

# Religion;

*What is It Good for?*

An essay by

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What if I told you there was something good about religion? You might ask, “is it the sense of community one gets from belonging to a church?” Or, “is it the moral code?” Perhaps, you might be wondering, “it's the transcendence people feel, right?” Well, not exactly. I know that some of you might be thinking I've lost my mind. And some who are reading this might think I'm somehow a religious person. You need to read on. The fact is that there is something valuable to us that religions have to offer. Each of those points are actually products of the singular thing of value, about which I'm teasing you. Okay, so what it all boils down to is the worldview. Every religion offers a worldview. But, I think we can be very well served by having a worldview as well. I know, I know. What am I thinking? “*Religions have something good about them?*” Are you seriously saying this? Well, let me explain.

Religions are bad. They are the root of most – though honestly, not all – evil. Whenever someone claims that religions do some good, they are trying to justify having religions but the fact is that any good that religions do is far outweighed by the harm they also do. Indeed religious worldviews are seriously dangerous and hurtful to all of humanity, let alone the world. And it's not a particular religion's worldview which I think is good. Quite the contrary, actually. It's the idea of a worldview, the idea of having a philosophical model by which we live our lives, which I believe to be good.

Obviously religions have a very seriously flawed premise on which each of them has based their worldview. So, it's not that which is good, the premise I mean. The idea that there exists any such thing outside of nature – a supernatural realm, including a heaven or hell, and afterlife –, is completely unsupported. As premises go, assertions that there is a realm of existence – and beings living there, like gods, angels, souls and whatever other fiction – which is not even hinted at by a single shred of evidence is as bad as flawed premises for a worldview gets. There are many types of worldviews, some of which are good or bad. Some worldviews are also more seductive than others. Most worldviews have some method to propagate them, which is built in. In Christianity, for example, the believers are taught that “*only through believing in Jesus can people be saved from hell.*” It's clearly a contrived scare tactic. They're taught that they ought to missionize for their religion, to go out and tell people about it and try to convince others to join them. In Judaism, though, missionizing wasn't really part of the religion. Instead the idea was to have as many children as possible. Christianity and Islam

both ran with that same excessive breeding policy, but each added their own twist as a secondary method to propagate the religion. But, there are other ways to propagate a worldview.

I believe that employing other means of propagation can be far better than the approach the religions generally take. There is a basis, in the religious worldview, for the reasoning behind the breeding competition. They believe that some god created the universe for them. In Christianity, the concept is called “Dominionism”, in which they claim humans have a “*god-given right*” to dominate the world. But, this view neglects reality. The world can only support so many people. Earth is actually at it's full capacity for humanity. So, in reality, breeding the worldview is not a tenable practice. It is clear that there are so many children born, who are put up for adoption. There is very real and desperate need. Adoption, as a means to propagate a worldview can proverbially 'kill two birds with one stone'. One could be to promote the adoption of children, instead of breeding. By adopting children – likely born of religious people – one can teach the child to be rational, instead of religious. Thereby slightly diminishing the number of people who will have a backward and harmful worldview. Clearly the impact could be great if many rational people took this approach. Additionally, it would increase the number who likely hold a progressive and good worldview. All the while, also being a proactive measure toward curbing the overpopulation of our planet. Another could be to set the example that inspires people to take on the worldview. If your worldview directs you to be charitable, to have a strong work-ethic, to be rational and logical, to be honorable and moral, to pursue the truth scientifically, to be kind and generous, to be intellectually honest, and to always improve yourself, it will be noticeable. It will make you a model, by which others will be inspired. Such a worldview, by your own behavior, would prove itself to be worthwhile having. It should certainly speak for itself, that religious worldviews push people to accept them with threats of eternal suffering and promises of eternal rewards, compared to a worldview that does no such a thing.

By this point you're probably wanting a clarification of just what is a “worldview”. It's fundamentally a uniform way of looking at the world and life. It's a personal outlook on the world. It informs how a person interprets the actions and words of others, and indeed all of the world. There's a reason why it's called that, after-all. A worldview is a philosophical system, or a model. It's a system of values, beliefs and attitudes, by which people live their lives. The reason I'm interested in worldviews is that everyone has one in some form or another, regardless of whether each part of it is intelligibly

connected. Fundamentally, every person thinks philosophically to some degree. Granted most people are not particularly active about it. Indeed, the large percent of people are not even aware that they have a worldview, or what that means. Most people tend to think about something in a philosophical manner only once in a while, and then without it dawning on them that it is philosophical. But, when they do they usually derive some principle which guides them. Though, usually, when most people derive that principle it doesn't occur to them how they're doing so. For most people, the idea just comes as a realization or they encounter the idea and like it. Since worldviews are a philosophical product, a serious problem arises when people haven't coherently connected the various parts. But, a worldview addresses many issues, like how it is that we know what we know. That is, in philosophical terms, an epistemological question. Religious answers tend to be that a supposed force outside of nature reveals the information to the individual. Even if one doesn't think about or realize that he/she has a worldview, that philosophy is nonetheless illustrated when one says something like "*god has a plan for you*".

Though a worldview can be bad, good or indifferent in many ways, it's still useful. Even a bad worldview gives structure of a sort to one's life. But, obviously I cannot morally argue for holding bad philosophies, and that's what religions offer. The religious worldviews often implicate themselves as immoral when the opinion is that there is another chance to live again. The very idea of a life after death necessarily diminishes the value, the sanctity, of this life. It suggests that suffering is acceptable because those poor victims, whom we've ignored, will be given paradise for eternity. Unless, of course, they happened to not believe in the correct god. The religious view is that ignorance is bliss. The religious view is that religious belief is sacred. The religious view is that morality is seriously concerned with pleasure and desire, our thoughts, our self-agency and some deity's authority, rather than human suffering. At the core of the problem with religious worldviews, inescapably, is the premise that something outside of nature exists, let alone a god. It's an unproven and unprovable, untenable and unsupported claim. And it is that claim which is the basis of all of the rest of the worldview.

I believe a secular option can be developed for non-believers to have the advantage of their own worldview. A philosophical model which is based on science as the foundational premise. I believe that worldviews are useful and beneficial, but not just any will do. A good worldview would

have to be concerned with genuine morality, instead of unrealistic and delusional claims of morality. A morality concerned with suffering rather than satisfying the ego of a fictional character. A morality concerned with improving the human condition for all, rather than suppressing mere disagreement. Indeed, such a secular worldview would need to demand that one's beliefs be based on evidence and logic, rather than obedience and wishful thinking.

I have been working on such a secular worldview. I believe a good philosophical model will help people to live meaningful, healthy and happy lives. It must be the purpose of such a worldview that people are not led to confusion, misery and immorality. Religions have done that for thousands of years. It's time that we have a philosophical model that gives us the benefits of the structure and principles, but now based on reality instead of fantasy. While there are other philosophies out there, which non-believers can adopt, they all are limited in their scope. And some are just plainly bad. Take Ayn Rand's so-called "Objectivism", for example. A philosophy, which is in reality just an attempt at justification for "*rational selfishness*", as even Rand, herself, had put her idea. On the other hand, Humanism is a respectable and good Moral Philosophy. But, it doesn't address issues of Epistemology or Metaphysics – the questions of "what is there to know?" and "how do we know what we know?" Solipsism, while a Metaphysical philosophy is rather absurd. Could anyone reasonably respect the idea that all of the universe, including other people, are all in one's head? A figment of one's imagination. While it is Subjectivism, in the extreme, there are some people who favor the Objective view (not to be confused with Ayn Rand's silliness). Though they take their conclusions the other extreme. The idea that how one perceives the world around them is not important. But, it really is ridiculous to make such a suggestion. The reality is that it's true that the universe, and all that is in it, objectively exist and that the facts are as they are, regardless of personal opinion. While, at the same time, to deny the importance of subjective perception in informing how we act is woefully ignorant. After-all, it is only through one's particular individual understanding of the world that one can operate.

Any worldview must encompass all aspects of life and philosophy. Most philosophies, however, fail to cover the multiple fields, or fail to connect intelligently the different philosophies. Honestly, I can't see how one could support a humanist moral philosophy with an exclusively Solipsistic view on what exists and how we know anything. For that matter a Philosophy of the Mind, for Solipsists would be rather simple, in that the mind would be the extent of the universe. That is quite

silly, and not much good really. Any coherent, stable, useful and good worldview would necessarily have all the positions on the various issues be able to point back to the premises. The foundation of the life-philosophy should be able to draw from reality and establish axioms that support the upper-level conclusions. So that one can argue from the facts about the world, including biology, to support our own evolutionary history. And that from the evolution of humanity one can argue to support a secular moral view based on the necessities of societies, as part of our species' nature. This, and more, I believe is possible for those of us who do not believe in supernatural claims. In fact, this has been my work for the past several years. I've worked, and am still working, hard on this because I believe that to have such a secular worldview is actually a good thing. A good secular worldview provides the structure for our values, beliefs, attitudes, actions and makes up a significant part of who we are, individually.