

Teleological Consciousness as the Ground of Religious Growth

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Abstract

This essay explains why religiosity - as a way of seeing the world and as an institutional form - arises systematically from the structure of human consciousness. The starting point is simple: we are vividly aware of our willing, we are far less aware of the causal chains that produce it. From this asymmetry springs teleology: a bias to ask "what is this for" rather than "how did this come to be" when teleology becomes shared, it condenses into norms and then into religious institutions. The claim is not polemical, religion here is described as a frame that amplifies, stabilizes, and formats antecedent tendencies - an amplifier, not a generator - and therefore changes when conditions change. In this way we preserve the principle of sufficient reason without collapsing meaning into a void.

1. Introduction

An adequate explanation of reality rests on prior causes, not on pre-written intentions. Human beings, by contrast, are born with a keen ear for desire (sometimes labeled appetite, craving, inclination). "What do I want?" "When did I decide?" "How does *yes* or *no* sound inside?" - this interior register is immediate and familiar. What does *not* sound with the same intimacy is the mechanism that produces the will: bodily, psychic, social, and historical causes that carried us to the threshold where we said "yes" (or "no", or "perhaps"). Thus, a standing pattern forms: awareness of willing alongside non-awareness of its causes. When that inner pattern is projected outward, it clothes things in the language of intention. We feel as though the eye were *made* to see, the storm *sent* to signal, the event *meant* to instruct. This is teleology. Teleological explanation is short, consoling, and action-guiding - and so - in practice, it often "wins" even when it reverses the arrow of time and confuses effects with causes.

2. The Claim, by the Light of Reason

No future end can serve as a prior cause without circularity. If an explanation is to stand, it must stand on order of occurrence: what came later cannot be the cause of what came before. This is a minimal demand of reason, not a ban on poetry. When we restore the arrow to its proper direction, a less theatrical sequence appears: conditions - material, psychic, organizational - arouse affects, those affects give rise to images and ideas, ideas consolidate into a frame. *Religion*, in this sense, is not an opening chord but a late packaging layer. What distinguishes this package from others is not the name of a god or the color of a flag, but the function: rules

of speech and action, authority and adjudication, shared times and boundary markers. Here the "ought" congeals, here "forbidden" is recorded, not because reality winked from a book, but because many people require a short and legible way to live together.

At this point a clarification is due. Because we habitually read cause as end, we inadvertently bend end to will. Private desire becomes the yardstick of good and evil, once phrased as the "end of the thing itself", it seeks to bind others as if it were universal law. Thus, an explanatory order is quietly replaced by an order of imperatives: from "how it arose" to "how it must be".

3. From Consciousness to Framework

When teleology is deeply rooted in human consciousness and becomes shared, it hardens into a story that aspires to cover everything. The story lowers coordination-costs: instead of beginning each encounter with full negotiation, expectations are known. The story also softens contingency: instead of a stubborn chain of causes, meaning is close at hand. These twin advantages - efficient coordination and accessible consolation - translate the imagined end into norm, and over time and discipline the norm becomes institution. In this sense, religion is neither enemy nor redeemer, it is a durable style of order, a social *operating plan*. We should therefore expect it to change dress and diction when conditions change - more rigid when fear is high, gentler when trust is abundant. This plasticity is not accidental, what is needed to reduce uncertainty is retained, what is not needed erodes. Hence the causal answer: when content changes while the mechanism persists, the mechanism is the essence.

4. A Necessary Distinction

There is no disdain here for religious experience. It binds and heals, elevates and reconciles. But the power of experience is not proof of a prior teleological source, it is the subjective index that the mechanism is functioning. Even science sometimes speaks in teleological shorthand - "the eye is for seeing," "species strive to reproduce" - to save breath, yet the valid account anchors in prior causes (variation, selection), not in prior ends. Likewise, in religion: the taste of things may be sung in verse, while their explanation belongs to the prose of cause. An explanation that demands a sufficient cause does not liquidate meaning, it locates meaning as result and human value, not as first cause.

5. A Clear Ending

We should, then, set cause before story - not to clip the wings of meaning, but to keep what consoles from usurping what explains. Religion then sits in its proper place: a robust frame that amplifies and formats antecedent trends - an amplifier, not a generator. And once we recall that awareness of will is not awareness of its cause, we can avoid inversion: not "*for this it was created*", but "*thus it*

arose". From this follows a poise that is not hostile to the world: things return to a chain of causes that can be understood, and therefore endured - without asking for an end that precedes its cause.

Notes

- *Awareness of willing / non-awareness of cause* - Already in Spinoza: we are conscious of our decisions but ignorant of the causes that produce them, hence the illusion of freedom born of ignorance of cause (*Ethics* IIp35S).
- *Teleology vs. causality* - The critique of final causes and the priority of efficient cause are spelled out in the Appendix to Book I of the *Ethics*. Ends are not prior causes, valid explanation demands a chain of adequate cause and effect.
- "*Amplifier, not generator*" - A functional description: religion constitutes cohesion, strengthens loyalty, and formats norms, but is not the primary source of their emergence. Compare classic functionalist lines in Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, on experience, see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

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