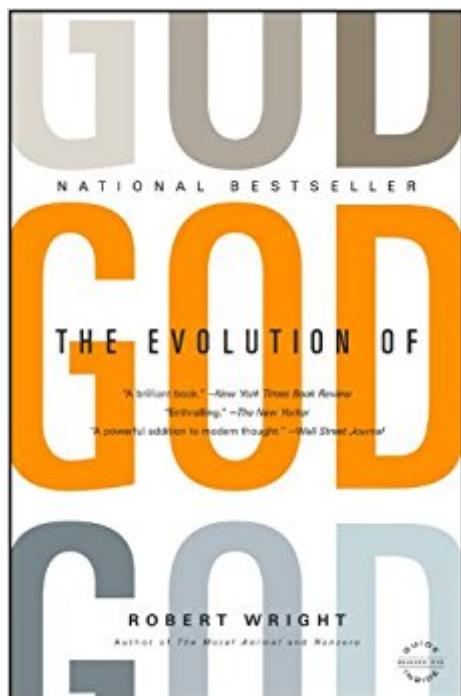


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The Evolution Of God (Back Bay Readers' Pick)



Synopsis

In this sweeping, dazzling journey through history, Robert Wright unveils a discovery of crucial importance to the present moment: there is a pattern in the evolution Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and a "hidden code" in their scriptures. Through the prisms of archeology, theology, anthropology, and evolutionary psychology, Wright repeatedly overturns conventional wisdom to show how and why religion can strengthen the social order—even in an age of globalization—and explains why modern science is not only compatible with religion, but actively affirms the validity of the religious quest. Vast in scope and thrilling in ambition, > brilliantly alters our understanding of God and where He came from—and where He and we are going next.

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Customer Reviews

In his illuminating book, *The Moral Animal*, Wright introduced evolutionary psychology and examined the ways that the morality of individuals might be hard-wired by nature rather than influenced by culture. With this book, he expands upon that work, turning now to explore how religion came to define larger and larger groups of people as part of the circle of moral consideration. Using a naïve and antiquated approach to the sociology and anthropology of religion, Wright expends far too great an effort covering well-trod territory concerning the development of religions from primitive hunter-gatherer stages to monotheism. He finds in this evolution of religion, however, that the great monotheistic (he calls them Abrahamic, a term not

favored by many religion scholars) religions—Christianity, Islam, Judaism—all contain a code for the salvation of the world. Using game theory, he encourages individuals in these three faiths to embrace a non-zero-sum relationship to other religions, seeing their fortunes as positively correlated and interdependent and then acting with tolerance toward other religions. Regrettably, Wright's lively writing unveils little that is genuinely new or insightful about religion. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

Straddling popular science, ancient history, and theology, this ambitious work sets out to resolve not only the clash of civilizations between the Judeo-Christian West and the Muslim world but also the clash between science and religion. Tracking the continual transformation of faith from the Stone Age to the Information Age, Wright, a self-described materialist, best known for his work on evolutionary psychology, free trade, and game theory, postulates that religious world views are becoming more open, compassionate, and synthesized. Occasionally, his prescriptions can seem obvious—for instance, that members of the different Abrahamic faiths should think of their religions as “having been involved, all along, in the same undertaking.” But his core argument, that religion is getting “better” with each passing aeon, is enthralling.

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Author Robert Wright is an articulate writer and very insightful. In this well balanced book, he does a very scholarly, in-depth job of tracing the concept of a supreme being from early shamanism to the world religions of today. He ably demonstrates how religions evolve over time, as does their concept of God. In the process, he shows how God becomes a reflection of particular groups of people at any given time in history. Wright continues to pull no punches by also showing how powerful and sometimes good-intentioned forces have manipulated religious writings to advance a particular concept of God. Even so he stresses the value of religion as an important moral force in world history. God, he suggests, may well exist, but not the God as defined by any one religious group. True to his scholarly approach, Wright provides excellent documentation of his work at the book's end with an appendix, a note on translations, a solid bibliography, and a detailed index.

This long book is quite an achievement. Wright presents a very plausible scenario for how the monotheistic God of Abrahamic religions evolved. It clearly won't appeal to most adherents of those

religions or any religions for that matter. However it is very well written, fairly compelling, well researched and very thorough. Highly recommended.

I found this to be a very interesting and thought provoking book. Wright covers a huge amount of territory, beginning with a review and possibly some speculations about the nature of religion in primitive societies, followed by a description of (his views of) the development of Abrahamic (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) monotheism. He provides a narrative that helped me place the varying images of God in the old testament into context. It had been clear to me for many years that the picture of God in the old testament changes dramatically from one book to another and sometimes from one verse to another (presumably as different editors added their views), but Wright's description helps make sense of it. Also helpful to me was his description of Islam and its origins and how Muhammad's different situations at different times in his career called for different emphases especially in dealing with infidels. His message, in a nutshell, is that religion develops in the context of a culture and society and is often a reflection of (or is heavily influenced by) the needs, views and prejudices of that society. There is also a second message that I found to be a bit fuzzy and less well supported. To the extent I understand (and remember) what he is saying - it is something like - societies are getting "better" (i.e. our "tribes" are getting more extensive to the extent that we are including all humans in our "tribe"), and these "better" societies and cultures have more "humane" gods, and therefore this is evidence of some sort of grand God-given design for the development of humanity. I think this is wishful thinking and possibly an attempt to appeal to some who consider faith to be a virtue rather than evidence of irrationality and lack of curiosity, but I encourage all to read the book. I think that most thoughtful people will find it fascinating.

Very interesting and researched history of who created god and why. Definitely agrees with what I have been thinking for some time, and now I have something to which I can compare my thoughts. I would recommend this book to anyone who questions the hypocrisy of the rules and regulations of any religion.

The definitive guide to the origin of religions. It compares the sociopolitical milieu of the time to the theology recorded. Not a resounding endorsement of faith, but a helpful guide to understanding for the seeker.

Excellent and concise book about the evolution of God or gods from various cultures starting from

the very earliest hunter and gather clans. Very compelling the arguments that the Abrahamic regions started out as polytheistic, moved to a form of monalitry and onto monotheism for political reasons.

Fabulously detailed and thorough tracing of how the idea of God changed as Man changed. Couldn't ask for a better explanation and factually based proof. The author goes out of his way to be balanced and present alternative theories to account for the changes, then proceeds to analyze them. If you love anthropology, history, philosophy, theology, you will love this book!

If you are really interested in learning about the relationship of man to his God(s) then this book will not disappoint. Using historical academic scripture, and archeology, this book traces from the very first relationship of man to his gods through the tumultuous history of the nations and how the that relationship has changed over the ages.

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