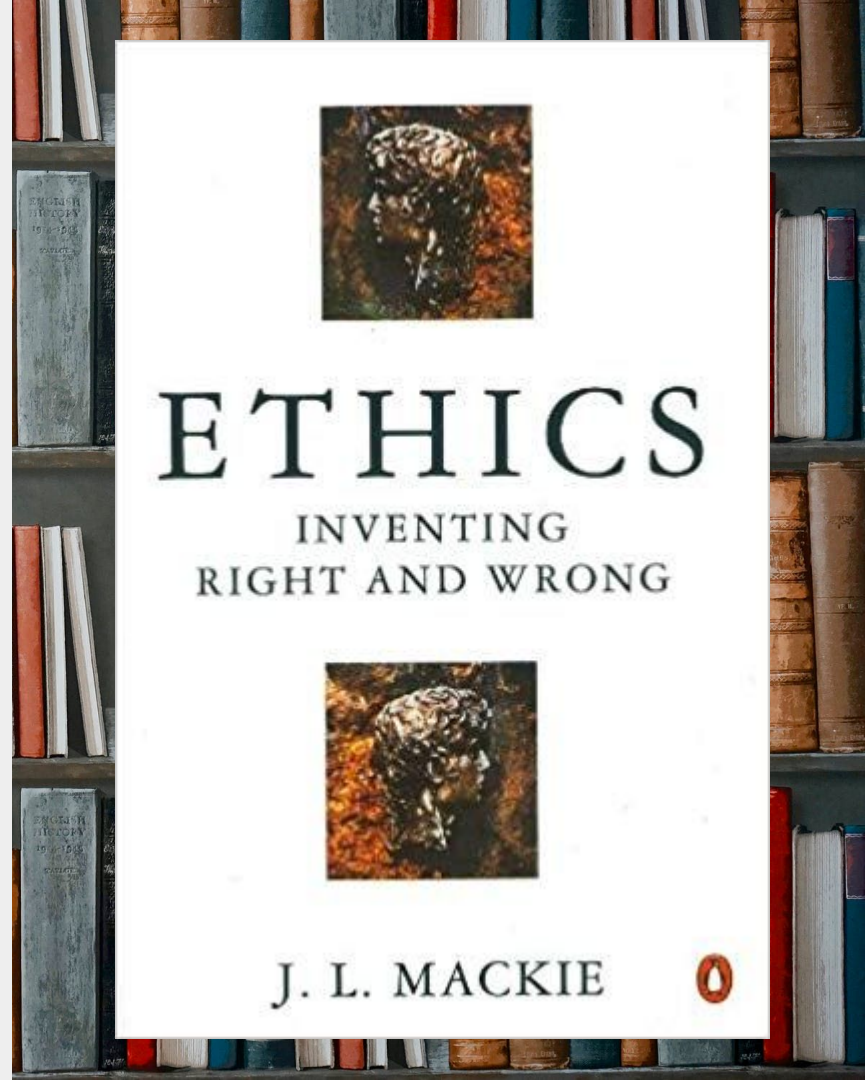


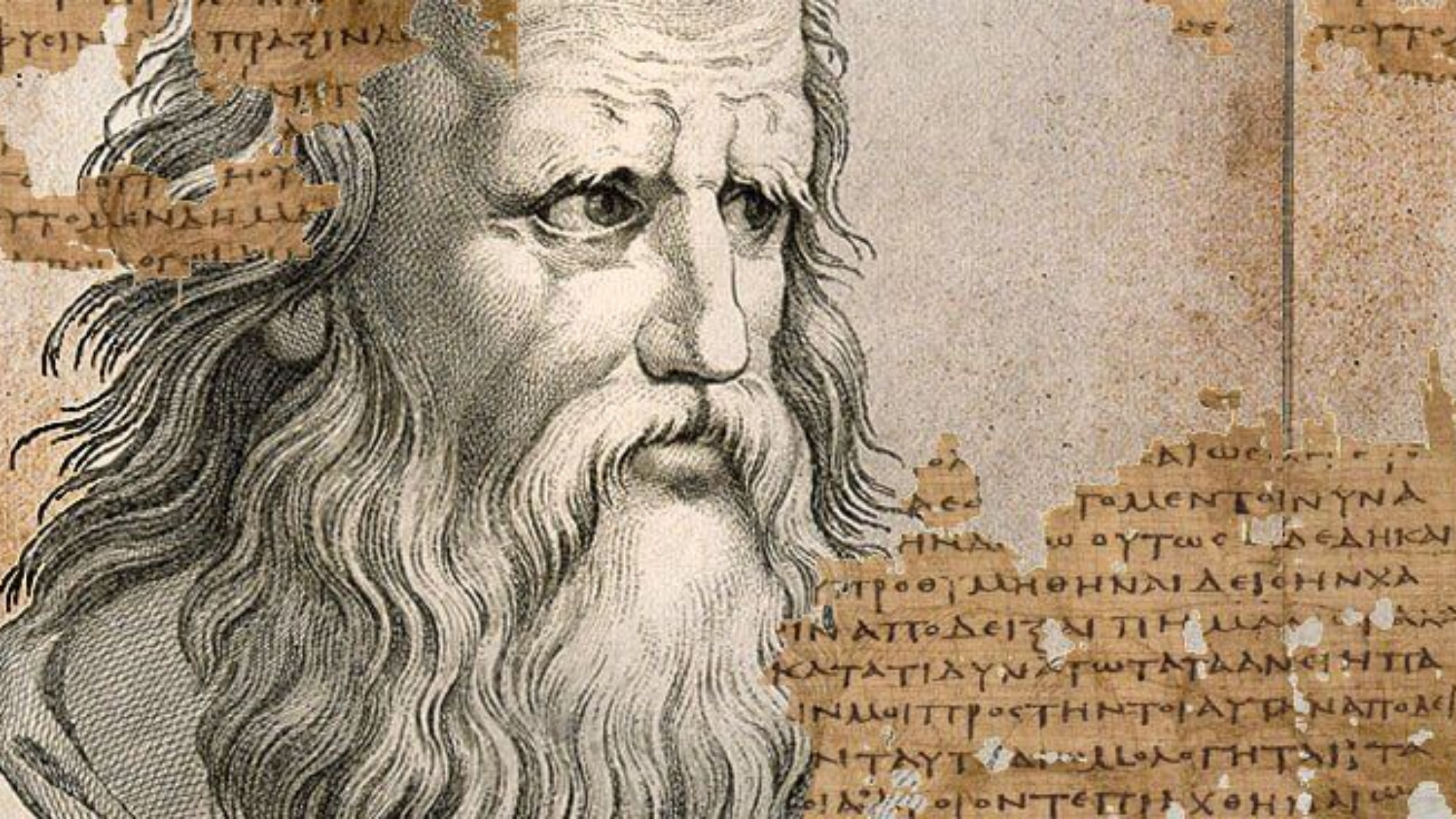
A vertical light streak on a black background, featuring a gradient from yellow at the top to red at the bottom. The streak is slightly blurred and has a soft, ethereal quality.

# Eyes in the Sky



In his influential *Inventing Right and Wrong*, John Mackie (1990) discusses how pervasive Social Contract Theory has been, spanning back millenia...





ΥΟΙΝ... ΠΡΑΞΙΝΑ

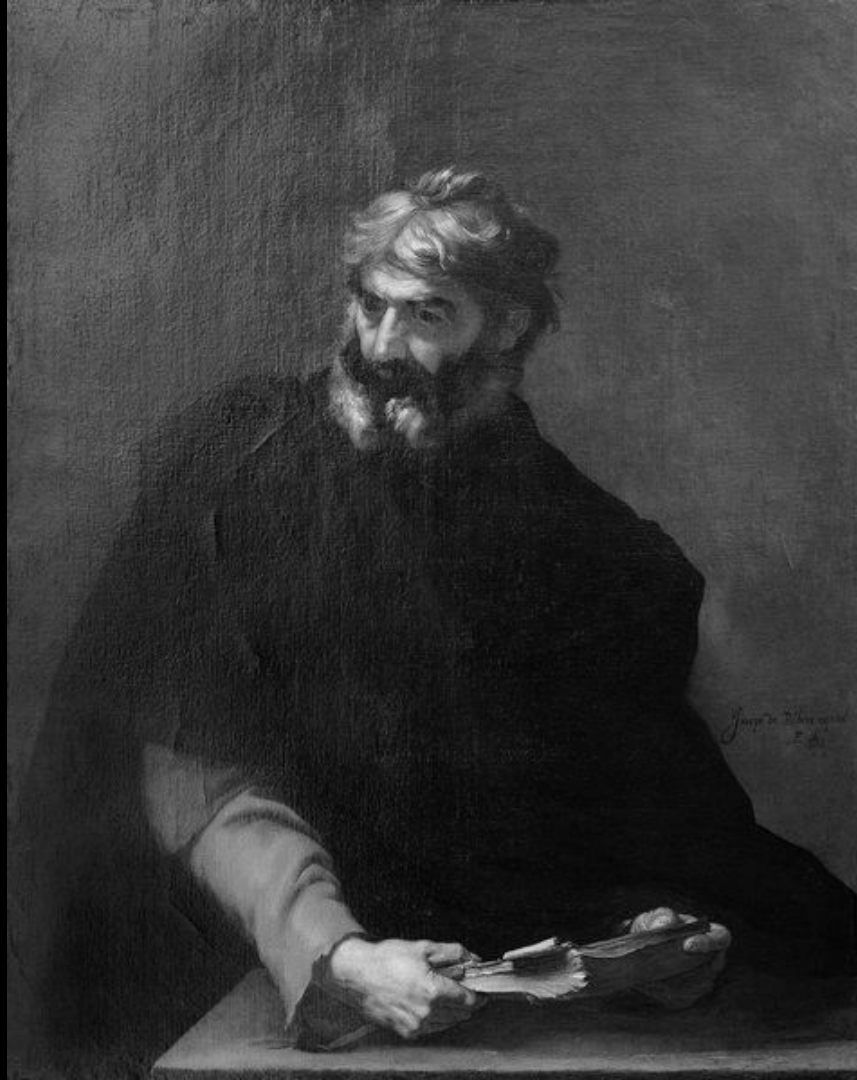
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... ΟΙ... ΟΝΤΕ... Π... ΧΘΗ... Λ... Ω

“This [SCT] is a useful approach, which has been stressed by a number of thinkers.

There is a colourful version of it in Plato’s dialogue *Protagoras*, where the sophist Protagoras incorporates it in an admittedly mythical account of the creation and early history of the human race.”





**“At their creation men were, as compared with other animals, rather meagerly equipped.**

**They had less in the way of claws and strength and speed and fur or scales, and so on, to enable them to find food and to protect them from enemies and the elements....”**

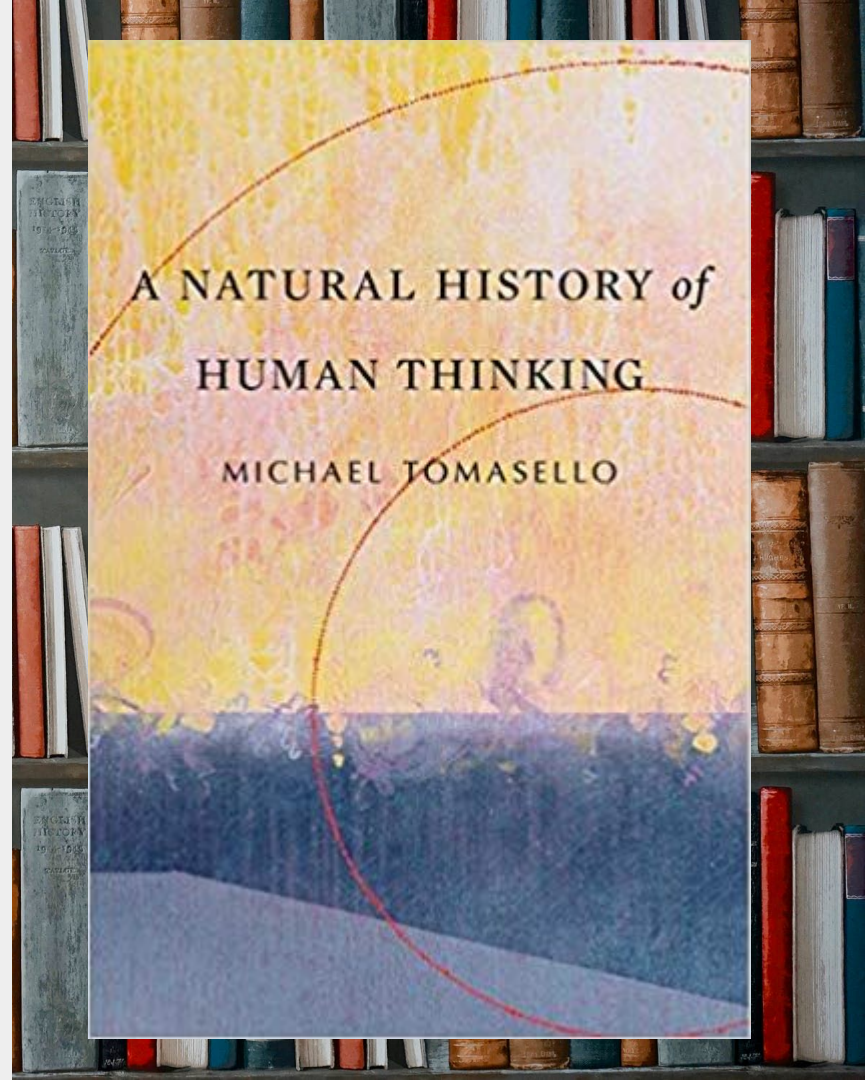
“Finally Zeus took pity on them and sent Hermes to give men *aidōs* (which we can perhaps translate as ‘a moral sense’) and *dikē* (law and justice) to be the ordering principles of cities and the bonds of friendship” (Mackie 1990: 108).



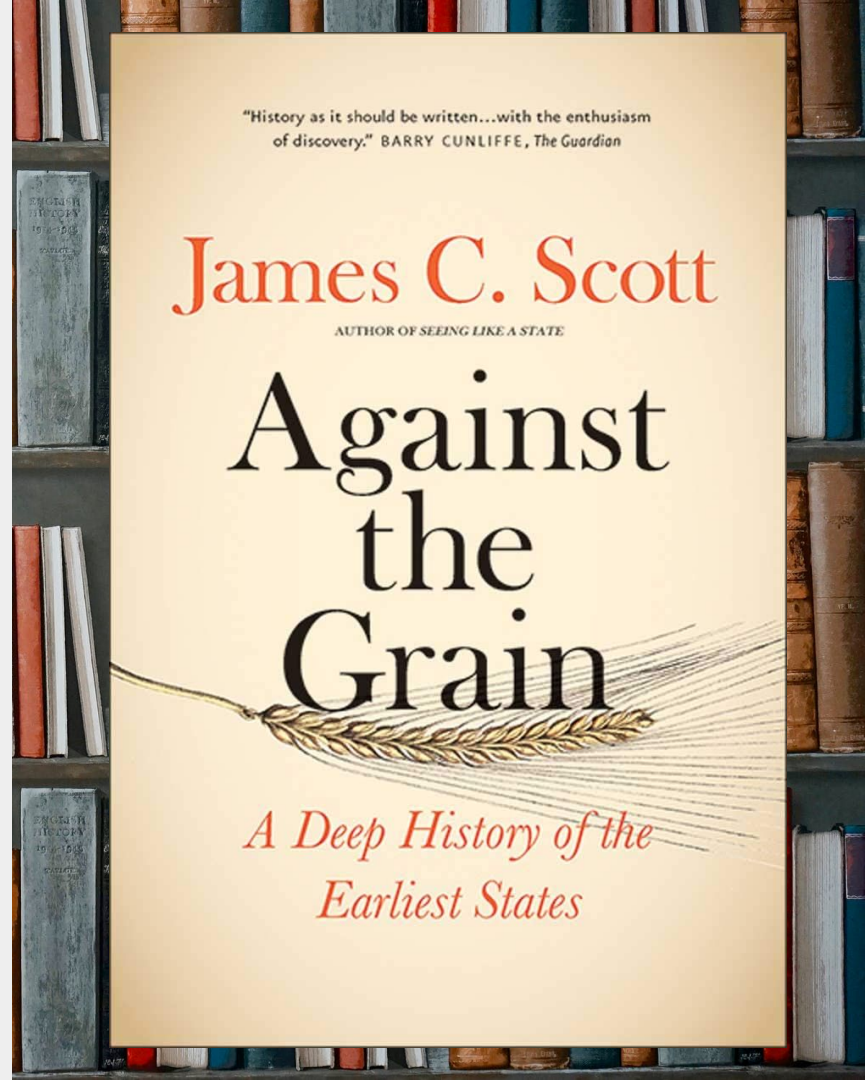
**Yet, despite acknowledging its influence, many thinkers, like Mackie and Turchin, do not believe SCT is accurate or tells the whole story....**



**“Some conventional cultural practices are the product of explicit agreement. But this is not how things got started; a social contract theory of the origins of social conventions would presuppose many of the things it needed to explain, such as advanced communication skills in which to make the agreement” (Tomasello 2014: 86).**



New evidence is leading deep history scholars to the conclusion that the earliest states could not hold their population and they used coercion to reinvigorate their pool of subjects (see Scott 2017).





**“If the formation of the earliest states were shown to be largely a coercive enterprise, the vision of the state, one dear to the heart of such social contract theorists as Hobbes and Locke, as a magnet of civil peace, social order, and freedom from fear, drawing people in by its charisma, would have to be re-examined.**

**The early state, in fact, as we shall see, often failed to hold its population. It was exceptionally fragile epidemiologically, ecologically, and politically, and prone to collapse or fragmentation.**

**If, however, the State often broke up, it was not for lack of exercising whatever coercive powers it could muster. Evidence for the extensive use of unfree labor, war captives, indentured servitude, temple slavery, slave markets, forced resettlement in labor colonies, convict labor, and communal slavery (for example, Sparta’s helots) is overwhelming” (Scott 2017: 25-9).**

# **What we want from an ethical theory:**

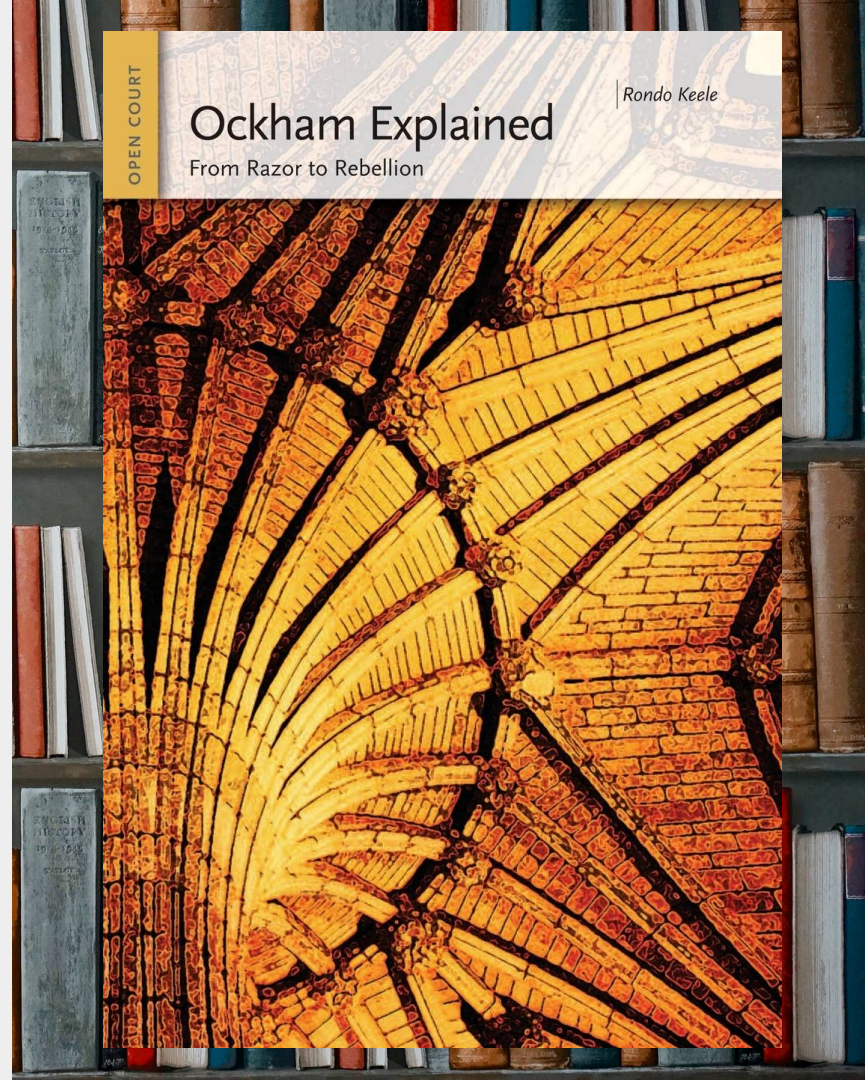
- ❑ Fit in with our moral intuitions**
- ❑ Reflect how we actually form our moral judgments**
- ❑ Resolve our moral debates**
- ❑ Solve the puzzle of human collective action**





**Divine Command Theory:  
Important Concepts**

**In his intellectual biography of William of Ockham, Keele (2010) begins with the historical and ideological context into which Ockham was born.**



**Per Keele (2010: 27), Divine Command Theory typically entails the following theses:**

- **God is the source of moral law.**
- **What God forbids is morally wrong.**
- **What God allows is morally permissible.**
- **The very meaning of “moral” is given by God’s commands.**



**The Divine Command Theorist argues that morality has no cause but God.**

**Morality simply is what God has stipulated it to be.**

**Note:**

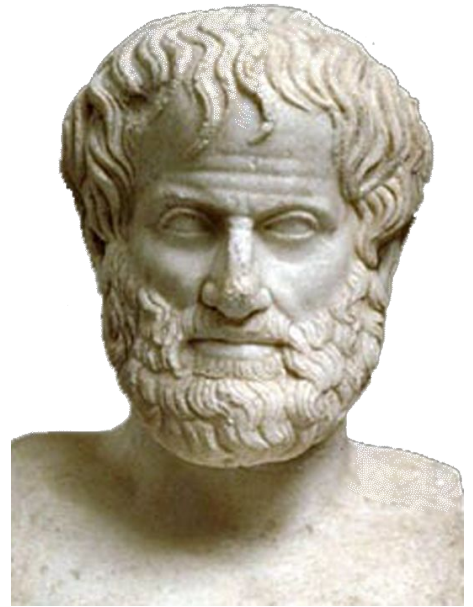
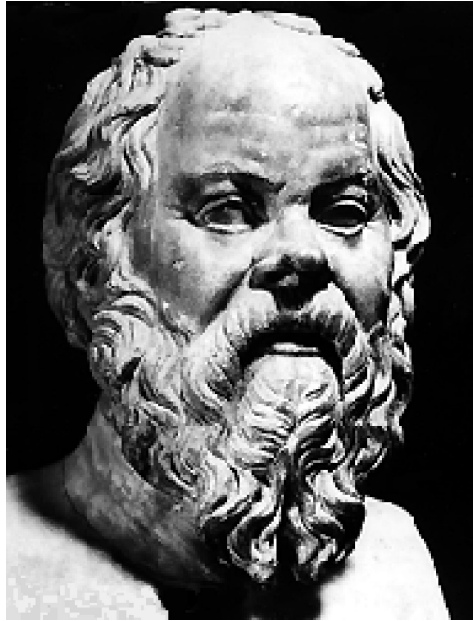
**Divine Command Theory can, of course, be modified for a polytheistic worldview.**

**To really understand Divine Command Theory (DCT), it is helpful to look at an ancient debate between Socrates and Euthyphro...**

ΝΟΗΣΟΝΤΟΙΝΥΝΗΝΔΕΓΩΩΣΠΕΡΛΕΓΟΜΕΝΑΥΘΑΥΤΩΕΙΝΑΙΚΑ  
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# The Euthyphro Dilemma



Socrates: What is piety?

Euthyphro: Me prosecuting my father for murder.

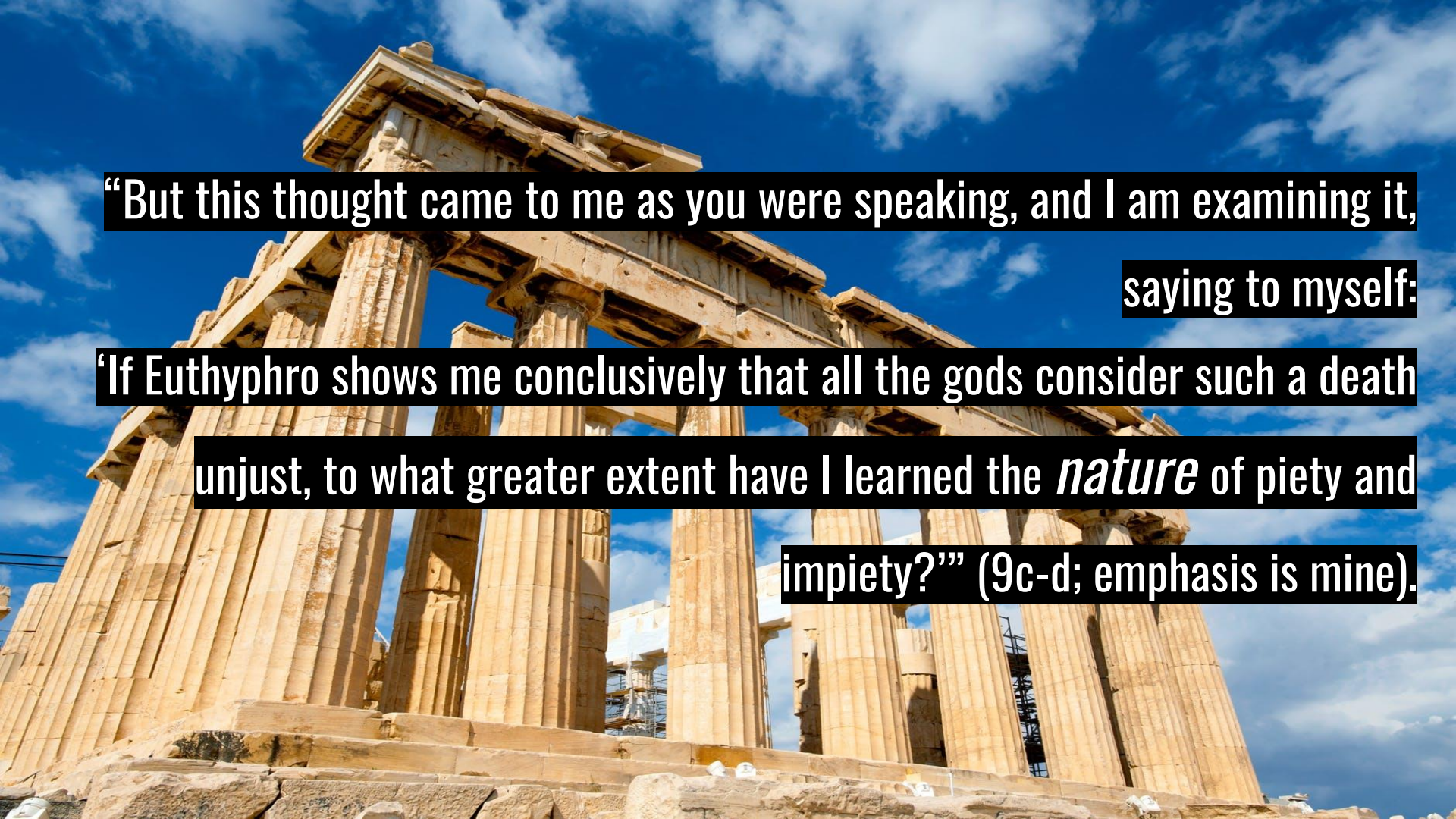
S: Nah, dog. That's just an example. Try again.

E: Piety is what is pleasing to the gods.

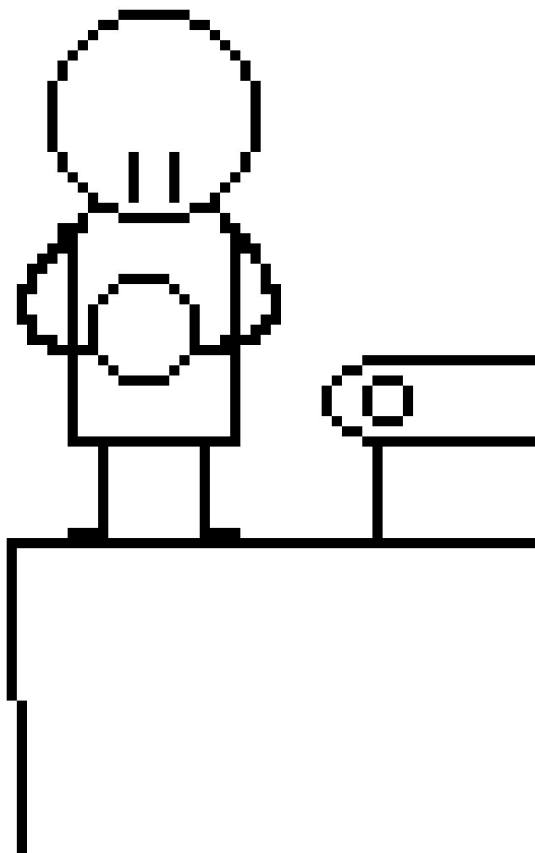
S: But the gods disagree and contradict each other often. This can't be the definitive meaning. Try again.

E: What all the gods *love* is pious and what all the gods *hate* is impious.

S: Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious? Or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?



“But this thought came to me as you were speaking, and I am examining it, saying to myself: ‘If Euthyphro shows me conclusively that all the gods consider such a death unjust, to what greater extent have I learned the *nature* of piety and impiety?’” (9c-d; emphasis is mine).





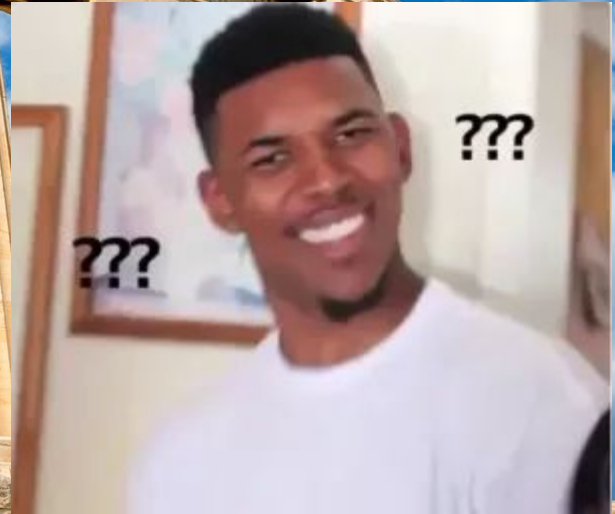
**Socrates: Tell me then, my good sir, to the achievement of what aim does service to the gods tend? You obviously know since you say that you, of all men, have the best knowledge of the divine.**

**Euthyphro: And I am telling the truth, Socrates.**

**Socrates: Tell me then, by Zeus, what is that excellent aim that the gods achieve, using us as their servants?**

**Euthyphro: Many fine things, Socrates.**

**(See 13e.)**



**In the end, and in monotheistic terms,  
Socrates asks...**

Is what is morally good  
commanded by God because it is  
morally good, or is it morally good  
because it is commanded by God?



Either...

**A. Morality exists**

**independent of God and He**

**commands us to obey the**

**moral law...**

Or...

**B. God simply**

**invented morality.**

—

## Reasons to Opt for A(?)

1. To believe B means to believe that some actions are wrong just because God said so. But it seems obvious some things are wrong no matter what.
2. Moreover, God could choose to make some things morally permissible on a whim. This doesn't seem right.

Either...

**A. Morality exists**

**independent of God and He**

**commands us to obey the**

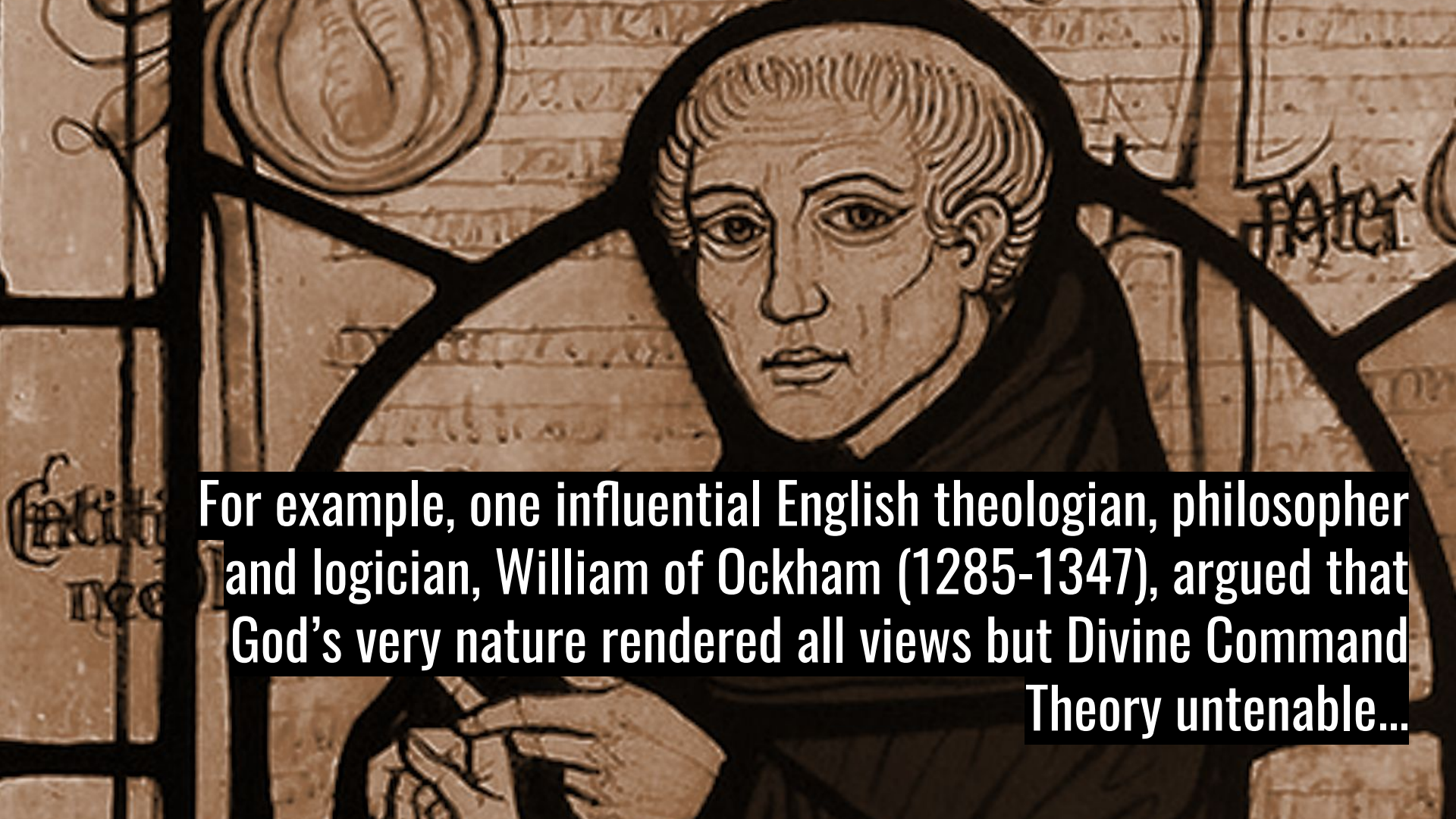
**moral law...**

Or...

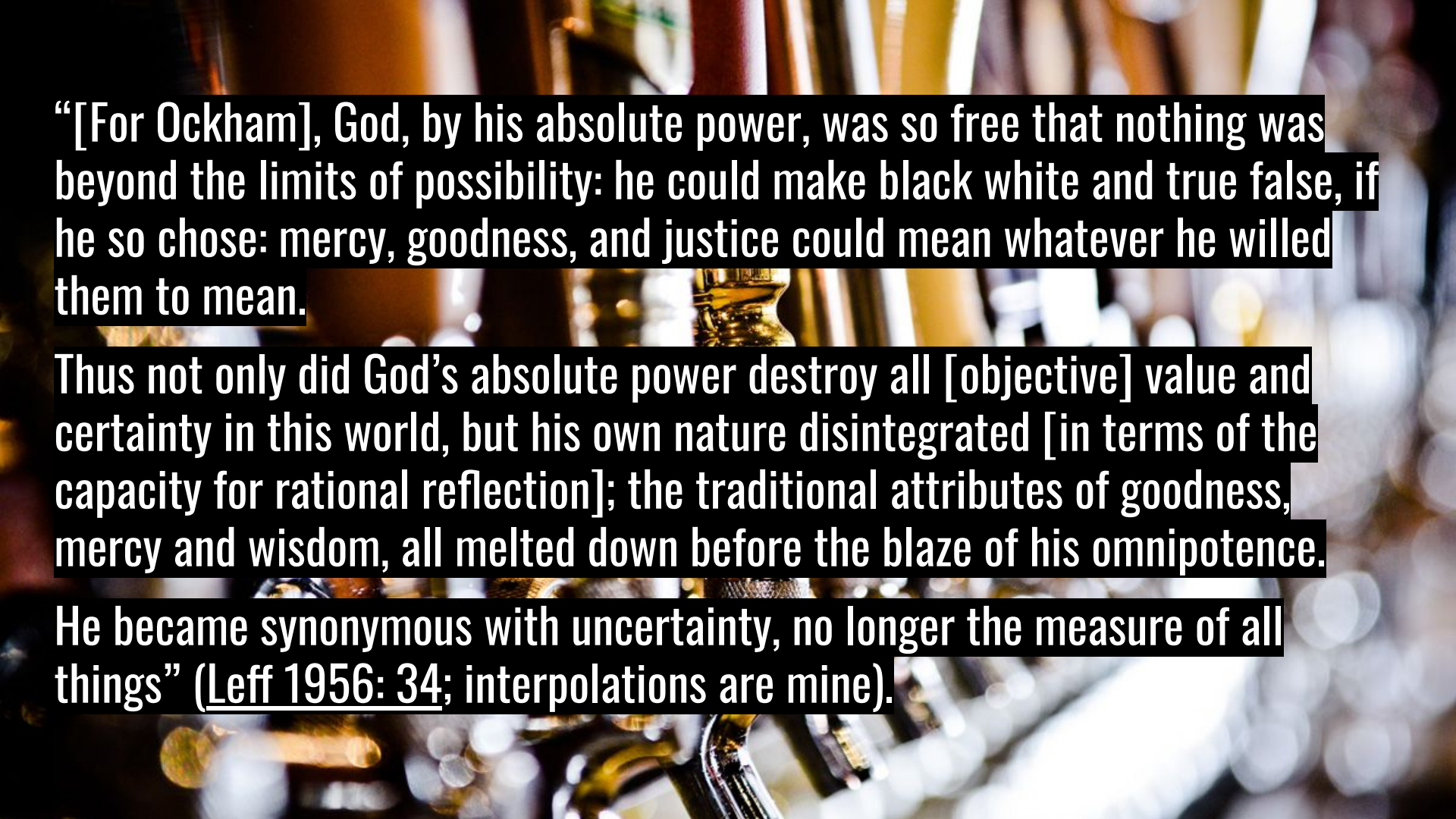
**B. God simply**  
**invented morality.**

—

Divine Command Theorists nevertheless side  
with B...



**For example, one influential English theologian, philosopher and logician, William of Ockham (1285-1347), argued that God's very nature rendered all views but Divine Command Theory untenable...**



“[For Ockham], God, by his absolute power, was so free that nothing was beyond the limits of possibility: he could make black white and true false, if he so chose: mercy, goodness, and justice could mean whatever he willed them to mean.

Thus not only did God’s absolute power destroy all [objective] value and certainty in this world, but his own nature disintegrated [in terms of the capacity for rational reflection]; the traditional attributes of goodness, mercy and wisdom, all melted down before the blaze of his omnipotence.

He became synonymous with uncertainty, no longer the measure of all things” (Leff 1956: 34; interpolations are mine).



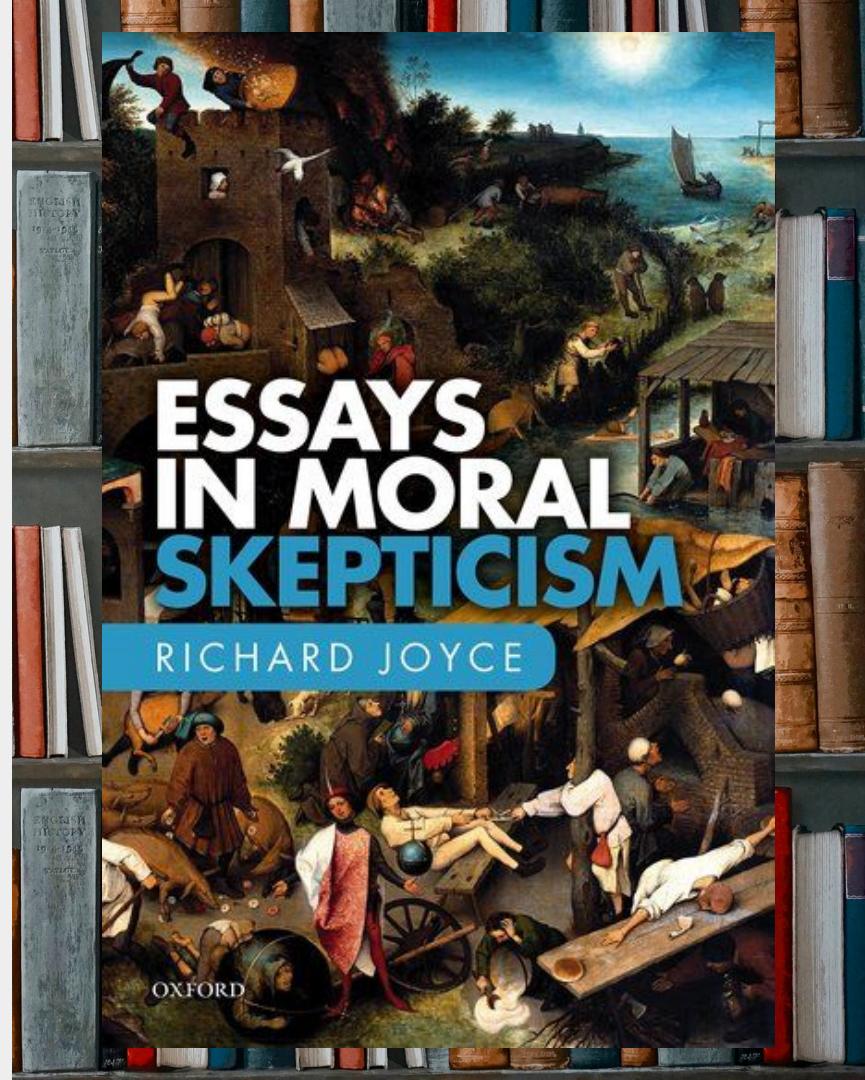


*Food for thought...*

**Question:**

**What if God doesn't exist?**

Some thinkers (e.g., Joyce 2016) both reject the notion of a supernatural being (atheism) *and* also argue that there is something descriptively accurate about Divine Command Theory...



# Normative Claims

Normative claims are those claims which prescribe how something or someone should be.

# Descriptive Claims

**Descriptive claims** are those claims which merely purport to describe how something or someone actually is.



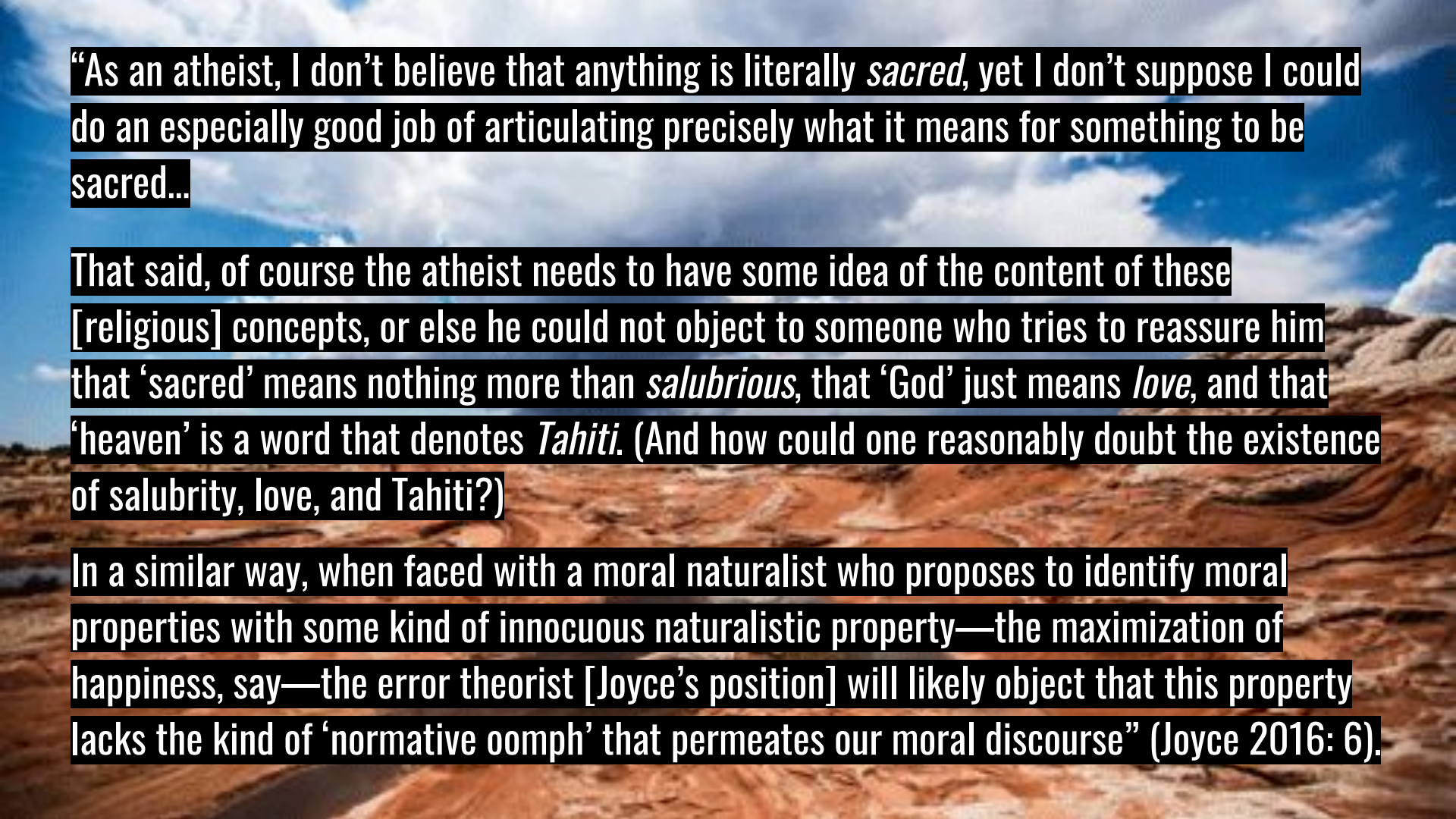
Joyce argues that DCT is *normatively* false, because there is no God, and so God doesn't actually command anything;  
but DCT is *descriptively* accurate, in that the force of moral concepts does seem to come from supernatural beings (as if they actually existed).

\_\_\_\_\_ is morally required.

\_\_\_\_\_ is pleasurable.



\_\_\_\_\_ **maximizes self-interest.**



“As an atheist, I don’t believe that anything is literally *sacred*, yet I don’t suppose I could do an especially good job of articulating precisely what it means for something to be sacred...

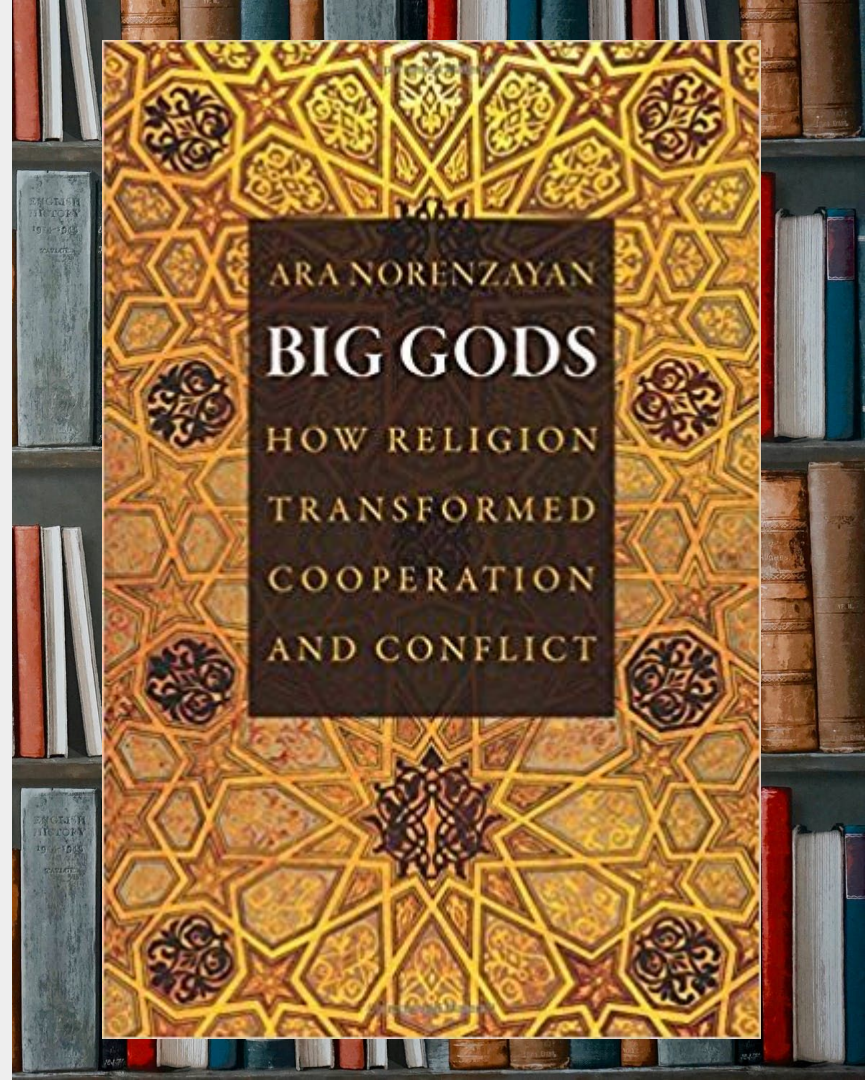
That said, of course the atheist needs to have some idea of the content of these [religious] concepts, or else he could not object to someone who tries to reassure him that ‘sacred’ means nothing more than *salubrious*, that ‘God’ just means *love*, and that ‘heaven’ is a word that denotes *Tahiti*. (And how could one reasonably doubt the existence of salubrity, love, and Tahiti?)

In a similar way, when faced with a moral naturalist who proposes to identify moral properties with some kind of innocuous naturalistic property—the maximization of happiness, say—the error theorist [Joyce’s position] will likely object that this property lacks the kind of ‘normative oomph’ that permeates our moral discourse” (Joyce 2016: 6).

Some researchers go further, arguing that humans, with their ability to construct social realities through cultural evolution, eventually stumbled on the idea of big, powerful, supernatural deities that were morally concerned.

These thinkers claim that “Big Gods” were a necessary element in what enabled society to scale up to the present level of complexity.

(For criticism of this view, click [here](#).)



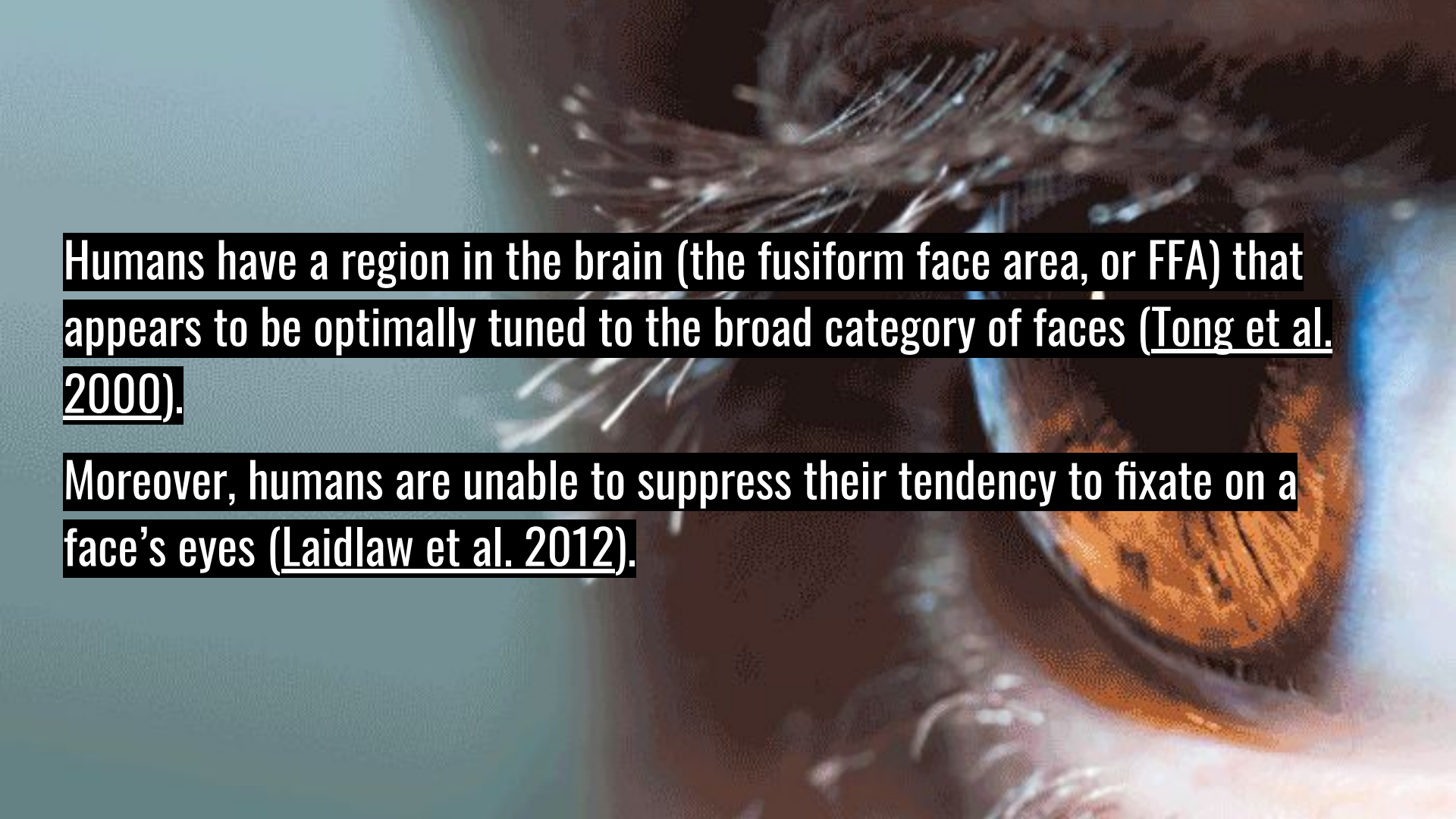
A close-up, high-resolution image of a human eye, showing the iris and eyelashes. The eye is looking slightly to the right. The background is dark and out of focus.

Displaying eye images has been associated with:

- Increased generosity in a “dictator game” where people decide how much money they will share with another person (Haley and Fessler 2005);
- Increased donations to a shared pot in a “public goods game” (Burnham and Hare 2007);
- Decreased littering in a self-service cafeteria, where patrons bus their own tables (Ernest-Jones et al. 2011); and
- contributions to an honesty box used to collect money for drinks in a university coffee room (Bateson et al. 2006).

A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a human eye. The eye is the central focus, showing a dark, almost black iris with some lighter, brownish-orange patterns. The pupil is visible, and there is a small, bright reflection on the surface. The eyelashes are long, dark, and appear slightly blurred, suggesting movement or a shallow depth of field. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue-grey color.

**Ambient darkness and wearing dark glasses increase dishonest and selfish tendencies (Zhong et al. 2010).**

A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a human eye, focusing on the iris and eyelashes. The eye is looking slightly to the right. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white. Overlaid on the image are two black rectangular boxes containing white text.

Humans have a region in the brain (the fusiform face area, or FFA) that appears to be optimally tuned to the broad category of faces (Tong et al. 2000).

Moreover, humans are unable to suppress their tendency to fixate on a face's eyes (Laidlaw et al. 2012).

Religious priming decreases the likelihood of one cheating ([Mazar et al. 2008](#)), even if the primes are subliminal ([Randolph-Seng and Nielsen 2007](#)).

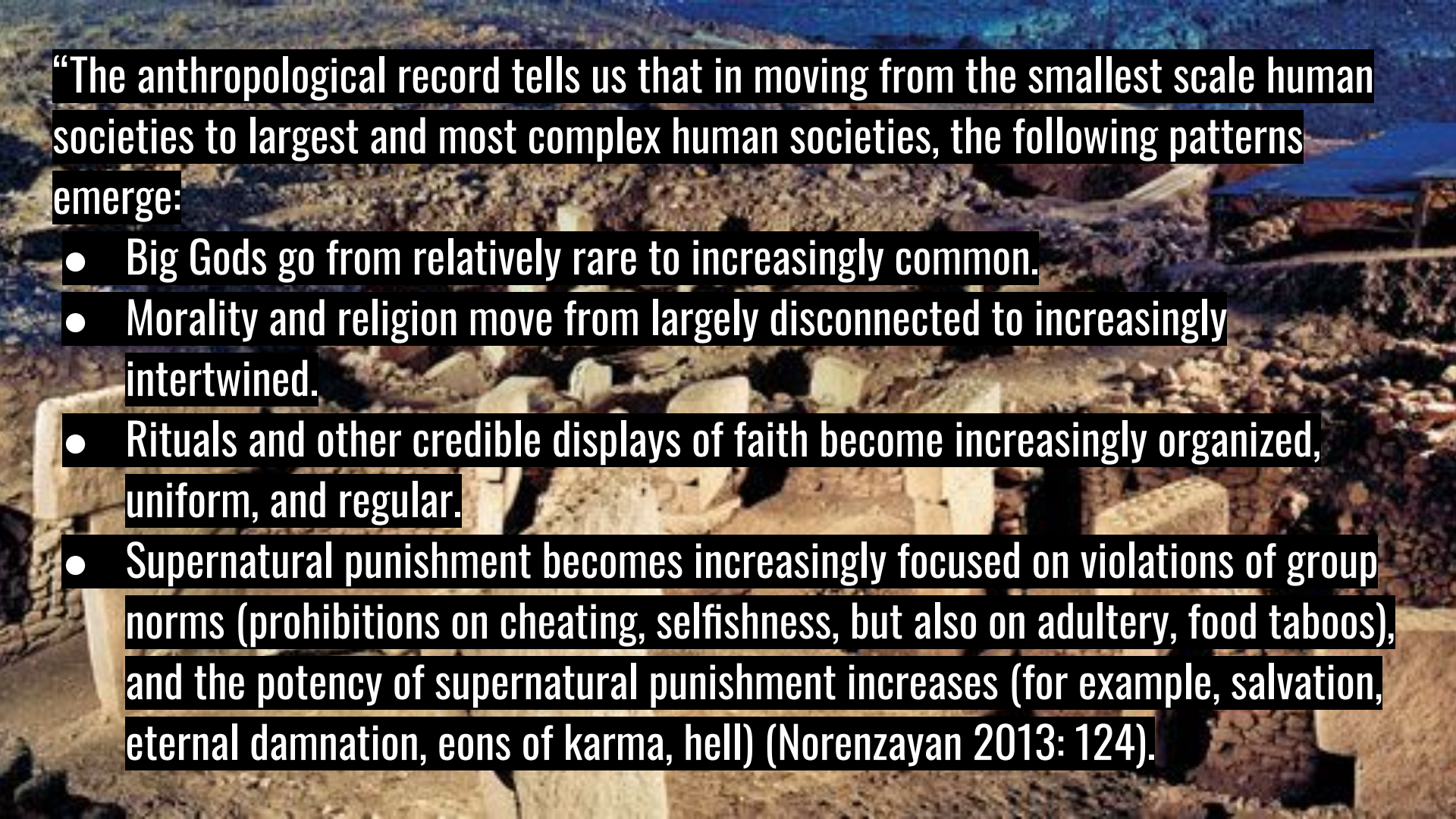
It also increases generosity and cooperation ([Shariff and Norenzayan 2007](#), Ahmed and Salas 2011), as well as increases the likelihood of costly punishment to noncooperators ([McKay et al. 2011](#)).





It's even the case that “those who attend religious services [Sundays] shift their consumption of adult entertainment to other days of the week, despite on average consuming the same amount of adult entertainment as others” ([Edelman 2009: 217-8](#)).





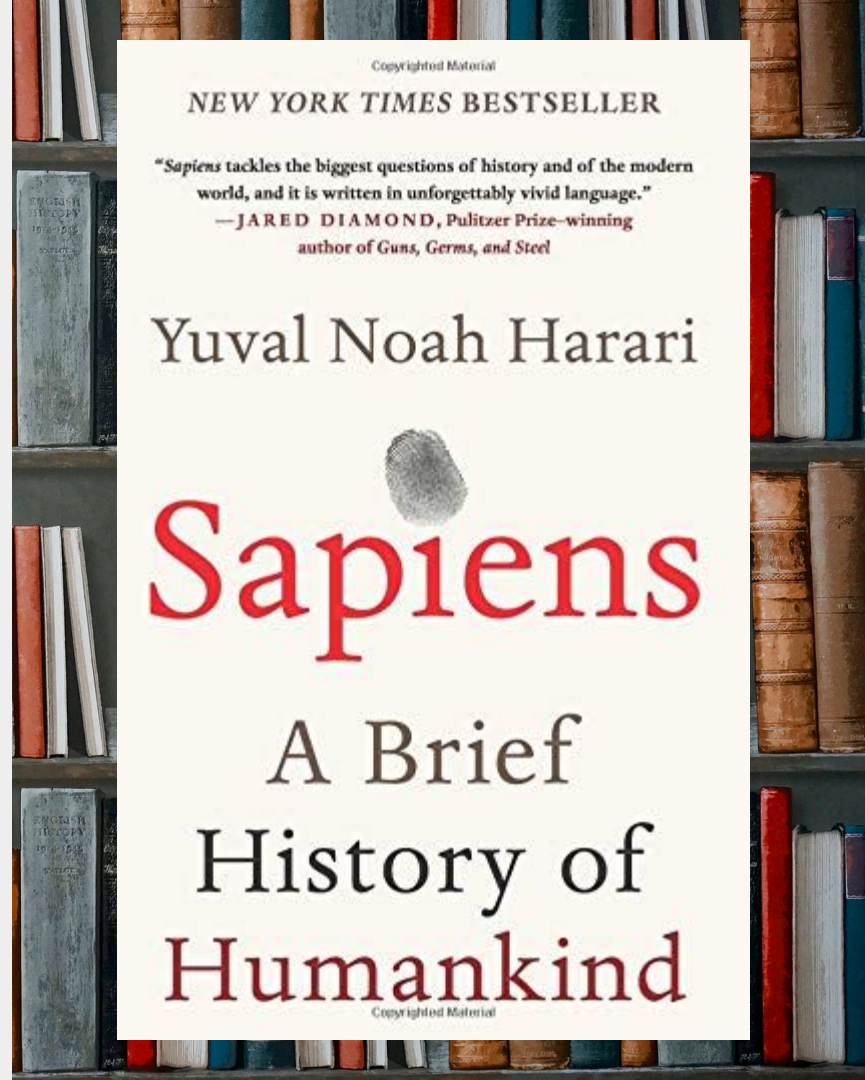
**“The anthropological record tells us that in moving from the smallest scale human societies to largest and most complex human societies, the following patterns emerge:**

- Big Gods go from relatively rare to increasingly common.**
- Morality and religion move from largely disconnected to increasingly intertwined.**
- Rituals and other credible displays of faith become increasingly organized, uniform, and regular.**
- Supernatural punishment becomes increasingly focused on violations of group norms (prohibitions on cheating, selfishness, but also on adultery, food taboos), and the potency of supernatural punishment increases (for example, salvation, eternal damnation, eons of karma, hell) (Norenzayan 2013: 124).**

Harari argues that “religion has been the third great unifier of humankind, alongside money and empires.

Since all social orders and hierarchies are imagined, they’re all fragile, and the larger the society, the more fragile it is.

The crucial historical role of religion has been to give superhuman legitimacy to these fragile structures” (Harari 2015, chapter 12, see p. 210 for quote).





And so...  
we should distinguish  
between theistic DCT  
(which posits the existence  
of supernatural beings that  
actually make *normative*  
demands) and  
an atheistic DCT (which  
only claims that DCT is  
*descriptively* accurate).

# García's TWO CENTS



It may very well be the case that the question of God's existence is an empty question.

“In its mythological use the word [‘God’] has a clear meaning... In its metaphysical use, on the other hand, the word “God” refers to something beyond experience. The word is deliberately divested of its reference to a physical being or to a spiritual being that is immanent in the physical. And as it is not given a new meaning, it becomes meaningless.”

The Logical  
Structure of  
the World

*and*  
Pseudoproblems  
in Philosophy

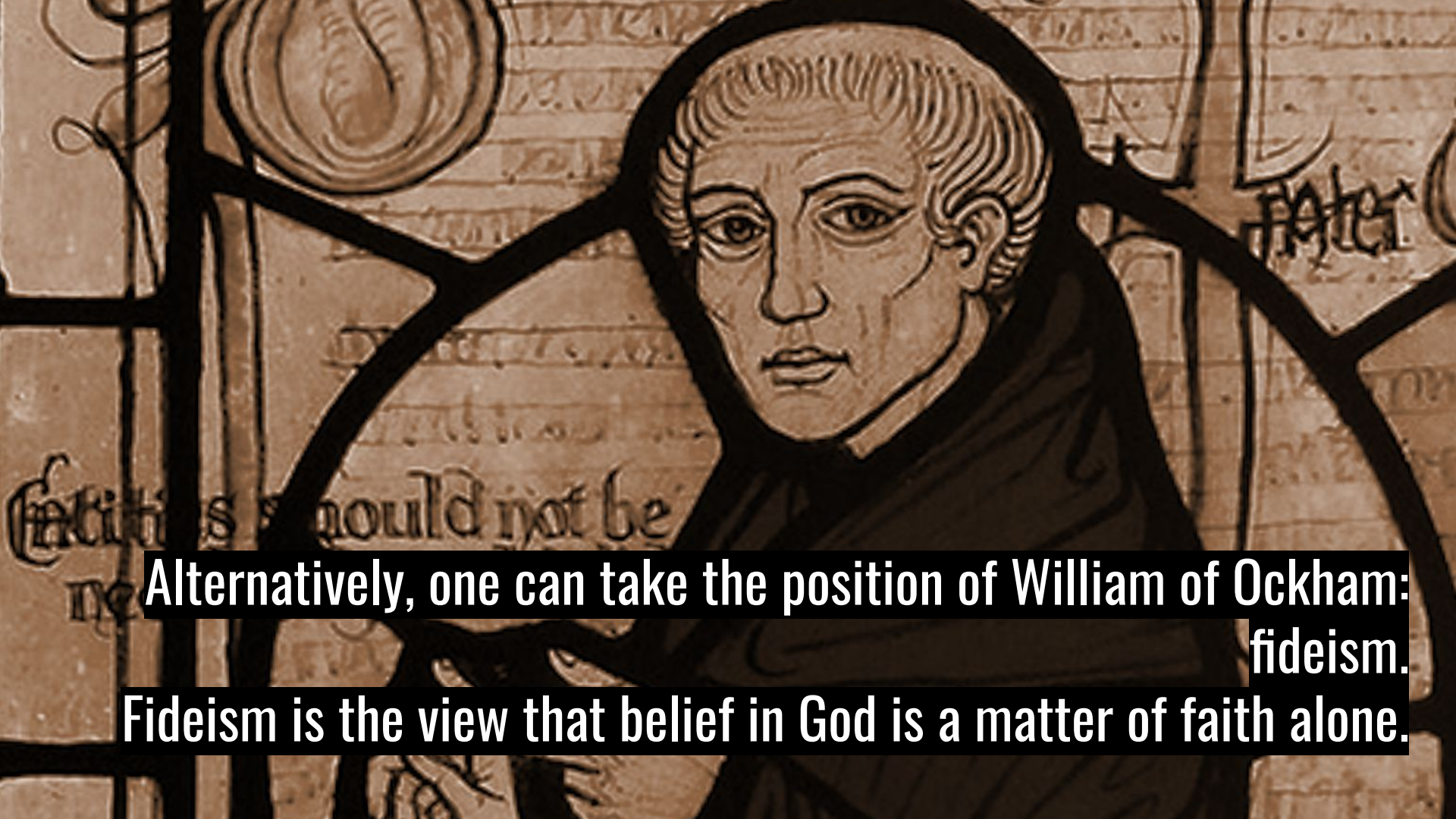
Rudolf  
Carnap

Translated by  
Rolf A. George

Open Court  
Classics



**However, if it turns out that the emergence of monotheistic gods facilitated collective action, it is feasible that theists could use this in defense of their religious conviction.**



**Alternatively, one can take the position of William of Ockham: fideism. Fideism is the view that belief in God is a matter of faith alone.**

# Problems with DCT (theist version)



## The Contradiction Argument

We are assuming that religions have a coherent, non-contradictory moral code. But, for example, the moral precepts in the Bible form an inconsistent set; i.e., they contradict each other.

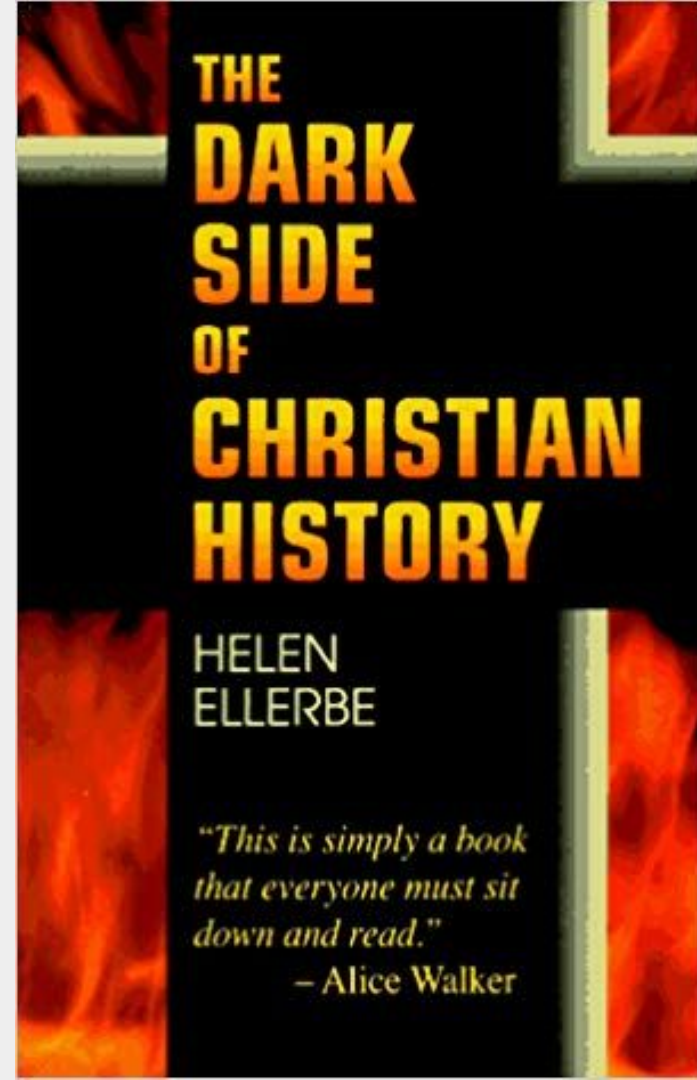
Hence, it is unclear just what God's Law is.

Can inconsistent moral systems really solve the puzzle of collective action or our moral debates?

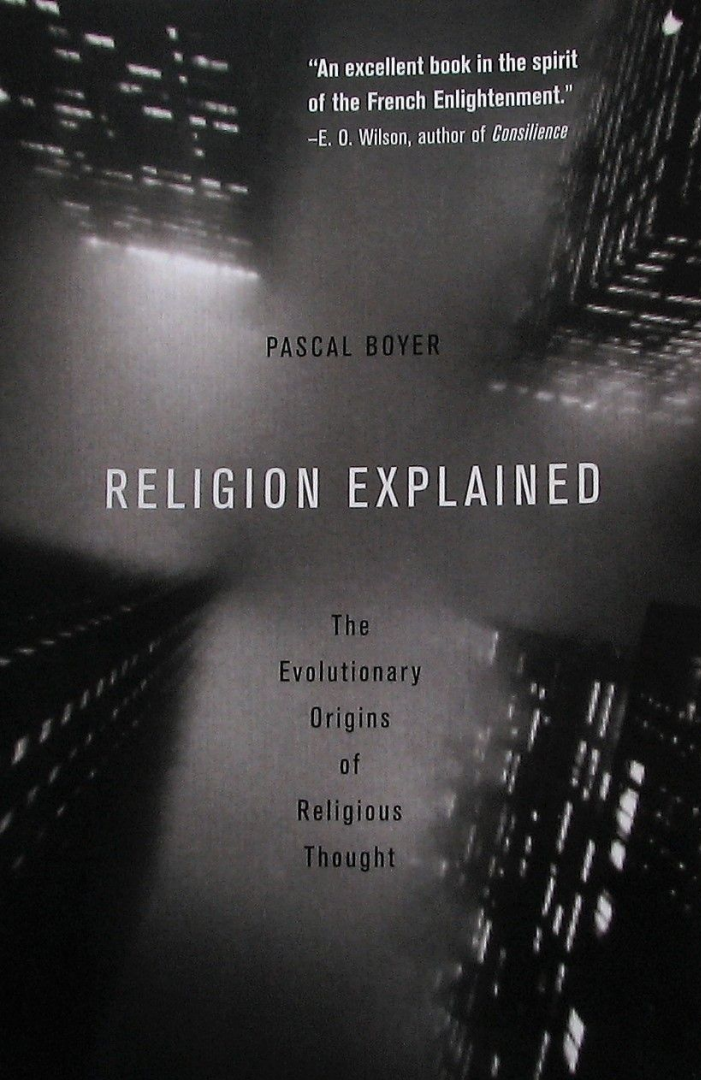
## The Moral Argument

Some of the moral precepts in the sacred scriptures of some religions, for example the Bible, are morally abhorrent;

e.g., genocide (click [here](#)), the prevalence of capital punishment (see Deuteronomy), misogyny, strange marriage customs .



# Problems with DCT (atheist version)

The book cover features a dark, atmospheric photograph of a long, narrow hallway with a grid-like pattern on the floor and walls, possibly a subway or industrial setting. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

**"An excellent book in the spirit  
of the French Enlightenment."**  
—E. O. Wilson, author of *Consilience*

PASCAL BOYER

# RELIGION EXPLAINED

The  
Evolutionary  
Origins  
of  
Religious  
Thought

## Lingering Empirical Problems

**Why should you feel closer to someone who has similar supernatural concepts?**

**To simply posit that the invention of “Big Gods” led to greater cooperation in society fails to detail just which cognitive mechanisms lead to this prosocial behavior and why (see Boyer 2001: 286).**

# **What we want from an ethical theory:**

- ❑ Fit in with our moral intuitions**
- ❑ Reflect how we actually form our moral judgments**
- ❑ Resolve our moral debates**
- ❑ Solve the puzzle of human collective action**