



God Is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human

By Dominic Johnson

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"And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." The biblical story of the flood crystalizes--in its terrifying, dramatic simplicity--the universally recognized concept of divine punishment. For millennia human civilizations have relied on such beliefs to create moral order. People who commit crimes or other bad deeds, we are told, will suffer retribution, while rewards--abstract or material--await those who do good. This simple but powerful idea has long served to deter self-interest and achieve remarkable levels of cooperation. Indeed, as all societies seem to have found, these beliefs are so good at promoting cooperation that they may have been favored by natural selection. Today, while secularism and unbelief are at an all-time high, the willingness to believe in some kind of payback or karma remains nearly universal. Even atheists often feel they are being monitored and judged. We find ourselves imagining what our parents, spouse, or boss would think of our thoughts and actions, even if they are miles away and will never find out. We talk of eyes burning into the backs of our heads, the walls listening, a sense that someone or something is out there, observing our every move, aware of our thoughts and intentions.

God Is Watching You is an exploration of this belief as it has developed over time and how it has shaped the course of human evolution. Dominic Johnson explores such questions as: Was a belief in supernatural consequences instrumental in the origins of human societies? How has it affected the way human society has changed, how we live today, and how we will live in the future? Does it expand or limit the potential for local, regional and global cooperation? How will the current decline in religious belief (at least in many western countries) affect our ability to live together? And what, if anything, will temper self-interest and promote cooperation if religion declines? In short, do we still need God?

Drawing on new research from anthropology, evolutionary biology, experimental psychology, and neuroscience, Johnson presents a new theory of supernatural punishment that offers fresh insight into the origins and evolution of not only religion, but also human cooperation and society. He shows that belief in

supernatural reward and punishment is no quirk of western or Christian culture, but a ubiquitous part of human nature that spans geographical regions, cultures, and human history.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This broad, reasonable presentation is amply documented with anthropological and biological evidence that religious belief is a by-product of evolution... Highly recommended [for] lower-division undergraduates through faculty." --*CHOICE*

"Think God is good? Think again. In his stunning new book, *God Is Watching You*, Johnson pulls back the curtain on tens of thousands of years of human evolution to reveal how religion's enduring success lies almost entirely in our belief in divine wrath and an unforgiving universe. And before you say, 'speak for yourself,' read this book. As it turns out, even atheists aren't immune." --Jesse Bering, author of *The Belief Instinct*

"According to Dominic Johnson, religion comes naturally to us because it is a biological adaptation. But if so, could we--and should we--seek to replace religion with secular institutions that serve similar functions? This lucid and highly entertaining book offers some surprising answers that will stimulate debate for years to come." --Harvey Whitehouse, author of *Modes of Religiosity*

"*God Is Watching You* is a remarkable book. Dominic Johnson brings his unique multidisciplinary expertise to every page and I simply marvel at the breadth, clarity, and acuity of his exposition. Johnson not only offers a novel and strongly supported explanation of how religion evolved, but crucially, he astutely explores the important implications of this evolutionary legacy for our world today." --Richard Sosis, James Barnett Professor of Humanistic Anthropology, University of Connecticut

"In a world where creationists deny evolution and atheists decry belief in God, Dominic Johnson provides a lot of answers by explaining belief in gods as an evolutionary adaptation." --David Sloan Wilson, author of *Darwin's Cathedral and Does Altruism Exist?*

About the Author

Dominic Johnson received a D.Phil. from Oxford University in evolutionary biology, and a Ph.D. from Geneva University in political science. Drawing on both disciplines, he is interested in how new research on evolution and human nature is challenging traditional understandings of international relations, conflict, cooperation and religion. He is the author of numerous scientific journal articles, as well as *Overconfidence and War: The Havoc and Glory of Positive Illusions* (2004) and, with Dominic Tierney, *Failing to Win:*

Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics (2006). For more information see www.dominicdpjohnson.com.

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Richard Fentress:

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