

Christopher Hitchens' Four Irreducible Objections

Tim Haile

Christopher Hitchens died December 15, 2011 at the age of 62. He reportedly died from complications from esophageal cancer.

Hitchens was only one of an estimated 146,000 people who die every day, which might lead some to wonder why I would devote an article to this one man. This is a fair question, particularly considering that so many others have already commented upon his life and legacy. His death has been widely reported by media outlets, and TV and web videos of his various interviews are now being emphasized. His insights, speech and writing skills are being extolled by many. What more can be added?

The death of Christopher Hitchens is particularly interesting to me for more significant reasons: Hitchens was a proud and avowed atheist, and an outspoken critic of religious faith. His books, writings and commentary will have a godless and potentially damning influence upon people for generations. His writings provide people with excuses for rejecting belief in God and the Bible, and they provide comfort to believers who are contemplating turning from their belief to unbelief. I cannot join my voice with the many who are offering high praise and commendation of Mr. Hitchens' life and accomplishments.

In his 2007 book, *"God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything,"* Hitchens offered what he called "four irreducible objections to religious faith." Some of these so-called "objections" contain logical fallacies. Others are based, not upon biblical prescriptions for religious faith, but upon unbiblical and false religious practices. This same mistake was repeatedly made by Mohammed (or whoever authored the Quran). His objections to "Christianity" were based upon apostate movements and unscriptural practices, rather than upon New Testament patterned religion. Some of Hitchens' objections are constructed, not from true religion, but from false religions that do not follow true "religious faith." True "faith" comes from *"hearing the word of God"* (Romans 10:17), and that faith is a way of *living* that reflects the principles of the gospel (Romans 1:16-17). I will not judge Mr. Hitchens' motives, but I can say that some of his conclusions and "objections" were based upon contrived and false religious beliefs and practices. His conclusions and logic are therefore flawed.

Mr. Hitchens' **first irreducible objection** to religious faith is: "*that it wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos...*" Like other faith-deniers, Hitchens had faith, but his faith was in *science*, not in God or His word. He wrote, "*Literature, not scripture, sustains the mind and - since there is no other metaphor - also the soul.*" This statement revealed Hitchens' strong bias against the Scriptures: Even one who denies the divine authorship of the Scriptures should at least be willing to classify "Scripture" as "literature." The Bible comes from some of the best attested manuscripts of antiquity. An honest man, even if an atheist, should be willing to admit that the Bible is at least as historically credible as other "literature." To deny the Bible at least this status is dishonorable.

Hitchens asserts that religious faith "wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos." This first objection is not so "irreducible" after all, for what proven *representation* of origins does religious faith *misrepresent*? Is it the representation that life and the universe were blown into existence by the explosion of a super-hot, super-dense atom? That lightning struck a mud puddle, produced life from non-life and set in motion a process of evolutionary change that produced men from monkeys? Or that extraterrestrials planted life on earth during one of their ancient visits to the planet? Given the absence of empirical evidence for any of these conjectures, upon what basis did Hitchens base his assertion? Was it upon his own personal *faith* in his preferred theory of origins? If so, don't I and others have as much of a right as Mr. Hitchens to propose our own "irreducible" with regard to origins? Hitchens' objection is based upon his own conjecture, not upon any empirical evidence. If Hitchens can affirm an unobservable, unrepeatable *non-biblical* account of origins, why can't I equally affirm an unobservable, unrepeatable *biblical* account of origins? Upon the basis of what empirical evidence can one affirm that Hitchens' claim is right and mine is wrong? How is his claim any more credible than mine?

Hitchens boldly proclaimed that religious faith "wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos." With equal confidence I can proclaim that Christopher Hitchens' scientific faith *wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos!*

Mr. Hitchens' **second irreducible objection** to religious faith is: "*that because of this original error it manages to combine the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism.*" "Servility" is an excessive desire to

serve or to please others. Mr. Hitchens cites this as a *weakness* of Christianity, implying that it is a bad thing. What is so weak or bad about people helping other people? Paul taught, "*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith*" (Galatians 6:10). How has "well-doing" for others ever hurt anyone or injured society at all? It is said that Jesus "*went about doing good*" (Acts 10:38). What harm can possibly come from one going about doing good? Why is this objectionable, even to an atheist?

Mr. Hitchens criticized the "servility" generated by religious faith, but failed to criticize the servility that is forced upon people in the *absence* of religious faith. Communist atheists have forced millions of people into abject servitude. Once utterly impoverished, people lack any ability to protect themselves and they become slaves to their leaders. The regimes of Mao, Stalin, Pol Pot and Hitler are prime examples of this scenario being played out. Such regimes caused the deaths of tens of millions of such helpless people. I will not charge all atheists with being ruthless, immoral and amoral. However, the rejection of God and biblical morality does make it easier for one to mistreat others. When combined with evolution, atheism becomes extremely dangerous. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest allows the strong to unreservedly exploit and victimize the weak and vulnerable to advance their own purposes. Conversely, the believer's faith causes him to conduct himself towards others upon the basis of his *God-consciousness* (1 Peter 2:19). His belief in an omniscient, omnipotent and judicious God compels him to regulate his behavior towards others. The unbeliever has no God-consciousness, so his motives are based exclusively upon human considerations.

Fortunately, some atheists do have a sense of concern for their fellow man, which keeps them from acting on a purely selfish and evolutionary principle. For others, atheism is freedom from moral restraint and freedom to do to others whatever serves their own personal and selfish desires. Hitchens wrote of himself and other atheists, "*We do not believe in heaven or hell, yet no statistic will ever find that without these blandishments and threats we commit more crimes of greed and violence than the faithful.*" As I have demonstrated, history has proven Mr. Hitchens to be quite wrong in his assertion. There is also a logical fallacy to consider:

People like Christopher Hitchens have spent their lives trying to convince other people that there is no God and that the Bible is purely mythological.

Ironically, if they were to be successful in turning all humans against religious faith, the earth would become an exceedingly dangerous place. There would be no real restraints against full-blown animalism, for one man's morals would be no better than those of another. By winning the argument, the atheist forfeits his life and property to his first true convert who happens to be stronger and smarter than himself. True atheism leads not to social bliss but to animalism and pandemonium. "*The fool has said in his heart 'There is no God'*" (Psalm 14:1).

But what about "solipsism?" Hitchens claimed that religious faith combined the maximum of servility with *the maximum of solipsism*. "Solipsism" is the theory that the self is all that can be known to exist. Solipsists tend to deny the reality of everything but oneself and one's own mind. I suspect that Mr. Hitchens is using certain elements and implications of *Hinduism* as the basis of his charge, in which case he horribly misrepresents Bible believers. While Bible believers believe that some things are perishable, while others are imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42), they do affirm that the perishable things are *real*. According to the Bible, the cosmos is quite *real*. Paul spoke of the sun, moon and stars as being real objects, each having its own distinct purpose and "glory" (v. 41). The Bible teaches that the universe and its contents are real and that their existence is independent of the human mind. So, contrary to the allegations of Mr. Hitchens, genuine Bible believers are not solipsists. Their perception of reality is, in fact, quite clear. Their understanding of the Scriptures actually provides them with a uniquely accurate understanding of reality.

Mr. Hitchens' **third irreducible objection** to religious faith is: "*that it is both the result and the cause of dangerous sexual repression.*" In order for him to make this claim, Hitchens had to cite conditions in Pakistan and other Islamic and Sharia governed states. While it was right for him to condemn the treatment of women in Islamic cultures, it was wrong for him to charge all religions with causing "dangerous sexual repression." It is dishonest to condemn one group of religious people for the false standards and evil practices of another group. As I stated earlier, the atheism of some people has resulted in the slaughter and starvation of millions of people over the past century. Would it then be accurate for me to say that since Christopher Hitchens was an avowed atheist that he was then personally responsible for the deaths of those millions of people? Of course not. And neither should he have charged all religionists with repressing women. The New

Testament teaches that men are to "*love, nourish and cherish*" their wives (Ephesians 5:28, 29). The man is to "*show honor to his wife as the weaker vessel*" (1 Peter 3:7). Women are said to be equal to men with respect to spirituality and salvation (Galatians 3:28). These Bible passages and many others plainly distinguish the religion of Christ from other religions with respect to the treatment of women. Mr. Hitchens should have been more discerning in his representation of "religious faith." Not all so-called "faiths" are based upon the word of God.

Mr. Hitchens' **fourth irreducible objection** to religious faith is: "*that it is ultimately grounded on wish-thinking.*" Why is it "wish-thinking" for Christians to believe as they do regarding origins and afterlife, but not "wish-thinking" for atheists and evolutionists to believe in a "big bang" and spontaneous generation? In the absence of any empirical evidence the atheist believes that the entire universe exploded itself into existence. He believes that order was created from disorder. In the face of much empirical evidence that explosions destroy things and never constructs them, the atheist yet believes that an explosion created what he admits being an extremely complex universe. Isn't this "wish-thinking" on the part of the atheist? In the face of much empirical evidence that life produces life, the atheist believes in spontaneous generation. Is this not "wish-thinking" on the part of the atheist? Sure it is. And if the universe came into existence by the explosion of a super-hot super-dense atom, then who or what made that atom? What forces or conditions made it explode? What caused the forces or conditions that made it explode? (and we could keep going and going on this point...). Truly, "*The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'*" (Psalm 14:1).

Conclusion

Sadly, to my knowledge Christopher Hitchens never changed his mind about "religious faith." I have no authority to pronounce his personal fate, but the Bible teaches that all unbelievers will be cast into eternal punishment (Rev. 21:8). We cannot change Mr. Hitchens' fate, but we can avoid being captured by his crafty arguments. Let us regularly contemplate the revelations of God - both in nature and in Scripture (Psalm 19).

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