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The Injustice of the Missionary

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Monotheist beliefs have traditionally regarded polytheist and atheist traditions as pagan or savage philosophies. Monotheist doctrine typically condemns these alternative theologies, prognosticating punishment for the sin of non-believers in hell during the afterlife. However, religion and morality are closely tied, sometimes indistinct concepts. Even though religious philosophy is used as a basis for interpreting moral law within monotheist communities, this does not mean that atheism is characterized by a lack of morality because it is not an organized religion. Similarly, atheism is not characterized by a complete lack of faith simply because that faith does not include God. Even if atheism and polytheism are truly pagan or savage systems of belief, both religion and morality are largely a function of upbringing, and have little to do with personal choice. An atheist cannot be blamed, nor take credit for choosing to be an atheist.

Of the three main monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, both Islam and Christianity condemn followers of other religions to never reach heaven, a universal concept of afterlife. Christian doctrine gives Christians missionary duty to convert non-believers and absolve them of their sin, as Pizarro tried to do for the Aztecs who he believed to be savages. Islam also contains a missionary element, as Shi'ite Muslims sought to convert Sunnis in holy war. Judaism, though it does not contain missionary policies, also contends that non-belief is to never reach God and heaven.

The concept of heaven is not unique to monotheistic tradition, however. Norse Valhalla and Greek Olympus are very similar polytheist concepts to monotheist afterlife. Even some atheists have faith that human souls go to a better world when their time on earth has been spent. Therefore the conflict between monotheist, polytheist, and atheist beliefs does not lie in argument about the existence of heaven, but the methods of reaching it. This is where the line between religion and morality becomes blurred.

The ten commandments dictate that adultery, murder, and covetousness are punishable

sins before God. Most atheists believe that adultery, murder, and covetousness are wrong or immoral acts punishable by other humans or the conscience of the person who commits the acts. Perhaps the only difference is that Monotheists choose to call the abstract idea of judge and punisher 'God' and atheists believe that humans are the judges and punishers. Even though the fundamental beliefs of Christianity and atheism are vastly different in terms of religion, the morality included in each that governs its followers' is virtually identical.

Both religion and morality have a foundation in faith, because certain aspects of religion and morality are unprovable. It cannot be proven that murder is wrong, when competition and natural selection are normal events in nature. Nor can it be proven whether or not man has an eternal soul. However, once certain beliefs of a religion or morality are established, its followers can structure their other beliefs based on these accepted truths. Once it is established that murder is wrong, it can be more easily established whether or not euthanasia and abortion are wrong.

Religion is often a means used to justify morality. Religion is a set of fundamental beliefs and faiths about the universe which governs people's actions. Far more inclusive than morality, which deals strictly with issues of right and wrong, religion deals with every issue in man's universe, attempting to explain such unexplainable issues as the nature of man's existence. Using the beliefs formed with religion, morality can begin to be justified, inescapably linking the two. A nearly universal belief is that a God created the universe. Whether it be Thor in Norse tradition or a Christian God, morals are described as means of reaching Him. Morals, defined in terms of religion, become a part of that religion and are strengthened by it. However, this does not mean that without an organized religion, one cannot justify or have a strong moral code.

For an atheist, moral values are justified using the context of the society in which they exist. Though an atheist's value system is not necessarily based on the values of society which are supposedly manifested in laws, it is strengthened by these laws. The atheist's moral code is also strengthened by the knowledge of comparable religious morality, though an atheist refuses to justify his own beliefs using those of any organized religion. The ideas in the Ten Commandments are not unique to Christianity, and atheists often use the document to support

their own belief. Though atheists do not have an organized religion to back up their morality, this does not mean that they cannot have strong faith in their morality.

Atheists are not lacking in faith even though they are lacking in organized religion. Atheists live in the same universe and experience the same unexplainable phenomena. Simply because they do not believe in God does not mean that they have explained their world in terms of science or reason. Some atheists do believe in the Big Bang Theory of the origin of the universe, but some also believe that the universe of matter and energy has always existed, it has just taken many different forms. Although scientists have 'proved' the big bang theory, science is simply a complex web of theories which help man understand his universe, technically an organized religion in itself, though it does not deal with abstract issues of morality.

Atheists form their beliefs using concepts from both science and other religions. Many atheists explain their universe purely in terms of science. Just as Creation is theorized but unproven, Big Bang believers place their faith in an unprovable idea. However, for some atheists, science is not the exclusive means to understanding the universe. Buddhist ideas are often adopted into atheist ideology. According to personal belief, man is perpetually reincarnated until a perfect form has been reached, although the perfect form is not God, but a complex form of energy. It is possible that these are simply two different names or concepts for the same reality, but most monotheistic doctrine is purist about the existence of a perfect God.

Polytheistic tradition includes the idea of a supreme being. Roman mythology placed Jupiter at the head of the Gods and Egyptians worshipped Ra as the ruler of the Gods. However, these beliefs are still condemned by Christians as non-belief. Not only do they include many different deities, but the deities are often given human-like faults and weaknesses. The Greek Zeus often submitted to pleasures of the flesh, coming down from Olympus to impregnate human women. Christians believe that God created man in his own image, but not that God has the same faults as man.

Assuming that monotheist condemning of atheist and polytheist belief is well founded, these beliefs are almost completely dependent on how one is raised. The majority of atheists

grow up in houses which do not practice any form of organized religion, just as Jews grow up in Jewish families who often practice religion on a daily basis and polytheist belief was taught among Greeks in verse and singing. Each person has little exposure to other ideas compared to those experienced during childhood.

Even if non-belief in one perfect God is a punishable sin before God, atheists and polytheists cannot be blamed for their non-belief. Each has very little choice in how he is raised and what beliefs he is taught and not taught. Nor can Christians take credit for belief in God, because Christians are raised under the same biased conditions as every other human being. They have just as little control as an atheist does. Fundamental beliefs are also difficult or impossible to change. Just as Christians are rarely converted to atheism, so are atheists rarely converted to Christianity. Even those that believe in God 'just in case He does exist' do not truly believe in God.

Atheism and polytheism are completely valid alternatives to monotheist tradition. Each exist or existed in substantially large populations and do not undermine society's values. The three different ideologies contain many of the same beliefs and morals, and none lack strong principles and faith. However, monotheist condemning of the others' traditions is unjustifiable because each person has little control over their own upbringing.