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WE WERE THE GODS

How the Birth of Consciousness Led to the Mysteries of Civilization

Why did all the ancient cultures around the world believe they were ruled over by a small group of gods who, aside from some special powers, mostly looked and acted like regular people? The gods of Olympus and Asgard had arms and legs and emotions and loves and wars and siblings and children. Why? Does it make any sense that prehistoric man would conjure up a crowd of very human characters to explain very non-human phenomena?

Anthropologists say that must be what happened, that faced with the wonders of nature and the hazards of daily existence, imagining an assemblage of beings just like them who ruled over the weather and their lives was a logical step. So logical, it was repeated in society after society, from the dawn of history down to today. But does that make sense? Of course not. There just hasn't been another explanation.

Until now.

In fact, there is a simple explanation – as most revolutionary discoveries are that make sudden sense of the world and change it irrevocably. It explains not just what primitive man was thinking, but also explains the sudden appearance of civilization after 100,000 years of cave-dwelling, Abraham's insistence that his son marry into a family of idolaters, the origin of the divine right of kings, the conspiracy theories of The DaVinci Code, and the basic nature of what it is to be human. Among other things.

This book will prevent you from ever looking at history and civilization in the same way again.

It makes the argument that consciousness – our self-awareness, our reason, our identity – was not a trait that evolved over the millennia, but appeared suddenly, first in only a few people, then in increasing numbers over time. Just as each of us begins life with a long childhood marked by a self-centered view of the world, without a true conception of our place in time or space, without the ability to make conscious decisions for which we're held responsible, so did mankind go through a childhood of nonconsciousness – tens of thousands of years in which homo sapiens were little more than highly intelligent apes, acting on "automatic pilot," as animals do, as even we do when our minds are "elsewhere." Prior to the appearance of consciousness, the world was populated by people who looked like us, who had the same potential, but for whom, somehow, the switch of self-awareness had not yet been thrown.

Then some 5,000 to 10,000 years ago, at the dawn of recorded history, individuals appeared who did have consciousness – and with it the ability to plan and invent and collaborate, abilities previously unknown. This awesome power allowed them to rule over their still-nonconscious brethren, as a normal adult would a group of children, as a charismatic leader would his cultists, as a hypnotist would his subjects. These newly conscious men were like gods in the eyes of their

savage followers, bestowing gifts of art and language and technology, establishing laws and institutions, while exacting tribute and fealty and even vengeance.

They guarded this precious trait of consciousness, this tool, this weapon, jealously, keeping it “in the family,” living apart, guarding the bloodlines, for as long as possible. But as more and more people became conscious, that hierarchy broke down. The distinction between “new” man and “old,” rulers and ruled, gods and mortals, became blurred.

Yet the memories persisted. New generations, now fully conscious, inherited from their nonconscious predecessors memories of those “gods” who had ruled over them, who had first brought those great gifts to their ancestors. And these memories became myths embellished with supernatural elements and a nostalgia for humanity's lost childhood. That is why the gods of those myths seem so human, with the foibles and emotions and dreams of mortal men. Because they *were* mortal men, people just like us. It was their *worshippers* who were not!

The implications of this discovery will change how we view ourselves, our world, and even our future.