

# The Reawakening: Religion and the Future of Humanity

## Synopsis



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### Introduction

Humanity is currently facing a severe ecological crisis. It is estimated that human demands on the planet constitute 150% of the planet's long-term capacity.

How have we come to this? The capitalist system has been in place in the past two centuries, a period which has seen the huge growth of human population and the beginning of unsustainable demands on the planet. However I believe that there has to have been a precursor to capitalist type thinking, which I identify with

monotheistic or monotheistic type religions, which prepared the way for our current ecocidal global culture.

I believe that an answer to these types of religions has already occurred: in Daoism, Buddhism and other traditions (which I call Version 2.1 religions, or The Reawakening).

I use a software metaphor. Religion 1.0 (prehistoric); Religion 2.0 was released after urbanisation, civilisations and the need for official cults, but was very buggy. Religion 2.1 was then released, which eliminated most of the bugs in Religion 2.0, but there has not been nearly enough uptake of this version.

In modern times capitalism (in the guise of liberal democracy) is happy to include within itself 'freedoms' derived from Religion 2.0 traditions ('our judaeo-christian heritage'), because freedoms such as freedom of speech and belief curtail fundamentalist thinking, but leave economic fundamentalist thinking untouched.

## The Thesis

I am using and critiquing Karl Jasper's concept of an Axial Age (a period around 500 BCE when humanity allegedly began thinking the universe had a moral order and moving towards religions of a monotheistic cast).

This thesis needs to be challenged, as well as the idea that humanity suddenly became more human (ie that prehistoric humans were 'primitive').

What contributed more to this period of religious innovation was the formation of early states and the creation of official cults—the invention of the alphabet allowed a more ready record of religious speculation to survive than had been the case in earlier periods.

I describe instead these official cults (Version 2.0 religions), and then Version 2.1 religions which arose to challenge these (especially Buddhism and Daoism). I describe these latter

traditions as 'The Reawakening' because it represents a resurgence of human instinct and a sense of belonging in the world that was banished by early urban life and the extensive empires that produced the invention of monotheism.

After this, however, this Reawakening has largely been ignored, what happened after is that a variety of dogmatic and mainly monotheistic religions arose and dominated official thought. These promoted cruelty, conformism and a neglect for humans and other beings (despite countercurrents within them). In addition, the ways of thought in the Reawakening have themselves been altered by contact with monotheistic religions. Towards our own time these misguided religious traditions ended up producing the seed-bed for Capitalism.

## Prologue: Prehistoric religion

I undertake a survey of evidence for prehistoric religions. I see these as largely conforming to the pattern of the world and a spirit-world being seen as coterminous, with humans needing to acquire religious knowledge to enter the spirit-world to try to influence events in the world.

Prehistoric religion sees continuity and rebirth within the world.

In later prehistoric religions religious hierarchies develop which separate the believer and the spirit-world (a foretaste of later religions).

## Pivotal Point: Monotheism arrives

The state cults of the Middle East, India and China; the invention of monotheism in Judah in the C6 BCE; the *de facto* monotheism of the Greek World under Zeus. Reflections of this in India and China (the Atman/Brahma and Confucianism respectively).

# Daoism

This may have developed from Confucianism, but by contrast it to that ideology it located the best method of understanding the Way of Heaven in the Way [of nature], not the Way of Man.

Daoism and its early history is outlined, including evidence for breathing practices and meditation.

I take Daoism as the paradigm for a 2.1 Religion with the following characteristics

1. It locates a source within nature ('the ten thousand things'), as opposed to wholly within human society, as the locus of meaning;
2. Has compassion as an important virtue, which it also extends to all living things;
3. It includes within it some form of mental or physical practice, which the adherent follows;
4. It is sceptical of, or silent about, basic ontology, being, by this, difficult to reconcile with religions that feature detached deities or a monotheistic religion.

Crucially, in having these characteristics, it reintroduces many of the important features of prehistoric religion.

The compassion that I am highlighting here and in the other Religion 2.1 traditions is an essential compassion which can exist within the individual and society. It is not a compassion which is used to control and moralise and coerce so that religions are used to justify such things as life or war.

The purpose of this work is not theology, it is only to show how the individual relationship to society, and vice versa, influences the relationship to nature which sanctions either exploitation as in capitalism, or self-limitation through compassion.

# Buddhism

I put forward evidence that Buddhism emerged into a northern

Indian world that was not yet Vedic/Hindu, but consisted of a variety of traditional and emerging religions. Buddhism's history of itself reflects the world of sectarian strife in the early centuries CE, not its actual origin, a view supported by examination of the *Edicts of Ashoka*.

I describe the nature of the Buddha's enlightenment and I note that Buddhism's key practice from the very first is meditation.

The Buddha's teaching has frequently been confused with a rejection of life or reality. Nothing could be further from the truth, it is difficult to see what would be the point of the Eightfold Path, or the practice of compassion, if nothing had any existence.

I describe the parallels between Daoism and Buddhism and show how Buddhism conforms to the paradigm for a Version 2.1 religion.

## Greek Thought

I analyse the religious context of the Greek religion in the centuries C6-C5, the official Olympian and pre-Socratic thought and the emergence of a dualistic Platonism. I describe Cynicism and Stoicism and show how these can be related to the paradigm of a Version 2.1 religion. Both these traditions insisted on physical and mental exercises as part of their practice, though details of these have not come down to us.

## Interlude 1: The case of Plotinus: Platonism deconstructs itself

Plotinus (C3 CE) was a philosopher in the 'official' Platonic tradition. However, he completely surmounts the usual vulgar dualism of that philosophy and argues strongly for an absolute Monism.

However, Plotinus was such a powerful thinker and strong personality that what shines through his writing, instead of a world where the physical is merely stain on the spiritual, is a version of the prehistoric spiritual world. This is the tradition of all true mystics subsequent to this.

## Interlude 2: Almost Pure Speculation

I suggest that Version 2.1 religions had a common origin, perhaps a shamanistic religion of southern China/Tibet influenced Daoism to north and Buddhism to south and this influence penetrated through to SE Europe just when Greeks were getting dissatisfied with Olympianism.

Penetration of Buddhism into China from the C2 CE onwards shows trans-Himalayan cultural influence was working then, why not earlier? It is also obvious that Daoism and Buddhism had a very long and fruitful interaction within China from the C2 CE onwards, which might indicate that they had very real similarities on which to build. I adduce some other evidence for this thesis.

## Version 2.0 Religions Develop

In various parts of Eurasia Version 2.0 religions developed. In the Middle East Judaism took shape, and in a stunning coup for 2.0 Religions Europe and other areas were taken over by Christianity, invented by Paul of Tarsus. Then Islam emerged. In China Confucianism was cemented as the state religion, in India god-centred strains took over Hinduism.

Fortunately each major Version 2.0 religion has a number of sticking points which prevent its too wide acceptance or full uptake.

The consequence of the triumph of these religions is that God is in

heaven and all isn't right with the world. Just as in a hierarchical state people must believe things which they don't observe (that obedience to authority leads to happiness and prosperity), people must now believe that they have a beneficent deity looking after them in heaven, despite all evidence to the contrary. The imperative is now to obey authority, believe, die and go to heaven. This leads to a neglect of this world, a neglect the body, (which becomes despised in the same way that people of low social rank are despised in hierarchical societies), and it makes people lonely and fearful.

Worse, monotheism passes people's dealings with the spiritual over to a hierarchical priesthood and strips away all the caveats that surrounded the spirit world in prehistoric religions. People are spectators, not participants, in religious rites, just as they are now spectators, not participants, in political affairs. People now no longer have to undergo ordeals, or privations in order to enter the spirit world, or practise self-cultivation, instead they simply pay fees to priests, or attend ceremonies as spectators, and the interactions they do have are correspondingly less satisfying.

## History of Religion 2.1

I will be arguing that 2.0 Religions have had an effect on the development of 2.1 Religions. Christianity killed off Stoicism and other traditions of Greek thought. In India Hinduism eventually triumphed over Buddhism, and elsewhere Buddhism came some way to resembling 2.0 Religions, with perhaps Zen as the tradition which best preserves the simplicity of the original enlightenment (though it is not a survival of the earliest period (and is indebted to Daoism)).

Daoism was influenced by conventional religion and Buddhism. I will be arguing the unfashionable position that philosophical Daoism and religious Daoism have little in common.

However, in both traditions meditation type exercises have been a constant feature.

## Countercurrents within Version 2.0 Religions

As well as stressing how long prehistoric religions persisted in many regions, I discuss countercurrents within 2.0 religions:

- In Islam: Sufism, a Neo-platonic non-dualistic, community-based tradition performing social works;
- In Christianity: Marian shaktism in music, poetry and architecture in the late Middle Ages; Protestant sects, especially Quakerism, in which Inner Light = the Way; non dualistic Mysticism eg Meister Eckhardt, *The Cloud of Unknowing* author, Traherne &c
- In Judaism: the Kabbalah and mystics of all ages
- In Hinduism: mystics, *bhakti*, *shakti*

## Capitalism

Capitalism is a form of dogmatic absolutism arising from Christian thought c 1600 (as per Weber's thesis). It is a secularised Version 2.0 religion. In those religions people have to contemplate heaven and earth being sundered, the earth being inferior, God being in heaven, and the true meaning of life being found only in death.

Capitalism is bizarre transformation of this blueprint, as it disdains any form of morality which gets in the way of profit-making, dwells entirely within the world, yet destroys it. This is because the world has been rendered grey from monotheism, and no-one feels the need to nurture it, and themselves in it.

## Conclusion: the Future

Secular humanism is a valid way of thinking as long as it sees the ecological whole, not parts of it.

However, Version 2.1 religions, revived and practised more widely would be a way of guiding humanity away from the destructive fixations of capitalism and Version 2.0 Religions.

