

Sample Negative Case

German spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle once said “Religions, to a large extent, became divisive rather than unifying forces. Instead of bringing about an ending of violence and hatred through a realization of the fundamental oneness of all life, they brought more violence and hatred, more divisions between people as well as between different religions and even within the same religion.” Although religions may provide an insular community for some, on balance, it provides more harms by creating strong divisions between groups in society and creating dogmatic followers with disproportionate influence. Today, I will present my case for why on balance, societies do not benefit from religious belief and practices. First, we will begin by analyzing what exactly the resolution asks and giving the judge a way to evaluate and compare arguments, then we will discuss why we believe societies do not benefit, and finally we will conclude with a few final points for the judge to consider.

By asking us to evaluate the effect of religion “on balance”, the resolution asks us to weigh all relevant factors. The negative believes this means that we should get a much broader scope of argument than simply small, personal benefits that some practitioners get. This should cover both effects within society and between different societies and how those weigh against any benefit the affirmative may win. Finally, we also believe that when discussing the extremes that religion may cause, discussing intent is futile. We must look to how people are able to use religious beliefs or practices to influence others’ whether that’s for good or bad.

That brings us to our first major contention: conflict. Although many religions build a community for believers, they have claws and fangs bared for those that fall outside of that

community. Religious belief and practice can create personal division and an “us vs. them” mentality. According to Deidre McPhillips from US News in 2018, “The divisions created by religion are deeper and potentially more harmful than those formed through other aspects of identity such as race, nationality or political affiliations because they confront individuals with differing opinions on the ultimate purpose of life.”¹ Those divisions expand beyond personal conflict within communities and can begin creating material conflict across nations. McPhillips continues, “As a radical sect of Buddhist nationalists persecute the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict wages on and a film challenging the Orthodox Church spurs violent protests in Russia, it seems that asserting sovereignty is the only thing the world's religions can agree on today. In a recent Best Countries survey of more than 21,000 people from all regions of the world, the majority of respondents identified religion as the ‘primary source of most global conflict today’.”

This divisive role that religion can play has historically created many conflicts which has resulted in countless loss of human life. In the 20th century alone, Luc Reyhler in 97, a UNESCO chair for intellectual solidarity and Sustainable Peace Building and PhD in international relations from Harvard University, points to 24 different wars that erupted with religious elements being a core cause. These conflicts involve Buddhists, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Sunnis, Shiites, native religions, and more². This demonstrates that the issue is often more than specific ideologies that religions espouse, but more often it is the very divisions that they create that

¹ Deidre McPhillips 2018, Data Editor, US News, “Religion Needs a Savior,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2018-01-23/tribal-divisions-created-by-religion-most-harmful-in-global-conflict-experts-say>

² Luc, International Journal of Peace Studies Vol 2 No 1 January, "Religion and Conflict," pg. 1-24

fuels conflicts. Some may say that these divisions have very little to do with religion or that conflicts have a political or economic factor, but Nader Hashemi in 19, the Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at Josef Korbel School of International Studies at University of Denver, notes that while conflicts may have more than one contributing factor, religious differences can often provide a unique “mobilization” factor that allows for political leaders to utilize those ideologies and the animosity they generate in order to mobilize a faction toward war³. This means that, even if the political leader may not hold those political beliefs, the beliefs themselves are easily manipulated by bad-faith actors to generate considerable conflict and strife in the world.

Our second contention is education. Many religions attempt to censor or close off large areas of study or inquiry under the guise of morality. For example, there has been substantial public debate in the United States over evolution. In Texas, there is a continuing struggle with allowing science textbooks to discuss evolution without disclaimers or other information attempting to discredit it for the religious students. Steven Schafesersman in 1982, member of the National Council for Science Education, describes considerable debate repeatedly over evolution in biology textbooks and even describes members on the school board opting for less quality books or attempting to significantly censor textbooks in order to appease religious parents⁴. Although it may not seem significant, this kind of battle carries significant weight as Texas buys a large share of the nation’s textbooks, and which book they choose will be much

³ Nader Hashemi 19 ABC, "The politics of sectarianism: What causes sectarian conflict, and can it be undone?" <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-middle-east-and-the-politics-of-sectarianism/11613338> 8/31

⁴ Steven Schafesersman 82 National Council for Science Education, Creation/Evolution Journal Volume 3 No. 4, "Censorship of Evolution in Texas," <https://ncse.ngo/censorship-evolution-texas> 8/31

cheaper than competitors and thus will be more frequent throughout the country. Religion, here, isn't benefitting any students and can hamper evolution education, which has been shown to be a key predictor of scientific literacy in post-secondary education.

These points show that, while the members of a particular religious community may show some benefits from religious practice, society overall is hindered because of the deep divisions that exist between them. These divides also have a compounding factor as each division they create adds additional fractures in society that is already divided among lines like class or ethnic lines. The burden is on the affirmative team to prove that any benefit they have can have a spillover effect that could possibly bridge these divides or provide a benefit that can possibly outweigh the conflicts whether they be physical or intellectual that the negative team has shown are spurred by religion.

Given this immense burden of proof, we urge a negative ballot. We have shown that conflicts and divides in society that occur along religious lines are deep and difficult to compromise in strongly dogmatic areas. Furthermore, we have shown that any benefits that the affirmative will point to are insular and don't span entire societies. This means the benefits that they will point to cannot on balance outweigh the negatives introduced today. For those reasons, we ask you vote negative. Thank you.