

Sample Affirmative Case

For thousands of years religion has played an integral role in countless societies by providing explanations for the phenomena around us and guiding difficult decisions. It helps simplify the complexities of the universe and establishes a moral compass for those trying to wrap their minds around existence and the baggage that comes with it. Though the differences between religions can be vast, they all provide a lens with which to understand the world and examine truth, therefore I affirm that on balance, societies benefit from religious belief and practice. By first interrogating the question that topic asks and then providing the ample benefits religion affords society, I will demonstrate the clear benefit religious belief and practices bestow on society.

First, we have to clarify the resolution a bit. Oxford Dictionary defines “on balance” to mean “with all things considered”. This means that the judge must account for all of the components of the debate and assigning them adequate weight and risk before making a decision. While that seems simple, the affirmative would like to provide a metric with which to weigh potential benefits or harms presented today. We believe that the judge should assess benefits or harms based on known consequences or results verified by data, not hearsay. For example, many will claim to be doing something others consider atrocious in the name of a particular religion. However, considering that to be a true result of genuine religious belief and practice is extraordinarily difficult given the multitude of issues that contribute to conflict like political, economic, and cultural factors. That is why today, we ask that the judge evaluate clear,

unequivocal data or observed and known effects of religion when assessing which side has made the stronger case *overall*.

That leads me to the first major benefit of religious belief and practice: health. Studies have repeatedly shown that religion can extend one's longevity and provides several other health benefits to regular practitioners. In fact, one study by Mark D. Regenerus in 2003 even shows that the gap between those who regularly practice religion and those who do not is as large as smokers and non-smokers¹. Another review of 250 epidemiological health research studies by Levin and Schiller in 1987 found that religious practice can reduce the risk of several diseases such as cancer and colitis². Although it seems fantastical, a study conducted at the Population Research Center in 1999 reported that religion creates a network of support with individuals in their community that encourages a healthier support network and promotes a healthier regular routine which can extend one's lifespan³. Having a healthier populace with a strong support network that encourages positive routines benefits society with healthier, stronger workers who in turn support and courage others within society.

In addition to healthier citizens, religion promotes and encourages people to excel. Mark Regnerus of the University of Austin Texas in two separate literature reviews in 2003 demonstrated that those from religious upbringings and in religious networks were more likely

¹ Mark D. Regnerus, "Religion and Positive Adolescent Outcomes: A Review of Research and Theory," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (June 2003), pp. 394-413

² Jeffrey S. Levin and Preston L. Schiller, "Is There a Religious Factor in Health?" *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (March 1987), pp. 9-35

³ Hummer *et al.*, "Religious Involvement and U.S. Adult Mortality."

to excel academically. Scores in math, reading, and science were all consistently higher in religious students or students who had parents that regularly attended religious services⁴. This academic achievement didn't only manifest itself in test scores either. Students often had more ambitious academic goals and aspirations if they were from religious backgrounds and felt they had a better chance of achieving them. Richard Freeman from Harvard University in 1985 also showed that this level of achievement is consistent regardless of background. He showed that inner-city youth also showed the same benefits from religious practice while it also decreased the likelihood for deviant behavior. This is because churches can provide a safe and positive community in many different children's lives that encourages growth and discourages short-term rebellious thinking⁵. The benefit from this kind of influence is clear: religious practice in at-risk youth can deter deviant behavior that can stifle growth and create a vicious cycle with the criminal justice system while simultaneously making an environment to create the next generation of ambitious dreamers and workers who will solve the next set of issues or questions facing society.

The final benefit I will present today is that religion teaches many to have a moral compass. Across all religions one thing that remains constant is that it encourages us to think about our actions and reflect upon them to decide if we made the ethical call. Even further, it forces us to ask difficult questions that do not always have a clear-cut answer. It also creates a

⁴ Mark D. Regnerus, "Religion and Positive Adolescent Outcomes: A Review of Research and Theory," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (June 2003), pp. 394-413

⁵ Richard B. Freeman, "Who Escapes? The Relation of Churchgoing and Other Background Factors to the Socioeconomic Performance of Black Male Youths from Inner-City Tracts," National Bureau of Economic Research *Working Paper* No. 1656, June 1985

formal space with trusted and respected community leaders who can help guide and promote critical thinking upon this difficult subject matter. Even for those who do not delve too deep into these kinds of philosophical pursuits, religions tend to provide a simple floor for moral teachings. For example, the 10 commandments from Christianity give very basic moral absolutes for religious practitioners to follow that benefit everyone in society. Having a clear foundation for moral principles is a key part of the behavior cited previously which deters bad behavior and can even curb crimes like murder.

While these morals can be an important deterrent of bad behavior, they also encourage positive behaviors as well. For example, many religions teach that we must help those in need. This often takes the form of charitable giving. Arthur Brooks from Syracuse University in 2006 shows that religious practice is often linked to higher rates of giving with religious respondents being 40% more likely to give than non-religious people. This was even controlled for factors such as education, income, gender, etc. Religious folks were also twice as likely to volunteer and 22% more likely to volunteer on a monthly basis⁶. An important note about this study as well is that it found that this trend continued regardless of what religion people identified with. This giving and volunteering translates into billions of dollars each year in the US to help the most vulnerable members of society and is sometimes deemed the second safety net by some. It also creates more conscientious citizens who continue to work to help disadvantaged people.

It is for these reasons, both material and immaterial that we strongly urge an affirmative ballot. Regardless of any critique of a particular religion or a particular practice, the data and

⁶ Arthur C. Brooks, "Compassion, Religion, and Politics," *Public Interest*, September 22, 2004, pp. 57-66.

evidence presented by the affirmative today should clearly demonstrate that on balance, religious belief and practice has benefitted society tremendously. Thank you.