RELIGION AND MATHEMATICS

Work in Progress

Gordon Burt   4 October 2020

Overview

1 God
    God and the universe
    God and living things
    God and the afterlife
    God and spiritual experience
    God, community and society
2 God and gender
    'Church faces crisis after veto on women bishops'

Overview

Apologies: what I am offering here is not at all in as good a shape as I would like it to be. What is here is a patchwork quilt of pieces of various lengths which I have written over the past ten years or so. However the final section, *Section 9 Models of possible gods*, does I think have some coherence.

At one stage I envisaged a chapter 5 for my 2016 Yearbook (which has not yet been produced!). The title was going to be:

　　5 Religion: the universe, life and society; positivity and truth

But then I felt that religion was just a type of the more abstract notion of an idea-action system. So:

　5 Idea-action systems: the universe, life and society; positivity and truth

　　What follows in this section are my initial attempts at some sort of overview of what follows.

　　When people think, when people act and interact, they deploy cultures. Here I shall not refer to 'culture' but to an 'idea-action system'. One component of an idea-action system is a value system. An idea system and an action system are also components of an idea-action system.

　　Chapter 4 of YB15 has discussed how one idea-system, the Enlightenment, clashed with other idea-systems, religions such as Islam and Christianity. The analysis of the reactions to the Paris killings provided a detailed account of the idea-system involved in the interaction between the different idea-systems.

　　Chapter 3 of YB15 has discussed lives and changing societies, and the narratives of biographies and histories. Here too I prefer not to refer to 'narrative' but to an 'idea-action system'. The chapter also discussed the support to lives provided by families, education, communities and religions – and also the idea-systems deployed in that support, from popular songs to the Gideon bible!

　　Now in Chapter 5 …

　　Religious strife – strife between different religions and strife between religions and secular beliefs – was much in the news in 2015.

People use the word 'God' and invoke religion in a variety of contexts - referring respectively to the universe, living things, afterlife, spiritual experience, life and society, gender, positivity and truth. What do God and religion signify in each of these contexts? If one accepts the existence of God in any one of the contexts, does one necessarily accept it in any of the other contexts? Suppose one accepts the existence of a God in all the contexts, are there many separate gods – or just one God present in all contexts? The contexts are also the province of various academic disciplines: the sciences of physics and biology; the social sciences of psychology and sociology; and the humanities disciplines of literature and philosophy. So we are led to the question, how do the accounts of these topics in religion compare with the accounts of the topics in academic disciplines?

Consider the film, 'A theory of everything' about Stephen Hawking. Can religion and physics be reconciled? The magazine Watchtower argues for the theory of intelligent design as an alternative to Darwin's theory of evolution. A survey finds that half the UK population believe in an afterlife. Sam Harris offers 'a guide to spirituality without religion'. Diarmaid MacCulloch notes how Christianity in the West is 'Sex and the West'

The film, 'A theory of everything' was about the physicist Stephen Hawking and prompted questions about the implications of modern physics for the existence of God. Darwin's theory of the evolution of the species continued to cause controversy.

Half the people in Britain believed in an afterlife - but is there any empirical evidence? Sam Harris asked: is spirituality possible without religion?

Religion can be seen as providing a model of life, a community of support, and an image of a positive society. One system of ideas might be characterised as self-interested other-regarding happiness-seeking rational choice. Guidance is offered. There are imperatives with justifications, of generic types. To what extent in these arguments is the role of religion and God necessary or sufficient?

However, what counts as a positive society? Sex and gender issues are much debated in contemporary society, religions participating actively in the debate. Diarmaid MacCulloch noted that 'Christian churches in the West were still tearing themselves apart over many sexual issues'. On

22nd May 2015 a referendum was held in Ireland on same-sex marriage with strong opposition from the Roman Catholic church. The ordination of women bishops in the Church of England continued to be a source of controversy. Elsewhere headlines such as 'young Iranians rightly flouting the mullah's medieval view of sex' run. Does the analysis of sacred texts indicate patriarchy?

Religion is seen by some as providing an image of a negative society. Are wars due to religion? Is terrorism due to religion? Is Islamic State Islamic? Steven Pinker has suggested that the Hebrew Bible is one long celebration of violence. Tom Holland has argued that Muhammad comes in many forms, both a moral leader and a war leader. Seeking to appraise these various ideas, we deploy the propositional calculus, the statistical analysis of texts and a more wide-ranging historical analysis. The views of Waltzer and Sacks are noted. Are religious statements true and are religious arguments logical? Arguments relating to strict religious truth, to the authority of sacred texts and to the ordination of women bishops are formulated in terms of the propositional calculus. Asking, is religion a 'Source of moral values'? ... or 'one long celebration of violence', texts are analysed and the Positive Speaking Quotient (PSQ) calculated: Sachs 63%; Moses 21%; Jesus 66%. In appraising religion there is a need to consider its history and diversity. The history of Christianity and Islam ... of Europeans and Arabs ... the myth of homogeneity and the reality of heterogeneity is considered.

In his 2016 New Year's Day homily the pope said that, every day, negative signs make us doubt the presence of God. This suggests a mathematical model: a set of possible 'god-worlds' differing in terms of existence, power, constancy and value.

Commentary 25, 10-34
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbW Fpbnxnb3Jkb25idXJ0bWF0aHNvY3NjaXxneneDo1N2ViM2NmOWY1NDkwN jFj

1 God

God and the universe

The film, 'A theory of everything' is about Stephen Hawking, his theory of the universe, his relationship with Jane his wife and his developing motor neuron disease. I recall four specific events. When they first met Stephen says he wants to understand how the universe began and Jane, having earlier explained she was Church of England, quotes from Genesis how God created everything. Much later he shares with Jane the concluding sentence from his book 'A brief history of time': 'and then at last we shall see the hand of God'. Also, speaking to an American audience Hawking is asked what his theories say about the existence of God. On another occasion Jane had been explaining to a dinner guest the physics of potatoes and peas (!): Einstein's general relativity had explained big objects like potatoes; quantum theory had explained very small objects like peas; but there was difficulty reconciling these two theories. She quoted Einstein's disavowal of quantum theory: 'I cannot believe that God plays dice!'

These ideas link in to an article which appeared in the Times, headlined 'science is now pointing towards the existence of God' (The Times, Saturday January 10 2015, p. 84). The article itself is somewhat more circumspect. Keith Ward is Regius Professor of Divinity Emeritus at the University of Oxford and Professorial Research Fellow at Heythrop College London. While some believe that science and a belief in God are at odds, Keith Ward argues that science and God may be more friendly! Key notions in his argument are: 'those features of experience which point to a transcendent source of value and of intelligible order in the universe'; 'the existence of a spiritual dimension in the world'; 'non-physical influences'; God as an observer; the possibility of God; a 'non-material mind-like basis of the physical universe'; the job of reason being to see that 'the evidence on all sides is fairly and accurately, critically and sympathetically, presented'. Whereas the determinism of Newtonian physics seemed to preclude the existence of God, quantum theory perhaps suggests otherwise. Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy allows the possibility of non-physical influences, as does the theory of entanglement. Events like the Big Bang could not exist without being observed (observation collapses wave functions into material particles) – and who could observe them but God?

Keith Ward'science is now pointing towards the existence of God' (The Times, Saturday January 10 2015, p. 84).

All this leads me to resume my study of Roger Penrose's 'A Road to Reality' (in the film Stephen Hawking attends a lecture by Roger Penrose on black holes). Penrose's section 19.1 discusses the 'evolution away from Newtonian dynamics' (440-442) leading into the classical fields of Maxwell and Einstein. Quantum mechanics is then introduced with the Heisenberg uncertainty relation, $\square p \square x \geq h/2$ (p. 523), quantum entanglement (pp. 603-607) wave functions and quantum entanglement (Chapter 23).

It occurs to me that Einstein and Keith Ward might be said to have opposing views:

Einstein: If quantum mechanics exists then God does not.
Keith Ward: Unless quantum mechanics exists then God does not.

Alternatively, God may or may not exist, irrespective of whether or not quantum mechanics exists.

God and living things

Back in 1955 when I was ten years old the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland visited our school and came into our classroom. He asked if we had any questions and Ian Chisholm put his hand up: ' how does the story of the creation in Genesis link to Darwin's theory of evolution?' our teacher Mrs Swanson smiled to the Moderator and explained that Ian was the son of a minister. It was a question that had soured the relationship between Darwin and Captain James Fitzroy aboard the Beagle. It was the subject of debate between the Bishop of Oxford and T. H. Huxley in 1860. In recent times critics of Darwin's theory of evolution have proposed the theory of intelligent design.

God and the afterlife

A recent survey finds that 44% of people in Britain believe in the afterlife, with 29% believing in Hell. Another recent survey of the UK1970 birth cohort found that 2/3 of women believed in an afterlife and

1/3 of women were atheist; whereas 1/3 of men believed in an afterlife and ½ of men were atheist. Thus twice as many women as men believed in the afterlife. The following percentages had no doubts about their faith: Muslims 90%; Baptists 70%; Catholics 33%; 17% of Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians.

Moody, Oliver. Church attendance in freefall but we still believe in Hell. 19.1.15,23
Leader. Spirit of the Age. Belief in an afterlife persists even as formal church affiliation has declined. 19.1.15,28
John Bingham
   Women keep the faith as majority of men say they do not believe in God
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11357707/Women-keep-the-faith-as-majority-of-men-say-they-do-not-believe-in-God.html
[Women more likely to believe in God. 21.1.15,22.]

God and spiritual experience

Keith Ward refers to a spiritual dimension to the world. It might be argued that religious belief provides access to this spiritual dimension, access which is not available to those without religious belief. Oliver Kamm refers to a challenge often levelled against [atheists]: 'where is your spiritual life? Surely there must be something more than our daily round of experience.' Responding to this challenge is Sam Harris' late, 'an attempt by an atheist to extol the virtues of spirituality without God'. Kamm however feels that 'real wisdom comes from reason not rumination'.

Oliver Kamm 17.1.15,Saturday Review, 14. 'real wisdom comes from reason not rumination'.
Harris, Sam. (2015) Waking up: a guide to spirituality without religion, Bantam.

God, community and society

For many people religion provides a mutual support community.

Finally there is a God who seems to be concerned with the detailed organisation of society: what people eat; the relationship between genders; the nature of the state and state power. Some of these aspects are very

specific and of concern only to a specific religion or indeed to a specific group within a specific religion.

Religion
Witchdoctors banned from killing albinos. Most Tanzanians say they are Christian or Muslim, but 93% also believe in withcraft. There have been 332 attacks on albinos in 24 countries across Africa since 1998. 16.1.15,34.

David Smith The guardian Tanzania bans witchdoctors in attempt to end albino killings 14 jan 2015
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/14/tanzania-bans-witchdoctors-attempt-end-albino-killings

Food
Don't mention the pig. Or the bear. Or the elf
Hugo Rifkind
 … If we follow OUP's [The Oxford University Press] advice not to mention pork products for fear of giving offence, where will it all end? 17.1.15, 24

Gender
Matchmaking mullah supervises hook-ups for young Iranians. 23.1.15,35
Persian Gulf: Young Iranians are rightly flouting the mullah's medieval view of sex. 32.1.15,28

Hands of Sentamu ignite row over woman bishop's ordination. Sentamu to avoid laying hands on new bishop. 22.1.15,1,8 Oliver moody

Will the Archbishop of York's hands be tainted by consecrating a woman bishop?
Archbishop calms row over hands ritual. 23.1.15,19

Letter The dispute over the hands of Sentamu. 23.1.15,29

State and state power
Whereas the Islamic State places religion at the centre of the state, France and the USA emphasise the separation of state and religion. In the UK the Church of England is the established church and the Queen is 'the Defender of the Faith'.

2 God and gender

The Hay on Wye Literature Festival is an annual event. There are reports in the media of festival events and two reports caught my special attention. One was Tom Holland's 'Deradicalising Muhammad'.
https://www.hayfestival.com/p-9689-diarmaid-macculloch.aspx;
https://www.hayfestival.com/p-9673-tom-holland.aspx

and the other was Diarmaid MacCulloch's talk, 'Sex and the West'

'As society becomes more liberal, the Churches often seem more entrenched. The Oxford historian explores how Western Christianity's complex and often divisive ideas about sex, marriage and gender have their roots in a story that began 3,000 years ago.

Western culture is hated in the rest of the world because of its obsession with sex and because of the enhanced role taken by women in society. Christian churches in the West were still tearing themselves apart about many sexual issues, in contrast to the popular pride in talking openly about sex.'

Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Sex and the West'

The Times (2015) Jihadists hate us 'because of our obsession with sex. May 27, p. 18.

A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years. London, Allen Lane. (2009)

Silence: A Christian History. London, Allen Lane. (2013)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00ntrqh;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diarmaid_MacCulloch

'Church faces crisis after veto on women bishops'
Front page, the first leader and a two-page spread: pages 1, 2, 6-7.

An organisation has a general procedure for producing an outcome when there is a conflict of opinion amongst its members. There are various criteria that the procedure and the outcome might satisfy. It may be that there is no general procedure that can in every case satisfy all the criteria. There may be multiple constituencies and the procedure needs to specify how these constituencies are to be combined. There are various methods for specifying the outcome from each constituency. The menu of options is important.

Here, there were just two options: the status quo and the ordaining of women bishops but 'a woman bishop would have been required to delegate to a stand-in male bishop to minister to parishes which rejected her authority, using a code of practice for guidance'.

The rule is that for a change to be made requires each constituency to pass it and passing it requires at least two thirds of the vote.

The votes/opinions in the constituencies for the change were:

	% for	% against	% abstain	number
bishops	90	6	4	49
clergy	77	23	0	193
laity	64	36	0	206

'Pope's book has infallible timing for Christmas market' page 43.

In '*Jesus of Nazareth: the infancy narratives*' Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) draws attention to the 'genealogy of Jesus' given in Matthew 1. I decided to have a look:

'(1.1) The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham ... (1.16) And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ ... (1.18) Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.'

So the first eight words of the first verse of the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament are false. It is not the book of the generation of Jesus Christ. It is the book of the generation of Joseph – and Joseph was not the father of Jesus. To get round this problem the Pope refers to Joseph as 'the legal father of Jesus'.

Given the debate about the role of women in the Church of England and given the sexual predation by men on women, it occurred to me to ask what message Matthew 1 gave about women. I concluded that Matthew 1 celebrated patriarchy.

.(a) the choice of giving the genealogy of the male non-parent as opposed to the genealogy of the female parent is a reflection of patriarchy;

.(b) '(1.19) Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.' Either option is a reflection of patriarchy.

.(c) Archangel Gabriel explains the situation to the male non-parent rather than to the female parent.

.(d) 'with child of the Holy Ghost'. Greek myth also has male gods visiting their attentions on female mortals, Zeus visiting Leda, Europa, etc. So gods themselves practice patriarchy.

.(e) It is a baby boy that is to be celebrated – not a baby girl.

.(f) No consideration is given to Mary.

However my memory was that Gabriel had spoken to Mary and I checked up and this is indeed the case in Luke 1 who gives prominence to Mary and her family and suggests that Mary consents. A less patriarchal, more feminist account perhaps?

Indeed Tom Wright, a former Bishop of Durham, points to biblical arguments for the ordination of women ...

'It's about the Bible, not fake ideas of progress' Tom Wright v. Steven Pinker
The Times (2012) Friday November 23, p. 34

'The resurrection of Jesus is the only Christian guide to the question of where history is going. Unlike the ambiguous 'progress' of the Enlightenment, it is full of promise – especially the transformed gender roles.'

This is the exact opposite to one of the central arguments of Steven Pinker's book that ancient traditions such as the Bible promote violence and that this has been mitigated over time, in particular the Enlightenment and an associated feminisation has reduced the prevalence of war.

Tom Wright notes that 'I Timothy ii is usually taken as refusing to allow women to teach men' but goes on to say that 'serious scholars disagree on the actual meaning, as the Greek words occur nowhere else'. For him 'all Christian ministry begins with the announcement that Jesus has been raised from the dead. And Jesus entrusted this task, first of all, not to Peter, James, or John, but to Mary Magdelene.'

[If I recall aright she was tending the grave ... the rather mischievous thought occurs to me that Mary Magdelene was the first of the Christian church women flower arrangers.]

Tom Wright also notes that 'the first expositor of Paul's greatest letter was an ordained travelling businesswoman' (Romans xv1, 7).

The statistical distribution of ideas in the Bible, the statistical distribution of interpretations

The situation which we seem to have is the following. Let B be the set of verses in the Bible, C be the set of Christians, W be the set $\{0,1,n\}$ and w be a judgment function from BxC to W where $w(b,c)=1$ if c believes that b is evidence in favour of women bishops, $w(b,c)=0$ if evidence against and $w(b,c)=n$ if neutral. Let p be the proportion of judgments in favour of women bishops. Each individual has their own value of p, each verse has its own value of p. There is a distribution of p across individuals and a distribution of p across verses. There is an overall mean value of p.

'Glass ceiling that prevents women from taking their place at the Bank's top table' page 53

'They are among the biggest losers in the economic downturn, yet in recent times women's voices have never been so disregarded. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that there are no women on the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England, that the next bank Governor is almost certain to be a man and that this is the first time in 16 years that there has not been a women minister at the Treasury.'

Ireland's referendum on same-sex marriage

This month's *Commentary* has a strong local focus: we look at the same-sex marriage referendum in Ireland where the Roman Catholic Church is dominant; and we look at the football results in England. How do these local events relate to the wider world?

A map of the world exhibits international variation in laws regarding homosexual relationships and expression. Laws in North, South and Central America, Western Europe, South Africa and Australia are supportive to varying degrees. Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia are less supportive or actively restrictive. The map for same-sex marriage is similar.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_relationship;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage

It was not only in Ireland that the Roman Catholic church participated in the debate – the Vatican did also. A map of the world shows substantial populations of Catholics in North, South and Central America, Western Europe (including Italy and Poland), Central Africa and Australia. Christianity as a whole is dominant in the Americas, Europe, most of Africa, Australia but absent in Asia and North Africa. The Chinese government is officially atheist; in India Hindu is dominant; and outside these various areas, Islam is predominant.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irreligion_in_China   ;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations

Although the Catholic Church has a worldwide presence, all its Popes have been Europeans – up till the appointment of Pope Francis, an Argentinian. He has 'placed the poor at the centre of his papacy' and met with Gustavo Guttarez, the founder of liberation theology. Archbishop Romero who spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations and torture in El Salvador was beatified on May 23.

The New York Times International Weekly (2015) Liberation's theology' revival. Views of a scorned movement shift as Pope Francis focuses on the poor. May 31, pp. 1-2.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/world/europe/popes-focus-on-poor-revives-scorned-theology.html?_r=0;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Francis;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavo_Guti%C3%A9rrez;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%93scar_Romero ;

'In an interview with Argentinian newspaper La Voz del Pueblo, the Pope said that he had decided that "(TV) was not for me". "I have not watched TV since 1990. It's a promise that I made the Virgin of Carmen [Our Lady of Mount Carmel] on the night of 15 July 1990," he said.

'The Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill 2015 (bill no.5 of 2015) is a pending amendment to the constitution of Ireland to mandate provision for same-sex marriage. The bill was introduced to the Oireachtas in January 2015 by the Fine Gael–Labour government, and passed in March, in time for a referendum, which was

held on 22 May 2015; all constitutional amendments must be put to referendum.'
    http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty-
fourth_Amendment_of_the_Constitution_(Marriage_Equality)_Bill_2015;
    http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_constitutional_referendums,_2015

The bill had the support of all the political parties but was officially opposed by the Roman Catholic church in Ireland – although there was some support from individuals and groups within the church.
    'Marriage is only between man and woman. Statement of Ireland's bishops in view of the constitutional referendum'. 12 March 2015
    http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/marriage-only-between-man-and-woman;
    http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en

The bill was approved in the referendum and this gave rise to a variety of reactions – see next section.

The reactions

'Today we woke up, smiling, in a changed Ireland. A kinder, gentler, more accepting Ireland.' Brian Sheehan, co-director of the Yes Equality campaign.
    https://www.yesequality.ie/deepest-thanks-expressed-to-irish-public-for-historic-yes-vote-in-marriage-equality-referendum/

The Independent on Sunday (2015) The power of positive thinking. Ireland's historic vote for equal marriage. Church urged to reach out after Ireland votes for gay marriage. Joy at Ireland's emphatic Yes to equal marriage ... the scale representing a seismic shift in social attitudes. May 24, pp. 1, 8-9.

The Times (2015) Church urged to reach out after Ireland votes for gay marriage. Even Catholicism should enjoy this moment. It has been a genuine social revolution, with the gay arguments debated at a rare, apolitical level. May 25, pp. 21, 25.

The Times (2015) Gay marriage vote 'a defeat for humanity'. May 28, p. 33.

'Ireland's referendum, however inspiring, is not a step forward for gay rights'

http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/ireland-s-referendum-however-inspiring-is-not-a-step-forward-for-gay-rights-1.2225587

A senior Vatican official has attacked the legalisation of gay marriage in Ireland. The referendum that overwhelmingly backed marriage equality last weekend was a "defeat for humanity", he claimed.

"I was deeply saddened by the result," Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state, said at a conference in Rome on Tuesday night. "The church must take account of this reality, but in the sense that it must strengthen its commitment to evangelisation. I think that you cannot just talk of a defeat for Christian principles, but of a defeat for humanity."

http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/26/vatican-ireland-gay-marriage-referendum-vote-defeat-for-humanity

'The Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano has said that Ireland's passing of the same-sex marriage referendum constitutes as a "defeat" that highlights a gap between the church and modern society.

While neither the Pope nor the Vatican have reacted officially to the referendum result, the newspaper reported of "a challenge for the whole Church," and of "the distance, in some areas, between society and the Church."

It said: "The margin between the 'yes' and the 'no' votes was too large not to be accepted as a defeat. It was the result of high voter turnout, notably among young people,".

On Saturday the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin said the marriage referendum results show that the church has a huge task in front of it to get its message to young people.

He said the Catholic Church "needs to have a reality check across the board."

Cardinal Georges Cottier, a noted Church theologian, was cited by the Osservatore Romano as saying it was impossible to understand the referendum result "without taking into account the paedophilia scandal which has rocked the Irish Church."

Pope Francis has called on Roman Catholics "not to judge" homosexuals who seek God, but he has also referred to church teachings which decry homosexuality.

http://www.rte.ie/news/2015/0525/703751-vatican-newspaper-irelands-referendum-a-defeat/

RTE News: RTÉ.ie is the website of Raidió Teilifís Éireann, Ireland's National Public Service Broadcaster.

http://www.rte.ie/news/

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http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/world/europe/popes-focus-on-poor-revives-scorned-theology.html?_r=0;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Francis;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavo_Guti%C3%A9rrez;

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%93scar_Romero ;

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http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/05/26/francis-i-havent-watched-tv-since-1990-after-making-promise-to-our-lady/

3 Tom Holland's 'Deradicalising Muhammad'

'What do the *Charlie Hebdo* murders and the rise of the Islamic State owe to Islam? It would be comforting to insist, as many have done, that they owe nothing at all; but Holland, in the inaugural Christopher Hitchens Lecture, argues that the truth is more complex. The best way to combat jihadism, he proposes, is to recognise the centrality of Muhammad to Islam – and that he comes in many forms. There is the moral leader who swallowed abuse peaceably; and there is the war leader who ordered people who insulted him put to death. How best, then, to de-radicalise the Prophet? Tom Holland is author of *In The Shadow of the Sword, Rubicon, Persian Fire, Millennium* and the new translation of *The Histories* by Herodotus. Chaired by Katrin Bennhold of the *New York Times*.'

The Times (2015) Historian calls for end to Muhammad taboo. May 26, p. 19.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_the_Shadow_of_the_Sword_%28book%29

I chanced on Mohammed Amin's review of Tom Holland's 'In the shadow of the sword'. This cites a review by Peter Webb.

http://www.mohammedamin.com/Reviews/In-the-Shadow-of-the-Sword.html

http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/books/islams-real-origins-7640194.html

Pinker (2011) talks about 'the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)' as having been 'superseded by less violent texts (the Talmud amongst Jews and the New Testament amongst Christians)' (pp. 6, 11). However earlier violent texts have not been superseded in the minds of all. In particular they have been embraced by Isis. Moreover moderate thinkers have chosen to ignore these earlier violent texts rather than argue that they are invalid.

Sacred texts and the sword: inside Isis training camps. Obs, 25.1.15,30-31

Peter Webb is due to give a talk in Hamburg on June 17. He notes that the label 'Arab' is sometimes invoked, engendering broad-brushed generalisations, creating simplified, monolithic impressions that historical Arabs constituted one cohesive ethnic community. In contrast modern Arabs are 'heterogeneous and impossible to categorise in tidy categories'.

https://www.islamic-empire.uni-hamburg.de/en/news-and-events/lecture-series/lecture-peter-webb.html;
http://www.art-histories.de/en/fellows-20142015/peter-webb.html;

This argument is pursued in depth in Peter Webb's thesis and forthcoming book:

'It demonstrates the likelihood that the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula was in fact 'Arab-less', and that Islam catalysed the formation of Arab identity as it is familiar today. These Muslim notions of Arabness were then projected backwards in reconstructions of pre-Islamic history (al-Jāhiliyya) to retrospectively unify the preIslamic Arabians as all 'Arabs'. This thesis traces the complex history of Arabness from its stirrings in post-Muslim Conquest Iraq to the fourth/tenth century when urban Muslim scholars crafted the Arab-Bedouin archetype to accompany their reconstructions of al-Jāhiliyya. Over the first four Muslim centuries, Arabness and alJāhiliyya were developed in tandem, and this study offers an explanation for how we can interpret early classical-era narratives that invoke the pre-Islamic Arab.'

'We conceptualise the pre-Islamic Arab today as an Arabian Bedouin tribesman primarily because Muslim-era writings depict him in that guise, and we almost invariably speak of the historical pre-Islamic Arabs as a cohesive ethnicity with uniform cultural traits because many Muslim-era writings present the literary persona of pre-Islamic Arabness in homogenised, stereotyped images. ...

The classical, foundational model of Arab Jāhiliyya, is, however, riddled with difficulties. Modern anthropologists demonstrate that ethnicities are not monoliths: racial purities are myths and peoples across the world engage in a constant process 8 of redefining themselves. The very use of 'the Arab' to describe the populations of pre-Islamic Arabia and the early Islamic Near East is accordingly specious. By treating Arabness as a static phenomenon, we prevent ourselves from probing the actual process of Arab ethnogenesis and we uncritically adopt the common narrative that Arabs emerged from a pagan and 'barbarous' Jāhiliyya. Racial 'purities' and the ethnic origin 'history' of other world peoples have been comprehensively deconstructed, but 'the Arabs' of pre- and early Islam have hitherto escaped such analysis. My thesis begins a fundamental reappraisal of 'Arab history' by investigating the

complexities of the supposed Jāhiliyya and Arabness archetypes in Muslim writings up to the fourth/tenth century.

I start with Robert Hoyland's call to investigate the extent to which Muslims "invented" the idea of the Arab.4 But I must refine Hoyland's statement: did Muslims just create one, monolithic "idea" of Arabness? Hoyland proceeded from an assumption that Muslim writers embrace a unitary impression of Jāhiliyya, 5 but, as I argue in Chapter 1, this is itself a simplification. I reveal the panoply of classical Muslim impressions of Jāhiliyya which accordingly permitted various different impressions of the 'original', pre-Islamic Arab to be expressed in classical Arabic literature. Those varied early Muslim conceptions of Arabs and Arab genealogy are considered in Chapter 2, where, just as Macdonald observed in the case of the Classical and Late Antique world, "the term 'Arab' has proved to be the most difficult to define of any in the ancient Near East",6 I reveal that classical Muslim writers experienced equal difficulties in trying to define Arabness themselves. Both Jāhiliyya and the Arab can be appreciated as complex, evolving ideas in classical Muslim consciousness, the development of which calls for sensitive analysis.'
pp. 7, 8

Webb, Peter A. (2014) Creating Arab origins: Muslim constructions of al-Jāhiliyya and Arab history. PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London
The book, 'Imagining the Arabs', Edinburgh University Press, March 2016.
The thesis: http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/18551

I am particularly interested in the contrast between Webb's phrases indicating homogeneity and his phrases indicating heterogeneity. He clearly thinks that heterogeneity is the reality and homogeneity is the myth.

Homogeneity:
broad-brushed generalisations, simplified, monolithic impressions, one cohesive ethnic community;
unify, archetype;
uniform cultural traits, homogenised, stereotyped images;
ethnicities are not monoliths: racial purities are myths; archetypes;
one, monolithic "idea" of Arabness, a unitary impression

Heterogeneity:

heterogeneous, impossible to categorise in tidy categories;

panoply of classical Muslim impressions, those varied early Muslim conceptions of Arabs;

difficulties in trying to define Arabness, complex, evolving ideas in classical Muslim consciousness, the development of which calls for sensitive analysis

4 God and good

My father was appalled by the Aberfan disaster. The coalmine waste had turned into a slurry and swept down the hillside engulfing the primary school. 'And people talk about a loving God' he commented: bad things happen in the world despite the claimed existence of God. Another issue was the moral character of God. I rather got the impression that the Scottish God had changed during the lifetime of my parents, 'You don't get the hellfire preachers you used to get,' they would agree – not so much the judgmental God of the Old Testament, more the compassionate God of the New – not so much conflict, more cooperation.

A final reflection

Current thinking is that the universe for almost all its existence has been without life, good, truth, spirit or society. Almost all of biological evolution has been without the human species and hence without good, truth or spirit. Almost all of human existence has been without the Hebrew bible. That might suggest that the existence of the earlier Gods is independent of the existence of the later Gods. For example a minimalist view of God might be that 'he' switched the universe on and then left it to its own devices – God as an armchair mathematical physicist. Or one might argue that God had increased its power over the last few thousand years bringing about a better world through the processes that Stephen Pinker describes. Teilhard de Chardin argued that the universe and human society are in a constant evolution to a perfect state.

5 Religious debates and mathematical logic

Mathematics, logic and ordinary language – the case of religion

'Language is an important aspect of social reality and mathematics provides an abstract way of looking at all aspects of language.' (Burt, 2010, p. 3)

Here we consider how ordinary language discussion about religion can be understood in terms of mathematical logic.

God and truth
1.2 The logical calculus of strict religious truth and ethics

First we consider the foundational belief that what is said in the bible is true. The lady who used to be on the till at Waitrose has retired and I now see her from time to time when she and her Jehovah's Witness colleagues knock on our door. We quite often have extended discussions. Sometimes we agree, sometimes we disagree. A key feature is their frequent quotation from the Bible and their belief that statements in the Bible must necessarily be true. This is quite different from an approach which questions the truth of every statement – such as Descartes' technique of methodical doubt.

'Jesus loves me.
This I know.
For the Bible tells me so.'

It's a lovely thought. My mother took me to church when I was four years old and I have known it ever since. It is also an example of the logical calculus of religious truth:

What religion says is true.
Religion says X.
So X is true.

In the field of ethics this becomes the logical calculus of religious ethics:

What religion says and does is ethically right.
Religion says or does X.

So X is ethically right.

Not everybody subscribes to the logical calculus of religious truth. I recall my friend Frank Lawrie in the sixth form (back in 1963) singing in his deep sonorous voice the latest song:

'The things that you're liable
To read in the Bible,
They ain't necessarily so.'

Interestingly, 'they ain't necessarily so' is rather a circumspect judgment of the truth of the Bible. Rather than the qualitative opposites of 'true' or 'false', the quantitative notions of the amount of truth or the degree of truth – or a more nuanced qualitative appraisal - may be more helpful. It may be that people can be placed along a continuum depending on how strict or relaxed their interpretation of the Bible is.

.   strict_____relaxed

My most direct personal experience of strict interpretations of the Bible is when I have discussions on my doorstep with calling Jehovah's Witnesses. These wide-ranging discussions have included the topic of same-sex relationships and my visitors have cited the relevant quotations from the Bible. Ireland's recent referendum on same-sex marriage suggests that the country is split between those who subscribe to a more strict interpretation of religion and those who subscribe to a more relaxed one. As the leading representative of the strict interpretation, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, said the marriage referendum results show that the church has a huge task in front of it to get its message to young people.

The issue does not apply just to Ireland or just to Christianity. Tom Holland suggests that the Islamic State applies a strict interpretation of their religious tradition - that it believes in the 'moral perfection of Muhammad'. Muhammad's destruction of idols in Mecca, Muhammad having a slave girl as a concubine, Muhammad owning a sword that can be translated as 'cleaver of vertebrae' … is, Holland argues, linked to Isis' destruction of antiquities, jihadists' taking of slaves and jihadists beheading infidels. In other words the jihadists are using the following logical calculus (The Times (2015) Historian calls for end to Muhammad

taboo. May 26, p. 19.). Holland's views are discussed further in the earlier chapter on religion.

What Muhammad says and does is ethically right.
Muhammad says or does X.
So X is ethically right.

The structure of all of these is that of Aristotle's syllogism. The truth of the third statement depends on the truth of the first and second statements.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syllogism

All men are mortal.
Socrates is a man.
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

A second example of the application of logic to religion debate is the debate which took place in 2012 in the Church of England about the ordination of women bishops.

'For those opposed, it is not good enough for a bishop merely to be a man. He must also be able to prove that at no point in his ministry has he been consecrated by a woman bishop, or by another man who was in turn consecrated by a woman bishop. This is known as the concept of 'taint'.'
The Times (2012) 'Right of refusal' jeopardises ordination of women bishops. Tuesday May 29, p. 7.

Some argue that this follows from the biblical record that all Christ's disciples were men. Others argue that it follows from the writings of St Paul who said that the man must be the head of woman.

What interests me here is whether mathematical social science can inform discourse about religion. A key issue is the nature and validity of argument. In mathematics there is a very strong and well-defined notion of valid inference. Certain statements (axioms) are assumed to be true; valid inference is applied; certain statements (theorems) are deduced to be true (more precisely conditionally true, depending on the truth of the axioms).

One of the simplest forms of argument is as follows. A certain statement (or set of statements) P is assumed to be valid. Another statement Q is claimed to be valid and that claim is justified by the claim

of an inferential link, 'P implies Q', between the two statements. This is the modus ponens rule of inference in the propositional calculus (Burt, 2010, pp. 42-44):

Proposition P is true.
'P implies Q' is true.
Therefore proposition Q is true.

P: All Christ's disciples were men.
P implies Q: 'All   Christ's   disciples   were   men'   implies   'all consecrated bishops
.   should be men'.
Q: All consecrated bishops should be men.

The various parties* disagree about the validity of Q but presumably agree about the validity of P. Therefore the source of the disagreement is about the inference 'P implies Q'.
.* 'senior figures in the Church of England', Archbishop of Canterbury, House of Bishops, Women and the Church, General Synod, Bishop of Buckingham, Dr Miranda Threlfall-Holmes

The formulation given above is also of interest in that statement P is a statement of fact and statement Q is a statement of value. The fact-value distinction was emphasised by philosopher David Hume who argued that it was impossible to infer a statement of value from a statement of fact. So either the inference 'P implies Q' is not valid or there is some additional value statement which is assumed in the argument. (There is some debate about this!)

Also in play is another argument which has the abstract form 'P implies Q':

A: Authority A makes statement S.
A implies S: 'Authority A makes statement S' implies 'Statement S is true'.
S: Statement S is true.

Two such authorities are referred to above, namely the biblical record and the writings of St Paul. We may define a perfect authority to be one whose statements are always true; a probabilistic-p authority to be one each of whose statements has a probability p of being true. The likelihood

of a probabilistic-p authority making a set of n true statements is p^n. In other words the more statements that are made the greater the likelihood that at least one of the statements is false ... and the greater likelihood that the above rule of inference, 'A implies S', is valid.

One way of demonstrating that a particular authority is not perfect is to identify an internal contradiction in the statements of the authority – in other words a pair of statements each of which implies the negative of the other. A particular example of this would be a pair of statements, P and not-P.

It may be (and I am not sure about this) that an example of internal contradiction in the bible is provided by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (St Matthew, Chapter 5). The phrasing 'Ye have heard that it was said (X). But I say unto you (Y).' The statements X refer back to Moses' statements such as the ten commandments in Deuteronomy the fifth book of Moses in the old testament. In some cases Y is an extension of X rather than a contradiction of X. However the following are clear contradictions of X (does X occur somewhere in the bible?):

'38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;
39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'
...
'43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.
44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies ...'

A final general point is that valid arguments are rare in ordinary language. Strong conclusions and weak arguments are common. This arises because the demand for specific conclusions is much greater than the supply of valid arguments.

In the above I have covered the following points.

assumed statements and derived statements
rules of inference
statements of value cannot be derived from statements of fact
the low likelihood of a large set of statements all being true
internal contradiction

valid arguments are rare
strong conclusions and weak arguments are common

The statistical distribution of ideas in the Bible, the statistical distribution of interpretations

The situation which we seem to have is the following. Let B be the set of verses in the Bible, C be the set of Christians, W be the set $\{0,1,n\}$ and w be a judgment function from BxC to W where $w(b,c)=1$ if c believes that b is evidence in favour of women bishops, $w(b,c)=0$ if evidence against and $w(b,c)=n$ if neutral. Let p be the proportion of judgments in favour of women bishops. Each individual has their own value of p, each verse has its own value of p. There is a distribution of p across individuals and a distribution of p across verses. There is an overall mean value of p.

6 A model of life and an image of a positive society

An image of a positive society

What should we do in these difficult times? 'Here is my recommendation ...'

Is religion a self-interested other-regarding happiness-seeking rational choice?

Gordon Burt   Conflict Research Society   9 July 2012

gordonjburt@gmail.com
        http://www.conflictresearchsociety.org.uk/

The Times (2012) We need to take a close look at the road less travelled. p. 74. 23 June. Jonathan Sacks.

'Become a member of a religious community ... seek and celebrate the spirit'
Imperatives
Justification of imperatives
Generic imperatives
Self-interested other-regarding happiness-seeking rational choice
The role of religion and God in the argument

'Become a member of a religious community ... seek and celebrate the spirit'

When religious leader Jonathan Sacks says 'here is my recommendation for the next few years', we expect him to recommend religion - and that is what he does. I am interested here in both the logic and the substance of what he says.

Imperatives

A number of the statements in the article are imperatives: 'buy', 'sell', 'do', 'invest', 'focus', 'read', 'study', 'enrol', pray', 'become', etc. Thinking about it I have discovered that I don't know how to handle imperatives – how to handle a single imperative or how to handle an argument which mixes imperatives with ordinary statements.

There are different types of imperatives:

.(1) Positive: do X.
.(2) Negative: do not do X.
.(3) And: do X and do Y.
.(4) Or: do X or do Y.
.(5) Conditional: if S then do X.

How do actions relate to imperatives? There is a consistency relation: the action of doing A is consistent with the imperative 'do A'. If you do A then you act in accordance with the imperative 'do A'. If you act in accordance with the imperative 'do A' then you do A. (Note that the notion of obedience has more to it.)

Can one infer one imperative from another? There is an entailment relation: 'do A' entails 'do B'. For example 'do X and do Y' entails 'do X'. Also 'do x' entails 'do not do 'do not do X''.

Justification of imperatives

The article does not just contain imperatives - it contains justifications of the imperatives. The general form of a justification is given in steps (1), (4) and (5) below. The imperative 'do X' is justified because doing X has a value or a reason.

(1) Do X.
(4) Doing X has value/reason.
(5) The imperative 'do X' is justified.

Step (4) is crucial. The tests of necessity and sufficiency can be applied to it. Is it necessary to do X in order to achieve value? Is doing X sufficient to produce value?

The value or reason in step (4) can take a variety of forms. Following theories of ethics the justification can be deontic or consequentialist. The justifications in the article are consequentialist: the phrase 'you will' appears fifteen times. The typical form of argument is: 'do X and you will Y'. For example 'eat only when you are hungry ... and you will lose weight'. In greater detail the argument is:

(1) Do X.
(2) If you do X then you will Y.
(3) Y has value.
(4) Doing X has value.
(5) The imperative 'do X' is justified.

Generic imperatives

The imperative 'eat only when you are hungry' is a specific imperative and there are many of these in the article. However the article also contains generic imperatives, imperatives which apply in a wide variety of situations. The following generic imperatives G are considered.

Rule A: if doing X is not possible, then do Y
Rule B: if most people do X, then do X
Rule C: if most people do X, then do not-X
Rule D: maximise value subject to (money and time) constraints

The assumption is that doing G is of value. But are these rules of value? Each of the Rules A, B and C might work quite well as a weak imperative of the form 'you might like to think about doing ...'. However each is problematic as a strong imperative. If X and Y are the only possible actions then carrying out Rule A is logically necessary; and if X and Y are not the only possible actions then doing Y might be worse than some other alternative Z. Rule B and Rule C are opposites. Rule B is often followed but Sacks notes that (sometimes?) the consequence can be boom, panic and crash. Rule C is interesting. Sacks says 'taking the opposite route, the contrarian opinion, 'the road less travelled''... It might be thought of as a collective Russell paradox. If most people follow Rule C then most people will do not-X, thus acting against the command of Rule C. Assuming most people do not follow Rule C, Rule C may be misguided in that sometimes most people are right (cf. the 'ask the audience' option in 'who wants to be a millionaire'). Rules A, B and C do not guarantee maximum value and so are always open to being overruled by Rule D. From a logical standpoint, Rule D is of value by definition – although the psychology of its use might be more problematic.

Self-interested other-regarding happiness-seeking rational choice

Rule D is the familiar constrained utility maximisation criterion ('your return on investment will, I promise you be better than any alternative on offer today'). Unemployment may involve moving from being 'money-rich, time-poor' to being 'money-poor, time-rich'. These shifting constraints prompt a change in the allocation of money and time in the manner indicated in standard economic theory, reducing the amount of expensive low-value activity ('eat only when you are hungry ... buy only what you need... travel light through life ... you will save much of what you now spend' ... 'stop wasting time doing the things you should never have done in the first place' ... 'rush less, savour more') and increasing the amount of cheaper high-value activity ('seek and celebrate the spirit ... the price is low ... the value could not be higher'). The utility function expresses how utility depends on the amounts of different goods (bought material happiness, 'made' spiritual happiness; fulfilment, flourishing, joie de vivre, sense of blessedness; profitable, admirable; ideals; spirit, soul, mind).

High-value inner mind involves ...
... eliminate the negative:
stop worrying about wealth and success
worry less, fears subside
entrust yourself to God's everlasting arms
... accentuate the positive:
think instead of the (taken for granted) blessings that surround you
look on the world and see God's glory
find your life flooded with meaning
sleep easier
wake in hope
inner strength,
ancient wisdom
pray

High-value relationships with people involve ...
... being positive towards them:
giving, not getting
praising, not being praised
smiling at strangers (and they smile back)
seeing good in people (they become good), not judging
admiring, not envy
... them being positive to you:

making friends on whom you can rely
becoming part of a community on which you can depend
... joining and meeting a high-value group
joining religious congregation
meeting people who care about ideals, willing to make sacrifices for them

The argument is interesting. The rational choice theory of classical economics has been criticised for assuming that people make rational choices, seeking their own self-interest, seeking their own happiness. Yet these are precisely the considerations Sachs invites people to make in justification of his imperatives.

The role of religion and God in the argument

Consider now the role of religion and God in the argument. Much of what is said does not refer to or depend on religion or God. Where religion or God is referred to there is broad toleration of different religions: 'study the sacred texts ... the Bible or other ancient works of wisdom'. Also religion and God are seen as important in relation to 'inner strength' and a congregation with ideals. Consider now the tests of necessity and sufficiency. Is religion necessary in order to achieve value? Is religion sufficient to produce value?

.(1) Is religion necessary in order to achieve value?
'... the Bible or other ancient works of wisdom ... the still compelling wisdom of the past ...' It seems to me that my best strategy would be to access the best sources of wisdom. Is there any reason why ancient sources should have more wisdom than more recent sources? Indeed is there any reason why ancient religious sources should have more wisdom than ancient 'non-religious' sources (such as the philosophers of Ancient Greece or the non-religious writings of Ancient China)? Given the extensive growth of information in recent times, might not some of this recent information provide a major source of wisdom?

.(2) Is religion sufficient to produce value?
'... don't judge people at all. Leave that to God. He is better at it than we are, and more forgiving too.' This runs counter to Steven Pinker's notion that the Bible is one long chronicle of violence and my own comparative analysis of Deuteronomy. On the other hand 'the ancient

vision of the prophets Isaiah and Micah, inscribed at the United Nations Plaza in New York, is the perennial challenge': 'they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' (Uniting for Peace, Issue 5, June 2012). So there are positive and negative elements in 'the ancient wisdom' – and, as a United for Peace leaflet notes, positive and negative elements in contemporary religion: 'sadly many conflict around the world today are fuelled by religious intolerance and violent misuse of faith. Yet, if true to their holy Scriptures and traditional affirming 'THE SACRED GIFT OF LIFE' the faiths should be promoting peace – locally and globally.'

 'progress' to refer to value and he identifies money as the resource which leads to value. His remarks

7 Handel's Samson … Israelites' Jehovah versus Philistine's Dakon

Location: Gaza, one of the five city-states of Philistia, 9th century BCE

CHORUS

Israelites and Philistines
Fixed in His everlasting seat, Jehovah/Great Dagon rules the world in state.
His thunder roars, heaven shakes, and earth is aghast.
The stars with deep amaze, remain in steadfast gaze;
Jehovah/Dagon is of Gods the first and last. …

Philistines
Great Dagon has subdued our foe, and brought their boasted hero low. …

Israelites
The Holy One of Israel be thy guide … heaven bids thee strike the blow. …

Philistines
Hear us, our God! O hear our cry! Death! Ruin! Fallen!
No help is nigh: O mercy, heav'n, we sink, we die!

Sunday 17th January, Catherine and I were at Church of Christ the Cornerstone to hear Handel's oratorio, Samson. 'It uses a libretto by Newburgh Hamilton, who based it on Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, which in turn was based on the figure Samson in Chapter 16 of the Book of Judges. The themes of Samson Agonsites are violence, women, religion and blindness.'

In the prelude to these events, Jehovah had caused the
Israelites to suffer at the hands of the Philistines because the
Israelites had done evil:

'And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of
the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the
Philistines forty years.'
(Judges, 13 ,1)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson_(Handel)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson_Agonistes
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dagon
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Judges
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=judges%2013-13&version=KJV

8 Religion

8.1 World religion: the future

The Pew Research Center has made the following projections for the population growth of world religions for the period 2010-2050.

'The religious profile of the world is rapidly changing, driven primarily by differences in fertility rates and the size of youth populations among the world's major religions, as well as by people switching faiths. Over the next four decades, Christians will remain the largest religious group, but Islam will grow faster than any other major religion.'

Pew Research Center. The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050. http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/

8.2 The British Academy explores faith

Why no religion is the new religion
Religion and the senses in Ancient Greek culture
Roger van der Weyden and the encounter between faith and art

Who cares if Britain isn't a Christian country?
Does religion do more harm than good?
Is true religion always extremist?

The role of religion in conflict and peace-building

'In this latest series of the British Academy Debates, we will be exploring faith. Far from fading away as many were

predicting just a few decades ago, religion is increasingly prominent in domestic debate and global affairs. What exactly is going on and why? How does religion influence art, literature and society today? And what are the implications of this for the civic structures in the UK and our relationships with others, both here and overseas?'
The British Academy. *Faith.* http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2015/Faith.cfm

Whereas the world is going in one religious direction, the UK is going in an opposite direction. 'No religion is the new religion,' Linda Woodhead told the British Academy:

'Britain is one of only a handful of countries in the world which is rapidly moving from having a Christian majority to a 'no religion' majority. But we are not becoming secular – only a quarter of us are confident there is no God; fewer than one in ten report being influenced by secularism. The lecture approaches this apparent paradox by excavating the category of 'no religion', and showing how and why the categories of the religious and the secular are losing their analytic power in relation to the current cultural situation. Drawing on new research, it traces the emerging outlines of a new, post-Protestant, moral paradigm.'
http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2016/Why_no_religion_is_the_new_religion.cfm
http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/news/articles/2016/why-no-religion-is-the-new-religion/

One year ago a YouGov survey had found that a third of British adults believe there is a God, a third do not believe in any sort of God or greater spiritual power, a fifth think there is some sort of spiritual greater power and a seventh don't know. Table 1 gives the percentages holding different beliefs, Christian or 'no religion' by social group. Old people and Conservatives were more likely to be Christian whereas

young people and Liberal Democrats were more likely to have no religion.

https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/02/12/third-british-adults-dont-believe-higher-power/

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/6v34wr1cpg/TimesResults_150209_atheism_Website.pdf

Table 1 The percentages holding different beliefs by social group.

.		Christian	No religion
Age	60+	68	26
Pol 1	Con	61	32
Pol 1	ukip	60	37
Pol 2	con	60	33
Reg	north	54	40
Pol 2	lab	53	38
Age	40-59	52	41
Sex	female	52	39
Class	C2de	51	39
Reg	mid/Wales	51	41
ALL		49	42
Pol 1	lab	48	42
Class	abc1	47	44
Reg	south	47	44
Reg	scot	47	44
Sex	male	46	45
Reg	London	42	39
Pol 2	lib dem	38	53
Age	25-39	35	52
Pol 1	lib dem	33	58
Age	18-24	22	60

Of those who had no religion, 45% were atheist, 17% were agnostic, 8% were humanist and 2% were secularist, while 21% were none of these and 8% were don't knows.

Christians were more likely to believe in a god and people with no religion were more likely to believe there was no god. However there was a gradation of belief within the two groups with some holding intermediate beliefs in some spiritual aspect or simply not knowing and indeed a few holding the opposite belief to what one would expect from their group. Unsurprisingly almost all atheists thought that there was no god. See Table 2.

Diarmaid MacCulloch, Iain McLean, Mona Siddiqui, Polly Toynbee and Sameer Rahim debate:

'Just how 'religious' is Britain? Is the UK a secular state? Multi-faith? Christian? What do such definitions mean both practically for the infrastructure of civil society and culturally in terms of how we view ourselves and others? Does having a formal label actually make a difference to what happens on the ground, to the experiences and activities of individuals and local communities?'
http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2016/Who_cares_if_Britain_isnt_a_Christian_country.cfm

Table 2 The percentages holding different beliefs by social group.

.	god	spirit	don't know	no god
Christian	55	23	12	9
No religion	4	18	14	63
Atheist	0	10	4	85

David Aaronovitch, Tina Beattle, Ian Reader and Malise Ruthven ask *Does religion do more harm than good?*:

The finger is often pointed at religion as the source of many conflicts, but is this really the case? Does the pursuit of religious freedom for some always necessitate restrictions on others? How do we balance religious freedom with fairness and equality for all?

http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2016/Does_religion_do_more_harm_than_good.cfm

Innes Brown, John Brewer, Richard English and Tehmina Kazi ask *Is true religion always extremist?*:

Religious extremism isn't a new phenomenon, so what makes the challenges we face today different from those that have come before? Is religious extremism really on the rise, or does it just have a new look for a modern, technologically-advances age? Given the pressures caused by an expanding global population in an increasingly interconnected world, is a clash of faiths inevitable?

http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2016/Is_true_religion_always_extremist.cfm

In September 2015 Silvestri and Mayall wrote a report on *The role of religion in conflict and peace-building* for The British Academy. They warn against viewing the question in binary terms:

'The role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding has all too often been depicted in binary terms: it is seen as a source either of violence or of reconciliation. This simplification obscures the complexity of the subject and shows that there is no common understanding of the central terms of the debate. As a starting point for a more meaningful analysis, this report aims to find a workable definition of 'religion' – a concept that is frequently applied to a diverse range of situations, institutions, ideologies and actors. Most recent efforts to

define religion have focused on how it is understood and experienced by individuals, rather than how it is assessed by institutions or doctrines. By observing how religion operates and interacts with other aspects of human experience at the global, institutional, group and individual levels, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of its role (or potential role) in both conflict and peacebuilding.

The major part of this report comprises a literature review, which aims to synthesise contributions from a variety of academic disciplines, including politics and international relations, peace and conflict studies, theology, history, philosophy, sociology, social psychology, security and terrorism studies. The report also draws on research and relevant publications from faith-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

Three conflicts that have shown some religious dimension are examined as case studies, namely those in Israel-Palestine, Mali and Bosnia-Herzegovina. We identify the concepts, actors and arguments at play in each instance, and show in what ways and to what extent different aspects of religion were implicated either in the violence or in the building of peace, or both. We find that religious factors and motivations vary in each case, supporting our contention that when it comes to understanding their role in situations of conflict, context is crucial.

This report puts forward several recommendations for policymakers, particularly those involved in conflict resolution or mediation, and for scholars in the field. Underpinning them all is our key finding that religion is never a static or isolated entity, but should rather be understood as a

fluid system of variables, contingent upon a large number of contextual and historical factors. It is rarely easy to discern the complex ways in which religion permeates a conflict, but it is vital for those involved in this area of study and diplomacy to strive to do so if progress is to be made in understanding them. Finally, a word of caution: we must be careful not to give undue prominence to religion in all instances; it is not a major factor in every conflict and there is a risk that it can sometimes come to obscure more deeply rooted causes and motivations.'

Silvestri, S. and Mayall, J. The role of religion in conflict and peace-building. London: The British Academy. September 2015.
Accessible from the page http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2015/Faith.cfm.

8.3 'Our values', the religious aspect: Israel and Palestine, UK, Scotland, Ireland, Ukraine, France

As noted above, Silvestri and Mayall (2015) argue for a nuanced approach which looks at how religion operates and interacts with other aspects of society. They illustrate this point taking the Israeli-Palestine conflict, Mali and Bosnia & Herzegovina as case studies.

In a somewhat similar vein I have taken the notion of 'our values' as a central idea, analysing the debates around the question 'is the UK Christian?'; noting that Scotland is more varied and less distinctive than might be imagined - in religious as well as other matters; noting a geographical gradient in Ireland in the referendum on same sex marriage; noting a religious aspect to the west-east gradient in Ukraine; and noting the complexity of reaction to the Paris killings in January 2015 (Burt, 2016a, Chapters 6, 9 and 10; Burt 2016b).

Case study I: Religion and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,
(Silvestri and Mayall, 2015, 46-56)

'The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is widely
seen as a nationalist struggle, where both sides are concerned
with issues of 'security, sovereignty and self-determination'
and not on building a state based on Islamic sharia or Jewish
halakhic laws (Frisch and Sandler 2004, 78). The roots of the
modern-day conflict are identified in 'ethno-political'
differences that emerged in the late nineteenth century
(Milton-Edwards 2006), since both 'Israeli Jews and
Palestinians have legitimate and inalienable rights … which
are rooted in the historical experience of each people, rather
than other factors' (Tessler 1994, xi). Fox and Sandler (2004)
and Frisch and Sandler (2004) argue that the nationalist and
state-centric identity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is
partially due to the norms of the international system, of
which both sides wish to be a part.

Despite the dominance of national identity in both the
causation and development of the conflict, religion and
religious aspirations have also played a role in the conflict, in
many ways intensifying it (Fox and Sandler 2004). It has been
argued that the conflict has been 'religicised' (Milton-
Edwards 2006), so that growing religious elements are used to
perpetuate rather than resolve it. In his study of the role of
religion in ethnic conflicts, Fox (2000a, 17) argues that the
Israeli-Palestinian conflict conforms to the model in which
secular conflicts, those fought over national rather than
theocratic claims, often 'evoke the use of religious legitimacy
and institutions' and, in doing so, can be transformed into
religious conflicts. However, while religion is used to
'promote the national struggle' in almost all cases, the

governing bodies will not let religion become dominant in a way that would 'threaten their collective candidacy in the exclusive club of territorial nation-states' (Frisch and Sandler 2004, 93).'

8.4 Judaism, Christianity and Islam – the three Abrahamic faiths

[Muslim communities] 'see the world differently from the rest of us.'
Ford, Richard, Faisla Hanif and Frances Gibb. (2016) Muslims are not like us, race quality chief says. Trevor Phillips. *The Times*, January 27, pp. 1, 4.

'Trevor Phillips omits to mention the historical links that the Abrahamic religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – share. They originate from the Middle east, consider themselves to be monotheistic, and are Abrahamic faiths. For example the story of Abraham and his sons told in both the Book of Genesis and the Koran. As a result Muslims commonly refer to Christians and Jews as 'People of the Book' – people who follow the same general teachings in relation to the worship of the one God as by Abraham. Perhaps, then, Mr Phillips ought to go back to school before making any more sermons.'
Letters to the Editor. (2016) Trevor Phillips and the integration of Muslims. Murad Qureshi, Labour group, London Assembly. *The Times*. January 29. p. 32.

The Tanakh, the canon of the Hebrew Bible. See Table 3 below.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh ;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism ;

The Christian Bible consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament. 'Every version of the Old Testament always includes the books of the Tanakh, the canon of the Hebrew

Bible. The Catholic and Orthodox canons, in addition to the Tanakh, also include the Deuterocanonical Books as part of the Old Testament. These books appear in the Septuagint, but are regarded by Protestants to be apocryphal.' The new testament consists of the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and the Book of Revelation.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity#Scriptures
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity#Creeds
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Testament

'Muslims also believe that Islam is the complete and universal version of a primordial faith that was revealed many times before through prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.[4] Muslims maintain that the previous messages and revelations have been partially misinterpreted over time,[5] they are nevertheless all obliged, according to the Qur'an, to treat the older scriptures with the utmost respect.[6] As for the Qur'an, Muslims consider it to be both the unaltered and the final revelation of God.'

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah_in_Islam
Biblical narratives and the Quran
Tawrat
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_and_Quranic_narratives

'The Quran speaks well[*citation needed*] of the relationship it has with former books (the Torah and the Gospels) and attributes their similarities to their unique origin and saying all of them have been revealed by the one God.[139]… The Quran recounts stories of many of the people and events recounted in Jewish and Christian sacred books (Tanakh, Bible) and devotional literature (Apocrypha, Midrash), although it differs in many details. Adam, Enoch, Noah, Eber, Shelah, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Jethro,David, Solomon, Elijah

, Elisha, Jonah, Aaron, Moses, Zechariah, John the Baptist and Jesus are mentioned in the Quran as prophets of God (see Prophets of Islam). In fact, Moses is mentioned more in the Quran than any other individual.[141] Jesus is mentioned more often in the Quran than Muhammad, while Mary is mentioned in the Quran more than the New Testament.[142] Muslims believe the common elements or resemblances between the Bible and other Jewish and Christian writings and Islamic dispensations is due to their common divine source,[*citation needed*] and that the original Christian or Jewish texts were authentic divine revelations given to prophets.'

Table 3 The books of the Tanakh (Mikrah, Hebrew Bible)

Torah (Pentateuch, Five Books of Moses):
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Nevi'im (Former, Latter and Minor Prophets)
Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel;
Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Ketuvim
The poetic books: Psalms, Proverbs, Job
The five scrolls: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther

8.5 Negativity in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

'... the [Hebrew Bible] today is revered today by billions of people who call it the source of their moral values. ... Yet for all this reverence, the Bible is one long celebration of violence'
(Pinker, 2011, p. 6)

Our earlier discussion of Handel's Samson has noted its
theme of violence – direct violence by Jehovah against the
Israelites and indirect violence through Samson. The source of
the violence is the Book of Judges and is exploited by Milton
in his play:

'Acts of violence are an important theme within *Samson
Agonistes* as the play attempts to deal with revenge and the
destruction of God's enemies. Michael Lieb posits that "the
drama is a work of violence to its very core. It extols violence.
Indeed, it exults in violence".[13] John Coffey simply describes
the action in the play as "a spectacular act of holy violence
and revenge".[14] Likewise, David Loewenstein remarks that
"the destruction and vengeance depicted in Samson
Agonistes, then, dramatizes a kind of awesome religious
terror".[15] Gordon Teskey describes the plot of the work when
he says, "delirious violence of the hero of *Samson Agonistes*,
who cancels the Philistine hallucination of a unified and
harmonious world"'
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson_Agonistes

This violence is echoed three thousand years later:

In the 'Readings in the Laws of Martyrdom' of the Islamic
Jihad there is an intertwining of religion and politics (Hatina
2005). The word 'shaheed' (Muslim martyr), itself denotes a
religious concept (Moghadam 2003), and the religious
doctrine of jihad (holy war) is referenced in the manifestos of
Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Fatah (Frisch 2005; Hatina 2005)
…
… Rabbi Kahane promoted a more violent interpretation,
although he believed his was coming directly from the
Halakha, or Jewish religious law (Sprinzak 1991b). He
believed in the necessity of a physical struggle against the

Gentiles, with 'Jewish violence sanctified and glorified for its own sake', since it 'proves the might of God by reversing the history of humiliation' (Sprinzak 1998, 120).
(Silvestri and Mayall, 2015, pp. 50 and 51)

'Petter Nesser's book on *Islamist terror in Europe*, and his statement that 'London was at the heart of the jihadi sub-culture in Europe' gives Michael Burleigh an opportunity to criticise the liberals who built 'Londonistan', British human rights lobbyists and activist lawyers, patrician liberal complacency, British securocrats and civil servants, waffling on about 'counternarratives' … adding 'as if this is a seminar, and not a war we are fighting.'
Michael Burleigh, Michael (2016) The liberals who built 'Londonistan'. *The Sunday Times Saturday Review*. 16 January, p. 14.

By coincidence my leisure reading of fiction this month has taken as its topic the negativity in gods and religions. In one the central character changes from a believer in a benevolent God to atheist to believer in a malevolent God, under the influence of the events he experiences. The book ends with the author quoting Randolph Churchill's derogatory remark on first reading the Bible and a listing of quotes from the Christian Bible which the author implies indicate a malevolent God.

Matthew 10, 34-37; Isaiah 45, 7; Exodus 15, 3; Luke 19, 27; Leviticus 20, 13; Romans 1, 30-32; Psalm 10, 4; Hosea 13, 15-16; Psalm 137, 7-9; Revelation 2, 22-23; Deuteronomy 28, 63; Psalm 18, 7-11; Hosea 13, 8; Hebrews 10, 31; Amos 3, 6; Hosea 9, 12.

'Special Agent Gil Martins investigates domestic terrorism for the Houston FBI. Once a religious man, now he's close to losing his faith; the very nature of his job leads him to

question the existence of a God who could allow the violence that Gil witnesses every day. … When a disturbed woman tells Gil that the victims have been killed by prayer, he questions her sanity. But as the evidence mounts up that there might be something in what she says, his new-found atheism is severely challenged, even more so when he finds that his own life is on the line.' (cover)

Another novel I've been reading takes us back to the witch finders of the 17th and 18th centuries (Morrow, 2006). The final pages of the book provide a timeline for witchcraft. The North Berwick Witch Trials were in 1590 and the Salem Witch Trials were in 1692. The Witchcraft Act of James I was repealed in 1736.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witchcraft

'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.'
Exodus 22, 18 http://biblehub.com/kjv/exodus/22.htm

8.6 Religions' attitudes to sex and gender issues

CHORUS
Israelites
'To man God's universal law gave pow'r to keep his wife in awe;
Thus shall his life be ne'er dismay'd by female usurpation sway'd.'
Handel's Samson

'Catholic Italy mobilises as conservatives mount last stand against same-sex unions. In the last country in western Europe not to offer rights to gay couples, thousands gather to condemn – or support – a change in the law.'
Scammell, Rosie. (2016) *The Observer*. January 31. p. 2.

'Germany shocked by Cologne New Year gang assaults on women'
BBC 5 January 2016
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35231046
http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/world/europe/coordinated-attacks-on-women-in-cologne-were-unprecedented-germany-says.html?_r=0

'This is a public letter of complaint being sent today (28th January 2016) to Birmingham Central Mosque regarding the misogynistic attitudes of Mr. Muhammad Afzal who is a trustee and Chair of the mosque. He is dismissive on the issues of forced marriage and domestic violence and we are outraged by the views he expressed during a meeting we had with him in December 2015. His attitude towards women's issues make him unfit for positions of authority in which he should be serving all communities - men and women.'
Muslim Women's Network UK
http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/;
http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/mediaStatmentDetail.php?id=155

Sex and gender issues – gay marriage - posed problems for the Anglican Church worldwide, for the Catholic Church in Italy (see above) and in Northern Ireland.
Burgess, Kaya. 2016. Anglican hardliners punish US church for liberal views on gays. The Times. January 15, 4
Kington, Tom. 2016. Renzi risks all in clash with church over gay marriage law. The Times. January 19, 31
BBC Question Time. BBC1. 21 1 16. Northern Ireland. gay marriage
http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/01/22/bbc-question-time-panel-grainne-maguire-northern-ireland-belfast-gay-marriage-ban_n_9047546.html

See also my Social Modelling Notes (Burt 2013):

8 The ordination of women bishops and the propositional calculus
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxnb3Jkb25idXJ0bWF0aHNvY3NjaXxneDo2MzMyMGI5MzRhNzJmNzI4
15 Women, religion, culture and measurement

8.7 'Promoting positive human values': kindness to oneself and others

However there is also positivity in Judaism, Christianity and Islam – and indeed in other faiths and non-faiths. Positivity can be found in places of worship …
…

Positivity is quite rare in newspapers like The Times but one place I can find it is in its weekly column Credo:

'Don't beat yourself up, try kindness as a new resolution'

Murdoch, Alison. (2016) The Times, 2.1.16, p. 78.
Murdoch, Alison. (2014) Moment of reflection with Alison Murdoch. Good Morning Sunday. BBC Radio 2. 14 July.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p022tshx

Alison Murdoch is a former director of Jamyang Buddhist Centre, London and of the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom. On 2nd January 2016, with New Year resolutions in many people's minds, she took the opportunity to suggest that Buddhist teachings and the ideas of the Dalai Lama could provide the basis of a 'new resolution'. Although a Buddhist teacher, the Dalai Lama says 'his main interest isn't in religion but in promoting positive human values' (Murdoch, 2014). He says 'this is my simple religion … the philosophy of kindness.' Alison Murdoch follows the Dalai Lama and says: 'from birth to death, we all flourish when we are loved and cared for in an environment

pervaded by kindness, generosity and forgiveness. What can I do this year to bring more kindness into my own life and the lives of people around me?' The Dalai Lama says: 'Be kind wherever possible – it is always possible.' 'If you can't help others, at least don't harm them.'

What are we to make of these statements? Are people always kind anyway? No. Does reminding people (oneself) to be kind make them (oneself) more kind? Sometimes. Is it always possible to be kind? In some situations, being kind is easy. In other situations, being kind is difficult.

'Kindness – not only towards others, but also myself.' This implies a certain balance, avoiding both preoccupation with oneself and neglect of others – and also avoiding neglect of oneself and preoccupation with others.

See also my Social Modelling Notes (Burt 2013):

10 What should we do in these difficult times? 'Here is my recommendation ...' Is religion a self-interested other-regarding happiness-seeking rational choice?
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxnb3Jkb25idXJ0bWF0aHNvY3NjaXxneDo3NmQ5YzZkNWJmYjVkNmY1
16 Religion: a model of life ... an image of a positive society
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxnb3Jkb25idXJ0bWF0aHNvY3NjaXxneDoxOTViODY3ZDQ0YmU1Yjk2

8.8 Different selections from religion's mixture of positivity and negativity

My conclusion is that Judaism, Christianity and Islam (and other religions) are mixtures of positivity and negativity. Within Christianity this is sometimes expressed as a contrast

between the Old Testament god and the New Testament god. I recall a Christmas service some years ago where the minister dramatised this contrast: the authority up in the pulpit in his splendid robes; then coming down among the congregation taking off his robes and wearing a tee-shirt emblazoned 'Kiss Me Quick'!

The contrast can be seen either as there being two aspects of the one god or as there being two different gods. However the two different gods notion is criticised in following:

'at the very heart of this question lies a fundamental misunderstanding of what both the Old and New Testaments reveal about the nature of God …
… Because of God's righteous and holy character, all sin—past, present, and future—must be judged. Yet God in His infinite love has provided a payment for sin and a way of reconciliation so that sinful man can escape His wrath.'
http://www.gotquestions.org/God-different.html

I think it is the case that positivity and negativity can be found in both testaments. The writer seems to embrace what I see as the negativity of god whereas I do not.

Rather than simply saying that there is a mixture of positivity and negativity, one can be more precise and calculate the amount of positivity and negativity. A few years ago I did this comparing small samples of text by Moses, Jesus and Lord Sachs. The 'Positive Speaking Quotients' (PSQ) were: Moses 21%; Jesus 66%; and Sachs 63%. (Burt, 2013).
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpb
nxnb3Jkb25idXJ0bWF0aHNvY3NjaXxneDo1YjY0OThjOTllN2Q0YTA4

Given that religion offers a mixture of positivity and negativity, what seems to happen is that individuals and

groups, prophets and sects, make different selections from this mixture – with different selections having different average positivity.

8.9 Alternatives to religion as the centre of one's personal life

While some people centre their lives around religion other people centre their lives around other aspects of life. The defining feature of people's lives may be ordinary lives and everyday society, consumption, family, belonging, arts, science …

A YouGov survey for The British Academy found that family, not faith, was important to Britons at Christmas:

'Thirty three percent of Britons hold faith to be the least important aspect of Christmas, according to a survey by YouGov on behalf of the British Academy.
Ahead of our season of events around Faith, we asked what are the least and most important parts of Christmas. Only 7% of those surveyed said that 'Faith / Christianity' is the most important part of Christmas.
'Spending time with family and friends' was held to be the *most* important by 65% of respondents, followed by 'Having time off' (12%).
Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch, who will be taking part the British Academy's Faith events, said:
"These interesting findings confirm a long-standing truth about the Christmas festival, that it has never been entirely an expression of Christian faith.
"Connected with pre-Christian winter observance, grafted on to Christian practice in the fourth century, and given its

present form by the Victorians with a great deal of non-Christian symbolism of trees and holly, it has always been a welcome break in dreary months."'

The British Academy. (2015) Family, not faith, important to Britons at Christmas. 23 December http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/1367

Woodhead, Linda. Relationships are the new religion at Christmas time. We haven't sold ourselves to shopping and self-indulgence after all. *The Times*. 23 12 15, p. 32.
http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/thunderer/article4648128.ece

YouGov
https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/22iawbpysa/BritishAcademyResults_151215_ChristmasHolidays_Website.pdf

Abby Day argues that what people believe in is belonging.

Day, Abby. (2011) Believing in belonging. Belief and social identity in the modern world. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
https://global.oup.com/academic/product/believing-in-belonging-9780199577873?cc=gb&lang=en&;
https://www.kent.ac.uk/secl/thrs/staff/day.html;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology_of_religion

At the centre may be something more prosaic than religion, namely ordinary lives and everyday society:

"This great nation will never be intimidated. People are going about their daily lives, working and shopping and playing, worshiping at churches and synagogues and mosques, going to movies and to baseball games … the tragedy has caused many Americans to focus on the things that have not changed – the things that matter most in life: our faith, our love for family and friends, our commitment to our country and to our freedoms and to our principles," Bush said.

Excerpted remarks from Presidential Address to the Nation. Atlanta, Georgia. November 8, 2001.
Bush, George W. (2003) We will prevail: President George W. Bush on war, terrorism and freedom. New York: Continuum. P. 64

Bush's phrase 'our faith, our love for family and friends' finds an echo in 'a novel of overwhelming humanity, one which

asks how far we can decide our own course in life, and what we should do for love, for faith, and for family' (Sahota, 2015):

'Three young men from very different backgrounds come together in a journey from India to England, where they hope to begin something new. To support their families where they can, to build their future, to show their worth, to escape from the past. They have almost no idea of what awaits them.

In a dilapidated shared house in Sheffield, Tarlochan, a former rickshaw driver, will say nothing about his life in Bihar. Avtar has a secret that binds him to the unpredictable Randeep. Randeep, in turn, has a visa-wife in a flat on the other side of town, whose cupboards are full of her husband's clothes, in case the immigration men surprise her with a visit.

She is Narinder, and her story is the most surprising of them all.

Utterly absorbing and beautiful in its scope 'The Year of the Runaways' is written with compassion and touched with grace. As Tochi, Avtar, randeep and Narinder negotiate their dreams, desires and shocking realities, as their histories continue to pull at them, as the seasons pass, what emerges is a novel of overwhelming humanity, one which asks how far we can decide our own course in life, and what we should do for love, for faith, and for family.'

Contrary to Linda Woodhead's claim that we have not sold ourselves to shopping, Frank Trentmann's new book argues that 'What we consume has become the defining feature of our lives: our economies live or die by spending, we are treated more as consumers than workers, and even public

services are presented to us as products in a supermarket.'
Read more at http://www.penguin.co.uk/books/empire-of-things/9780241198407/#HUC5s7VWlLJ6IhBP.99
Trentmann, Frank (2016) Empire of things. How we became a world of consumers: from the fifteenth century to the twenty-first. London: Allen Lane.
http://www.penguin.co.uk/books/empire-of-things/9780241198407/
DeGroot, Gerard. (2016) How shopping has bought us freedom. *The Times Saturday Review*. January 16, p. 12.

In support of Woodhead, Will Hutton argues 'If having more no longer satisfies us, perhaps we've reached peak stuff. There is a quest for meaning that is not answered by traditional goods and services.'
Hutton, Will. (2016) The Observer. January 31, p. 38.
Sedlacek, Thomas. (2011) *Economics of good and evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Goodall
http://makewealthhistory.org/2011/11/14/has-britain-experienced-peak-stuff/
http://www.ft.com/fastft/2016/01/22/peak-stuff-uk-retail-sales-drop-in-december/
http://www.cbc.ca/news/trending/ikea-peak-stuff-1.3408824

And at this point the drinking song from La Traviata is playing in the background!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZvgmpiQCcI

Arts may offer an alternative to religion. On 1st February a free online course enables us to find out how poems, plays and novels can help us understand and cope with deep emotional strain. Libby Purves comments that 'poetry has the power to heal tortured minds - poems can alleviate distress quicker than a novel, but they should include the nightmarish as well as the nightingales.'
http://www.bibliotherapyfoundation.org/
https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/literature
Purves, Libby. Poetry has the power to heal tortured minds. The Times. January 18 2016. 27

Some argue that science provides an alternative explanation of the world that does not require any invocation of God. 'Has

science replaced The Bible?' ask the Jehovah's Witnesses (The Watchtower, June 1, 2015, 1-8). They note that 'science has affected your life in many positive ways' but that science has its limitations and that the Bible provides guidance that science cannot provide.

8.10 Jesus, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Tolstoy
http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p039wcdk

Tonight Catherine and I shall be settling down to watch War and Peace. I think I would have preferred a series devoted to Tolstoy's religious and political beliefs:

'In the 1870s Tolstoy experienced a profound moral crisis, followed by what he regarded as an equally profound spiritual awakening, as outlined in his non-fiction work *A Confession*. His literal interpretation of the ethical teachings of Jesus, centering on the Sermon on the Mount, caused him to become a fervent Christian anarchist and pacifist. Tolstoy's ideas on nonviolent resistance, expressed in such works as *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, were to have a profound impact on such pivotal 20th-century figures as Mohandas Gandhi[2] and Martin Luther King, Jr.[3]
…
After reading Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Tolstoy gradually became converted to the ascetic morality upheld in that work as the proper spiritual path for the upper classes: "Do you know what this summer has meant for me? Constant raptures over Schopenhauer and a whole series of spiritual delights which I've never experienced before. ... no student has ever studied so much on his course, and learned so much, as I have this summer"[23]

In Chapter VI of *A Confession*, Tolstoy quoted the final paragraph of Schopenhauer's work. It explained how the nothingness that results from complete denial of self is only a relative nothingness, and is not to be feared. The novelist was struck by the description of Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu ascetic renunciation as being the path to holiness. After reading passages such as the following, which abound in Schopenhauer's ethical chapters, the Russian nobleman chose poverty and formal denial of the will:

But this very necessity of involuntary suffering (by poor people) for eternal salvation is also expressed by that utterance of the Savior (Matthew 19:24): "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Therefore those who were greatly in earnest about their eternal salvation, chose voluntary poverty when fate had denied this to them and they had been born in wealth.
Thus Buddha Sakyamuni was born a prince, but voluntarily took to the mendicant's staff; and Francis of Assisi, the founder of the mendicant orders who, as a youngster at a ball, where the daughters of all the notabilities were sitting together, was asked: "Now Francis, will you not soon make your choice from these beauties?" and who replied: "I have made a far more beautiful choice!" "Whom?" "*La povertà* (poverty)": whereupon he abandoned every thing shortly afterwards and wandered through the land as a mendicant.[24]

In 1884, Tolstoy wrote a book called "*What I Believe*", in which he openly confessed his Christian beliefs. He affirmed his belief in Jesus Christ's teachings and was particularly influenced by the Sermon on the Mount, and the injunction

to turn the other cheek, which he understood as a "commandment of non-resistance to evil by force" and a doctrine of pacifism and nonviolence. In his work *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, he explains that he considered mistaken the Church's doctrine because they had made a "perversion" of Christ's teachings. Tolstoy also received letters from American Quakers who introduced him to the non-violence writings of Quaker Christians such as George Fox, William Penn and Jonathan Dymond. Tolstoy believed being a Christian required him to be a pacifist; the consequences of being a pacifist, and the apparently inevitable waging of war by government, are the reason why he is considered a philosophical anarchist.

Later, various versions of "Tolstoy's Bible" would be published, indicating the passages Tolstoy most relied on, specifically, the reported words of Jesus himself.[25]

Mohandas K. Gandhi and other residents of Tolstoy Farm, South Africa, 1910

Tolstoy believed that a true Christian could find lasting happiness by striving for inner self-perfection through following the Great Commandment of loving one's neighbor and God rather than looking outward to the Church or state for guidance. His belief in nonresistance when faced by conflict is another distinct attribute of his philosophy based on Christ's teachings. By directly influencing Mahatma Gandhi with this idea through his work *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (full text of English translation available on Wikisource), Tolstoy's profound influence on the nonviolent resistance movement reverberates to this day. He believed that the aristocracy were a burden on the poor, and that the only solution to how we live together is through anarchism.[*citation needed*]

He also opposed <u>private property</u> in land ownership[26] and the institution of marriage and valued the ideals of chastity and sexual abstinence (discussed in *Father Sergius* and his preface to *The Kreutzer Sonata*), ideals also held by the young Gandhi. Tolstoy's later work derives a passion and verve from the depth of his austere moral views.[27] The sequence of the temptation of Sergius in *Father Sergius*, for example, is among his later triumphs. Gorky relates how Tolstoy once read this passage before himself and Chekhov and that Tolstoy was moved to tears by the end of the reading. Other later passages of rare power include the personal crises that were faced by the protagonists of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, and of *Master and Man*, where the main character in the former or the reader in the latter are made aware of the foolishness of the protagonists' lives.

Tolstoy had a profound influence on the development of <u>Christian anarchist</u> thought.[28] The <u>Tolstoyans</u> were a small Christian anarchist group formed by Tolstoy's companion, <u>Vladimir Chertkov</u> (1854–1936), to spread Tolstoy's religious teachings. Philosopher <u>Peter Kropotkin</u> wrote of Tolstoy in the article on anarchism in the *<u>1911 Encyclopædia Britannica</u>*:

Without naming himself an anarchist, Leo Tolstoy, like his predecessors in the popular religious movements of the 15th and 16th centuries, <u>Chojecki</u>, <u>Denk</u> and many others, took the anarchist position as regards the <u>state</u> and <u>property rights</u>, deducing his conclusions from the general spirit of the teachings of Jesus and from the necessary dictates of reason. With all the might of his talent, Tolstoy made (especially in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*) a powerful criticism of the church, the state and law altogether, and especially of the present <u>property laws</u>. He describes the state as the

domination of the wicked ones, supported by brutal force. Robbers, he says, are far less dangerous than a well-organized government. He makes a searching criticism of the prejudices which are current now concerning the benefits conferred upon men by the church, the state, and the existing distribution of property, and from the teachings of Jesus he deduces the rule of non-resistance and the absolute condemnation of all wars. His religious arguments are, however, so well combined with arguments borrowed from a dispassionate observation of the present evils, that the anarchist portions of his works appeal to the religious and the non-religious reader alike.[29]

During the Boxer Rebellion in China, Tolstoy praised the Boxers. He was harshly critical of the atrocities committed by the Russians, Germans, and other western troops. He accused them of engaging in slaughter when he heard about the lootings, rapes, and murders, in what he saw as Christian brutality. Tolstoy also named the two monarchs most responsible for the atrocities; Nicholas II of Russia and Wilhelm II of Germany.[30][31] Tolstoy, a famous sinophile, also read the works of Chinese thinker and philosopher, Confucius.[32][33][34] Tolstoy corresponded with the Chinese intellectual Gu Hongming and recommended that China remain an agrarian nation and warned against reform like what Japan implemented.

In hundreds of essays over the last 20 years of his life, Tolstoy reiterated the anarchist critique of the state and recommended books by Kropotkin and Proudhon to his readers, whilst rejecting anarchism's espousal of violent revolutionary means. In the 1900 essay, "On Anarchy", he wrote; "The Anarchists are right in everything; in the negation of the existing order, and in the assertion that, without Authority, there could not be worse violence than that of Authority under existing

conditions. They are mistaken only in thinking that Anarchy can be instituted by a revolution. But it will be instituted only by there being more and more people who do not require the protection of governmental power ... There can be only one permanent revolution—a moral one: the regeneration of the inner man." Despite his misgivings about anarchist violence, Tolstoy took risks to circulate the prohibited publications of anarchist thinkers in Russia, and corrected the proofs of Kropotkin's "Words of a Rebel", illegally published in St Petersburg in 1906.[35]

Tolstoy was enthused by the economic thinking of Henry George, incorporating it approvingly into later works such as *Resurrection* (1899), the book that played a major factor in his excommunication.[36]

In 1908, Tolstoy wrote *A Letter to a Hindu*[37] outlining his belief in non-violence as a means for India to gain independence from British colonial rule. In 1909, a copy of the letter was read by Mohandas Gandhi, who was working as a lawyer in South Africa at the time and just becoming an activist. Tolstoy's letter was significant for Gandhi, who wrote Tolstoy seeking proof that he was the real author, leading to further correspondence between them.[38]

Reading Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* also convinced Gandhi to avoid violence and espouse nonviolent resistance, a debt Gandhi acknowledged in his autobiography, calling Tolstoy "the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has produced". The correspondence between Tolstoy and Gandhi would only last a year, from October 1909 until Tolstoy's death in November 1910, but led Gandhi to give the name Tolstoy Colony to his second ashram in South Africa.[39] Besides nonviolent resistance, the two men

shared a common belief in the merits of vegetarianism, the subject of several of Tolstoy's essays.[40]

Tolstoy also became a major supporter of the Esperanto movement. Tolstoy was impressed by the pacifist beliefs of the Doukhobors and brought their persecution to the attention of the international community, after they burned their weapons in peaceful protest in 1895. He aided the Doukhobors in migrating to Canada.[41] In 1904, during the Russo-Japanese War, Tolstoy condemned the war and wrote to the Japanese Buddhist priest Soyen Shaku in a failed attempt to make a joint pacifist statement.

Towards the end of his life, Tolstoy become more and more occupied with the economic theory and social philosophy of Georgism.[42][43][44][45] He spoke of great admiration of Henry George, stating once that "People do not argue with the teaching of George; they simply do not know it. And it is impossible to do otherwise with his teaching, for he who becomes acquainted with it cannot but agree."[46] He also wrote a preface to George's *Social Problems*.[47] Tolstoy and George both rejected private property in land (the most important source of income of the passive Russian aristocracy that Tolstoy so heavily criticized) whilst simultaneously both rejecting a centrally planned socialist economy. Some assume that this development in Tolstoy's thinking was a move away from his anarchist views, since Georgism requires a central administration to collect land rent and spend it on infrastructure. However, anarchist versions of Georgism have also been proposed since.[48] Tolstoy's 1899 novel *Resurrection* explores his thoughts on Georgism in more detail and hints that Tolstoy indeed had such a view. It suggests the possibility of small communities with some form of local governance to manage the collective land rents for

common goods; whilst still heavily criticising institutions of the state such as the justice system.'

8.11 Heavens on earth: feudalism, Utopia 1516, capitalism, communism, fascism

What system would replace feudalism? In 1516 Thomas More proposed an ideal society: Utopia. What actually happened was that capitalism gradually replaced feudalism. Feudalism lingered on in Tolstoy's Russia. Tolstoy's prescriptions coexisted with prescriptions for communism. Fascism arose in opposition to liberalism, Marxism and anarchism.

Utopia 1516

'UTOPIA 2016: A Year of Imagination and Possibility at Somerset House, launching on 25th January 2016, celebrates the 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's inspirational text, *Utopia* – the largest ever celebration of this radical work anywhere in the world.'
http://www.somersethouse.org.uk/about/press/press-releases/utopia-2016-a-year-of-imagination-and-possibility
http://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/newsrecords/151102-Utopia-2016.aspx

Feudalism
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism

'Feudalism was a combination of legal and military customs in medieval Europe that flourished between the 9th and 15th centuries. Broadly defined, it was a way of structuring society around relationships derived from the holding of land in exchange for service or labour.
…

Feudalism itself decayed and effectively disappeared in most of Western Europe by about 1500.[30][31][*why?*] It lingered on in parts of Central and Eastern Europe as late as the 1850s. Russia finally abolished serfdom in 1861.'

Montefiore, Simon Sebag (2016) *The Romanovs*. 1613-1918. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

DeGroot, Gerard. 92016) Depravity, death and dwarf tossing. [Review of Montefiore]. *The Times*. Saturday Review. January 23. P. 11.

Capitalism

Opinion pieces in The Times regularly argue that capitalism has been a beneficial social form. At the same time there have been concerns that certain aspects of capitalism threaten to undermine support for the system. The failure of Google and other companies to pay tax is seen as unfair. 'Google tax: settlement 'not a glorious moment' for government' said Business Secretary Sajid Javid.

BBC (2016) January 31. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-35453772

'The God that failed' ... Stalin, Shostakovich and Aaronovitch

In Julian Barnes' new book, 'Shostakovich's struggles in the Soviet Union are vividly drawn – the composer is both hero and victim of a system in which success is bound up with political complicity'. [Shostakovich: 1906-1975]

Barnes, Julian (2016) *The noise of time*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert (2016) The composer playing for his life. *The Times*, January 16, p. 17.

Sam Aaronovitch (26 December 1919 – 30 May 1998)[1] was a British economist, academic, working class intellectual and senior member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. His son David Aaronovitch is a Times columnist and in his new book records his communist upbringing: 'Socialist Sunday School, Russian movies and holidays in Bulgaria … a

childhood where the party overshadowed everything, including his relationship with his parents'.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Aaronovitch
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Aaronovitch
Aaronovitch, David (2016) *Party animals: my family and other Communists*. Jonathan Cape.
Aaronovitch, David (2016) My family and other Communists. *The Times Magazine*. January 16, pp. 46-53.

'The God that failed' is a 1949 book[1] which collects together six essays with the testimonies of a number of famous ex-communists, who were writers and journalists. The common theme of the essays is the authors' disillusionment with and abandonment of communism. The book jacket for the 2001 edition says it "brings together essays by six of the most important writers of the twentieth century on their conversion to and subsequent disillusionment with communism."[2] The six contributors were Louis Fischer, André Gide, Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Stephen Spender, and Richard Wright. Koestler's novels provide a more extended account of his ideological journey.'

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_God_that_Failed#cite_note-1
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrow_in_the_Blue
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darkness_at_Noon
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Invisible_Writing

Fascism … Hitler and Mussolini
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fascism

For the first time since 1945, Adolf Hitler's 'Mein Kampf' is available for sale in Germany. With a new annotated edition, Historians hope to "defuse" the Nazi-era bestseller. Even after seven decades, it remains a dangerous proposition.

Doerry, Martin and Wiegrefe, Klaus. (2006) Book of Hate: The Bold Attempt to Demystify Hitler's 'Mein Kampf'. Der Spiegel. January 15.
http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/new-annotated-mein-kampf-offers-insight-into-hitler-a-1072032.html

'Hot on the heels of the reissue of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in Germany, another fascist dictator is hitting the bookstores as Benito Mussolini's First World War diary is revived by five publishers … *Il Mio Diario Di Guerra (1915-1917)*, which has not been widely seen since the 1930s, has been republished because copyright has lapsed, seven decades after Mussolini was shot by partisans at the end of the Second World War.'

Kington, Tom. (2016) Stampede to print Mussolini war diaries. *The Times*. January 20. p. 31.

'It is estimated that two thirds of Europe's Jewish population died in the Holocaust. Historians debate whether the Nazis had a deliberate scheme from the outset of the destruction of the Jews (the 'intentionalist' view') or whether the Final Solution was arrived at by improvisation rather than master plan (the 'functionalist' view). Cesarani argues that the fate of the Jews 'was rooted in antisemitism but it was shaped by war' – 'it might have taken a different form', it followed 'an erratic course', 'the pattern of aggression was set by the exigencies of wartime'.

Cesarani, David (2016) *Final solution. The fate of the Jews 1933-1949*. London: Macmillan.

Kamm, Oliver (2016) Was the fate of the Jews sealed in 1933? *The Times Saturday Review*. January 16, p. 15.

9 Models of possible gods

The preceding sections have considered both religious and secular gods. The models in the present section may be applied to either.

9.1 Doubting God

'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me …'
Psalm 22; Matthew 27, 46; Mark 15, 34

Psalm 22 is part of the Tanakh, the canon of the Hebrew Bible; it is part of the Book of Psalms, a book in Christianity's Old Testament; and the Book of Psalms is referred to as the Zabur in Islam and regarded as a revelation from God. In the Christian New Testament, Matthew and Mark (but neither Luke nor John) has Jesus saying these words as he suffers on the cross.
http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2622.htm
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_22
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_view_of_the_Christian_Bible
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+27%3A46&version=KJ21
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayings_of_Jesus_on_the_cross

In his New Year's Day homily the Pope said that, every day, negative signs make us doubt the presence of God:

'Each day, as we seek to be sustained by the signs of God's presence, we encounter new signs to the contrary, negative signs which tend to make us think instead that he is absent.'
http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/01/01/pope_francis_homily_for_mass_on_feast_of_mother_of_god_/1198248

The misery of immigrants tested religious faith.
Kington, Tom (2016) Pope: misery of immigrants makes us doubt God. *The Times*
January 2, p. 37.
http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4654290.ece

A month or so previously the Archbishop of Canterbury had
asked himself where God was during the Paris attacks:

'The Archbishop of Canterbury has said that the Paris terror
attacks made him doubt the presence/existence of God. When
the attacks happened, he told the BBC's *Songs of Praise*, the
Most Rev Justin Welby was left asking where God was in the
victims' time of need. Asked whether the attacks had caused
him to question where God was, he said "Oh gosh, yes," and
admitted that they had found a 'chink in his armour'. Yes.
Saturday morning, I was out and as I was walking I was
praying and saying 'God why – why is this happening? Where
are you …?'"

Rankin, David. (2015) Church fury over ban on Lord's Prayer in cinemas. *The
Times*. November 22, pp. 1-2. See also: Archbishop 'questioned God's existence'
after Paris attack, in
http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4620509.ece

9.2 God: beliefs about existence, power, constancy and value

The examples of the previous section show that when times
are bad, one has doubts about God. These doubts can take the
form of questioning:

> the existence of God
> the power of God
> the constancy of God (over space and time … over
situations)

the value of God

Doubting the power of God, one can ask also which situations God can influence, at what times and in which places God can exercise influence, and how much power God has in a particular situation. Doubting the value of God, one may wonder whether God is benefactor, neutral or malefactor.

9.3 Contexts in which gods might be involved

[the universe, living things, good, truth, spiritual experience, afterlife, community and society]

A year ago, January 2015, I wrote:

God has been very much in the news this month. Yesterday evening Catherine and I went to see the film 'A theory of everything' and that set me thinking ...

People use the word 'God' in a variety of contexts. What does the word refer to in each of these contexts? - what does it mean? Here we consider seven contexts. If one accepts the existence of God in any one of the seven contexts, does one necessarily accept it in any of the other contexts? Suppose one accepts the existence of a God in all these seven contexts, are there seven separate gods – or just one God present in all seven contexts?

The seven contexts are as follows:

God and the universe
God and living things
God and good
God and truth
God and spiritual experience
God and the afterlife
God, community and society

I then proceeded to discuss each of these seven contexts. The present Commentary has focused on good and community and society.

Commentary 13, January 2015, pp. 13-17
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpb
nxnb3Jkb25idXJ0bWF0aHNvY3NjaXxneDo3NzhjOTTVkODQ1MjA2YWVm

9.4 Levels of involvement which gods might have … designer or participant

A designer notion of a god might be that the god sets up the initial conditions for the universe to begin, sets up the mathematical principles governing the universe and then just stands back and lets the principles determine the development of the universe.

Stephen Hawking 'wrote in the 1988 book: "If we discover a complete theory, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason — for then we should know the mind of God."'

In his new book he rejects Sir Isaac Newton's theory that the Universe did not spontaneously begin to form but was set in motion by God. "The question is: is the way the universe began chosen by God for reasons we can't understand, or was it determined by a law of science? I believe the second. If you like, you can call the laws of science 'God', but it wouldn't be a personal God that you could meet, and ask questions."
Roberts, Laura. (2010) Stephen Hawking: God was not needed to create the Universe. Daily Telegraph. September 2.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/7976594/Stephen-Hawking-God-was-not-needed-to-create-the-Universe.html
Stephen Hawking's Reith Lectures:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1qCD6jwN3c6GSzY0SY7DYjH/professor-stephen-hawking

In complete contrast is the participant notion of a god which the Pope and Archbishop Welby (and Christ and Psalm 22) seem to have. They expect their god to be an active

participant in daily events, ensuring that what happens is good.

9.5 Emotions, personalities and relationship styles which a god might display

Values, emotion, personality and relationship style are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the 2014 Yearbook (Burt, 2016, pp. 46-47, 47-48, 53-56).

Which of the six basic emotions – happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, anger, disgust - does a god display?

Are a god's emotions positive or negative, strong or weak, active or passive?

How does a god score on the Big Five personality dimensions – extrovert or introvert, agreeable or disagreeable, conscientious or slapdash, stable or unstable, open or closed?

What relationship style – responsive or unresponsive, demanding or undemanding, authoritative or authoritarian, indulgent or neglectful - does a god display?

9.6 A mathematical model

Consider a world consisting of a set of events S. Suppose there are the following subsets of events:

subset V are the events which have positive value;
subset N are the events which have negative value;
subset G are the events under the power of God;

subset H are the events not under the power of God;

The proportions of V, N, G and H events are v and n=1-v; and g and h=1-g.
Note that a proportion takes a value between 0 and 1.

Definition
The existence of God corresponds to the power of God being non-zero. Non-existence corresponds to powerlessness.
God exists if g>0. God does not exist if g=0.

We now consider the intersection of the four subsets:

subset G and V are the events under the power of God which have positive value;
subset G and N are the events under the power of God which have negative value;
subset H and V are the events *not* under the power of God which have positive value;
subset H and N are the events *not* under the power of God which have negative value.

The proportion of G events which are of positive value is b (the benevolence of God).
The proportion of H events which are of positive value is a (godless benevolence).
The benevolence differential, the amount by which God is more benevolent than godlessness, is d=b-a.
(Note that the differential can range from -1 to +1; and, for a given a, from -1-a to 1-a.)

Result 1

The value of world events equals the power of God multiplied by God's benevolence plus godless power multiplied by godless benevolence. Equation [1] below.

Result 2
The value of world events equals the power of God multiplied by the benevolence differential plus godless benevolence. Equation [2] below.

Proof, 1 and 2
$$v = g\,b + h\,a \qquad\qquad [1]$$
$$v = g\,b + (1-g)\,(b-d) = g\,d + a \qquad [2]$$

We now consider a number of cases for Equation [2].

Result 3 (Non-existence)
If God does not exist, then the value of world events equals godless benevolence.

Proof, 3
Substituting $g=0$ in equation [2] gives:
$$v = a$$

Result 4 (Omnipotence)
If God is omnipotent, then the value of world events equals the benevolence of God.

Proof, 4
Substituting $g=1$ in equation [2] gives:
$$v = b$$

Result 5 (Equal benevolence)
If the benevolence differential is zero, then the value of world events equals the common value of benevolence.

Proof, 5
Substituting d=0 in equation [2] gives:
v = a = b

Result 6 (Maximal benevolence)
If God has maximal benevolence, then the value of world events equals the power of god plus godless power multiplied by godless benevolence.

Proof, 6
Substituting b=1 in equation [1] gives:
v = g + h a

Result 7 (Maximal malevolence)
If God has maximal malevolence, then the value of world events equals godless power multiplied by godless benevolence.

Proof, 7
Substituting b=0 in equation [1] gives:
v = h a

The set of all possible 'god-worlds'

We now consider the set of all possible 'god-worlds'. Each god-world corresponds to a set of values for god-power g, benevolence differential d and godless benevolence a. These three values determine the value of world events in accordance with Equation [2].

v = g d + a   [2]

We now seek to illustrate some of the possible 'god-worlds'
in a graph. Suppose godless benevolence is a=0.5, in other
words half of the godless events are positive and half
negative. So the benevolence differential can range between -
0.5 (extreme malevolence) and +0.5 (extreme benevolence).
We consider three values for the power of god g=0, 0.5 and 1.
Figure 3.1 displays a line for each of these three values
showing how the value of world events increases as the
benevolence differential increases (this corresponds to the
benevolence of God increasing while godless benevolence
remains fixed). Comparing the three lines we note that
increasing the power of God increases the slope of the line
with the benevolence differential having an increasingly
strong effect.

Figure 3.1 The value of world events depends on the power
of god, the benevolence differential and the godless
benevolence

value of world events
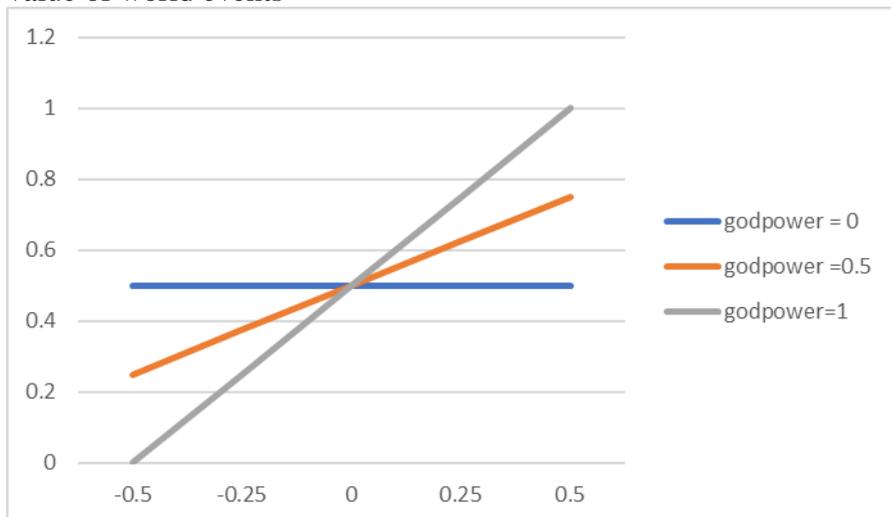
.   benevolence differential

We now seek to illustrate some of the possible 'god-worlds' in a graph. Suppose godless benevolence is a=0, in other words none of the godless events are positive and all are negative. Then Equation 1 becomes

$$v = g\,b \qquad [3]$$

Isovalue curves

Now consider the value of world events v is fixed. Then, using Equation [3], as god-power g increases god-benevolence b decreases.

For example, suppose v=0.5. This can occur if g=1 and b=0.5 (God has maximum power but only 50% benevolence); if g=0.5 and b=1 (God is always benevolent but only has 50% of the power). In other words, if the world is less than perfect then either God is not always benevolent or God is not always powerful.

Beliefs of people

We now consider the beliefs of people. Which god-world do they believe they are in? We suggest that people have estimates for god-power, god-benevolence and godless benevolence - but entertain uncertainty about these estimates and about how close these estimates are to the real value.

In particular they may be uncertain about the existence of God. It is proposed here that the greater their estimate of the power of God the greater the probability they place on the

existence of God. We use p to denote their subjective probability. So p=f(g), where f is an increasing function. For example, $p=g^c$. Figure 2 presents the situation where c=1/2. The subjective probability of God's existence increases fairly rapidly as the estimate of God's power increases from zero (but this increase necessarily slows down as the probability approaches 1).

Figure 2 The subjective probability of God's existence depends on the estimate of the power of God, $p=g^{1/2}$

subjective probability of God's existence, p
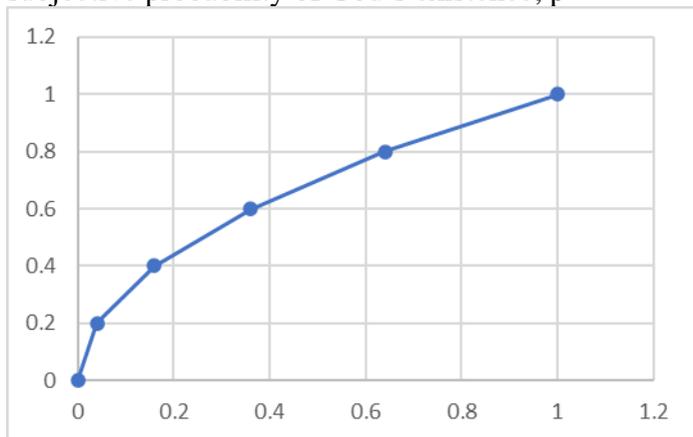
estimate of the power of God, g

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