

## **Essay 1- What is Collective Consciousness and How it Emerged?**

Why do we operate and think the way that we do? Many of our individual actions and beliefs can be credited to the larger theme of collective consciousness. According to Christopher Elliott, collective consciousness is the shared beliefs that unify a society. An example of this is religion. Prior to the emergence of this phenomenon, humans had no self-assessment or control and did not influence their actions based on the expectations of others. Through evolutionary changes, however, humans have developed societies and culture, leading to collective consciousness and subsequently religion.

The change in the human consciousness that led to the emergence of religion can greatly be credited to the evolution of the human brain. In the article “Neurology of Religion,” authors Alexandra Maryanski and Jonathan Turner argue that religion is a consequence of natural selection. According to Maryanski and Turner, the brains of our ancestors began expanding 20 million years ago and resulted in humans having a large neocortex. This allows humans to have a greater range of emotions and symbolic thought. This resulted in the emergence of both language and culture, allowing individuals to coordinate and participate in symbolic and meaningful activities. In the article “Microfoundations,” authors Fligstein and MacAdams explains that the ability to think symbolically creates the framework for religious thought. According to Fligstein and MacAdams, abstract thought allows humans to have an “outer perspective” in which they see themselves as a member of a larger picture or in the eyes of the supernatural. The recognition of our own existence leaves many questions and fears as to the purpose and meaning of life. Fligstein and MacAdams argue that to combat these uncertainties, humans developed religion creating an emotional connection to the world and attaching meaning to life itself.

As social creatures, humans have evolved to form strong connections with each other and the world around them. Through millions of years of natural selection, humans have developed the ability to think abstractly and can recognize themselves and their participation in a larger society. Through the recognition of their own existence, humans have developed culture, language, and stability through spiritual belief. By participating in religion as a form of collective consciousness, individuals are provided both security and meaning to an otherwise lonely existence.