

How and Why God Evolved: An Alternative Perspective

Babar Shah Khan

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This expansively inquisitive work examines the evolution of religion throughout human history.

From Babar Shah Khan comes an expansively inquisitive new work that seeks to challenge world religions where they stand. *How and Why God Evolved* is a logical interrogation of religion, particularly of monotheisms, that brings to the fore many of the most pressing questions held by believers and nonbelievers alike.

To show that many modern believers hold conceptions of a divine being not unique to their traditions, Khan first undertakes a historical survey of God and gods, showing that humans first saw divinity in features upon which they were dependent—the sun, the moon, stars, weather phenomena, etc. Then, he says, gods were presumed to have human qualities and were politicized, with world leaders becoming their representatives, as with the cults of ancient Egypt. Khan roots belief in a monotheistic God in those tendencies, arguing that many of God's worst qualities are actually the vices of mankind.

Here, as elsewhere, Khan strikes a curious balance. His work is clearly well researched, and should be appreciated for its resultant depth. Khan draws parallels between monotheistic creation stories and creation stories across the world, referencing notable precursors to biblical tales, as with the Enuma Elish. Still, drawn conclusions can drift into hairy territory: it is one thing to call God's behavior in scriptures cruel and indicative of human shortcomings, and quite another to compare God's tendencies to those of fascist dictators, as Khan does. This work is best where it avoids such quagmires.

Khan engages religious criticism on a number of levels, with textual criticism becoming a common theme. Arguments surrounding the credibility of miracles—from Muhammad's night journey to the decision to count things like rainbows in that category—are compelling, as are challenges to the ethical behavior and failings of dominant characters in the scriptures.

The work is replete with epistemological queries, but also enters into realms of theology and comparative history ably. Later chapters on the imperfect nature of humans who have been elevated by religions, including popes and saints, hammer points about religious shortcomings home, though they can come to seem gratuitous in a work that has already made similar points so well. Some of Khan's suggestions—as with subjecting priests to regular background checks concerning child abuse—mistake the nature of the problems he approaches.

While Khan's work is occasionally anachronistic (omniscient/omnipresent/omnipotent is a later theological development than its presentation here, as are concepts of the afterlife in the monotheisms; Second Temple religious divisions are presented as more historically substantial than they were, etc.), it is more often a highly credible and widely referential exercise in rejecting religious literalism. Some of its revelations will be familiar to students of religion, but are nonetheless foundation-shaking problems for general religious populations. Readers of all backgrounds would be well-advised to consider Khan's many fair points.

Perhaps not all will agree with his conclusion—that, seeing these inconsistencies between literal religious presentations and science and logic, humanity has begun to move away from belief—but either way, it is impossible to say that the bulk of his criticisms are not fair. *How and Why God Evolved* is uncommonly conversant in world traditions for a work of its nature, and Khan's overall academic approach to religions is highly appreciable.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (October 23, 2015)

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