

invented god-figure could then operate as a force additional to the now more restricted influence of the group leader.

At first sight, it is surprising that religion has been so successful, but its extreme potency is simply a measure of the strength of our fundamental biological tendency, inherited directly from our monkey and ape ancestors, to submit ourselves to an all-powerful, dominant member of the group. Because of this, religion has proved immensely valuable as a device for aiding social cohesion, and it is doubtful whether our species could have progressed far without it, given the unique combination of circumstances of our evolutionary origins. It has led to a number of bizarre byproducts, such as a belief in 'another life' where we will at last meet up with the god figures. They were for reasons already explained, unavoidably detained from joining us in the present life, but this omission can be corrected in an after-life. In order to facilitate this, all kinds of strange practices have been developed in connection with the disposal of our bodies when we die. If we are going to join our dominant overlords, we must be well prepared for the occasion and elaborate burial ceremonies must be performed.

Religion has also given rise to a great deal of unnecessary suffering and misery, wherever it has become over-formalised in its application, and whenever the professional 'assistants' of the god figures have been unable to resist the temptation to borrow a little of his power and use it themselves. But despite its chequered history it is a feature of our social life that we cannot do without. Whenever it becomes unacceptable, it is quietly, or sometimes violently, rejected, but in no time at all it is back again in a new form, carefully disguised perhaps, but containing all the same old basic elements. We simply have to 'believe in something'. Only a common belief will cement us together and keep us under control. It could be argued that, on this basis, any belief will do, so long as it is powerful enough; but this is not strictly true. It must be impressive and it must be seen to be impressive. Our communal nature demands the performance of and participation in elaborate group ritual. Elimination