

## **The rise of the human predator and the transcendence of consciousness**

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### **Introduction**

Religion is a strange behaviour pattern seen only in one species on the planet, namely *Homo sapiens*. This phenomenon is often interpreted as a sign of the special relationship between God and man. Gods are depicted in the image of humans or statements are made that humans were made in God's image. Humans are seen as a special creation between God and nature, but never as part of nature. This led to the perception that nature was given to humankind by God to use as it wishes. This perception, together with the evolution of technology, has contributed to a culture that is all-consuming and will culminate in the destruction of natural resources of the planet.

### **Humans as apes**

Hippocrates and Aristotle observed over 2 millennia ago that humans and monkeys shared morphological characteristics. Galen of Pergamum was the first scientist to confirm the shared characteristics of humans and other primates by means of dissections. He wrote approximately 1800 years ago: "The monkey is closest to the human with regard to internal organs, muscles, arteries, veins, nerves and shape of the bone". Even though early European biologists only had monkeys to compare humans to, the comparisons were compelling. Carolus Linnaeus, who was the founder of the biological classification system, created the category or order Primata (Latin 'primus' = first) in 1758 for *Homo sapiens*, which he saw as the crown of creation (Durand 2008).

Apes, which are even more similar to humans than monkeys are, were unknown at the time in Europe. Explorers in Central Africa sent Edward Tyson, a British zoologist, a young chimpanzee at the end of the seventeenth century. Tyson dissected the chimpanzee and realised that it was neither a monkey nor a human, but something in between. He argues that this organism was the dwarfish human-like 'pygmy' referred to in Greek fables. He states "*I take him to be wholly a Brute, tho' in the formation of the Body, and in the Sensitive or Brutal Soul, it may be, more resembling a Man, than any other Animal; so that in this Chain of the Creation, as an intermediate Link between an Ape and a Man, I would place our Pygmie*" (Tyson 1699).

Morphological, embryological, palaeontological and genetic evidence overwhelmingly confirms the fact that humans and other primates, especially the apes, are closely related. The physical similarities between humans and apes are so great that differences in characteristics occur only in degree but not in essence. The active genetic difference between humans and chimpanzees is as little as 1.2%, attesting to their genetic proximity. The study of primate endocrinology, neurology, behaviour, psychology, anatomy and physiology enable us to understand humankind and its origins better.

Apes communicate like humans with facial expressions, gestures, body language and vocalisation. Apes cuddle and kiss their babies. Ape juveniles play with one another; they tease and bully one another.

Apes comfort one another when they are scared. In chimpanzees, gorillas and bonobos the family groups are ruled by a dominant male. The dominant male has access to every female in the troop to mate with; he has the privilege of taking the food from any other individual in the troop and can force the troop to attack certain individuals and other neighbouring groups. Resistance will be met by banishment, pain or death. Young chimpanzee males patrol the perimeter of their territory, and attack and kill any intruder from a neighbouring group or any outcast from their own troop on sight.

The similarities between chimpanzee and human behaviour would indicate that our ancestors, the apemen, had similar behaviour patterns. The roots of religion should be traced back to this common behaviour pattern shared by apemen and primitive humans (Durand 2006).

### **Ecological role of humankind**

Although the similarities between humans and other primates have been recognised for more than two thousand years, the palaeontological confirmation of this relationship is less than a century old. The first apeman was discovered in 1924 at a limestone mine in the Northwest Province of South Africa. Subsequently thousands of hominid fossils have been discovered representing at least 15 species that existed at intervals over a period of 4.5 million years. Hominids include all the relatives of humankind that arose after the evolutionary split from the ancestor we share with chimpanzees, and include apemen, primitive humans and modern humans. The thousands of hominid fossils from Sterkfontein represent a minimum number of over 600 *Australopithecus africanus* individuals. This, together with hominid fossils known from many sites in East Africa and Eurasia, has enabled palaeoanthropologists to put together a reasonably accurate picture of the origin of humankind and related species.

The majority of the fossils from Sterkfontein, including those of apemen, show carnivore damage. This evidence would indicate that the fossils are the food remains of the predators such as sabre-tooth cats, leopards

and hyenas which used the caves as their lairs during the Plio-Pleistocene (Brain 1981). The apemen fossils in the Cradle of Humankind palaeontological deposits outnumber the fossils of other medium to large animals. It is clear that apemen were the preferred food of several of the large carnivore species living in the Cradle of Humankind.

Approximately 8 million years ago the climate changed considerably. The subduction of the Indian plate under the Asiatic plate continued to elevate the Himalayas to such a degree that profound changes occurred in the atmosphere. The monsoon rains that are the direct result of this process extracted great amounts of moisture from the atmosphere that in turn caused the gradual aridification of Africa. Savannah and grass veld, which are more resistant to drought, started to replace the forests and bush that covered the greater part of Africa. The related apes that are optimally adapted for life in and among the trees remained in the forests of Africa and Asia. Apemen were the first primates that could walk upright for extended periods. Bipedalism was a prerequisite for the survival of apemen on the savannahs, enabling them to observe their surroundings better and contribute greatly to their success and survival on the African savannah.

Bipedalism and small eye teeth appeared simultaneously in the Australopithecines. Apart from a specially adapted pelvis, backbone, feet and skull base, the snout had to become foreshortened or less prognathic to further facilitate bipedalism. The flatter face was necessary to enable hominids to see down to the ground and spot obstacles in front of them by means of peripheral vision, even when looking straight ahead. This would not have been possible with a protruding snout, like that of a chimpanzee which walks on all fours. More prognathic snouts would have caused them to constantly stumble over obstacles. The only defence apes and monkeys have against their natural enemies, the big cats, are their big canines. The shortening of the snout in hominids also caused the big canines, which are common in the great apes, to be reduced.

The reduction of the large canines to small eye teeth rendered apemen completely defenceless, especially since they had no manufactured tools to defend themselves effectively at this stage of their evolution. Apemen, as savannah dwellers, were often far away from a tree into which they could brachiate like their relatives in the forest. These adaptations made apemen the ideal prey of the big cats and hyenas because they were more defenceless than any other hominid or savannah dwelling mammal. The huge collection of apeman fossils in the Cradle of Humankind is the result of this detrimental twist in hominid evolution.

Rapid and continuous breeding was the only solution which saved hominids from extinction. Apemen survived only by outbreeding their predators, like many other organisms at the bottom of the food chain such as rodents and insects. Our ecological role, and therefore the whole reason for

our existence, is to convert tubers, nuts, invertebrates, small vertebrates and leaves on the savannah into cat food. This strategy is only possible with an increase in fecundity, promiscuity and mating frequency. Although humans, like other primates, have one baby at a time, our females ovulate every 28 days and can conceive soon after having a baby, whereas a period of up to five years may pass before a chimpanzee female comes into oestrus again after giving birth (Goodall 1988). Apeman numbers were kept in equilibrium with the rest of the ecology only by heavy predation.

Humans and bonobos or pygmy chimpanzees stand out among the great apes as the only species that mate frequently and regardless of whether the females are in oestrus or not as a method of social interaction. Mating among chimpanzees takes place less frequently than among humans and bonobos. When a female is in oestrus she will be receptive to males only for ten days in a month but will then mate with multiple partners. Gorillas, however, maintain alpha male dominated clans and are far less sexually active and less promiscuous than humans. Compared to other large mammals, including our closest living relatives, hominids have been genetically programmed to be hypersexual, which was in a pre-technological situation, a prerequisite for survival in a region characterised by big carnivores and little shelter.

### **Origin of technology**

The use of tools is not unique to humans. Chimpanzees use rocks to crack open nuts and grass to fish termites out of termitaria. *Homo habilis* was the first hominid to shape tools from stone approximately 2 million years ago. These stone tools, which can also be considered as the first physical cultural products of humankind, were designed to kill. Early humans used these tools to obtain food and to defend themselves from predators. Technology enabled humans to acquire food with impunity and to acquire food species which were previously inaccessible because they were difficult to kill. Humans could also now defend themselves effectively against the predators which kept their numbers in check. These two actions freed humans from the food chain and had dire and irrevocable effects on nature.

With the discovery of fire and the development of tools, more advanced hominids displaced the large carnivores that were the bane of apemen. This strategy eventually led to the extinction of cave bears and sabre tooth cats and caused the drastic reduction of many of the other big cat species. Humans, like the rest of the primates, remain the natural prey of large cats. Many people are killed and eaten annually in Africa and India by lions and tigers.

Primitive humans were the first hominids to live in caves. The thousands of stone tools found in the fossil caves in the Cradle of Humankind

attest to the fact that they were occupied by early *Homo*. The majority of the thousands of stone tools in the Cradle of Humankind belong to one of two distinct tool industries – the Oldowan which is the oldest at 2 million to 1.7 million years, and the Acheulean which is dated at approximately 1.7 million to 1.5 million years (Kuman & Clarke 2000, Herries et al 2009). Oldowan industry tools are associated with *Homo habilis* fossils in East Africa while Acheul industry tools are associated with *Homo ergaster* in East Africa (Clark et al 1994; Blumenschine et al 2003).

The presence of Acheulian tools in the fossil caves in the Cradle of Humankind proves that *Homo habilis* managed to evict cave-dwelling carnivores from the caves and settled there. Over the past two million years, cave dwelling became the norm rather than the exception for hominids wherever caves were available. The fossils in the caves containing stone tools are by default the food remains of *Homo* and not that of other predators. The fossil bones show evidence of being cut, chopped and crushed by stone tools.

The morphological characteristics that distinguish *Homo habilis* from *Australopithecus africanus* are few and subtle. The new hominid species discovered in the Cradle of Humankind, dubbed *Australopithecus sediba* (Berger et al 2010), has characteristics in common with both *Australopithecus africanus* and *Homo habilis* and could be seen as a transitional form. Because the transition from apeman to primitive humans is so gradual and subtle, the invention of tools is commonly used to define humankind. The occurrence of *sediba* overlaps with the oldest tools in the Cradle of Humankind and there is a strong possibility that they were the toolmakers who lived approximately 2 million years ago in that region.

### **Origin of religion**

Religious behaviour includes putting meaning to arbitrary random happenings and seeing mysterious forces behind natural phenomena. Common sense would suggest that this bizarre behaviour pattern could hardly contribute to the survival of a group. In fact, the survival of a group behaving irrationally would be impeded. The ubiquity and prevalence of religion in all cultures, in all continents and for as far as we can tell, leads us to wonder how and why religion evolved and how it enhanced the survival of religious groups.

Religion may act as a system that contributes to the cohesion within a group while excluding others. This behaviour will allow a small group of interdependent individuals to act as a unit which enables them to successfully procure resources essential for the survival of that group through cooperation while excluding 'the others'. Although social groups can be distinguished by means of their culture (language, customs, technology, norms and values), most distinguish themselves from others by means of their religion and their

purported special relationship with the god(s). Few religious groupings see themselves as survival units acting in a strategic sense to acquire resources, but would rather refer to themselves as 'the people', 'the chosen', 'the true believers', 'God's children' and so on, while the others are the 'heathen', 'kafir', 'infidel', 'unholy', 'goyim', 'Eskimo', 'San' and similar unflattering names.

Religion could also have been inspired by the fear of the unexplained and of death since all religions have some explanation of what happens to you after you die. Some of the oldest evidence of ritualistic behaviour is associated with *Homo neanderthalensis*, our sister species that lived in Europe and the Middle East 250 000–40 000 years ago. In some parts of Europe, Neanderthals seems to have had a special veneration for cave bears, which could have played a central role in their religion as totem animals (Hayden 2003). Cave bear skulls have been found placed in niches carved in the cave walls, and in one cave in France cave bear skulls were found stacked three deep in a stone-clad vault in the cave floor (Campbell et al 1996).

Neanderthals were also the first hominids that buried their dead. Several graves containing the skeletons of Neanderthals have been unearthed in Europe and the Middle East. The burials were often accompanied by ritual activities. A few examples include the cemetery of graves containing the remains of a Neanderthal family which was discovered in a cave in La Ferrassie, France. In Shandinar in the Middle East the skeleton of an old Neanderthal man was discovered in a grave which was presumably filled with flowers, judging from the pollen layer under the skeleton (Solecki 1975). The Cro-Magnon, the first anatomically modern humans in Europe, buried their dead with food and weapons for the journey into the hereafter. The similarities between the rituals of *Homo neanderthalensis* and early *Homo sapiens* suggest that this behaviour pattern was already established by their common ancestor *Homo heidelbergensis* more than 250 000 years ago.

However, although group selection and the fear of the unknown and of death were important for the evolution and persistence of religion, the earliest transcendence of consciousness began probably earlier. Certain religious symbols, themes and rites have very primitive roots which can be traced back to the origin of hominids and can be compared to chimpanzee behaviour today. The limbic system, which controls the most basic survival urges such as aggression, fear, feeding and sex, is the most important part of the brain controlling religion, instead of the frontal lobes as one would assume. This is the reason why religion is obsessed with aggression, fear, feeding and sex and has many rituals involving these.

### **The death of Gaia**

The hominid's obsession with sex is reflected in many social institutions, including religion. Most cultures have various sexual taboos, precepts and socio-religious rites associated with attaining adulthood which generally give the young individual the right to procreate after initiation and acceptance into society as an adult. These rites may include circumcision, fertility rituals, focus on the first menstruation or enforced celibacy. The common denominator of these socio-religious institutions is to accentuate or suppress sexuality. Very few religions take a neutral stance toward sexuality.

Fertility cults existed worldwide and predated male-dominated religions. Some of the oldest works of art ever discovered are female fertility figures. The fertility idols dating from the Palaeolithic era are characteristic of fertility cults where sexuality is revered and celebrated. The 25 000 year old Venus of Willendorf is but one of many fertility idols discovered in Eurasia. These figurines are usually adorned with exaggerated buttocks, breasts and sometimes, as in the case of the Venus of Willendorf, distinct labia. In rock art in Africa, Eurasia and Australia depictions of females with large genitals, breasts and buttocks and males with erections are common. Fertility cults were once common in Eurasia and still exist in places in the Far East. Worshippers still place offerings at lingam or phallic altars at the Khajuraho temple in India that is famous for its statues in erotic poses.

There are clues that the Neolithic Indo- Germanic people who gave rise to the cultures in Europe, the Middle East and India believed in an Earth Goddess and a Sky God. Several references to a Sky God and Earth Goddess still exist in ancient, classical and even modern religions. Fertility cults under the auspices of an earth goddess existed while oppressive warlike societies were associated with a sky god or war gods.

During the Neolithic Age, offerings were brought to Mother Earth as the creator and sustainer of life in order to ensure an abundance of food and fertility. Mother Earth worship was probably the source for many of the Eurasian fertility cults where the reference to sexuality and actual sexual intercourse played an important role. Females played an important role in these religions and not only took part in the proceedings, but often took the lead as priestess or shaman.

Farming originated during the Neolithic Age with the domestication of animals in Asia and Central Europe 12 000–9 000 years ago. Originally Neolithic herdsmen farmed with sheep and goats but by 9 000 years ago they managed to domesticate cattle as well as the first plants such as wheat and barley. Whereas herdsmen originally had a nomadic lifestyle and constantly trekked with their herds to new pastures, agriculture led to the erection of semi-permanent dwellings that eventually evolved into the first cities such as those of Çatal Hüyük and Ur approximately 8 000 years ago.

The Bronze Age, starting approximately 5 000 years ago, saw the beginning of the male dominated, technologically driven world. The mining

of ore and the forging of instruments demand hard physical labour and have been part of the male domain since the advent of metalworking. The Bronze Age coincided with the rise of the Father Sky religions and the decline of the Mother Earth religions. Agricultural implements such as shovels, hoes and axes and weapons such as knives, spears, swords and arrowheads were made from bronze during this time. The Bronze Age gave way to the Iron Age approximately 2 800 years ago in Europe and the Near East. Again, most iron tools were in the form of weapons or agricultural implements.

There is a strong correlation between the male dominated industries of metal mining, smelting and forging, the tool and weapon industry and religious development. From the start of the Bronze Age male deities already featured more strongly than female deities in many Indo-European religions; these religions were also under the management of male priests and shamans. The technological advancement brought about by the metal industry and cattle husbandry demystified Mother Earth as we took of her what we needed with our ploughs, hoes, spades and axes. Humans could not make it rain, however, except through prayer and offerings to the Sky God who controlled the weather.

The technological revolution in agriculture led to the domestication of several grain species such as wheat, millet, oats, barley and rice in Europe, Near East, Asia and the Levant. The socioeconomic results from the agricultural industry were trade, urbanisation and social stratification. Permanent residences in the form of towns and cities sprang up around storage facilities for the grain surplus that was produced. Animals were kept in these towns as draft animals and for additional food. Urban life brought about division of work and the associated social stratification with labourers, farmers, soldiers, craftsmen, tradesmen, administrators, priests and elite. A sedentary life-style, trade and free time were conducive to the origin of writing and numeracy. The oldest written texts discovered are trading receipts, and some of the oldest stories known tell of war and conquest under the guiding hand of a Father Sky. From these writings and stories grew the major religions of the world.

Although agriculture started during the Neolithic, it boomed under the influence of metal tools. Ploughshares and swords were created by the same cultures. Large populations and cities could not have come into existence without agriculture. Writing, including holy books and libraries, could not have come into existence without cities. Empires and world religions would not have existed if it were not enforced with the spear, sword and arrow. The Bronze Age sees the establishment of the Egyptian, Sumerian, Semitic, Hellenistic, Western European and Eastern religions.

Father Sky and his sons went by the names of Baal Hadad, El, Yahweh, Ahura Mazda, Asshur, Indra, Zeus, Jupiter, Odin/Woden and Thor/Donar, and they controlled the weather. Many religions have rituals for



the invocation of rain from the sky gods, but not to prevent the erosion of the topsoil or to ensure the fertility of their crops or cattle, for instance. There are many parallels in the descriptions and attributes of the Semitic Bronze Age sky gods Yahweh and Baal Hadad (Smith 2002). One of the most persistent attributes of these sky gods is their ability to create lightning. Yahweh and Baal Hadad were invoked by their respective acolytes on Mount Carmel to set their altars alight by means of lightning. Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from El/Yahweh, who descended in a column of fire on the mountain top which was covered in a thick cloud from which issued bolts of lightning and spoke to Moses in a voice of thunder. The sky gods can send bolts of lightning down on the people below as punishment.

The concept of the three-tier universe was also established during the Bronze Age. The sky gods live in heaven or on mountain tops above the world inhabited by humans. This is why Jesus had to ascend into heaven on a cloud to sit on the right hand of God, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in the form of a dove, angels need wings to fly, smoke of offerings has to rise into the nostrils of God, Moses had to climb Mount Horeb to receive the ten commandments, Eli and the prophets of Baal built altars on the mountains, and the tower of Babel was built to reach heaven and make humans equals with gods.

On the other hand, one descends into hell. The underworld – Sheol (Hebrew), Hades (Greek), Niflheim (Norse) – is the opposite of heaven. This is where according to Semitic (Arab, Jewish), Christian and Muslim tradition Satan and his demons live. The subsurface, which was originally the domain of the Earth Goddess, the sustainer of life, became an evil place of banishment, death and torture. The female monster Hel, who ruled the underworld Niflheim in Norse culture, gave her name to the Germanic Christian underworld.

The rise of the male-dominated religions also goes hand in hand with the discreditation of the female.

Femininity is seen as weak and sinful, menstruation is seen as unclean and sex and conception are viewed as sinful. Natural urges and deeds in general are seen as impure and sinful, and the female is depicted as the seducer who entices men to commit these sins. Mother Earth and her priestesses disappeared in this male-dominated world of metal and war.

### **The rise of the Sky God**

The rise of the male-dominated religions sees the establishment of non-life sustaining male enterprises such as politics and war accompanied by patriotism and heroism. Self-sacrifice, celibacy, pain, torture and death become common references in Bronze Age cultures and are often themes in

religious writings. Blood feuds, sacrifices (animal and human), mutilation, torture, rape and the persecution of dissidents as instructed by the male Sky God and his priests become the norm.

To discover where our bellicosity came from, we have to study chimpanzee behaviour: as our closest living relatives, they can give us an insight into our own origins. In chimpanzee studies, many cases of deliberate murders of individuals and violent clashes between troops, which can be compared to wars, have been recorded (De Waal 1986; Goodall 1990). Chimpanzees fight to the death or stop when the opponents flee, but even then they may pursue the fleeing troop. To retain the alpha male's blessing, which includes access to mates, feeding rights and safety, the beta and gamma males do their utmost to defend him, their troop and their territory in such a confrontation. An isolated chimpanzee faces the real danger of being exterminated by a hostile patrol.

The suppression of normal bodily functions such as sexuality, eating and even survival is perhaps the most sinister aspect of male-dominated religions. This suppression often includes the oppression of the individual, especially the youth and women. Male juveniles are often exposed to humiliating, painful and sometimes life-threatening initiation ceremonies which are supposed to be their rite of passage towards manhood.

Sexual suppression is not unique to humans, but occurs in varying degrees among many other mammal species. An alpha male usually leads social groups in mammal societies. Male dominance is common among socially active mammals, but there are a few rare exceptions such as wild dogs and hyenas, where the group is led by a dominant female; she is normally the only reproductively active female in the group, while the rest of the pack is there in essence to provide for her and her offspring.

The phenomenon of the alpha male can only be established and maintained by the physical and psychological suppression of the other males. Suppression manifests in several ways but is usually a combination of constant physical and emotional bullying and social manipulation that involves the control of the underling's social position, his ability to reproduce, to eat and to feel safe. In many instances the bullying is of such a degree that the submissive individual's growth is stunted and his or her hormone production is inhibited, which has a detrimental effect on his or her ability to reproduce. In certain extreme cases the suppressed individuals become sterile.

Although many individuals never get the opportunity to mate and have to be content with a gamma status for the rest of their lives, certain individuals may rise through the ranks from the position of gamma male as juvenile to beta male as adult. If they have the appropriate physique and temperament, they may challenge the alpha male for leadership of the group. If they do not succeed the first time, they may withdraw and challenge the

alpha male the following year or move away with other individuals to start a new group. When an alpha male becomes old and loses his position in the group, he may revert back to gamma male status.

The most extreme case of social behaviour, termed eusocialism, in mammals is found in the naked mole rat of Africa. As in social insects, only the king and queen of the colony may reproduce while the other individuals have to clean the nest, collect the food, guard the nest and excavate tunnels. The slaves are kept in their social position by constant bullying by the king and queen that have permanent and deep-rooted emotional, physiological and physical effects on the slave caste, whose members remain small and submissive and become sterile.

What would inspire humans to subject themselves to a male deity, and to the resulting male-dominated society which suppresses their sexual urges and in some cases even demands sexual abstinence? The alpha male may bully other individuals, but in general he is also forced to protect the group against other competitors because he needs the group to protect his genetic investment – his offspring. Submissive individuals who would not stand a chance of surviving as solitary individuals have a sense of security and safety by belonging to the group which is protected by the alpha male. Humans, like the rest of the primates, yearn for a strong leader to guide them. Regardless of how much the average person insists on his or her individual rights, the urge to be governed is greater. Most people shirk responsibility, avoid making radical decisions and prefer to take their lead from a strong leader – hence the existence of dictatorships.

Unfortunately, most alpha males are jealous and focused on their own gain. The alpha male may protect the group, but only to protect his genetic investment, and will expect other individuals to sacrifice themselves for this cause. He will also demand the safest sleeping spot protected on all sides by his group; he will also eat first and most and will choose the best food for himself; and he will determine what and when the others may eat. Mating is in many species restricted to the alpha male, who has sole access to the females of the group, and he will be the only male of the group to propagate his genes. In species such as chimpanzees, where subservient males are allowed to mate, it will only happen with the alpha male's consent and he usually retain the right to mate with those females too. Humans with their behaviour patterns inherited from lower primate ancestors, have the emotional need for male leadership, including in their religions. This urge led to the creation of male deities that would comply with the emotional need subservient primates have for a über-leader (Morris 1967).

All the social structures associated with alpha male leadership were superimposed on the male deities. Religious food taboos such as kosher and halaal foods, eating rituals and offerings and prayer rituals before meals echo the control the alpha male exerts on who eats when, what and where while

demanding the best for himself. Fasting plays an important role in many religions and is said to feed the spiritual and suppress the physical. The priestly castes from the West and the East are often known for their ascetic life style, and serve as inspiration for many pietistic believers. We created deities to satisfy our need for an alpha male to whom we can defer responsibility for everything that happens to us. It is emotionally preferable to many people to believe that this alpha male will look after them, accept and love them as long as they are blindly loyal to him, even if this entails the sacrifice of their personal and biological freedoms.

Many post-Neolithic religions are characterised by their suppression and control of sexuality similar to that exerted by the alpha male in the primate troop. This suppression may take the form of religious rites such as marriages at which the deity is called in as witness and enforces monogamy, to extremes such as sexual abstinence, genital mutilation and castration. Jesus was not regarded as God by the early Christian church but rather as a spiritual leader, and as an example for the faithful it was important that he be depicted as celibate. Jesus as the head of the church, and therefore the most subservient of all the faithful, did not have the same rights as God to procreate. It would be absurd to imagine that the early church would consider that Jesus, as part of the trinity, could procreate with Mary Magdalene.

It is expected of the priest and priestess castes of many religions, which have to serve as examples for the rest of the community, to be celibate, as can be seen in the Essene, Christian and Buddhist monks and nuns and Vestal virgins. It is important to note that the religious leaders play the chief role in the suppression and control of sexuality within the community. Church ministers, rabbis, muftis and priests ordain weddings, prescribe celibacy and condemn masturbation, conduct circumcisions and in some extreme cases even perform or condone castration (e.g. Matthew 19:12). The religious leaders claim as a rule that the male deities have ordained these rules and taboos. In stark contrast, male deities such as Thor, Heimdall, Zeus, Jupiter, Brahma and El retain the right to have intercourse with human females, most importantly with the approval of the religious community, similar to the custom among alpha males.

This unfair advantage that the alpha male has over the rest of his followers may seem unfair according to modern Western ideals, where individual freedom is valued. Until a few centuries ago, however, it was acceptable for the landed gentry in Europe to have sex with their labourer's bride on the night of their wedding. An affluent Muslim often has more than one wife, and a sheik may have a whole harem. Polygamy and the access to the wives of underlings is clearly the privilege of the alpha male. Beta males, next in terms of superiority, often are only allowed one wife and gamma males may have none. Slaves were often kept in captivity and their movements and socialisation severely restricted, often preventing them from

procreating, and in certain societies slaves were commonly castrated, which places them in the gamma stratum of human society. King David is a good example of an alpha male who simply took Bathsheba for himself, regardless of the fact that he already had a harem. True to nature, when Absalom vanquished David, he erected a tent on the roof of the palace where he proceeded to have sex with his father's wives in full view of the nation (2 Samuel 16:22). This is the ultimate motive of alpha male superiority – to succeed genetically. The victory over another male is concluded only after the sexual subjugation, and eventual impregnation, of his females. The Bruce effect, an extreme example of this strategy, occurs in mice. When a new alpha male takes over the group by killing the previous alpha male, the females impregnated by him spontaneously abort in order to be receptive to the new (and stronger) alpha male's genes. The urge to sexually subjugate the loser's females is clearly the reason why victorious soldiers rape the women of their vanquished enemy during a war.

The subjugation of males in male-dominated societies often has a strong sexual nature. This is done in order to subdue the submissive or vanquished male to a gamma status and therefore to the same social rank as a female, while the victorious male confirms his alpha status. This behaviour is manifested in the compulsory shaving and celibacy of army recruits, the focus on the buttocks of a boy when he is disciplined, many initiation rituals where young men are forced to undress or be humiliated otherwise and the castration of prisoners of war.

One of the most interesting phenomena associated with male-dominated religions is that the priestly caste also occupies a special gamma status. The gamma male can come closest to the alpha male in mammal societies without evoking an aggressive response from him. Other alpha males and even beta males are potential threats to the alpha male and are suppressed, removed or destroyed. If God occupies the role of the alpha male in male-dominated religious societies, the priests serving him must occupy a gamma status. The deities: Osiris (Egyptian), Asshur (Assyrian), Ahura Mazda (Persian), Tahan (Hittite), Zeus (Greek), Jupiter (Roman), Odin (Norse) and El/Yahweh/God (Judeo/Christian) were all depicted as alpha men from the societies that spawned them – big, strong, muscular and bearded. Sumerian, Egyptian and Phoenician priests were clean shaven in contrast to the rest of the male population. This tradition survived in the Christian tradition. The shaven face and/or head accentuates the childishness or emasculated nature of the priest in relation to the deity. This emasculation is especially evident in the cases where the priests are celibate or castrated.

Male-dominated religions view free sexual relations as an abomination. Genital mutilation of children is probably one of the most offensive religious customs that is wide spread in Eurasia, Africa and Australia. Male circumcision, or the removal of the foreskin, occurs in many cultures on these

three continents. The oldest depiction of circumcision can be seen on a 4300-year-old wall painting in Egypt but the practice is probably much older, at any rate centuries older than Abraham. Circumcision is still widely practised in Africa, the Middle East, South-east Asia and Australia and forms part of the initiation rites of juveniles into the socio-religious community. Circumcision is a religious rite in the Middle East and North Africa, ordered by the deity according to the Jews, Muslims and Coptic Christians so that they can become part of the covenant made between God and man.

The underlying reason for this type of genital mutilation that is prescribed by the Torah and the Hadith is to inhibit, suppress and stigmatise sexual enjoyment. If circumcisions are not executed by the priestly caste, they approve of it or give it their consent at least. Circumcision apologists claim that the removal of the foreskin prevents the accumulation of sand under the foreskin in desert conditions and that it is thus done for hygienic reasons. If this argument were true, no desert dwelling mammal would have a foreskin. This argument also cannot explain the widely distributed custom of circumcision, even in the jungles of tropical Africa and southeastern Asia. The express purpose of the foreskin is to protect the glans of the penis against abrasion and to maintain its sensitivity. The removal of the foreskin exposes the amputee to infections, secondary injuries and desensitisation of the penis.

If one navigates through all the religious rhetoric about becoming part of the covenant and initiation into manhood, it becomes clear that the real reason for circumcision is to minimise masturbation, which is a taboo in all circumcision cults. In addition, circumcision is not the surgical procedure many people imagine it to be. A specially trained rabbi, the Mohel, does the circumcisions in the Jewish faith. The procedure occurs as follows: the Mohel pulls the foreskin away from the body, past the glans and cuts it off with a sharp knife (not a scalpel), then he gouges out the soft raw flesh around the base of the glans with his thumb nail and then he sucks up the blood welling up from the raw wound with his mouth. If one pauses to reflect about the possibility of the transmission of diseases such as syphilis, HIV and hepatitis from the rabbi to the baby or vice versa, the implications are frightening. Apologists claim that since the procedure was ordained by Yahweh, Yahweh himself will prevent the transmission of any such disease during the circumcision rite. On the other hand, razor blades, pieces of glass or sharp rocks are used for circumcision in Africa. The same instrument is commonly used over and over again on a series of young men without sterilising it between victims. Many babies and young men are scarred for the rest of their life and some die due to bleeding and secondary infections picked up during and after circumcision.

Probably the most repulsive of all genital mutilation procedures is the circumcision of girls in Africa and the Middle East. Although it is not prescribed in the Koran, this practice is common in Muslim communities where

the mother, aunt or an older woman or priestess would be responsible for this deed which is supposed to preserve the girl's chastity and turn her into a submissive, chaste wife for the exclusive enjoyment of her future husband. Female circumcision is not synonymous to male circumcision however. It is important to keep in mind that no anaesthesia or antiseptics are used for this deed that is committed with a razor blade, a glass shard or a knife. Female circumcision can be done in three different ways: the clitoris is cut off, or the clitoris and labia minora are removed, or the clitoris, labia minora and labia majora are severed from the body. In the latter case, the bleeding hole left by the procedure is simply sewn shut with needle and thread so that only a small hole is left for the passage of menstrual blood and urine. On the wedding night the groom cuts open the scar tissue covering her vagina with his knife in order to penetrate her.

Sex is seen at best as a necessary evil and as sinful otherwise, and celibacy is encouraged by male-dominated religions. The spiritual is seen as superior to the fleshly body which is depicted as sinful. Following in the footsteps of Paul (1 Corinthians 7:1,2,8), Origen believed that sex polluted the body, that sin was brought to the world through sex and that birth pains were clear proof that sex was sinful. Augustine said that nothing suppresses the spirit of man like the caress of a woman and the fleshly relations which are part of marriage. Sexual urges had to be contained and suppressed. Libido was seen as a sin which will lead you away from God. He considered celibacy, purity and virginity as superior because they were much closer to the perfection of God than the alternative. Ambrose said that he who remains unmarried becomes like the angels in heaven. Thomas Aquinas said that masturbation is a bigger sin than rape because fertilisation is the only reason why people should have sex and no fertilisation can occur during masturbation, while it can happen during rape.

If devotees are willing to castigate, mutilate and deprive themselves, how much sympathy will they have towards dissidents and people from other religions? The right to marginalise, punish, torture or kill "the other" and dissidents is upheld with enthusiasm by the priestly caste. The persecution of witches in Europe started in the fifteenth century. Approximately 100 000 people were prosecuted on the belief that they were witches between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Of those who were accused, 60 000 were executed and most were tortured before they were killed. Approximately two thirds of the witches were female. In most of the recorded cases, there was mention of sexual transgressions – often with the Devil. From the torture methods and instruments used to torture females it seems as if the priests had an obsession with female genitalia.

Sexual repression is only one method of inhibiting and manipulating people; other methods are also used to persuade people that their individual rights weigh less than the welfare of the group. Most Indo-Germanic

religions are characterised by the aggressive enforcement of their dogmas and the persecution or marginalisation of dissidents. The priestly caste would personally, or through the incitement of others, persecute dissidents. The Spanish Inquisition, the burning of Bruno and Servetus and the witches of Salem, the execution of heretics or social transgressors by Jews and Muslims, are but a few examples of this phenomenon. Ostracism, abuse and ultimately murder of the dissidents are common among chimpanzees (De Waal 1986).

The exclusivity of religions leads to an intolerance not only towards dissidents within the community but towards everyone not part of that group, who are as a rule depicted as heretics, heathens, pagans and ultimately as the enemy. Most religions believe that they have exclusive access to the deity and rights to the hereafter, and that everyone else is wrong and therefore damned. The chosen people also have not only the right but the holy charge to exterminate the heathens. Total submission of the individual to the supreme authority, consisting of a mixture of male priests and secular leaders, as ordained by the deity, is demanded. In these communities women and youths have virtually no rights, and it is demanded from the members to conform: individualism is suppressed. People in these religious societies are told that the only way they can be useful is to sacrifice their worthless life for the bigger cause of serving the deity.

Male-dominated religions are often characterised by the physical and emotional suppression of people. Members are indoctrinated to believe that one can gain acceptance from the deity by humiliation, self-inflicted pain and self-sacrifice and the general forfeiture of the individual's survival instincts. The most extreme example of self-sacrifice is to die during a holy war.

Self-inflicted injuries by flogging and cutting are common in the Indo-Germanic religions, in order to prove submission to their male deities and to get their blessing, as one can see from the account of the priests on Carmel who tried to evoke the sympathy of Baal by cutting themselves with swords and knives (1 Kings 18:28). Shiite Muslims slash themselves with swords and flail themselves with chains and cut open their scalps with knives during the Ashoura feast. This orgy of self-mutilation occurs under the guidance of imams and often takes place in mosques. Proud mothers will bring their babies to the imam to slice open their scalps. The theme of self-inflicted pain and injury is also common in the Christian religion. Pilgrims to the Holy Land would crawl on their bloody knees along the Via Appia. Certain believers develop stigmata from which blood would drip in the places where they imagine Jesus was penetrated by nails, thorns and a spear. It is immaterial whether this phenomenon is real or imagined; what is relevant here is the emotional need to experience and witness it. It was a common practice in the past for Catholic priests and nuns to flog themselves, until they bled or passed out, for a variety of reasons such as penance for sins real and imagined or merely to attain humility, and therefore grace from God.



Self-inflicted injuries are a small step from self-sacrifice and the killing of other people for a religious cause. Besides the dehumanisation of humankind by religions, the suppression of natural behaviour and urges, human life itself is depicted as worthless and futile if not solely applied for the expansion of God's kingdom or sacrificed for the cause. Only those who have devoted their lives to the deity and his kingdom will receive grace and love and will not go to the underworld. Shiite Muslims believe that one of the surest ways to gain access to heaven is to die in a jihad. Similarly, the only way Norse people could gain access to Valhalla was to die in battle. In Valhalla, warriors would fight one another every day and feast every night until Ragnarok (Young 1954). Other people, like women, children and men who died ignominiously of disease or old age, had to go to Nilfheim, ruled by the monstrous Hel, where earth serpents fed on their bodies. Religious warriors see themselves as the 'hand' or 'sword of God' that not only fulfil his wishes on earth, but also become the enforcers of his will on the rest of humankind.

Warring religious groups would pray to their deities (often the same deity) on the eve before the battle and would ask for victory and protection. After the war, the victors would believe that the deity fought on their side and the losers would believe that their deity had punished them. When innocent people died in the process, it was believed that it was the will of the deity; if believers died, it was argued that they were willing to die for the cause anyway; and when the enemy died, it was the punishment meted out for them by the deity. This is the rhetoric that inspires people to walk into shopping centres or get on to buses with sticks of dynamite strapped around their bodies. Very seldom do believers accept personal blame for this orgy of bloodletting.

Worldwide from Meso-America, Western Europe, Middle East and the Far East, people have been sacrificed to their deities. Mostly these deities are male, but in some exceptional cases female deities such as Kali, the consort of Shiva, also demand human sacrifices. Male deities such as Mars, Wotan, Tiwe, Thor, Shiva, Yahweh/El and Allah demand sacrifice – human and animal.

Human sacrifices were common in Eurasian countries from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. The sacking of cities and the killing of all its inhabitants – men, woman, children and animals – was demanded from Joshua by God, for example: "But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God has commanded thee" (Deut. 20:17). The most chilling example of all human sacrifices is probably the custom of the Phoenicians, who were a culturally and technologically developed people, of sacrificing their own children in times of need to Baal Hammon. This custom was commented upon by the Jews who described how the Philistines

sacrificed their children to Moloch in the Valley of Hinnom by placing their children on the hands of a bronze statue of the deity which was heated from below by a fire, so that they cooked to death. Plutarch, Tertullian, Orosius, Philo and Diodorus Siculus refer with disgust to this custom as they witnessed how babies and small children were sacrificed by their parents at Tophet in Carthage between 400 BCE and 200 BCE. Archaeologists have so far unearthed over 20 000 pots containing the charred remains of children at this site. The beautifully engraved head stones of the graves at Tophet prove that these children were loved by their parents and that it probably demanded a lot from the parents to give their children up for sacrifice. There is little to choose between whether a child is sacrificed on an altar to appease a god or sent to fight a holy war.

### **Conflict between the sacred and the profane**

Paradoxically the normal life giving and life supporting instincts and processes have been and are being made suspect by male-dominated religions because we will not survive without these instincts and processes. The religious ideals set by these religions are unattainable which leads to a hypocritical and schizophrenic existence where our supposed spirit is in mortal conflict with our very real nature.

This 'dual nature' of humankind – body and spirit – has been the topic of religious and philosophical discourse for thousands of years. These two aspects have been interpreted as being opposites of one another. The body and bodily functions were depicted as base and evil, while the spirit and spirituality were depicted as good and superior.

If one believes that God is creator of heaven and earth, and therefore of nature, one of the most nonsensical statements in the Bible is: *“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be”* (Romans 8:6-7).

The religious are rewarded by the deity (in control over life and death) if they sacrifice their lives for 'the cause', or if they forego their carnal needs and instincts. Celibacy, fasting, mortification of the flesh and self-sacrifice are believed to be symbols of the victory of the spirit over the sinful body which will lead to acceptance by the deity. Religions generally have little to offer except the promise of an afterlife in the company of God after the denunciation of the physical.

The suppression of normal survival instincts in the religious context creates a type of schizophrenia. People are genetically programmed to be hypersexual, but this is prohibited by most post-Neolithic religions. Not that these taboos prevent people from being promiscuous, albeit with a guilt complex. This schizophrenic behaviour is the cause of a plethora of sexual

deviations, inhibitions, sporadic promiscuity – enough to keep marriage counsellors, sexologists, social workers, pastoral psychologists and others in business for many centuries to come.

A carnival effectively illustrates this dichotomy in human sexual behaviour. It is common in many religions to suppress sexual intercourse especially over religious holidays. The carnival (literally the 'feast of flesh') occurs after Lent when people of the Christian faith fast and abstain from sex. During the carnival people who just recently were the epitome of restraint now cause the pendulum to swing to the other side of the norm by over-indulging in every respect. The suppression of sexuality often causes abnormal sexual behaviour, such as the many cases of paedophilia committed by priests, pastors and church ministers that have come to light in recent years. Sexual abuse seems to thrive in situations where a sexually oppressed spiritual leader is in a position of power in a society where the individual has few rights and juveniles even less.

It makes as little sense that a deity would create a foreskin just to demand that it be removed, as to imagine that our instinctive behaviours such as procreation, fighting, fleeing and feeding, which ensure our survival, would be regarded sinful by the deity who created them. The religious view that the flesh is sinful is directly opposed to our survival as animals, and this leads to an emotional schizophrenia when people are expected to suppress their real bodily needs in favour of an unattainable spiritual existence. Regardless of this great sacrifice demanded from believers, people still subject themselves willingly to the anti-nature dogma of religions.

The origin of this self-destructive behaviour is again not only mirrored in our closest relatives the chimpanzees, but also occurs in many other social mammals. Emotionally we are programmed to subject ourselves to the protection, mercy and punishment of an alpha male. The presence of a dominant male creates a feeling of security and safety in most people, even though they have to compromise their individual freedom or if it requires the suppression of their sexual needs, or pain and even death. It has been shown in a series of experiments that the presence of a male, or rather the pheromones contained in the underarm sweat of males, relaxes women (Pilcher 2003). This emotional need to be led and dominated ultimately gave rise to the male-dominated religions.

Fasting, sexual deprivation, fear and cruelty stimulate our limbic system which triggers religious feelings. The mind of a person subjected to intense initiation rituals responds in the same way as a person suffering from a post-traumatic experience. The amygdala (the 'seat of fear') lies adjacent to the centres in the limbic system which control the fight or flight, feeding and reproductive functions. The experiences of spiritual enlightenment of celibate, fasting, lonely or frightened people are well documented (Atran 2002). There is no doubt that these experiences, which to the subjects were

overwhelming and very convincing, were induced by the stress the limbic system was exposed to (Newberg et al 2001).

### **The death of Gaia's children**

After the invention of technology two million years ago and the resulting extermination of our predators, humans nevertheless continued to behave like a prey species. The reason for overpopulation is directly the cause of the optimal reproductive behaviour of humans, minus the ecological counterbalance initially provided by carnivores. Even wars, the direct result of overpopulation and competition for limited resources, do not stem the human tide engulfing the planet. The death of millions of people during a war stimulates a reproductive response amongst humans that leads to a sharp rise in population numbers afterwards. This reproductive strategy is also seen in places wracked by drought and famine: the harsher the living conditions of people, social or physical, the more promiscuous and therefore numerous they become, ensuring the survival of the species.

The result of the exponential increase in the human population has wreaked havoc on ecology. Whole ecosystems have been and are being destroyed for living space and the production of food. The ultimate destruction of nature as we know it is inevitable as a result of the avarice and consumeristic momentum of humankind. Long before the end of this century there will not be enough resources to sustain the human population. Civilisation as we know it, which grew from the Bronze Age civilisations, will cease to exist.

Civilisation has come full circle, from its inception 4000 years ago with agriculture, cities, writing and mathematics to its destruction through the overexploitation of nature by means of technology. A clear indication of the unsustainable nature of the Bronze Age religions is the perception that nature was given by God for mankind to subjugate and exploit (Gen. 2:28-30). Ironically the same culture that gave us our technology also gave us our religions, and the combination of the two will destroy the creation of God – which includes humankind and the ecology.

### **Summary**

The transcendence of consciousness began with the origin of *Homo* when we invented technology and became predators ourselves. The same technological development enabled us to kill our predators, which led to the overpopulation of the earth by humankind and the destruction of the ecology. This change in the ecological role of humankind was the prime drive behind people's transcendence of consciousness. The evolution of technology separated us from the rest of nature, which inspired us to believe that we were created separate

from nature and that nature was given to us by God to subjugate. The Neolithic cultures, where both male and female deities were worshipped, gave way to metal-dominated technology which saw the origin of male-dominated religions and the death cults they supported. This unholy combination of religion and technology is contributing to the destruction of nature.

There is a strong correlation between the social structure and hierarchy in ape troops and the social and religious institutions of humans. This phenomenon explains the existence of similar behaviour, needs and fears among all people, and why similar social institutions, including religious rites have evolved worldwide. People are like other organisms: slaves of their genetic wiring. We can modify our behaviour superficially or mask it behind sophisticated technology, but under the skin we are still apes – anatomically and emotionally. Social customs and even religions are steeped in ape needs, fears and urges. It is futile for humans to try and attain the goal envisaged by most religions, where one has to suppress your physical and emotional needs in favour of a more spiritual existence.

We will have a deeper understanding of human behaviour if we take the origins of our ancestral instincts and behaviour into account. An understanding of the evolutionary origins of our behaviour will hopefully lead to greater empathy among people in the little time we have left on earth.

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