

Security and the Understanding of Belief and of Belief in God

We have been programmed by natural selection to seek security. Natural selection has selected almost everything about us, even our beliefs, on the basis of a security paradigm. Presented here are three fundamental understandings that derive from natural selection and are based on a security paradigm: that all human behavior has security as its goal; that the emotional mental system is really a combined belief and security system; and that gods are placebos. In the process of presenting these understandings this essay rectifies, clarifies, and adds to concepts that were originally introduced in my 2010 book, *The Primal Instinct: How Biological Security Motivates Behavior, Promotes Morality, Determines Authority, and Explains Our Search for a God*, and then were advanced in five essays, including this essay, that are now on my website: www.mdjaffe.com.

Why Natural Selection Selects for Traits That Increase Security

To understand why security is the goal of all human behavior requires furthering present understandings of how natural selection works:

First, it is presently understood that natural selection selects for traits that increase reproductive success. And it is generally believed that traits that sufficiently prolong survival (increase life expectancy) to include the reproductive years will increase reproductive success. But, as first explained in *The Primal Instinct*, this survivalist theory of natural selection is faulty because there can be no specific gene for prolonging survival or for increasing life expectancy. At first glance this may be confusing; it has confused evolutionary psychologists for decades. But prolonging survival or increasing life expectancy are not, themselves, mechanisms to increase reproductive success. They are goals that require a mechanism to increase life

expectancy. That is, natural selection selects for traits that are mechanisms or are structures that enable mechanisms to prolong survival. As emphasized in Essay 3, the *only* mechanism by which life expectancy has been, or is, increased, is by increasing security. No other mechanism has yet been discovered. (Lengthening telomeres might turn out to increase life expectancy, but is not yet feasible.) The behavioral traits that natural selection selected for in the past, when life expectancy was much shorter than it is today, were those that increased security, thereby making personal security the goal of human behavior. Understanding natural selection in terms of a security paradigm rather than in terms of a survivalist paradigm seems to be a minor change, but it has monumental consequences by reorienting thinking about how evolutionary psychology really works.

Second, the only substantive argument that, to my knowledge, has ever been leveled against the “security” hypothesis involves the peacock’s tail. Although the peacock’s ornate tail may lead to sexual selection, which results in natural selection because it increases reproductive success, it does not increase the peacock’s security. It is an encumbrance that may even decrease the peacock’s security. Thus, although sexual selection may lead to the survival of a species, it does not accomplish this by enhancing the security and resultant survivability of an organism within the species. This, however, does not hold for genetic adaptations. All adaptations are naturally selected because they increase security. The universal objective of, and the reason for, almost all biological structures and behaviors that have ever existed in plants and animals – from cells to organ systems – is security. That is because almost all inherited traits result from genetic adaptations. Only when natural selection occurs for reasons other than for adapting to an environment, such as in the case of sexual selection, is security of no concern.

Third, evolutionary psychologists hold that *all* human behavior originates from genetic traits that have been naturally selected. This is true in evolutionary biology and for instinctive behaviors in evolutionary psychology, but it is not true for volitional behaviors in evolutionary psychology, where behavior derives from the belief that originates from a belief system, but not from being naturally selected. A glaring example of evolutionary psychologists' mistaken thinking is the popular, ongoing controversy over how altruistic behavior is naturally selected: whether by kin selection (inclusive fitness) or by group selection (multilevel selection). These arguments, although prominent in evolutionary psychology's literature, are embarrassingly bogus because altruistic behavior is not naturally selected. There is no genetic trait for altruistic behavior, nor can there be, because altruistic behavior is volitional and volitional behavior, which includes almost all human behavior, is determined by belief. Belief originates from a belief system, not from a genetic trait that is naturally selected.

Altruistic behavior results from emotional attaching. People attach to increase security because human behavior, including attaching behavior, is adaptive, and adaptations are naturally selected because they increase security. Security is acquired by physically possessing its source, as in the case of eyes, ears, shelter, or food, or by emotionally attaching its source, as in the case of gods, friends, or family. When emotionally attached, those attached are bonded together as one, and, therefore, they treat their attachments as they would treat themselves, which is altruistically. But I now recognize that although altruistic behavior primarily derives from emotional attaching, as I had previously written, (*The Primal Instinct*, pp23-31; Essay 1) altruistic behavior can also be learned. In either case, altruistic behavior does not derive from a genetic trait that has been naturally selected.

Why the Emotional Mental System Is Really a Combined Belief and Security System

Humans have inherited two information processing systems: an emotional system and a cognitive system. The only purpose of these systems is to generate belief to be used for determining volitional behavior. But the two belief systems are also security systems. This is due to the fact that all body systems have resulted from adaptations that have been naturally selected because they increase security.

An emotional feeling is a type of belief, which is generated by the emotional “security” belief system, and, as a result, there is only one type of emotional feeling: a feeling involving security. Behaviors that derive from beliefs that originate in a security system, such as the emotional “security” belief system, have the feeling of security as their goal, even though they are not naturally selected. That is, the only product of the emotional belief system is the emotional feeling of security, and because an emotional feeling is a type of belief, all belief that emanates from the emotional belief system is subjective and has the feeling of security as its goal.

The beliefs that emanate from the cognitive belief system are objective and have security as their goal, but as an ultimate goal. Truth, which results from evidence-based reasoning, is the cognitive belief system’s proximate goal. The reason that the cognitive belief system has security as its ultimate goal is that truth or reality (truth is reality) provides the best information to guard against threats to security. Human belief emanates from either or both belief systems, and from only those systems, so that every human belief and its consequent behavior has either the feeling of security and/or truth as its goal.

Although it is apparent that beliefs result in behavior, it is not apparent how this is accomplished. As explained in *The Primal Instinct* (pp 18-22), the behavior that emanates from the beliefs of both belief systems is motivated by the desire to feel secure. Feeling secure derives

from the emotional feeling of security. That is, the goal of every human belief – security or truth – is determined by which belief system is the dominant source of belief, but motivation to act on the belief from either source is determined by only the emotional feeling of security. The reasoning behind this claim is explained in the next paragraph, which explains why we enjoy playing physical games, such as baseball, golf, or tennis; intellectual games, such as cards, chess, or crossword puzzles; why there is a multi-billion-dollar video game industry; why we want to win; and why we may become passionate about playing games and obsessed with winning.

When physical competence is shown to be high, such as by winning at any physical sport, the athlete feels good because demonstrating physical competence demonstrates heightened ability to physically protect the athlete from harm. Self-esteem measures both physical competence, from the emotional belief system, and intellectual competence, from the cognitive belief system. (This corrects the statement in *The Primal Instinct* that self-esteem measures only intellectual competence.) Being physically and/or intellectually protected from harm increases a subject's feeling of security. That is, the level of a person's security depends on both the severity of a threat to security and the competence to withstand the threat. Both a feeling of security and of self-esteem are determined by a person's competence to withstand the threat to security.

When we behave competently our self-esteem and our feeling secure rise, and we feel good. We try to win, even if there is no prize, because winning makes us feel good. We feel good because an increased emotional feeling of security acts as a trigger for the brain's reward system. Whenever a person feels secure, without exception, he or she feels good. This suggests that the brain's reward system functions to motivate behavior to seek security. I can neither think of nor find any other reason for having emotional feelings – feelings that are only about security, such as happiness from increased security, fear or anxiety from a threat to security, and sadness or

depression from loss of security. It is the desirable, good, pleasant feeling of satisfaction, comfort, content, or happiness from the reward system that is the incentive and the positive reinforcement for physical and intellectual competent behavior. Both belief systems result in behavior that is brought about by the reward system when the emotional feeling of security triggers dopamine release into the nucleus accumbens of the limbic system.

Emotional Security and Cognitive Truth Compete for Dominance

Stress threatens security, so that with stress, which occurs with fatigue, illness, sleep deprivation, time pressures, and dire emergencies, the emotional belief system is automatically activated. The emotional belief system is the earlier system to evolve, is the more basic, and is the default belief system. In the absence of the cognitive belief system, belief and subsequent behavior derive from only the emotional system, as they essentially do in infants and animals.

Cognitive ability is enhanced by plastic changes in the brain secondary to experience as we mature from infancy, through childhood and adolescence, to adulthood. This contributes to the progressive learning, generation by generation, to use evidence-based reasoning and to use the advances that evidence-based reasoning delivers. The sole mechanism driving the ongoing cultural evolution that has propelled and is propelling humans from being savages to becoming civilized appears to be the progressive learning to use the cognitive belief system.

In primitive hominids belief was determined primarily by the emotional belief system. Since then, due to cultural evolution, the cognitive belief system has been gaining dominance. As the cognitive system has gained dominance the emotional belief system has lost dominance, as occurs in a zero sum game. The dominance held for millennia by the emotional belief system is slowly transitioning to a dominance by the cognitive belief system. That is a move in the right

direction: Being civilized beats being a savage.

Because cultures are the product of beliefs and behaviors, and behaviors result from the beliefs that derive from belief systems, the disparities among different cultures, behaviors, and beliefs can be traced back to the differences between belief systems. This is evidenced by the conflict between the culture of religion and its beliefs and behaviors, which derive from the emotional belief system, and the culture of science and its beliefs and behaviors, which derive from the cognitive belief system. There are many consequences stemming from humans having two belief systems – with the emotional system seeking security and the cognitive system seeking truth – which compete for dominance. For example, religion prefers security (people believe in god because they feel that god provides security) over truth, whereas, science prefers truth over security. When Galileo was brought before the Inquisition, the Inquisition sought security and Galileo sought truth.

Lying, cheating, defrauding, and corrupting are behaviors that derive from beliefs that stem from the emotional belief system. They result from placing self-interest (personal security) above truth. On the other hand, integrity and honesty derive from the cognitive belief system and result from seeking the truth at the possible expense of security. Valuing behavior, which determines what is important, right, desirable, or good, derives from whichever belief system is dominant. If the emotional belief system is dominant the subject will believe that seeking personal security is the most important, right, desirable, or good thing to do, but if the cognitive belief system is dominant the subject will believe that seeking the truth is the most important, right, desirable, or good thing to do.

The ideological divide between liberal and conservative attitudes results from our having two belief systems. The greater the competence in the use of the cognitive belief system, the

more evidence-based reasoning will be utilized for providing liberal, change-oriented attitudes; whereas, the greater the threat to security the more the emotional belief system will be used to provide conservative, status quo-oriented attitudes. A full understanding leading to liberal or conservative attitude preference involves both nature and nurture and has yet to be worked out.

Switching Belief Systems

It is ironic that the emotional belief system, which was specifically designed by natural selection to bring security, now threatens our civilization. Although the cognitive belief system brought weapons of mass destruction, the control of the use of those weapons by judgment derived from the cognitive belief system would be markedly safer for humanity than if the control were by those governed by their emotional belief system, such as by an authoritarian dictator in North Korea, or by a fundamentalist ayatollah in Iran.

There are major advantages to intentionally switch the origin of belief from the emotional belief system to the cognitive belief system. Switching would opt for change and for progress, and would weaken or eliminate religion and all placebos, imaginary entities, and mistaken beliefs. It would strengthen science, find the truth, decrease or eliminate violence and wars, and produce a more civilized world.

But, is it even possible to intentionally switch away from the emotional belief system, a system where emotions are automatically activated by the perceived level of security? And if it is possible to switch, how can this best be achieved? The following observations suggest that intentionally switching from the emotional belief system to the cognitive belief system for belief is possible, and that it can best be achieved by teaching the use of evidence in determining belief.

First: When we are exhorted to “calm down,” and do calm down from being emotionally upset we are able to think more rationally. It appears that on that basis we have intentionally switched away from the emotional belief system to the cognitive system. When we calm down, our elevated blood pressure and pulse rate, which stems from emotionally induced sympathetic nervous system activation, also return to normal. This suggests that switching from the emotional to the cognitive belief system entails minimizing the entire emotional response to a threat to security.

Second: Scientists who believe in god compartmentalize their beliefs by switching back and forth, between using their emotional “security” belief system for religious beliefs and their cognitive belief system for scientific beliefs.

Third: The cultural evolution of humans has resulted from their having decreased the use of their emotional belief system as they progressively learned to use their cognitive system for belief. And infants start life with a strongly functioning emotional system whose dominance is, to varying degrees, overcome, as, with aging to adulthood, they progressively learn to use their cognitive belief system for belief. In both examples the origin of belief is switched from the emotional to the cognitive belief system by learning to use the cognitive belief system.

Fourth: Medical and religious placebos are faith-based. Faith is belief without evidence. Faith-based beliefs derive from the emotional belief system and evidence-based beliefs from the cognitive belief system. Switching from faith-based belief to evidence-based belief, as the medical profession learned to do when they eliminated medical placebos, and as atheists have learned to do in order to eliminate religious placebos such as god, suggests that it is possible to switch from the emotional to the cognitive belief system for belief. An effective way to accomplish this is by teaching the value of and the need for using evidence. Theists tend to

ignore the fact that evidence-based reasoning is necessary for belief to be truthful; they, instead, rely on faith in authority, so that religious belief brings security, but not truth. To quote Nelson Mandella, “Education is the most important weapon you can use to change the world.” In my view, (Essay 4) the most important weapon that education has for changing the world for the better is that of teaching the use of evidence for belief. Evidence switches belief away from dominance by the emotional belief system toward dominance by the cognitive belief system: a switch in a civilizing direction.

Why People Believe in God

What is so compelling about gods that people notoriously have made human sacrifices and wars, killing themselves and others, on behalf of their god? And why for millennia have people worshiped gods? A more basic question is “Why do people do anything?” I claim, in *The Primal Instinct* and in Essay 1, that because of natural selection people are genetically wired to seek security. The desire to feel secure is the only motivator of human behavior that has been recognized. People believe in god because they believe that god provides security.

The religious faithful who use an emotional belief system for belief, base their beliefs on faith in authority, not on truth. They believe that god has the power to provide security because they have faith in their authority, Holy Scripture, which told them so. Authority is faithfully followed by those who favor their emotional belief system for belief because to them authority provides security, and whoever or whatever controls security controls behavior.

On the other hand, those to whom the cognitive belief system is dominant, rightfully believe that authority cannot be trusted to provide truthful information. Albert Einstein asserted, “A foolish faith in authority is the worst enemy of truth.” Beliefs that are based on faith or are

based on authority lack evidence for the belief and, therefore, are imaginary. But they are imaginary only to those whose cognitive belief system is dominant and who believe that something is true only if there is evidence to substantiate it. Thus, those in whom the emotional belief system is dominant believe that god is real and exists, whereas, those who subscribe primarily to the cognitive belief system do not have faith in authority, do not believe that god has powers that provide security, and do not believe that god exists. Which belief system should we choose to determine our beliefs? If we are truthful and want to live in a rational world, we will prefer the cognitive belief system's beliefs, where truth is the goal of belief.

Why Gods Are Placebos

The dispute over god's existence can be decisively resolved by understanding that god is a placebo and that placebos deceive. *Placebo deception has tricked much of humanity into believing in non-existent gods.* To fully understand placebos, requires a security paradigm. Normally, security and the feeling of security correspond, but they do not correspond with placebos. Placebos occur when an authority attributes imaginary powers to an inert or imaginary entity. That the placebo's powers can be used to increase the subject's security makes the subject feel more secure, but the powers derive from faith in authority and not from hard evidence, which makes them imaginary and unable to increase security. Thus placebos produce a false sense of security in which subjects feel more secure than they actually are. Deception occurs because subjects feel secure and, therefore, believe that they are secure, when they aren't.

Theists are deceived by a placebo effect into believing in god because they use their emotional belief system to determine their beliefs. The fundamental problem with religion is that it derives from the emotional belief system, where security is the goal of behavior, and not from

the cognitive belief system, where truth is the primary goal of behavior. Had evidence from the cognitive belief system been used for belief instead of faith in authority from the emotional belief system, placebo deception would be avoided, because the lack of evidence would make it clear that the placebo's powers are imaginary. The medical community has confirmed this by showing that evidence-based medicine, using placebo controls, avoids placebo deception. Those who use their emotional belief system for dealing with security concerns, (god is the primary source of theists' feeling of security) are deceived by placebo deception, but they cannot recognize that they are deceived because they use their emotional belief system, which does not use evidence for security-related matters. Thus, to those whose emotional belief system is dominant, the fact that god is a placebo is undetected, which makes god the greatest hoax ever. But god is not the only religious hoax. All religious entities that lack evidence and are imaginary are placebos, deceive, and are frauds. This includes heaven, hell, angels, the soul, miracles, the afterlife, and the concept that god provides security and is transcendent and immanent.

Anxiety results from a threat to security and sadness (depressed feelings) from a loss of security. Placebos work well in relieving both feelings of anxiety and depressed feelings because placebos increase the feeling of security, which acts to reverse the decreased feeling of security that occurs with anxiety and sadness. Medical placebos tend to reverse the anxiety component of disease, and religious placebos, such as gods, tend to reverse the anxiety that results from life's stresses. (Essay 2) When anxiety or sadness occur, the decrease in the feeling of security matches the decrease in the level of security. When, however, emotional diseases, such as anxiety disorders and clinical depressions, occur, the feeling of security decreases, but the decrease is not due to a decreased level of security, unless a decreased level of security is the event that precipitates the emotional disease.

What's Wrong with Religion?

Religious fundamentalists fiercely protect their monotheistic god, who, they feel, provides them total security, and they will do almost anything, even kill or die, to protect that source of security. People's desire to feel secure results from the same dopamine reward system that addicts them to opioids. The desire to feel secure is so compelling that Islamic fundamentalists, in their fanatical desire to propitiate Allah, their source of security, consider it their duty to kill those who merely insult Allah. Many Muslims deplore the atrocities committed by the Taliban, by al Qaeda, and certainly by ISIS and claim that savage behavior is not representative of the Muslim religion. But Islamist fundamentalists justify their unseemly savage behavior and acts of terrorism, which emanate from the emotional belief system and harken back to human's primitive origins, if it benefits Allah.

The difference between a radical fundamentalist and a liberal secularist depends upon the degree of security they believe they obtain from their god, which, in turn, reflects the degree of dominance of their emotional belief system over their cognitive belief system. The attitudes of liberals and secularists are strongly influenced by the cognitive belief system's beliefs, whereas the attitudes of the radical fundamentalists reflect the emotional belief system's beliefs, and exhibit the defects of that system. These defects include four major failings that make religion objectionable:

Religion's first major defect: Religion is a con game of biblical proportions, where *placebo deception has tricked much of humanity into believing in the existence of non-existent gods*. The fact that gods are placebos, explains, more than any of the many arguments against a god concept are able to explain, why most people in the world, dating back thousands of years, believe in gods that don't exist. Placebo deception is made possible by the emotional belief

system, which uses faith and authority for determining belief, and can be eliminated by evidence from the cognitive belief system. Arthur C. Clarke stated, "A faith which cannot survive collision with the truth is not worth many regrets." Religious faith derives from the emotional belief system, where belief has security, not truth, as its goal. According to Clarke's maxim, losing religion is not regrettable.

Fundamentalist religion's second major defect is that, as noted earlier, it is violent. In spite of preaching peace, religions continue to war. Wars are organized, mass violence. Ironically, violence often erupts from a quest for security. Violent behavior springs from the emotional belief system, as a physical response to a threat to security. That is, the emotional system is physical and violent; the cognitive system is intellectual and nonviolent. The reason that religious fundamentalists' behavior is physically violent, as is evidenced by history and as is currently seen in the Middle East, is because religion stems from the emotional belief system. If the emotional belief system were eliminated, religion and violence would also be eliminated. When religious fundamentalists react violently in defense of their god, who they mistakenly believe is their major source of security, their violent behavior arises from a "fight or flight" response to what they believe is a threat to their source of security. This behavior originates in the amygdala, a part of the emotional belief system. As explained in Essay 4, the use of evidence acts to eliminate both religion and violence by switching belief and consequent behavior from the emotional to the cognitive belief system. The more that behavior derives from the violent emotional belief system the more similar it is to primitive, savage behavior, whereas the more that behavior derives from the nonviolent cognitive belief system the more civilized it is.

Religion's third major defect derives from its strong influence on behavior. Whoever or whatever controls security controls behavior. Monotheistic religions' followers believe that their

god provides total security. (Not true. Gods are placebos and provide only feelings of security.) The mistaken belief that god provides total security results in a devout belief in god. Religion derives from an emotional belief system that opposes science, which derives from the cognitive belief system. Religious teachings frequently reject the teachings of science, as evidenced by the clash between creationism and natural selection. Passionate commitment to god has instilled inordinate faith in and use of the emotional belief system, which blocks gains to humanity from the cognitive belief system. The civilizing process consists of people using their cognitive belief system more and their emotional belief system less. But this is compromised when the emotional belief system champions religion, which slows progress from the scientific and societal advances that emanate from the cognitive belief system.

Religion's fourth major defect is that it is authoritarian and supremacist. God is considered to be the Highest Authority and the Supreme Being. Authoritarianism and supremacy conform with a dominance hierarchy seen in animals and, therefore, stem from the emotional belief system. Supremacy is arrived at through competition and competition is a major source of evil. Religious fundamentalists have often treated their competitors with disdain, eventuating in discrimination, persecution, and domination, and resulting in anti-Semitism and violence against other religions and even against other religious denominations, such as between the Sunni and Shia Muslims and between the Protestant and Catholic Christians. Religious supremacism has resulted in Christian Crusades and Inquisitions, and in Islamic apostasy laws and jihads. It has led to prejudice and discrimination against those of other faiths and those of no faith.

Authoritarianism is strict obedience to the leader, and as such, it has resulted in a faulty authoritarian morality. Normative morality focuses on security for everyone. Religious authoritarian morality focuses on security for god. (*The Primal Instinct*, pp 69-89)

Religious fundamentalists tend to maximize their emotional belief system and to minimize their cognitive belief system for determining beliefs, so that religious fundamentalists hold their beliefs with certainty, resist the use of evidence but employ authority if they even question beliefs, avoid compromise, resist change, may be wary of science and new ideas, and may reject a modern lifestyle. Those whose beliefs primarily derive from the cognitive belief system favor autonomy, whereas those whose beliefs primarily derive from the emotional belief system, such as the religious faithful, favor authority. God is authoritarian and religious authoritarian morality fixates on treating god, but not god's subjects, morally, while authoritarianism limits freedoms, demands total obedience, and is undesirable to those who value liberty.

The flaws of religious belief that make religion unacceptable derive from the fact that religious belief stems from the emotional belief system, an anachronistic system that poorly serves an intellectual culture. The emotional belief system met the survival needs of animals well, but is woefully deficient in meeting present human intellectual needs.

The information presented here makes it clear that the culture of science and the cognitive belief system are far superior to the culture of religion and the emotional belief system for advancing our civilization. As humans progressively learn to utilize their cognitive belief system for belief at the expense of their emotional belief system in an ongoing cultural evolution, humans are turning away from religion and the emotional belief system in favor of science and the cognitive belief system for belief. Although we are emerging from an era dominated by a religious culture and an emotional belief system, we still have a way to go. Americans polled by Gallup in 2014 showed the shameful statistics that 42 percent of Americans believed that god created humans in their present form and only 19 percent of Americans believed in evolution

without the help of god. Even so, this is a significant improvement over the 1999 statistics, which showed that only 9 percent of Americans believed in evolution without the help of god. Also, according to a 2015 Pew Research Center report, the religiously unaffiliated (nones) had increased from 16 percent in 2007 to 23 percent in 2014. In 2007, 22 percent of the “nones” said they did not believe in god; whereas, by 2014, 33 percent did not believe in god. And, in 1958 only 18 percent of Americans stated they would be willing to vote for an atheist for president, whereas a 2015 Gallup Poll showed that 58 percent of Americans would be willing to vote that way. The stigma that religion had imposed on atheism is decreasing, and the fear of offending the religious in the United States is fading. More young people are turning to science and away from religion; and if the new bombshell that *placebo deception has tricked much of humanity into believing in non-existent gods* gains traction, we might expect more closeted atheists to be more open to expressing their minority views without fear of retribution.

My Legacy

“Be ashamed to die until you have scored some victory for humanity.” – Horace Mann

After it became apparent that natural selection selects for genetic traits that increase security, it soon became clear that the use of a security paradigm provides an entirely new way for understanding evolutionary psychology, human behavior, emotions, moral philosophy, belief, placebos, and theology. A security paradigm's greatest academic strength is that it opens a new chapter in understanding the origin of human belief and behavior. In doing so it has totally revamped current understandings of how emotions work. Even more important is its impact on society. Because of a security paradigm there is, finally, a definitive answer regarding the existence of gods, which, arguably, is the most important philosophical question that exists today.

A security paradigm provides a new way to understand placebos, and to understand that it is *placebo deception that has tricked much of humanity into believing in non-existent gods*. This understanding does not attempt to explain where religious beliefs are wrong, as most anti-religious arguments do. It, instead, explains why gods are mistakenly believed to exist.

Has human culture evolved sufficiently that society is able to understand and accept that it is *placebo deception that has tricked much of humanity into believing in non-existent gods*? The claim that god is a placebo may automatically be rejected because it is almost unthinkable that what has been considered to be an unsolvable god problem has actually been solved by a nobody, who presumably must be wrong. In my case, it is easy to attack the messenger rather than the message. I will soon be ninety years old and although I have self-studied evolutionary psychology in depth, I have had no formal training in, nor am I a recognized expert in, evolutionary psychology, belief, emotions, moral philosophy, or theology. On that basis one may question whether the radical new understandings presented in my essays derive from science or senility; from expressing how the world really works, or from tilting at windmills. But does a messenger's lack of credentials automatically preclude serious consideration of the message? If this were so, the world would miss out on what are among the most important advances in the understanding of evolutionary psychology, human behavior, emotions, moral philosophy, belief, placebos, and theology, ever; and I would miss out on scoring a victory for humanity.

The ideas presented here took origin from a eureka moment in 2002 when I first recognized the possibility that natural selection selects for genetic traits on the basis of security rather than on the basis of survivability. It is now clear that the strongest argument favoring the use of a security paradigm for the understanding of belief and behavior is that it works, and it works spectacularly. It has led to a number of profound hypotheses: that the goal of human

behavior is security; that people emotionally attach to gain security; that moral and altruistic behaviors are based on attaching; that we base our values on security; that the entire emotional belief system is based on a security paradigm; that emotional feelings are really beliefs, and that there is only one basic emotional feeling, which is the emotional feeling of security; that the transition from belief to behavior is motivated by the emotional feeling of security's triggering the brain's reward system; that those who use faith and authority from the emotional belief system as their source of belief are tricked by placebo deception into believing that placebos provide security (they provide only the feeling of security), whereas, those who use evidence from the cognitive belief system for belief are not tricked into believing that placebos provide security; that people are tricked into believing in non-existent gods by placebo deception; and that the security- oriented emotional belief system competes with the truth-oriented cognitive belief system for dominance of belief. None of these hypotheses would even have been considered were it not for the understanding that adaptations are naturally selected on the basis of security.

Since my 2002 aha moment I have avidly pursued the idea that natural selection selects traits on the basis of security, which has led to the new understandings listed in the previous paragraph. The use of a security paradigm makes it unmistakable that gods are placebos. This is the definitive answer to the debate over god's existence. Although in America today it is generally taken for granted that there is such a thing as a god, as in “God bless America,” in “God we trust,” and in “God bless you,” the unvarnished truth is that much of America has been deceived by placebo deception. It can now be declared with absolute confidence: *Placebo deception has tricked much of humanity into believing in non-existent gods.*

My intent is not to attack religion. It is more fundamental than that. It is to explain why non-existent gods are believed to exist. It has required a series of new understandings to arrive at that goal: that all gods are placebos; that placebos require a security paradigm to be completely understood; and that a security paradigm stems from the understanding that natural selection selects for adaptations that increase security.

The understanding that *placebo deception has tricked much of humanity into believing in non-existent gods* is game-changing. It has the potential of reshaping society for the better. It is not a question of *if*, but of *when*, the game is changed. It may take some time to disseminate the understanding that gods are imaginary and result from placebo deception, and possibly years, decades, or even generations for it to gain acceptance, but this truth will eventually out, and when it does – hopefully, earlier rather than later – it will complete the transition of the world's dominant culture from one of religion to one of science. Admittedly, the understanding that god is a placebo may be disturbing to many, and will be opposed by many, but I believe that, after the dust has finally settled, the fallout from a placebo understanding of god will make our world more civilized, and, thereby, will establish both a victory for humanity and for my legacy.