



Death in the Clouds (Pt. II)



Empirical Claims of DCT

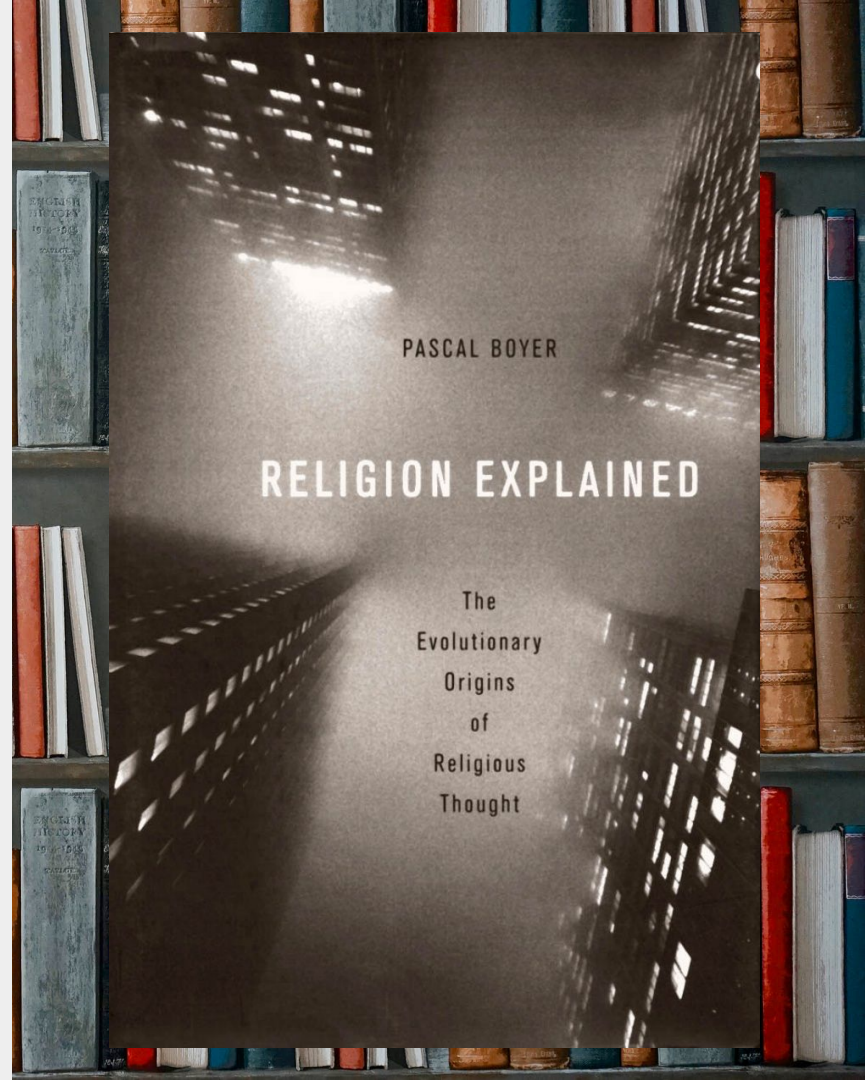
- After revelation, human societies increased in complexity as religious devotion to God spread (the Big Gods hypothesis).
- Watched people are well-behaved people (social monitoring hypothesis)



Food for thought...

**Question:
Why belief?**

Pascal Boyer (2007) argues that **religious belief is a byproduct of several of our basic cognitive modules**, like our **agency-detection module** (our capacity to project personhood) and our **personal-file system** (our ability to keep track of different individuals in our lives).



Our *personal-file* module (along with some other modules), leads to the belief in ghosts, since our personal file for a relative or friend is still active even after they've died (Boyer 2007: 314).





Our *agency-detection* module might be overactive and so we misattribute agency to nature and/or the universe itself (Boyer 2007: 150-176).



Maybe our personal-file and agency-detection modules play a role in some ethical debates, like abortion...

Common Arguments on the Permissibility of Abortion

—

Marquis' (1989) Deprivation Argument

1. If an action deprives a victim of a valuable future, then that action is wrong.
 2. Abortion deprives a fetus of a valuable future.
 3. Therefore, abortion is wrong.
- In other words, abortion is **almost always wrong**.

Warren (1973)
argues that:

Opponents of legalizing
abortion usually **presume**
that a fetus has rights
without proving it
(begging the question) or
they argue for fetus rights
through **equivocation**.

Equivocation

This is a fallacy in which an arguer uses a word with a particular meaning in one premise, and then uses the same word with a different meaning in another premise.

Standard Pro-life
Argument
(according to
Warren):

1. It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.
 2. Fetuses are innocent human beings.
 3. Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.
-

The phrase 'human beings' in premise 1 is intended to mean 'moral persons', while in premise 2 'human beings' refers to 'genetically human entities.'

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Warren: Pro-lifers need to give an account of what gives humans moral personhood **that includes fetuses.**

If they cannot, their argument fails.

Warren's Criteria for Personhood

1. Sentience
2. Emotionality
3. Reason
4. The Capacity to
Communicate
5. Self-Awareness
6. Moral Agency

Warren: Fetuses at early stages of gestation have none of the relevant criteria; hence they are not persons; hence they have no rights.

In later stages of pregnancy, fetuses perhaps have 1 of the criterion, but it would be unreasonable to insist that this gives the fetus the same moral status as a full-fledged human.

Warren's Criteria for Personhood

1. Sentience*
2. Emotionality**
3. Reason
4. The Capacity to Communicate
5. Self-Awareness
6. Moral Agency

* Most (98%) abortions are before 20 weeks. See [this](#).

** By 9 months infants are thought to experience all basic emotions. See "Essentials of Human Development," by Kail and Cavanaugh.

Objection:

Infants seem to also not have the requisite criteria for personhood.

It seems that this view allows for infanticide.



Thomson (1971) argues that:

Even if we assume that fetuses have moral rights, we can still demonstrate that abortion appears intuitively permissible in some cases.



The Famous Violinist



The People Seeds



The One Hour Pregnancy

Do you agree?

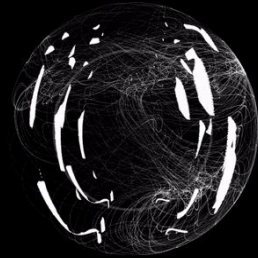
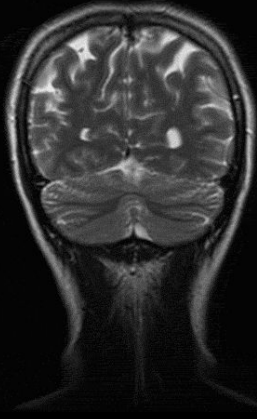
Note:

If you agree with at least one of Thomson's thought-experiments, she's made her point.

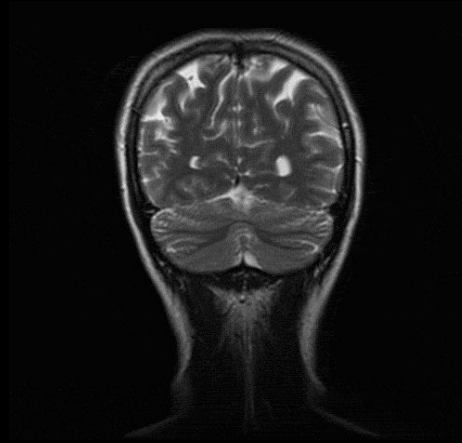
In other words, abortion can appear to be sometimes permissible, sometimes impermissible.

Question:

When does moral personhood begin?



Rational Beings



Sentience

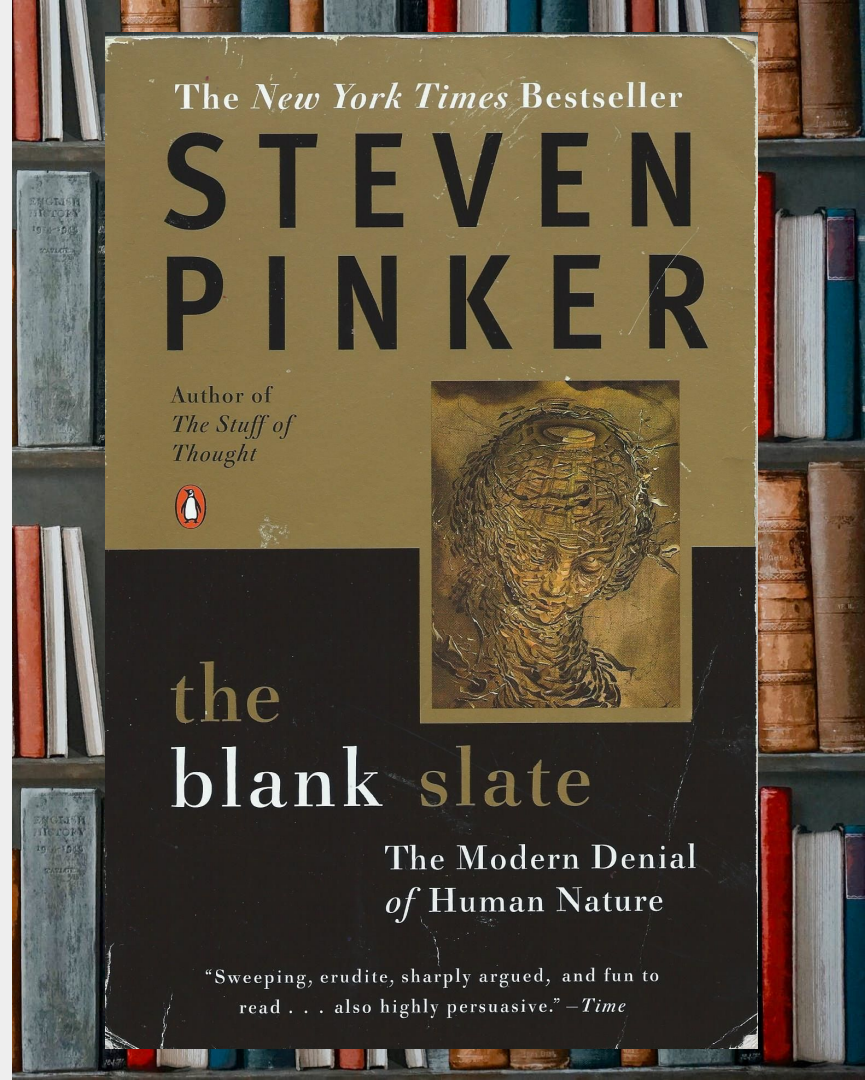


Souls



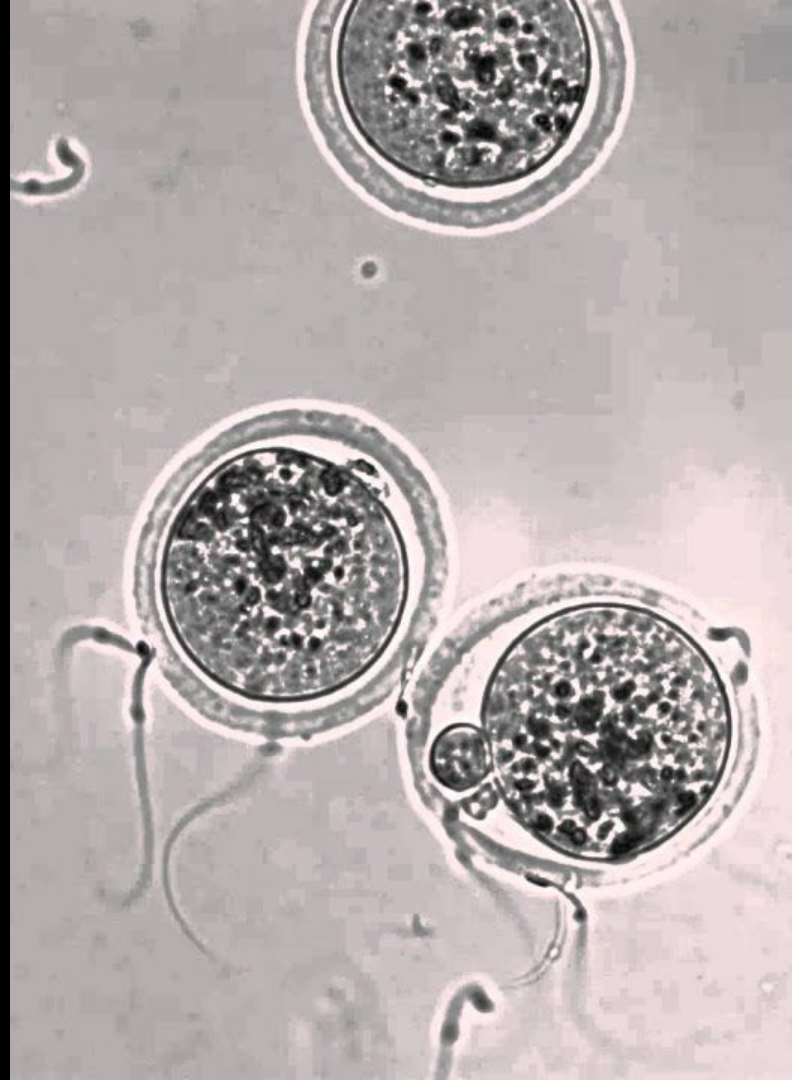
Pinker (2003, chapter 19) discusses how difficult it is to reconcile the notion of a soul with modern medicine.

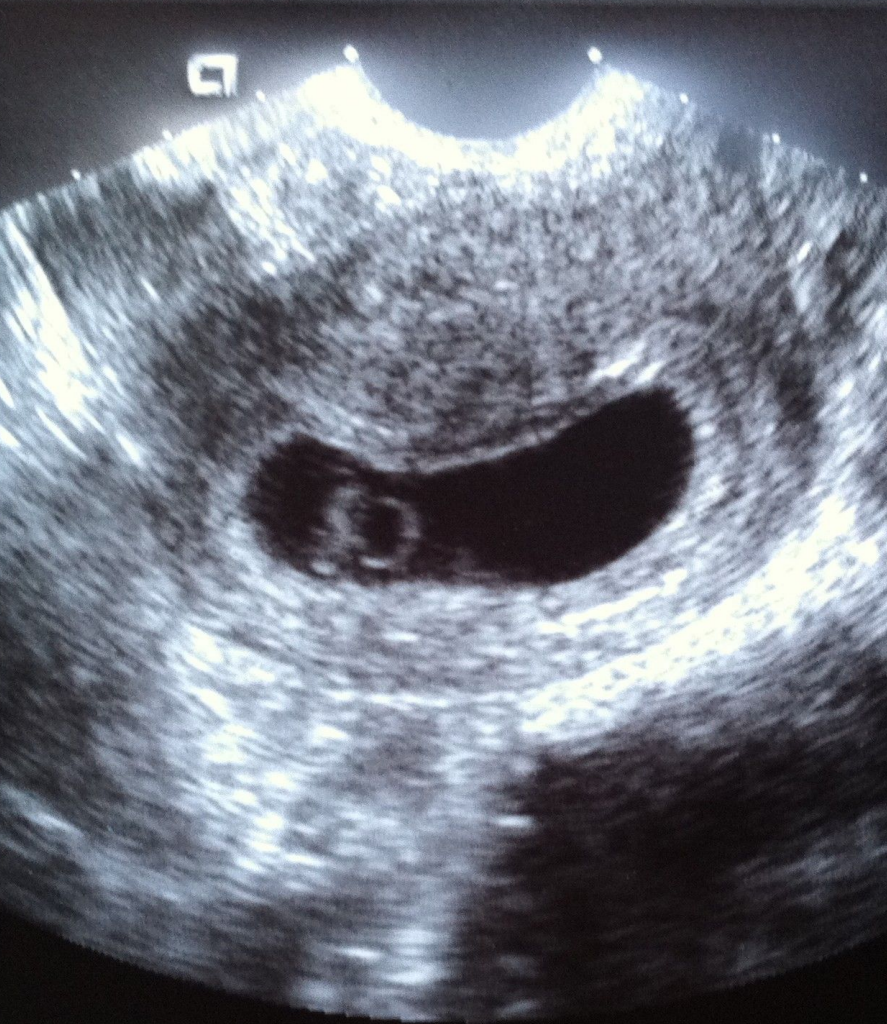
In particular, it is difficult to pinpoint when exactly the soul enters a human being.



**Human reproduction can be ambiguous.
For example, sometimes the moment of
conception is not a moment at all; it
can take days when multiple sperm
cells enter the egg.**

**And even when it is only one sperm cell,
the genomes remain separate for a day
or so.**





Nor does the conceptus necessarily mean that soul exists since between $\frac{2}{3}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of them never implant in the uterus and are spontaneously aborted, some for no discernable reason.

**Is the soul identical to the genome?
Then do identical twins share a soul?**





To further complicate things, occasionally two fertilized eggs merge into a single embryo, which result in a person with two genomes. Does this person have two souls?



The Lesson:
Our *individual-file* and *agency-detection* modules didn't evolve to be perfect detectors of **moral persons**.
In the face of medical advances, our **intuitions about personhood vary widely**.



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To this data we can add the finding that secular societies with powerful/effective states with strong rule of law, like Denmark, Sweden and France, also tend to reliably behave in prosocial ways (see [Norris and Inglehart 2011](#) and Norenzayan 2013, chapter 10).

This, by the way, also gives some support to contractarian theories.



Even Utilitarians acknowledged that watched people are well-behaved people.

Jeremy Bentham (who coined the word *utilitarianism*) argued that there would be beneficial consequences to constant surveillance of prisoners.



Bentham's Panopticon



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EMPIRICAL

DATA

TIME



The Big Gods hypothesis was popularized by Norenzayan (2013). It states, in short, that Big Gods enabled an increase in civilizational complexity.



But Norenzayan argued for his point primarily through a literature review in anthropology, social psychology, and sociology; importantly, he did **not** engage in rigorous statistical analysis.



So in the Spring of 2019, a team of researchers, including Peter Turchin (pictured left), all experts in mathematical modeling and cliodynamics, performed [the necessary analysis](#).



“However you slice it, the conclusion is that Big Gods do not precede Big Societies.

At best (in about half the cases), they appear simultaneously, but in the rest of cases they can trail the transition to Big Society by hundreds, and sometimes even thousands of years.”

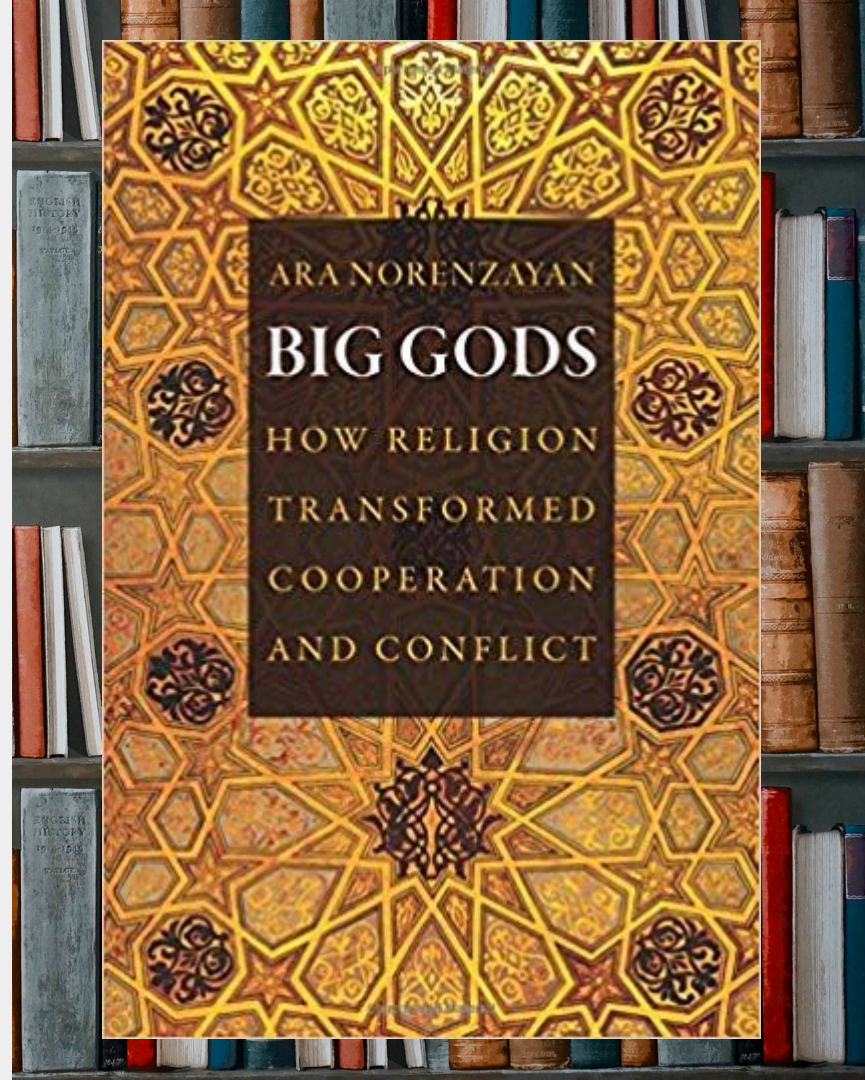


“This is not to say that the Big Gods hypothesis is entirely wrong — just one aspect of it, which predicts first Big Gods, then Big Societies.”

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](#).)





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Ontological Claim of DCT (theist version)

- ? God exists

