



# Natural Rational Religion: Why Bother?

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## What are we talking about?

I'm going to present two ideas,  
that to Atheists are radical, if not heretical.

### **1. That we can define a natural, rational religion, that:**

- Does NOT involve supernatural beings or things: it's "natural";
- And is based on reason and the evidence: it's "rational";
- But DOES involve (a minimal degree of) faith, beliefs, values, meaning and purpose: it's a "religion".

### **2. That promoting – proselytizing – this religion is worthwhile.**

It is:

- An effective strategy to promote reason and common sense.
- Emotionally as well as intellectually satisfying.
- Possibly persuasive on a global scale.





## Natural Rational Religion

To explain **what I mean by natural rational religion** I'll briefly cover:

- A **theoretical analysis**, of Philosophy;
- A **practical analysis**, of Science and History;
- Means of **Expression** in Religion and Culture;
- Personal and Political **action**; and finally,
- A comprehensive **world view**.

We will consider:

- *what we know, what we don't know,*
- *what we value, and what we feel.*

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## What is Religion about

Let's begin with this simple idea:

(from the Christian existentialist philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich)

**Religion is about our ultimate concerns:**

- **values,**
- **beliefs,**
- **meaning and purpose.**

What are values, beliefs, meaning and purpose?

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## Values reflect Choices

The most critical issue we face in life is that,

**on a moment by moment basis,  
we have to, and we do, make choices,** one way or the other:

- perhaps this is done somehow using our “free will”;
- perhaps it is determined by God, our genes or upbringing;
- perhaps it is random, arbitrary or chaotic.

But in some real sense we make choices, however they are explained,  
**based on our beliefs and feelings about the world.**

**Our choices reflect our values, and our values guide our choices.**

That is **what we actually value**, not what we *pretend* to value.

Choosing to do nothing, or not consciously choosing, are still choices.

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## Beliefs are Corrigible

Our feeling and choices are based on our beliefs about the world.

**What kind of beliefs?**

The beliefs I propose are **corrigible – they can be corrected:**

- tentative, working hypotheses;
- not fixed, arbitrary, or dogmatic;
- not held on faith alone – when we don’t really know;
- *as far as possible* based on, consistent with, reason and evidence;
- updatable as we gain insight, evidence and refine our reasoning.

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## Meaning and Purpose

**Meaning** comes from **seeing our life in a wider context.**

- **For theists** this context is God(s), stories about creation, the prophets, and our relationships with the God(s).
- **For some other religions** the context includes stories about the dreamtime, or nirvana and enlightenment.

**Purpose** comes from **adopting a role** in a wider context.

**Can an Agnostic, Atheist or Sceptic find meaning & purpose**

in some wider context, with acceptable stories,  
without arbitrary choices based on arbitrary beliefs?

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## Theoretical Analysis: Philosophy

To answer, we move on to our **theoretical analysis, our philosophy.**

- Our **core choices** aren't scientific or historical conclusions based solely on reason and the evidence. despite what Atheists, Sceptics or Rationalists might say.
- They are **philosophical** choices based on **what we know and feel. constrained by science and history**, reason and the evidence.

We'll consider very briefly the classic areas of epistemology, metaphysics, theology, theory of mind, ethics and aesthetics.

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## Epistemology: What is Truth?

Whether we have “free will” affects our idea of what Truth is.

***Everything that happens is either caused or chaotic!***

- ❖ ● Perhaps all our beliefs and values are **caused** by the laws of nature; OR
  - Perhaps *God* knows and controls what we will do even before we do it.
 Either way it seems that we don't have free will, and choice doesn't matter.
- ❖ Yet again, perhaps some things, including our beliefs and values, are **not caused by anything!**

That means that our beliefs and values are arbitrary – **chaotic**.

***But we feel and act as though we can and do make real choices!***

- ❖ We **act as if** we have free will, despite the evidence to the contrary.

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## Truth Dilemma

- Some claim our brain **physiology is deterministic**, but at some **emergent**, psychological level we somehow freely choose between options.  
This is just ignoring the underlying issue, defining away the problem.
- Some say **quantum theory** leaves room for free will,  
But nervous systems may be above the level where quantum effects apply.  
And quantum effects appear to be random – despite Einstein's distaste.
- Some say free will only refers to a **lack of external coercion**.  
If there is no gun at our head, we can choose freely,  
This avoids the deeper question.

BUT

**If our beliefs are caused or chaotic they are not necessarily true.**

**This point is missed by most people** (e.g. Sam Harris, in his book *Free Will*).

This dilemma seems unresolvable, so **we should be agnostic** about it.

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## Truth and Action, Belief and Faith

**When there is uncertain or conflicting evidence on an issue:**

- *If it is possible*  
we must accept our ignorance and not jump to conclusions.
- *But often that isn't possible: often some action is required.*  
**Then we have to make a choice,  
to act or not, as best we can.**

This is a **leap of faith**: simply making a choice  
on the evidence we have to hand, hoping it will be OK.

This **faith is minimal**. The **choice is forced** on us.

It would be silly to make a leap of faith **despite** the evidence  
or when it's **not necessary**.

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## Reason and Its Truth Limits

**Using reason often leads to better outcomes,  
but it's not the ultimate source of the truth.**

- We can't use reason to justify using reason!
- We have to use prior knowledge of the world to know when logical rules apply!
- Gödel showed there are truths we can't prove in some mathematical systems.
- We are being **rational if finding new evidence might change our mind**.

But if new evidence arises, we can't prove that it's relevant  
or that it should sway our opinion.

Rationally, we get into an infinite loop justifying our choice,  
or we stop at some convenient or arbitrary point.

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## Truth and Revelation

If **reason is limited**, can we can find the **truth through revelation**?  
NO!

- If we could justify preferring one revelation over another, we wouldn't need the revelation to know what is right and good.
- So we would need to **arbitrarily choose** which revelation, which interpretation, and which rules to follow.
- It's not a solution to choose arbitrarily, on groundless faith.

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## What we Value

Ultimately, despite these uncertainties,

- We all effectively **choose to believe in the *Truth***:  
**that *it is valid to seek the truth*.**

This fundamental choice reflects a **core value**, even if it is obvious or done unconsciously.

- We are also forced to value **Diversity**, because we have to allow that a reasonable person could make a difference choice.

There is some mystery about this; we learn to **embrace the mystery**. We don't *value* mystery as something to strive for, but we live with it.

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## Metaphysics: What is real?

Continuing our philosophical analysis: **What is real?**

**Appearances based on perceptions are only indirectly related to reality.**

- Science still doesn't tell us what the ultimate nature of reality is. Scientific theories are approximations, apply in limited areas, and are likely to be revised.
- But scientific progress continues to strengthen the case for materialism: that all phenomena, including mental events and consciousness, are identical with material interactions.

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## Partitioning reality with language

**We construct our perception of reality, and partition reality, with language.**

- We all interpret reality in terms of **space** and **time**, and impose **causality** on it.
- **Different cultures partition the world differently**, into different concepts.
- We all construct our 'world' out of these generally ill-informed cultural norms.
- **All spoken and written language, and most conscious thinking consists of social constructs, concepts we unconsciously absorb as we learn to talk.**

But still ...

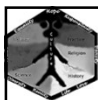
- Some experiences aren't adequately described in words, like smells, and music.
- Many people have **wordless 'spiritual' experiences**. These don't involve disembodied minds, but can affect our emotions, feelings and life choices.

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## What we Value

But still **we value the idea of a shared, natural, public *Reality*.**

Despite its subjectivity, uncertainty, cultural differences & social constructs, the idea of a **public *Reality*** is the basis for all our communications.

And this analysis emphasises that we should value ***Diversity***, because reasonable people can partition the world differently.

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## *Theology: Does God Exist?*

Time only allows me to make a few points on the existence of God.

- Atheists contend there is no evidence of God's action in the world.
- The burden of proof for any kind of god is on the believer.  
Like the celestial tea pot, on the other side of Saturn, we don't have to disprove the existence of something that's undetectable.
- There is no reason to believe in any of the proposed kinds of God.

And we note that

- **No religion explains existence itself.**

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## What we Value

Even if there is no god or supernatural beings, we (mostly) still **choose to continue the struggle to live.**

We can explain this:

- There are evolutionary explanations for these drives.
- Even a difficult life can have its good moments.
- Human nature has its *humane* side.

Regardless:

We choose to value ***life*** rather than death:  
we choose *this natural life*,  
rather than a non-existent, *supernatural* afterlife.

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## *What is the nature of Mind?*

Consciousness is not a single ongoing, unitary experience that philosophers and religionists fantasise about. Eg:

- We weave in and out of consciousness.
- Some people have multiple voices in their head.

Religions equate minds with souls (or eg the Hindu atman) but don't explain how souls are created, or consider life before (the first) birth.

**Science tells us there is no consciousness or mind without a working brain.**

## What we Value

Again, we value this *potentially comprehensible* natural ***life*** as opposed to incomprehensible, supernatural mind.

We value ***life*** and ***love*** even more because they are ephemeral.

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## Ethics: Why be good? What is goodness?

**We know that ethics don't come from God – or from science!**

- Acting in fear of God or bad karma is not goodness: it's being practical.
- If we know God is good it's because we already understand goodness.
- We know that many religious rules, from God or not, in fact are bad.

Science and history tell us what *did* or *does* happen, but  
can't tell us what we should do

(despite what Sam Harris & Richard Dawkins say).

Ethics *in most of us* is in fact driven by the feelings of compassion and altruistic behaviour we acquired as humans evolved.

But we can't just rely on evolution, which many use to justify selfishness or that 'might is right' or that the strong should win.

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## Ethical Choices for Core Values

- **We choose as a core value *love*,**  
to do what we can to reduce suffering and promote happiness or fulfillment, in all sentient beings.
- **We choose to assign *responsibility*** to others and ourselves, when there is  
a potential for social or personal intervention to be effective.
- **We also choose as a core value *equality*:**  
there are no reasonable grounds to believe one person *innately* deserves more chances for a better life than another.

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## Aesthetics: What is Beauty?

- Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.  
It's the choices we make!
- Many of us find pleasure, and experience the mysteries of life, by seeking out contact with the world's **natural wonders**, or participating in "cultural" experiences, **artificial works**, like art, music, dancing, movies and so on!

### What we Value

**We make daily choices**, that are more than simply utilitarian, reflecting that we value *beauty*.

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## Core Values from Philosophy

Values an Agnostic, Sceptic, Atheist or Rationalist can obtain from philosophy are:

***Truth, Diversity, Reality, Life,  
Love, Beauty, Equality and Responsibility.***

As we discuss later, the final core value we propose is ***Hope***.

*We can't conduct scientific tests to prove or disprove our philosophical conclusions or the validity of our core value choices.*

These nine **core values** are ***orthogonal*** and **coherent**. That is

- They don't overlap.
- Choosing one doesn't imply another.
- They fit together.

We need to choose *all* of them.

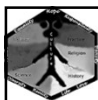
There may be other core values, such as **self-fulfilment** or **self actualisation**.

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## Beliefs of a Natural Rational Religion

### We can summarize our philosophical beliefs:

1. Although the laws of nature affect us, we believe in the Truth, but with some uncertainty.
2. Reality is real; we categorise it, using language, but some experiences are wordless.
3. There is no transcendental creator god, no immanent god, no god who cares for us.
4. Our minds and our consciousness are our brains working, so when we die, we rot.
5. To be good is a choice that comes from within, and can't come from god or science.
6. Beauty arises from our shared innate desire for self expression and to communicate.

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## Practical Analysis: Science & History

### *Derived Values*

Now we move on to our practical analysis: ie science and history.

- The scientific and historical methods are based on **core** values like Truth and Diversity that we rephrase or combine into eg Transparency and Respect. These can be called **derived** values.

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## Beliefs of a Natural Rational Religion

### We can summarize our scientific beliefs:

7. The scientific method uses reason and evidence to explain how nature works.
8. Science can explain the evolution of matter, energy and the stars, after the big bang.
9. The sun, moon and earth evolved out of star dust, giving us tides, seasons, days & rain.
10. Science is working out how life began, from simple molecules to complex living cells.
11. Evolution brought predators & prey, different sexes, nervous systems, pleasure & pain.
12. Some apes in East Africa evolved into early humans, who then spread out over Eurasia.
13. Science is developing explanations of how our brains evolved into all that we are now.

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## Beliefs of a Natural Rational Religion

### In history, we summarize our beliefs:

14. History uses reason and evidence to describe our past and explore future trends.
15. Homo sapiens spread across the world, starting farming earlier where it was easier.
16. Technology developed differently often due to differences in geography and needs.
17. Civilisations rose and fell depending on their environment and rulers' effectiveness.
18. Western Europe colonized the world because of various geographical accidents.
19. Colonialism has collapsed, human rights and democratic government are spreading.
20. Increased prosperity and material growth is good but now threatens our environment.

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## Science & History

### A final *Core Value*

- Despite our short term perceptions and localised violent extremes, historical analyses by the likes of Steven Pinker show that overall **the world is now a better place than it ever has been.**
  - History tells us that there are grounds for ***Hope***. With a small leap of faith we can believe that **personal and political action is valid.**
- Hope is a core value, guiding our choices, based on our global experience, rather than a theoretical analysis.***

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## Science & History

### *Effecting or Instrumental Values*

Science and history help us to work out the best choices, which are ***instrumental***, ie they help to put into ***effect***, our ***core*** values.

We revise such ***effecting*** values as new evidence comes to light. For instance:

As **science learns** more about human behaviour we devise better justice systems, to realise core values of ***equality*** and ***responsibility***.

**History's lessons** also support ***effecting*** values, such as: ***productivity, rule of law, human rights, freedom and democracy.***

Atheists such as Sam Harris confuse ***effecting*** values from science with ***core*** values from philosophy.

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## Science & History

### **Ancillary Values**

History shows:

- It takes **courage, strength** and **self-discipline** to follow our chosen path in our personal lives; and
- Political action needs **loyalty** and **commitment**.

These we call **ancillary values**. They aren't **core values** because

- they are also used for evil purposes ,  
such as Nazism and terrorist attacks; and
- they are useful **guides only in support of justifiable core values**.

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## Science, History and our Feelings

**Science and history are not just cold, hard facts.**

**They affect our feelings.**

- Science helps to explain **why we are as we are**, and why we behave as we do. **It makes us feel normal.**
- Long term, global history **helps us to free ourselves** from our limited personal histories, to escape from identity politics, to overcome our parochialism and short sightedness, to seek more universal values.
- Science and history form the **basis for our universal narrative**, of our origins and our destination, and helps us to find our place within it.
- Science and history **provide good strategies** to achieve our core values.
- These stories and strategies  
will be replaced only by better ones as we learn more.

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## Expression: in Religion and Culture

We need to move on to a more sophisticated understanding of religion.

Religion is humanity's *attempt to find meaning and purpose*. It's about what we care about most, our "**ultimate concerns**", guiding how we live.

Despite their differences **religions have a common structure**:

- an explanation of our **origins**, generally including a **paradise lost**, the beginning of **suffering**, and why we are in need of help;
- behavioural rules to **reduce suffering** or gain redemption; and
- sources of inspiration, **exemplary models**, as prophets or teachers;

These form a **grand narrative** in which many find meaning and purpose.

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## Religion, Culture and Values

Religion, culture, media and the arts **don't provide core values!**

**They explore ways to express our values.** Their stories certainly strongly influence what we value.

How we choose to interpret sacred texts, literally, or as allegories, or as fairy tales, generally **reflects our pre-existing values**.

Wisdom can be found in selected religious stories, just as they can in selected literature and movies,

**regardless of whether they are historically true or scientifically valid.**

We must calmly acknowledge and **take from religions and the arts whatever wisdom they offer and discard the rest.**

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## Beliefs of a Natural Rational Religion

### We can summarize our beliefs about Religion:

21. Religions tell stories about our place in the world but we must interpret these sensibly.
22. Early beliefs about spirits and ancestors are understandable but no longer reasonable.
23. Traditional eastern religions provide useful insights into the mind, but are unscientific.
24. Western monotheists retell their good stories and rules but often ignore their bad ones.
25. Modern religions are unreasonable: they are variations of old ideas, pseudoscience or atheist.

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## Beliefs of a Natural Rational Religion

In this religious context, we don't need to delve into the history or breadth of art and culture or the ways it is transmitted through the media.

We do need to recognize its significance and influence.

### Summary beliefs about Culture, Media and the Arts:

26. Art that is authentic helps us to express ideas and understand our place in the world.
27. Media must tell the truth: but we must also become better media consumers and regulators.

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## Religion, Culture and our Feelings

Religion, culture and the arts help to connect us to the world.

**The best of religion adds richness and depth to our universal narrative (derived from science and history) and our part within it.**

**The best of art and culture, distributed via different media, give us a huge variety of ways to embellish the universal narrative and provide insights into our roles within it,**

as children, lovers, parents, workers, managers, citizens and so on,  
**and the multiple identities we have, based eg on**  
 age, gender, race, caste, class, sexual preference, religion or nationality  
**filling out and colouring the multiple stories**  
**in which we find meaning and purpose.**

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## Action: in Personal Life and Politics

- Our analysis of these beliefs and values in all knowledge domains, gives us a **basis for developing rational, evidence based guidelines** for our:
  - psychological & physical health, relationships and 'spirituality';
  - economics, government, the environment, society & education.

Unsurprisingly, it's often a question of **balancing one value against another.**

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## Beliefs of a Natural Rational Religion

### We summarize beliefs regarding Personal Practice:

28. Our choices reflect our values, and are based on our beliefs in all domains of knowledge.
29. We must look after our bodies: eat well, exercise and take proper medical advice.
30. We are more effective if our ongoing choices are realistic, integrated and consistent.
31. Relationships, especially sexual ones, can be fun, but must be honest and consensual.
32. Family relationships must be based on respect, compassion, responsibility and duty.
33. Community involvement is unavoidable and more fulfilling when based on respect.
34. We can have, and express, 'spiritual' experiences, without supernatural explanations.

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## Beliefs of a Natural Rational Religion

### We can summarize our political beliefs:

35. Politics works when we agree on peaceful, equitable procedures to resolve disputes.
36. Mixed, managed economies, with controlled markets, best promote prosperity.
37. Democratic, transparent and accountable governments best promote human fulfilment.
38. Area governments must use minimal force to maintain stability and the environment.
39. A sustainable global environment needs management of population and resources.
40. We need global NGOs to address global problems of survival, equity and prosperity.
41. We must educate both children and adults to understand the bases of these beliefs.

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## *Personal & Political beliefs and our feelings?*

We may initially feel overwhelmed by complex arguments. But ...

This analysis **provides** us with **the confidence**:

- **that our personal striving is valid** and justifiable;  
because it is based on sound analyses and life affirming value choices;
- **and in the political sphere**, the confidence  
**to join the struggle** for justice, human rights, and  
to humbly, but assertively, defend liberal democracy.

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## Integrating into a comprehensive Vision

How can we integrate this into a world view?

Firstly, **we accept that some mysteries can't be resolved.**

**We can only embrace them.**

- No science, religion or philosophy resolves the mystery of **existence itself** or answers the ultimate question: "why?"
- Perhaps we'll never resolve the dilemma of **causality or chaos** versus the free choice needed for truth and justice.
- Perhaps we'll never completely explain **consciousness or love.**

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## Integrating Spiritual Experiences

**We may never fully understand ‘spiritual’ experiences,**

- including wordless epiphanies, feelings of oneness with the universe, outer body or near death experiences,
- that sometimes have a life changing emotional impacts,
- that many people have experienced,
- and interpreted as best they can, using what they know & feel.

**But we can interpret these without invoking the supernatural,**

- acknowledging the emotional impact, and
- given that our minds are extremely complex,
- there may be different explanations for different phenomena,
- and we can only embrace the remaining mystery.

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## Integrating natural rational rituals

Natural rational **rituals reflect our values** and provide meaning. They include the rituals of:

- Democracy, justice and law enforcement;
- Workplace relations and commercial interactions;
- Clubs and societies; friendship groups;
- Individual and family celebrations: birthdays, graduation, etc;
- Annual celebrations, anniversaries, ... ;
- Day to day polite and considerate interactions with other people.

The daily practice of these rituals provides psychological **comfort**, a degree of **contentment**, or **spiritual satisfaction**. And we can do this without bending the truth.

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## Confronting Post Modernism

Our universal narrative, which we say provides a coherent, comprehensive story, is, in a way, just another social construct.

But it's **a good** social construct.

- It's based on the global scientific consensus and long term global history, not parochial, short term, western imperialism.
- Our global beliefs and values reflect explicit informed choices made in many cultures, not just "the West".
- Values such as **truth**, *diversity*, **love** and equality, mean we oppose **ignorant**, *closed*, **cruel** and oppressive societies.

and we need to always remember, **in real life we have to act, despite social constructs, the uncertainties & our ignorance.**

- The valueless paralysis of post-modernism is part of the problem, not the solution.

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## Beliefs of a Natural Rational Religion

### In Conclusion:

42. These beliefs are an evidence based, natural, compassionate, reasonable way of life.

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## A comprehensive Vision: What we Feel

Despite the uncertainty, this vision is not just **intellectually** but also **emotionally satisfying**.

- It is philosophically sound, scientifically and historically valid;
- It provides humane guidelines on how to live;
- It allows for rituals and spirituality;
- It provides a path for followers of traditional religions to grow;
- It is life affirming, reducing the fear of death, and provides hope;
- It provides some contentment otherwise unobtainable to an informed, reasonable, global citizen;
- It gives meaning & purpose more satisfying than unreasonable faiths.

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## Is this a religion?

This approach certainly has characteristics that are similar to religion:

- A focus on our **ultimate concerns** providing values, meaning & purpose.
- A **universal narrative** describing our origins and our place in the world;
- An explanation of the **causes of suffering** and ways we can address it;
- An associated, justifiable **set of values** to guide our behaviour;
- **Exemplary models**, and a wealth of literature;
- **Rituals** for conducting and celebrating our lives;
- Embracing the **mystery** of existence and the majesty of the universe.

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## Court case about religion

Australia's High Court, in the 1980s, accepted that Scientology was a religion and hence is entitled to tax exemptions.

Five High Court judges ruled on the Scientology case.

- They all accepted that a Religion **typically** involves: the **supernatural**, and a **canon of conduct** linked to those beliefs.
- This matches similar opinions of other Courts, eg in the USA.
- But a majority **DID NOT INSIST** that supernatural beliefs are paramount. Despite what the ACNC (Australian Charities Commission) currently says.



## Defining religion

Acting Chief Justice **Mason** and Justice **Brennan**:

- Defined religion by the **content of the beliefs** rather than its purpose;
- They required a belief in a **supernatural being, thing or principle**, and a **canon of conduct** linked to those beliefs;

But these Justices

- Allowed that the supernatural could be of relatively low importance.

And they

- Defined the supernatural to be "a belief that **reality extends beyond** that which is capable of **perception by the senses**".
- We'll consider what a supernatural principle means in a minute.





## Defining religion

### Justices **Wilson and Dean**

- Stated that “no single characteristic can be laid down constituting a formularised legal criterion”, and they
- Listed some **indicia** that “may be helpful”, ie not mandatory.
- Their **indicia** did include a belief in the supernatural,  
but
- They said the indicia may change over time, and
- The relative importance of each of their indicia may differ depending on the particular case.

This suggests that a belief in the supernatural can be of little importance to be legally defined as a religion.

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## Defining religion

The final judge, Justice **Murphy** took a broad view of religion.  
He did not require belief in the supernatural.

Murphy J specified 3 **sufficient** definitions:

- any body that was a revival of an earlier cult,
- any body which believed in a supernatural being,

and most importantly:

**“The following bodies are religious: ...**

**Any body which claims to be religious, and offers a way to find meaning and purpose in life”.**

This defines religion **by its purpose, not the content** of its beliefs.  
This definition is closest the definition in international covenants.

We fit this definition.

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## Legal Definition Summary

### High Court Conclusion

- One Justice did not require belief in the supernatural at all.
- Two proposed “helpful indicia” that included the supernatural, but these aren’t mandatory, may change over time and vary in relative importance.
- Only two of the five said belief in a supernatural Being, Thing or Principle is required, but they allowed it could be of relatively low importance.

So, although it should NOT be essential,

- can an Atheist – who does not believe in supernatural Beings or Things – acknowledge some kind of **supernatural Principle**?

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## Reality and Perception

- We really do believe in a reality that is beyond our ordinary perceptions:
  - Sound scientific ideas such as Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle and Poppers Falsifiability Principle lead us to accept that science will never know the true nature of reality.
  - Our notions of reality are also socially constructed, so we aren’t sure what ultimate reality is.

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## Faith as well as Reason

We choose our core values, **to some extent, on faith:**

- Despite the scientific evidence that eg
  - our behaviour, beliefs and choices are caused, or random;
  - and evidence that we are in fact not all equal; and
- despite the historical evidence of
  - selfishness, suffering and grounds for despair;
- our core value choices such as **equality** and **hope** are **to this extent** contrary to, perhaps **more than**, reason and evidence.

Choosing these core values reflects our **faith in something bigger than ourselves.**

**But we need to be even more sophisticated than this** about the legal definition of a *Supernatural Principle*.

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## More than Reason

The **more** in “*more than mere reason*” is not unreason.

The **more** is choice.

- Judges talking about religion seem to emphasise static *supernatural things*, obscuring that reality is dynamic.
- Values involve making choices, ongoing *events*.
- Values are not immaterial, nebulous **things** permeating the ether,
- but **making choices on faith (when reason is not enough).**

**To that extent**, this *Way* involves a **supernatural principle**, *as it has been defined by the courts.*

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## Religious or Secular?

So we claim to legitimately call this approach to life  
a **natural, rational religion**.

- The Australian Charities Commission (ACNC) doesn't agree.
- Many will prefer NOT to call this a religion because of the connotations of that word.
- You may prefer to call it a world view or a philosophy.
- It doesn't matter in most contexts.

Either way, it is a sensible and emotionally satisfying  
philosophy of life, which, for want of a better label, I call

***A Reasonable Global Way.***

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## Proselytizing Natural Rational Religion

Now we move on to the second heretical proposition:

**That promoting this (atheistic) religion is worthwhile.**

We'll look at:

- Secularism and Humanism;
- Our need for a positive narrative;
- Positive and negative aspects of religion and Atheism;
- Disillusionment with economics and democracy;
- The positivity of natural rational religion;
- The value of a brand;
- Why we should bother.

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## Secularism and Humanism

### Why promote this Way rather than Secularism or Humanism?

**Secularism is a political movement** to make all religion and non-religion equal in the eyes of the law and the state.

- It **has no other world view**, other than this political ideal.
- In practice, secularists focus on specific practices required or banned because of religion,
  - Such as (Christian) prayers in parliament;
  - or Chaplains in schools.

**This Way is much more** than a focussed political movement.

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## Humanism

*A Reasonable Global Way* can be seen as a variety of Humanism.

**Humanism** refers to a **philosophy and ethical system** based on the value of humanity and our ability to address issues using critical thinking and evidence.<sup>1</sup>

- It is a respectable, long standing tradition, that satisfies many, and is treated as a religion in some jurisdictions,
- although it is has not attracted a very wide following globally.

I suggest we **need a more definitive - better defined - brand.**

- Just as there are many e.g. Christian sects, there is no harm in **promoting a specific variant of humanism with strong positions** on philosophy, science, history, religion, culture and politics.

**But we must still support secularism and learn from humanism.**

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## The appeal of narrative

**We interpret the world almost totally through narratives.**

Neuroscientists are finding more and more evidence:

- We connect randomly occurring events into narratives;
  - At a waterhole, the crack of a twig and a bird flying away evokes a narrative of a predator, to watch or flee from.

**Everyone watches movies or TV series or reads novels.**

- Regardless of the genre – classic, historical, sci-fi
- we are all obsessed with narratives.

**We learn from and remember narratives not isolated facts.**

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## The appeal of religious narrative

About 90% of the world's population is religious or theist,

- 84% follow a traditional religion
- 16% claim no religious preference but about **half** of them **are atheist**.
  - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_religious\\_populations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations)

**All religions have a religious narrative,**

- which explains how we got here, what's real, and how we should behave.

**Their narratives have many sub plots and back stories,**

- So they are engrossing, all encompassing.

**Suppressing our need for narrative is counter productive.**

- We prefer a good story to complex, boring, reason and the evidence.

**Atheists must learn from religion to use the power of narrative.**

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## The positive value of religion

**Surveys show religious adherents are happier and more content.**

- It's **not the beliefs** of the religion, because this applies to all religions.
- It's **not the theism**, because God, to many, is terrifying.
- It's the **comprehensive, emotionally satisfying** view of
  - **the world** and how we should respond to it;
  - **the "faith"** or the confidence we have; and
  - **the community** of believers and their sense of fellowship.
- **Community fellowship** brings us into contact with people who need us.
  - **Helping people**, the exercise of compassion, **relieves our anxiety**.

A natural rational religion can provide similar benefits.

- A *Reasonable Global Way* has a universal narrative,
- that is emotionally satisfying as well as intellectually sound,
- and provides values, humane codes of conduct to live by.

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## The negative aspects of religion

All traditional religions have their negative aspects:

Most religious followers are advised to believe, on faith, in:

- **Arbitrary rules** about sex, clothes, food, purity, uncleanness and evil,
- And most religions have supported **violence, oppression** and **sexual abuse**.

Too many religious leaders aren't honest or transparent.

- They often don't share the simplistic views of their followers; and
- Many covered up deceptive and evil practices to protect their institutions.

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## The negativity of simple Atheism

Atheism itself is negative: a non-belief in supernatural beings.

- Many atheist writers discuss ethics and altruism to “fill the void”.
- Some Atheists describe this as **Atheism Plus**.

Atheists spend a lot time criticising supernatural beliefs.

- This adds to the perception that they are negative, with nothing to offer.
- Instead of this negativity we should be promoting a positive world view.

Atheists, sceptics and rationalists often appear to be angry.

- Atheists are often contemptuous of “non-scientific” beliefs,  
but psychology and neuroscience tell us most beliefs are unscientific.
- Atheist humour sometimes attacks the person rather than the belief.

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## The economy isn't a positive narrative

Many hope greater prosperity will overcome our dissatisfaction:

- But increasing prosperity hasn't led to more happiness, even in a country like Australia, with its long period of economic growth, cultural diversity, a pretty good health system and well targeted welfare.

Hugh Mackay says we have an “**epidemic of anxiety**”:

- Individualism and competitive materialism lead to alienation;
- As herd animals we become anxious as we are cut off from others;
- Self absorption leads to a heightened sense of personal entitlement.

So it's still worth pursuing policies of **inclusiveness**.

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## No positive narrative in democracy

### Democracy is losing its positive appeal.

Democratic societies are becoming fragmented.

- We can blame right wing media, technology, or demagogues;
- We can blame modern appeals to nationalism all over the world;
- We can blame self centred leaders fostering their own ambitions.

But division is widespread, from political dissent to violent jihad:

- Islamist terrorists are typically under-employed less-educated young men who feel oppressed and have recently converted or become more pious.
- Now white nationalists are becoming more energized, especially under-employed less-educated men, who feel like they're now the oppressed.
- Many so-called "ordinary people" are supporting fringe political parties.

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## Youth need a positive narrative

Andrew Singleton says in "Generations of Change" (2011):

- Almost half of Australian young people aged between 13 and 24 (in 2005) did not belong to or identify with any religion or denomination.
- Barely half of Gen Y believed in God; another third were uncertain.  
Attendance at services of worship was low.
- <https://journals.jcu.edu.au/linq/article/download/3147/3100>

But Atheists can't be pleased or complacent about our youth:

- More **believed in reincarnation** than traditional ideas about the afterlife.
- Only a **minority** were strongly secular, ie '**genuine atheists**'.
- Many were **indifferent** to religion, but didn't reject it out of hand.
- Most hold some religious or spiritual beliefs, but don't do much about it.
- It is among Gen Y that religions (apart from Christianity) flourish the most.

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## Components of a positive narrative

Martin Seligman says faith in something larger than ourselves is essential to find a sense of meaning in life.

Mackay says “the vacuum created by religion must be filled”. He says we need to rejuvenate using four strategies:

- **Faith** – in something larger than the self
  - **Community** – the more interaction with others, the better we are;
  - **Nature** – “real life” outside the digital and commercial worlds;
  - **Self expression** – acting creatively and positively in the world.
- **Our psychology demands it. New Atheism doesn't do it.**

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## The positives of natural rational religion

A natural rational religion provides the benefits, but not the disadvantages of the traditional world religions.

- We don't have to turn the clock back, or shut down our brains.
- It involves a **minimum of faith** and a **maximum of reason**.
- It has **reasonable beliefs and values**: no arbitrary rules.
- It is **global in perspective**, genuinely universal, not parochial.
- It is a **positive alternative** to the Sceptics' and New Atheist negativity;
- It helps to **renormalise 'spiritual' feelings** and community attachments.

It provides a global context in which **reasonable people can find values**, meaning and purpose.

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## A path for traditional religions

A natural rational religion provides a path for traditional religious adherents to grow:

- Traditional religions are aware that their sacred texts contain **scientific errors, false histories and inhumane ethics**.
- One option is to **reject modernity**: science, history and ethics.
  - But most people find this difficult: fundamentalism is declining.
- Another option is to **demythologise the sacred texts**,
  - to express their core truths without the anachronistic baggage.
  - Natural rational religion is the logical outcome of this process.
- A third option is to **remythologise the core truths**,
  - to devise new stories to express truths that can't be said directly.
  - Natural rational religion selects these **from our rich global culture**.

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## A path for traditional religions

Natural rational religion presents traditional religious adherents with a **definitive** as well as a positive **growth path**:

- Our **definitive global beliefs** constitute a universal narrative
  - that allows us to see our roles within it,
  - and **hence we find meaning and purpose**.
- We also have **definitive global values**
  - that allow us to choose how we react to the world
  - in both personal and political spheres.
- We present as a **positive alternative**,
  - that is **emotionally** and **spiritually satisfying**,
  - without having to damn anyone's starting position.

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## Small steps for traditional religionists

Ayaan Hirsi-Ali, a heroine of the New Atheists, suggested that

- many Muslims who see problems with Islam may at first need to take one small step and **convert to Christianity**,
- then they can take the final step to **convert to Atheism**.

*I have talked with Muslims who wanted to take this path.*

A natural rational religion provides an alternative way:

- The first step is similar in size to converting to Christianity; ie **convert to a Reasonable Global Way**.
- But there is no need for a second step.
- This approach is **more honest**, and perhaps more persuasive.

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## A path for scientific & technological societies

Defining natural rational religion provides a better picture of a **positive future** of where **science and reason** can go:

- **NOT** towards a dystopian future,
  - where there is no compassion and no mystery,
  - a materialistic universe devoid of value.
- **TOWARDS** a compassionate world
  - that benefits from technological progress,
  - and has the confidence and the values to address its flaws.
- **Science & reason help but don't define** natural rational religion.
  - This is not "scientism".
  - Our Way provides the **values, meaning and purpose, to add a humane face to a technologically advanced future.**

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## A sound moral grounding for activists

*A Reasonable Global Way*, as a natural rational religion, is a **philosophical and ethical underpinning of social action**,

- that still allows for different interpretations of the evidence,
- that values a diversity of informed opinion,
- that defines core values such as truth, reality and equality,
- that is the basis for an inclusive, pluralist, liberal democracy,
- and opposes fake news, divisiveness and parochialism.

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## The value of a brand

*A Reasonable Global Way* provides a comprehensive package.

Given the many alternatives, both religious and secular,

- we need a label to identify this package, to group all the ideas,
- so we can say, in “a word”, something like:  
“I follow X, why don’t you?” or “I am an X-er”.
- just like other people can say  
“I follow Jesus – or the Buddha - or The Prophet Mohammed.”  
Or “I am a Christian/Buddhist/Muslim”.

We can promote such a package with options:

- either as a ***substitute for religion*** rather than ***as*** a religion,
- or as a **replacement religion**.

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## So why Bother? Brute force hasn't worked.

**Why not work towards simply abolishing religion?**

**This is the approach adopted by most Atheists.**

**But it's not working fast enough. It might NOT succeed!**

- Christianity and Islam still dominate half the world, and especially the USA, the Middle East and Africa;
- Hindu and Buddhist radicals are becoming increasingly oppressive, especially of Muslims and Christians.

**Abolishing religion doesn't provide the replacement we need.**

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## So why Bother? It's a reasonable option.

As Allah once told Mohammed (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:256)

**There is no compulsion in religion.**

There is **no logical necessity** to follow this *Way*.

I don't suggest that promoting natural rational religion is the only, or the best, way, to counter traditional religious falsities and superstitions, but it's a reasonable way.

And I do suggest many people could live with the beliefs and values espoused in this *Way*.

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So why Bother? It will provoke discussion.

On the other hand:

Packaging this *Way* up as a religion **will confront all** traditional religionists and Atheists, Sceptics & Rationalists.

I expect this will promote debate and hence further the cause of secularism in general.

And other people, like me, and a few others, might also find it a **satisfying approach** to the meaning of life.



So why Bother? Because it's "good" and "true"!

But mostly we should promote the beliefs of this *Way* **because, despite the uncertainties, this is the direction in which we find the truth.**

**Modern society needs to get a better grip on reality.**

- This natural rational religion stands in opposition to fake news,
- and counters the paralysis and guilt of post modernism,
- because it provides a **universal narrative** that is **emotionally** as well as **intellectually satisfying**.





Why Bother? It provides meaning and purpose!

**Natural rational religion,  
a *Reasonable Global Way*,  
provides a path to address  
our ultimate concerns,  
the critical personal and political issues of our times.**

Thanks for your time.

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**Natural Rational Religion:  
Why Bother?**  
Because it's *A Reasonable Global Way!*

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