

The Personal God as an Idea

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Human consciousness, the development of the self and the central nervous system's organisation of the archetypes

The Origins of our Spiritual History

Why a personal God? Why the move away from polytheism with its major gods and goddesses to an eventual proliferation of minor gods and goddesses to the idea of one big God who can be related to personally? What happened to make this happen? And where does Jesus fit into this puzzle? Why did he make the move towards a personal God and shrug off the distancing aspect of Judaism and the Law? Why the Jewish fascination with Law; and from where and for what reason an empty Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple? Why an empty room at the heart of Judaism?

In *The History of the Devil*, the French author Gerald Messadie speaks of Mesopotamia as the place where the West's spiritual history was forged.¹ Few scholars would disagree with him. So why such a resistance from many Christian scholars to properly recognise the infiltration of religious ideas from ancient Mesopotamia into Judaism and Christianity? Why the tendency to either ignore such connections, or belittle them as mere background noise to the main event of Christianity's birth in the first century CE? An historian turned philosopher who has written controversial studies of the life of Jesus, Messadie says that travellers to Mesopotamia today would find it hard to believe that the grand empires of Sumer, Assyria and Babylonia had been fashioned from her flatlands. They might also be astonished to learn that the concept of Satan, or the Devil, most probably started in Persia six centuries before Jesus appeared on the scene. True. But I think they would be even more astonished to learn that it was in Mesopotamia that

religious consciousness probably underwent its most remarkable transformation - a transformation in substance without which Judaism and Christianity could not have arisen.

The uncomfortable truth that Christian scholars had to contend with as the world opened up in the mid-nineteenth century was that their civilisation had its roots in the cultures of the Near East, and that Greece and Rome, like Syria and Anatolia before them, had acted merely as conduits for religious ideas and experiences belonging to a third millennium empire called Akkad - a civilisation which itself reflected the even earlier civilisation of Sumer. What a shock that was; it immediately began to undermine the idea of divine revelation without precursor; for it quickly became evident that Christianity's claim of historical and theological uniqueness was, to say the least, overblown. Yes, Jesus had certainly taken a personal tack when speaking of Israel's God, and this was without doubt a change in direction from orthodox Judaism's insistence that "Law" was all that mattered, but there was much in Christianity and Judaism that resonated with earlier religious ideas, and this resonating of concepts and religious experience was more than a fluke, more than a chance similarity due to proximity of culture and language - Christianity was (and still is) merely a stage in the evolution of religious consciousness, and perhaps a retrogression rather than a progression when its long and violent history is examined in detail. The more astonishing change in religious consciousness had erupted in Mesopotamia during the third millennium, and it is to the great civilisations of Mesopotamia that we now must turn in our attempt to understand the transition of human consciousness from one level to another.

The Still Small Voice

In his quite extraordinary book *The origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, the psychologist Julian Jaynes cites some figures on auditory and visual hallucinations recorded during the last century in England. Using only normal people in good health in these studies, it was shown that out of

7,717 men, and 7,599 women, hallucinations were experienced in 7.8 and 12 percent of these groups respectively. Oddly enough, twice as many visual hallucinations as auditory were recorded, and such experiences were had most frequently by subjects between 20 and 29 years of age. Jaynes points out that this is the exact age at which schizophrenia generally appears. As to why such an old study was used, the reason given is that treatments like Thorazine (chemotherapy) now eliminate hallucinations altogether. Questioning the use of such treatments, Jaynes notes that patients experiencing hallucinations are generally friendly and more positive towards others than nonhallucinating patients.²

But for our purposes, his most important observation is that “Hallucinations *must* have some innate structure in the nervous system.”³ Even schizophrenics “profoundly” deaf since birth can apparently experience auditory hallucinations, and these can range from the voice of God to that of angels, devils, enemies or dead relatives. Voices can also come from woods or fields, walls, cellars or roofs of houses, from heaven or hell, from parts of the body or even from bits of clothing. Such voices threaten, admonish, command, instruct, mock, sneer or curse, and can even be experienced as “foreign bodies” welling up in the mouth. And in what Jaynes calls “twilight states”, scenes of a distinctly religious nature can be hallucinated in broad daylight - the heavens can stand open and a God can speak to the patient. And it doesn’t much matter that it is only the patient who hears or sees in this manner, for they consider themselves “singled out by divine forces”, and feel compelled to obey these “elemental auditory powers” without question.

Julian Jaynes’ basic thesis is that schizophrenic hallucinations are of a similar order of experience to that of communication with the gods in antiquity. That is his main tack, and it is a handy theoretical structure to have at hand when considering both Old and New Testament auditory-cum-visionary phenomena. A study of modern schizophrenia throws much light on the inner voices and vision experienced in Biblical times, and Jaynes seriously suggests that the whole

of third millennium Mesopotamian society was naturally schizophrenic or "bicameral", that is, two-chambered, or double-minded in their experience of the self. Which is to say that their experience of the "self" was not at all like ours, but more in the form of a non-conscious, non-subjective self governed by a dominant self which seemed to be a separate entity of divine dimension. The authority of such a voice (or voices) was absolute; it was an authority which could not be argued with. And schizophrenics today consider their voices objectively real in spite of life's general experiences. Capable of gaining a measure of control of their voices after long experience, they are however generally held in a position of unquestioning submission.

To help us get to grips with this startling thesis of schizophrenia having been a general condition of third millennium society, Jaynes puts forward the observations that when listening to someone talk there is a sense in which we momentarily become the other person; that is, we let the other person become part of us for a few brief seconds - we let them "in" by allowing what is being said to completely usurp our attention. A second or two later we are again attending to our own thoughts as primary, but during those moments of real listening we become secondary to the primacy of the other. Which is to say that we momentarily suspend our identities, that we sort of hold our psychic breath and allow the other to breathe for us. Conversation during which a willing suspension of identity does not periodically take place in the other produces frustration and the sense of the other not communicating properly. Only by making such a move can we truly understand what the other is talking about, for to understand the other means to *understand*, or stand "just below" the other, to "give way" to the other with respect to conscious attention.⁴

Spatial distance also plays an important role in our influencing of the other, or in their influencing of us. There are culturally established distances for general communication, and these are only broken under special circumstances. Stand too close to someone during a conversation, and you will see them

back off to a safe distance. Jaynes makes the point that when someone is too close there is the sense of their trying to control your thoughts; when too far away, of their “not controlling them enough for you to understand . . . comfortably.”⁵ The latter part of that statement carries a much greater punch than many psychologists might suppose. Conversing with someone at a proximity under what we generally allow either means we are in the presence of a lover or an enemy. Hence face-to-face threatening during which one person gains authority over another. And again there is an unusual insight from Jaynes when he points out that our constant judging of the other, our constant criticising and pigeonholing of the other in our heads is simply our attempt to regulate the other’s influence over us. Perhaps too our bouts of “inattention” when another is speaking, when in spite of quality of content we decide to hold the other at arm’s length by refusing to *understand* them. Imagine then the loss of control when the “other” is a disembodied voice inside one’s own head which cannot be kept at a safe distance. What to do then? Unhindered by boundaries, this voice cannot be drawn away from or reduced in authority through criticism. It is all-prevailing and encompassing; it is a voice as omniscient and omnipotent as the old voice of the gods, and cannot be disobeyed.

But surely that is to misunderstand the word “voice” in relation to these early societies? Isn’t the word “voice” merely a way of speaking based on a way of describing an imaginative relationship with the gods of antiquity? Isn’t it no more than a metaphor when used by these ancient peoples? Perhaps not. Julian Jaynes presents a convincing case for such voices having been an integral part of everyday life in all ancient societies; which is to say that the voices spoken of in the old texts were heard in a literal manner. If a man or woman said that a god had spoken to them, they were not playing some imaginative game, they were reporting an experience which no one doubted because they too heard similar voices on a regular basis. Jaynes’ point is that individuals then were not individuals in our sense of that word; they were non-subjective. Non-subjective? How could such a thing be? How could someone who had built a

society, related and had children not have a subjective self? Jaynes' answer is surprisingly simple: through a split-brain process (parallel processing?) still with us to a limited extent in normal individuals, and fully visible in those experiencing strong schizophrenic episodes. Pushed about like robots by internal voices which were part of their own psyche not yet integrated into a neuronal whole, early man functioned without a personal ego.

The questions this raises are twofold: What does it feel like to function without a personal ego? And, can such a state be described or defined? The answer to both questions is "Yes"; but it requires a certain ingenuity of mind to imagine ones way into question one. For what one has to do is imagine a situation within which ego is not operative, but consciousness can be clearly seen to function without impairment. Jaynes chooses the driving of a car to illustrate the point, and his observations perfectly capture the oddity of a mind simultaneously conscious and unconscious. For when driving a car we often slip into what is commonly referred to as "automatic pilot", and during this phase somehow manage to avoid other cars, not mount the pavement, apply brake and clutch when required, and arrive at our destination unscathed. Enthralled by personal thoughts, or by a conversation with a passenger which carry us into deep subjective involvement, we *unconsciously* drive our car and arrive where we wish to go with little actual memory of how we managed to do so. Jaynes refers to this unconscious state as being in "a totally interacting reciprocity of stimulation . . . while my consciousness is . . . off on other topics."⁶ Subtract that consciousness altogether, and a non-subjective or egoless human being is caught in the searchlight of our conscious scrutiny. Jaynes tells us that "the world would happen to him and his actions would be inextricably part of that happening with no consciousness whatever."⁷ So if confronted by a blocked road, or a flat tyre, such an individual would not react as we would react, he would be forced to wait for his inner voice to speak a solution from stored-up "wisdom" - which is not at all the same thing as saying that his memory came on line. In this sense the divinity

would convey the necessary information so that the man might extricate himself from the situation.

Describing the gods and goddesses as “organisations of the central nervous system”,⁸ Jaynes says that they gave orders, advised and led in a similar fashion to the ego-superego relationship postulated by Freud. Truly hallucinatory in origin, the gods had a separate existence inside the individual, and as societies grew in complexity the individual incorporated and organised the voices of his superiors into an internal pantheon of authority figures whose voices could also be heard within the individual. The king obeyed the dead king as a god, heard his voice within himself, and when he too died, became the admonishing and advising voice of the king who followed. The lowly labourer did not hear the voice of the dead king (that would have led to anarchy); but he did hear the voices of his immediate superiors, and had the dictates of the higher gods relayed to him through priesthood. Every household had its own shrine containing idols or figurines, and these were the personal gods of the ordinary people, little gods who could be importuned to speak with gods more elevated in the divine hierarchy. The old texts stated that a man lived in the shadow of his personal god, and Jaynes tells us that personal names usually reflected this close relationship between human and divine.

With the breakdown of this dependant mental state, and the first flickerings of subjectivity proper, priesthood would have blossomed into a complex hierarchy where "prayers" (one-way talking) would have taken the place of actual dialogue with the gods, and this in turn would have resulted in the construction of intermediaries such as angels and demons. Perhaps this is why "angels" looked just like men (the wings were added later) in spite of being able to enter the presence of divinity - they had simply retained bicameral ability - and why demons encompassed the notion of breakdown and anarchy. For there must have been a long transition period when individuals already subjectively inclined were identified by their bicameral brothers and sisters as "different", and such individuals may have been looked upon as "evil" because of

their ability to practice deceit, the deceit of hiding, on a long-term basis, the fact that they were now thinking their own thoughts. But when almost everyone had reached this stage of subjectivity, the stragglers would in turn have taken on a special aura, for were they not the only remaining ones capable of speaking directly to the gods? The whole notion of Satan/Devil/Lucifer being the "father of lies" begins to make sense in this context.

But first chaos and breakdown. For when the hallucinated voices eventually weakened and all but disappeared, the individual must have found it difficult to make up his or her mind about anything. But that they did eventually make up their minds is obvious, and that they knew something dramatic had happened within themselves is on record. Jaynes uses the Iliad as an example of human beings functioning without ego, but notes that at the end of this great poem Hector and Agenor talk to themselves. Nothing terribly unusual in that for us, but to these two characters a unique event, an event of such astonishment that they both use exactly the same words to describe the experience. Jaynes records their words: "But wherefore does my life say this to me?" Indeed, for which cause or reason had the words materialised? There was no divine context. The words had appeared as if from nowhere and there was no indication that a god, goddess or interiorised superior was in control? Such words would have seemed to come from nowhere, out of sheer emptiness, to have formed in the mouth without prior existence and be curiously without conviction.

That must have astonished the speaker. Which raises the question: did these changelings experience incipient "subjectivity" in the same way as we sometimes experience "inspiration"? Could it be that they found their own voice sounding within them as odd as we find the voice of inspiration which occasionally breaks into audible clarity? For we do hear that voice from time to time; we do sometimes actually hear another voice articulating the sentences or idea we are about to speak *before we speak them*. Perhaps the hangover of this is our incessant need to talk to ourselves, why we slip so easily into our inner world of dialogue and

disappear from sight. Left only with Elijah's still small voice to nudge at us during creative reverie, we stumble from one conscious decision to another. How odd. How odd we look, all of us, as we mumble our way through our lives. And how difficult for those who just happen to be wired up a little differently, who actually have the curious ability to hear, and sometimes see, pathologically confused remnants of the old divinities.

The Process of Breakdown

Julian Jaynes draws our attention to the Sumerian epic poem known as *Atrahasis*, for it contains a vital sense of breakdown in communication between the gods and human society.

The people become numerous...
The god was depressed by their uproar
Enlil heard their noise,
He exclaimed to the great gods
The noise of mankind has become
burdensome . . .⁹

The problem was that as society became more complex, so did the decisions that had to be made. And the sheer number of decisions that had to be made were equally daunting. So the deities proliferated to handle the vast flow of new contexts (Gerald Messadieu speaks of 4000 gods), and advanced polytheism became the way out of a problem which in turn created its own problems. Literally swarming with gods and goddesses and internalised authority figures to handle the ever-growing trade in decision-making, there arose the need for some other organising principle to control the mental traffic of village life become city life. Termed the Intermediate Period by scholars - who insist that outside force did not cause the recorded breakdown in social cohesion - authority frayed to breaking point, broke, and initiated a period of chaos. Jaynes speaks of a built-in periodicity in bicameral theocratic collapse allied to loss of hallucinatory control. That feels right; and it

also helps explain the constant desire of later theocracies to return to earlier forms of worship, the desire to re-enter a rigorist-type relationship with the gods based on revelation alone.

The extra organising principle that arose seems to have been "writing", the ability to create grocery lists and so contain the problem of what went where to whom and why. There were no banks. Jaynes tells us that the word translated as "money" is incorrect - no money has ever been found from these early periods. He even rejects the word "rent", replaces it with "tithing", and talks of wine being "exchanged" rather than "purchased". Imposing modern categories of thought on what was basically a bartering system, modern scholars have inadvertently distorted our picture of the distant past and allowed us to assume the existence of civilisations not unlike our own in mentality.

So says this Princeton psychologist, and the more one reads of this vast period with Jaynes' overview in mind, the more it seems that this precocious thinker may be correct. Writing things down seems to indicate a reduction in auditory hallucination, a change over from the god's voice to a personal voice in rudimentary form, from the certainty of divine communication to the vagaries of human speech and the ever-growing interpretative necessity of written language. So two things were happening simultaneously: the taking of control away from the bicameral mind due to the pressure of a civilisation grown too large, and the breakdown of the bicameral mind towards the subjective state which may in itself have been driven by evolutionary pressure. Hence Richard Friedman's disappearing God of the early Old Testament period; God had simply served his purpose and been replaced by the self-serving "I" of the individual. Banished into the hinterland of consciousness, this disappearing God would show his face from time to time, but only a Moses or a Jacob would have the capacity to hear and see him.

But these divinities who had once inhabited the human brain were not out for the count. They were still distantly there. Near. Still subjectively sensed and worshipped from afar

through a growing corpus of texts trying to describe the way it had once been. They were far away yet still near. Really close, yet spoken of through the distance of language in the head and in writing. And every so often there occurred an individual with the bicameral gift of hearing and seeing the god at first hand, of knowing what the god wanted, of being able to speak the god's words and guide a village or a whole society as it manoeuvred subjectively through the deep and treacherous waters of intellection and subjective desire. There was a sense of deep awe as such individuals straddled the mental divide and revealed the corrective steps for a society gone wrong, for a king who had forgotten the needs of his people, for a priesthood reduced to guesswork. But sometimes there was a distorting voice, a garbled mixture of bicameral gift and subjective imagination - authority without substance. And sometimes no gift at all, just a cunning simulation of powers bestowed.

But before this stage of breakdown and replacement there was the need for little personal gods to talk to the big impersonal gods who were fast receding into the heavens due to social overload. Functioning as an adjunct of language evolution within the individual, the gods articulated to the individual what the individual already knew *but did not know he knew until told*, and the result was a system of personal volition identified always as "other" until subjectivity proper (the next step in an evolutionary process allied to the spread of language) began to form. Jaynes is careful not to make the arising of consciousness a biological necessity; instead, he places the emphasis on the growth of language as a spoken and written medium carrying survival value. It is language which initiates the slow change from bicamerality to personal subjectivity, and it is the use of language which will eventually slam the door on bicamerality altogether.

It would be only too easy to move into a discussion of what consciousness is at this point, but that would take us away from our theme of the personal god, and it is on this that I wish to concentrate. Yet we cannot move too far away from such a question, because it is integral to our understanding of

what happened to human beings during the third millennium. Conscious of being conscious they seem not to have been, but conscious by way of *reacting* to their environment and to one another they certainly were. This fact clears the ground for Jaynes' approach to how consciousness functioned in relation to the "I", and it does not seem to have functioned in the way we generally think it functioned. Jaynes says simply that we are "continually reacting to things in ways that have no phenomenal component in consciousness whatever",¹⁰ and this fact speaks of our only being conscious *of being conscious* from time to time. *That*, in a nutshell, is the problem we have to fully comprehend. If we do not recognise that there is a problem, then we have simply not cottoned on to the explosive nature of what Jaynes is highlighting - we are behaving mostly in an unconscious manner during our waking hours as psychiatry has recognised for a long, long time. We are awake, but we are not conscious. We are engaged in conversation, but we are not necessarily conscious. We are reacting subtly to all sorts of stimuli, but we are not necessarily conscious. We are reading the words on this page, but we are not . . . Ah, now we are; and that is Jaynes' point exactly.

So what if we never bother to wake up and remember that we are conscious human beings, that we have the ability to shift focus and become conscious of being conscious? What then? Would it make any difference? Would we be able to detect that we had forgotten to be conscious of being conscious? The answer is No. We would not know. We would be quite *unconscious* of the fact that we were functioning perfectly well without a vestige of consciousness registering on us as an existential fact. And it is this rather startling fact that has to be appreciated before we can assimilate what was going on in Mesopotamia all these millennia ago. Jayne's postulates that here was no subjective recognition of a personal space, no "I" to punctuate the days and years, no sense of self to break the internal trance of obedience to the god. They were living inside a cocoon of mind from which there was no escape. This is hard to imagine and to accept until we consider that we spend much of our time in a similar (but not identical) state, a state of

suspended subjectivity, a state of *reactivity* which can last for hours or even days without as *waking up* to that fact.

The point of this discussion is that the little gods not only helped produce a sense of connection with the big gods, they also inadvertently strengthened the sense of separation from the larger gods and at the same time highlighted the idea of the personal, the small, the intimate. It was a two-way traffic of influences which must have eventually helped rupture the once cosy bicameral connection and produce, in combination with the god's words as commands committed to paper, the first inklings of decision-making without divine assistance. For as Jaynes points out, written commands could be ignored, whereas injunctions straight from "the god within" could not. Which suggests that the voices began to break down and fall silent, that the gods began to withdraw as the clamour of large, complex societies increased, and that the advent of writing developed on the gods' behalf was in fact the principle reason for the gods' final disappearing act. Relying more and more on the god's words transferred to static written forms, to the god's words repeated endlessly out of the original context, the individual could, in a rudimentary fashion, sort of forget to remember to obey. And in the growing, stuttering silence which developed within the individual as the voice of the gods petered out, the first of many recalcitrant thoughts began to take shape - thoughts which at first utterly astonished the thinker.

In their stimulating book *The Hiram Key*, Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas confirm Jaynes' basic observations when they note that the relationship between the Sumerians and their gods noticeably declined during the eighteenth century BCE. It was at this point that the personal gods (who were generally nameless) took on particular importance as "guardians" of the individual, and were felt to be specifically related to the individual who conversed with them. Such gods were inherited from within the family, from the father, and as such lay behind the generally misunderstood statement "he worshipped the god of his fathers". The term "father" in this sense did not refer to the nation, but to the family of the

individual, and expressed both identity and birthright. Looked after by his personal god, an individual could however be deserted by his god for not paying close enough attention to his god's requirements, or for directly disobeying his personal god in some fashion.¹¹ The great gods were already fading from everyday life, and the personal gods were all that was left to keep the individual in his or her place. The great gods were still named and called upon, but the voices which had once been hallucinated from them no longer functioned. They were now just pieces of stone, empty-eyed giants whose mouths were equally empty. And so a power-vacuum formed, and into that curious psychic emptiness flew not only the angelic guardians, but also the dark powers and shadows of individual subjectivity made dualistically concrete.

It is interesting to note that subjectively conscious human beings were at their most cruel when attempting to enforce the secondhand, written words of their now silent gods. The whole society had hung together when the god's voice was distinct, and it had even managed a semblance of unity when the voices became intermittent; but when the terrible silence struck there was nothing to fall back on but the violence generally used against other societies and their gods. So the great codes of human behaviour appeared, the codes of Hammurabi and Moses, and with them the rise of aristocratically based priesthoods with the power to ruthlessly enforce whatever they claimed the god had said. The gods may have fallen silent, but the priesthoods in each society were all a clamour with their *divined* pronouncements and demands. No longer the certainty of directly inspired words and concepts, more a process of intuition, or guessing, a foreseeing or predicting or conjecturing which quickly deteriorated into a self-serving nightmare where external law replaced inner contract.

The predicament of third-millennium man was that he eventually shed his slave like bicameral relationship with the gods and found himself stranded on the human side of the consciousness continuum - he became subjectively isolated and began to trade ideas with himself. Alone where he had once been in a relationship, he did everything in his power to re-

establish that relationship, but instead inadvertently distanced himself further still from the very gods he wished to draw close to, so setting up an ever strengthening conscious barrier. And so the little household gods proliferated, and man's sense of his own existence in relation to such personal forces began in turn to personalise and strengthen his rudimentary sense of self, and when the process was complete he stepped out into the possibility of a life without any gods whatsoever. So the gods receded, and in all but name, statue and written text vanished from sight and hearing. But they were in fact still there, lurking in the shadows of consciousness as nudgings from another realm, and would sometimes unexpectedly break through the now strongly evolved subjective barrier in reverie or dream to reinstate their divine claim on the individual.

Our predicament, by way of comparison, is that we have completely lost sight of our bicameral beginnings, have had to wait until the appearance of a Jaynes to make similar observations by others academically respectable, and are now unconscious prisoners of subjective consciousness in much the same manner as we were once prisoners of objectively perceived divinity. Prisoners of a low-grade reality because it has never quite dawned on us that the reality we deal with on a minute by minute basis is lacking a prime ingredient - a sense of self - we function mostly without any sense of self, relate artificially (even when emotionally charged) to others caught in exactly the same trap of "reactive" consciousness, and the result is a world of misunderstanding and truncated reasoning. We are not present. We are fundamentally absent. We are on a mental holiday from our own space. We are no better than zombies. No. Not quite as bad as that; but damned near it. We do have the ability to wake up, and from time to time do so, but have the habit of again re-entering the zombie-like state so quickly that we do not properly detect that we have been awake and fall immediately back into the sleep of self-forgetfulness. If not concerned with philosophical questions, we imagine a continuity of self in time and space which in fact is without substance in existential terms, and only hazily sense that this is the root of our problems. We do not *understand* one

another, and seldom bring an authentic sense of our own innate existence to the innumerable social contracts we so robotically engage in.

On the other hand we categorically deny the existence of a self on any level, and in doing so become a menace not only to ourselves, and others, but also to the world we so outrageously inhabit as non-habited beings. Like the behaviourist who not so long ago could deny the existence of consciousness with a straight face, but never ever doubted his own, we can also deny ourselves a "self" and inadvertently fall into the trap of a self-fulfilling prophesy. Forgetting to remember that we tend to forget ourselves most of the time, we succumb to our own private system of alienation and confirm our own worst fears.

The Hebrews

The earliest sections of the Old Testament are most probably borrowings from earlier centuries, and from a variety of countries, and did not necessarily take place either in the time-order given, or even entail the people nominated. The nomadic Hebrews, or Khabiru (also sometimes termed Hapiru, Habiru or Abiru), are known to have borrowed heroic stories, songs and sermons from others for their own use, and out of these literary artifacts constructed the beginnings of a linear history for themselves. This is not to say that they did not possess story-histories of their own, simply that they had an eye for a good yarn, a longing to understand their own origins in the larger context of prehistory, and an eventual historical purpose which helped transform nomadic wanderings into something a little more structured and attractive.

The Genesis story of the Garden of Eden, for instance, is Sumerian in origin, and many of the cities mentioned in Genesis (Ur, Larsa and Haram) belonged to that early civilisation. Before the time of the Hebrews kings the people were overseen by "judges"; this is seen in the fact that the ancient Sumerians were deeply concerned with "justice", not merely with rules and regulations as the later Babylonians

were. The Jewish New Year is a period of evaluation when human behaviour is weighed, and it is probably no coincidence that the Sumerians had a deity who annually judged the people, and that Abraham, the acclaimed father of the Jewish nation, came from the Sumerian city of Ur where the ancient stories would have been well known.

But perhaps the most telling overlap between these cultures is the Genesis story of creation and the unearthing of an artefact in Mesopotamia depicting an almost identical storyline. The image unearthed was of a serpent entwined on a tree bearing some kind of fruit, and the Mesopotamian texts speak of someone called "Adapa" being granted knowledge, but *not eternal life* by the god Enki. By itself, such a find would be enough to make one suspect cross-fertilisation of concepts, but when we discover that the Hebrew for "serpent" is *nahash*, and that the root of this word, NHSH, means not only "snake" but also to "decipher or find out", and that Enki was the Sumerian god of knowledge, then the whole puzzle of Genesis begins to fall into place. For depicted along with serpent, tree and fruit is the moon's crescent, and this symbol apparently stood for none other than the god Enki.¹² This does rather suggest that the Genesis story has been rearranged to suit some other purpose, and that the idea of knowledge gained at the expense of eternal life is a distorted and truncated version of human beings *waking up* or *consciously emerging* from the god's presence never to return. No longer a slave of the god's all-encompassing will, Adapa-cum-Adam became a person in his own right, a subjectively conscious individual to whom re-entry back into the god's space would have to be accomplished by other means.

Writing of the Genesis period, Paul Johnson notes the anomaly of an unvisualised God always being presented as a person. Curious. And this God who is a "person" makes moral decisions, so presenting man with moral categories. Johnson says that this differentiated the Jews from the nations around them, who worshipped all sorts of things. And so the Jews are portrayed right from the very beginning as knowing right from wrong in an intrinsic fashion. The universe is fundamentally

moral because God is moral, and this moral God eventually shows his hand by attempting to destroy the whole human race with a great flood because he likes neither their attitude nor their behaviour. And so we have the story of Noah and his ark, and the rest is Jewish history at its best.

Well, not quite. In 1965 the British Museum discovered two tablets referring to the flood in a deposit at Ur, Abraham's city of origin, and in this much earlier written record we again have a god regretting that he has made the human race, and resolving to destroy it with an avalanche of water. But it is not to be, for once again the god Enki appears and the humans are warned. Knowledge indeed. And twice purveyed to human beings by a god *separate* from the god who first banishes them, and then tries to exterminate them. Something odd is going on here. But what? Might it be that the god of knowledge, Enki, is in fact human consciousness subjectively at work within itself, and that the god of destruction is nothing more than the fears of the people projected on to the undoubtedly dramatic upheavals then talking place in nature? Our problem now is that we imagine people in the distant past to have been just like ourselves; that is, similar, if not identical, to ourselves re our mental processes. But it would seem that they were quite different; their mental state may first have been totally subjective. Later Jewish texts will make Noah a righteous man, so creating a moral context for the story, but in the original tale the survivor is a priest-king called Ziusudra, king of the south Babylonian city of Shuruppak, and reigning in 2900 BCE.

What interests me about the Jewish account of the Creation is that their unvisualised god is presented as a person. Why? Who is this invisible God who goes walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day? And how can Adam and Eve hope to hide from this their creator? He shouts to them, and they hear his voice, and "come out of hiding" to speak with him about *what has happened to them*. How odd. And how odd that they should suddenly realise that they are naked, whereas before they were oblivious to their nakedness. One minute unconscious of their state, the next minute conscious of it. One minute working for God, then all of a sudden possessed of

knowledge which in some fashion made them not unlike gods themselves. And dangerous too now that they had knowledge, for they could now differentiate between good and evil like God himself, and as such might decide to go all the way and become immortal by partaking of God's own special diet - the fruit of the tree of life. Curious. And even more curious that all of this is a mishmash of folklore and mythology and history laced now with morality and made into the reason that human beings first lost contact with their God. Disobedience is the keyword. Guilt is the result. Punishment is the reward. And what a punishment. Exiled into a hard-edged reality where they have to survive by their own efforts, by their own intelligence, by their new power to decipher and find out. And before that terrible moment of exile struck, the image of them trying to explain and justify their actions to a God who was there yet curiously not there, a God with whom they had a close personal relationship, a God who had taken to leaving them to their own devices knowing the dangers.

I think all of the above is self-explanatory within the context of Julian Jaynes' thesis of the bicameral mind; it is very apparent as one reads the text. And it does not take too much imagination to realise that the God Adam walks and talks with is actually himself as a split persona - he is simply talking to himself *as if* to another. And Eve as the weak link in the chain is no more than a telling glimpse into who woke up first - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is exactly what it says it is, it is a new capacity of mind. But the whole story has been literalised; it is now long after the event of bicameral breakdown, and the writer/compiler of this ancient Jewish text is simply trying to make sense out of something that no longer makes sense. But he recognises the borrowed text's importance, realises that he is dealing with an ancient conception of creation predating Hebrew existence, and with the sureness of a good theologian creates a moral context to explain the story's curious contents.

By the time of writing the Hebrew God was one God, he was undivided, and that in spite of the fact that Genesis has God say "Behold, the man is become one of *us*, to know good

and evil”.¹³ (emphasis added) Us? Is there a Sumerian pantheon of divinities lurking in the background here? But not for long; the Hebrew conception of God as one God will evolve quickly and single this people out as different from their neighbours. Well, not quite. They will certainly evolve the notion of one great God, but it will take many, many centuries to make that God the one and only God of Israel. And this is where the problem lies, for as Paul Johnson points out in his history of this people, the Jews eventually saw everything in their past as providentially designed, and moral in context. Every step taken was either towards God, or away from God, so making the times away from God an intrinsic part of their journey with God. That, however, is theology, it is not history. The whole history of the Israelites is the history of a people at odds with itself, and with its conception of God. The Israelite God shows himself to be peevish, jealous and insensitive. He is just a big kid with too much power. He is a bully in need of a good psychiatrist.

The Very Reverend Tom Wright (Dean of Lichfield) would reject my statement that much of Jewish history is merely theology in disguise. He would argue that such an arrangement *is* history, and his argument is based on the belief that there is no split between God, history and logic. If we believe in any kind of God at all, then that God must be there *in* history in some form at all times.

This is problematical; it hinges on the idea of a “conscious” God, a God who in some sense or other is a “person”, and as such drags us back into the kind of mental space harboured by Jesus’ disciples, and used by the early Christian Church to excuse its worst excesses. It is, in other words, an epistemological dead end, and it is equally deadly in terms of extracting ourselves from the religious conflicts of the twentieth century. What is going on around us, and *in* us, has to be our touchstone; we simply cannot afford the luxury of perceiving God as an overblown human neighbour whose characteristics are mirror-reflections of our own in a state of ultimate perfection. If God is “conscious” in any sense similar to ourselves, and “moral” in some vastly extended human

manner, then He does indeed constitute the menace many have suspected Him of being. For when all is said and done, such a God is no God at all, He is a fantasy of the human imagination which must necessarily fail in His humanly fabricated purpose because of constant aberration this end of the space-time continuum. If Christianity is presently the highest reflection of God on earth, the only true measure of what God is and means, then we are surely in trouble.

The Textual God

Jesus personalised the God of Israel and made him his “father”, so becoming a “son of God” by definition. He entered into a new relationship with Israel’s God, and in doing so set in motion a spiritual sensibility which reintroduced his followers to their hidden, bicameral aspect. But there was a complication. It was no longer a matter of simply returning to the old relationship with the god within, for subjective consciousness with its strong analog “I” could not be dismantled, merely circumvented from time to time. And anyway, the whole idea of God had undergone a transformation; he was now a textual God, a God of the written word who could only be glimpsed by way of prayer and the Law. Only through the Torah could God be known. Or as the Gospel of John puts it, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”¹⁴ It was now the recorded history of Israel and her Laws which constituted contact with God, the voice of the prophets having fallen silent long before. And so what a stir when John the Baptist turned up with his message of repentance for the individual. Who had ever heard of such a thing? The individual? Wasn’t God’s will only done when the “nation” turned towards him? Wasn’t it a collective effort that God expected?

The Baptist's message of repentance changed the whole focus of Jewish religious life, and after John’s arrest Jesus took over and developed the idea of personal repentance further still. For in his spiritual vision personal repentance heralded a drawing close to God in a new way, and as a result of this shift

in religious psychology God was intuited to reciprocate. The only problem with this was that the God who reciprocated for the early Christians was not the God who had walked with Adam in the cool of the day, it was the textual God of the Torah who came on line. Gigantic in conception due to having swallowed all the other gods of antiquity, God as the Word was too much for the subjective "I" to handle in a personal sense; he short-circuited human psychology and the result was a scrambled-egg version of Judaism, and much else. Trying to digest the textual God of Judaism drawn near, the early Christians inadvertently released within themselves something of the old bicameral relationship with the self, but in the end this activity of the mind intertwined with the heart broke down into the recorded charismatic chaos of Paul's enthusiastic congregations. Contact with what lay beyond the subjective "I" had been made, but it was being forced through a theological filter which inadvertently distorted its shape and meaning. Recognising that there was a problem with the early Christian (Nazarene) Church on more than one level, the later Church curtailed such activity and channelled it through a return to reliance on Scripture. The Word was back in place with a vengeance, and to keep it all "human", to keep it simultaneously personal and transcendent, the messenger was eventually transformed into the message by way of interpretive gloss. Jesus was now the Word made flesh. The problem was solved.

But the problem was not solved; it would reappear. Century after century the problem of Jesus being made into the Word, into God, into the message of good tidings for all human beings began to reveal itself as no more than an interpretive mistake. But too late to change. Too late to do anything about it once the Church had become a powerful institution utterly dependant for its status and credibility on that mistake. A Catch-22 not only with the capacity to disorient the participants, but progressively dangerous in its overall effect as societies grew ever more complex. And so the necessity to resort to the (s)word, to killing, to murder, to segregation and genocide so that God's blueprint for human salvation could

remain steadily operative. The textual God was on the loose, and there was no arguing with him. His voice could not actually be heard, but his past commands could be heard loud and clear in the mouths of his priesthood. Forget the process of history, the process of science and medicine, the process of philosophy and mathematics. Forget the natural process of human development and relationship. It was all just a matter of belief, a matter of focus and faith and human folly brought to heel. God was in control *even* when everything was out of control, just as the Jews had continued to be his chosen people when estranged from his presence through outright idolatry. There was no escape. No escape in life, and no escape in death. Submission to the “God of the texts” was the answer, the answer we each had to recognise and act upon before the blackness of death caught us in its irreversible clutches. The God of the texts. The God who had lost his voice and could now only be heard by way of priestly guesswork.

References and Notes:

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- 3 Ibid, p. 91.
- 4 Ibid, p. 199.
- 5 Ibid, p. 97.
- 6 Ibid, p. 85.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid, p. 74.
- 9 Ibid, p. 195.
- 10 Ibid, p. 22.
- 11 Knight, Christopher & Lomas, Robert, *The Hiram Key*, Random House, London 1996, p. 88.
- 12 Sitchen, Zecharia, *The 12th Planet*, Avon Books, New York 1978, p. 371.
- 13 Genesis 3: 22.
- 14 John 1: 1.

