-of-hand.[[22]](#endnote-5) This is a privileged position in history. We have front row seats from which we can see the gradual unfolding of a Christian process which will culminate in the Church telling us they actually pioneered the notion of quality for homosexuals; exactly the same way they now tell us that, despite placing Galileo under house arrest and banning his book, they actually started the Scientific Revolution.

3) Christians tell us they brought a unique message of love and charity to the world. This is quite simply, false. For some reason, many Christians seem to think that Jesus was the first person to ever utter the Golden Rule or the injunction to love your enemies[[23]](#footnote-18), and God was the first to frown upon murder, lying, and stealing. Not only that, they seem to think that we wouldn’t/couldn’t have made our way to these foundational principles of any functioning society by ourselves. This is also false.

Both of Jesus’ ‘unique’ teachings were expressed long before he was born, by almost every ancient culture or religion we know of. And, to be quite honest, if we couldn’t have figured out that murder and stealing weren’t conducive to a well-ordered society, we wouldn’t have been able to establish any functioning societies before Moses. But unless my history is off, Moses was in fact, born into a functioning society (and kept by force in another one), that had somehow sprung up even though every savage citizen still thought it was okay to run around sleeping with each other’s wives, murdering anyone who tried to stop them, and stealing anything not nailed down.

No one was more peaceful or loving than the Buddha is purported to have been (even Jesus suffers in a comparison of the two), but is it surprising that Indians *don’t* run around claiming that without the Buddha they wouldn’t understand love or peace? No, of course it isn’t. It would be an exorbitant, outrageous, *arrogant* thing for them to claim. We call it ‘Christian’ love, as if the concept somehow belongs to Christianity, but no Indian calls it ‘Buddhist’ compassion, with the same connotation. Perhaps Buddhists would say that the Buddha provided for us an excellent example of virtue or compassion but no one would claim that without the Buddha, Indians wouldn’t know how to be kind to one another.

Why not? Quite honestly, they just aren’t as arrogant as Christians. They don’t think that they are the elect and will be *saved* in some long foretold Second Coming, while all the others (sinners, every one of them) will be damned for eternity. In short, they don’t think they are *better* than anyone… *everyone* else.

I also suspect that Christianity’s inflated and ridiculous claims are at least in part a defensive reaction in the face of a secular/scientific world populated by less gullible/naive individuals who are beginning to see through the elaborate nonsense Christianity has cloaked itself in.

At any rate, the fact is that **there is absolutely nothing unique in the positive teachings of Christianity or those of Christ**, and what *is* unique about them are unfortunately things that have done nothing but inculcate fear, guilt, and misogyny in the world (i.e. beliefs about talking snakes, wafer torture, or Original Sins).

4) Knowing that Christianity wasn’t original regarding any of its principles that actually happen to be merit-worthy, opens naturally into another comment I want to make. At bottom, what Christianity is actually up to here with its claim that they gave us love and charity is **they are trying to take credit for our humanity**.

This is clear for two reasons I have already highlighted in this essay. First, we have never enjoyed more freedoms, equality, and less discrimination in the West than we do today, and one of the ways we know this is by direct comparison to the time when Christianity ruled the West. Despite coming to power in the 4th century, Christianity failed to change the world for the better. This would have to wait for greater philosophical and cultural movements to inculcate this kind of awareness as society and culture matured.[[24]](#footnote-19)

I have heard a fairly weak argument against this by David Bentley Hart who claimed that Christianity *couldn’t* affect such changes because the ‘cultural grammar’ was absent. Well, that is exactly the point I am making. Christianity couldn’t provide this ‘cultural grammar’; it would come, in a sense, *naturally*, as society and culture matured in its sensibilities and actually moved away from primitive, tribal, conceptions of how the universe worked (and accordingly our modern recognition of the importance of fairness, kindness, and equality all came with the eclipse of the Church).

Second, Christianity was not original in *any* of its positive proclamations (which are, let’s not forget, buried under mounds of dubious metaphysical teachings, inconsistencies, and blatantly harmful doctrine) which, not indicates, *proves* that they come from a deeper place than the mouth of an iron age carpenter or some unknown ‘prophet’ writing an unknown length of time beforehand.

Applying this to Buddhism, we can see that the tenets of this, what I think of as a, *non-religion[[25]](#footnote-20)* (such as peace/harmony/kindness) resonate with certain human minds because those minds are *naturally[[26]](#footnote-21)* inclined to peace – not the other way around. We aren’t inclined to peace because of Buddhism; we recognise peace as a something of value because there is something in us that points us *naturally* in that direction. If this was false; if there wasn’t something in our humanity (our *being human*) impelling us on to notions like equality, fairness, and kindness, we wouldn’t see the same maxims independently formulated across almost every culture on the planet.[[27]](#footnote-22) Likewise, Christianity didn’t give us any privileged knowledge or special, esoteric insight; it merely stumbled upon some maxims that make for pretty good living (at least, as we might define it today).

Of course, these maxims weren’t always recognised by all people as having the value most of us invest them with today. Jesus did a good job of spotting how important the way of peace was, I would never think of taking that away from the Christ, but we need to remember that there are three qualifications we must make on this; 1) he didn’t say anything unique, 2) he wasn’t the first to say what he did and, 3) he said a whole bunch of other stuff that went a long way towards undoing the good those few sentiments did.[[28]](#footnote-23)

5) A crucial point Christianity has to secure before it can sell the idea that it is responsible for all the good in the modern world, is not just that it actually *is* all about love and charity but also that it *was* all about those ‘good’ things back in pre-modernity when it was actually supposed to be moulding modern Western culture.

The problem is that we have seen many (and you can find any number of other) instances, both in the present *and* the past, where the Church failed to act out of love and where the doctrines of Christianity itself/Jesus/God all fail to advocate the higher road.

So how do they overcome this minor, inconvenient fact? Simple, **they take 21st century definitions and sensibilities and retrospectively apply them to the medieval period to make it sound like Christianity was better than it really was back when it was supposedly ‘moulding’ modernity**.

To be fair, the Church and modern Christianity are certainly more about love and equality and freedom than they used to be in the past and they couple this focus with a keen desire to distance themselves from the mistakes/inconsistencies that have plagued their rule/doctrine for thousands of years. But the contrast this affords us with the Church and doctrine of yesteryear only make their rewriting of history all the more apparent.

In our modern, secular age the catch cry of Christianity is that “God is love and goodwill towards all men”[[29]](#footnote-24) and neo-Christians happily take this and project it backwards into history but the truth is that Christianity was never even close to being this simple back then. Christianity was political, corrupt, greedy, elitist, obsessed with sin and guilt and power, and a number of other choice adjectives that have nothing to do with loving thine enemy.

Sure, they stood by Jesus’ words (in principle at least) but they also persecuted and murdered those who refused to bow to Him; they made money off their ignorant, naïve, poor flock by charging them for nonsense such as ‘indulgences’ becoming filthy rich at a time when the average person was filthy poor; they separated the world into the ‘elect’ and the ‘damned’; their Popes schemed and manipulated to further the influence of the Church; tried to control what people could read by condemning and burning both books and people… how much longer shall I go on? (Note that the argument that Kings and Queens weren’t any better is completely irrelevant because no one is claiming that they built modernity and they didn’t claim to be God’s representative on earth (at least not as overtly as the Church did))

Neo-Christians do exactly the same thing with their interpretations of the Bible and Christian doctrine, *re*-interpreting them to align with our modern sensibilities and moral attitudes. *We* (meaning, atheists) take their doctrines exactly as they are written and exactly as they have been interpreted for centuries but neo-Christians immediately respond that we are taking all these beliefs in the worst possible light and they needn’t be as negative as we are making them. Original Sin doesn’t have to be a metaphysical black mark on our souls which will condemn us to hell if we don’t surrender to God; it can just be recognition of the evil that man is capable of. The existence of heaven need not reduce earth to a mere trial or something to be endured; perhaps it is just a progression from something good to something better. I agree. But, make no mistake, these attitudes are **modern**, neo-Christian interpretations, they are NOT how Christianity has been interpreted for most of its two thousand year history… and that is what we are talking about, the Christian history which preceded, and supposedly built the foundation for, modernity. If Christianity really had put all of these positive slants on these doctrines in the past, I wouldn’t have any problems with it (or at least, I would have markedly fewer problems than I do). But they didn’t. These attitudes are unmistakeably modern and as such, can’t be used to explain how we got to modernity in the first place.

Neo-Christians trawl through their religion, freely re-interpreting the doctrines they find in line with their distinctly modern sensibilities (sensibilities that would have been unthinkable in earlier, Christian times) and discover that their religion actually isn’t as bad as the atheists claim. The problem is that all the gems they discover in Christianity’s past, they put there themselves, albeit five to fifteen hundred years later.

6) Imagine that Western society hadn’t had the, what we might call, ‘moral uplift’ (wherever it came from), that saw us come to value equality and freedom and democracy, etc. and created the sensibilities our modern era is founded on. Imagine we still practiced slavery (largely based on skin colour), women were not allowed to be educated, stoning was a legitimate punishment for disobeying your parents, ‘learning’ was considered the greatest form of heresy, and thoughts (and writings) that differed from those of the powers-that-be were outlawed on punishment of death… just to choose three things that may not have changed the way they did. Modernity then, is just a, let’s say, hi-tech version of the Middle Ages.

Could Christianity take credit for these things and claim that modernity is built on a foundation they established? Absolutely. The five things I mentioned (of course, there are many other things I could have included here) all have Biblical/Church father/doctrinal mandates for them. The Church (sometimes with too much enthusiasm) actively instigated, upheld, and enforced practices and rules that reflected these sensibilities (and others like them). The Church could quite rightly say that without them, the alternative modern society we have imagined here just couldn’t have come into existence the way it did and with the values it has.

And yet, most of us would agree that this alternative modernity would be a huge moral and cultural step backwards from where we are today. So, the problem is that if Christianity could legitimately take credit for such a hellish, backwards modernity (I have only briefly given an outline of), had modernity gone in that direction, how can it possibly take credit for a modernity that turned out to be almost the complete opposite of this?

The argument that in fact, modernity *didn’t* take that nightmarish turn (with the implication that Christianity was behind this) has failed to catch the point. An institution (Christianity) that *could* have taken credit for such an *un*enlightened modernity is obviously one so corrupted and rotten to the core that it simply *can’t* plausiblytake credit for the comparatively enlightened modernity we happen to live in. **If Christianity can take credit for a hellish modernity *and* a pleasant one, then the reality is that it can actually take credit for neither**.

7) If modernity is founded on Christianity, what was Christianity founded on? Christians like to tell the story in such a way that Christianity appears to have exploded on the scene without precedent:

“No one ever imagined a virgin birth,” they say. False.

“No one ever imagined a *creation ex nihilo[[30]](#footnote-25)* account of the beginning of the universe.” False.

“No one ever claimed to be the son of God.” False.

“No one ever claimed to have risen from the dead.” False.

The truth is that there is nothing… absolutely *nothing*, in Christianity that didn’t appear in at least one other (and frequently more than one) ancient religion. In fact, the entire creation story and all of God’s early hanging out with the Israelites is completely and wholly taken from Judaism.

It is also well-known that Christianity ‘appropriated’ dates of celebrated pagan holidays re-labelling them with Christian themes because this made it easier for the public to accept. Since they already celebrated that date anyway, it was relatively easy to give them a new reason for doing so, rather than try to start a new holiday from scratch.

Christianity also owes a significant debt to Plato, through Plotinus, who articulated Christian themes in a Platonic framework. This allowed Christianity to ‘slide into’ and, in some ways merge with an established, well-known, and influential system of thought, giving it more credibility and making it easier to understand for the citizens who were already quite familiar with Plato.

Now, no pagan has ever arrogantly or with an air of moral superiority tried to make Christianity acknowledge its debts to paganism[[31]](#footnote-26) (which are patently obvious) and yet we see that **with the same passion Christians deny they owe any debts to any system of thought which preceded them, they nevertheless demand that we acknowledge the debt modernity owes Christianity**. Just another example of the blind bias and one-sided reasoning that so characterises Christian thinking.

We went from a Roman society which believed in a pantheon of supernatural gods, which prayed to them, made up stories about them, and believed in them, to a society which reduced this pantheon to one… and Christians claim there was no overlap here.

Meanwhile, modernity saw the rise of atheism (the *absence* of a belief in any deity) and secularism (the de-centralisation of religion in daily life) and Christianity promptly declares that we owe everything we are to them. Truly, only a religion could have come up with an argument as irrational as this.

Michael Allen Gillespie makes a similar nonsensical claim when he says, ““Atheistic” materialism thus had a theological origin in the nominalist revolution.”[[32]](#endnote-6) In his book, Gillespie traces modernity back to the nominalist revolution which he argues was responsible for ending the Christian era.

Briefly, nominalism was a school of thought that came to replace realism, which had, up until then held sway in the Church. Realism essentially entailed that universals were real, which is to say that universal terms like ‘human’ (terms that apply to a whole class of particular individuals) weren’t just conveniences of language; they were real entities that actually existed somewhere independently of the particulars they described. Nominalism called this position, which had been in place since Plato and Aristotle, into question by denying the reality of universals. Despite the fact that nominalism was very much a movement away from realism, it was instigated by Christians (predominantly Franciscan monks) and was still entirely religious in nature. Gillespie’s thesis rests on nominalism causing a metaphysical/theological crisis in the Church and sees the whole of modernity as an attempt to answer the question raised by nominalism. And since nominalism was a Christian phenomenon, he concludes that modernity (even though it is ostensibly secular) had a theological origin.

Now, we can quite happily concede that nominalism played a significant role in the downfall of the Church and that this downfall created a ‘gap’ through which Western society could slip out into a secular modernity but does that mean atheistic materialism (which forms a key part of modern scientific thinking) has a ‘theological origin’?

Let me give you an analogy. Hitler represented the absolute pinnacle of racism, elevating the Aryan race and at the same time denigrating the Jewish race/culture with a hatred not seen since the early Church fathers. But, out of the horrors of his concentration camps and gas chambers, the Allies were forced to unite in order to defeat the Nazi regime and were also given a front row seat to what it truly means when we forsake the Golden Rule. From this turning point, the ideal of racial equality bloomed in the Western mind.

Now, even if this isn’t the way things *actually* played out, it is easy to imagine that a scenario like this *could* have occurred. Following Gillespie’s reasoning, we would then be obliged to say that, ‘racial equality had a racist origin in the Nazi movement’. But there is something ridiculous about that isn’t there?

The very fact that the two terms, ‘racial equality’ and ‘racist’, are polar opposites renders the statement completely false; in the same way that the terms, ‘atheistic materialism’ and ‘theological’, undermine Gillespie’s thesis.

Tracing the downfall of the Church (and the start of modernity) back to a school of thought which was explicitly religious, does *not* give us a theological origin for an atheistic and secular modernity.

Of course, Gillespie is a little more subtle than this. He suggests that the problem of nominalism, which was never about abandoning God but more about the nature of God and the existence of universals, resulted in a number of alternative proposed answers, one of which turned out to be atheism. Atheism is therefore an answer to a specifically theological question; a question which was prompted by and arose within a greater theological construct. Gillespie claims that this greater theological construct hasn’t changed since the Middle Ages; we have curiously construed an *anti*-theological viewpoint while our thinking still harbours theological markers and religious overtures.

As a specific example of this, Gillespie asserts that secularism isn’t atheistic, it is merely a transference of the divine to other realms, such as man or nature. Humanism, in the days of the Renaissance, with its heady fixation on man and the wonders he can perform, simply replaced the Creator God with the Creator Man, who was to a certain extent responsible for his own destiny and active in creating his greatest masterpiece, his own life.

Science of course, venerates nature with almost the same vigour humanism venerated man. We construct reductionist theories that seek to unlock the secrets of nature and ultimately yield the holy grail of a theory of everything. Materialism does for nature what religion did for God.

The problem I see with Gillespie’s theory is that he doesn’t go far enough back. He stops his investigative inquiries at theology, as if religion was the start point from which humanity flowed. This results in something like Gillespie’s begging the question. He claims modernity is grounded in theology, but he starts his survey of civilisation with theology and refers everything that came afterwards back to it. Of course his conclusion supports his argument; they both start at the same place!

There is a deeper ontological question here. Gillespie sees modernity as a response to theology but what if the chain didn’t start with theology? In other words what was it that both theology *and* modernity were responses to?

We have a tendency to think of ‘atheistic materialism’ as the new player on the scene, the usurper of a crown that theology claimed exclusive rights to for thousands of years. But is this right? Sure, every ancient civilisation on the planet developed a theology that was characterised by supernatural deities, mystical events, and miracles and it was only recently that atheism reared its ugly head. But what came before religion?

We tend to think of religion as the default position of any culture because all ancient civilisations had their own creation myths and deities, but this isn’t true. Theology didn’t exist first and then we came along to ask questions about it. It’s funny how we often forget, right at the times when remembering would clarify things greatly, that *we created religion*. We frequently talk about religion and modernity as if they were independently existing entities, but without humans to breathe life into either of them, neither would have been possible. The common thread behind both is humanity.

And this answers our first question above; what came before religion? Humanity. Certainly not humanity as we know it today; but humanity as a raw, primitive, ontological existent, clawing its way to self-awareness through a painfully slow process of evolution.

And now we clearly see the significance of the question that Gillespie fails to ask, ‘what problem was religion the answer to?’ The answer? The problem of existence, the question the human being raises for itself just by being, the question of human *being*.

**Modernity wasn’t a response to theology (specifically, Christianity), it was another response to the very same problem theology was an early response to; the problem of existence.**

(This section has grown significantly from where it started and although it may seem abrupt to terminate it here, that is exactly what I am going to do. There is much more that could (and perhaps, should) be said about this, but for the purposes of this essay, the central point is that modernity did not have an origin in theology; rather, it had its origins in something far more primordial, something theology too had its origins in.)

Closing Thoughts

Modern Christians, stunned into denial from witnessing the death throes of their beloved God, are currently (and desperately) seeking a permanent place for their religion in Western civilisation. They have realised that the increasingly secular and scientific world doesn’t actually need or want their God so they are trying to slip Him into the very fabric of modernity.

“You *think* you don’t need God,” they shout at us, “But what you don’t realise is that God is inextricably embedded in your culture, He is revealed every time you have a kind thought, and worshipped every time you use a piece of technology. Without Him, this whole age would be unthinkable.”

Make no mistake about it. This is a sneaky claim. Slipping God into the foundations like this means that every time we say, “We don’t need God do be good, most atheists are kind, nice, well-adjusted people; not raving lunatics who delight in torturing babies and raping women just because they don’t believe in a God”, Christians can say, “Well of course you are, but that is only because Christianity has seeped into the very fabric of this age. You take in the Christian messages of love, hope, and charity with your mother’s milk. As you grow up, you may turn against God and religion but you can never escape its influence because the whole of society reflects and embodies Christianity.” Every time we claim that we can stand upright ourselves on our own moral peak, Christians claim that we used their ladder to get up there in the first place.

What I am saying in this essay is that Christians need to do more work than that. The Christian era preceded modernity, but that in itself is nowhere near enough to justify their claims to have built the whole foundation modernity rests on. Christians have to *prove* this, which means answering all the questions raised in this essay, including:

* Why we had to wait so long after Christianity came to power for the ‘goods’ of modernity to manifest
* Why *all* social and moral ‘development’ (from our modern perspective, at least) that went into building modernity accelerated in direct proportion to the decline of Christianity
* Why the Church is often the last bastion for ignorance and bigotry (some issues the modern Church is still hopelessly backwards on; female equality, homosexuality, and condom usage)
* Why there is absolutely nothing unique in the positive teachings of Christianity or those of Christ
* Why it is that with the same passion Christians deny they owe any debts to any system of thought which preceded them, they nevertheless demand that we acknowledge the debt modernity owes Christianity

And they must also answer the charges brought against it in this essay that:

* They are essentially trying to take credit for our humanity
* Christianity can NEVER make up for the misery, fear, and suffering they have caused over the centuries
* If Christians wants to even think about claiming that Christianity was so influential that we owe it for all the good we have today; they must also front up and take the blame for all the bad that modernity has produced
* They get their moral ‘gems’ out of Christian history by taking 21st century definitions and sensibilities and retrospectively applying them to the medieval period to make it sound like Christianity was better than it really was back when it was supposedly ‘moulding’ modernity
* If Christianity can take credit for a hellish modernity *and* a pleasant one, then the reality is that it can actually take credit for neither
* Modernity wasn’t a response to theology (specifically, Christianity), it was another response to the very same problem theology was an early response to; the problem of existence

Did Christianity build modernity? No. The sad truth is that this supposed beacon of righteousness, this light which was supposed to uplift us and place us on a higher path, was responsible for tripping us up, holding us down, and taking all our money, freedoms, and dignity until we were cowering, impoverished souls, fearful of our own sin and scared to death of where we would end up after we died.

Is it any great surprise that the first civilisation to turn away from religion, to dare to imagine a world without a God (or gods), was the first civilisation to lead humankind into modernity? The road hasn’t always been smooth, but no one ever promised it would be, and why would we think it should be? (Unless we were sweet-talked into believing this by a silver-tongued God)

No. The truth is actually the opposite of what modern Christians (and their neo- counterparts) claim. They didn’t lead us into modernity – we dragged (and are still in the process of dragging) them into the 21st century.

They have fought us all the way; it was Christians who told us we would burn in hell if we didn’t do what they said; Christians who told us God only loves those who love Him; Christians who burnt us at the stake for daring to believe something different from them; Christians who tried to tell us what we could and couldn’t read/listen to/think; Christians who opposed the abolition of slavery, not atheists; Christians who claimed that blacks were inferior to whites (the Bible said so); Christians who told us women should not talk in church and obey their husbands; Christians who refuse to allow homosexual couples to marry (and who often still claim it is their *choice* to be gay/lesbain); Christians who refuse to allow a woman to have an abortion (sometimes even in the event of rape); Christians who stand in the way of potentially life-saving medical treatments (out of some misguided, completely irrational view that a few cells, a human being make); Christians who preach against condom usage in countries where AIDS and HIV are absolutely rife… and the list goes on… but there is one more important ‘Christians who’ phrase that needs to be added… it was Christians who rammed their doctrine (and their ‘love’) down our throats for so long and so forcefully that most of us now can’t even remember the horrendous crimes they have committed in their God’s name.

Appendix One: Education, Hospitals and Reason

The most pernicious claim is… well, the most pernicious claim… but other similarly annoying claims include things like Christianity establishing universities, building hospitals and supporting a divinely created universe based on reason (vis-a-vis Scholasticism), which therefore makes it amenable to and understandable by humans. This is by no means a complete listing of all such Christian claims but will serve as a representative sample.

Even though each of these claims is true on its own (albeit it to varying degrees), the real problem comes when Christians start to claim that modernity owes something to them for their efforts in these directions.

Let’s quickly look at the fact that Christianity built universities. This is true enough and good on them for it. But does this mean that they founded the spirit of free inquiry which we all feel blessed to enjoy today? Hardly.

First, it was Christianity that crushed all schools of thought the Greek philosophical tradition had built up (from centuries before Christ was even born) and eventually outlawed and exiled all philosophers from Rome. But of course, this is the textbook opening play for one hoping to establish an autocracy. After seizing power you have to ensure that any possible sources of dissenting opinion are closed off to the citizens. Have you ever tried preaching Christianity in North Korea? It’s about as hard as it was to try teaching philosophy in Christian Rome.

And let’s not forget that it was Christianity that rallied angrily against ‘secular’ learning for centuries before the first universities appeared on the scene. If you have any doubts about this, take a quick look at Pope Gregory the Great, honoured as one of the four ‘doctors of the Church’ no less, whose opinions on learning and investigations into ‘cause and effect’ at the expense of the one true cause of all, God, give a fairly interesting account of the Church before people like Galileo challenged it.

Second, these universities were severely restricted by doctrinal concerns. Heresy (that is, the ‘crime’ of having beliefs that differ from the orthodox ones of the Church) was vigorously being pursued and punished by the Inquisition just as the first universities came into existence. Although we call them ‘universities’ we must be careful that we don’t superimpose our modern idea of a university over on these Middle Age Scholastic versions which were a completely different species.

Why do we owe the Church for replacing something they originally destroyed with an inferior copy of that thing?

How about hospitals? True, they built ‘hospitals’ and were even genuine about treating people. Good on them. But is that the extent of their claim? They built places of healing, like every single culture that ever existed on the face of the earth? Hardly. No, they talk about it as if no culture had ever tried to heal people before Christianity and thanks to them modern medicine emerged fully formed right from out the front doors of the church.

First, guess what. They banned all pagan temples of healing and put a swift end to anything which remotely resembled modern medicine, that is, anything that actually tried to find a physical cause for an ailment and treat it accordingly, as opposed to attributing the sickness to a ‘possession’ or ‘lack of faith’ and treating it with prayer.

Second, the Church’s ‘hospitals’ typically treated illness by such nonsense as praying over relics of martyrs and various icons of Christianity. We would have to wait for modernity (through science) to actually provide cures that worked. On this subject, it is revealing to note that the famous ancient Roman physician and philosopher, Galen’s (born in the 2nd century), medical and physiological theories dominated Western medicine until the modern age.

Again, should we thank the Church for destroying an already existing thing, outlawing discussions of it, and replacing it with their own inferior copy?

Finally, Christianity also claims that it provided the intellectual framework within which science became possible. Scholasticism was all about reason (not to be conflated with common sense or ‘reasonableness’) and its leading proponents advocated that God created a rational universe, rendering it understandable to human reason. This is true enough and good on them. But Christians don’t stop there; they then claim that without this underlying attitude, no one would ever have bothered to try to understand the universe, ultimately concluding that the whole scientific enterprise would have been impossible without Christianity.

Well… first of all (you see the patter here now, don’t you?) Christianity was hardly the first or the only institution to claim that the universe was rational. Socrates and Plato, as is well-known, grounded their entire philosophical edifices on reason and the pre-Socratic philosophers[[33]](#footnote-27) all speculated on the nature of reality using reason to justify their assertions (one of the latter of whom, Democritus, even theorised about the existence of tiny, indivisible particles of which everything was composed, which he called, ‘atoms’). What did Christianity do with this massive head start the Greeks had provided? Well, we have already seen the Church’s reaction to the theories of the philosophers.

Second, it is completely ludicrous to claim that Christianity was responsible for a mind-set amenable to scientific inquiry when its early attitude to secular learning could best be characterised as one of open hostility, and at the birth of science itself they showed their cards by placing its founding father on trial, finding him guilty of a crime as ‘anti-basic human rights’ as heresy, forcing him to recant his ideas, and placing him under house arrest for the last nine years of his life.

Yet once more, Christians claim we should be indebted to them for shutting down all progress in a particular direction, fiercely rallying against anything that was even remotely sympathetic to the aforementioned direction, and replacing what had already existed with their own completely contrary system of thought.

As we are typically discovering to be the case whenever we investigate grandiose Christian claims, the truth is actually the complete opposite of what they maintain. Rather than deserving credit for any of the above, they actually deserve blame for waylaying us after the Greeks made the progress they did, and then forcing us to wade through centuries of their nonsense before we found our way back to the track and picked up the Greek baton they had left us once more.

Of course Christianity wasn’t all bad and they deserve credit for the good they did do, but come on; building (inferior) schools after they destroyed all prior learning, establishing (inferior) places of healing after rallying against secular knowledge, and endorsing the idea of a rational universe which we were only allowed to inquire about within strict doctrinal boundaries?

If someone steals a dollar from you and then gives you ten cents back would you thank him? Apparently a Christian would.

Appendix Two: One Major Problem with Neo-Christianity

As I explained in an earlier footnote, neo-Christians are a new breed of Christian who don’t need to believe in the miracles and supernatural events that eventually become part of any religion. They often don’t believe in hell, might be suspiciously quiet on the notion of heaven, and perhaps even ‘politician-worthily’ cagey about the existence of God Himself. Nevertheless they think that belief in Christianity is important.

It reminds me of something I think it was Daniel Dennett who said; they believe in the belief of Christianity rather than Christianity itself. One reason they typically give for this is that without God there is no reason to be good. The Dostoevsky line frequently comes up at this juncture, “Without God, everything is permitted.”

So, without the threat of God’s punishment hanging over our heads, we just couldn’t find it within ourselves to actually be good. I have serious doubts about this claim, but let’s roll with it for now.

The big problem with this position is that neo-Christians typically don’t believe in hell. If you complain about how God can allow a place as terrible as ‘hell’ to exist to a neo-Christian, they will say, “Yes, that is the medieval version of the story, but hell needn’t be *actual* fire and brimstone. Perhaps it’s just the feeling of isolation from God, which means that we can be in hell even while we are still alive.”

What a clever answer. Denying the metaphysical existence of ‘hell’ and redefining it as a ‘bad feeling’ all while remaining non-committed to anything extra-physical or post-mortem. The problem of course, is that in redefining hell like this what the neo-Christian has actually said is, “If you act like a #%&\*, no one will like you.”

Hmm. I knew that already, but more importantly, the neo-Christian’s watered-down version of hell doesn’t actually achieve what he originally wanted, which was to make people be good.

The problem can be stated in a more general form; neo-Christians need God with all the bells and whistles (promises and threats) to give teeth to what they really want out of religion, a check on the more disruptive human desires, but at the same time they deny anything supernatural. Take away God, heaven, and hell and you take also take away any metaphysical incentives to be good (or not give in to these disruptive desires). In short, neo-Christians want to have their metaphysical cake and eat it too.

It is important to note that this is a problem that can’t be resolved. It’s a contradiction in fundamental concepts. A watered-down Christianity without any of the ‘medieval superstition’ just can’t impact us in the way the neo-Christian wants.

Appendix Three: If Christianity isn’t responsible for modernity, how did we get here?

I have claimed that despite coming to power in the 4th century, Christianity failed to change the world for the better. This change instead would have to wait for greater philosophical and cultural movements to impact on the Western mind. But, if it wasn’t Christianity, what was it that spurred this ‘enlightening’ process whereby we began to recognise and respect individual human rights and freedoms? (Changes which only began to pay real dividends relatively recently in human history, I might add)

I think the key to understanding the changes that resulted in things like the right for women to vote and the abolition of slavery, is to realise that as Western civilisation grew, both in size and complexity and science began to revolutionise our lives (of course in terms of technology but also conceptually, taking us off the pedestal at the centre of the universe that religion had propped us up on), we were faced with situations that we couldn’t handle with paradigms of old. Individuals and individual groups began to speak out against injustices and inequality… and they kept speaking out until we listened. Racial equality and women’s rights didn’t come out of the Bible, they came from blacks and women refusing to be treated like second class citizens anymore.

But you might still wonder why did we start to listen to them after ignoring them for centuries under Christianity?

And that is the key question.

The key answer to that is that the West was the first culture to move away from traditional religion. Read that again. **The reason that we (that is the West) moved into modernity first and why our culture happens to be the most progressive when it comes to things like justice, equality, and fairness, is that we were the first to separate these concepts from religion.[[34]](#footnote-28)**

Religion, which venerates tradition with fanatical obsessiveness and mires itself in dogma that is unquestionable precisely *because* it is dogma, never provided an opening for any major changes in thought. Good people believe in God and go to heaven, bad people don’t and go to hell, God has told us what He wants us to do and we wrote it all down in a book (which is where the justification for slavery, discrimination against homosexuality and women, and countless other foolish beliefs come from). The beliefs of any religion quickly become unquestionable dogma because if (any) religion simply allowed any old Tom to custom-design their faith, the religion would cease to exist as a religion, which is just a term we use to describe a set of fixed beliefs. What good would Christianity be if people could decide for themselves whether or not Jesus was God? If we could choose whether or not to believe in heaven and/or hell? There are certain tenets that need to be locked in if a religion is to mean anything at all. And that means ultimately that there are things that can’t be questioned.

The feature that made the West different from all other cultures and propelled us into modernity was the fact that we dropped our religious baggage before anyone else. Only once we had created the space to allow ourselves to think *ir*religiously and challenge heretofore unchallengeable assumptions did we discover that it wasn’t right to treat women the way they are treated in the Bible and keeping slaves wasn’t acceptable. Only then did we truly find our way to freedom, equality, and fairness; values we all cherish now.

1. Nietzsche, F. (1974). *The Gay Science* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York: Random House. (Original work published 1887). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Neo-Christianity” is my term for the modern faith position which interprets all doctrine in the best possible way, using all the philosophical or societal ‘enlightenment’ and ‘humanist’ advances in thought to bolster what the believer obviously perceives as a flawed system. It is a Christianity which appeals to the rational, scientifically-minded individual because it rejects all myth… maybe ‘reject’ is too harsh… it *doesn’t rely* on the myths that tend to be central to all religions. Neo-Christianity has no need to believe that Moses parted the Red Sea, or that God spoke to Abraham, or that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead, and even the existence or non-existence of God is sometimes of little or no concern to such a believer (one argument we hear from neo-Christians a lot is that, even if religion is false, we still need it to be moral, and we can still benefit from it). Appendix two contains one argument that neo-Christianity is actually internally *in*consistent as an outlook. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. And a stationary earth at that. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Of course, they don’t stop there. Next they comb through their holy book looking for any trace of a hint of an idea that maybe, possibly could be interpreted in such a way as to confirm current scientific facts… and then, to their amazement, they find that their cherished Bible actually reported these very same facts two millennia before science caught up. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Obviously not literally, but we know of animals that have organs that do nothing except detect light, others who can detect certain patterns but lack the clarity of human visual perception, and even animals like hawks that have far more acute vision that humans. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Appendix one directly addresses these first three claims. The body of the essay proper is devoted to what I have called, ‘the most pernicious claim’. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Which, by the way, is a veritable who’s who of the greatest minds of human history, including works by authors such as, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, Voltaire, Kant, Spinoza, Hobbes, and many, many more. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Of course this is hardly a comprehensive list of the Church’s transgressions, but we have to stop somewhere and I have other points I want to make. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Harris, S. (2010). *The Moral Landscape*. London: Transworld Publishers. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
10. Pope hits out at criticism of Church over sexual abuse. (2014, March 5). BBC News Online. Retrieved from BBC.com/news/world-europe-26448075 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
11. This is not a word I use often, but surely, if anything on earth was truly evil, it would be the systematic sexual abuse of children by the Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
12. I was actually told this by a Muslim. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
13. E.g. the Church’s obsession with sin which reached its ridiculous pinnacle in the concept of Original Sin and which Luther extended by saying, “No one is by nature Christian or righteous, but altogether sinful and wicked”, the idea of a God who punishes His enemies and those who don’t love Him, the Christian fear of sex and praise for chastity which has completely destroyed any chance of a healthy Christian relationship with this completely natural, physical urge (not to mention tainted attitudes towards women (the evil temptress, Eve) and possibly produced, or helped to produce, the deviant sexual behaviour we have only recently discovered the extent of), negatively affected our opinions of this earthly, mortal realm which is little more than a testing ground to determine whether we go to heaven or hell when we die, the inevitable division of the planet into the elect and the damned, and many other such negative doctrines/beliefs. (Neo-Christians often claim here that we are interpreting Christianity in the worst possible light and essentially raising a whole bunch of straw men to knock down. This is false and something I will address later) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
14. Vis a viz. the Church’s frustratingly backwards attitudes towards female equality, homosexuality, use of condoms, etc.) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
15. Don’t mistake me here for accusing Christians of deliberately scheming to pull the wool over the eyes of us innocent atheists. They don’t necessarily *wilfully* set out to deceive anyone; the problem is that they have so much invested in Christianity that, when they do encounter the facts, they can’t help but ‘massage’ them so that they conform to some pre-conceived (suspiciously modern) ideal. Of course, in this scenario as I have outlined it here, the primary target of any deft manipulation of facts is actually the believer him/herself, making the effort expended one of self-deception. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
16. I make no apologies for the graphic analogy, even though I cringed inwardly as I wrote it. It’s time to get serious and if I have to shock you into thinking about some of these issues, then so be it. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
17. I will have plenty to say about these claims a little later. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
18. I always thought it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
19. I.e. That a ‘loving’ God exists who will send you to hell if you fail to obey Him or that He demanded a blood sacrifice before He could forgive us for Adam’s horrible sin of eating that apple all those millennia ago, for just two examples of these. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
20. One Republican Senate Candidate in the US, as recently as 2012, betrayed the sheer stupidity that circulates in pseudo-scientific, religion circles when he claimed that “If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing [becoming pregnant] down.” (Todd Akin, Republican Senate Candidate, Says Women Can’t Get Pregnant After ‘Legitimate Rape’. (2012, August 19). *International Business Times*. Retrieved from http://www.ibtimes.com/todd-akin-republican-senate-candidate-says-women-cant-get-pregnant-after-legitimate-rape-750937) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
21. Pope on homosexuals: ‘Who am I to judge?’. (2013, July 29). *National Catholic Reporter*. Retrieved from http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/pope-homosexuals-who-am-i-judge [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
22. Pope says Catholic Church should not dismiss gay marriage. (2014, March 10). *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/10688421/Pope-says-Catholic-Church-should-not-dismiss-gay-marriage.html [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
23. I am being a little facetious here; we know that the reason many Christians believe what they believe comes from the generations of brainwashing they have endured. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
24. But what were these philosophical and cultural movements themselves based on? Christianity? I address this rejoinder in appendix three. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
25. I call Buddhism a *non-religion* because it doesn’t have the structure of a typical religion; meaning that there is no deity to believe in and therefore no entity whose favour we have to curry (or risk the wrath of for failure to do so properly). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
26. I will explain my use of the word ‘naturally’ here a little later, but essentially what I mean is, ‘as our natures have evolved’ not, ‘as we are in some intrinsic capacity’. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
27. Just to quickly point out – the argument that this somehow proves the existence of God is a non-starter (everyone has a God-shaped hole inside them) because it is far more likely that we learned to value kindness through a) evolution, where those who had tendencies to kindness enjoyed better social relationships, found partners easier, and lived longer, and b) our unique ability to consider other people’s situations and imagine ourselves in their place (thanks to what have been called ‘mirror neurons’ in the brain); an ability otherwise known as empathy and one which leads quite naturally to the Golden Rule. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
28. E.g. Jesus warned us about the wailing and gnashing of teeth that will go on for those who don’t follow him, he reminded us he didn’t come to bring peace but the sword, those who deny him he will deny before God, and was pretty racist, only here for the “lost sheep of the house of Israel”, not to mention many other beliefs that didn’t foster loving compassion and universal brotherhood. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
29. This is still highly debateable but, at least, less so than it used to be. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
30. Creation from nothing. That is, no one before Christianity ever imagined a God creating the universe from nothing, rather, all other religions/creation accounts all include some deity fashioning or shaping some pre-existing substance. Or so some Christians would have us believe. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
31. Of course, this task would is difficult not least because Christianity succeeded in wiping paganism from the face of the earth. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
32. Gillespie, M. A. (2008). *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p.36. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
33. A collective name for the group of philosophers who preceded Socrates, the first of whom is generally considered to be Thales of Miletus, who flourished sometime in the 6th century BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
34. Note that this is not some kind of ethnocentric ranting about how wonderful the West is. It is what I consider to be a statement of fact. Growing up in any Western country bestows a certain number of individual freedoms, opportunities, and safeguards that we might not necessarily have growing up in a different culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)