

Chapter 8 – What’s Wrong with Religion

In this chapter he argues that faith and religion are bad because faith denies the use of human reason and it leads to violence.

Here are the reasons why Dawkins is so anti-religion:

(a) Fundamentalist religion subverts science

Some Christians do seem to want to avoid science for fear of what it will do to their faith. Such people are wrong. However, Dawkins is fundamentally wrong. Science exists primarily because of the Christian worldview that there is a creator God who put order into the universe.

In contrast, this what the late Melvin Calvin, Nobel Prize winner for Chemistry back in 1961 said:

As I tried to explain the origin of this conviction [that is that the universe is orderly] I seemed to find it in a basic notion discovered 2000-3000 years ago, and enunciated first in the Western World by the ancient Hebrews. Mainly, that the universe is governed by a single God and is not the product of the whims of many gods each governing his own province according to his own laws. This monotheistic view seems to be the foundation for modern science.

It is ironic that the institution which has provided Dawkins with an education, an academic career, and a platform for his writings, was founded by Christians and has to this day the following motto in Latin on its coat of arms: *Dominus Illuminatio Mea*. These are the opening words of Psalm 27, which may be translated as 'the Lord is my light'.

(b) Absolute beliefs lead to intolerance. For example, homosexuality is said to be a sin

In this section Dawkins quotes stories of people treating homosexuals badly. Some of these come from the Taliban. Some of these are from earlier in the history of the UK when society at large (not just Christians) was against homosexuality.

Sadly, Christians have often been homophobic. However, it is possible to believe something is wrong without treating the people who disagree with you badly. Believing the bible doesn't make a person hate homosexuals (or thieves, gossips, hotheads, or anyone else for that matter). It might be worth remembering Paul's words to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

(c) Religion is cruel as it is against abortion and euthanasia, therefore causes suffering

In this section Dawkins picks on the examples of anti-abortion extremists who shoot doctors and blow up abortion clinics. He is right to condemn these people. Murder is never justified in these cases. However, just because they use some parts of the bible to justify their practices doesn't mean they are right to do so, or that the bible is therefore bad or untrue.

Some people have used scientific advances to create chemical weapons and atomic bombs. Does that mean science is bad? Of course not!

Aside from that, he also argues that the biblical view on abortion and euthanasia causes suffering and is wrong. In reply, it should be noted that allowing abortions and euthanasia also causes suffering. And on what basis can his moral system be said to be "better" than ours? Given that he denies the existence of God he can have no objective, absolute moral standard, so he has no objective basis for claiming his views are better than ours.

(d) Moderation in faith fosters fanaticism

In this final section he cites cases of terrible, dangerous behaviour among religious people. For example:

- Christians who long for nuclear war so that Christ will come again.
- Religious suicide bombers (although he lists the Tamil Tigers among these and they are a mainly secular organisation)¹
- Religions persecuting people of different faiths.

Some of that is true, as we see in militant Islam. But of course, it is not *necessarily* true. And it can be equally true of dogmatic atheists. So for example, look how Christians are treated in what is probably the last atheist state on earth – North Korea.

The fact is that people of religion or people of no religion can do horrific things. Yes, religion can be used for bad, but then so can science. Just because scientists designed atomic bombs, does that make science bad? Of course not! The common factor is not religion, but human beings. What all this shows us is that there is a problem with us as human beings, and not with religion or science themselves.

One of Dawkins' key beliefs is that faith is dangerous because faith means not questioning. He says, "Christianity, just as much as Islam, teaches children that unquestioned faith is a virtue."²

¹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p303

² Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p306

Sadly, there are some Christians like this. But actually, Christianity itself does not teach us to stop thinking. Quite the opposite! Doubt is not frowned upon but allowed to be expressed openly. Just look at the Psalms if you don't believe me! And faith always has its reasons and is not blind. In fact, Christians are commanded to be able to give a reason for the hope that we have. (1 Peter 3:15).

Conclusion

The three main underlying problems with Dawkins' arguments in this chapter are as follows:

1. He takes extreme example and extrapolates these to all religions and all religious people
2. He assumes that "faith is believing something in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence." But he has no evidence to back up this assertion. In fact, all the evidence from Christian theology goes against him on this.
3. He seems to assume all religions are basically the same.

The best answer to this chapter is to actually live godly, wholesome Christian lives. That will silence our critics ultimately.

Live such good lives among the pagans that although they accuse you of doing wrong they may see your good needs and glorify God on the day he comes to visit us. (1 Peter 2:12)