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Prof. S P

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The Dawkins Rationale

“When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion, it is called religion” (Pirsig, 1974).

Organized religion has benefitted from years and years of special treatment. From medieval times when the churches made the rules and taught science to the last few decades, religions imposed on us explanations for creationism, why we are here and what comes after life. The leaders of religions have enjoyed riches, decided on the rules that people were to follow and were allowed to extinguish naysayers, let alone come under public questioning. It is likely that since the dawn of the scientific revolution, people’s trust in religion has dwindled. Recently, in the last few decades, people have been probing the creation of the Earth and even the existence of a god. One such group of non-believers that have emerged is the atheists and at the helm of atheism is Richard Dawkins. Simply put, atheism is the belief that there is no god and Dawkins is set out to argue just that. In this essay, reasons why we do not need religion will be argued from a Dawkins perspective.

First of all, it is important to understand the protection and respect religions have had even still to this day. When an individual dares to be outspoken against religions, people are appalled and surprised at the naysayer- as if the churches and likelihood of god are too sacred of a topic. What gives religions the immunity from scrutiny more so than, for

example, politics, law or science? They dictate how we behave in this life just as much. So it stands to reason that we, as logical and thoughtful human beings, would question the religious doctrines along with the law, science and politics that are the dominant factors in our lives. The special treatment of religious leaders goes as far to keep priests out of jail when they are caught for molesting young boys. A Catholic priest, Leo Landry, abused two boys in the 1950's and was sentenced to serve probation from his trial in 2004 (Carroll, 2004). On the other hand, in 2011, an Iowa man who is not a priest, Steve Robbins, was sentenced to four years in prison for sexually abusing two young girls in 2009 (Mehaffey, 2012). Furthermore, according to Wilbourn (1995), the common punishment for Catholic priests is a transfer to a new parish and to pray for forgiveness. Many incidents are just swept under the table, continuing the cycle of protection for the reputation of a religion. In an interview with Richard Dawkins on the Agenda with Steve Paikin (2007), Dawkins argues that there is nothing special about religion that entitles it to different treatment and further to that, he claims that it should be criticized just the same as a political opinion would.

Now that religion is opened up for discussion, we can take a look at some plausible explanations as to why people are religious at all. The strongest and most common reason is observed is indoctrination during childhood and tradition. Another reason that is substantiated by this author (when he used to be Catholic) was for fear of an eternity in hell. Also, people commonly look to religion when they are desperate or in need. We occasionally see a character on television humorously interlocking their fingers and getting down on their knees when they find themselves in dire straights. People also turn to religion to belong to an in-group; a sense of belonging as well as a social network is ob-

tained and this can give great comfort to those looking for it. Finally, religion can often fulfill the incompleteness and provide people with “answers” about the lingering life questions that are almost innate to us. To some, the aforementioned explanations as to why people are religious are enough to address the thesis of this essay - those people need religion.

For so long our moral code has been passed down from generation to generation through their respective religious texts. People used to look to their religions to tell them what is right and what is wrong. Thankfully though, that has diminished, at least, in Western culture. Our necessity for religion, in terms of an authority for laws and morals is small. As many positive morals that the Christian Bible professes, the Old Testament also advocates stoning women to death if they have sex before marriage. Contrary to that, the Bible offers a morally rich story about the adulteress who was caught and brought before Jesus by a group. He stated, “Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone” (John 8:7), and everyone around just left. However, regarding a disobedient wife, in his Qur’an, Muhammad dictates to first, admonish them; second, refuse to share your bed; and third, to beat them (Qur’an, 4:34). This is still the rule today. At least in Western culture, these violent behaviors are illegal and immoral. The Bible does have some strong moral stories, but Dawkins argued that since much of the world does not stone or beat people for punishment, they obviously get their moral code from somewhere other than religion. On that note, when one picks and chooses which teachings of these holy books to live by, they are further confirming that their moral code comes from other places as well, therefore eliminating the need for religion overall for what is right and wrong (Agenda, 2007). Additionally, there have been groups such as the North Ameri-

can Indians who have inhabited the Americas and survived for a very long time without religion. They did, however, have impressive ethical codes that were passed through the generations exclusively through stories that were usually metaphors.

What has religion done for us that nothing else could? After much consideration, an answer could not be found. As pointed out before, religion certainly has its merits such as camaraderie (a sense of belonging), possible answers as to what our purpose is, its nature is to spread love, and to behave appropriately or else face fire and brimstone. Despite religion's merits, one can still obtain every one of them from other sources. It seems that the atrocities that are committed in the name of religion far outweigh the positive aspects that it offers. As Robert Buckman states in "Good Without God" (2007), if you were visiting from another planet, you would find human behavior to be very peculiar. He was implying that religion is a strange construct to anyone that is not used to it. The opposite of what religion has done *for* us is: what has religion done to hurt us as a species? As Richard Dawkins addressed this perfectly in his website article, *Imagine No Religion*,

Imagine, sang John Lennon, a world with no religion. Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Kashmir dispute, no Indo/Pakistan partition, no Israel/Palestine wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no Northern Ireland 'troubles'. Imagine no Taliban blowing up ancient statues, lashing women for showing an inch of skin, or publicly beheading blasphemers and apostates. Imagine no persecutions of the Jews - no Jews to persecute indeed, for without

religion they would long ago have intermarried with the surrounding populations (Dawkins, 2006).

It may be impossible to ever understand the magnitude of the events in this small quote; or as Dawkins urges the reader to imagine the world without these religiously motivated horrors. The answer is that we humans could have done without these things and can do without the similar things that are still happening to this day. Therefore, we can do without religion because it was largely, the motivator.

When arguing the validity of religion or even the existence of god, the postmodernist perspective offers some valid ideas and points out that nothing about the argument is cut-and-dry. As stated by Grassie (2003), postmodernism is what came after modernity and modernity stemmed from the Enlightenment period with its move from religious doctrines to science and free thinking. He further states that in postmodernism, there are no absolute truths. Science can even partially agree with that because science is not science unless there are new things to figure out. Therefore, what is unexplainable and not scientifically endorsed right now, could be fully understood and be considered science tomorrow - just as it has in the past. When one ponders whether there is a god or need for religion, the postmodernist would state that everyone has their own truth and that if one believes in god, then it is true- for that person. The postmodernist would argue that there are no absolute truths about religion and the subtext within that argument is that anything can be possible too. This theory is most helpful with tolerance of other people's beliefs and refraining from passing judgement on one another. It is really one perspective for a total answer to this whole essay. As valid an argument as this is though, it is also where it falls apart. Having no absolute truth or a truth for every person is what re-

religious wars and various forms of persecution are all about. It is one group who does not like another group's truth and soon they want to kill the other. This is where Dawkins and postmodernism intersect. In a talk he gave, posted on Youtube as "What if you're wrong?" (2006), Dawkins was asked if there is a chance that he is wrong about his standpoints on religion and the existence of god. His answer was one that is similar to a postmodernist answer. His reply was that anybody could be wrong. Furthermore, he commented that there are many different religions all believing differently and what makes any of them right? That thought suggests that either no one is right or we are all wrong in our beliefs. Considering all of that, a postmodernist would not assert either way that there absolutely is a god or need for religion.

Overall, we do not need religion. For too long it has been protected from real criticism and as that protection lifts, people will begin to understand the inconsistencies, contradictions and senseless acts carried out in the name of religion. Although, the positive characteristics of religion will hopefully remain and come out of the ashes as people become enlightened. However, religion is not the be-all-end-all and one can find the same positive traits that religion offers in many other areas of life. A most important example is our sets of moral values. The postmodernist standpoint is an accepting, all-encompassing one. It answers the need for religion by understanding each individuals subjective need. The problem, however, for those that want solid answers, the postmodernist approach is just not adequate enough. One can inform the religious of all these facts against what they believe and they will not be able to successfully refute any of them. Without fail, they have no answer, but to just have faith.

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