



# God Is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human

*Dominic Johnson*

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"And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." The biblical story of the flood crystalizes--in its terrifying, dramatic simplicity--the universally recognized concept of divine punishment. For millennia human civilizations have relied on such beliefs to create moral order. People who commit crimes or other bad deeds, we are told, will suffer retribution, while rewards--abstract or material--await those who do good. This simple but powerful idea has long served to deter self-interest and achieve remarkable levels of cooperation. Indeed, as all societies seem to have found, these beliefs are so good at promoting cooperation that they may have been favored by natural selection. Today, while secularism and unbelief are at an all-time high, the willingness to believe in some kind of payback or karma remains nearly universal. Even atheists often feel they are being monitored and judged. We find ourselves imagining what our parents, spouse, or boss would think of our thoughts and actions, even if they are miles away and will never find out. We talk of eyes burning into the backs of our heads, the walls listening, a sense that someone or something is out there, observing our every move, aware of our thoughts and intentions.

*God Is Watching You* is an exploration of this belief as it has developed over time and how it has shaped the course of human evolution. Dominic Johnson explores such questions as: Was a belief in supernatural consequences instrumental in the origins of human societies? How has it affected the way human society has changed, how we live today, and how we will live in the future? Does it expand or limit the potential for local, regional and global cooperation? How will the current decline in religious belief (at least in many western countries) affect our ability to live together? And what, if anything, will temper self-interest and promote cooperation if religion declines? In short, do we still need God?

Drawing on new research from anthropology, evolutionary biology, experimental psychology, and neuroscience, Johnson presents a new theory of supernatural punishment that offers fresh insight into the origins and evolution of not only religion, but also human cooperation and society. He shows that belief in supernatural reward and punishment is no quirk of western or Christian culture, but a ubiquitous part of human nature that spans geographical regions, cultures, and human history.

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