

Leishman's musings on morality not grounded in fact

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Regarding Rory Leishman's column, *Atheists can provide no moral instruction* (Dec.18)

To Leishman's unintended credit, he liberally quotes Oxford University professor, Richard Dawkins, who comments on the divisive role of religion in most of today's violent enmities. Dawkin's comments are in themselves a contribution to "moral instruction" Unwittingly, Leishman improves his own article, but disproves his own thesis by re-stating Dawkin's rational point of view.

Leishman says Josef Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot were all atheists. This statement is questionable in the case of Hitler, whose Nazi soldiers wore, on their uniforms, the insignia, "Gott mit uns"(God with us) . Certainly the other three leaders were ideologues who followed the extremes of communism as zealously as Osama bin Laden followed his own warped religious fanaticism. Leishman points out "these Godless tyrants killed more than 100 million people". Then he compares this horrific slaughter to that of the Spanish Inquisition during which, he claims, "fewer than 200,000 died".

Perhaps he should include on religion's side of the ledger, such religiously inspired events as the Crusades, the burning of so-called "witches" throughout history, the execution of the Anabaptists in the 16th and 17th centuries, the agonies of the religious war that accompanied the partition of India, the ongoing murders fueled by religious intolerance in Ireland, or the atrocities of the recent war in Kosovo. Consider also, the daily eye for an eye retaliation between the Israelis and Palestinians and the September 11 destruction of the World Trade Centres.

Leishman decries the "atheists who cannot account for the difference between right and wrong" because "they think all values are relative". It would be an interesting experiment to assemble a room full of atheists next to a room full of

theists and present each group with the same moral issues to discuss among themselves. These issues could include questions concerning the morality of birth control, female clergy, euthanasia, sexual orientation, capital punishment and other current moral issues. I suggest there would be much more unanimity among the atheists than among representatives of the hundreds of current religions which presently exist.

In other words, belief in God, even within a single religion, does not unite followers in one view of moral truths. Theists views of what is moral will be “relative” to their particular experiences and perceptions. Of course, it is for this reason that many hundreds of religions exist worldwide.

Leishman mistakenly argues Thomas Jefferson was guided by God when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. It seems that Lieshman is wrong on two counts in this claim. Jefferson was guided by Unitarian and humanist principles and it is assumed by most historians that the Declaration was written by committee. The influence that Jefferson did have was guided by his own intelligence and experience as the writers together pondered the kind of government that would provide the greatest freedom, security, and democracy for the people of United States of America. Above all, the personal papers of Jefferson subscribe to the principles of Humanist Societies throughout the world.