

**Looking Beyond Religion:
The Universe's "Salvation" Story**

Davidson Loehr

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"All the world's major religions, with their emphasis on love, compassion, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness can and do promote inner values. But the reality of the world today is that grounding ethics in religion is no longer adequate. This is why I am increasingly convinced that the time has come to find a way of thinking about spirituality and ethics beyond religion altogether."

— Dalai Lama's Facebook page, 2012

Theologians can be expected to defend, if not "God," at least God-talk, as the best way of framing our enduring questions. But I agree with the Dalai Lama's summary: that time has passed. Much like alchemy, God-talk has become, for growing numbers, irrelevant and quaint.¹ At the same time, some of our newer sciences have developed more useful insights into our enduring spiritual and ethical questions. The most relevant sciences here include ethology, some neurosciences, and dual-focus fields like evolutionary psychology etc. Over the last two centuries, scientific discoveries have largely replaced religious revelations as the dialect for truth-seeking. Most people don't even realize the two words mean the same thing. To "discover" is to remove a "cover," and "revelation" removes a "veil."

The word "salvation" must also be unpacked, because it has two very different meanings. The first is supernatural, as used by most religious conservatives. The second, used by many liberals, is completely this-worldly, where "salvation" – from the word "salve" – alludes to a healthy kind of wholeness, here and now. The seeds of fairness, empathy and compassion are innate in us, as they also are in many other species. So also is the template of the universe's "salvation" story: the desire to become more dynamically complex in a healthy kind of wholeness. I'll flesh out this argument later and try to make it persuasive, or at least clear enough to help critics mount more focused attacks. First, a sketch of the state of religion in the United States:

- Only about 17% of Americans attend any church, synagogue or mosque regularly.²
- In the first decade of the 21st century, the median attendance at a typical worship service decreased, from 130 to 108.³
- Evangelicals make up only about 7% of Americans, not the 25% they have claimed.⁴
- At least 14% of Americans are non-believers: twice as many as evangelicals.⁵
- 30% of adults under 30 define their religion as "None". Those "Nones" are the fastest-growing group on the religious horizon.⁶ At the present rates, most Americans will identify themselves as non-religious by 2035.⁷ (But relying on religion to organize against feminism might be a strategy that's hitting a hard limit: age. As in, younger people are simply not as interested in religion as they used to be. As Adam Lee, writing for the *Guardian*, details, **young people are disengaging with religion generally** and the religious right in particular at an amazing rate. Millennials, he writes, are "the least religious generation in American history – they're even getting less religious as they get older, which is unprecedented." And the most anti-feminist denominations, the Catholics and the Southern Baptists, are seeing some of the highest levels of drop-off.

AlterNet / By *Amanda Marcotte*

With the Christian Right Dying Off, Who Fuels Misogyny? Enter Secular Sexists of #Gamergate and MRA Movement)

- Confidence in religious institutions is at an all-time low.⁸
- People's beliefs often have little to do with their behaviors.⁹ Catholic women use birth control and abortion at about the same rate as non-Catholics,¹⁰ and while only 7% of American women are evangelicals, they make up more than 20% of the women who get abortions.¹¹
- In spite of continuing efforts by many good people, the misogyny and hypocrisy of religious and political leaders have done much to poison all biblical religions in America. This is magnified by extreme examples – as when Pope Benedict said ordaining women would be at the same moral level as priests sexually abusing children.¹² By the Church's own records, the sexual abuse of children by priests has been going on since the first century.¹³
- Then there are some stubborn facts about Yahweh – the God of the Bible – suggesting that the biblical religions may not be *able* to point us toward the more inclusive and empowering ideals we need. The ancient Hebrew people lived among the Canaanites, whose religion was that of an agricultural people with male and female deities who, like the later Greek Olympian deities, could show very human traits like a fondness for sex

and alcohol. But Yahweh began as a war god with the attributes of a tribal chief. The basic form of the covenant between God and his people, as we can still see in recent movies like “Noah” (2014), is: “I am your God, and you are my people. If you please me, I will favor you. If you displease me, I may destroy you.” Unlike many other gods, Yahweh had no women in His life, neither wives nor consorts. It should not be surprising that He became the model for thirty centuries of patriarchy, misogyny and violence.

— Finally, the number of Christian denominations in the world has been estimated from 21,000 to 43,000. This is the description of a thoroughly diluted and dissipated religion.¹⁴

Please understand that none of this is meant as an attack on religion; but it *is* meant as a sobering sketch of the challenges facing those who want their religion to remain relevant and persuasive in what some have called a new Axial Age.¹⁵ We should wish them luck in leading their believers in the ways of love, justice, and our highest inner values. However, we must also find another way of thinking about how we should live, expressed in plain talk rather than religious jargon.

Our dream is that there is a structure of reality and a way we should live that are mirror images. Can our sciences save our dream by showing us an ideal structure of reality that is also innate in us? *Is* there such an innate ethical template? If so, can living in harmony with that story be qualitatively better? And is there a penalty for living in opposition to this alleged cosmic norm?

The good news is that the answer to these questions is Yes, and the empirical evidence is both within and around us. These innate ethical structures exist at three levels of increasing complexity:

Fairness. We, like thousands of other species, have an innate sense of fairness, as has been shown by many scientific experiments. Details are in the Endnotes of this paper,¹⁶ as well as a website where you can watch a 2-1/2 minute video clip of the famous – and hilarious – scientific experiment conducted to learn whether monkeys have a sense of fairness. The audience’s explosive laughter tells us we identify deeply and immediately with the behavior of the monkey who has been cheated. (The experiment has been repeated with many other species, with similar results.)

Empathy and Compassion. We are also among the species in which empathy and compassion can be shown to exist.¹⁷ We count empathy and compassion as key elements in ethically good behavior. Ethologist Frans De Waal cites a study to find out how children respond to family members instructed to feign sadness (sobbing), pain (crying), or distress (choking). Children a little over one year of age already comfort

others. Since expressions of sympathy emerge at an early age in virtually every member of our species, they are as natural as the first step. An unplanned sidebar to this study, however, was that household pets appeared as worried as the children by the “distress” of family members. They hovered over them or put their heads in their laps.¹⁸ So: we don’t get our goodness from religions or gods, but from “Mother Nature,” through evolution, where many other species of animals have had these traits for tens or hundreds of millions of years before we evolved and named them. See the Endnotes (#17) for examples.

A Yearning for “More”. Most importantly, there are good data to show that the growth toward more inclusive and dynamic complexity is built into the structure of the universe at all scales of magnification. We carry this cosmic story within us, just as we carry the sense of fairness and the capacity for empathy and compassion. Further, there are immense benefits to those people, institutions and societies who embody this leit-motif, and severe penalties for those people, institutions and societies that do not, as the following examples illustrate. It is the one universal norm that takes the measure of absolutely everything. The numberless gods we have created in the past several hundred thousand years are but pale representations of our possibilities.

Historical Examples of the Universe’s “Salvation” and “Damnation”¹⁹

Those in Big History write of the universe’s story as the growth toward greater complexity. When talking about humans, it’s helpful to add a few more adjectives: like *more inclusive, empowering and dynamic complexity*. As complexity increases, the possibilities increase to create situations or “worlds” that may not even have been imaginable in simpler systems.²⁰

My historical examples of this sort of “salvation” involve Frances Perkins and Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s work in the 1930’s and our country’s empowering and compassionate actions following WWII. The “damnation” is the subsequent dumbing-down of the U.S. culture since the 1970’s to measure human and social worth through (mere) money, in a parasitic capitalism.

“Salvation” — Growing toward a healthy and complicated wholeness²¹

During and after Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “New Deal,” the U.S. was transformed into a vastly more complex country, releasing world-changing energy and potential. Behind the scenes in FDR’s presidency, one woman first made herself more complex, and was then able to help guide the U.S. into the healthiest kind of wholeness in its history. Her name was Frances Perkins (1880-1965), and her story can be told briefly

(and more completely in the Endnotes).²²

She graduated from college with a double major in chemistry and physics in 1902, and added a master's degree in economics and sociology from Columbia University in 1910. She developed the radically inclusive view that "poverty was preventable, destructive, wasteful and demoralizing. In the midst of potential plenty, it is morally unacceptable in a Christian and democratic society. Because the 'poor' are people, with hopes, fears, virtues, vices and fellow citizens..."²³

Meanwhile, in her personal life, her husband and their daughter had what today we call a bipolar personality disorder, and her husband was in and out of mental institutions throughout their marriage. Frances Perkins was the sole financial support for her family.

When FDR was elected President in 1932, he made her his Secretary of Labor, a position she held from 1933 to 1945. She was the first woman ever appointed to the U.S. Cabinet, and her twelve years are still the longest anyone has served as Secretary of Labor.

In that capacity, she brought the labor movement into the New Deal coalition. She helped craft laws against child labor, and established the Social Security Act, with unemployment benefits, pensions for the many uncovered elderly Americans, and welfare for the poorest citizens. She established the first minimum wage and overtime laws, and defined the standard forty-hour work week. These achievements were gained for the first time in U.S. history. She worked to put an end to child labor and to provide safety for women workers. Meanwhile, on the day the Social Security Act was signed into law, her husband escaped from a mental institution. It's hard to know how Frances Perkins continually bridged the chaos of home life and the new and complex order she helped bring to our nation, but it has an almost unimaginable complexity.

After WWII, the U.S., through the Marshall Plan, helped both Germany and Japan back on their feet, enabling them to buy the things we made, and establishing the U.S. as the most widely respected nation on earth for several decades. Veterans were given a generous GI Bill, allowing millions of men to get a college education, usually for the first time in their family. Husbands, on their single paycheck, were able to support a family in the new "middle class" and help put their children through college. With a proud, healthy and educated workforce, we saw the beginning of what some have called the American Century, achieved by what others have called The Greatest Generation. But all of this was made possible by Frances Perkins, FDR, the New Deal, and the compassion of our post-war actions, toward our veterans and our former foes. And this new complexity was inclusive, empowering, and dynamic, bringing a far greater percentage of our citizens into our governance than ever before in our brief history.

When done right, moving into more inclusive and dynamic complexity can create

whole new worlds, much like more complex stars and supernovas can create new planets and new elements. The New Deal was about empowering citizens to reach that more complex kind of healthy wholeness, without which a more healthy, whole and dynamic society would have been impossible.

“Damnation” — The devastation from four decades of capitalistic greed²⁴

Over the last several decades, we have watched most of that productive complexity crumble, as people came into power for whom money became – again – the currency in which human worth was measured – what some have called parasitic or vulture capitalism. Only money and power were respected, and money has been given free rein to buy politicians and elections wholesale. This was the simplistic and short-sighted vision that reinstated our capitalist ideology and its indifference, to both human potential and human suffering. This marked our devolution from the 1970's to the present. Here is a sketch of the world created when our leaders spurned the universe's “salvation story”:

- We pay more for our health care than any other country, but receive poorer service.
- Infant mortality in the U.S. is more than *twice* that in Sweden, Japan, Finland and Norway, and significantly more than in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria, Denmark, France, Switzerland, Netherlands, Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada.
- The figures for maternal mortality are even more shocking. With 99% of maternal deaths occurring in developing countries, it is too often assumed that maternal mortality is not a problem in wealthier countries. Yet, statistics released in September of 2010 by the United Nations place the United States 50th in the world for maternal mortality — with maternal mortality ratios higher than almost all European countries, as well as several countries in Asia and the Middle East.
- Even more troubling, the United Nations data show that between 1990 and 2008, while the vast majority of countries reduced their maternal mortality ratios for a global decrease of 34%, maternal mortality nearly *doubled* in the United States. For a country that spends more than any other country on health care and more on childbirth-related care than any other area of hospitalization — \$86 billion a year — this is a shockingly poor return on investment. Given that at least half of maternal deaths in the United States are preventable, this is not just a matter of public health, but a human rights failure.²⁵

- The U.S. educational system has been ranked 17th among other industrial countries.²⁶
- Just comparing the U.S. educational system with that of South Korea, David J. Lynch²⁷ reported:
 - 93% of all students graduate from high school in South Korea
 - A little over 75% of all students graduate from high school in the U.S.
 - An experienced secondary-school teacher makes almost 25% more [in South Korea] than a comparable American teacher
 - The South Korean government spends more on education as a percentage of its economy than the U.S.
 - South Korean families spend three times more than U.S. families on K-12 education
 - South Koreans ranked second on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) math test
 - American kids finished 25th of 30 countries on the same PISA math exam.

While some European nations provide free college education, the rising rates of student loans in the US now have US students owing over a trillion dollars in student loans, crippling them for years or decades after graduation, and putting education as far out of reach for many as it was before the GI Bill after WWII.

Over the past four decades, short-term profits have been ranked higher than people. Many have proclaimed that “Greed is good,” and best-selling books have taught us to “swim with the sharks” and apply the ancient teachings of Sun Tzu on *The Art of War* to business and life. In religion, this is called an “idol”: a very seductive call that can not lead us to happiness or fulfillment.

Capitalism – meaning any system that values profits over people – idolizes people who learn to value profits over people. In his influential book *The Corporation*, Joel Bakan listed some traits he saw in large corporations:

Irresponsible

Grandiose, self-absorbed

They lack empathy

They won't accept responsibility for their destructive actions

They are unable to feel remorse

They're finally quite superficial: all power, no depth; all manipulation, no connection.²⁸

But these are the traits of people diagnosed as *psychopaths* – the word literally means people with “sick souls”, people who lack an essential character trait of our species. In addition to poisoning a society and a world, capitalism cannot fashion noble human beings, the kind we look back on with respect and admiration.

In my 23 years as a minister, I officiated at a lot of memorial services. And as people rose to speak of those who had died, I never once heard anyone saying “He could fire a hundred people and never feel a thing,” “She intimidated everyone she met, and used it to her personal advantage,” or “He may not have been a good person, but he more than made up for it with the piles of money he made.” At every memorial service, whether for those with little or much money, when people rose to speak, the things they praised were always in the currency of a healthy and compassionate character: “He cared; she touched the lives of everyone she met; his unconditional love brought life to all who knew him; she leaves a hole of empathy and compassion that the rest of us must somehow try to fill now, without her.” It isn’t rocket science, but it is the secret of the universe.

E = mc² — As Metaphor and Reminder

The story of Big History — of growing toward greater, more inclusive, empowering and dynamic complexity — is actually broader, deeper, more profound and revolutionary than the Golden Rule that is common to all our major religions. This is because it concerns not only how we treat other people, but also how we relate to our world’s systems and resources – intellectual, political, educational and financial.

The story of Big History is remarkably similar to Einstein’s theory of relativity: $E = mc^2$. As Einstein theorized and scientists later proved, mere matter -- though it may look small and inert -- contains an unimaginable amount of energy, which can be released only when the right conditions are created. To bring this down to earth: if we could release 100% of the energy in 1 kilogram of mass, it would create 25 billion kilowatt hours of electricity. We will probably never reach that ideal of 100%. But even in a nuclear power plant, where the industry standard reaches about 40% efficiency, that’s 10 billion kilowatt hours, which would meet the lifetime electricity needs of 10,000 Americans.²⁹

Yet this is far *less* than the energy released in converting human potential to reality. Think of Frances Perkins, FDR and the now-endangered New Deal, or the transformative ideas of scientists like Galileo, Newton, Darwin or Einstein, the invention of the telescope, microscope, steam engine, X-rays, automobiles, airplanes, radio, television, the polio vaccine, computers, the Internet, iPhones and many more. $E = mc^2$ *understates* the power of world-creating ideas and inventions when we achieve

more inclusive and dynamic complexity in our lives and our world.

We are, all of us, incarnations of the universe's story. And, as Frances Perkins (and many others) have showed, living out that "salvation story" can create whole new worlds.

After beginning this essay by sketching a picture of the growing irrelevance of Christianity and other biblical religions, I keep thinking of a quotation attributed to the man Jesus, two thousand years ago, in the Gospel of Thomas. It is not found in the Bible. As Elaine Pagels wrote in her book *Beyond Belief*, those who chose the four gospels to go into the New Testament canon – out of more than two dozen gospels written in the first two centuries – could not have included both the gospel of John and the gospel of Thomas, and the gospel of John was far more useful to churches and rulers, who could consolidate their power around the idea of one savior, one God, one church and one ruler. So the following quotation is not part of Christianity, but it has an abiding wisdom, written very deep into the most fundamental "salvation" story of the universe:

If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you. (The Gospel of Thomas, #70)³⁰

The universe's story is within us as an ethical guide. We all grow up to believe there is more to us than meets the eye. We project that hope into almost all of the religions and gods we have ever created. Most of our favorite tales are variations on this one archetypal theme. From religious stories about David and Goliath and Jesus to the "Hero's Quest" and movies like Avatar, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Harry Potter, The Matrix, The Hunger Games and many others, we spin webs of meaning about the victory of good over evil, courage over cowardice, and the righteous weak over the brutally strong. All of these stories reveal our faith in the powers and possibilities within us, needing only the right circumstances to let us become more fully alive and whole, both individually and collectively. That possibility is within and among us, and the ball is, as it has always been, in our court.

Author Bio:

Davidson Loehr earned a B.A. in music theory (University of Michigan), an M.A. in methods of studying religion, and a Ph.D. in the areas of theology, the philosophy of religion, philosophy of science and language philosophy (Dissertation: *The Legitimate Heir to Theology: A Study of Ludwig Wittgenstein*, University of Chicago 1988). He has been a Fellow in the Jesus Seminar since 1992, served as a Unitarian minister for 23

years, retiring in 2009, and was chosen as “The best minister / spiritual leader in Austin” in 2005, by the Austin Chronicle. He has published one book: *America, Fascism & God: Sermons from a Heretical Preacher* (Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 2005). He has done weekend programs on the Jesus Seminar, Liberal Religion and Science & Religion for about 20 years, and will (hopefully) begin offering a weekend program on the subject of Big History and Religion in the spring of 2015. His essay “To Care Without Judging” became the lead essay in Walter Capps’ book *The Vietnam Reader* (Routledge Press, 1991). His retirement hobbies include photography, cooking and woodturning.

ENDNOTES:

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¹ Alchemy has long puzzled researchers: how can it have attracted some of history's most brilliant men? Isaac Newton practiced alchemy throughout his life, and left over 10,000 written pages on the topic. In the 20th century, a first-rate psychologist (Carl Jung) and scholar of world religions (Mircea Eliade) both wrote books on the topic, saying that the "lead" they sought to turn to "gold" was really the psychological/spiritual "lead" inside of them: another way of alluding to a healthy kind of wholeness. So psychology and religion could be seen as more direct paths to that psychological/spiritual goal. In the same way, we are living in a time when some of our newer sciences – ethology, new neurosciences and fields like evolutionary psychology – are providing more direct and empirical styles of thinking about our developmental and ethical goals. For a better sense of this transition, go to Amazon and, under "Books," enter the word "alchemy."

² C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny L. Marler revolutionized studies of church attendance by asking churches for actual attendance figures, rather than accepting the self-reported figures used for most of the past century. See, e.g., the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, News and Notes, Vol. IV, No. 1, 2006. See also Online Articles & Bibliographies about Sociology of Religion at <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/sociology/articles.html>. David T. Olson, in *The American Church in Crisis*, claims his data base includes accurate information for over 200,000 orthodox Christian churches (David T. Olson and Craig Groeschel, Zondervan, 2nd printing Feb 24, 2008). Also, see interview with David T. Olson by G. Jeffrey MacDonald for Religion News Service, 28 February 2009.

³ See <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2011/09/30/church-attendance-down-congregations-getting-older-report-says/21006>. The findings are based on responses from more than 11,000 Christian, Jewish and Muslim congregations in 2010 and more than 14,000 congregations in 2000

⁴ Christine Wicker, *Fall of the Evangelical Nation* (Harper One, 2008), says "The actual number of committed evangelicals is probably about 1.9 million, about one-eighth what we've been led to believe." (But she inflates it to 3.8 million to err on the side of giving them credit.) (p. 26) "So if we count 4 million Southern Baptists and 3.8 million in the NAE, we round up to 8 million people, instead of the 54 million they claim. Not 25 percent but 3.7 percent." She rounds that up to 5 percent. (Ibid., p. 27) Adding an estimated 4 million from individual Bible churches comes to about 7 percent, a number that evangelical pollsters also come up with. (Ibid., p. 28).

⁵ Christine Wicker, *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶ David T. Olson, *The American Church Research Project*, 2008. See www.TheAmericanChurch.org.

⁷ "Trends among Christians in the U.S." at www.religioustolerance.org.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Wicker says, "Misbehavior is so widespread among the great mass of those who call themselves evangelicals that evangelical author Ronald Sider calls the statistics devastating. When pollster George Barna looked at seventy moral behaviors, he didn't find any difference between the actions of those who were born-again Christians and those who weren't. His studies and other indicators show that divorce among born-again is as common as, or more common than, among other groups. One study showed that wives in traditional, male-dominated marriages were 300 percent more likely to be beaten than wives in egalitarian marriages. (Wicker, p. 80)

¹⁰ See "abortion facts" at www.prochoice.org.

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¹¹ Wicker, *Ibid.*, p. 81. Evangelical pollster and author George Barna has also documented the disconnect between beliefs and actions. It disturbed him enough that he dropped out of evangelicalism and joined the “house-church” movement, which focuses on behavior rather than belief.

¹² See Religion Dispatches, July 12, 2010:

Vatican Equates Women's Ordination with Priest Pedophilia? *A now-released document includes the ordination of women in the same category as sexual abuse by priests.* By Mary E. Hunt.

Also see http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/sexandgender/2954/vatican_equates_women's_ordination_with_priest_pedophilia/. See also the book *Sex, Priests and Secret Codes: the Catholic Church's 2,000 Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse*, by Thomas P. Doyle, A.W. Richard Sipe and Patrick J. Wall (2006).

¹³ Also, there is a famous and funny experiment done a decade ago that you can watch by typing “monkeys and fairness” into your search engine. A monkey is willing to do a simple task in return for a slice of cucumber until he sees his neighbor monkey get a grape for the same task, after which he throws the cucumber at the human offering it, and rattles the bars of his cage, his body language screaming “Let me out of here!” <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=capuchin+monkeys+and+fairness&FORM=VIRE4#view=detail&mid=63DCC5012CA276AD0EF463DCC5012CA276AD0EF4>

¹⁴ Many sources give many numbers. One source citing several others gives sources for a range of 21,000 to 43,000:

- World Christian Encyclopedia (David A. Barrett; Oxford University Press, 1982) apparently estimated almost 21,000 denominations, and the updated World Christian Encyclopedia (Barrett, Kurian, Johnson; Oxford Univ Press, 2nd edition, 2001) estimated at least 33,000. “Denomination” is defined as “an organised christian group within a country”.
- The Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary estimated 34,000 denominations in 2000, rising to an estimated 43,000 in 2012. These numbers have exploded from 1,600 in the year 1900. (<http://theway21stcentury.wordpress.com/2012/11/23/how-many-christian-denominations-worldwide/>)

¹⁵ Karl Jaspers defined the time of 800-200 BCE as the Axial Age, meaning the time when human self-awareness was shifted on its axis, as “the spiritual foundations of humanity were laid simultaneously and independently in China, India, Persia, Judea, and Greece.” Today's shift is from that “spiritual” view to a *cosmic* perspective, as we struggle to reconceive ourselves as creatures in a nearly infinite universe.

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¹⁶ About ten years ago, Sarah Brosnan was doing post-doctoral work with Frans De Waal at the National Primate Research Center in Atlanta, when she devised a brilliant – and hilarious – experiment to see if Capuchin monkeys had an awareness of fairness. That experiment has now been replicated with many other species, with the same result: they do. This needs to be seen. Type “monkeys and fairness” into your search engine, and select the video clip that’s about 2:39 long, in which De Waal explains the experiment then shows the video. The explosive laughter of the audience – and, most likely, you – shows how deeply we share the cheated monkey’s reaction. The site of the video clip is <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=monkeys+and+fairness&FORM=VIRE5#view=detail&mid=63DCC5012CA276AD0EF463DCC5012CA276AD0EF4>

¹⁷ Again, there are many examples. Frans De Waal relates two quite memorable examples. One came from a troop of chimpanzees in a zoo.

During one winter at the Arnhem Zoo in the Netherlands, after cleaning the hall and before releasing the chimps, the keepers hosed out all rubber tires in the enclosure and hung them one by one on a horizontal log extending from the climbing frame. Most of the tires had tears or holes in them, and the water leaked out. But one tire was in good shape, and remained full of fresh water. A female chimpanzee named Krom wanted to get this tire down. Unfortunately, the tire was at the end of the row, with six or more heavy tires hanging in front of it. Krom was slightly crippled, and also deaf. She had never mated, but had helped raise many of the young chimps, acting as a kind of aunt. She pulled and pulled at the tire she wanted but couldn’t remove it from the log. She pushed the tire backward, but there it hit the climbing frame and couldn’t be removed either. Krom worked in vain on this problem for over ten minutes, ignored by everyone, except Jakie, a seven-year-old Krom had taken care of as a juvenile.

Immediately after Krom gave up and walked away, Jakie approached the scene. Without hesitation he pushed the tires one by one off the log, beginning with the front one, followed by the second in the row, and so on, as any sensible chimp would do. When he reached the last tire, he carefully removed it so that no water was lost, carrying it straight to his aunt, placing it upright in front of her. Krom began scooping up the water with her hands. (Frans De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, pp. 31-32). Jakie’s behavior showed both empathy and compassion.

There are behaviors from other species that seem to go beyond our Golden Rule, like the story of a bonobo ape named Kuni, who one day caught a starling who had landed on her island in the Twycross Zoo in England. The bird seemed stunned but otherwise ok, and the trainers tried to get the ape to give them the bird so she wouldn’t hurt it – or eat it. Instead, Kuni held the starling in her left hand, and climbed up the tallest tree on the island. Then, holding on to the tree with her feet, she carefully took the bird’s wing tips in her hands, spread them out as though the bird were in flight, and tossed the starling high into the air. (Frans De Waal, *Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape*, p. 156).

An even more primitive – and frightening – exhibition of what we can recognize as a primitive kind of empathy and compassion has been found among *e coli* bacteria, which have transferred antibiotic-resistant genes to other bacteria, helping them become more resistant to our anti-biotics. See here: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1389172308701841>. Also see the scientific paper from 1973 showing transfers of antibiotic-resistant genes from both *e coli* and *Klebsiella* isolates, here: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1947056/>.

¹⁸ A study by Zahn-Waxler et al., 1984, cited by Frans De Waal in *Primates and Philosophers*, p. 28.

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¹⁹ The quotation marks are to indicate that these words are being used in non-religious ways, which is a good argument for abandoning religious jargon altogether and saying what we mean in plain talk: *ordinary language*, as Wittgenstein put it. Right now, I don't know what "plain" words to suggest in place of "salvation" and "damnation."

²⁰ This use of "worlds" is similar to Ludwig Wittgenstein's "forms of life" and David Christian's "Lifeways."

²¹ I'm not married to this phrase, but haven't thought of a better one. Suggestions?

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²² Frances Perkins graduated from college with a double major in chemistry and physics in 1902, and added a master's degree in economics and sociology from Columbia University in 1910. In 1911, she witnessed 146 female factory workers jumping to their deaths in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire – the building lacked fire escapes. She said it was “a never-to-be-forgotten reminder of why I had to spend my life fighting conditions that could permit such a tragedy.”

Perkins felt that “poverty was preventable, destructive, wasteful and demoralizing. In the midst of potential plenty, it is morally unacceptable in a Christian and democratic society. Because the ‘poor’ are people, with hopes, fears, virtues, vices and fellow citizens....”

She taught chemistry at what is now Lake Forest Academy, and was a professor of sociology at Adelphi College. In 1918 she continued her study of economics and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

In 1913, she married New York economist Paul Caldwell Wilson. She kept her birth name – defending her right to do so in court. The couple had a daughter, Susanna. Both father and daughter were described by biographer Kirstin Downey as having “manic-depressive” symptoms – what is today called a bipolar personality disorder. Wilson was frequently institutionalized for mental illness.

Frances Perkins was the sole support for her family.

She worked in politics at the state level in New York, where she began her friendship and professional connection with then-governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When FDR was elected President in 1932, he made her his Secretary of Labor, a position she held from 1933 to 1945. She was the first woman ever appointed to the U.S. Cabinet, and her twelve years are still the longest anyone has served as Secretary of Labor.

In that capacity, in the midst of the Great Depression, Perkins' accomplishments were almost mythic. She brought the labor movement into the New Deal coalition. She helped craft laws against child labor, and established the Social Security Act, with unemployment benefits, pensions for the many uncovered elderly Americans, and welfare for the poorest citizens. She established the first minimum wage and overtime laws, and defined the standard forty-hour work week. These achievements were gained for the first time in U.S. history. During WWII, Perkins resisted having American women be drafted to serve the military so that they could enter the civilian workforce in greatly expanded numbers – she gave us Rosie the Riveter. She worked hard to put an end to child labor and to provide safety for women workers. Also ... on the day the Social Security Act was signed into law, her husband escaped from a mental institution.

Following her government service career, Perkins remained active as a teacher and lecturer at the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University until her death in 1965 at age 85.

Perkins remains a prominent alumna of Mount Holyoke College, whose Frances Perkins Program allows “women of non-traditional age” (i.e., age 24 or older) to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree. There are approximately 140 Frances Perkins scholars each year.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Same as in footnote 21. I'm not married to this phrase. Suggestions?

²⁵ Maternal Mortality figures are from <http://www.arhp.org/publications-and-resources/contraception-journal/march-2011>

²⁶ <http://www.edudemic.com/south-korea-vs-u-s-education-new-report-examines-key-differences/>

Moving Beyond Religion: The Universe's Salvation Story

²⁷ David J. Lynch in USA Today in November 2008

²⁸ Joel Bakan, *The Corporation*, p. 57.

²⁹ See <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.USE.ELEC.KH.PC>, which rates the annual electricity usage in the United States at about 13,000kwh. Multiplying this times a life expectancy of 80 years (to get a nice round number) yields a lifetime electricity usage in the U.S. of about 1 million kwh. I'm grateful to Dr. Ray Newell, an atomic physicist with the Los Alamos labs, for this information.

³⁰ Translation by Thomas O. Lambdin

The biblical admonition that the sins of the fathers are visited on their children for three or four generations (Exodus 20:5) is similar. The universe's story works with all "systems" thinking, where our behavior can bless or curse our larger world. It also works with the concepts of *karma* found in many Asian religions.

Thus, simply by chance, some universe will have the "winning combination" for life. It is just like you produce lottery tickets. Even if it is 1 in a 10 million chance, the winning ticket will eventually come up. According to this idea, human beings are winners of a "cosmic lottery." When it comes up, humans evolve and look back and say, "we were lucky!"

Some Observations on Multiple Universes (Multiverse Hypothesis). First consideration: There is no shred of evidence to prove the existence of these multiple universes. To those of us who have grown up following the history-altering warp flight of Zefram Cochrane, which was witnessed by a Vulcan spaceship and soon enough began Earth's acceptance into the more evolved planets of our galaxy, Prof. Eshed's teachings are familiar, even trite, with one important proviso: we know Cochrane is a fictional character (born in 2013 or 2030, Star Trek is not a very organized universe). Eshed may not be distinguishing so good between reality and fiction. Eshed, 87, holds a bachelor's degree in electronics engineering from the Technion, a master's degree World Religions.

It linked salvation to baptism: "We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins." What do the Christian churches believe now? In recent centuries, the conservative wings of Christianity have generally taught that the vast majority of individuals are "unsaved". Such people are isolated from God, and lost in their sins. Although everyone has eternal life after death, only those who are "saved" eventually go to Heaven, where they receive rewards beyond our imagination. The vast majority of humans end up in Hell where they are tortured endlessly without hope o... "The Bible offers no hope that sincere worshipers of other religions will be saved without personal faith in Jesus Christ." The Bible is inerrant and infallible -- without error.

3. Beyond Religion book. Read 425 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. An unprecedented event: a beloved world religious leader proposes ... Now, in Beyond Religion, the Dalai Lama, at his most compassionate and outspoken, elaborates and deepens his vision for the nonreligious way. Transcending the mere "religion wars," he outlines a system of ethics for our shared world, one that gives full respect to religion. With the highest level of spiritual and intellectual authority, the Dalai Lama makes a stirring appeal for what he calls a "third way," a path to an ethical and happy life and to a global human community based on understanding and mutual respect.