



The Evolution of God: The origins of our beliefs, Robert Wright, Little, Brown Book Group, 2010, 0748118551, 9780748118557, 576 pages. For centuries, faithful followers of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have looked to their holy texts for spiritual guidance, social and political mandates, and answers to man's burning questions about the workings of the universe. But what if these believers have been overlooking the most important message in their Scriptures? In THE EVOLUTION OF GOD, bestselling author Robert Wright finds a kind of hidden code in the Bible and the Koran. Read closely, he says, these texts reveal the key to harmony among the Abrahamic faiths, and thus to a peaceful world - nothing less than the salvation of humankind. THE EVOLUTION OF GOD explains why spirituality has a role today, why science affirms the validity of the religious quest, and why the future will hold harmony instead of religious extremism. If there is an author capable of giving us a revolutionary, enlightening re-reading of the Scriptures, it is Robert Wright. He has written acclaimed and influential books on the evolution of our minds and our history. Now he tackles the evolution of God.

Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith, Norman Cohn, 2001, Religion, 282 pages. All over the world people look forward to a perfect future, when the forces of good will be finally victorious over the forces of evil. Once this was a radically new way of ....

An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible A Thematic Approach, Sandra L. Gravett, Karla G. Bohmback, F. V. Greifenhagen, 2008, Reference, 486 pages. This introduction to the Hebrew Bible begins with the most basic questions about the origins of the Hebrew Bible. It then explores how ancient Israelites organized themselves in ....

Evolution Of God A Concept, Or Is God Stagnant, Robert E. West, 2005, Religion, 422 pages. This New Concept is as valid as those of a miraculous creation, the big bang, the big bubble, the big accident, or any other concept. None can be empirically proven or refuted ....

A receipt to stay the plague. Delivered by R.W. , Robert Wright, 1630, , . .

The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond Departures and Change, Kevin Ingram, 2009, History, 363 pages. Converso and Morisco are the terms applied to those Jews and Muslims who converted to Christianity (mostly under duress) in late medieval Spain. "Converso and Moriscos Studies ....

An humble address to the Right Honourable the Lords, and the rest of the Honourable commissioners, appointed by Act of Parliament to judge of all performances relating to the longitude; wherein it is demonstrated from Mr. Flamsteed's observations, that by the late incomparable Sir Isaac Newton's theory of the moon, as it is now freed from some errors of the press, the longitude may be found by land or sea, either night or day, when the moon is visible, and in proper weather, within very few miles of certainty, Robert Wright, 1728, Transportation, 50 pages. .

The AMG Concise Bible Commentary , Don Fleming, Apr 1, 2002, , 604 pages. When People Read

the Bible, they are often frustrated by the wide gap in time and culture that separates them from the original readers. The aim of the The AMG Concise Bible ....

Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism , , Nov 1, 2012, Religion, 618 pages. Focusing on concepts, practices and images associated with purity in the ancient Mediterranean, this volume contributes new aspects to the current discussion about the forming ....

Jealous Gods and Chosen People : The Mythology of the Middle East The Mythology of the Middle East, David Leeming Professor of English and Comparative Literature University of Connecticut (Emeritus), Jan 15, 2004, History, 160 pages. Esteemed scholar David Leeming, who has authored more than twelve books on mythology, here offers the first comprehensive narrative study of the mythology of the Middle East ....

The Moral Animal Why We Are, the Way We Are: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology, Robert Wright, Nov 3, 2010, Social Science, 496 pages. Are men literally born to cheat? Does monogamy actually serve women's interests? These are among the questions that have made The Moral Animal one of the most provocative ....

In The Evolution of God, Robert Wright, award-winning author of the bestselling books Nonzero and The Moral Animal, takes us on a sweeping journey through religious history, from the Stone Age to the Information Age, unveiling along the way an astonishing discovery: that there is a hidden pattern in the way that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have all evolved.

This book is interesting and well worth reading. It covers some of the same material as Karen Armstrong's book, The History of God. However, Mr. Wright also provides greater insight into the socio-political contexts that led to the significant shifts in the concept of god historically. Admittedly some of his views are speculative, but they are well researched and plausible. And the weave of the story together with an historical explanation makes for engaging and informative reading.

On the other hand Mr. Wright makes a case for directional history by drawing upon the theme developed in his earlier book, Non Zero. His proposition is that we need to understand history through the prism of game theory. Human history evolves in a positive direction (albeit with ample tragedy) because it pays to recognise that antagonistic communities share common interests. While I don't wish to go into all of the counter-arguments here, my own view is that this metaphysical argument is tenuous. Mr Wright goes further even to suggest that his discerned direction to history suggests an underlying purpose to life and to human history. His position is I believe demonstrably false and I have said as much in my own book, The Bridge. Mr. Wright takes aim at the physicist, Steven Weinberg, for his statement that there seems to be no point to the universe or to life. And so Wright presents his defence of purpose. But his arguments are underwhelming; I vote with Weinberg.

Mr. Wright develops these arguments in the final chapters of the book, where he also presents an optimistic case for the future of human history. There is certainly a worthy cause to be argued in favour of maintaining a dialogue between nation states and differing religious communities. However, Wright argues this cause by once again anchoring his position in the concept of non-zero sum game theory. First of all I don't see why it is necessary to suggest such a link. Isn't it sufficient to say that our genetic predisposition fortunately permits us an escape route from the clash of civilizations and to build upon that cornerstone from a humanist perspective? Furthermore, Wright's arguments remain at a fairly detached and theoretical level. He fails to present a serious critique of the West's responsibilities in the present day conflict with Islamic fundamentalists. And he fails to bring forward any pragmatic suggestions other than simply to maintain a dialogue and to appreciate that we are in a non-zero sum game: We are all in the same vessel, the increasingly global community. Read more &rsaquo;

I really like Robert Wright, and I love his online presence and previous book (The Moral Animal -

highly recommended) but I feel he has gone a bit soft on this one. In this book, I fear, he is letting his agenda cloud his search for truth. In that sense it appears he is not being sincere in his conclusions or that he is mistaken or (very possibly) the subtlety of his argument has gone completely over my head.

Morality like mathematics is naturally occurring in the universe - so co-operation, reciprocal altruism and non-zero sum logic are mathematical algorithms that just happen to work, like Euclidian geometry, without any need to invoke "special consideration" i.e. "higher purpose" or "divinity" that then might imply a "divinity" as a reason for them. Instead, through strategic self interest human minds converged on to these naturally occurring moral math, that in so doing improves wellbeing beyond the individual, and therefore gives the appearance of enlightened moral behaviour. There is nothing divine or special about this.

Without human brains there is no such thing as right or wrong, only a cold meaningless universe of matter and energy. The sense that moral truth is "special" is an illusion of our human minds, as the sense of right and wrong are emotionally loaded in order to give them the necessary clout to alter our feelings and behaviours to aid in achieving the ultimate (via the proximate) goal of genetic proliferation. All human thoughts, feelings and actions are animated by human emotions, but in reality the feelings of "being wronged" or "gratitude" or "respect, fear and love" to mention a few emotional drives are just electrochemical neural circuits firing i.e. illusions.

In effect what Wright does is to wrongfully attribute higher meaning/purpose to the results of natural selection because it is amazing and great that it evolved a mind capable of feeling moral emotions. What he overlooks then is that his sense of anything being "important" or "valuable" is an emotional illusion that humdrum natural selection instilled in him. And therefore the moral sense deserves no more special consideration for higher meaning or purpose or divinity than say, 3D visual perception. Read more &rsaquo;

A tour through religion from prehistoric animism, through Shamanism and Polynesian religion to the three Abrahamic faiths. Robert Wright pulls in ideas from evolutionary theory, such as Dawkins' idea of memes, and a rather simplified version of game theory to show how human ideas of god(s) have changed over time. As other reviewers have commented, there are some large omissions, such as non-Abrahamic modern religions. Arguably Wright's treatment of Shamanism and non-Hebrew polytheistic religion is also rather superficial, but what can you expect in a book of only 500 pages? This is also true of evolution, game theory and particle physics, which Wright touches on to give support for his own ideas; if you want to learn about these theories, look elsewhere, for example Dawkins' books. When it comes to Christianity and Judaism, Wright's academic credentials shine through. He writes in an informed and balanced way that is also clear and easy to read, though sometimes a little informal for my taste. I am sure his lectures are entertaining.

And what of its contribution to the "God Delusion" debate? Religious fundamentalists are likely to throw this book down in disgust, though they should try not to. Atheists will read the book nodding in agreement with 90% of it, and are likely to learn from it, unless they have studied academic theology and know his source materials already. Wright argues that religion is not as harmful as Dawkin and Hitchens claim, but it would be possible for to concede these points whilst remaining an atheist. I think there is useful reading here for the religious liberal too, though it is tucked away in the afterword and an appendix, where Robert Wright has hidden his arguments for the existence of a real, as well as a perceived, God. Unlike the rest of the book, which is easy to follow, these arguments are condensed and abstruse -- I suspect that they are flawed, but it rather hard to tell. Please Dr Wright, could you expand these arguments into another book? Read more &rsaquo;

In this sweeping, dazzling journey through history, Robert Wright unveils a discovery of crucial importance to the present moment: there is a pattern in the evolution Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and a "hidden code" in their scriptures. Through the prisms of archeology, theology, anthropology, and evolutionary psychology, Wright repeatedly overturns conventional wisdom to show how and why religion can strengthen the social order-even in an age of globalization-and explains why modern science is not only compatible with religion, but actively affirms the validity of

the religious quest.

In his illuminating book, *The Moral Animal*, Wright introduced evolutionary psychology and examined the ways that the morality of individuals might be hard-wired by nature rather than influenced by culture. With this book, he expands upon that work, turning now to explore how religion came to define larger and larger groups of people as part of the circle of moral consideration. Using a naïve and antiquated approach to the sociology and anthropology of religion, Wright expends far too great an effort covering well-trod territory concerning the development of religions from primitive hunter-gatherer stages to monotheism. He finds in this evolution of religion, however, that the great monotheistic (he calls them Abrahamic, a term not favored by many religion scholars) religions—Christianity, Islam, Judaism—all contain a code for the salvation of the world. Using game theory, he encourages individuals in these three faiths to embrace a non-zero-sum relationship to other religions, seeing their fortunes as positively correlated and interdependent and then acting with tolerance toward other religions. Regrettably, Wright's lively writing unveils little that is genuinely new or insightful about religion. (June)

Straddling popular science, ancient history, and theology, this ambitious work sets out to resolve not only the clash of civilizations between the Judeo-Christian West and the Muslim world but also the clash between science and religion. Tracking the continual transformation of faith from the Stone Age to the Information Age, Wright, a self-described materialist, best known for his work on evolutionary psychology, free trade, and game theory, postulates that religious world views are becoming more open, compassionate, and synthesized. Occasionally, his prescriptions can seem obvious—for instance, that members of the different Abrahamic faiths should think of their religions as "having been involved, all along, in the same undertaking." But his core argument, that religion is getting "better" with each passing aeon, is enthralling.

This new book from acclaimed author Robert Wright is a well-researched one covering a great deal of territory. It should be read in its entirety to be properly understood. In it he discusses the history of religion with a focus on western Abrahamic faiths, although not entirely neglecting eastern religions. He tells us in the Introduction that he's giving us a human "materialistic" account of it, although he thinks doing so "actually affirms the validity of a religious worldview," though not a traditionalist one, but one nonetheless. Wright argues the gods arose as illusions and that "the subsequent history of the idea of god is...the evolution of an illusion." This evolution points to the existence of a "divinity," he argues, even though this god is not one that most believers currently accept. As it evolved it has "moved closer to plausibility." (p.4).

Wright begins with the five types of primitive hunter-gatherer supernatural beings: elemental spirits, puppeteers, organic spirits, ancestral spirits, and the high gods. These primitive gods were not always worshipped but treated as we would treat other human beings. In these societies the Shaman was the "first step toward an archbishop or ayatollah" who had contact with these otherwise hidden forces and could help focus their powers to heal, protect, and provide.

As small tribes grew into larger societies the chieftdom was the next evolutionary stage where there was a need for a "structural reliance on the supernatural." Chiefs in these agricultural societies were conduits through which divine power entered the social scale down to the lesser folk. If things went well for a society then the chief was doing a good job. Superstition reigned in these days. [Read more](#)

In 2000 Robert Wright published *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny* to some acclaim. In it he argued that there is a favorable direction to human history attributable to increasing opportunities for non-zero-sum interaction where both parties gain something, versus zero-sum situations where one party may gain, but only at the expense of the other. Social structures grow to take advantage of these situations, he contended, and build incrementally toward supranational governance. He concluded that "...it is hard, after pondering the full sweep of history, to resist the conclusion that -- in some important ways, at least -- the world now stands at its moral zenith to date."

Now comes *The Evolution of God*, where Wright further elaborates his contention that moral progress is ingrained in the course of history. In it Wright offers a materialist analysis of changing portrayals of gods and God, sure to aggravate conventional believers of many faiths. But he also asserts that history shows there might be something like a God force behind moral improvement, a position that many religious skeptics are likely to reject.

Wright's thesis entails three basic propositions. The first is that God evolves. By this Wright means not an actual God, whom he generally treats as illusory, but rather peoples' conceptions of gods and God. The "evolution" he writes about is mostly cultural evolution, although he includes an appendix on the possible biological roots of religion. [Read more &rsaquo;](#)

Robert Wright is an intellectually curious journalist and a fine writer whose previous books (*The Moral Animal* & *Nonzero*) I enjoyed. Wright's new book explores the character of religion through history, and, marshalling scholarly research, shows how religious ideas developed in response to changing social and political circumstances. The explanations make no appeal to the supernatural. But Wright sees progress (however haphazard and intermittent) in the moral dimension of religion through time, which leads him to speculate that this phenomenon actually points to the existence of something worthy of being named divine.

The bulk of the book is an interesting run through research findings from anthropology, archaeology and textual analysis on the topic of historical religious ideas and practices. The tour begins with a look at hunter-gatherer style animism and the role of gods and religion in tribal cultures, continues with an examination of the development of the various pantheons of gods in ancient civilizations, and then tackles the Abrahamic traditions. In all cases there seems to be a plausible explanation of prevailing religious ideas and the character of God or gods changing in concert with the "facts on the ground". As nations make war, their gods intone contempt for non-believers. As empires digest conquests, they co-opt the gods of their new subjects. More positively, as societies enter into non-zero sum relationships with a wider circle of neighbors, their gods become more universal and more supportive of a broader moral vision.

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