The Problems with the Ethics of Various Religions.

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Many people believe that their own particular religions are absolutely correct; however, atheists such as me have noticed that religions do not possess a monopoly on correctness. Frequently religions and their followers behave very unethically toward those considered to be “infidels,” or nonbelievers. An examination of religious ethics is incomplete unless it considers the positive as well as negative aspects of religion and also the fact that that religions are products of people, and no group of people can ever behave in a manner which is completely ethical for any extended period of time.

The behavior of some members of assorted Christian religions forms a pattern I frequently experience. Members of various Christian religions recurrently castigate my assertive atheistic ideology. Such people generally characterize my resistance to religious conversion as some form of close-mindedness and complain that it is unfair and unintelligent of me not to listen and accept their religious beliefs as fact. I generally respond by explaining that a fact in science is some information which was measured. Religious concepts are not measurable; therefore, they are not facts. When attempting explanation of my beliefs, I experience an intolerant response and often a threat that I might eventually end up in some place such as hell. One potential basis for this behavior is a supposed statement from God in The Covenant at Mount Sinai, “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,” (Covenant, 2002).
It is not fair that I am expected to admit Christianity is the one correct path in life when this is opposed diametrically to my view that God is not the creator of the universe. Christians do not at all wish to hear my views and yet I am expected to convert to theirs. This is an example of hypocrisy sometimes practiced by those of a religious faith, and serves to prove the concept that not all ethical, moral behavior is monopolized by any particular religion(s).

Another interesting example of the conflict between religion and atheism is the fight in classroom discussions between Sarah, Melissa, and me. The entire dispute is extremely amusing and I try to have some fun arguing in favor of my atypical perspective regarding the nature of our existence. However, analyzing the argument more directly, some common elements of the argument between Christianity and Atheism can be discovered. Namely, there is no way to measure the truth of either argument, and the interlocutors are not willing to change opinions on the issue; therefore, the only solution is some form of agreement to disagree, or perhaps a fusion of the two perspectives. This is an important discovery that reflects the potential positive aspects of religious tolerance: arguments over a correct religion cannot be settled, and people need to be able to cooperate on such issues.

The perspective of the Islamic religion toward “infidels” is intensely more negative that that of most Christian religions. In Islamic countries, killing those who are even slightly outside the boundaries of various church policies is a commonly-accepted practice. The religious scholars in the Islamic states appear entirely undisturbed by the fact that noncompliance with the policies of
the state-mandated church can be very fatal to otherwise good, decent members of society. One example of this can be found in the Koran, “There is no compulsion in religion. Rectitude has been made clear from error,” (God Reveals Himself, 2002). This shows that intolerance for alternative religious perspectives is a very fundamental tenet of Islam. It is true that the meaning of this directive is dependent upon interpretation, but an atheist should certainly be concerned by this arrogant attitude toward alternative perspectives on the nature of our existence.

Buddhism is a religion which is more correctly termed a system of beliefs. The Buddhist attitude is that those who have not achieved success (enlightenment) shall be reincarnated; in essence, given a second (or third or etc.) chance to succeed in life. Buddhism is one of the least forceful religions. Buddhists do not threaten or pressure the “infidels.” In fact, many Buddhist ideas are rather practical and contributory to a successful existence. An interesting proclamation in the Dhammapada states, “...those who know few scriptures yet practice their teachings, overcoming all lust, hatred, and delusion, live with a pure mind in the highest wisdom. They stand without external supports and share in the joys of the spiritual life,” (Twin Verses, 2002). This shows that the Buddhists are not particularly concerned with the nature of a person’s religious system; contrariwise, they are rather practical.

The Buddhists have discovered a central idea from which other religions could stand to benefit. It is important for everyone to realize that moral, ethical behavior can come from many other sources besides religions. One great
example of this is from the Dhammapada, “People will blame you if you say too much; they will blame you if you say too little; they will blame you if you say just enough. No one in this world escapes blame,” (Twin Verses, 2002). This is a principle that explains the feeling one often experiences with religion: no matter which religious affiliation one belongs to, there will be someone of another affiliation who has or will criticize it. Escaping debate over religion is not possible; therefore, one must be prepared both to engage in and defend one’s beliefs in such debates.

In academic situations, it is important for people to realize that discussion of the differences and advantages of different religions is an unavoidable topic. Everyone should study the reasons for and history of his own religion so that he may be a resource from which others might learn about other systems of beliefs. In addition, it would be wise for those in academic situations to refrain from making judgments on the beliefs of others without having spent some time investigating the reasons for the beliefs possessed by the followers of a particular religion.
References

