

From Retaliation To Unconditional Love: The Grand Narrative of Human Exodus

Author: Wendell Krossa

(Foreword- this essay is the outcome of several decades of interaction with Bob Brinsmead, and notably, material of his such as The Scandal of Joshua Ben Adam.)

The foundational story of humanity is the story of liberation from our animal past. This is not just the narrative of our exodus out of Africa but more so it is our exodus out of animal existence toward a more human or humane existence. Our exodus toward a more human mode of living is the engine that drives humanity's overall trajectory of progress toward a better future. This story reveals the meaning and purpose of human existence in our endeavor to humanize all life. It is a story that responds to those profound human questions of why we exist or what we are here for. It explains the millennia long struggle of people to discover what it means to be human and to live as human.

(Some have reacted to this assertion of human origins in an animal past so I have offered some further explanation in Appendices 3 at the end)

Let me break this story into some basic elements or themes. It begins in an animal past shaped by the drives of domination (alpha male/female), small band exclusion, and retaliation. This dark past provides the context against which the wonder of becoming human shines all the brighter as it emerges gradually over time.

Joseph Campbell (Myths To Live By) has similarly expressed this theme of leaving the animal for human existence in arguing that human story is about learning to conquer the animal in order to live as human. This struggle to overcome our animal past and its base features is engaged on the individual level as well as by humanity as a whole. He also framed human story as going out, confronting and conquering monsters, learning lessons, and then returning with insights to benefit others.

The element of struggle to overcome in this story arises from the fact that the animal past continues into our human existence in the form of a residual animal brain with its animal-like impulses that continue to influence our emotions, responses, and behavior. We see this in the fact that people continue to act like animals- excluding one another, dominating others, or retaliating against others. And these base animal features are even embedded in our belief systems where we try to maintain and validate them to the detriment of our efforts to be more human.

Retaliation, in particular, is the one notable feature that brings the worst of animal existence into human life. Musonius Rufus (Roman philosopher, circa 30-100 AD) expressed the animal nature of retaliation well, "For to scheme to bite back the biter and to return evil for evil is the act not of a human

being but of a wild beast” (<http://unsafeharbour.wordpress.com/2012/03/31/ancient-quotations-returning-evil-with-good/>). Retaliation is humanity behaving at its worst. Establishing retaliation as a feature of our animal past helps expose its bestial nature, its inhumanity.

One of the more serious mistakes that early people made was to project this destructive feature of animal existence onto early views of gods. They created the perception in the earliest gods of a greater reality that was threatening, malicious, and punitive. Something that would retaliate against human failure or sin. In doing this they created new super monsters for people to fear. Something that would get you. Over time this perception of retaliation in divinity was refined further with legal categories as something that would exact harsh justice, punish evil, or engage in just retribution. This would later be developed into systems of human justice as payback, or what we know as eye for eye justice. So retaliation makes a line down through history to become the legal entity of justice as punishment.

Other refinements were created over history to reinforce the idea of divine retaliation such as the development of the idea of holiness in gods. In fact, this would become the prominent feature of the Jewish and Christian God. It would be argued that because God was holy he was therefore obligated to punish sin. Holiness became part of a complex of ideas that supported the demand for payback or punishment, including ideas such as human sinfulness which offended a holy God. As religious believers would subsequently argue, because God is holy he cannot ignore sin. He cannot just forgive it without first punishing. But despite sacralising retaliation in divinity with such concepts as holiness, at core it was still very much about animal-like retaliation, revenge, or payback.

The concept of holiness itself is about purity, exclusion, and separation from things considered unclean or defiled. It is a priestly invention supporting the demand of priests to mediate between impure people and their gods. Holiness creates a sharp contrast with human imperfection, an imperfection that then appears all the worse, as something that religious people call sinfulness. Human sinfulness has always been a perverse concept that views humanity as something that must be punished, something that deserves retaliation. It has promoted guilt, shame, and fear over being imperfectly human.

We would do better to view human imperfection in terms of the fact that we started out in animal reality but have gradually become something that has improved markedly over time (see for instance, Stephen Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, or James Payne’s *The History of Force*). This gradual process of growth, development, and advancement over history is not something that deserves condemnation and punishment.

A further validation for the view that the gods were retaliatory was the early perception that because the gods were behind the forces of nature, and as those forces were often destructive, early logic then concluded that the gods must be angry and engaged in punishing people for their sins via the destructive forces and events of nature.

This theme of retaliation is found in the earliest human writing (circa 2500-2000 BCE), in the accounts of storm gods and other gods threatening to annihilate early people with a great flood (e.g. Sumerian Flood myth- Wikipedia). It is evident in other early myths of a chaos monster threatening the order of creation (Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come, Norman Cohn). These myths were eventually

developed into the grand myth of a final apocalypse, that a retributive God would destroy and purge all life in a grand world-ending punishment (see Zoroastrian beliefs). This feature of retaliation would then reach an epitome expression in the perverse myth of eternal Hell, the final and ultimate retaliation against imperfect humanity.

Another related idea concocted by the ancients was that any sickness or misfortune in a person's life was understood to be due to the gods punishing sin or broken taboos. This is found all through early mythology in accounts of gods afflicting people with sickness (e.g. Epic of Gilgamesh). This idea has caused immense additional guilt and fear to people already suffering physical problems. Look also at the Old Testament account of Job's 'comforters' beating him with this theme- that his misfortune and illness was punishment from God because he had sinned.

In all such mythology retaliation was being sacralised, made something sacred or divine. It was being made a core feature of deity. In doing this early people were creating monsters above ordinary monsters to frighten one another.

This central theme of retaliation or payback lodged in gods has then validated endless violence between people, clans, and nations. A retaliating God will inspire retaliation among his followers. Part of the reason for this is that people have always appealed to the divine to validate their own lives. People try to replicate in their own lives and societies what they believe to be the divine model or reality. So the creation of threatening, punishing gods has long validated people retaliating and punishing one another. Therefore, if you want to get to an important root validation for violence among people, then start with these core beliefs that have long supported retaliation or payback (see James Carroll's book *Constantine's Sword* for historical illustration of the influence of religious views inspiring mistreatment of others).

When you embed retaliation in the sacred or divinity it becomes untouchable, a sacred ideal not open to challenge or questioning. The things that we protect in God we are notably afraid to challenge because of our natural respect or fear of deity. These things are then immensely damaging to us because we believe them to be from God and therefore ultimately true and immutable. They must be believed and adhered to. Such appeal to the divine has always been a powerful concept and a potent means to manipulate and control others.

But exposing the primitive origins of a feature such as retaliation we may help to break its grip on human consciousness.

The Salvation/Sacrifice Industry (the Appeasement Industry)

What has been the most damaging outcome of projecting the animal feature of retaliation onto God? It evokes in people the natural response of appeasement or placation. The human fear of death plays a central role here. This is the felt need to appease the angry, threatening gods/God in order to avoid punishment, whether sickness, other misfortune, or death. Retaliatory gods have long aroused human fear of death. The appeasement response then leads to one of history's most oppressive outcomes- the enslavement to wasteful systems of sacrifice and other salvation schemes.

Myths of a God angry at human failure have also produced the corollary idea of separation from God, a separation that supposedly happened at the time of the Fall when humans lived in an original paradise called Eden. Since that Fall God has apparently abandoned humanity, breaking off a former close relationship, according to religions like Christianity. If you think abandonment by parents is traumatizing then add this myth of abandonment by a Creator and Source of all, and note the impact this can have on human psyches. These perceptions further intensify the fear of divinity and death, and stir the felt need to atone.

And so the natural psychology of appeasement is stirred and this leads to endeavors toward some salvation plan, to offer some sacrifice to placate the angered deity.

It is not clear when all this Salvationism started but it was long ago in prehistory. Some innovative person, probably an early shaman, came up with the idea of blood sacrifice to placate threatening gods. This may have been based on the perception that because life was in the blood then a life could be offered in place of another life. Researchers studying the origin of sacrifice suggest that sacrifices were made for varied reasons- to secure favor from the gods, to feed the gods- but a prominent reason was to appease the gods, to atone for sin (see for instance, <http://www.istor.org/stable/3155070> notably p. 605, or <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-israel/ritual-sacrifice-in-ancient-israel/>, also see Sacrifice at Wikipedia). I am focusing on this element of appeasement of angry gods because it arises at the very beginning and it has had such a damaging impact on human psyches and societies.

No matter what the ancient reasons were for sacrifice, "It is all inhumane and sadistic and stupid" (Bob Brinsmead, personal email, Feb.2013). "As for suggesting that God loved the smell of a burning animal as the OT says...then this god has not yet been humanized" (Ibid). But here we have it today- Salvationism which argues that some payment must be made; we must pay the debt, pay for the offense, and make amends. A cruel, violent blood sacrifice must be offered. And again, the belief in sin is integral to this perspective. Human imperfection was developed into the mythical belief in human fallenness or sinfulness as a means to explain why the gods were angry and wanted to retaliate against humanity. This was further developed into the theological logic that human sinfulness was an offense against a holy God and atonement must be made.

And the earliest sins were beyond silly which revealed the petty nature of the gods that early people had created. The earliest epics of punishing people's sin told of gods that were upset because people had multiplied too much and become too noisy. One god- Enlil- could not sleep with all the noise so he planned to annihilate all people via a great flood (http://history-world.org/sumerian_and_akkadian_myths.htm). The gods hated human self-expression, freedom, and curiosity for knowledge in the biblical Adam's case.

But because of human sinfulness atonement had to be made. So the massive burdensome salvation industry has continued all through human history, feeding off of human fear and misery. And it maintains a priesthood that lives well off this human misery, employing these myths to manipulate and control people. Priests claim that the great cosmic separation of humanity from the divine must be

healed, the broken relationship must be restored and only they know how to mediate this atonement and restoration. But there is not a shred of evidence anywhere in history that any such abandonment ever occurred except in the minds of power-seeking shamans and priests. It is all a massive system of human enslavement and of the worst kind- mental, emotional, and spiritual slavery.

The entire industry continues to reinforce in consciousness this perverse idea of something threatening and punitive that must be appeased. It is an industry that has resulted in an incalculable waste of human time, resources, and creative potential. You see this as people under fear and felt obligation everywhere trudge off to temples and churches with their offerings, engaging often esoteric religious ritual, believing that if they don't then they will suffer some misfortune. They are wasting time and resources that could be better spent developing themselves in other more beneficial ways. This waste was evident in a documentary I watched recently on the Quechua Indians of South America spending their scarce resources on offerings made to saints. Entire days are spent in such activity.

I also saw it firsthand among the Manobo tribes of Mindanao. People offering scarce chickens and pigs to placate angry spirits instead of seeking proper medical help. And when those resources were gone then often there was nothing left for a trip to a lowland hospital to save life.

All of this salvation/sacrifice activity is done to solve a non-existent problem, a mythical problem that does not exist and has never existed- the felt need to appease some angry reality that will punish.

These primitive ideas of a threatening and retaliatory super monster stick around and continue to cause damage even today. They persist because they resonate with deeply imprinted beliefs and emotions such as the feeling that we somehow deserve punishment because we have screwed up. Today, similar in emphasis to the earliest mythology, it is claimed that GAIA (or the planet) is angry because people have again multiplied too much and have become too creative, expressive, and successful in technological society (see, for instance, <http://www.green-agenda.com/gaia.html> and note the reference to Lovelock's book *The Revenge of GAIA*; see also <http://reason.com/archives/2010/04/21/sinners-in-the-hands-of-an-ang> ; and <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2008/06/17/202790/lessons-from-an-angry-planet/?mobile=nc> noting this comment, "the tornados and floods battering the country (US) with almost unimaginable severity are the early tantrums of an angry planet"). People trying to better their lives have now been condemned for engaging the sin of greed and thereby destroying nature. We then see the appeasement response in people feeling obligated to obstruct and halt human economic development and growth (make a sacrifice) in order to placate the angry GAIA or angry planet. Just as in the ancient past, this sacrificial obstruction of human progress is done out of the felt need to appease some angered and punitive reality. Unfortunately, many people advocating these views, and considering themselves modern secularists, are still holding to the core themes of primitive mythology at its worst.

Let me summarize this fear/appeasement/salvation process again as it has significantly undermined human freedom. It is a pattern that is repeated endlessly through history. Someone first scares people with some threatening scenario (imminent apocalypse, punishment from the gods, global warming destroying life). This touches the most basic thing in human psychology- the fear of disaster and death

(see Ernst Becker's Denial of Death). The fear-mongers then propose a salvation scheme such as some sacrifice (e.g. in our time, cut back energy use) in order to placate the angry and threatening monster that has been presented to people. And scared people will then support the looniest and most damaging salvation schemes and willingly give up their freedom in order to find relief from whatever has scared them. Stirring fear in such a manner is a direct assault on human freedom.

Non-retaliation or Unconditional Emerges

Among the earliest human writing in Sumeria (2500-2000 BCE) we see another line of insight that was entirely opposite to the theme of retaliation or payback. In those early minds shaped by animal-like features, with their monstrous threatening and punishing gods, the wonder of human consciousness was making a significant new advance. With their maturing human consciousness and its human impulses those people were struggling against their past and discovering in new ways what it meant to be human and to live as human. They were becoming more aware of themselves as human persons and were experiencing new human emotions that inspired them to seek liberation from debasing animal drives and perceptions. That was a new surge in the grand narrative of humanity learning to conquer the animal in order to live as human.

People were awakening more to the inhumanity of retaliation response or payback and how that reduced the wonder of being human to pettiness with its promotion of cycles of endless violence and death. They were becoming aware of new human ideals and human ways of responding and relating to one another. They realized that they did not have to retaliate and destroy one another. They were feeling and experiencing compassion, mercy, and kindness. And that developing sense of humane response led to such new practices as forgiveness which was a supremely human response that broke cycles of revenge and violence. It was a radically new insight and discovery that challenged the dominant culture of animal-like retaliation.

That was a unique new phase in the liberation of humanity from an enslaving animal past with its destructive drives. There is no worse enslavement than to the drives to retaliate and punish or destroy others. These drives have darkened human minds with hate and revenge all through history. They have ruined relationships, communities, and disrupted human progress significantly. Look, for example, at the destruction to national infrastructure from war. That has set entire nations back for decades.

Finding freedom from these animal drives is the exodus out from animal existence toward a truly human existence. It is the grandest liberation movement that humanity has ever conceived. It is the real exodus to a promised land. The potential offered by unconditional relating to others, is the potential for liberation to an entirely new and higher plane of human existence. This new human mode of relating argues that no matter how badly people treat us we can pull human life toward something higher and better by treating them more humanely in return.

Non-retaliation is one element of what is more generally known as unconditional love. This refers to the practice of endless forgiveness without first demanding that requirements be met or amends be made. It refers to the expression of unlimited generosity expressed toward those who are undeserving. And it refers to the unconditional inclusion of all persons whether classified as good or bad. Unconditional

clarifies in a striking new way the real meaning of all human ideals and practices. It opens up as never before the true meaning of the supreme human ideal of love.

This new human response of unconditional treatment of others also gets to the very core of human meaning and purpose. It answers all those great questions such as why something, why this universe exists, and what is the point of conscious human existence. It is simply the greatest insight in all history as to what it really means to be human. In the developing awareness of unconditional treatment of others, people were getting to the very essence of being human.

The new response of non-retaliation also proved critical to such things as the development and growth of commerce. People chose not to destroy one another but to cooperate in trade and that lifted societies toward a better life (e.g. Paul Seabright, *In the Company of Strangers*). This was known as “the moralizing influence of gentle commerce”. Other good in human society flowed from this. Non-retaliation became central to human success and progress.

This emerging response of non-retaliation is the future for humanity to explore. It is at the core of what it means to be truly human, and at the core of the ongoing endeavor to humanize all of life. It liberates people to entirely new heights of being human. It offers a fundamental solution to the major problem plaguing human existence- the cycles of violence and war. It gets to the very root of the worst of human afflictions.

The Origins of Non-retaliation

We find one of the earliest statements of this maturing consciousness of what it means to be human in an early bit of Akkadian literature- the Advice of an Akkadian Father to his son (circa 2000 BCE). He says, “Do not return evil to your adversary; requite with kindness the one who does evil to you, maintain justice for your enemy, be friendly to your enemy” (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/2200akkad-father.asp>).

A similar insight emerged around 1500-1300 BCE in the Egyptian Instructions of Anii. This states, “Conquer malice in yourself...Do not speak rudely to a brawler...When you are attacked, hold yourself back...when your relations are friendly... the aggressor will desist...” (http://www.perankhgroup.com/ani_wisdom.htm).

The Notable Hebrew Breakthroughs

This same insight then emerges in other traditions across the world. For example, the Hebrew prophets (800-600 BCE) began to advocate an entirely new view of justice not as punishment (retaliation, revenge) but as liberation of the oppressed and mercy toward all. Bob Brinsmead says that in Latin/Western thinking, justice became associated with penalty, price, punishment, atonement, or payback. His study of the OT word for justice- *sadak*- found that it meant, instead, fidelity to a relationship and had a restorative meaning related to liberation and mercy (personal email, Feb.9/13).

The Hebrew prophets also began to offer an entirely new view of divinity that was not interested in sacrifice or payback atonement. They claimed that God did not want sacrifice but mercy (e.g. Hosea 6:6,

Micah 6:7-8, Amos 5:21-24). There are other statements noted by Brinsmead: “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart...” (Psalm 51: 11-17). “When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Jeremiah 7:21, 22). “I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats” (Isaiah 1:11). Brinsmead concludes, “So Paul’s message about the propitiation of God’s wrath by the blood sacrifice of Jesus as a payment for human sin is not the fulfillment of the message of the Old Testament prophets, but completely contrary to it” (personal email, Feb.18/2013).

In these striking new claims the Old Testament prophets were confronting and challenging the greatest monster ever created in history- the threatening, retaliatory God; the punishing God. They were stating clearly that past perceptions of deity were all wrong. Now if the story of humanity is about conquering monsters, as Campbell suggests, then a retaliating, punishing God is the biggest monster of all for people to conquer and overcome. Human perceptions of ultimate reality have the most powerful influence on human outlooks.

The Egyptians were also making somewhat similar discoveries regarding humanizing deity and attributing kindness and mercy to their pharaoh gods: “at the high period of the Pyramid age a new comparatively humane, benevolent, fatherly quality began to be apparent in the character and behavior of the pharaohs...even the gods had become kind” (Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythology*, p.95). This is how the process of humanizing gods works. People discover new more humane features about themselves and then begin to attribute these to their concepts of deity. They perceive ultimate reality in terms of how they perceive authentic humanity. An understanding of divinity begins with humanity (Campbell, *Myths to Live By*, p.93, 243-249).

Brinsmead also argues that the Hebrew prophets said absolutely nothing about the Jewish Day of Atonement. The justice that they advocated for was freedom from all oppression, to break every yoke, and to let the oppressed go free. It was the Israelite priesthood that promoted the sacrificial system and Salvationism with its bondage to mediators that oppressed people with this dark theology of looming punishment and the demand to atone. The prophets, to the contrary, were offering an entirely new view of deity as unconditionally forgiving and loving.

It is difficult to state how radical a break this was with past views of gods as threatening, punitive monsters seeking retribution against imperfect and fallible people. That had been the overwhelmingly dominant perspective through previous history (retaliatory, punishing gods had always terrified people. A reviewer in *The American Journal of Theology*, vol.13, No.4, Oct. 1909, p.605, *The Origin of Sacrifice*, states regarding a book titled ‘*Semitic Magic, Its Origins and Development*’ by R. Campbell Thompson, “The author appears to maintain that religious institutions have been molded by belief in evil spirits rather than by faith in good divinities. He directly asserts it of the rite which he calls atoning sacrifice”. He continues, noting the central religious belief that sickness was caused by sin; it was the result of people breaking taboos which offended the gods who then punished those people, hence, the need for atoning sacrifice to appease).

But instead of payback punishment people were beginning to discover this new human ideal of non-retaliation or unconditional response toward others. As noted earlier, this new human response included the following elements: Unconditional inclusion of all people as intimate family (no more outsiders or enemies), unconditional forgiveness of all offenses or wrongs, and unconditional generosity toward all. Non-retaliation or unconditional response means absolutely no conditions in our relationships with others; no pre-requisites are to be demanded, and no payment exacted for failures or mistakes. As dictionaries define the word unconditional: not subject to any conditions, absolutely no conditions.

Other traditions offered similar insights on the new non-retaliatory response. In Buddhist literature we find the following statements: “Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world: through non-hatred alone they cease...Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth...Let us live happily, not hating those who hate us. Let us therefore overcome anger by kindness, evil by good, falsehood by truth...Nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred...” (Dhammapada 3-5, 223-234, 197, Majjhima Nikaya 129, written about 250 BCE, though dating to the time of the Buddha around 500 BCE, see for instance such sources as <http://www.unification.net/ws/theme144.htm>)).

Confucius taught his followers to propose justice and not revenge or anger (Analects 14.36, ca. 450-250 BCE). The Taoists advocated being kind to the unkind (Tao Te Ching 49, 300 BCE). In Jainism it was said, “Man should subvert anger by forgiveness, subdue pride by modesty, overcome hypocrisy with simplicity” (Samanasuttam 136). Hindus taught that a superior person “does not render evil for evil...but will ever exercise compassion even towards those who enjoy injuring others or those of cruel deeds” (Ramaya, Yuddha Kanda 115, around 500-400 BCE). Socrates (470-400 BCE) urged, “We ought not to retaliate or render evil to anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from him”. And so on.

Interestingly, Hinduism began when the people of North India, around the time of the Buddha (roughly 500 BCE), grew disillusioned with the sacrificial system that they viewed as wasteful and cruel (Karen Armstrong, Buddha, p.23). They no longer believed that salvation was through animal blood sacrifice and began to seek answers in a new tradition that focused on human potential (p.25). As people continued to understand more humane ways of responding and relating, they then rejected sacrifice, payback, and appeasement thinking and practices.

The Hindus also rejected the priestly elites, according to Armstrong. They believed that they could discover God for themselves without a system of sacrifice and mediating priesthood (p.26).

The Historical Jesus Tradition

This ongoing liberation movement from animal retaliation or payback broke through to a new level of coherence and clarity in the teaching of the historical Jesus who is entirely different from the Christian Jesus. I refer readers to the research of the Jesus Seminar for some basic principles on how to detect what the historical person actually taught in contrast to the statements of the New Testament gospels which present all sorts of contradictory teaching that they claim came from Jesus. For instance, in

Matthew 5 Jesus is presented as teaching that we are to love our enemies. Then a few chapters later (Matt.11) we find him damning people to hell for not agreeing with his message. This is an irreconcilable contradiction in teaching and must be rejected as not authentic to the historical person who clearly taught love of enemies. Unfortunately, blind devotion to the sacred prohibits people from seeing such contradictions in their holy books.

Using Jesus Seminar principles of interpretation, nothing in Jesus' teaching comprises a more consistent core set of ideas than this theme of unconditional treatment of others. This is the new kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about; the new mode of truly human existence.

The historical Jesus presented the wonder of unconditional thinking and existence in a coherent set of sayings and stories. For instance, in Matthew 5:38 he set a context first by summing up the old payback view of justice as "eye for eye" response. This sums up past views of retaliatory or retributive response-reward for good, punishment for wrong. Tit for tat. Getting even in relation to a strict standard of payback.

He then countered that old view entirely by arguing that we should not retaliate against offenders, we should not respond in kind or in like manner, returning evil for evil. If we are mistreated or offended we should respond instead with over-the-top goodness, kindness, and generosity. We should not engage in the old payback response of only loving friends and hating enemies, but we should love enemies also. There is nothing authentically human in just loving those who love us. Even animals do that. Genuine human response goes further and loves enemies also. It is absolutely unconditional in its treatment of all people.

If we do this- not retaliating, not engaging in payback response- then Jesus says we will be like God who is good and generous to all alike. Take a minute and let the radical, history-overturning nature of this comment sink in. God, according to Jesus, gives good things (sun and rain) to both good and evil. God does not engage in the old payback response of eye for eye treatment of people (rewarding only the good and punishing the evil). God does not exclude the bad. God has no favorites, and there are no insiders/outsideers with God. There is no threat and no punishment with a God that is Unconditional Love. Like the Hebrew prophets before him, Jesus was presenting a stunning, entirely new view of deity that countered the previous historical understanding of gods as threatening, punitive entities. This was a major shift or turnaround in human perspective.

This statement of Jesus- if you do this you will be like God- also plays on the ancient impulse in people to replicate in their lives and societies what they believe to be the divine model; to fulfill in their lives what they believe to be the divine purpose for their lives.

There are other statements by the historical Jesus that affirm there is only unconditional goodness behind life and not threat or punitive reality. Note, for instance, his statements that God clothes the grass and feeds the worthless birds that no one pays any attention to. Limitless generosity shown to all life alike, no matter how insignificant.

Researchers argue that some of the other accounts in the gospels did not originate with the historical Jesus. But whoever recounted them, they are of the same tenor as the core teaching of Jesus on non-retaliatory response toward others. For instance, there is the story of the man born blind in John 9. The writer contradicts conventional perspectives by stating that this sickness was not a punishment for sin. As noted earlier, primitive thought understood that any sickness or deformity was a punishment from the gods for sin. This belief has caused endless misery to unfortunate people afflicted by disease and deformity. It adds extra guilt and shame to already unbearable suffering. It is one of the cruelest perceptions ever concocted- that a punishing deity gets even with human failure by sending sickness and misfortune. Again, this belief promotes a sense of sinfulness and obligation to appease or atone, to submit to salvation/sacrifice schemes and mediating priesthoods. It is oppressive slavery and wasteful to boot. But Jesus taught very clearly that there was no punitive reality that demanded appeasement. He took on the ancient perception of a threatening punishing reality behind life and denied that any such monster existed. He taught the very opposite, and this was considered blasphemy by his contemporaries.

We find this same core theme of unconditional treatment of others in Jesus' short stories or parables. He spoke, for instance, of a prodigal or wasteful son (Luke 15) who was welcomed home, forgiven, and treated generously by his father who refused the son's offer of repentance or atonement. The father just wanted to celebrate without any requirement to make amends or demanding payback first for the wrong done by the son. It is important to note that these stories also include others who represent conventional payback attitudes. These other characters express the resistant attitude of many good people toward this radical new teaching on unconditional response toward offenders. Note in this regard that the older brother in the prodigal parable is indignant that the father is too generous and unconditional toward the wasteful son. He believes in conventional justice where good is rewarded and wrong is punished. He represents most good, moral religious people who demand that justice be upheld and fulfilled. There should be some form of retaliation, some form of exact response according to the deed done, whether good or bad. But the generous, unconditionally forgiving father would have none of it. He believes in justice as liberation, and scandalous generosity toward all, whether good or bad. This is the new human response, completely unconditional toward all persons no matter what they have done. The older brother shows the harsh and petty nature of payback thinking and response. His sense of good morality and justice is offended but his morality is in reality the pettiness and cruelty of primitive payback thinking. It is more animal-like than truly human. And this story shows how deeply ingrained such thinking is in many people. Unconditional generosity and mercy offends good moral people seeking conventional justice.

The story of the vineyard owner and workers makes a similar point (Matthew 20). At the end of the day all the workers are given the same payment regardless of hours worked. The workers who started at the beginning of the day are not cheated. They received the wages that they agreed to. But the late starters who get there at the end of the day, for whatever reason, also have families to feed. And the owner gives them the same as the early starters who then find such generosity offensive and complain to the owner. The owner is not acting according to conventional views of just treatment of people. He is too generous and unconditional, according to the early starters. And his generosity really pisses them off.

They live by conventional fairness as strict reward or punishment according to actions done. They are good, moral people with a strong sense of justice as payback. They do not get this new unconditional treatment of undeserving people.

The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) also speaks to unconditional treatment of others. The Samaritan assists a wounded enemy, showing no sense of exclusion or payback but only concern for his welfare as a fellow member of the human family.

In this new body of teaching by the historical Jesus we are seeing millennia of primitive thought being completely overturned. Jesus is arguing for an entirely new type of authentic human response. And he states very clearly that, contrary to past historical teaching on divinity, this is what God is actually like. Let me state his teaching as plainly as possible in theological terms. God is not threatening or punitive. God does not retaliate against human failure or wrongdoing. God does not punish anyone. God does not engage payback response toward anyone. Most previous human perspective on Ultimate Reality was wrong, according to the historical Jesus.

This is such an entirely new understanding of Deity or God that it is hard for us to get the full impact that his teaching had on the people of his day. The greatest monster in history- the threatening, punishing God- was being confronted directly and overthrown. That monster was being decapitated and conquered. The great payback God of religion, the biggest bogeyman ever created with all the added features to terrify- holiness, wrath, judgment, hell, blood sacrifice to appease- this was all being discounted entirely as false and thrown out as unworthy of truly human thinking and existence.

God was being revealed as unconditional love. At the very core of reality, the creating and sustaining Consciousness was being presented as unconditional goodness, generosity, and mercy. The implications of this were stunning. It meant the end and abolishment of all sacrifice and all salvation thinking and practice, and the consequence of this means the end of all priest-craft and religion. It lifts a great burden off of humanity with all the associated guilt, shame, despair, and fear that has always accompanied ideas of human sinfulness and myths of gods punishing that sin.

Follow the obvious conclusions for yourself. Since the beginning most religion and Salvationism had been built on the inhuman myths of a punishing, retaliating God. That monster, according to Jesus, did not exist and had never existed. So all the subsequent salvation theology and practice was a response to a problem that never existed in the first place- meeting atonement conditions to placate angry gods in order to be forgiven. God had never been angry with people for their animal beginnings and their imperfection and their gradual historical development toward something more human. And God had never abandoned humanity at some mythical fall in a past paradise. There had never been any separation that needed to be healed or restored. God had never threatened to punish anyone. It's all bad myth to scare people, and shaman/priests had from the very beginning used this mythology to manipulate and dominate populations by fear (see John Pfeiffer's *Explosion: An Inquiry Into the Origins of Art and Religion* on the origin of religion as an institution to terrorize and control people).

So we need to radically revise our perceptions of deity or ultimate reality. The ultimate reality behind all was revealed by Jesus as unconditional love. That had always been the true nature and character of

God. And now simply stated, because there is no threatening, punitive God, then there is no need for salvation or any form of sacrifice. This means the end and abolition of religion.

Christianity Reverts To Payback Conditions

The followers of Jesus, with a stunning lack of insight, dismissed his core theme of unconditional and instead reverted back to the old payback thinking of past religious belief. And they thus created the payback theology and system called Christianity. In the development of Christianity the historical battle between retaliation and non-retaliation reached a new climax of profound contrast and opposition. In direct contradiction to Jesus' teaching, Christianity was developed as a religion of supreme conditions. Christianity then became history's grandest embodiment of punishment, threat, payback, or retaliation. In this regard it has been like all religion which makes divine forgiveness and love conditional. But none moreso than Christianity which created a theology of the greatest condition ever conceived- that of the need for an infinite payment. Previous religions had insisted on some sort of sacrifice to appease offended gods, including human and even child sacrifice. But Christianity took this thinking to new heights by arguing that as the sin of humanity was an infinite offense against an infinitely holy God so the payment must be equally infinite. According to Brinsmead, church theologians then created the theology of not just human sacrifice but of the sacrifice of a God-man (a member of the Godhead or Trinity). Only an infinitely valuable sacrifice could meet the infinite demand for making amends to an infinitely offended Deity. This took conditional payback thinking to new unheard of heights.

Christianity came down decidedly against the new liberation that Jesus was trying to promote, the liberation into unconditional living or the new kingdom of God as truly human relating and existence. Christianity retreated, instead, into the old enslavement to retaliation thinking and existence. So the historical struggle between retaliation and non-retaliation came to a unique climax in the Jesus/Christianity contradiction. In the historical Jesus we found a new summit reached in the understanding and expression of what truly human existence could be- unconditional response and relating. His message clearly established an existence of no conditions, no requirements to be met in order to receive full forgiveness, unconditional inclusion, and unlimited generosity.

In pronounced contrast, with Christianity we got a system of supreme condition, a return to the old God of anger and punishment. Unfortunately for Western societies, Christian payback thinking has reinforced the felt need for payback in society as well. Note in this regard the Christian support for the death penalty in the US, and more imprisonment for offenders, even non-violent ones.

How did this happen? How did Christianity get it all so wrong? Because the man whose thinking and theology became Christianity- the apostle Paul- did not pay any attention to what Jesus actually said or taught. Paul ignored entirely the unconditional teaching of Jesus and created instead a new theology about Jesus that was shaped through and through by the primitive payback perspective. Paul got Jesus backwards, upside down, and absolutely opposite from what he actually taught.

Paul and the other followers of Jesus were just like the older brother in the Prodigal parable. With their strong sense of morality and justice as full payback they could not just ignore wrong with free

forgiveness. No. It first had to be punished. Amends had to be made. Debt had to be paid as a prerequisite condition. Holiness demanded all these conditions be met.

Paul argued that humanity had wilfully fallen from original perfection and that all people had become sinful and all deserved punishment and damnation. So a great payment had to be made to atone for what was believed to be wilful human sinfulness. A sacrifice of a God-man was necessary to placate an offended God that intended to enact retribution on all humanity.

Note some summaries of the retaliation theme in Paul's letters, starting with his central book on Christian belief or doctrine, Romans: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men (Rom.1:18)...you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God will give to each person according to what he has done....to those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress" (2:5-8)...

He then presents the solution to avoid this damnation from an angry God, "the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (3:25). The condition for escaping the wrath of God is faith in the blood sacrifice of Jesus. This condition for escaping wrath is repeated elsewhere throughout Romans. "If you confess with your mouth...and believe in your heart...you will be saved" (10:9).

Other statements affirm this payback theology, "God is just: he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you...He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel...They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord" (2Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The book of Hebrews continues this theme of retaliation and the condition of atonement by blood sacrifice. "Every violation and disobedience received its just punishment..." (2:2). For those who do not believe, "I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest.." (3:11). "It is mine to avenge. I will repay" (10:30). The condition to avoid this anger, "He sacrificed for their sins...when he offered himself..." (7:27).

This theme of blood sacrifice to appease a threatening God continues throughout the New Testament and reaches a terrorizing culmination in the book of Revelation. After noting again the condition of violent, bloody sacrifice to appease angry deity ("He has freed us from our sins by his blood", 1:5) the writer of Revelation then threatens those who refuse this blood sacrifice with an endless roasting on the big barbie down under. And he means the "lake of fire", forever (20:11-15). Ultimate and eternal payback, punishment, or retaliation.

So where Jesus had taught that no payment needed to be made before forgiveness was offered, Paul and other New Testament writers claimed that all debt must be paid in full before God would forgive. Paul denied completely what Jesus had taught. He went against Jesus' message entirely. He missed the most humanizing insight in all history, the discovery of the greatest human ideal ever conceived. He then successfully aborted the grandest human liberation movement of all; one that Jesus sought to take

even further, to new heights of humane relating and existence. And yet, confoundingly, Christianity claims to be the religion of Jesus. Well, where then is Jesus' central message of unconditional treatment of others? Christianity opted instead for the message of Paul about supreme conditions.

It has been established that Paul was a domineering man who tolerated no opposition and jealously fought to have his theology established as the only true Christian theology (see Charles Freeman's *The Closing of the Western Mind*, p.109-114). James Tabor (*Paul and Jesus*) has summed this up well in stating that Paul wrote most of the New Testament and other books support his viewpoint (e.g. Acts). Christianity is therefore Paul's Christianity. Paul's view of Jesus is the one that the world received. And there is nothing of true unconditional in Paul or his Christianity.

Yet the diamond of unconditional teaching is still here and there in the New Testament even though it has been almost buried by the dunghill of payback myth and theology of the New Testament.

Deity Meeting A Lower Standard

Christians today facilely use the term unconditional love to describe their God and what they believe they are obligated to fulfill in their lives. But this is an oxymoronic and irreconcilable mixing of entirely opposite things. Consequently, they come up with some fantastical and contorted explanations when presenting what they call "God's unconditional love through the sacrifice of Jesus", seemingly unaware of the contradictory nature of what they are doing (see for example, http://www.biblicaltheology.com/rom/rom_12_13.html noting the comment, "because love without hypocrisy loves as God loves: unconditionally... By so doing we leave the judgment and vengeance entirely up to the Lord"; also <http://www.commontruth.com/UnconditionalLove.html>. Others just give up entirely on unconditional- <http://withchrist.org/unconditional.htm> or <http://preservedwords.com/uncond-pv.htm>).

And yes, admittedly, Christians are at least embracing and wrestling with this theme of unconditional. They sense the spirit of this ideal in what Jesus taught but they present it thus- we must forgive unconditionally just as Jesus taught, so we must then let God repay as payback is a divine responsibility. In this manner they are trying to maintain both unconditional, which cannot be denied in Jesus' teaching, and yet also maintain the old payback views in their overall theology which is the supporting background of their belief system (God will exact revenge). This is an irreconcilable and profound contradiction but it is the best that they can come up with given the starkly opposing realities they are trying to hold in tension. This contradictory Christian mish-mash is the result of holding a felt obligation to the immutable sacred that they have inherited (a holy God that must punish sin) and then trying to read the unconditional Jesus through this payback lens. The outcome is that it only confuses the humane ideal that Jesus was advocating. The larger payback context that they are maintaining woefully distorts the actual meaning of unconditional.

So when pressed on this issue of genuine unconditional response Christian believers will argue that God cannot just forgive sin. God is holy, they claim, and must first punish all sin before he can forgive. Holiness takes precedence over love. Therefore, God demands that any debt be first paid in full before he will forgive or include anyone. A sacrifice must first be made before mercy can be shown (in direct

contradiction to the Jewish prophet's claims that God wanted no sacrifice but only mercy). Consequently, unconditional (absolutely no conditions) is distorted beyond recognition.

In response, we need to challenge that theology by asking a simple question- why cannot God just exercise authentic forgiveness as Jesus taught and be merciful and generous without first demanding payment? We are urged to act like this with no pre-conditions being met first. We are told to just forgive others for their offenses. Why is the God of Christianity held to a lower standard of behavior than we are? Is not God supposed to be something better, something more humane than we are? Why then are we held to a higher standard of human response and relating than God is? As Brinsmead says, a God who demands full payment before he forgives is a God who knows nothing of genuine forgiveness. Where the debt is paid in full, then no forgiveness is required.

And what about the teaching in such places as 1 Corinthians 13? It states that authentic love keeps no record of wrongs. And is not God love? Why then such contradiction by claiming that God must keep record of all wrongs and punish all sin? The entire salvation and sacrifice industry is built on noting faults and demanding atonement for them. Again, if ordinary people are held to a new humane standard of unconditional love then it is valid to ask why a supposedly supremely humane God is not held to the same standard? Edward Schillebeeckx has correctly stated, "God is more human (more humane) than any human being" (The Praxis of the Reign of God, Mary Hilker, p.56). Why then these silly myths of a God maintaining a lower standard of distinctly inhumane behavior? God is either Unconditional Love (absolutely no conditions), or not. If not, then you cannot define that conditional reality with the term unconditional.

Watch The Context

Payback thinking missed entirely the real meaning of ideals such as forgiveness. As noted above, when you try to embed human ideals in a payback context (e.g. unconditional love in a Christian theological context) you distort the real meaning of these human ideals. They are no longer authentically unconditional. This is the problem with all religion which is conditional. Note in this regard that many religious believers have tried to humanize their gods over history, recognizing that the barbaric gods of the past are too primitive for modern minds. So they have added new more humane features to their gods such as love and mercy. But they also feel obligated to maintain the old features that have to do with retaliation and punishment. For instance, as noted above, they claim that holiness demands punishment. Forgiveness and love are then dependent on first making some payment or sacrifice. Forgiveness is then rendered meaningless. When human ideals are couched in a payback context they are then rendered something entirely different from the unconditional that should define them.

Ignoring the core theme of Jesus, Christianity has continued to sacralise archaic payback thinking. And the Christian God has become an even more intense version of this perspective, with his infinite qualities such as infinite holiness demanding infinite payment. The Christian God has become an even greater retaliating monster than other early payback deities. And Hell in Christian theology has become the ultimate statement or expression of the hateful, inhuman response of retaliation toward human imperfection. All to scare people into the vast salvation/sacrifice industry that saps human time and resources, and hinders human progress.

The sum of the matter is that Christianity got Jesus all wrong and it got God all wrong. God is indeed unconditional love just as Jesus taught. And unconditional love to incomprehensible levels beyond all human imagination. There is no threat, no condemnation or judgment, no punishment, no conditions to meet for acceptance, absolutely nothing to fear in a God that is love. Let me state as plainly as possible the central point that the historical Jesus was trying to make. Every human being is fully and equally included; all are fully forgiven, and all receive the full generosity of God. All are safe no matter what they believe or don't believe. There is no threatening monster behind life to fear or dread. There is only Unconditional Love at the very core of all reality and life. There are no conditions to meet to be included in the love and generosity of this Ultimate Reality. No one has ever been separated in any manner from this Unconditional Love.

And while you are conquering this monster-the old punishing God- set your sight also on bringing down the second greatest monster of all, death. Over human history death has been made an even worse terror to people because it has been defined and explained in terms of religious belief and myth. Shaman and priests have long told people that death was a punishment from God for sin, and more punishment would follow after death. Cheer up, they said, the worst is yet to come. This intensifies normal fear of death. Death then becomes a terrifying monster for humanity to face and resolve. I know a lady who was reduced to despair and crying when a relative of hers died, refusing to meet the Christian condition of "accepting Jesus" in order to "be saved". The lady subsequently believed that her relative had gone to hell. That cruel nonsense adds further psychic misery to already unacceptable human suffering. The realization that there is only unconditional love at the heart of all reality dispels the enslaving fear of death or life after death. Unconditional does indeed take the sting out of death. Death can then be seen as the toothless monster that it really is. We should not hesitate to laugh in the face of such a grotesquely exaggerated monster.

Unconditional is liberation like nothing else in all history, and especially liberating is this realization that there is no threatening, punishing reality behind life. This gets to the deepest roots of long held human fears, anxieties, concerns, despair, and depression. In this regard, unconditional is utterly limitless in its liberating potential for human minds. It goes to the root of darkness in human consciousness, darkness long promoted by religion and its myth of coming payback.

Unconditional love at the very core of all reality breaks the grip of religious fear by overturning all those past perceptions of some looming retaliation, punishment, or need to placate with sacrifice. Real liberation is not just social but more essentially liberation of mind, thought, perception, feeling, and spirit. We can be physically free but still enslaved to the worst ideas held from a primitive past. Unconditional thinking therefore takes freedom to the very heart of what really enslaves humanity and this positively impacts human creative potential in profound ways. It liberates mind and emotions and spirit from a long history of guilt and shame over being imperfectly human, and still gradually developing toward something better and more humane.

And it points us toward the ultimate meaning and purpose of the universe and life. As others have suggested, the main point of human existence is to learn something about love. Well, this new definition of love as unconditional, takes that formerly high human ideal to new heights of clarity and humanity.

This new insight into unconditional love as the supreme human ideal and the true nature of ultimate reality offers profound potential to reshape human behavioral response and society. It liberates as nothing else can ever do from all the debasing and dehumanizing features of animal existence with its conditional exclusion (small band, tribe), domination, and retaliation, and the destructive consequences of these behaviors in human society.

Living An Unconditional Life

Naturally, questions arise as to how to express such an ideal in daily life. I once brought up this idea of unconditional treatment of others in a discussion group and someone countered, “Oh, you’re saying that we should let psychopaths go free?” Well, no. Absolutely not. No such thing is being suggested. Any common sense understanding of love will recognize the fundamental responsibility to protect innocent people from harm. This means that people who cannot or will not control their worst impulses to harm others need to be restrained (locked up and in some cases the key thrown away). It may even mean proactive endeavor to prevent such things as terrorism. We remember the common sense expressed by the pacifist preacher who said, “If someone attacks me and my family, I will beat him over the head with a 2by4 and when he is lying on the ground unconscious then I will sit down and discuss my pacifist principles with him”.

But, more seriously, any such protective restraint should be done “with a loving heart and with the other person’s welfare in mind” (<http://www.unification.net/ws/theme144.htm>). This is a call for conventional views of justice to be continually re-evaluated and reformulated in terms of necessary restraint but also in terms of the ongoing need for strengthening restorative justice ideals as desirable human ideals. And we ought to be careful that when presenting these common sense qualifiers above (i.e. forcible restraint of violent people) that we do not diminish the full impact of the ideal of unconditional treatment of all others.

Further, how do we judge and assign culpability in any human life? For instance, decades ago a teenage boy in the US was condemned to death for a brutal rape and murder of a woman. But during his trial it came to light that he had been brutalized from before birth. His father, suspicious that his mother may have cheated, had beat her pregnant stomach. After the boy was born he was thrown against walls for crying and beaten repeatedly. He knew only hate and violence all through his young life. And if the condition of psychopathy is involved in such cases, researchers suggest there may even be a genetic factor. These people may be born with defective brains. They still need ongoing restraint and imprisonment in order to protect others, but surely they also should be shown mercy for things that have happened to them that were beyond their control. So the argument is not about setting people free that cannot control their own worst impulses but for showing mercy even to the worst offenders (e.g. abolishing the death penalty).

Further, some studies have shown that exacting revenge through our payback justice systems brings no ultimate or final closure to victims (e.g. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/06/revenge.aspx>). We also remember that forgiveness does not mean that victims are responsible to like offenders in order to properly forgive them. Others argue that forgiveness is more about personal liberation from negative emotions regardless of any contact or relationships with offenders. And by way of caution here- normal

human sensitivity will respect the overwhelming trauma caused to victims by the unrestrained and intentionally cruel violence of some offenders. Sensitivity will understand that each person approaches these human ideals in different ways, from differing experiences, and at their own chosen pace. Any severely traumatized human being deserves the utmost respect in regard to how they may wrestle with these human ideals, or choose not to engage them. So while we can argue that unconditional treatment of all others is a profoundly liberating approach, different people will embrace such things as they feel able. The trauma of some people, however, does not mean that unconditional treatment of others should be dismissed as unrealistic, impractical, or unworkable. Such dismissal would miss the liberating potential of this ideal.

Others argue that if there is no threat of punishment in society then there is nothing to restrain people from wrong behavior. Anarchy will break out. But the discipline of psychology has shown that most people respond better to positive affirmation than to threat and fear. The Australian Psychological Society has a paper entitled 'Punishment and Behavior Change' (http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/punishment_position_paper.pdf) which argues "that recent trends towards increased reliance on punishment as a primary response to crime" do not work as expected. For example, punitive parenting approaches have been linked to higher levels of aggression in children, the paper claims. And these punitive approaches do not rehabilitate and deter criminal offenders. They don't teach "alternative acceptable behaviors". The paper recommends approaches that do such things as explain other people's perspectives and feelings, and promote empathy and other more positive alternatives.

Also, we obviously teach children the natural consequences to all sorts of actions. And unconditional is not an argument against restitution. That is a common sense and entirely humane responsibility of any offender. It is up to the victim to engage unconditional response toward offenders.

Contemporary psychology (and theology) further offers another insight that is important to consider in regard to our struggle to overcome our animal past and live as human. It states that we are not our inherited animal brain (e.g. Jeffrey Schwartz, *You Are Not Your Brain*). Though we still struggle against this residual influence, we are in reality a conscious self that is essentially love (see for instance, Albert Nolan's *Jesus Today*; or Karen Armstrong's *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*). Some suggest that this true human self as love is the God of love incarnated in all humanity.

Note again that the ideal of unconditional treatment of others faces stiff resistance from numerous people. It is an ideal that is particularly offensive to good moral people, and notably to Christians (some examples- <http://withchrist.org/unconditional.htm> , and http://www.acts17-11.com/cows_unlove.html). We saw this earlier in the stories of Jesus where people were included as a contrast to someone expressing unconditional generosity, such as the older brother who was offended at the generous father who refused to punish or demand repayment first. He was not acting with payback justice (reward good, punish wrong). We could respond to this by recognizing that all of us intuitively feel that we should be treated unconditionally and our failures forgiven freely, but we are then often less generous with the failures of others that we view as worse than ours. So we begin to set conditions for them that are harsher than what we apply to ourselves. This type of thinking leaves us all

insecure in the end. Who is really forgiven and included and safe if some are to be excluded from full unconditional treatment? Once we make it conditional and uncertain for some then it becomes conditional and uncertain for all of us.

I would add that to focus this ideal of unconditional only on response to major traumatizing events (e.g. serious crimes) is to miss an important application. Lifting a population or society is more about all members practicing unconditional in the little details of daily mundane human interaction. This is where we experience unconditional as a “hard saying” but as the purest form of liberation and enlightenment.

Love Beyond Comprehension

When considering this new discovery of unconditional love at the core of all reality we ought to remember the true nature of anything transcendent or having to do with divinity. It is beyond all imagining in terms of its real perfection and beauty. It is beyond all understanding or expression. As Campbell notes, categories, words, names, or statements only distort and diminish the truly incomprehensible. What Ultimate Reality actually is, is so much better than we can ever imagine or express. The reality of a God that is unconditional love is infinitely better than the best that can be imagined. When Near Death Experiencers return after experiencing unconditional love they cannot find words to express it. So, as Ken Ring says, they stammer hyperbole about that love. It is something better felt than understood or explained.

In light of this, anything less than or contrary to unconditional love could be evaluated as not truly human, humane, or even true. Unconditional becomes a new touchstone or centering ideal for all truth and meaning. It becomes the new baseline for all perception of reality, for meaning, for purpose, for humane feeling, response, behavior, or authentic human existence. Comparatively, anything less may be considered non-authentic or inhuman. This new ideal answers the profound human desire to know and experience what it means to be authentically human and to know what to look for in order to find that better future or existence that all humanity longs for.

At the core of the universe is this pulsating Energy, Life, Power, Mind, and Consciousness that is defined by Unconditional Love. It is the greatest discovery ever made, the greatest insight ever conceived. It gets to the ultimate meaning of the universe and life, to the purpose of all. And it gets to the essential nature of what creates and sustains all things, and why- to learn and live something of real love, and to know that love is unconditional. Unconditional takes the ideal of love to a new height of humane expression. This is the grand liberation that we continue to reach for.

There is a major revolution occurring in the historical development of human perception and outlook. We still have further work to do in order to root out this perverse perception that there is some horrific monster behind life that is going to retaliate and punish humanity. This is a residual perception that still hinders modern consciousness from a full liberation into a more humane future.

The grand narrative of humanity is about this liberation into that more human future. Counter movements like Christianity have tried to derail and abort this liberation but it goes on, driven by dreamers like the Akkadian father, the Hebrew prophets, the historical Jesus, and many others who have also felt something of the wonder of being truly human. We are just beginning to play around the

edges of something so profoundly wondrous and liberating that we are hardly able to understand or begin to express it. It pulls us forward to make life something ever better.

Wendell Krossa

Appendices A:

Some argue that any speculation about unknowable realities is a waste of time. But because a lot of distorting speculation has already occurred over history and has long shaped human thought and behavior, often in damaging ways causing much harm, it is important to correct that speculation and offer better alternatives. To point toward a better direction for human perception. Hence, my foregoing theological speculation.

Appendices B:

If humanity can no longer blame punishing gods, how then do we explain human misfortune and suffering? We can no longer explain it (as people have done all through past history) in terms of gods retaliating against sin, or disciplining failing people, or teaching people lessons. And anyway, what monster would harm or kill people just to teach others lessons, as is the argument of Job's comforters?

We have better alternatives to help in understanding the mystery of suffering. We now recognize there is an element of freedom in nature and in human existence (freedom of choice and action).

Freedom is a concept essential to any authentic perception of love. Any contemporary understanding of deity must accept the fact of non-intervention (non-coercion) as central to genuine love. Love does not over-rule human freedom and choice. This leaves open the possibility for poor choice and hence, abuse and suffering caused to others. But such freedom also permits genuine moral good to be expressed which, according to theologians, is valued highly by a God of love.

For more detail on these issues that have perplexed people for millennia see, for instance, *The Triumph of God Over Evil* by William Hasker. He offers a thorough coverage of the issues related to human suffering and attempts to understand and explain this mystery as much as it is possible.

Background to Retaliation and Conditional- Appendices C:

Let me rehearse here in summary some of the more prominent themes from early mythology that have continued to shape human belief systems through history, most notably with a punishment orientation. I am focusing on the origins of the two themes developed in the essay.

First, to clarify, the human fear of death is the fundamental impetus to mythmaking (Campbell- "The recognition of mortality and the requirement to transcend it is the first great impulse to mythology" *Myths to Live By*, p.22). Early people with their developing human consciousness became aware of life, of existence, and of beauty, love, suffering and all that comes with conscious human experience of life.

But it was their awareness of death that impacted them the most. Their experience of life and love ended in the rot of death. That realization of finiteness and mortality became a terror to people.

Coupled with their death awareness and death fear they also felt the fundamental impulse of consciousness for meaning and purpose (Victor Frankl). This impulse for meaning drove the human desire to understand it all and to explain life and death. This led to early attempts at mythmaking, at creating systems of meaning or explanation.

While fear of death pushed them to create mythical explanations, there were other ideas that shaped the nature of the explanations that they came up with. Prominent among these ideas were the perception that there were spiritual forces or spirits/gods behind the forces of nature. We see this in early accounts of water and wind gods (storm gods), lightning gods, sun gods, moon gods, and other related gods.

Early people, using the best logic available to them, concluded that the spirits/gods were angry because the forces of nature were often destructive and harmed people.

Further, people emerging from an animal past understood life in terms of animal drives and impulses such as small band mentality, domination of others (alpha male/female), and retaliation (destroy competitors/enemies). It is important to note that retaliation begins in the animal world. We embody our animal past in our physical body and in our genes (98% similarity with chimpanzees), and we also share the same dark and brutal impulses that animals manifest.

These dark animal impulses are mediated to humanity via a core animal brain. This is the dark side in humanity, what religious people call original sin or sinfulness. Viewing human imperfection and failure with the developing idea of sin is to view humanity too harshly as possessing something that provokes the gods to retaliate. Human imperfection is then viewed as something deserving punishment and damnation. Early myths also added the element of wilfulness to human failure. Early people intentionally chose evil and ruined the original paradise and destroyed life (the Fall of man or original sin myth). Later people would project onto their gods the feature of holiness which further sharpens the sense of human imperfection and affirms the felt need to punish humanity. Theological retaliation logic argues that holy, pure gods are obligated to punish sin.

But to call our animal background and inheritance sin is to unnecessarily demonize humanity and to intensify the felt urge to punish. It is our background and it remains with us in the form of this inherited animal core brain (tri-partite brain in evolutionary biological terms- reptilian core, limbic system, and then later cortex that mediates the later human impulses). Humanity should not be condemned for emerging out of an animal past and struggling to gradually progress toward a more human future. Surely patience and assistance is a more appropriate response to our endeavor to become more human.

Unfortunately, with that animal background and the still residual animal drives felt in human life, the brutal features of animal existence were then projected by early people onto their gods. Those gods were shaped as notably predatory, punitive, or retaliatory gods. They punished and destroyed people

(for example, note the Sumerian Flood myth, Wikipedia, where an early council of gods decided to annihilate humanity with a flood).

Further in relation to these ideas, people developed the belief that any human sickness was evidence of punishment from the gods. It was understood that the gods had sent any sickness because people had broken taboos and deserved retribution.

The ultimate expression of the gods retaliating against human imperfection was the idea of final apocalypse, a grand annihilation of all humanity and all life; the ending of the world. This was the ultimate expression of retaliating gods punishing humanity.

But later mythmakers would take retaliation and punishment even further in the perverse myth of hell. After the apocalyptic ending of the world, imperfect humanity would be destroyed and punished forever in a fiery and tormenting hell. This is the dark and perverse drive to retaliate and punish taken to a traumatizing extreme.

The culmination of developing these themes in early mythmaking is the perception that there is something threatening and punitive behind life, some great retaliating monster; a super predator. This has been the most damaging perception ever created by human minds. It has reverberated all down through history in human consciousness causing more terror, misery and despair than can be calculated.

As noted in the essay, this perception of something threatening and punitive, or retaliatory, then sparked the appeasement response in early people. This is the fear of death being aroused to extremes. Early people, afraid of the angered spirits/gods, naturally sought a way to escape punishment and death. They wanted to find some way to appease the angry gods and find salvation from their threats.

Therefore, the early shaman/priests devised salvation schemes. Notable here was the offering of sacrifices or blood to appease angry spirits. This salvation/sacrifice movement has developed into a massive endeavor over human history. It has been revised and refined in many diverse ways in the varied religions that people have created but it always expresses essentially the same desire to appease some angered and retaliatory entity behind life.

Christianity developed the above myths into their most intense expression and that Christian body of myth has arguably shaped Western consciousness and society more than any other complex of ideas, and the civilization of the West has subsequently influenced much of the rest of the world.

So we have this line of descent from base animal characteristics and existence down to early animal-like myths and gods, and further down to more refined expressions of such themes in religions like Christianity. But in contrast to this line of descent, we also see in history the emergence of human consciousness in early humanity. This is something new and uniquely human or humane. As John Eccles says, it is something entirely outside of the evolutionary process ("A supernatural, spiritual creation... no other explanation is plausible"). And human consciousness with its new and unique human impulses takes humanity in an entirely new direction from animal behavior and existence. This is the exodus into

freedom (freedom from animal drives and existence). It is the beginning of the humanization of all life in the wonder of civilization.

Evolutionary biology or psychology often does not get the human element right with its endeavor to understand human experience and life in terms of our animal past and inheritance. These disciplines have distorted and degraded the uniquely human by trying to explain it in terms of animal drives and existence. There are more helpful explanations coming from the disciplines of theology and psychology.

With the emergence and maturing of consciousness there has been an ongoing struggle between the human and the animal (religions try to explain this as a struggle with original sin, but see, for example Lyall Watson's *Dark Nature* for alternative approaches). Despite the ongoing influence of that animal inheritance, our human consciousness has sparked an overall trajectory in history that improves irreversibly toward something better over time. Note, for instance, Stephen Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* and James Payne's *History of Force* for evidence of this long-term improvement, rise, and advance of humanity and human civilization. We become something more humane over time and we also humanize the rest of life.

To sum up, the long historical line of ongoing development and refinement of retaliation (payback, punishment, revenge) has to do with our animal past and inheritance, and the early projection of this onto ideas of God. The long historical line of emerging unconditional treatment of others (non-retaliation, compassion, mercy, and other human traits) has to do with human consciousness emerging and maturing in humanity over the long-term. As some argue, this is divinity incarnated in humanity and inspiring humanity through the wonder of consciousness to become something better over time. To become what we are- human.

To further clarify once more, let me add that researchers like Karen Armstrong (*Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*), Albert Nolan (*Jesus Today*), and Jeffrey Schwartz (*You Are Not Your Brain*) are also wrestling with this issue of dualism in humanity. They argue that as human persons or human selves we are not our animal inheritance. We are in essence human and defined by the core human feature of love. This is our essential nature as human persons, as supernatural, spiritual creations. This consciousness that is love defines us most essentially, not our animal past or inheritance.

Thus a new dualism is emerging. Note also the Near-Death Experience research in this regard. Monism or materialism never dealt properly with the fundamental human impulse for meaning or purpose. It never understood the wonder of human consciousness or the wonder of being human as a distinct and unique new reality in life.