

If You Thought Religion was a Bad Idea ... Check Out Atheism

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In a 2012 interview with *Esquire*, Ridley Scott, director of the movie *Prometheus*, stated that 'the biggest source of evil is, of course, religion.' This seems to be the trendy thing to say nowadays, but is it true? Has anyone actually looked into this? What kind of track record does atheism have when we compare it with, say, Christianity?

Rudolph Rummel, former professor of political science at the University of Hawaii and 2007 winner of the International Association of Genocide Scholars' Award for Distinguished Lifetime Contribution to the Field of Genocide and Democide Studies and Prevention, and frequently nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, has done an enormous amount of research in the area of mass killing.¹ What does his research show when we compare Christianity with atheism?

This article should by no means be understood as an attack against, or defense of, individuals who identify themselves as atheists or Christians. There are many atheists who live good, upstanding lives thanks to their God-given moral intuitions.² There are also many self-professed Christians who live despicable lives.³ The objective of this article is compare authentic Christianity with the track record of atheistic societies to see which is a greater force for good or evil, and why this may be so.

A. Atrocities credited to Christianity

The phrase 'Christian atrocities' seems like an oxymoron given the teachings of Jesus, which form the core of authentic Christianity, but let us put that thought on hold for a moment. The Crusades and the Inquisition are famous events of large-scale killing performed by people who were, supposedly, Christians. Witch burnings were largely driven by mediaeval superstition, but pop beliefs today also attribute those to Christianity, so they shall be included here as well. What was the total death tally?

Rummel's research yields the following estimates ...

Crusades: 1,000,000
Spanish Inquisition: 350,000
Witch Hunts: 100,000
Total: 1,450,000 killed⁴

¹ <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/PERSONAL.HTM>

² Romans 2:14-16

³ Matthew 7:21-23

⁴ <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/DBG.TAB3.1.GIF>

Is this authentic Christianity in action or could it be that it is actually a perversion of Christianity? More to the point, is this what Jesus actually taught? If Christianity is merely a man-made religion that evolves over time, then there would be no objective grounds to argue that a person who claims to be a Christian is not actually an *authentic* Christian accordingly whatever form the religion of Christianity takes at the time. If, however, Christianity is true, that is, Jesus Christ is actually God and it is He who defines true Christianity, then there can be a difference between authentic Christianity as defined by Christ and perverse Christianity as represented by individuals and groups who do not follow the central teachings of Christ.

Ask any atheist today what Jesus of Nazareth's two great commands were, upon which the entirety of God's moral law is based, and they are unlikely to know. The two commands were, love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself (and by 'neighbor', He made it clear that it included every human being on the planet, especially your enemies).

So how does killing 1,450,000 people fit with loving your neighbor as yourself? Next time you hear someone mindlessly spouting the trendy, 'religion is the source of evil', objection, ask the person if that applies to the teachings of Jesus Christ. It might also be enlightening to discuss Christ's contention that not all people who claim to follow God actually do. "You will know them by their fruit," Jesus said.

There are quack doctors in this world. Does that entail that all of medical science is quackery? or that *all* doctors are quacks? If a group both claims to be Christian and blatantly contradicts and violates Christ's two great commands, does it logically follow that they represent authentic Christianity? Actions speak louder than words. A person who believes that the motivation for the slaughter of the crusades, inquisitions and witch hunts was the teachings of Jesus Christ has either abandoned critical thinking or is woefully ignorant of what Jesus actually taught.

Why would people commit atrocities in the name of something good? It is an ugly fact of human nature that people will do terrible things to each other while attempting to justify it in the name of whatever society holds in high regard at that time. New atheists such as Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens are either blissfully naive on human nature or, just maybe, their hatred of a God they insist does not exist has led them into intellectual dishonesty on this matter.

It is a simple minded chap indeed who naively believes that a person or group can carry out mass murder in the name of Christianity and, at the same time, be obeying Christ's great command, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself'. Jesus said that on the final Judgment Day, many will say to Him, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and in your name perform many

miracles?', but Jesus will respond, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!'⁵

B. Atrocities of atheistic societies

Christopher Hitchens' book *God is Not Great*, is astounding for its colossal omission of the atrocities of the atheistic societies of the 20th century. One could truthfully say that all people who drink water die, but it would be dishonest to not mention the fact those who do *not* drink water die sooner.

There are many countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, which currently have a large percentage of atheists but who also enjoy a significant Christian population and/or Judeo-Christian ethic. Predominantly atheist societies do not exist in history until the 20th century, when several arose that held atheism as a central core value. It was vigorously promoted by their governments, relentlessly taught in the schools and acted out in their policies and decisions. Furthermore, in these societies, there was a concerted attempt to weed out all religion and create a predominantly atheistic state.

Notable leaders among these atheistic societies were the U.S.S.R. and the Peoples Republic of China. As for the zealous promotion of atheism, it would be hard to beat the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and North Korea, though their populations were considerably smaller. All four atheistic countries had a strong, government driven campaign to promote and teach atheism and, in all four cases, slaughtered, starved, tortured or imprisoned those who believed in God. These four states represent the closest thing history has had to a purely atheistic society, so it would be informative to look at them to see how their mass killing tally compares.

The results are in. These four states have a horrific record of violation of human rights. As for sheer numbers slaughtered, communist China and the U.S.S.R. have the largest mass murder record in all of human history. Rummel's research looks at the number of deaths through *democide*,⁶ which includes genocide, politicide and mass murder. His findings, heavily peer reviewed, are as follows:⁷

China (Mao Soviets, 1923-1948): 3,468,000

Peoples Republic of China (1949-1987): 76,702,000

U.S.S.R. (1917-1987): 61,911,000

Total murders for U.S.S.R. and communist China: 142,081,000

Although a relatively small country, it is also worthy of mention that the totally atheistic Khmer Rouge killed an astounding 31% of its own population in Cambodia.

⁵ Matthew 7:21-23

⁶ <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/DBG.CHAP2.HTM>

⁷ <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/20TH.HTM>

Some atheists have attempted to shift the blame to Communism instead of atheism, but what was it about the type of Communism practiced by those four states that incited them or permitted them to such unprecedented slaughter? There are communal societies today, such as the Hutterites, which are exceptionally peaceful, but there is a fundamental philosophical difference between them and the form of Communism practiced by the societies just mentioned the Hutterites have a strong Christian belief in God. Furthermore, those communist countries that were less zealous in eradicating religious belief, such as Cuba and Nicaragua, had a far lower tally of mass murder. The more atheism was promoted, taught and enforced, the greater the atrocities. Looking at the numbers, even perversions of Christianity over a thousand years have a killing record that pales into insignificance in comparison to just 70 years of atheistic democide.

These atheistic societies killed and imprisoned for two reasons. First, they killed and imprisoned and tortured directly for the sake and promotion of atheism. To clarify, they regarded belief in God as competition or a threat to atheism, so they executed or imprisoned millions of religious peoples in order to advance atheism. Secondly, under atheism, there are no grounds for morality that cannot be changed by humans in power to mean whatever they decree. There is no final accounting after death for ones moral decisions, no objective moral law that transcends civilizations, history and geography and no right or wrong other than what those in power decide it to be. This is the horror of atheism which frees people up like nothing else to kill, torture, trample human rights and practice atrocities all under the belief that there is no God who will ultimately call every person to account for what they have done in this life.

The track record of history shows that it is atheism that is the greatest source of unrestrained evil, by far. Authentic Christianity, centered around the two core activities of loving God and loving ones neighbor as oneself, actually restrains evil and promotes good.

C. Social benefits of Christianity vs. Atheism

An article in *Macleans* magazine, titled 'Do atheists care less' summarized the findings of Statistics Canada data. The results revealed that atheists do, in fact, care less about the well being of society in general. The average annual donations of churchgoers were over three times that of the rest of the population and they put in twice as many hours of community volunteering as the non churchgoers. An atheist charity launched to showcase the charitable tendencies of atheists and humanists had raised, four months after its launch, a pathetic \$18,760 from its 447 members which, the article pointed out, was about what just 18 church goers give in one year.⁸

⁸ 'Do Atheists Care Less?', *Macleans*, 2010/05/06

Research has also shown that religious people tend to be more prosocial, a term for positive behavior that benefits other people at one's own expense.⁹ Atheist, Matthew Parris, wrote an article that discusses this characteristic in evangelical Christians. Here are four excerpts ...

Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa.

Christians black and white, working in Africa, do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write, and only the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it.

The Christians were always different. Far from having cowed or confined its converts, their faith appeared to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, an engagement with the world - a directness in their dealings with others - that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall.

Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.¹⁰

Next time you hear some trendy sage claiming that more people have been killed in the name of religion than anything else, ask that person if they have ever looked into the track record of an atheistic society. Ask them if they know what Jesus actually taught.

D. Why do atheistic societies fall over the moral precipice?

It seems that the atheistic societies mentioned earlier in this article carried out mass democide for two reasons, as a method to advance the cause of atheism by wiping out theism as the competition and, second but maybe a greater factor in the end, as a consequence of having no objective grounds for morality. I will briefly expand on each.

As mentioned earlier, a central core belief of the four communist societies credited with mass democide was atheism. It was vigorously taught in the education system, rigorously enforced in day to day life, was a requirement for advancement at all levels in those societies, and was a foundational factor in their philosophy and policies. The objective was a pure atheistic, communal society and, within that context, theism was a competing view that could not be tolerated. Thus, enormous

⁹ Norenzayan and Shariff, 'The origin and evolution of religious prosociality', *Science*, (2008), vol. 322, 58-62

¹⁰ Matthew Parris, 'As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God', *TimesOnline*, December 27, 2008.

numbers of theists were imprisoned, tortured and killed, directly for the cause of atheism, eliminating its competition.

The second reason these atheistic societies carried out such unprecedented democide may be more devastating in the long term. One of the attributes of God is that He is perfectly good, or *maximally excellent*, that degree of excellence beyond which it is not logically possible to be more excellent. Thus, God provides objective grounds for moral rules that transcend human civilizations, history and individuals. If there is no God, then one is left only with ones own God-given moral intuitions. These internal moral rules can enable an atheist to live a good life until he or she wakes up one day and begins to wonder what the grounds for her moral intuitions are. Even the 'no harm' principle of acting in a way that brings the least harm to people disintegrates in the face of a godless world in which survival of the fittest is better than an overpopulated world competing for dwindling resources.

Moral rules or laws should act as a guardrail that restrains the individual and societies from plunging over the moral precipices that are a sad fact of human history. To do this, morality must be anchored to something that is both external to humanity *and* maximally excellent. If there is no God, then morality is defined by society and, thus, is subject to the whims and trends of what that society wants. The chilling result is that for an atheistic society, morality becomes like a guardrail that society carries in its own hands, attached to nothing other than itself. As a society drifts, so does its portable moral guardrail, with nothing to restrain that society from eventually drifting over the moral precipice.

To summarize why purely atheistic societies are so dangerous, they not only killed for the cause of advancing a purely atheistic society, but their moral guardrail has no grounds. Thus, extraordinary democide can result, because a portable, hand-carried moral guardrail is no guardrail at all.