

THE ORIGIN OF FOOTBALL IN THE BREAKDOWN OF THE BICAMERAL MIND

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Abstract

This paper commences by outlining Julian Jaynes' *breakdown of the bicameral mind* hypothesis and how this relates to the development of human consciousness. The paper progresses to consider how football offers a replacement for the gods that had once been an intrinsic feature of the human mind: supporting a football team offers a means by which we now seek solace via collective worship of an external entity. The utilization of the national football team as a replacement god is also considered. It is suggested that attitudes towards the coach of England's national team also intimates reconfigurations of the bicameral mind. The contemporary phenomenon of formation worship is then explored: the endeavour to discern meaningful and progressive of patterns of human activity demonstrates the post-bicameral impulse to seek order and symmetry within nature. It is argued that the loss of the clear hierarchies of the bicameral period leads to tensions with regard to attempts to access ultimate reality; that is whether routes to this reality are only available to an elite group (footballing truths understood by ex-player TV pundits) or is more universally accessible. It is concluded that the human search for the gods that were lost following the breakdown of the bicameral mind has strongly shaped the development of football in relation to its fanbase.

Introduction: bicameralism

Psychologist Julian Jaynes presented an intriguing perspective on the development of the human mind in his 1976 book, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Jaynes's hypothesis suggests that in the period circa Homer's 'Iliad' humans were yet to develop consciousness. Instead, the two halves of the brain offered very distinct functions: the right hemisphere of the brain would prompt action by generating a hallucinated voice, whilst the left hemisphere would 'hear' these commands and obey. When a king died his voice would continue to be heard as an auditory hallucination and his directives would take on god-like significance. The hallucinated

voices emanating from the right hemisphere of the brain were therefore perceived to come from a god. As the voice of the god-king could still be heard, their shrine would be attended to by the people as though he was still living; for example, by leaving offerings of food. The pyramids in Egypt represent the elaborate burial procedures of the bicameral period. In addition, illustrations from this era often present god as a corporeal presence who can communicate directly with people. Jaynes argued that bicameralism of the human brain broke down in the last centuries BC as human consciousness began to develop and people became more autonomous and self-directed. Accordingly man's relationship to god changed as the hallucinated voices from the right hemisphere of the brain faded away. God was no longer an immediate presence but had departed and now ruled from afar. This introduced the requirement for practices such as prayer, and iconography such as winged angelic intermediaries; these resources were required so that humans could retain connection with the distant gods.

We are now in the transitional period following the breakdown of the bicameral mind. It can be argued that societies are becoming increasingly secular as we refine our worldview following the departure of the gods from our immediate vicinity. The rationality and materialism of science increasingly guide our view of nature and its underpinnings, rather than any appeal to religion and superstition. However, Jaynes states that the influences of bicameralism still impact strongly upon human thought and beliefs: the contemporary world is full of substitutes for the authorization that was provided by the bicameral mind. Humans search for the lost directives that were once provided by the right hemisphere of the brain in a number of ways. Science itself represents the endeavour to uncover immutable truths, which were once offered by the Earth-bound gods. Alternatively, belief in a superstition such as astrology represents the search for celestial guidance left by the footprints of these departing gods.

Worshipping a football club

It is oft-stated that football is a religion, and with the breakdown of the bicameral mind as an analytical lens perhaps this is more than a metaphor or cliché. People within a community pledge their allegiance to their local football club. This team therefore represents the community and provides a locus for collective worship. Football clubs accordingly accumulate symbolic artefacts, which stand comparison with those associated with religious organizations. The team's ground is a place of worship like a

church, and the team badge takes on the status of sacrosanct accoutrement. Players can demonstrate their allegiance by kissing the team badge when they have scored, a practice which is reminiscent of kissing a religious icon. When attending a game of football it is also apparent that some fans are more interested in singing songs about the provincial city or town in which they dwell rather than watching the game. I attended Newcastle's St James Park a few years ago as an away supporter, but was sitting close to the home fans. The crowd behaviour in the vicinity was almost solely focused on singing and dancing whilst engaging in playful but antagonistic banter with the opposing fans. The occurrences on the pitch were apparently of minimal interest. Supporting a team therefore allows people to become subsumed reassuringly under the process of collective worship, thus cementing the in-group with reference to the rival out-group. The bicameral mind once provided the solvent necessary for allegiance to the social collective; now a football club provides the referent that engages people within solidifying tribal rituals. But whilst fans at a game sometimes seem more preoccupied with chanting familiar songs than watching the actual game, they will still have selected a player within the team who is worthy of particular worship. It is likely that this player will demonstrate holy zeal and passion in their quest to help the team win. This demonstration of intense commitment to the club is of reassurance to the faithful in the stands, as they can sense that the player shares their religious fervour. Of course, people don't always follow their local team (particularly now that the media provide coverage of so many teams around the country/world) but less locally-oriented support tends to be focused on more powerful and successful teams – which then take on a reassuring iconic presence.

Supporting a team therefore enables a person to seek meaning from an abstract entity that represents a community and set of fans. The team doesn't need to represent the community or fanbase in a particularly direct fashion (players can be from all around the world) – all that is needed is for a group of participants to enact an on-pitch ritual that provides a locus of activity around which celebration of the tribe can take place. Following the breakdown of the bicameral mind, people still wish to feel part of something greater than their isolated selves and to seek guidance and solace from a higher entity.

The national team as saviour - and crucifying the coach

In a world increasingly devoid of collective orientation, supporting a successful team can bolster the self-worth of an individual: people experience the successes and failures of the team they support as their own. This is one of the reasons why 'big' club sides, rather than lesser clubs, are likely to be supported from afar. However, the link between on-pitch success and a personal sense of pride is particularly apparent with national football teams. The link between god and nation state has traditionally been closely linked; a vestige perhaps of the immutable tie between the god-king and their city in bicameral societies. However, the influence of the church has waned whilst faith in human rationality has increased. This humanism can be argued to be a relic of bicameralism; as we have lost the directives provided by immediate gods, and the remaining ties to a more abstract god are gradually eroded, we look to ourselves for salvation. Humanity becomes its own saviour through a misguided notion such as 'progress' which suggests that rational mastery of our world is possible via science, technology and politics. Representatives of communities/nations are now more likely to be humans or collections of humans than god or his religious representatives. Whilst people still feel an allegiance to their nation-state as a source of identity, selected human activity (such as that undertaken by sportspeople) is more representative of the nation than god or church. As a result, we basically worship ourselves.

The support of England's national football team presents a degree of intense veneration that implies a type of religious observance. The success of the England team is closely linked to sentiments of national superiority and well-being: a successful England team represents the nation in what is perceived to be the required and appropriate manner. The players of the national team enact a competitive ritual against other nations and this provides the basis from which people within the country can join in collective self-worship. England has a second-tier national side that has won only a single major tournament - and that was 45 years ago with home advantage. The requirement for the national team to act as a substitute god means that evidence for this second-tier status being demonstrated *over and over again* does not diminish the belief that England has some divine entitlement to succeed at major football tournaments. Regardless of bountiful stark evidence to the contrary, we must believe that our god (national football team) is the best.

What enables some protection of our sense of personal and collective worth is the ability to crucify the representatives of our faith. In a bicameral society the gods' directives were synonymous with thought so it was impossible for a vantage point to be obtained that would enable these thoughts to be questioned. Following breakdown of the bicameral mind, gods became distant and our relationship with them more complex. Elaborate frameworks were therefore more necessary to bridge the distance between humans and the now departed gods. This can be seen with the Trinity under Christian belief with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost representing the same deity. Whilst prophets that provide a link to a transcendental realm are often treated with reverence, their separability from god means that they can be dispensed with if necessary. For example, in times of trouble a community may be bolstered by ascribing responsibility for any misfortune or hard times to the prophet. The prophet can therefore be removed, thereby solidifying the community whilst leaving faith in the deity intact. In a Guardian blog article (1) Wilson highlights that the tendency to hail a new coaching messiah, and then crucify them, is an ongoing phenomenon with regard to England's national football team. An individual is appointed who must lead the nation to the success it deserves, but when failure occurs the messiah is crucified. This enables blame to be placed upon a false prophet who failed to provide the necessary guidance to the national football team. By blaming the coach, misguided notions of national superiority remain unsullied by yet another failure. The son (coach) is crucified, but the father (England) and Holy Ghost (the national football team) retain their sovereignty until another coach-prophet is crowned. We can therefore continue the worship of England, our football team and ourselves without the damaging impacts of failure diminishing this glorification.

Formation worship

As the religious traces of the bicameral mind recede, residual experiences of faith tend to become diversified. We become less likely to follow a core faith as a collective and adjust our appeals to wonder and certitude to meet our personal circumstances. There is a tendency to claim to be 'spiritual but not religious' in modern day England. We therefore inscribe our personal lifestyle with non-intrusive and reassuring aspects of faith whilst eschewing those aspects that might bind us to a constricting relationship with a broader social collective. This means that football does not only offer the possibility for a binding relationship to a team or nation. Fans in the stand may choose to lose themselves in the crowd whilst the performance of their team on the pitch is a pretext for

spiritual reverie. However, some people pursue the human need for meaning by actively analysing what happens on the pitch. These football fans are less likely to pledge strong allegiance to one team but seek truths via detailed scrutiny of match activity. The analysis of football formations and tactics therefore becomes an avenue to grasping the essence of life. In a world in which scientific humanism expresses the residue of a bicameral religious mindset, the interlocking actions of footballers generate a means by which we can worship patterns of human behaviour: on-pitch activity accordingly becomes a form of secular scripture to be decoded by the engaged analyst (2).

To some extent these patterns are discerned from the spatial coordinates of the players on the pitch in relation to one another. This would appear to satisfy the desire to obtain a clear descriptive framework which is based upon scientific principles. However, formations are not simply abstractions of physical coordinates as we also interpret players' positions with reference to role significance, not just on-pitch coordinates. For example, full-backs are considered defenders even though on average over the course of the game they are usually closer to central-midfielders than centre-backs. This is because, regardless of how much the full-back pushes forwards down their flank over a game, we consider their primary role responsibility to be defence. By addressing both physical coordinates and the meanings underpinning human action, the exegesis of formational scriptures is shaped by the metaphysical desire to grasp ultimate truths underpinning the universe. Therefore, with god absent and broader collectives losing their social solvent, we can still embark on a personal quest to locate the divine in emergent patterns of situated human endeavour. But whilst projects that resist the dogma of collectivism may begin with emancipatory aims, they are prone to take on the unifying social symbols and shared lexical frameworks associated with organized religions, established sciences and football club worship. This captures the difficulty of extricating oneself from the long-reach of the post-bicameral religious impulse. The emergent-materialism of on-pitch activity provides the basis for a quasi-religious congregation to genuflect before the synthesis of reality contained within abstract formational templates. It is through these representations of human activity/natural processes that a metaphor for all existence is pursued by the disciples of formation worship.

Unlike club-focused spectators, people who worship formations are unlikely to revere a player simply because they demonstrate passion and commitment to the game - the breadth and diversity of player proclivities are worshipped instead. The tactically-minded observer embraces the glorious diversity of the human condition as expressed via individual talents; they then consider how these different talents can be effectively unified within a team framework. For example, how a *trequartista* and a *regista* might both be accommodated under a 4-4-2 formation. This reconciliation of the component (player) with the whole (team) also resembles scientific endeavour, in that it aims to account for different levels of existence within a totalizing explanatory scheme. Natural sciences and social sciences represent the contemporary pursuit to obtain this insight by addressing the dualism generated by monotheistic religions. Following breakdown of the bicameral mind, monotheistic religions (such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam) conceived a transcendental god that existed outside nature. Created in god's image, humans are also considered to exist to some degree outside nature. (This contrasts with pantheistic religions which view god as coterminous with and dispersed throughout nature.) Strands of monotheism have accordingly inspired secular/humanist reconfigurations of religion: with separation of humanity and nature invoked by the transcendental nature of god, contemporary academic practice has its foundations in the attempt to bridge or eliminate the gaps generated by this dualism. As humans are claimed to be separate from nature we can attempt to master it from our detached philosophical and scientific vantage point. Via the natural scientific attempt to generate a complete theory of the physical universe we aim to know the mind of god (3). Alternatively, within a social science such as sociology this orientation is presented as the desire to generate a theoretical framework that links individuals to social collectives, thus providing a deep totalizing understanding of the human world. Now that god has left us alone on Earth, the social sciences take on the pursuit of embedding the human individual within a transcendental societal entity. The desire to link football players to team formations and systems provides a clear demonstration of this social scientific orientation. Painstaking football analysis provides a means by which we seek the reassurances of order and unity in schemes that link building-block components of life to more abstract holistic forms. So when we were intensely debating how Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard could be accommodated in the same England midfield we may have thought that we simply wanted our national team to perform better. But what we actually craved was the comforting reconciliation of the dualism (the human individual separated

from god/nature) that was created by monotheistic reconfigurations of the religious impulse following the era of bicameralism.

Through historical analysis humans also set out to discern the route of progress towards an ultimate goal; for example, the Marxist progression to a Socialist utopia. With regard to football the patterns of cooperating individuals, performing as players on the pitch, mutate in response to the patterns of another group of individuals whom they are competing against. Jaynes highlights that there is a tendency for scientific mythologies to unite behind canonical texts in much the same fashion as that exhibited by religion: Jonathan Wilson's 'Inverting the Pyramid' comes close to offering a canonical text that defines and inspires the contemporary cult of formation worship. Wilson's influential monograph demonstrates that formational analysis is not just focused on the here and now, as it sets out to reverse engineer a purposeful history in which we can see how human social groups, directed towards a defined goal, have responded and adapted to changing circumstances. Clear patterns with a certain symmetry can be discerned; for example the inverting of formations from a 2-3-5 approach to 5-3-2 over a few decades of incremental football development. These morphing patterns of human behaviour intimate that a progressive orientation towards enhanced social configurations is an inherent feature of the human animal. Socialism as a form of societal god may have been shown to be unattainable by the collapse of the Soviet Union, but at the more tangible micro-level of human interaction on the football pitch, we can perceive how we strive towards ever-improved social formations. As replacements for the bicameral gods, an ideal society and an ideal football formation may both be unattainable— but the latter is at least easier to postulate in diagrammatic form.

TV punditry as the priesthood

Personalised approaches to an appreciation of football (such as formation worship) still have to resist recalcitrant social customs that bolster more traditional reconfigurations of the search for lost bicameral certitude. In addition to adopting complex symbolic frameworks, religions take on complex social forms to bridge the gap between our Earthly residence and now distant gods. These social configurations often take on a strict hierarchy with a clear demarcation established between the designated spokespeople for god and the rest of the population. Scientific disciplines display a similar pattern, with professional closure meaning that only those able to make it through

rigorous assessment processes are able to enter the cloistered echelons of the expert. This process enables a select group to have access to the truths which inhere within nature, and it is the responsibility of these few to disseminate these truths to the broader lay population. Football analysis represents an example of this tendency. Only those who have extensive playing history are allowed to take on the highest profile roles as pundits on television. The requisite for professional playing experience means that only a privileged few can ever hope to join the ranks of expert TV punditry. Through the insights afforded by experience, the ex-player can reveal arcane dimensions of the game that would otherwise be hidden from the uninformed viewer.

The worship of formations and tactics actually challenges this orthodoxy. Specialist journalism, niche websites and fan forums set out to broaden the route to football-related truths. Through the application of rigorous analysis the engaged football viewer can ascertain on-pitch patterns of play which are not solely accessible to the experience-laden TV pundit. According to this perspective, access to the reality of football does not require the mediating lens of an appointed expert. Formation worship therefore compares to a reforming religious movement, or a philosophical association (such as the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle) which set out to make access to knowledge universal via application of the scientific method. With clear guidance from the right hemisphere of the brain no longer available in this post-bicameral era, the quest for truth is fraught with tensions between elitism and universalism. TV punditry suggests the requirement for a defined hierarchy (with an exclusive group at the top) so that higher truths can be passed down to the laity, whereas the cult of formation worship promotes a more universal creed of analysis where footballing truths can be discerned by the population more directly.

The breakdown of the bicameral mind explains it all

Whether we are revelling in the stand singing about a bland post-industrial provincial city, shaking our heads at the shocking decision-making of that fool Fabio Capello, or deliberating over whether Barcelona are playing 4-3-3, 4-6-0, or 4-5-1 with a 'false nine' we are simply searching for the gods that departed the right hemisphere of the human brain back in about 400BC.

References / Endnotes

1. Wilson, J. 2010. "The Question: Is a messiah complex the cause of England's failings?", The Guardian - The Sport Blog, 16th September 2010, available from: http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/blog/2010/sep/16/england-fabio-capello?CMP=tw_t_qu
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