

In October of 2012 a debate between evolutionary scientist Richard Dawkins and Cardinal George Pell took place in the hopes to sway viewers and answer questions about evolution and religion. As the debate began and progressed the audience showed a good deal of immaturity as they laughed and hooted at either Richard Dawkins or Cardinal George Pell and were asked several times by the host to not call out. At one point the Cardinal recalled a story in which he was “preparing some young boys” for an event at church, and the audience made a lot of “oooooh” sounds and burst out laughing as they found that he had incited something sexual. The Audience didn’t give a damn about the debate going on. Perhaps to a certain degree they cared about what was going on, but to them the debate was like watching reality TV. It was as if they were on the a more sophisticated version of the Maury Show, a talk show that brings people on to a stage and tells them if they are the father of this baby, or what to do with their pregnant daughter while the audience boo’s and yells out at them. As I continue watching videos that also have responses in which it seems the audience doesn’t really care about the topic, but rather the drama of it, I find that for the most part the audience’s do not act quite as insane as in this particular instance with Richard Dawkins, but it did open my eyes to the way that debates were going on and how affective they are. I wanted to know how well most public debates were being conducted. Surely, if even the people that pay to go see these debates cant take them seriously, how will people that see them at home be persuaded. In this paper I will investigate the spectacle of public debate and the level of ineffectiveness that occurs at this grand scale. After this we will began to look more deeply other forms of debate and the effectiveness of those debates.

As we look further into debates within American politics and the divide between the republican and democratic parties. You probably have been witnessing this divide as long as I have seen politics on TV and was interested to explore this situation further. I am continuing debates, old and new. I am looking into the history of American parties and the divide we have experienced over the years, the divide that we’ve had since the beginning. I am exploring this because just by looking at the way that things are now with this separation within the United States, despite the many debates we have every year. The majority of debates are just one side trying to embarrass the other side and make them seem incompetent such as in a fox news debate with Bill Nye in which the interviewer asks him a series of yes or no questions about climate change and does not let Nye contribute, to them there are no compromises or deals, but rather it’s about the win for the party and who can come out on top. I want to know how this sort of thing could be fixed, if it could be. Within the parties there is also a large schism in the idea of religion, mainly weather it should be present in politics or not. As I look further into this I continue to research religion in schools as well as the points of view that Voltaire had on religious toleration, as well as a few lectures on religious toleration and how we should discuss religion. Through this I am becoming increasingly more interested in religious debate. I look at more debates like I was in the beginning where it was someone who was religious verses someone who is usually and atheist or agnostic. I found that generally this was not the right approach to this. You can’t have two religions go head to head and win because what they are arguing is based solely off belief. For the same reason you cannot have a Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist or whatever else head off with an Atheist and have a debate that is really of any value because what they are arguing for is based solely on something they choose to believe in. This may not seem like the case for

atheism, but in fact Atheism is still an explanation for something that cannot be explained. After a large amount of looking and exploring I have come up with an essential question to help me guide my process in which I want to be going, "what is the most effective way we can debate?" I want to research and develop solutions to the problems as I am doing my research, rather than just looking at problems and being upset by them. With my research I looked into current political debates, and within that more specifically religion, I am also looking at various figures in history that talked about religious tolerance, and through these subjects I am able to make concrete ideas about how we as a society should go about debate.

If you have ever watched a presidential election taking place, watched any politically based shows such as Real Time with Bill Maher or the Daily Show with Jon Stewart, or Fox news or MSNBC you probably are not aloof to the fact that we have a pretty huge divide within our country. This divide is important to look into when focusing on religious division, because of the many religious aspects in the separation within our country. In addition it is important to see why other operations fail to better understand how to have another operation succeed.

The case of the United States there are two dominant parties that fight for power. The relationship between these parties is one of little compromise and much disputing. In the politically left show Real Time with Bill Maher, Maher had on the guest Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary scientist who has dedicated most of his work to putting down religion, advocating for Atheism and evolution. After Bill Maher introduced Richard Dawkins they immediately began chatting about religion and the stupidity of it. The title of the video posted on YouTube was in fact called "Richard Dawkins and Bill Maher team up to demolish stupid religious scum". They talked very little about why they believed what they did and did a very large amount of trash talking about religion and why they did not believe in the other side of things. They continued to put poor arguments in the mouths of those with opposing views, put themselves up on a pedestal, and more or less just pointed there fingers and laughed. As I watch this I wonder what exactly was the goal of these people. Do they think that by laughing at others they are persuading them to take the same stance, or do they not hope to achieve anything, but rather just make money off the enjoyment of those who already hold the same views as them?

Another video in the in which no resolving is getting done is of a very right winged Christian who made a video advocating for his belief about creationism. The name of the video he made was "100 reasons why evolution is stupid." As the name suggests, the man lists off reason after reason of why evolution is implausible, and why creationism is the only way. His beliefs are inherently politically motivated as he does have a clear goal, which is to get evolution out of textbooks and put Christianity in, as well as to put religion into laws. With this mans speech it may be clear what his goal is, but it is unclear to me as to why he believes that this is the best way for his goal to be achieved. Just like the Bill Maher show, he mocks his opposing viewers, trying to humiliate them and puts himself up on a pedestal of pretentiousness and acts as if the rest of us who don't agree with him just aren't getting something. I am curious while I watch this, like Bill Maher, does he think that he was persuading people by mocking them and trying to humiliate. Clearly this was not an effective approach to what he was trying to accomplish. As I watch more and more debates and lectures by various people, shows

and organizations I am curious as to how many of them really had the effect that they wanted. How many of these people were really persuading their audience? Did most of them even set out with the goal to change the minds of their audience?

One of the few debates I have found in which it seemed everything was conducted well, and with the intent to persuade and not to humiliate was the Bill Nye Ken Ham debate over Creationism vs. Evolution. They took turns with questions, did not interrupt, and did not seek to make the other look stupid, but rather to present what they saw as the facts and to persuade the viewers. Was even this effective though? They exchanged ideas well, but what does that really even mean? Did this debate help? The answer is yes it was effective and beneficial. When the debaters are able to effectively communicate their ideas then the ideas can be effectively communicated to the audience in a way that lets viewers be able to make a more effective decision. When it is just two people slamming each other trying to seem the more intellectual individual, then generally the same thought provoking arguments and rebuttals do not end up coming out. This causes for confusion and disorder amongst a debate, and usually leads to nothing getting done. Despite this one great debate I found there was really nothing else out there that I found to be satisfying. Everything leaned one way or another and had a heavy reliance on pleasing one side. With this I have found that one of my biggest problems with the debate system was that generally since the people involved in these debates are politicians, they lean heavily to one side not because they want to, but because they need to in order to increase their own popularity. The reason for this is because we have a two party system. If you don't lean right, then you lean left, and if you don't lean left, you lean right. If you don't find yourself in either of those camps, then you can count on your opinion not being well represented. This is a huge flaw in the way American politics works. There are many other parties in the US, but generally they are much smaller and don't pack a large effect on the overall state of things. This is an issue as it means that people have to pick between only two parties with very different viewpoints, even if they have views that don't match up with either party, or match up with both. This is also a problem as it forces parties politicians to take incredibly heavy stances on things they wouldn't necessarily otherwise. A solution to this is runoff voting. The way that runoff voting works is you vote for the people you want to win the election in order. As people are knocked off the ballot due to lack of votes, if your first vote is knocked down, then your vote goes to your second choice, and if he is knocked down then it goes to your third choice, and so on and so forth. With this system people can vote for whom they most identify with and support the smaller parties without wasting their vote. With more power to smaller parties debaters will not be forced to take single side, but rather to take the side that they most closely identify with. This helps an aspect of debates that are completely controlled by bipartisan nonsense.

As I look at debates more specific to the political sphere, much of what came up was religious. I have already mentioned the ongoing creationism vs. Evolution debate, which is a very important section of the religious debates. What we most often see with these debates is, religion putting down other religions, religion putting down atheism, and atheism putting down religion. Atheism is not a religion, in fact as Bill Maher describes it "religion is defined as the belief in and worship of a superhuman power, and atheism is precisely not that. Got it? Atheism is a religion like abstinence is a sex position." Although I do agree that atheism is not a religion, atheism is a belief just the same as

religion. Religious people believe in god, atheists believe there is not a god. It is a belief and should be treated as such. When people like Richard Dawkins write a book like “The God Delusion” and say that god is statistically improbable, and then they are trying to apply science to something that science cannot be applied to. More than this they are once again still just trying to put down the other side. In their minds they are doing the right thing, and are being an advocate and a political figure for those with similar views. What this really does is create a divide between those with differing religious views. The effect of this is always negative. All we have to do is look at the Israel Palestine situation to know that these religious controversies are not where we want to be. No one religion is going to win over the other like they always want it to, the only solution is religious toleration. One of the greatest examples of those speaking in favor of religious toleration is Voltaire. He advocates for complete acceptance for everyone with different religious viewpoints. He writes “Not only is it extremely cruel to persecute in this brief life those who do not think the way we do, but I do not know if it might be too presumptuous to declare their eternal damnation.” The only way to be able to progress when religious views clash is to accept the other person’s differences.

How do we create solutions to the issue of ineffective debate? There are no easy solutions to such complex widespread problems, but that doesn’t mean it is impossible to mend things. One solution to the complete inefficiency of debate is complete tolerance. Just like tolerance for religion, you should be tolerant of political views. A political view is someone’s belief, and should be treated as such. We cannot insult someone’s beliefs in order to make our own be better validated. We need to know that compromise is something that has to be done. If you don’t want the other side’s beliefs to completely persevere, than you must understand that compromise is necessary, as it would then be unfair if the beliefs that you had were the ones that were persevering. Compromise is essential when half of the country thinks one way and the other half thinks another. Debate should not be conducted (spiritual or political) in a way where one seeks to completely overpower the other. Debate needs to be an address of the situation, and communication about how the problem can be resolved. It should not be a fight about the opposing views, because at the end of the debate they will both still have the same views, as will the people watching most likely, and it will create a greater divide between the two groups of people.

Something else we need to do in order for effective solutions to current political and educational issues is to keep religion out of it. In the documentary “The Revisionaries,” we can see how the Texas board of education functions. A huge ongoing debate between them is that of creationism vs. evolution. Many push to have the supposed “controversies of evolution” be taught in the textbooks. The problem with this is not with the view that these people hold against evolution, but the fact that what they are trying to put into the textbooks is inherently religious. It is a huge mistake to believe that because something is put in textbooks that is an explanation for why things are the way they are, and is not religious, it is inherently atheist. The only way to solve the issue is to not put in anything that is religious, or atheistic.

In short, to solve our problems we need to accept the opinions of others and compromise, encourage debates that do this and not watch programs that do not follow this, persuade without the intent of humiliation, encourage runoff voting, keep spiritual

views out of politics and education, and not try to win our arguments, but inform and persuade through education and be open to compromise.

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