

‘Is there a God?’

By Eleanor Higginson, 9d.

The argument of what creation proves is a very appropriate one to begin this essay on and a widely disputed one. Whilst “Genesis” gives us the much loved stories of “Noah’s Ark” and “Adam and Eve,” many people are not satisfied with the solutions they offer. For starters, how did Noah build such a large boat to fit every species in the world onto it? And isn’t the story of “Adam and Eve” quite sexist, suggesting that women were made out of Adam’s rib purely to be a companion to him? Most people today protest that these stories aren’t meant to be taken literally, they’re just metaphors. Like for instance, when it says that God made the world in six days, it doesn’t literally mean that God made the world in six days. It is instead meant to symbolise that the time it took God to make the world was no time at all to him, an eternal being. Truth be told, it’s a bit of a fishy explanation and once you start saying that bits of the Holy books shouldn’t be taken literally, a religious person’s explanation starts to disintegrate. But then along comes science with it’s theories of the big bang, natural selection and evolution: explaining not only how we got here but why nature is so beautiful and complex. These theories were the beginnings of people starting to realise that we don’t necessarily need a supernatural creator to explain things.

Another very important argument which many use to say why God doesn’t exist is the argument of pain. This is known as the inconsistent triad: God is omnipotent, God is omnibenevolent and evil exists. Perhaps the solution to this is that evil comes from us, not from God, and that He wanted to give us free will? However, this doesn’t entirely work: evil is natural to all human beings, and if God made us then he made the darkness inside of us too. Furthermore, this does not even cover all evil; evil can be divided into two types, moral and natural. Putting moral evil aside (murder, racism, assault, etc) we are still left with natural evil (earthquakes, cancer, starving children in the third world.) Atheists say that the amount of suffering that goes on in the world every day, every hour, every minute is so great that God must not exist because if he did then he would not allow it.

A theist’s comeback is that God put us on this planet to learn how to stop these things, by making Scientific discoveries and helping others through charity. Many also argue that life is a sort of test: it does not matter that bad things happen, it is how you react to them that counts. Plus, if there was no evil and everything was perfect then what would be the point of anything? Likewise, if we had never been cold we would not know what it was to feel warm, and if we had never been sad then we would not know what it was like to feel happy, there would be no good without evil. In the end though, to me none of these arguments can even begin to explain why, for example, so many people had to die in the recent earthquake in Haiti.

Looking at things in perspective, there really are more arguments for God not existing than existing. One which is very convincing is that how we as humans, have a tendency to want to know everything and make up stories to explain things when we get stuck. When the Ancient Greeks lived, they didn’t understand about how the seasons changed because the earth is orbiting the sun, so they made up the story about Thor and his hammer. They probably in all honesty believed this, because they couldn’t face admitting that they didn’t know the answer. So does this analogy work with us: have we made up stories about heaven, hell and resurrection because we can’t face the fact that we have no idea what happens after we die? It has also been

proven that people with higher IQs that went on to further education, are more likely to be atheists.

However, there are still some arguments for theism that cannot be cast aside. Such as the fact that every group of people that has ever lived on this planet has had a similar theory about the existence of at least one God. Religion has never been a question of knowledge or proof; it has been a question of faith, of something that perhaps cannot be studied under a microscope. This satisfies our need to thank someone for the wonder of our lives and the constant barrage of gifts and privileges that we enjoy. Religion also, putting aside the question of whether or not it is true, comforts people. If there was no religion, then what would there be to comfort the unhappy, the underprivileged, the dying and the bereaved?

The roots of morality have unquestionably come from religion. Considering they were written about 2000 years ago, "The Ten Commandments" are still very much what we base our system of justice on today. So this leaves us with the all important question of: if we dispose of religion, will we too be disposing of all our moral values? If there is no ulterior meaning to anything, then what is there to stop us from doing whatever we want, with no regard for the needs of others? One thing is certain: God provides us with an omniscient policing system. This is actually quite depressing: if we are only good because we are afraid of divine punishment, then there isn't much hope for us. Belief in God has definitely taught us that we should not kill, we should not steal etc, all of which are very important for retaining order in our civilisation. So should we really be so keen to dispose of it?

Although on the other hand, religion has given us bad things as well. We live in a time where extremism is a constant worry. Just go to any airport and you will see that we can no longer trust our fellow passengers not to blow up planes in an ill advised bid for martyrdom. And these disasters are done in the name of religion and were supposedly "God's will." This is not the only thing: remember the Crusades, the Holocaust, the constant modern day conflict over who owns Jerusalem? The vast majority of all wars, past and present, have been fought over religion: the seemingly never ending "my God is greater than your God" conflict. Theism can foster society's natural tendency to favour in-groups and shun out-groups. The traditional treatment of women in overly-religious cultures has also been appalling: in some parts of the world today a woman can be beaten to death for leaving the house without a male relative.

In conclusion, the verdict on whether or not there is a God, is still divided. I think that we have reached a time where we need to divide religion into two categories: the outdated and the still useful. Outdated religion is limiting religion, where outrageous claims such as that a woman is the property of her husband or that all followers of another religion will burn in Hell for eternity, are made. Furthermore, any religious belief that claims that questioning it, debating it, finding fault with it, is blasphemy or a sin should be scrapped. If you are not allowed to question something, then that is undoubtedly to cover for the fact that it is implausible anyway.

On the other hand, religion has given us some great cultures and The Bible, The Torah, The Koran etc, are by themselves beautiful pieces of literature. If we can celebrate the diversity of these cultures and ancient traditions whilst nurturing the good in ourselves and others, then religion is still useful. Religion only becomes a problem when it teaches us that we are merely puppets, here to serve an invisible creator, whose reasoning we are not even allowed to guess at because are not worthy, pure or holy enough. When it teaches that there are things that we cannot know and should not seek to find out then it is restrictive and outdated. We live today in a world where we are constantly pushing the realms of our knowledge further and further.

Even if there is no God, there is still hope for the human race. We have each other, we have the seeds of morality that exist inside every one of us and we have the power of knowledge. At the present time, we as a race have come a long way but still have an enormous way to go. Many mysteries, such as the one we have just discussed, are for the moment shrouded in darkness, but as time continues, we may eventually find the answers.