

ATHEISTS ELICIT AN AMORAL ETHICS

Do human beings possess natural rights, rights given by God that all governments must respect? Or is this plain nonsense?

A recent Pew Research Center survey shows how this philosophical question comes into play in real-life settings. If ventilators are in short supply, whom should we service first? Those who are most in need at the moment? Or those most likely to recover?

The answer, like so many ethical issues, turns on religion. The majority of those who are religiously affiliated say those who are most in need of a ventilator should take priority, while the majority of the unaffiliated (mostly agnostics and atheists) say those who are the most likely to recover should get it.

Similarly, when questioned about the role of religion in one's life, religious Americans favor giving the ventilator to those in need at the moment; those for whom religion does not play a role prefer giving it to those most likely to recover.

On a related issue, a Pew survey in 2013 found that religious Americans were the least likely to say suicide is a moral right; the unaffiliated were the most likely to support it.

A 2018 Gallup poll disclosed that euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide varied widely on the basis of religiosity: religious Americans were the least likely to support these options; the unaffiliated were the most likely to support them.

In 2010, the British Medical Journal found that atheist and agnostic doctors, as compared to those who are religious, were almost twice as likely to decide, by themselves, that it is

proper to hasten a person's death if the patient is very sick.

To put it differently, those who are not religious are more likely to devalue the sanctity of human life. This is not a desirable outcome for anyone, especially the vulnerable.

This all traces back to natural rights. Those who take their religion seriously are more likely to believe in natural rights: they believe all humans possess equal rights, and that they cannot be overridden on the basis of utility, or what works best overall. So when ventilators are in short supply, those who are most in need deserve to get them—we are all equal in the eyes of God. Their rights should never be subordinate to those who are the most likely to live.

Those who believe otherwise embrace a utilitarian ethics.

Atheists embrace the utilitarianism as espoused by Jeremy Bentham. The British philosopher maintained that morality was best served by providing for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Such a philosophy advantages the powerful and the healthy—it can be used to justify slavery and euthanasia—which is why it is fundamentally an amoral ethics.

Bentham called natural rights “nonsense upon stilts.” Not surprisingly, he was an atheist. For him, the idea that innocent human life is sacred was chimerical. What counts, he believed, was serving the best interests of the majority of people, even if it comes at the expense of others.

Atheism is amoral because its ethics devolves to the individual. It's all about me, not we. It is this kind of thinking that allows irreligious doctors to decide whether their patients should live or die. Ironically, even atheists who are sick would not want to have such a physician.

Society prospers morally when we have more religious persons, not less. This does not mean that all atheists are immoral or that all religious persons are moral. But it does mean that

society, as a whole, is better off, generally speaking, when it is populated by people of faith, and not their atheist counterparts.