

The Penumbra Series (3 of 6): Emotion, Dreams and Religion

A fine example of those trapped in the Penumbra are those who claim that religion is based on emotions and/or dreams. Well, there is no doubt that emotions do run high when speaking of religious matters, and nearly all gods are likewise described as emotional, including Jehovah. Only the nameless, faceless Shadow Gods are not known for emotions. Then again, they are not really known for anything at all, hence my calling them Shadow Gods. Likewise, many gods are well known for appearing in dreams or trances when speaking to their prophets. Again, this includes Jehovah. But to assume that since religion can be emotional that it must have Evolved out of emotions is faulty logic, as is assuming that since gods speak to humans through dreams that religion must have Evolved out of dreams. This can be addressed from many angles, and I'll take some time to address some important ones.

First of all, let me point out that Evolutionists tend to believe in an Infinite Regress when it comes to Evolution, or at least a Regress so long that is it Infinite for all practical purposes. Yet when they design their proofs based on Evolution, they only go back a few steps. I don't expect them to perform thousands, hundreds or even dozens of steps backwards for every statement they claim, but I do feel they should at least identify potential crisis points in this progression and address them. And when it comes to emotions and dreams, we have two examples of them going back only one step, and both examples stop just before a potential crisis point. In other words, they are claiming an Infinite Regress without even going two steps back.

The typical argument for religion being born of emotions goes something like this: man was afraid of the world because he realized so much of it was out of his control. In order to feel better about himself and his surroundings, he Imagined there were supernatural forces that controlled things and that he could somehow influence these forces by performing certain rituals (which makes it a superstition). Religion, in turn, was therefore born out of long-standing superstitions. Now, I am not going to completely disagree with what is going on here, and it may appear that Religious Evolutionists have gone back three steps. But this is only illusion. In reality, all we have done is gone back one step: the fear of things outside one's control. While man may have responded to fear with superstition and then religion, to call it Evolutionary must mean that it was a natural thing to do. But if it is a natural progression, then man should not be alone in following that path. All animals capable of feeling pain can feel fear. We should see most, if not all, higher forms of animals practicing superstitious rituals and a few of the highest forms with at least a rudimentary religion. But we don't see this. Not even one example.

When we do see the flaw in not taking Evolution back to other animals, we see that some more subtle flaws manifest themselves as well. If the only reason man came to religion was to combat fear of a dangerous world, what happens when that religion fails to reduce the danger? It would seem to me that the Evolutionary answer would be for religion to die out. We can see an example of this in professional baseball, as many pitchers are very superstitious. They have some talisman they use for good luck, but as soon as their stats drop so does the talisman (often replaced by another). Therefore, for a superstition to build into a real religion, it seems to me that one of two things needed to happen: either the superstition really did work and/or there was something else calling the person to religion. Both possibilities point to some form of deity.

We also see a flaw in the understanding of emotion itself. While all animals with measurable intelligence can experience fear, there are some feelings unique to man that also seem inseparable from

religion. One such example is anxiety. One experiences fear when confronted with something perceived to be dangerous. One justifiably feels fear when actually seeing a tiger coming towards one or when one reasonably believes that the sound of the growl around the corner came from a tiger. All animals capable of feeling pain behave like they have this fear. But a human can feel anxious about a tiger simply by walking into a jungle where such animals have been seen, even if only very rarely. On the other hand, animals who display fear in the presence of a tiger seem perfectly calm when in an environment where tigers are possible yet not currently observed. I do believe, through torture, some non-human animals can be made to feel anxiety as well, but the effort required to make them anxious only proves my point that this is a human emotion. They have to be taught by humans to experience it. But I think we have a problem here, as anxiety is the natural growth of fear, and one does not normally associate experiences with deities with anxiety, but rather awe.

And awe is another emotion that man has that other animals do not. Many animals experience curiosity when confronted with something new. They make efforts to understand what it is as long as they feel safe doing so. But they give no indication of wondering why it is there. They accept the reality of this new thing while their interest in it is limited to how it impacts their lives. Tests with primates that have been taught sign language indicate that even the most intellectually advanced and educated non-humans are limited in this way. Yet humans are not satisfied with simply knowing a reality exists; they want to know why it exists the way it does. Awe is the feeling of wonder that comes from recognizing that some things are beyond our ability to understand. It seems to me that religion is more likely to have Evolved out of curiosity, not fear. But while this observation does call into question just how well-thought-out that particular line of Atheistic thinking was, it still leaves us with the question of whether man invented religion. To answer this, I think we need to address what I have come to believe is the most fundamental of all differences between man and other animals: Imagination.

If man created gods as an Imagined way to deal with the chaotic universe, then, being mere constructions of man, gods should be Imaginable. And no doubt many representations of gods were created through Imagination. Yet, even after reducing the source of man's awe to something man can understand, the awe remains nonetheless. Accounts world wide of individuals experiencing these gods either have the god taking on an avatar to hide his true self, or the person becoming awestruck to the point of death. So, in the sense that man may have created religion as a way to reduce the incredible to something man could understand, this may be correct. But this does not discredit Theism because the source of these emotions is still unknown; it is still beyond human understanding.

Finally, I want to say a few things about dreams. In the previous article of the series, I noted that dogs were the only animal other than man that can dream, and pointed out that man created the dog, not nature. Man has nothing in this world from which to get his dreams from. The theory that man created religion as a response to dreams fails to address where dreams come from. What we see here is an assumed Infinite Regress of steps, yet there is not even a single step back that can be taken.

And even if we assume dreams can be explained naturally, we still have a failed explanation for them leading to religion. While many people believe the dream they had was real as they dreamt it, I know of no person who claims they can't tell that it was a dream after they wake up. I find it hard to believe that any sane person would make such a claim. Hallucinogenic drugs might allow for such testimony, but I would argue that one under the influence of mind-altering drugs is not sane at the time. I sometimes remember a dream I had once I awoke, but I don't ever recall remembering being awake once I started a dream. While the question, "Did you ever have a dream so real you didn't know you were asleep?" makes for great poetry, its practical application is limited to the Sci-Fi/Horror genre of "mad

scientist with a brain in a jar" story line.

It is from the Light that man has higher order emotions, dreams and religion; the Dark is, at best, to have simple, utilitarian emotions.

Raymond Mulholland
Original Publication Date: 29 July 2021