CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Pilgrim or Customer?

Summary:

Moral confusion of present day. Morality as part of genetic inheritance, not something invented solely by priests. Man cannot live by bread alone – rules and procedures as vital component of nurture. Society’s challenge to project an ethic reflecting balance between human and environmental needs. Need for humanity to contain ‘wants’ within responsible, self-sustaining levels. Potential for balance to restore individual with recognition of importance of spiritual needs.

In October 2002 I had been invited to address a major conference of teachers in Birmingham when, late the evening before, I was told that my time slot was being cut as a "very important speaker from Downing Street" had expressed his willingness to address the conference at short notice. I came out of my session breathless as Tony Blair walked up on the stage. For an extremely busy man he spoke most eloquently about the importance of education and roused the spirits of teachers like a general facing his troops.

Listening carefully, I was struck by two things. He yet again reiterated his favourite political mantra - real Adam Smith stuff - that competition was the best way of raising standards in schools and therefore it was totally right that parents should hold the schools accountable for the education of their children. He then went on to exhort the teachers to think of all possible ways of improving secondary schools, and invited the audience to let him know what we thought.

As it happened I was flying to Tokyo that evening, so I had an opportunity to think about what the prime minister had said and, as I did so, found myself drafting a letter to him. I kept the letter short. I congratulated him on his personal commitment to education - and I meant everything I said. My second point was, however, a rebuke: every time that you or any other politician tell parents to hold the school accountable for the education of their children, I said,
you deliver a devastating, perhaps unintentional, subsequent message, namely that it is the school's job not the parents' to bring up their children to be fully responsible adults. I then went on to make the argument that it was in the failure to appreciate the biological opportunities of adolescence that secondary education was failing. I indicated that modern research is showing that the practice of secondary education simply does not match the opportunities which we now know exist in the adolescent brain. "Only by restructuring secondary education to reflect what we now know about the adolescent's deep need to experiment, and take increasing control of their own learning and progression, can we ever hope to get the improvements, Prime Minister, that we all seek." I concluded by suggesting that, in verifying what I’d said he should not refer my letter to the Department of Education "who see every problem as having a school-based solution," but rather to those neurologists and psychologists with a professional interest in adolescence.

I was disappointed, but I suppose not surprised, to get the standard Whitehall-style reply: The Prime Minister thanks you for your letter, but you will appreciate he is too busy to reply, so we are referring your letter to the Department of Education. Why bother, an inner voice kept saying, the invitation to a dialogue was surely empty rhetoric. Yet I did write again, but heard nothing until, some three weeks later, I had a curious letter from the Customer Focus Team at the Department of Education. It said: "As part of our continuing programme of listening to our customers we are researching what customers think of the quality of our replies to letters... you are one of our recent customers." Six times the letter referred to me as a customer.

"Customer”? Is that what we are to think of ourselves as - a model based on how much money we spend on a range of alternatives? Are parents simply the customers of a school, rather than partners in the complex task of bringing the next generation of children into adulthood? Are children customers of what their parents might have to offer? Whose children are they in any case, the parents’ or wards of the state? Or are they simply young customers in the making? We seem to have got this all the wrong way around. Neither the church nor the government should ever control what is taught in the school, as Marx argued in 1875, for it is better that the state should be educated by the people.³

‘Customer’ surely defines a specifically materialistic concept of life. My life has worked on a very different model, namely that of John Bunyan's pilgrim, a man making his troubled way
through life with a heavy load upon his back, beset on all sides by temptations and threats to belief. A very human kind of being who could see beyond him the House Beautiful, yet could still flounder in the Slough of Despond. A Pilgrim moved by the story of the Good Samaritan to know that, however rough the going was for him, there were always others who were worse off. A man who grew stronger with every obstacle that he learned to overcome.\(^4\)

Pilgrim or customer? A creator of his own eternal destiny, or a purchaser of a range of goods and services as defined by someone else? A thinker able to take responsibility for his own actions, and willing to accept responsibility for working for the common good, or a man who, in his frustration that nothing he has so far pulled off the shelves of a supermarket quite suits his taste, searches for yet another perfect brand? That one has to raise such a question about who we think we are - pilgrim or customer - has to be a sign of the moral confusion of our times. And these are confused times.

**Brave New (troubled) World**

"Every so often," writes the classical historian Chester Starr, "civilisation seems to work itself into a corner from which further progress is virtually impossible along the lines then apparent; yet if new ideas are to have a chance, the old systems must be so severely shaken that they lose their dominance."\(^5\) That, surely, has to be where we are now. At a time when only twelve per cent of the British population described themselves as being "not spiritual",\(^6\) the vast majority are either indifferent to, or appalled by, the attempts of conventional religious organizations to come to terms - not only with problems of injustice and poverty - but with what sexuality means to our definition of humanity. Richard Holloway, the frequently controversial and thought-provoking former Bishop of Edinburgh, observes that "it would be difficult to exaggerate the moral confusions of our day and the urgency and importance of finding an agreed basis for our conduct towards one another as sharers of life on this planet."\(^7\)

Both notions - progression and confusion - reflect our muddled sense of community and lack of a set of shared values and common goals. Even the word "common" sounds a dissonant chord within modern Western society. From birth, we have told ourselves that individuality is the supreme goal, and that only in differences can we find our own identity. Theories that
emphasise our common humanity are viewed with suspicion. Special interest advocacy 
groups claim that individual needs are overlooked when theories of commonality are pursued. 
They have solid grounds for such claims; in the past, as in the present, homogenous 
communities have, as well as their benefits, bred prejudice and concealed suffering. Now in 
2004, with a new appreciation for the importance of such individual needs, sexual 
homogeneity is fast becoming a thing of the past, and its challenging formal religious 
structures to reinterpret their basic belief in ways that shake their members to the core. Not 
only is this merging of lifestyles and cultures happening in metropolitan centres but, with the 
costs of travel and technology plummeting, the ability to and the necessity for, each of us to 
interact with cultures far removed from our own is increasing all the time. 

Nevertheless, any vigorous, multicultural community that still seeks to be coherent must be 
able to claim and honour certain ties that bind it together. Honouring ”the dignity of 
difference” declares Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, is the only way to avoid the clash of civilizations. Differences in belief, argue such men as Rabbi Sacks, reflect man's continuing 
search to find meaning; they are a sign of hope, not despair. If, in our time, we are to avoid 
the Balkanisation of communities, cities and nations, Holloway's question is critical: how do 
we find an ”agreed basis for our conduct towards one another?”

We each experience moments of truth that force us to think deeply. I well remember that day 
in Estonia, some five years ago, when an English speaking Russian cornered me with the 
profound question, ”Who are you?” She challenged me to explain the values that defined 
what we were wont to call proudly the Free World. ”When the Berlin wall was there you in 
the West defined yourselves negatively; you were against Communism. Now that 
Communism is no longer a threat to you, your reason for being seems empty. Surely you are 
about more than just money?” she taunted me.

It was a question similar in its profoundness to one put to me by an intense, gifted seventeen-
year-old in the Sixth Form when I was Head some fifteen years before. He was experiencing 
both a personal and an intellectual crisis, having recently read Richard Dawkins' ‘The Selfish 
Gene.’ He looked at me: ”If I'm no more than a collection of selfish genes, why should I 
bother with life? What's wrong with suicide?” It was a chilling argument that he advanced.
Of course we are more than selfish genes, I wanted to assure him, and we are more than customers I wanted to tell both the Estonian questioner and the English Prime Minister. Yet my own intellectual base was stronger on philosophy and religion than it was on a knowledge of maths, science and economics. The discussion I had with that young man showed me that, if I were to make the case that life was sacred, I would have to understand the sciences far better. Faith has to do more than cover up for intellectual laziness. That scared me, as I believe it does our troubled world; unthoughtful religious dogma destroys spiritual life. It frightened me as I started to move into such unfamiliar territory that I, like Charles Darwin, might lose my faith.

When I was thirteen, there was an incident that had left me confused. It was the day I was taken by my parents to visit the public school I was shortly to attend. "I hope," said my father to the headteacher, "that my son won't be taught evolution." Although I can't recall the Head's exact response - he was an inscrutable character - I certainly remember it being ambiguous. There was something going on I did not quite understand, but it took me a long time to realise as much.

It was to be in San Francisco, half a century later, that I began fully to appreciate the long history behind my father's well-intentioned question. I could also begin to see that, contrary to my fears, I need not necessarily lose my faith in the concept of the Pilgrim by delving deeper into questions of science. The two approaches were not, I realised, mutually incompatible. It was in 1998 that I first attended a meeting of Mikhail Gorbachev's State of the World Forum, an annual gathering of some nine hundred of the world's most outstanding thinkers and scientists. It was at that meeting that I heard an eminent Austrian biologist say, with the greatest of sincerity, "The future sanity of the world depends on the coming together of two great disciplines that haven't spoken together for more than a hundred years - Biology and Theology". In a split second I was back to that conversation between my father and my future headteacher. Fifty years on I found all my senses alert to a challenge I had been subconsciously ignoring. I was a slow, slow learner.

If I felt I had been in denial, then that denial appeared to extend far beyond my own lifetime. The ‘How’ of life, as it were, was being studied in a very different way to the ‘Why’ of life. If spiritual truths were as important as I believed them to be, why had we allowed them to become so marginalized?
My attempt to convince that confused seventeen year old of the sacredness of life, based on both philosophical and religious concepts, could not bring solace to a young mind shaped by the theoretical advances of modern science. My protracted denial, and the denial of others like me, was also increasingly out of step with the assumed expectations and ambitions of modern society. If, in 1965, I could define my role as a teacher as being in loco parentis, thirty years later there was such confusion about the role of parents, that the underlying principle for how teachers thought they should operate, was in tatters. As a Catholic bishop commented in the 1980s, "To teach children the Lords Prayer is meaningless to many of them, even harmful; they either have little appreciation of fatherhood, or find it totally intimidating."  

Since Darwin, probably the biggest scientific challenge to established religion has come from the relatively new science of evolutionary psychology, the discipline that I find most helpful in understanding the centrality of learning to us humans. Evolutionary psychology's founding principle rests on a simple question: if every page of Gray's *Anatomy* applies to every person, in every country on this entire planet, why should the anatomy of the mind be any different? It's the issue that Darwin raised back in 1859 when he suggested that "psychology will be based on a new foundation…the acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation", in other words through 'evolution in the brain'. It was the refusal for more than a hundred years, both of religion and of psychology, to try and understand what this meant, which has resulted, as the Bishop of Oxford Richard Harries says, "in spiritual people objecting to Christianity." Robert Wright, the journalist and commentator who writes most knowledgeably about evolutionary psychology, argues in his two books *The Moral Animal* and *Nonzero* that evolutionary psychologists are, at root, "trying to discern a second level of human nature, a deeper unity within the species." They are focusing "less on surface differences among cultures than on deep unities." Evolutionary psychology believes that the mind, an organ like the heart or the lungs, evolved and developed in much the same way as other parts of the body. It was not until the mid 1970s that psychology was prepared to accept this. Evolutionary psychology, the offspring of conventional psychology and sired out of biology, requires considerable interdisciplinary thinking; and that makes it a difficult intellectual challenge. Evolutionary psychology does not fit snugly into university departments or faculties, yet its impact on how we think about ourselves is becoming increasingly influential.
Morality as part of our Genetic Inheritance

Take the fundamental question of how much are we in control of what we do? Evolutionary psychologists are certain that particular forms of behaviour are closely aligned with the "deeper realities" which are to be found, they believe, in all human beings regardless of their culture. The preliminary answer to the question about control seemed to be "not very much at all". "Personal reflection and self-examination," writes the theologian Richard Holloway, "as well as the study of human nature through the biographies of others, shows us that we are largely, though not necessarily completely, determined by forces that are beyond our control." Wright agrees: "We're all puppets and our best hope for even partial liberation is to try to decipher the logic of the puppeteer." However, Matt Ridley, in ‘Nature via Nurture’ proposes an ever finer adjustment to endless arguments about the relative significance of the two. "Genes", he says, "are designed to take their cues from Nurture." Ridley goes on to quote research that shows how animals actually adjust the thermostat on the front of their genes, so enabling them to grow different parts of their bodies for longer. A chimp for example has a different head from a human because it grows the jaws for longer, and the cranium for less time than humans. "Imagine the possible implications of this", writes Ridley. “You can turn up the expression of one gene, the product of which turns up the expression of another, which suppresses the expression of the third. Right in the middle of this little network you can throw in the effect of experience. Something external - education, food, a fight or unrequited love, say - and influence any one of the thermostats (on the genes).” Elsewhere Ridley surmises "Your genes are not puppet masters pulling the strings of your behaviour, but are puppets at the mercy of your behaviour; a world where instinct is not the opposite of learning, where environmental influences are sometimes less reversible than genetic ones." We now have to understand that culture matters quite enormously.

Take the issue of sex, something it is said men think about once every three minutes and women once every ten minutes. From Oedipus to the Oedipus complex, human sexuality has been a universal scapegoat to explain our behaviour. In as far that, from the beginning of time, religions have come about to provide satisfactory explanations about both our existence and our behaviour one towards another, sexuality is a central feature of spiritual discourse.
It’s hardly surprising, therefore, that Wright devotes a large proportion of his ‘Moral Animal’ to discussing the subject and its role of ensuring the successful transmission of genetic material. The findings Wright synthesises, however, are not the stuff of poetry or song but rather relate to stimuli that cause the other person to trigger a response that changes the chemical balance in their brain.

It is the response to our sexual impulses that has created the moral maze in which male and female bonding then occurs and has given birth to much of the morality that governs human sexuality. It is important to understand this proposition. At root, Wright argues, the differences between male and female attitudes to sex and marriage can be traced almost directly back to the level of investment required. With each successfully fertilised egg, a pregnant woman undergoes a gestation period of approximately nine months, followed by a period of nurturing that lasts years. For that first nine months the woman carries the child within her, eats enough to support the foetus, and goes through a whole variety of hormonal and emotional changes before birth. The level of investment required by the newborn baby after birth scarcely needs mentioning. To successfully transmit their genetic material into the next generation, the statistically most viable route for men to follow is that of maximum procreation: sleep with as many women as possible and spend as little time as possible with each one.

Although aggrieved women worldwide may disagree, most men actually do not follow this strategy apart from, possibly, in their fantasies. Indeed, as Wright notes, "in every human culture on the anthropological record marriage - whether monogamous or polygamous, permanent or temporary - is the norm, and the family is the atom of social organisation." Somewhere along the line, extensive male parental investment entered our evolutionary lineage for the simple reason that, although the scenario described above may appear to be statistically advantageous for the male genes, his offspring are not much good if they end up as tiger bait, human babies being far more vulnerable than baby chimpanzees. In other words, successful reproduction most certainly does not end with a live birth; if a woman was not supported out on the savannah by a man able to bring home the meat while she nursed the child, the child would perish (see Chapter 15). High levels of paternal as well as maternal investment are essential for ensuring the transmission of genetic material. As Wright puts it, "genes inclining a male to love his offspring - to worry about them, defend them, provide for them, educate them - could flourish at the expense of genes that counselled continued
remoteness." Thus, he argues, love grows from the dictates of natural selection, love not just for the child, but also for the woman: "the genetic payoff of having two parents devoted to a child's welfare is the reason men and women can fall into swoons over one another, including swoons of great duration." Love between a man and a woman, that venerable inspiration for poetry, music, literature, and fine art, is just nature's way of sustaining the species, argue the evolutionary psychologists. Morality is part of our genetic inheritance; it was not invented by priests.

Although the majority of societies known to anthropologists - most of which have been hunter/gatherer societies - have permitted a man to have more than one wife, within these societies polygamy tends to be the exception rather than the rule: "for eons and eons, most marriages have been monogamous, even though most societies haven't been," says Wright. He then explores the current situation in the United States, his home country. Given the high rates of divorce that's accepted in society, and of subsequent remarriage, America has become what Wright calls "a nation of serial monogamy, and serial monogamy in some ways amounts to polygamy." The social and political ramifications of this conclusion are important, and worrying in as far as they fly in the face of biological realities. Given that monogamy is, theoretically, the only system that can provide a mate for just about everyone, a polygamous society naturally limits the number of available women. "Men have long competed for access to the scarcer sexual resource, women. And the costs of losing the contest are so high (genetic oblivion) that natural selection has inclined them to compete with special ferocity." Male ferocity, however, can be dampened by circumstance, the most significant being laws that effectively share out women equally so that every testosterone-aggressive male ends up with one. "An unmarried man," Wright observes, "between twenty-four and thirty-five years of age is about three times as likely to murder another male as is a married man the same age." Furthermore, he is also likely to "incur various risks [as he seeks] to gain the resources that may attract women. He is more likely to rape. More diffusely, a high-risk, criminal life often entails the abuse of drugs and alcohol, which may then compound the problem by further diminishing his chances of ever earning enough money to attract women by legitimate means." With serial monogamy a few men get a lot of women; so inevitably some men get no women - and that drives some of those men crazy. Whilst the rigid sexual mores of the past held many women in suffocating marriages, on aggregate such strict codes were more beneficial to society as a whole than the looser codes
we may now prize. High divorce rates really do, it seems, contribute to an erosion of the societal fabric.

As Wright further explores the inherent moral tensions that are a characteristic of thinking people, he introduces the concept of non-zero-sumness, the idea that, through cooperation, two people can be better off than they would have been had they pursued their own, separate, paths. There's a lovely Chinese proverb that captures this perfectly; Hell is a banquet table piled high with delicious food, hungry people are seated on either side, each one supplied with a pair of chopsticks which are so long that even with arms extended, no one can get food into their mouths. Heaven is the very same banquet table, but here the guests are smiling and chatting, enjoying the delicious food. The difference? They're using their long chopsticks to feed each other. This idea of cooperation, non-zero-sumness in Wright's terms, accompanied by reciprocal altruism, is a very major driving force behind evolution. On balance, Wright asserts, over the long run "non-zero-sum situations produce more positives sums than negative sums. Cooperation, in the long term, is more beneficial than competition."

Balancing individual competition, with group collaboration, began millennia ago; it has kept on happening generation after generation, serving as the ratchet to increase social evolution, as societies became more complex and interdependent.

This in turn explains how reciprocal altruism - in layman’s terms the notion of doing good to those who do good to you - has evolved. Imagine a cold winter in which circumstances have provided your family with more than enough meat to last through to the spring, then think of another family that does not have enough meat. Operating under the twin logic of non-zero-sumness and reciprocal altruism, you would give your family's excess meat to the hungry family, under the unspoken assumption that, should the situation ever be reversed, you would receive meat for your family.

I observed all these forms of behaviour amongst the Hadza. Founding such life or death contracts on unspoken and physically unrecorded assumptions may seem insubstantial, especially when compared with today's lengthy legal contracts, but in the tightly-knit communities that characterised our ancestral environments, unspoken assumptions carried significant force because they were part of that society's belief system. It’s only in our more fragmented, transient societies that written contracts have assumed such significance. So, out of genetic dictates, did such moral notions as "do as you would be done by" arise, and were
articulated by the earliest of law makers, Moses and Abraham. Rules, which were unthinkable to break if you lived in compact, coherent communities, but which, it seems, can be broken with impunity in the anonymous conurbations of present times. Charity, the very mention of which evokes religious imagery, seems, in such a context, to be nothing more than an anachronistic by-product of our evolutionary heritage: we give simply because we hope at some specified time in the future to receive. In hunter/gatherer societies such thinking made sense, but now that our relationships are so temporary, and the people we meet from day-to-day less likely ever to re-enter our lives, charity makes little sense from an evolutionary perspective, yet most people still yearn for a life where human relationships can still be meaningful. Is it any wonder that we complain about big cities feeling lonely while small communities feel more caring? "Morality is the device of an animal of exceptional cognitive complexity," Wright concludes, "pursuing its interests in an exceptionally complex social universe." Does that simply mean that Man created God as a means of making life tolerable?

In Robert Wright's second book, 'Nonzero', he develops the idea that out of mankind's initial, and fumbling, attempts at cooperation between individuals - operating under the dictates of non-zero-sumness and reciprocal altruism - cooperation grew between far greater entities. As populations increased, and villages evolved into chiefdoms, then into cities, and then into nation-states, the potential gains from non-zero-sum relationships increased exponentially. With increasing populations, control over resources becomes vital, and conflict between communities inevitable. In such circumstances leadership and hierarchies naturally emerge, together with the thirst for power which, wrote Immanuel Kant, "drives [man] to seek status among his fellows, whom he cannot bear yet cannot bear to leave." Herein lies the crux of our human problem, for just as we developed cooperative skills, so too did we develop the ability to organise and push others around; we can, to paraphrase Adam Smith, invent Oxfam, apartheid and nuclear war all at the same time. No wonder we're morally confused, and seek for explanations at a superhuman level.

It is here that the work of Lawrence and Nohria in their study ‘Driven: How Human Nature Shapes Our Choices’, earlier referred to in Chapter Sixteen, has a further relevance. The authors devote a great deal of attention to the concept of models, simple stories formed by the human mind over long periods of time to explain the world in ways that help us make decisions about the future. Just as Adrian Mole was trying to do in his search to understand
his place in the universe. Lawrence and Nohria suggest that these different stories (myths) go through the same Darwinian ‘V/S/R process’, (Chapter Three) that accounts for the origin of the species. Initially the individual is presented with a Variety of narrative frames, such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Communism or biological determinism. Then the mind Selects the frame or model that is the most congruent with its own experience in explaining the world in a way the individual understands. Once that framework has proved versatile and reliable, the brain will Retain it and, until it faces a serious challenge to its legitimacy, it will serve to inform and direct thought and action.
Searching for Something Bigger than Ourselves

So powerful is the drive to learn - or, to put it another way, the drive to ‘make sense’ of existence - that we ignore the inquisitive person at society’s peril. The problem of our time, a greater problem than it was in previous centuries, is that an ever increasing proportion of people don’t believe that all the bits can ever come together because, they think, there never was an overruling design, and ‘sense’ can’t be made out of chaos. Yet we are a persistent species and we have a deep need, it seems, to be able to explain and rationalise the world. This tendency, Lawrence and Nohria caution, is the ‘dark side’ of the drive to learn, “the capacity to believe plausible but inaccurate stories, the tendency to go on mind journeys of unchecked fantasy, the attraction of novelty for its own sake, and the general susceptibility to incomplete ideologies.” We have to believe something, it seems. The early twentieth century poet, G.K.Chesterton put this neatly, "When men give up believing in God, they will believe in anything."

Now, in the early twenty-first century, Richard Holloway argues that Christianity has allowed itself to become an incomplete ideology, and as a former bishop he must see this from the inside. Most of the time people seem unwilling to challenge their belief systems in the light of new understandings. Nevertheless there is something about Christianity, and indeed about other religions as well, that still hold a number of highly intelligent people in its thrall. There is something, it seems, so precious that it just won’t go away. The apparent choice for Holloway is stark: "Either abandon Christianity, because it is so manifestly out of tune with what you consider to be the best values of contemporary culture; or cling to a version of Christianity that is profoundly antipathetic to the freedoms of post-modern society.” But he then goes on to ask, "Is there a third approach which is not a middle way between belief and unbelief and is neither diluted fundamentalism nor watered-down scepticism?"  

Holloway certainly believes that there is. He sees with great clarity that the mythical and narrative power of Christianity has become smothered by orthodoxy and dogma. What is needed, he contends, is a breaking apart of the original myth - the complex story earlier told for an illiterate people - to discover anew its transcendent, life-giving intensity. "If religious narratives are to retain their power," he writes, "they must be capable of constant reinterpretation." We must relearn Christianity, imbuing it with the kind of metaphorical power it had in the years following Jesus’ death, when orthopraxis (imitation of Jesus through
action) had not yet been overtaken by orthodoxy (simple belief in things about Jesus). At this point in its history Christianity was about disturbing the world, not making it more comfortable or more secure. As the modern church crumbles, Holloway, the bishop who resigned before his time over the issue of the ordination of homosexuals, sees reason for optimism. In almost Biblical metaphor he sees the risen Christ standing, revealed, amongst the rubble. When old mental frameworks begin to break apart, unable to respond to rapid social change there is great confusion as new stories struggle to find acceptance, which was what, coincidentally, so attracted those entrepreneurs in Venice. That is precisely where early twenty-first century society finds itself now.

As the old and venerable walls of two millennia of Christianity collapse, a brave new belief system seems poised to take its place. Unfettered and increasingly evident on a global scale, capitalism, with its birth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, appears to have reached its apogee in the twenty-first. With its basic premise, that we are all essentially customers driven to acquire, we are each responding, as Lawrence and Nohria explain, to the oldest and most basic of the four human drives. Acquisition has been an essential part of our psychological makeup for millennia and continues to be so, indeed there seems to be a strong causal connection between a low position in any given cultural hierarchy and high instances of mortality and morbidity. The evidence is overwhelming: an ability to acquire more of this world's goods than your neighbour almost certainly leads to better survival prospects.

It is upon the rock of acquisition that the belief in capitalism has been founded. But in metaphorical terms is it a rock of salvation like a lighthouse or a treacherous reef destroying all who approach it? ‘Get more, wants more’ seems to be a well-tested truism; the greedy person is never satisfied, as the Hadza man explained about those who plant crops expecting to be the only ones to benefit. Now add to this Lawrence and Nohria's observation that none of the four drives can exist independently of the other three, and that if any one becomes too dominant, at either a micro or macro level, individuals as much as whole societies are then thrown off balance. These are the ambitions (drives) that make us human, but we let them get out of proportion at our peril. Yet this is just exactly what we seem to be doing, in England and in many other lands. The drive to acquire appears to have reached unparalleled proportions, and it seems that people's expectations have grown beyond any realistic possibility of achieving them. In terms of John Bunyan’s Pilgrim we have each filled our rucksacks to bursting point, so that they are now too heavy to carry.
Society is starting to pay the terrible price which is involved in such a Faustian bargain.\textsuperscript{1} E. O. Wilson wrote in ‘The Future of Life’, "The mood of Western civilization is Abrahamic; 'May we take this land that God has provided and let it drip milk and honey into our mouths for ever'. Now more than six billion people fill the world. The great majority are very poor; nearly one billion exist on the edge of starvation. Half of the great tropical forests have been cleared. Species of plants and animals are disappearing a hundred or more times faster than before the coming of humanity. An Armageddon is approaching, but it is not the cosmic war and fiery collapse foretold in sacred scripture. It is the wreckage of the planet by an exuberant, and ingenious humanity. A global land ethic is urgently needed. Surely our stewardship is the only hope? We will be wise to listen carefully to the heart, then act with rational intention and all the tools we can gather and bring to bear."\textsuperscript{32}

The past thirty years have seen the rape of our planet proceed virtually unchecked and often even unnoticed. In July 2002, a study by the World Wildlife Fund gave that home - our only possible home in the universe - another half-century to live.\textsuperscript{33} Mankind's inexhaustible lust for consumption has doubled since 1970 and continues to accelerate by one and a half per cent a year. This may not seem like a phenomenal growth rate, until you consider that, according to Wilson, the human population exceeded the Earth's sustainable capacity around 1978. The front-runner in the race to global devastation is, not surprisingly, America. Far and away the most unrepentant in this regard, the United States consumes more than twice its nearest competitor, yet has only four per cent of the world’s population, America consumes twenty seven per cent of the oil produced each year. Whilst it takes 12.2 hectares to support the average American and 6.28 for each European, it takes only half a hectare to support each citizen of tiny Burundi. If the rest of the world - to put this in perspective - were suddenly to reach American levels of consumption, we would require four more planet earths from which to draw our resources.

Every day, I noted in a speech I gave in Australia in July 2003, thirty thousand children worldwide die from preventable diseases. More Americans bought more gas-guzzling SUVs which will contribute further to global warming so destroying more of the precious ozone

\textsuperscript{1} The hero of Christopher Marlowe’s ‘Dr Faustus’ is based on a magician and astrologer of that name who was born in Wurtenburg and died in about 1538. The idea of making a pact with a devil worldly reasons is of Jewish origin. The basis of the Faustus story is that he sold his soul to the devil in exchange for twenty-four years of further life during which he was to have every pleasure and all knowledge at his command.
layer that makes life on this planet possible. While global warming may well be part of the explanation for the unseasonally good summer days of recent years, it’s also why the country of Kiribati in the Pacific – that collection of tiny, low-lying islands which, because they are so close to the International Date Line became the first nation to enter the twenty-first century – may also be, wrote the Australian philosopher Peter Singer, “the first [nation] to leave it, disappearing beneath the waves.”

Maybe even within the next twenty-five years.

What is not often discussed, at least amongst the giddy cheerleaders of capitalism, is the fact that two hundred of the richest corporations command resources equal to the combined wealth of the poorest eighty per cent of the world's population. The implications of that are staggering. Consider too the fact that the assets of the world's three richest people exceed the combined GNP of all the least-developed countries and their six hundred million people. Or the fact that, according to the United Nations, the income differential between the world's wealthiest and poorest twenty per cent was thirty to one in 1960, sixty to one in 1990 and seventy-four to one in 1995. These are the concrete results of what Lawrence and Nohria describe as our over-emphasis on the drive to acquire.

According to Matthew Fox, the former Jesuit priest and author of ‘The Reinvention of Work’, "poverty is not a certain amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people." What he says makes perfect sense – poverty is relative. If you live in a community in which every single person makes, say, five dollars an hour there will be no such thing as poverty. The same goes if everyone in that community made only two dollars an hour. There is, however, one caveat. You should not be able to know of people in any other community who might be making more than you are. Once you are aware that they’re earning ten times what you earn, then you realise that you are poor. Of course there is a standard of living below which no human should fall, but Fox's point still holds: poverty is more about relations between people than about relations between people and their money. This has serious consequences for a key determinant of average life expectancy, it turns out, is the difference in income between the rich and the poor in any given community. The more homogenous a community, the happier people are and the longer they live, which probably explains why fifteen per cent of Americans, as long ago as 1995, had a clinical anxiety disorder.
Extrapolate the word ‘community’ to embrace the whole world, throw in television, newspapers and the Internet and you have a clear recipe for disaster. Fewer people are happy when they see how much richer other people are. The drive to acquire lies dormant, just below the surface like so many of our predispositions - give it a prod or two and suddenly most of us can become envious, even greedy. The mediaeval church really did understand the self-inflicted poison of the seven deadly sins - those aspects of acquisition, avarice, envy, lust, covetousness, pride, sloth and gluttony - which now fuel the modern advertising industry.

It’s not just the countless millions upon millions of second and third world citizens who find themselves labouring under abysmal working conditions to sustain ever more enhanced profits for corporate giants such as Gap, Nike, Wal-Mart and Starbucks that suffer. Matthew Fox insists that the working conditions of the average, suburban American need just as much radical rethinking. Fox's own thinking reflects that of David Jenkins who, when Bishop of Durham in the early 1980s, challenged his flock to accept the responsibility to create a Heaven on earth, not simply a Heaven in the Hereafter. For Fox, "there can be no joy in living without joy in work." Here he makes a fundamental point: work is not only the means by which we feed ourselves and our families - although that is an undeniably important aspect of it - but also it is "a metaphor and symbol for what we cherish." Work, for Fox, is much more than just a job; a 'job' as Dr. Johnson defined it in 1721, as "petty, piddling work; a piece of chance work." The activity of what we do is nothing less than an expression of who we believe ourselves to be", writes Fox, who went on to quote Saint Thomas Aquinas as saying, "By their works ye shall know them". Yet work is so very rarely like that for many people, and the resulting damage to the human spirit is enormous. Fox goes on to define work as the roll (from old French "rolle" meaning the roll of paper from which an actor read his lines) we see ourselves performing in the unfolding drama of life. The life story, in reality, of the Pilgrim.

But what can be done when entire industries with budgets larger than most Third World countries are predicated on keeping as many people in "jobs" (as opposed to work) as possible? The gigantic worldwide advertising business is founded not on satisfying needs, but on expanding wants, for as Fox asks: "Is [the purpose of advertising] not to pump up the wants of those who have extra means? And does this economy not then oppress those whose
true needs are not yet met?""43 Yes, and yes again. But the problem goes further than mere advertising.

Fritjof Capra believes that ethics refer to a "standard of human conduct that flows from a sense of belonging",44 while Matthew Fox sees in the original meaning of the word ‘religion’ as something that can ‘bind us back (re-ligio) to our common origins. But instead of returning to traditional creation stories with all their beauty and simplicity Fox argues that: "a new creation story is essential for our species, for it has the potential to awaken our wisdom."45 For once the priest agrees with the scientist, as E.O. Wilson writes: "If Homo Sapiens as a whole must have a creation myth - and emotionally in the age of globalisation it seems we must - none is more solid and unifying for the species than evolutionary history." He continues by suggesting that the ‘evolutionary epic’ might be a story that could serve as our "binding myth in the modern scientific age - a myth not in the sense of an untruth, but in the sense of a story that explains our existence and helps us orient ourselves to the world."46

A Crisis of Meaning

When Capra observes, however, that "mainstream religions have not developed an ethic appropriate for the age of globalisation"47 it seems that he is probably closer to an answer than either Fox or Wilson. Although I’m certain that we need a story, a narrative strong and inclusive enough to bind together our fractured society, I’m not convinced we need a new creation story, nor am I convinced that, if we did, evolutionary history would be emotionally and spiritually satisfying enough to provide it. When Capra says that the spiritual life is "a direct, non-intellectual experience of reality," I believe he highlights, albeit indirectly, the flaw in Wilson's solution. Evolutionary history, whilst a fascinating and deeply instructive body of science, cannot appeal directly to our "non-intellectual experience of reality."

Some truths simply do not conform to mathematical equations. Einstein knew this. That's why he once said: "Not everything that counts can be counted; and not everything that can be counted actually counts". An over-enthusiastic expectation that the hypothesis as being set out by modern scientific studies could be equally dangerous. Kenan Malik in his fascinating book, entitled ‘Man, Beast and Zombie: What Science can tell us about Human Nature’, warns us that our very success in understanding nature (Evolutionary Psychology and
Cognitive Science) has generated deep problems for our understanding of human nature. “[Evolutionary Psychology] views man as a sophisticated animal, governed as animal is by evolutionary past; [Cognitive Science] treats the human mind as a machine, or as a ‘Zombie’ as contemporary philosophy refers to entities that behave like humans but possess no consciousness. Man as beast, or man as Zombie? To many the triumph of Darwinism and Artificial Intelligence seems to have solved the age-old problem of how to understand human beings in a materialist universe. But this is an illusion, I suggest, fostered by the abandonment of any attachment to a humanistic vision. The triumph of mechanistic explanations of human nature is as much a consequence of our cultures loss of nerve as it is to scientific advance.”

These last two sentences fascinate me. "An illusion, fostered by the abandonment of any attachment to a humanistic vision." This is similar to something that was said by Sir John Eccles who, through his work at Cambridge on neurobiology, which gained him a Nobel prize in the 1980s, felt it necessary to write: "I maintain that the human mystery is incredibly demeaned by scientific reductionism, with its claim in promissory materialism to account eventually for all of the spiritual world in terms of patterns of neural activity. This belief must be classed as a superstition. We are spiritual beings with souls in a spiritual world, as well as material beings with bodies and brains existing in a material world.” Matthew Fox nicely captures the duality of our consciousness in a very simple, pictorial way. He wrote: "As I looked out over the stunning beauty of San Francisco Bay I realised that San Francisco Bay was in my soul, but my soul was not contained in San Francisco Bay.”

Fox’s words made a considerable impact on me, for the very day I first read them I was flying out of San Francisco to San Diego to meet Gerald Edelman. A man of enormous, direct and highly focused energy, he assured me over an excellent lunch that he and his laboratory would, within five years, have solved the riddle of consciousness. "Once we have done that", he said uncertainly, "what is the big idea around which we will then organise ourselves?"

Now is the time for big ideas. Shirley Williams, the daughter of Vera Britten who wrote the poem about the suffering of the First World War and a founder member of the Social Democratic party in England in the late 1970s, describes these times as "an almost uniquely turbulent assault upon tradition,” when she looked at world society from the perspective of
international politics after World War I and II, and the horrific conflicts in Vietnam and Cambodia. The world, she observed, has lost a sense of a global morality: "How can any kind of moral structure be re-imposed on a world so far gone in degradation?" Just over three years ago I received an interesting email from a school psychologist at the Jakarta International School in Indonesia. It read as follows: "The biggest crisis we are facing is a crisis of meaning. The tremendous social changes of the last hundred years have stripped modern society of that which gives us meaning, be it in our roots to our ancestors, religions, spirituality, our relationship to nature. Within this crisis of meaning our young people are facing a moral crisis - a crisis of values. Without these anchors young people no longer understand the value of perseverance, learning for learning's sake, etc. Instead our daily lives are filled with the pursuit of money and temporary ecstasy. Both of these goals are unfulfillable and result in a misguided frenzy in the pursuit of the next thrill, or in depression."

I certainly don't think it's because we've lost the institutional trappings of Christianity that this crisis has occurred. Rather it is because the values that the Abrahamic tradition taught us have been left spinning in the wind, with no framework - no narrative - to help us structure them. In his most recent book entitled 'On Forgiveness' Richard Holloway suggests that organised religion may be seen as a rocket, designed merely to launch its satellite in to space: "Religion has thrust its best values into the human orbit where we hope they will continue to do their work long after the vehicle that got them there has disappeared." In fact, Holloway argues persuasively elsewhere that a break with religion may be a positive thing, as society is moving "from a rules morality to a values morality, from a morality of command to a morality of consent."

Probably he offends those still hankering for a simple faith when he says: "The attempt by humans to discover a morality apart from God might, paradoxically, be God's greatest triumph; and our attempt to live morally as though there were no God might be the final test of faith." Could a revolutionary new understanding of a synthesis between science and theology be a framework for "a morality apart from God"? Could we finally be finding a way to the fullness of Pope John Paul II's plea that "Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes"? Cutting-edge science is, after all, currently in the midst of discovering how central spiritual belief is to
the evolution of the human mind. Steven Pinker has recently referred to religion as "One of the deepest mysteries of the human species."

Slowly, ever so slowly, theology and biology are discovering their commonality. We have to be careful. If God could be ‘proved’ we would have no need of faith. In such a world we would have no decisions to take. In that sense we would not be fully human. We would be back in the Garden of Eden before having eaten the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. More than that, I suspect our minds would become so over-awed with the concept that we’d flounder still more than we do at present. As Hamlet said to his friend, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."55 I don’t believe that we have come close as yet to understanding the Mind of God.

Richard Holloway puts the scale of all this nicely into perspective: "To us the sun appears to be the largest and brightest of the stars, but it is actually the smallest and the faintest…It is that violent and blazing star whose light and heat comes to us from ninety-three million miles away that makes it possible for us to sit comfortably in our homes thinking about it all."56

Do we actually sit comfortably as we ponder such an awe-inspiring vision of the universe, or do we feel that we now know too much for our own comfort? Wasn't the human mind better able to appreciate the human scale of the story of Adam and Eve? If our planet is such a puny object, then where does humanity fit into such an explanation, and what happens to our best hopes and fears for all that we hold dear? Are they really too insignificant to matter? Is there any connection with the stories that have been told over hundreds of generations that inspired, and sometimes terrified, our ancestors? Have we, in two hundred years, persuaded ourselves into thinking that we, and we alone, are the measure of everything? Have we yet found a story that could compel a future William Blake to write:

“To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And Heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour”57

Have we yet created a new story that parents can tell to their children which, in the intimacy of the nursery or by the side of the kitchen table, enables us parents to be true to our own
beliefs and uncertainties while filling our children with awe, wonder and a passion to become involved in life? Although religious establishments have soaked history in blood for too long, the narrative and explanatory power of religious belief has also brought great happiness and succour to millions.

Although these ancient narratives are indeed capable of stimulating radical, personal transformation, they are equally prone to encourage profound blindness, and a retreat from the inquiries of science: the rise of creationism promoted as a valid alternative to evolutionary theory illustrates both the explanatory power of religious texts and the dangers that they present. As I was told in Ireland in 2002 by a remarkable Catholic nun, Sister Teresa McCormack, Head of the Presentation Sisters, as she was dying of cancer, "We have to rediscover the Jesus story as it was before Christianity, and humbly appraise what are the essentials of our faith, and abandon the historical baggage". Her words have an unusual resonance with those of Charles Darwin when he wrote: "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most adaptable to change." Christianity, whatever it may be, is not comfortable with change; that is probably its greatest weakness. Holloway's bitter account of the Church's divisions over homosexuality attest strongly to that, as does Rowan Williams' attempt to lead a church where, as Karen Armstrong observed in June 2003, "issues of sexuality and gender have long been the Achilles heel of western Christianity". But change Christianity must, or its mythic power will be lost forever. Whilst E.O. Wilson's "evolutionary epic" may satisfy the scientist, it remains to be seen if it can inspire artists, poets, philosophers and social scientists. Society depends on all of them.

A Civilisation able to Envision God…

In any case, as Robert Wright cautiously observes, "The question of moral responsibility in the view of evolutionary psychology is a large one, and dicey . There are deep and momentous issues lying out there, going largely unaddressed." They are indeed momentous issues, and ones for which few can even begin to claim an answer. Coming to grips with the ramifications of this new science is a difficult, painful process, but to avoid engaging with it is surely to deny the intelligence with which we have been endowed, either through our evolutionary origins, or in the belief system of some of us in a Divinity. To those who do ascribe the wonders of creation to God then we cannot accept that the world be satisfied if we
fill our minds with superstitious ignorance. The revelations that evolutionary psychology is providing throws the everlasting moral struggle into new turmoil. Yet I can only believe that it is a creative turmoil. “A civilisation able to envision God,” E.O. Wilson concludes in ‘The Future of Life’, "will surely find the way to save the integrity of this planet and the magnificent life it harbours." 59

Due in large part to the diverging paths taken by natural science, philosophy and theology, western society has largely forgotten how to care for the environments in which we live. We have forgotten the wonder of creation, and exploited the forests and oceans as if they were ours, rather than seeing them as fragile yet bountiful gifts loaned to us before we, in our turn, pass them on to generations as yet unborn. It is in the remembering of the passage of life from one generation to the next that I suggest, is why visitors to the Venetian island of Torcello are so affected by the tears on the face of the Teotoca Madonna. We sense, even though we can neither effectively put this into words never alone prove it, that we are all part of something bigger than ourselves.

We have, for the most part, also failed to treat each other as equal parts of such a wondrous creation. Some have, however, and I stand in awe of the goodness of Nelson Mandela, or the young German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, facing execution in his lonely prison cell on the day war ended – (his death was the voice of triumph, not the Nazi bullet) - or of the Chinese student facing down the tank in Tiananmen Square. We are all part of a most awesome species. Are we up to using our minds to care for a world of which we are only temporary tenants? Can we start to bring heaven to earth, not for some but for all?

Which brings the conclusion of this chapter back to the opening question: are we Pilgrims or Customers? Aristotle once observed that only in our relationships with each other do we each discover our true humanity. In the final analysis what we make of our humanity is up to us. Are we as individuals and as a society authentic? We may never find the answers to all the questions we could ask but are we constantly searching for the truth, and respecting all those other honest seekers on their own unique journeys? I’m reminded of the words of Oscar Romero just before he was murdered on the steps of his cathedral in San Salvador in 1984: "This is what we are about. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.
"We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that. This enables us to do something, and enables us to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way. We may never see the end result, but that is the difference between the master builder, and the worker. "We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not Messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own". 60