

The Atheist and the United States Government

The atheist argues that we cannot have any semblance of religion or religious practice in a public place such as a public school or a governmental institution. I have a hard time understanding why the atheist would care what anyone says about God.

If the atheist is being honest then he obviously does not believe there is a God. And, if he is certain there is no God, then he can be certain that no matter how much one talks about religion one cannot magically create a God.

The atheist cannot argue that it is wrong to make people believe in God, because by their own reasoning, believing in something does not mean that that something exists. How would one person's need for believing in a God change the way an atheist believes that there is no God? If the atheist is right then no harm has been done. If he is wrong then he might have the opportunity someday to acknowledge the existence of a God. In either case the believer's act of believing does no harm to the atheist act of not believing.

The atheist might argue that because he does not believe in a God he is naturally at odds with those who do believe in a God. This conflict, he might go on to argue, is exacerbated by the continuous need for the "believer in God" to pass his or her beliefs onto others.

As this continues, and more converts are won over to those who believe in a God, the atheist more and more finds him or herself at odds with a society that, in general, believes in God. It cannot be argued that the "believers" will almost always proclaim their beliefs in as public a way as possible. By doing so, the atheist might argue, the believer creates a greater wall of animosity between the atheists and the believers.

With this in mind the atheist might then argue that it is wrong for the government to sanction religious beliefs to the point of allowing people to express their beliefs on public property. It is wrong because it both defies the idea of separation of church and state, and it harbors a situation where one group of people is discriminated against by the other simply by espousing their beliefs which in turn causes there to be a greater disliking of those who do not believe. All this is done under the name and auspices of the government.

This, however, is not a legitimate reason not to discuss religion under public auspices. The fact that teaching a certain philosophy causes disagreement between two parties or entities does not make it wrong or unconstitutional to teach that philosophy. If that were true then it would be wrong for baseball to try to create a loyal fan base. Whenever fans of one ball team meet up with fans of another ball team there is bound to be fireworks, and in some cases fights may even break out.

In other words, differences of opinion happen in every aspect of life. The government has no place trying to ensure that differences are avoided. As a matter of fact it is those differences that the constitution tries to protect. Thus freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and so on. Each freedom is an acknowledgement that we all

differ in many ways. These freedoms allow us to have and live with those differences. Differences do indeed cause conflicts, but differences are protected nonetheless. Which brings me back to the idea of the atheist wanting to deny anyone to practice their religious beliefs in a public place. The atheist, for reasons stated above cannot effectively argue that to teach religion in schools causes an aggravation of the differing opinions, and therefore should be banned.

Onto the other argument then; that teaching religion in schools is a violation of the perceived constitutional requirement of separation of church and state. Before going further I will say that I do not believe the constitution in any way requires a separation of church and state. But that argument is for another paper such as this. For this paper I wish to argue that the atheist has no standing wherein to argue for the separation of church and state even if one did believe the constitution requires such separation.

What harm comes to the atheist, or his family, if the school teaches about the existence of a God? More to the point, what harm comes to the atheist or his family, if the school simply sanctions a prayer by one of its students before the beginning of a sports event?

Sanctioning a school prayer does not cause the creation of God. If He exists, which I believe He does, then he was there long before the prayer was uttered. If he does not exist before he will not exist afterward. The very concept of God requires an eternal existence. A god created at the inception of a prayer is no god at all. Rather it is a concept used as a crutch to get through life.

This is, to an extent, what the atheist believes. What harm, then, is there in allowing all the non-atheist their supposed crutch? He argues that he is offended by the public display of belief in God. But why? What does he base that suffering of an insult on? If there is a God then he must be a pretty kind one to be apparently willing to overlook the atheist non-belief and not strike him dead for his non-belief.

On the other hand, if there is no god then how can he possibly be insulted? If a person can dictate whether or not he is insulted then I feel I should be able to demand that all liberals not be allowed to talk, because almost every time they open their mouths I am insulted by something. Whether it be because of my religious beliefs, my fiscal beliefs, my political beliefs or whatever. They insult me daily.

So, the atheist cannot argue for separation of church and state because he was insulted by the religious act. Besides, what, about a religious act, can possibly harm an atheist. Again, if god does not exist then a religious act has no meaning and therefore is harmless. If God does exist then a religious act could bring salvation to the atheist; a much desired situation if indeed there is a God.