

“But surely sin is a purely abstract concept?” The words from Baxter’s mouth raced across the room at one hundred miles an hour. His hands waved furiously. “Where did sin originate from? From God? Remove God from the equation and you are left with nothing more than a clever way of one set of humans, i. e. the religious sect, controlling another set of humans – the uneducated, weak and poor. But not only these people. Oh no, the control reaches out further into society. It reaches by different means.”

“No, no, no, no my dear fellow,” interjected Watkins, “one simply can not *remove* God from the equation?”

“And why not? If we are to take Richard Dawkins’ view from *The Gene Machine*, then the abstraction of God is quite simple. Humans are a product of their own biology.” Baxter sat back in his stainless steel chair and dragged a huge blow of chac weed.

“Ah, yes the good old Richard Dawkins. Well of course if you are following that path you may as well throw in Darwin and have be done with it. No, it just won’t do old boy.”

“Yes it will. Look, not only did the Christian Church control, for over two thousand years of earth’s history, the poor and uneducated but also the well to do middle class *and* the aristocracy plus the Royal Family to boot! Control the poor through fear and ignorance, control the middle class, more really in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but never-the-less controlled the middle class through tradition and controlled Royalty by duty. The Church perpetuated this myth, this belief that a god existed and therefore created the concepts of Good and Evil. The result of human Evil, of humans breaking the rules is sin and sinning.”

“But even today none of the scanning machines have broken down the third sector, despite the bio-tech membrane developments. There still is that, that something

unexplained.” Watkins took the pipe offered by Baxter and like his fellow professor inhaled the smoke.

“True, true Watkins. That does not mean the unexplained sector houses sin or God or even the belief in God. It’s just control of one group of greedy, insecure people making sure that knowledge was suppressed to the masses so the dominant group could make up any old cods wallop and the masses would except this as the truth. What the Church didn’t bank on was free will and free thinking.”

“Ah,” Watkins exhaled letting the blue coloured smoke jet from his mouth and fill the drawing room, “free will and free thinking! Now, we’re in a completely new sphere altogether. Free will is a chicken and egg argument. God allows us certain amount of freewill. God is all-powerful and knows everything. Your life is already mapped from the start, even before the start, right until your last breath and beyond.”

“Hmmm, I can see where you are aiming but you are way off and are neglecting a few points, dear colleague.” Baxter had taken the pipe back. By now it was extinguished. He placed it in its case and slipped the object into his coat pocket. “Who says God is and has to be all-powerful?”

“Okay, if God isn’t all-powerful then what predicates separate God from humans?”

“I shall answer that question in this manner. Humans needed to explain their own environment. They were not true masters of the weather, for example, therefore they did not understand it and were frightened. The normal response to such a weakness was to project upwards and outwards the very best of what a human is supposed to be. Gradually, and I mean gradually they discovered the mechanics of the weather. No longer did they need to rely on their stories they had created to explain in human terms just what was happening to their environment. They could see via advancing scientific progress exactly

how the world was constructed. They began to gain a clearer sense of the fabric their world was constructed of and they realised that God did not fit.”

“Oh my dear Baxter. One fundamental flaw almost too easy to attack that I might start to believe you left it open on purpose. ‘Humans *needed* to explain their own environment?’ Who put the *need* in them in the first place? God?”

For the first time Baxter paused. Actually paused as if hearing Watkins in an unusual manor. He stared Watkins in the eye measuring him in the process. He was of fine education, stiff collars and a consultant multihigh-tech programmer for Nexos, Secmore and Time. But there was always something refreshing about Watkins.

Baxter lifted his light frame out of his chair and strolled towards the tinted panoramic glass window. He stared out across the far reaches of space. A black and white backdrop with patches of colour to attract the senses. Baxter’s mouth hardly moved as the words almost absent-mindedly floated out, “you know Watkins, I’ve seen many things in my life, many, many things. I’ve seen moon beams across planets. I’ve seen a blue-backed spider weep tears of joy. But nothing quite compares to being; pure and simple existence.” Baxter continued to gaze. His eyes were now tracking a freighter ship power down its thrusters and glide smoothly into docking position. He turned and faced Watkins.

“The *need* was instinct. And instinct is a proven biological factor,” Baxter said as he briskly crossed the floor to the drinks cabinet.

Watkins watched his companion and colleague. Watched his sturdy body move and his brain think. Watkins had always thought their relationship was that of the old Conan Doyle stories. He Dr. Watson to Baxter’s Sherlock Holmes. And like their bygone fictional characters, they too were brilliant in their own professional field but for whatever reason intellectually they stepped up another level when together. Baxter’s research is

second to none, Watkins reflected. What makes a person a person, he mused to himself as Baxter poured the brandy.

Baxter handed Watkins his drink and returned to his chair. “Sin is a state of mind. And like all states of mind can be altered, manipulated to suit the society, the government, any organised religion – be it official or cult, and even suit the individual depending on the situation and time,” Watkins attempted to interject but Baxter waved him silent. He was used to this and allowed his friend to continue, “cognitively speaking the mind is built up of several layers, each a state of mind – belief system if you like. Now, my dear Watkins, each belief system is a complex series of thought patterns comprised of thousands of influences. I know what is on the tip of your tongue old boy, the psychologists’ favourite, the good old nature verses nurture debate. But that’s my point. Really it’s not nature *verses* nurture but more like nature *with* nurture. Let’s suppose for one moment the divide between does actually exist. So we have a human being born of a sinful persuasion, or to put it another way, is already predisposed to act in a certain way, then no matter what his or her environment he/she is exposed to they will not be influenced by their environment? I find this a very hard concept to grasp giving the complexities of the human mind and body.”

Watkins was listening intensely and was also thinking how redundant he was to the debate. Baxter seemed quite content to pitch all the possible counter arguments back to himself and just carry on without him. He did decide to respond, “maybe so Baxter, but surely all humans are born equal? Are you suggesting that some are more advanced or privileged in the womb? That must come after when they have at least been born into an environment of either poor, middle or rich position?”

“As daft as that sounds, that is *exactly* what I’m proposing! All humans are *not* born equal and very few live equally. By the very nature of a human it is impossible to be

equal. We are not talking about a machine here. The human, as I don't have to point out, is an organic, living organism prone to inequality. And that, my friend, is the strength. Individuality! It is only when collectively human laws are formed and social pressure is forced on individual behaviour that actions are deemed acceptable or unacceptable. On top of that are the levels of acceptability. And on top of that are the social circles within social circles that exist that each have their own levels of acceptability. Likewise, human predicates are evident or have the potential in all. For example one individual may have a higher count of 'humour' than another whilst possessing more 'aggressiveness' than another. It is the environment that the individual finds him or herself in that promotes, enhances and encourages that 'humour' or 'aggressiveness' in that person. Or it is the environment that *discourages* these predicates. Therefore we have two variables in the equation. Firstly, the random genetic make-up of levels of predicates in the individual and secondly the circumstances that individual finds him/herself in and thirdly, I've just thought, what age the person is and what era."

Watkins watched Baxter sit in a new train of thought. Pleased at himself for thinking of a strand never before heard to him. Watkins was cautious to interrupt for fear of losing Baxter's monumental line of discourse, "yes, Baxter but where does sin follow in all of this?"

Baxter's eyes flashed grey steel, "Ah, yes of course sin, sin. As sin is our main topic we shall conclude with sin. The line of argument could quite easily be deduced with 'good' or 'evil'. Sin is a human device for control as we have said."

"As *you* have said," Watkins put forward. Baxter corrected himself.

"As *I* have said. But the real question is not why control but why be *controlled*? How can one person have control over another? Control is more effective in numbers but that is not absolute. Organised religion provides the excuse needed. If they claim they

have the 'Book of Life' that contains how humans should behave then so what? If on the other hand they claim that there is a right way and a wrong way of behaving then again so what? So, the obvious strategy is to provide an explanation for the environment and the purpose of life. Religion feeds the misguided theory that there must be someone or some greater being who controls the fate of the human race. Religion conveniently steps in to bridge the gap. They claim they have direct contact with the wishes of this great entity, this God and they have been given rules and codes of behaviour to teach the rest of the human race. The masses are thus convinced that there is a *divine* set of rules..."

Again Watkins interrupted Baxter, "the Ten Commandments." Baxter nodded and repeated the sentence.

"*The Ten Commandments*, exactly. And those who break these commandments commit sin. Commit sin and you will be punished twice: once by social order and again by God. Punished on earth and in the after life. Clever really." And with that Baxter relaxed into his chair, rolled a batch of *chac* and inhaled deeply allowing the smoke to burn his chest. He offered Watkins a drag but he declined.

Watkins was on the edge of his chair. His palms began to sweat. "Can I ask a personal question Baxter?"

"Yes," Baxter ventured cautiously.

"Have you ever murdered someone?"

Baxter was still. His eyes darted directly towards Watkins who presently was focusing directly back at him. Baxter did not move for fear the windows pressurising and shatter into a million pieces across empty space.

"What a strange question Watkins. Why do you ask?" Baxter said placing the question back with his colleague.

“I wondered if you had killed someone,” his answer was curt and his eyes were steady.

“Killed?”

“Killed,” Watkins confirmed and waited.

“You’re serious,” Baxter said. “Killed, murdered. You mean deactivated, disassembled don’t you?”

Watkins remained silent.

“You don’t, do you?”

It was Watkins’ turn to stand. He stretched his full height and looked directly into Baxter’s eyes. “Killed.”

Baxter refocused, “what do you mean Watkins?”

“I mean taken another life...”

“Deactivated...”

“I’m not talking about machines Baxter,” Watkins spat the words, “life Baxter. Life! Pure living and breathing *human* life!”

“Life. Humans?”

“Yes Baxter for God’s sake!”

“You know that isn’t possible, don’t you?” Baxter spoke softer, “don’t you?”

“Oh but it is Baxter. As possible as you and I.” Watkins strolled calmly across the room. He too gazed far into space. The freighter ship had gone leaving an empty port, its hatches closed.

Baxter’s voice sounded in the background.

“Tell me.”

Watkins began to speak, his throat was dry “Seven hundred years has past. Seven hundred long years have dragged by since it happened. I was working for Pro-Human

Biological Laboratories and it was my first position. We were primarily researching mechanical and non-mechanical structures. I say we as the project was conducted by a small team, me being the youngest. I've not told you this Baxter but I worked alongside Doctor Ramsford..."

Watkins had a sudden head rush. He felt sick.

"I had just completed my bio-mechanic finals. A group of us had decided to take a holiday to Entropic Soma to relax. It was there that I meet the great Doctor Ramsford. He was gathering life samples. I hardly noticed him. One of our group did. I was overwhelmed but angry with myself at the same time. He was the most brilliant bio-mechanic that had ever lived and I had failed to recognise him. Still I more than made up for that mistake.

"It was the fifth day and I had risen early to catch the ninth sun in its full glory. So refreshing. I had made my way down the cliff side and onto the rock near the beach. The birds were feeding, as were a collection of strange creatures with tusks I had never seen before. I decided to stay on the rocks and read the old fashion way. You know with one of those hand-held pocket pcs. I was lost in a cyber world of fiction when a shadow cast itself over me. It was Doctor Ramsford. He was a tall lengthy person whose body was permanently lopsided 'one leg shorter than the other. They didn't notice. I've become rather attached to it' he said. A halo of sun surrounded his head as it blocked the sun. His face was out of focus and his thin sandy hair looked on fire. 'Allow me to introduce myself,' he said extending his arm. 'I'm Doctor Ramsford.' I shook his hand in silence. I couldn't believe the day could begin this way. 'And you are?' He patiently asked me. I replied to which he smiled. 'I see you have a Comhight 4,' he waved his bony hand towards my machine. 'Oh yes. I have a liking to the past,' I said not sure of his intentions.

He smiled again as he moved out of the sun's path. 'Come walk with me,' he said leading the way over the rocks. I followed and sealed my destiny forever.

"The rest of my friends returned home but I stayed. By now Doctor Ramsford and I had struck an exceptional intellectual relationship. It was obvious that his limbs were wearing out and he had had enough of life. His eyes were almost dull with the weight of living. He said he longed for the day when he would be free from the constraints of his degrading body. He was fooling himself into believing there was life after deactivation. He wanted his 'spirit' to join others in a world free from pain. He knew that was not possible but longed for it all the same. He said I must be the one to carry on his work. His 'spirit' must live on through his knowledge and his knowledge must live on through me. Of course I tried to protest that he would live another three hundred years but he laughed. 'How the youth are so believing,' he told me.

"We left Entropic Soma a full 4 months after we had first met. Doctor Ramsford had collected his life samples and we arrived at his research base on Chaos Hope just before the change of season. The samples were mainly small single-celled creatures nothing extraordinary. I had passed my finals. I had intended advanced research at the Institution of Computerised Bio-mechanics and Membrane Studies but that chance encounter with Ramsford had changed all that. 'You are studying with me,' he would say in his flamboyant way. And so it was I stayed and helped with his research.

"It wasn't until another two years of working along side Ramsford that our lives were horribly shaped. I was using the info-comps when Ramsford approached me, 'Got a minute Watkins?' he asked, 'I have something to show you.' His face was calm but stern. I followed him in silence out of the main research complex building, through the parameter fencing. We walked slowly in the twilight. Thick woodland surrounded us. I can't remember how long we walked for or indeed which direction he led me but eventually we

stopped at a clearing. In the centre was a small grassy mound. Ramsford did not utter one word. Instead he motioned me to follow him further to an opening at the side of the mound. It revealed several stone steps descending beneath the ground. We cautiously approached a large black metal door. ‘Two tons of solid iron,’ Ramsford finally spoke, ‘coated with liquid armour. Nothing gets in here.’ I remained silent. He stared at me. Maybe the light caught him but I’m sure Ramsford’s eyes changed colour. The only word to leave his thin lips was ‘Watch.’

“Before I realised what had happened Ramsford’s skin also began to change colour. The level of concentration on his face was immense. His skin was now actually silvered. I stepped away as far as I could. My back thudded into the cold wall. I could feel sweat seep from my pores. With a hideous fascination I looked once more into his eyes. They seemed like spheres of solid marble. My hands instinctively covered my face. There was enough moonlight to see the figure through my fingers. I could see Ramsford’s face begin to melt. His flesh started to drip like hot wax. He raised his hands to his burning skin. His fingernails dug deep. His mouth opened and let a terrified cry echo through me.

“Within half a second his entire skin from his head to his mid-drift had melted and his hair had burnt to ash. His metal frame and organic tissue was exposed to the night air. I barely saw him in this distressed state for long as he seemed to melt himself through the iron door. I was left stunned. All I could do was stare at the door wondering what had happened. I did not notice the drop in temperature or the night sounds of the wood until the door suddenly slammed open.

“The entrance was dark. I ventured slowly over the threshold. A strange calmness was present as I carefully stepped onto the stone floor. At first I couldn’t make out where exactly I was or what was in this place. My eyes strained to see Ramsford. He was nowhere. I walked further in through the underground cave. I decided to follow the wall

so I stretched out my hands. The wall was uneven, wet and rough to the touch. By now my eyes were adjusting to the darkness. My eyesight still lacked definition and I could only see a gleaming in the far distance of various different shaped objects. I made my way towards them with intense fear. I got the impression the walls had narrowed into a corridor, as I suddenly became claustrophobic. After several steps the corridor widened again and shafts of moonlight randomly stabbed onto the floor through small metal drains.

“I stopped dead still. I saw Ramsford in the distance. His disgusting figure was leaning against what looked like a glass sphere. His fleshless hands clasped the dark blue coloured glass. He did not notice I had ventured nearer as his head was fixed to the glass. As I grew closer I could smell a rancid burning of flesh. An unrecognisable voice called my name, ‘Watkins! Watkins! Look!’ I stepped closer toward the glass and there in front of my eyes in the dead of night was a sight that nearly turned me to madness.

“My eyes tried hard to focus, to comprehend what was presented to them. Floating in a congealic sensitive gel was a fully formed human. ‘Is it alive?’ I shouted. My adrenaline carried the words. ‘Yes,’ sounded Ramsford’s voice, ‘the last human alive...’

“Time seemed unimportant. We stared at the most amazing creature. ‘How did you...’ I spluttered. ‘No questions, no questions.’ Ramsford was obviously in pain. His face was contorted and he began to sink to his knees, ‘help me Watkins, help me.’ The pain looked excruciating as Ramsford’s body began to convulse violently. I quickly grabbed his wrists, legs anything I could hold onto. Chunks of flesh pulled away in my fingers as I wrestled with this mass of burning mechanical tissue. Then it suddenly dawned why this was happening. He cried in pain. His words were now barely audible. His hands grabbed my face and with super strength he pulled me closer. The stench was thick. I could see his eyes change from the solid spheres to normal in a split second. He

said one word to me; 'kill,' then the struggle lessened and I saw his normal eyes fade. They were still. I knew he could no longer see me.

"I carried Ramsford back into the other room and placed him onto the large operation table. After I had straightened his rotted limbs I grabbed a plastic operating curtain and lay it over him. There I paused for what seemed an age. Out of the madness I returned to the glass sphere.

"The melted flesh on the stone floor stuck to my shoes as I looked at the human. What made you? What technician assembled you? A creature free from mechanics. How is that possible? My questions were left unanswered as I disconnected the power. The gel's colour began to change shade as it hardened. The human made no sound. Peace and solitude I whispered, peace and solitude..."

The silence lasted several minutes. Neither Baxter nor Watkins felt the need for further words. Watkins broke the stillness.

"So you see Baxter I *have* sinned." Baxter did not reply. "Sinned Baxter, sinned," Watkins repeated the word, "and now it is my turn." Watkins reached inside his coat pocket and removed a small pair of scissors. He carefully unbuttoned his left shirt cuff.

Baxter was stirred "What are you saying Watkins?" He stood from his chair.

"I have lived my life. I have studied far and wide," Watkins pressed his arm panel open. "I too have also witnessed great things. But I have seen the other side Baxter. A world where life and death are merged. Where sin does exist."

He snipped his life wires and spoke slowly, "time for forgiveness."