

# The God Show

Presents

the debate between

Christopher Hitchens and Dinesh D'Souza:

What's So Great About God?

at

Macky Auditorium, University of Colorado at Boulder

on

Monday, 26th January, 2009

Transcribed for The God Show by Karim D. Ghantous

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First edition

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## D'Souza

Thank you all very much. I am honoured and delighted to be here. This is a great venue, a beautiful venue. My podium's a little narrow but I guess that's okay since I remembered to wear pants.

And this is not my first debate with Christopher Hitchens. We've actually debated a few times before. I'm not sure why we keep doing it. One of us may be a slow learner. But I will say that all of our debates have been totally different. And so I always approach these with a tremendous sense of suspense and anticipation.

What we're here to talk about: what's so great about God? And I want to emphasize that in this debate, which is in not just a secular venue but the secular venue of Boulder, which may be for me the 'lion's den'. But our approach in these debates - and certainly mine - is to make arguments that in no way depend on the authority of Scripture or revelation or in no way presume the truth of Christianity. These are arguments that are going to be rooted in reason and skepticism and history and philosophy. In other words, Christopher Hitchens and I are debating with the same weapons, we're debating on the same ground, which is the ground of reason alone.

And so in thinking about what's so great about God, I thought I would frame my remarks by beginning to ask what are the things that are important to not religious people, not Christians, but secular people and in fact, atheists. I've been skimming some of the books of some of the new atheists to make a list of some of the values that the new atheists, like Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, the philosopher Daniel Dennett, the bioethicist Peter Singer, what do they care about? Well, they care about the idea of the individual. They care about science as an independent and autonomous enterprise. They care about the equal dignity of women. They care about the abolition of slavery. They celebrate compassion as a social virtue. I want to argue that it is not merely the idea of God but very specifically the active work of Christianity that brought these very values, secular values, into the orbit of Western civilization and in some cases into the world.

Now I'm hardly being controversial in asserting that Western civilization, our civilization, is built on two pillars, Athens and Jerusalem. By Athens of course we mean classical reason; and by Jerusalem I think we mean the combined legacy of

Judaism and Christianity. And if you look at a list of what we can for a moment call the 'atheist virtues', we can ask, "is it true that those virtues are ours, shared by believer and non-believer alike, because of this legacy of Athens and Jerusalem?"

Consider for a moment the virtue of compassion. One can go to ancient Greece and Rome before Christianity and look for that virtue. Aristotle makes a list of the virtues - compassion, by the way, does not appear on the list. For Aristotle it's something more like a vice. Compassion comes into the West as a new virtue with Christianity. Or consider something else: the value or preciousness of human life, an important value in our culture - who would deny?

Well in ancient Sparta if you were weak or sick they would deposit you on the hillside in the winter and were quite happy to find you dead in the morning. And that's not even the big scandal. The great thinkers of ancient Greece, Plato, Aristotle, knew about this but viewed it with relative equanimity. It was to them not such a big deal. And why? Because the sanctity of human life, the preciousness or sacredness of life, was simply not a cardinal value in classical antiquity in Greco-Roman civilization. That became important to us with Christianity.

Sam Harris in his book *The End of Faith* says that the Christians bear a big responsibility for slavery. And yet slavery has existed for millennia in every known civilization. For many centuries slavery needed no defenders because it had no critics. It was like the family, taken pretty much for granted. Only in one civilization, the civilization called Christendom, did slavery become controversial. And some people say, "Well, we had to wait 'til the Enlightenment and the modern period for that to happen." Not true. Slavery was in fact withered and abolished in Western civilization and in Europe largely between the fourth century and the tenth century. Then there was a second anti-slavery movement in the modern era in which groups of Quakers and evangelical Christians began to take the idea, a theological idea, that we're created equal in the eyes of God, and to draw from that a political lesson, namely, no man has the right to rule another man without consent.

And by the way this idea becomes not only the moral root of abolition, or anti-slavery, it's also, if you think about it, it's also the moral root of democracy. Why? Because democracy is based on the idea that no man, no person has the right to rule another without consent.

And so the point I'm trying to make here is that whatever you think of God, even if you're not a believer, it seems to me to be the beginning of intellectual and historical honesty to acknowledge that all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, are in fact standing on a pillar that we are to respect and acknowledge. In some senses even the values that Christopher Hitchens stands by would not be here. And he wouldn't hold them if it wasn't for the role of Christianity in the world.

I want to suggest that even modern science is rooted in not just theist but specifically Christian assumptions. This seems a little bit strange to some people because they say, "Oh, science is based on reason but religion is based on faith." Actually that's not so. Science, too, is based on three, faith-based propositions that can in no way be derived from reason. And in fact are the direct legacy of Christian theology.

What are those three faith-based propositions? Number one: we live in a rational universe. That's not exactly obvious. You or I can be rational because we have a brain. The universe as far as we know does not possess a brain. And yet it is presumed to be rational. The universe is also presumed by modern science to be lawful, to have operations that can be described in the lawful language of mathematics. And finally not only is the universe presumed to be rational and lawful, but the rationality of the world out there is presumed by modern science to be mirrored in the rationality of our own minds. If you think about it, that's the strangest fact of all. Your brain is made up of atoms and molecules and neurons and circuits - why should all the worrying that's going on in here have a one-to-one correspondence with the rotation of the planets or  $E=mc^2$  or any of the stuff going on out there. Why should there be a match between the two? What is the reason? There is in fact no reason.

Now, if you are a Christian all of this makes a certain kind of sense to you. You can say "I believe God is omniscient" which is another word for super-rational. So hey, he made a rational world. I believe God is a lawgiver, he gave us the moral law, the Ten Commandments let's say, so it's not too surprising he gave us the physical law, the laws of nature. And we believe we're created in the image of God, which is to say we have in us a spark of that divine rationality. And therefore it's not entirely mysterious that we're capable of comprehending, of apprehending the world out there.

But my point is if you're an atheist, you've got to take these things one hundred percent on faith. Notice that it's no accident that modern science, the scientific method, laboratories, verification, checking, did not develop simultaneously in all cultures. It developed in *Western* culture. And this I believe is the explanation for it.

Now, what's so great about God? I think one thing that's great about God is that he has given us a universe adapted or finely tuned for life. Here's what I mean by this. I don't mean that we live on a lucky planet that happens to be the right distance away from the sun. I rather mean that if you look at the fundamental, numerical values of nature.

If you look at the Hydrogen atom the mass of the proton is 1,836 times the mass of the electron. If you look at the gravitational force, the electromagnetic force, the strong nuclear force, if you look at all the different constants of nature - one physicist, Lee Smolin says, "It's almost as if God is sitting at a table with a bunch of dials in front of him" - what happens, modern science asks, if the scientists sneak into the room, each dial now reflects a certain numerical value of nature, what if you fool with the dials?

Change them a little bit. This issue by the way is discussed by Stephen Hawking in his book *A Brief History of Time*. And Hawking points out that if you touch one of the dials - he's talking about the rate of expansion of the universe - and you move it, not ten percent or one percent, but one part in a hundred thousand million million, you would have no universe, you would have no life. What does this mean? What is means is not just our planet but the entire universe has to be as big as it is and as old as it is and have precisely the numerical values that it does because if it didn't, we wouldn't be here. The universe appears to be a kind of giant conspiracy to produce, well, us.

And I think we owe a little bit of a thank-you note to God for that one. Or perhaps Christopher Hitchens will come up with a better explanation. Now, I think we also need to be grateful to God, if you will, because it's something that we have uniquely that makes us human, something that in some strange sense almost appears to defy natural explanation.

And by natural explanation what I mean of course is not just the explanations of evolution or Darwin, but in a deeper sense the explanation of being captive to physical laws. While all objects in the universe operate according to fixed laws - a stone for example has no choice but to roll down a hill; a cheetah has very little

choice but to run after an antelope - we as human beings inhabit two rather distinct domains. On the one hand this is the way we are. But then there's a second domain: this is the way we ought to be. In other words we have this doubleness to our nature.

And what's particular about the second domain, the domain of the 'ought', is that it appears to be free. In other words, you could never say to someone "You ought to do this" or "You shouldn't do that" or "You shouldn't discriminate on the basis of race" or "You shouldn't be a gay basher" if they had no choice in the matter. If the decision was solely determined by physical laws, all of morality would be an illusion. But morality is as real of a fact in the world as any other. It's as real as this watch in front of me.

If there are human beings who are without morality, we don't have philosophical disputations with them, we put them in straight jackets and carry them away. They are sociopaths. So the point I'm trying to make here is that not only is morality, if you will, a strange fact in the world but it's a fact that militates against self-interest. And that is part of its peculiarity.

Now if you're an atheist you might say "I'm grateful to Christianity, I'm grateful to the legacy of Christianity, what should I do about all this?" And I think what you should do about all this is number one, to respect the fact that our world is the way it is, and your values are the way you are because of God, and specifically because of Christianity. And second, you might do well to consider living as if there is a God, because ultimately that will make you a better person. And if you give thanks to God and if you talk to God, you never know. He might say something back. Thank you very much.

## **Hitchens**

Thank you, Dinesh. Am I audible to all? Make it more convincing: can you hear me? Okay. Thank you, Dinesh. Dinesh is quite right to say - to have said to you - that there's no element of pre-arrangement in any of our debates. We've never concerted or compared notes before starting. And I hope we never will. We've never given the same speeches twice.

We've sometimes repeated each other and each other's arguments but there must have been an energy leak somewhere this evening because he wanted to praise me and my fellow atheists for our compassion. There must be some mistake here at least

in my case. One of the very few times I've ever felt like being a Christian is when reading how the early church fathers, lost for an account of why it is fun to be in paradise, the alleviation of the first hundred million years of saying "thank you" for example, would say "Well at least you can go to the lip of the thing and look down and see the screams and wails and torments of the damned when you want to be cheered up," and then I think, "That's me." I'd be religious on *that* basis.

One of my very few pleasures actually is crowing over the misfortunes of other people, and trying to add to those misfortunes. And I'm hoping in fact to score a few points of that sort tonight.

Thomas Aquinas, like me, didn't believe in astrology, or rather he didn't think you should try it because it would only let the demons in. He thought it was a very dangerous science, the sort of thing that could allow the devils a foothold. Unlike me, believed himself capable of levitation, had a higher opinion of himself - in fact as a debater - than I do of myself.

But Dinesh has left me with no alternative but to start at a position I hadn't ever begun with before. Which is to ask anyone here if they've read a novel called *When it Was Dark* by Guy Thorne. There's an off chance - I thought someone waved there. It was a huge best-seller before the First World War. Enormous international best-seller.

I'll very quickly summarize its plot for you. From Palestine there comes a report that the bones, that the grave in other words, the cadaver, the remains of a Nazarene martyr evidently who'd been subjected to crucifixion, had been discovered in a tomb where a stone had to be rolled away to unearth it. And more and more the rumour is believed and reported in international press that the mortal remains of Jesus of Nazareth had been found.

What are the consequences? Well, the consequences are just what you would expect. People start having sex in the streets; they don't care for family values anymore; they dissolve their ties of kinship that bond them with their own relatives, indeed with other human beings; they steal, they rob, they cheat, they lie - all restraint is gone. And it's only by the miraculous discovery that all this initial story is a fraud, put around by Jews and secularists and Freemasons and other riffraff, that morality is restored to the human race.

I recommend a reading of this piece of trash novel which makes *The Da Vinci Code* or the *Left Behind* series seem like Proust or Balzac or George Eliot. Because unless you

believe something like that, everything Dinesh says, just said to you, is complete nonsense from beginning to end.

I invite you to the thought experiment: if it could be shown to you that the figure of the Nazarene was in fact as we believe entirely mythical, as was the figure of his mother, as was the figure of Vishnu, as was the revelation supposedly given to the illiterate Arabian merchant, peasant, Mohammed, the man calling himself the prophet, as was the existence of Moses and the legend of the Exodus, if all of this can be shown as it can be - I haven't time for it, but I'll take any challenge on any of these points - to be an entirely man-made legend, would you really look at your neighbour differently? Are you telling me or are you willing to be told even by someone as fluent and charming as Dinesh that it would be true of yourself that you would then become a thief? That you would then become a liar? That you would then not condemn a rapist? That you would then have no knowledge of the difference between a right action and a wicked one? I don't think there's anyone in this room who could be so abject, so wanting in self-respect, so masochistic, so subject - and I'm coming back to this - so servile as to believe any such thing. And if I had to stop now that's all I would really have wanted to say this evening. But as I say I didn't come to be compassionate. I have some more suffering to inflict on you before I am done.

Morally, ethically, I submit we would be in precisely the same case as we are now if, as is in fact the case, these stories are proved to be man-made legends. We would be faced with the same questions that we are ever faced with. What are our duties to one another? Why are we here? Does our existence have a meaning or a purpose or a pattern beyond what we can discern? How could we build the just city? Does our presence here have a point?

These questions pre-date monotheism, were debated very earnestly in schools of philosophy in the Mediterranean long before monotheism was inflicted upon us. And these questions would remain as urgent, and they would have to be posed again and anew in every generation if monotheism were by chance to decline, as it has been doing, or even to pass away which I don't think that it actually will. The same would be true if polytheism was to undergo a similar collapse.

Now the believers say that the problems I've just mentioned don't really exist. They're only problems in the mind of philosophers. The question of how to be moral and why has already been decided. Dinesh, I think rather too tolerantly, said that he had an open mind on matters of faith. He wasn't here to defend the Christian religion, or revelation or any of these things. I don't know what kind of - I leave it to the good

father - what kind of Catholic Dinesh now seems to be in his own eyes or in anyone else's.

But in fact religion means you must believe that God has revealed himself to us - and his purpose. That his commandments and wishes are knowable and indeed known by human beings, that this revelation has in fact taken place. And that all that he's required is for us to live up to - created sick as we are, commanded to be well as we also are - what kind of dictatorship creates you ill and then orders you recover? I'll come back to that - but created as sick as we are, our duty is simply to live up to these preachments of this revelation. That is what religion means to me.

If anyone wants to stand up and say it's not what it means, I'll take the question - I can't wait for it, in fact. And that we're short only of prayer and faith and good works. And that we can have our sins expiated for us, that there can be vicarious atonement, that our shortcomings can be taken upon someone else whose pain and misery and suffering can redeem us.

In other words that I come to you, madam or sir, and say, not that I'll pay your debt because I know you're in trouble - I have some spare money. Not that I will take your place in prison which I might, if I really loved you, be willing to do. Not that I would take a risk for you, put my own body in front of yours to prevent suffering from falling up you, or coming upon you, as I would with a child of mine.

But, no, that I can take away your sins. That I can make them go away. That vicarious redemption and expiation is possible. In other words, that personal responsibility means nothing.

That you can throw your sins onto a scapegoat. And rightly is scapegoating considered by us to be a contemptible term, a contemptible verb. No, it won't do. It won't do morally, it won't do ethically. And there is no reason to suppose that any such moment of vicarious expiation or redemption every took place.

Now, when I said in my subtitle - this is a lousy microphone, isn't it? Was it only for me? - when I said in my subtitle that there's something about religion that poisons everything - I know publishers like controversial subtitles, but I was willing to stand by it and I knew people would say "Everything? I mean, cricket? Tantric sex, Chinese food..." Yes, I sort of do mean in a way everything. For this reason: it attacks us in our deepest integrity, in some of the ways I've just tried to describe. It says, we don't ourselves have any innate knowledge of what's good or wicked. We couldn't, on our

own responsibility, out of our own self-respect, decide upon an action in this way and decide to defend its integrity. We would need divine permission and maybe even a human sacrifice or two to ram it home for this to occur. And I go on to say that it makes intelligent people say stupid things and it makes decent and kindly people do and say very cruel things.

And I'll just give a couple of examples. What would you say, Dinesh, was the lifetime now established scientifically of homo sapiens? Francis Collins, the Christian chairman of the Human Genome Project, thinks it could be 150,000 years. Richard Dawkins thinks it could be as much as quarter of a million. I'll - I don't know - does anyone have a - I'm excluding those who think it's only 6,000. What if I call it 100,000?

All right then. For a hundred thousand years - hundred thousand years - homo sapiens have been on the planet. A fragment of evolutionary time. During that time, people are born, usually dying in the process, or at least 10 to 20% change of doing so. If they survive infancy their odds go up there a lot, they'd probably have a life expectancy for the first 50, 60, 70 thousand years of about 25 to 30 years, usually dying of their teeth, the rending pains of childbirth killing the mothers as well, famine, disease, fear, terror. Earthquakes, where have they come from? Thunderstorms, why? Hurricanes, what is this? Volcanic explosions that blot out the sun. Appalling life of fear, of want, and disease where germs are not known of, you know.

[I] don't have to draw you a complete picture. And that's to leave out the wars over territory, over sex, over womanhood, over possession, that would additionally take life. And, this is the Hobbesian situation. Life is, as Thomas Hobbes describes in *Leviathan*, very nasty, brutish and short.

And I'm just asking for a hundred years - hundred thousand years for this. For the first 98,000 years of it heaven watches with indifference. "Who cares? Doesn't look terrific. But you know, they're inching along I guess, I mean, sometimes moving forward, sometimes a bit back, but... anyway, let's just see how it goes." *Two* thousand years ago it's decided, "Actually, now we have to intervene. But only in illiterate parts of the Middle East, to reveal our face to this species and tell them how to behave." Now, I can't prove that that did not happen. I cannot disprove that.

But I can say of someone who does believe it that they're willing to believe pretty much anything. And I don't just mean: believe pretty much anything that they're *told*.

I mean, to believe almost anything about their deity. Because if that is how it happened, it's the same as saying that a universe that contains perhaps a hundred thousand million planets contains just one, which has one favoured mammalian species, alone chosen for salvation. While the others go into black holes, white dwarves, shooting stars, imploding comets and the rest of it. You can believe that if you want. I can't tell you that wasn't the design.

But I can tell you, or I can assert, I can make you think, I can ask you to consider whether the person responsible for this is not either very incompetent, very tinkering, very capricious or very, very cruel. And I won't let you hope - I hope I won't let you go home without leaving these questions in your mind. I'm not going to answer them for you. I going to hope I've placed them where you'll have to think about answering them for yourselves. And I see my time is very nearly exhausted.

In other words I think that our morality is innate, our ethics are innate to us as they are in other mammalian and primate species. It's observable that there are solidarities, there are ways of group behaviour, family function and so forth that make it clear that without this kind of evolution, we wouldn't be having this discussion, we wouldn't *be* here if we only looked out for each other and other primates and mammals know this too. In that case, since the evils are innate in us as well, what are we to do?

Are we to invent another supernatural person who's responsible for those, as the religious tend to do? "Ah, those don't come from *this* God, they come from another God, an evil one." Well, fine, if you wish, if you want to do it, if it makes you feel better in some way. Invent another supernatural entity. There's an infinite multiplication of them that you can do as Aquinas did with the demons; as Muhammad did with the desert Jinns. Keep multiplying these assumptions.

But how long can a healthy mind be satisfied with the infinite replication of supernatural assumptions when the natural world explains itself, and when we already have enough explanation for why people are encoded and programmed the way they are? Where our knowledge of that is increasing all the time? What is - and I'll close on this and I'll be quick - what we risk if we take the supernatural route is the idea of an unchangeable, unalterable authority; one apparently benign, one apparently wicked, both of them eternal, both of them unchanging and unchangeable, and ourselves as their play-things and their objects and their raw material, this is the origin of the idea of the totalitarian. This is where the idea of tyranny begins: with the eternal, unchanging, tyrannical authority. Where we must

try, with our poor powers, to guess what's wanted of us. And to spend our lives on our knees. I say the beginning of emancipation is to repudiate this antique serfdom and all the contemptible and often laughable superstitions that it requires for its maintenance. And the job can be begun tonight, and I invite you to join me in doing so. Thank you.

## **D'Souza**

When I first came to America from India, as an exchange student I was assigned to live in Arizona. One of my first entertainments was to go to a rodeo. I feel like I'm back at the rodeo. By which I mean, in listening to Christopher Hitchens, I see a point here, a point there, but also a lot of bull in between.

## **Hitchens**

Come on, baby, I could have said that!

## **D'Souza**

Now, as an act of Christian mercy, I will skip over the issue of whether Christ was in fact an historical person. I will focus on what I take to be Christopher Hitchens' two main points. One of them, I want to say - a gross misunderstanding of my opening argument, which was in no way a claim that Christianity or religion is the sole source of all morality in the world.

In fact, where do we get morality? I said myself that if we want to figure out what's right or wrong we get morality from the voice within. Conscience is for each of us the practical arbiter of morality. And of course the atheist and the believer alike share conscience. The point I was trying to make was maybe a little different. And that is, it is one thing to say that the Golden Rule is universal and quite another to say that within our civilization this very important force called Christianity has had some very specific cultural impact. That's not to deny conscience. It's not the claim that in the absence of Christianity there would be cannibalism and genocide.

But we would be a very different civilization. How do we know that? Historically, ask yourself this question: slavery is universal - who can name an anti-slavery

movement outside of Western civilization? Well I can. There's always been one group opposed to slavery. That group has been called 'slaves'. But I'm talking about something different. I'm talking about Abraham Lincoln's idea: "as I would not be a slave so I would not be a master." That's remarkable, Lincoln doesn't want to be a slave, we know that. He doesn't want to be a master either.

Or think about something else. If tomorrow there was a big famine in Rwanda or a tsunami swept the coast of Asia, what would happen? All the Western countries in unison would rise up, there would be cries of outrage, Doctors Without Borders, the Red Cross, donations, missions and so on. All the rich countries in the world. The Muslim countries, now India, China: there would be a kind of great wall of silence. Why? Because in those cultures, this idea of universal brotherhood is not as much of an established value. When I was growing up as a kid in India, one of the proverbs we learned was 'the tears of strangers are only water.' So it is quite a different point to say that Christianity has had a very specific impact. That was my point.

Now I want to turn if I may - how much time do I have left? A minute and a half to discuss this issue of the absentee God. Raised very much at the end. And I'll only be able to touch upon it. I'll come back to it. I want to suggest that if we are evolved primates - Christopher Hitchens' view; we've been on the Earth for a hundred thousand years - the problem that he states is far bigger a problem for his position than for mine. I've got to try to explain why God acts in the world as he does. He has a bigger problem.

Think about it this way: if we're evolved primates, about the same size as we are now with about approximately the same brain size we have now, nobody claims that homo sapiens has radically altered in this interregnum, history becomes a complete mystery. Because if you go into history class, here at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and you say "I want to hear about human history," they say "Let's begin with the Sumerians, thirty-five hundred BC. Then we'll move on to the Egyptians." In other words, history begins around the year 3,000 BC. So my question is this: if we are evolved primates, about as smart as we are now, how is it the case, from a completely secular point of view, that homo sapiens, for the first 95,000 years of its history, accomplished absolutely nothing? In other words, no wheel, no plough, no writing, and then suddenly mushrooms of civilization -

**Hitchens**

Oh, come on.

## **D'Souza**

- the pyramids. And then the cathedral of Chartres, the cathedral of Notre Dame, and pretty soon we're on the moon and we're using iPhones. It's almost as if human history is this great airplane trying to get off the ground for 95,000 years it goes up, *bang*; up, *bang*; up, *bang*. And then suddenly, mysteriously, about 3,000 years ago: take-off. I might almost venture to suggest that it almost seems as if some transcendent creature leaned into the world and breathed some kind of a message or a soul into man and suddenly, savage man became Biblical man. And that seems to give almost a better explanation of this dramatic take-off of human history than the lame assertion that we've been around for all this time, and only in the last 1% of our life did we start figuring out stuff.

And so it seems to me that we should be skeptics. But Christopher Hitchens is a one-way skeptic. He is skeptical of the claims of religion but applies little skepticism to his own claims. Thank you very much.

## **Hitchens**

Well now Mr. Chairman[?], I have to take back some of the nice things I was just saying then[?]... One of them has to do with the prearrangement. I've heard him make that point about the bull's horns *so* many times now. Tonight was the lamest. I've also heard him try it on other people. I hope this is the last time I have to hear it. I notice it didn't go down *that* well. It's because it's not *that* good. And he was also never at that rodeo.

To his second point which I can scarcely believe I have heard made, let alone - and some of you should blush on your way home - let alone applauded: yes of course, the reason why civilization stopped being barbaric and why things - stuff - started to happen, was the arrival of monotheism. I mean, to say... There is a one-word refutation of that I think. You want to know what it is? You've guessed (this is a university): China.

When the first missionaries reached the emperor of Beijing, as he sat amid a civilization that dwarfed anything that Europe and the Middle East - or Latin

America, even at that time - ever produced, he said "If what you are telling me is true, how has it taken so long to reach the people of China?" No, I'm sorry there are some arguments that just won't do and don't require any further refutation.

The lost years, the lost millennia of the misery of human prehistory have to be taken into account. And after all, we were invited to touch upon it by Dinesh, in considering the difference between antique and modern slavery. All right, I'm not going to reject a challenge like that.

And slavery in antiquity was this: you lose, our civilization has conquered yours, you now work, you the victims, you work for us. You are machines from now on, you work under our lash, you build our system for us, you build our walls, you dig our canals in return for our rations. Woe to the conquered. You can easily see how it happened.

It is only with the arrival of religion that it is said in holy books that certain people are born, as a race or people, to be the masters and others to be dispensable, either to be slaughtered or, when most of the slaughter is done, for the remainder to be kept, often female, as slaves. In every holy book from the original holy books of the Jewish people through those wrongly adopted in my view by the - mistakenly adopted by the Christian religion, to the Koran, to the Book of Mormon, slavery is mandated, and those who are born into it, usually by a different coloured skin are clearly, plainly identified, usually as the sons of Ham. Or some such nonsense. Pseudo-ethnological garbage. Okay? That's what's different!

So you... in the waning centuries of this foul system it is true that some Christians out of conscience turned against it. Wilburforce is one of the best known. William Lloyd Garrison who later became a secular humanist is another very famous case.

But it was *never* not the case, *never* not the case - and this is what Abraham Lincoln pointed out with such irony and bitterness - it was *never* not the case that all the justifications for slavery were religious, too. And that all the leaders of it and all the profiteers of it were taking their text and their authority from the Holy Scriptures. *That's* what you can't get over. And that's what you can't accuse the Babylonians and the Sumerians of doing.

So my point remains exactly what it was: not that religion doesn't make people behave better because it quite plainly does not; but that there are things in it that no secularist would regard with other than the horror that we now reserve for things like

cannibalism and slavery. The genital mutilation community, ladies and gentlemen, is exclusively as far as I know a religious one. The mutilation of the genitals of children - forceful mutilation of genitals - is entirely, scripturally mandated. The suicide bombing community among some Tamils in Sri Lanka may or may not be partly secular, it depends, some of them are very extreme Buddhists. And some of them, quite extreme Hindus. But for the most part, the hideous idea of suicide murder is a religious mandate, not just something that has religious authority but is a *commandment*. People wouldn't do this if they didn't have faith.

I'll open our next session with a question. And I'll make it my closing... because I think it's time for my closing argument[?]. And I'll ask it not just to Dinesh but I'm hoping to leave all my questions in the minds of all present for this evening. There's a baby born tonight in Pakistan. Would you rather, from the point of view of ethics, morality, the advance of human civilization, that this baby adopt my views of secular humanism or that it become a Wahabi Muslim baby? Because if you think that religion is good for people I don't see why you don't say the second. And if you *don't* say the second I think you ought to work out why you *don't* say the second. And if you prefer it over me *see me afterwards!* Thank you.

### **Moderator**

As great as the conversation has been so far it's about to get better because at this point the gentlemen will go head to head. And they'll pose questions to each other.

### **Hitchens**

I'm back!

### **Moderator**

And this is going to be good.

### **Hitchens**

What was the rule [unintelligible]?

**Moderator**

You just...

**Hitchens**

I knew you were kidding.

**Moderator**

No rules.

**Hitchens**

All right. Bring it on.

**D'Souza**

I think I would agree with you if given the choice between the Hitchens philosophy or Wahabi Islam I'd have to go with you, Christopher, although by a fairly narrow margin. But I could easily turn that example on you and say if you had to choose between someone adopting my philosophy or becoming one of Stalin's henchmen trying to eliminate religion from the world and establish the workers' paradise.

My point is you got to compare like with like. You can't compare - one of the things that's very striking, and you see this very often, is that the worst manifestations of religion are compared to the greatest achievements of science. Nobody says "Let's compare primitive religion to the science of bay leaves." It's always, "Let's compare the worst of religion to the best of science."

Well it's - we have - this is a questioning session so we're going to go a little back and forth. Let me pose a question to Christopher, picking up this issue of whether or not Jesus is mythical because you emphasized it with some ferocity. Do you believe that

Alexander the Great was in fact an historical figure?

**Hitchens**

Yes.

**D'Souza**

You believe that Socrates was an historical figure?

**Hitchens**

No.

**D'Souza**

What about Aristotle?

**Hitchens**

We think that it's a sure thing that Aristotle was the tutor in philosophy of Alexander of Macedonia. The figure of Socrates is not known to us except through descriptions of him by - I have to use the word - later disciples. But it doesn't matter, you see, I can still say I'm for the Socratic method.

**D'Souza**

Well I think -

**Hitchens**

Nothing depends for me on the demonstration of his physical existence. It's a matter

only of ideas.

**D'Souza**

No, the point I'm trying to get at here is this, and I'm trying to show the way in which you are essentially - you are essentially abandoning all canons of historical scholarship when it comes to the ancient world. You're applying a standard to Jesus that you'd never apply to other figures which - I mean I don't know if there's a philosopher in the world who considers Socrates to be entirely mythical.

**Hitchens**

I didn't say that either. I said we have no - we have nothing that we could call historical proof of his existence. I'm not at all varying my rules. They're the same as they were for the Nazarene question.

**D'Souza**

Here's the point. We have pretty good historical proof. We have Plato, we have Xenophon, we have Aristophanes. Why would all those guys make up Socrates when they are - some of them are approaching him critically, some of them are approaching him... So historians generally agree that there's no good reason to make up Socrates.

But the reason that you've got to say he might have been made up is you're establishing essentially an impossible canon of historical verification. Most of the historical figures of the ancient world are attested to by one or two or in - Christ has probably more attestations than many other figures whose historicity you wouldn't doubt for a moment.

**Hitchens**

Dinesh, I don't know why you're doing this to yourself.

**D'Souza**

I'm doing it to you actually.

### **Hitchens**

The existence of the Macedonian royal house is an archaeological question as well as - among many others. It's decidable in innumerable ways. ... innumerable ways. The probability of there having been someone with the one name of Socrates is very high but it can't be absolutely attested to and it doesn't need to be because those ideas would've been in someone else's mouth if they weren't in his.

The idea - it's surely important to you, that the physical existence of Jesus can be proved in a rather different way since he is the Son of God, and the Word made flesh, and born of a virgin and by his death we are all healed. So you've got a little bit more riding on this than -

### **D'Souza**

That's not my point.

### **Hitchens**

- I do and you've got no evidence for it! None!

### **D'Souza**

We're not...

### **Hitchens**

There is no [unintelligible] these [unintelligible].

### **D'Souza**

I may have a lot riding on the resurrection and we're not talking about those things. We're really saying - what you seem to be saying -

**Hitchens**

I'm sorry but I am insisting on talking about it.

**D'Souza**

What you seem to be saying, even though we have not only - we have the Gospels, we have the Acts of the Apostles, we have the testimonies of Suetonius, Tacitus, Roman sources, Greek sources, Jewish sources including Josephus, then we have an early Christian movement following Christ that has no incentive to do so, they're in a persecuting Roman empire, many of them go to their deaths because of Christ and you're saying they all went to it because of a made-up guy. That's historically preposterous.

**Hitchens**

No, it's not.

**D'Souza**

And most historians agree with me.

**Hitchens**

The fact - the willingness of - excuse me - the willingness of people to die for a rumour, or a delusion or an illusion is very well attested. That - there's no element... there's never been... alas, for our poorly evolved mammalian primate species, there's never been a period of history, however modern, where that won't happen. Look at how many people are still willing to do this for Joseph Smith, for example. Or for a deluded epileptic called Mohammed, a plagiarist of some of the foregoing.

I repeat: if you will accept this for one will you not accept it for all? Or must - or are

you not obliged to accept it, for are not all these prophets and revelations equally valid or equally false? My position is at least intelligible.

**D'Souza**

Let's come to your question about -

**Hitchens**

And consistent.

**D'Souza**

Let me ask you about the question about religion poisoning everything. And I want to read a list of - a few names. Dante: did religion poison Dante? Did religion poison Shakespeare? Did religion poison Milton? Did religion poison Bach? Did religion poison Handel? Did religion poison Michelangelo? What about Bernini? What about the guys who did the Gothic cathedrals? Yes or no?

**Hitchens**

Yes to Dante. Made him waste a lot of his talent on descriptions of hell. Very gloating, very poorly written, sadistic accounts of what happened to people who he didn't agree with. It was a real waste of his time.

**D'Souza**

What about Shakespeare? Was he in the same league, ruined by religion?

**Hitchens**

No, no, I - Shakespeare - well, I'm forced to the belief that if he wasn't himself a secret Catholic, he was probably from a closet Catholic family, and that there's some intriguing evidence in his work of the practice of the ancient mass and so forth and

that that's worth knowing.

But it neither adds nor subtracts anything to his talent and that when someone writes, "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, I all alone bewep my outcast state, and trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, and look upon myself and curse my fate, wishing me like to one more rich in hope, featured like him, like him with friends possess'd," you want to ask two things. One: who is this person whom Shakespeare is jealous? Who is this man he wishes he was? Who is the man who has so many more talents, more friends than him? And second: he got it right about deaf heaven and troubling it with his bootless cries. He knew what despair was. He knows that the realization that you must begin with is that the heavens are empty. And that we have to deal with each other here on Earth and this is the only life we have. Otherwise we wouldn't need Shakespeare.

**D'Souza**

Christopher, this is why -

**Hitchens**

And we wouldn't have the holy books[?]. Do you want to go on through all the architects and poets? I'm willing to do it.

**D'Souza**

No, no. But this is why you are such a charming evader. Because my point is that Shakespeare's -

**Hitchens**

I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, did I evade the question about Dante or Shakespeare?

**D'Souza**

Shakespeare's moral universe is inconceivable without Christianity. The strength of it is he gives voice to different views within that universe. You isolate a view from one character, impute it to Shakespeare and imply that Shakespeare somehow transcends -

**Hitchens**

No, excuse me, the person I was just quoting was Shakespeare. That's one of his sonnets.

**D'Souza**

Yes.

**Hitchens**

It's not a character from a play as you should know.

**D'Souza**

The sonnets are all -

**Hitchens**

It's him reflecting upon his own condition.

Now, my life - I'm willing to admit, my own life which is mainly devoted to the question of language, is inconceivable without, say, the King James version of the Bible, sometimes not by the Aquinas group, but by others called the Authorized Version of the Bible; and by the Cranmer Prayerbook which falls somewhere on the Protestant-Catholic frontier. And other things. I couldn't imagine my life without being able to call upon verses and staves of this, or in fact without being visited by them when I didn't even call upon them. But that doesn't mean that my morality

comes from that or that I need the permission of the Church by law established in Canterbury to think moral thoughts...

**D'Souza**

My point is that the -

**Hitchens**

... or immoral ones, if it comes to that.

**D'Souza**

The point you're missing is not the King James Bible, but the sonnets have narrative voices behind them. Some of them are said by a young man, some of them seem to be said in a homosexual tone. Others are clearly heterosexual. So in literature, because someone wrote a sonnet, that doesn't mean it's their opinion. But it's your turn to ask me a question.

**Hitchens**

Ah. Well you know that - I mean, I suppose one of the things that most upsets and depresses and alarms, nauseates secular humanists is sectarianism or any appeal to it. In other words I didn't want Rick Warren at the inauguration, not just because of his apparent - not just because he's a boring, fat dunce and so on but because - and not because he's not inclusive enough about gay people because he doesn't have to be inclusive about that if he doesn't [want to], but because he was so openly willing to say to a Jewish woman who asked him in public, could she too go to heaven, or *come* to heaven: "No, you can't." Now, I don't see how he can't say that.

I'm prefacing, I'm throat-clearing, Dinesh, in this way because I want to ask you something. And I - it's another question I want to lodge in the minds of others present here this evening. To be a Roman Catholic is not to believe that religion is a good idea. All right? Or that God is a good thing. Or that the Bible contains some true stories. It is to believe those things, too, but it is to hold the belief that if you're not a

Roman Catholic, you're not going to be saved. Now, so I'm asking you - and we now have a fresh occupant of the Holy See, Mr. Ratzinger as he'll always be to me, who is increasingly determined to restore the doctrine of *ex[tra] ecclesia[m] nulla salus*, that there is not just *the* Church but there's *one* Church, one true Church. Well, I'm going to ask you anyway. And you must have asked yourself. I'm going to ask every one else present for their consideration. Do you think that's true or not?

**D'Souza**

I think it is not true. And, I don't - I think it is - not only is it not true, it is actually not the Catholic position.

**Hitchens**

[Possibly to audience member] Stand up, that man.

**D'Souza**

And to go even further the - look, I don't even think... I think you got to be careful here because...

**Hitchens**

It's time[?] to be.

**D'Souza**

Even from an evangelical point of view, you mention Rick Warren, and the... even if someone takes the Bible for what it says, literally - I'm not a Biblical literalist, but even if you were, the Bible says really very clearly that Jesus is the way, in fact the only way, to salvation. But there's a second proposition that is often confused with that. And that is: everyone in the world, whether they lived before Jesus, or whether they lived in other cultures, but if they have not positively accepted Jesus Christ, they are going to hell.

There are two groups of people who infer this. One is a certain type of extreme and ignorant fundamentalist. And the second is a certain type of equally ignorant atheist. Both read the Bible the same way and draw from it conclusions that are actually neither stated in Scripture nor in fact a position of either the Catholic or the Protestant Churches. [Audience members interject] Well, we'll explore that further but I -

### **Hitchens**

Look, I was going to say "not my problem" but I was rather amazed to have elicited such enthusiasm from people clapping, saying "no, the Church has never claimed to be the one, true Church." I mean, you can clap that if you like but it doesn't seem to be historically true. Anyway, it's nothing to me, I just wanted to know which side of it you took. But you don't seem to have everyone with you.

### **D'Souza**

It's not a matter of taking sides; in Catholicism there is something called a development of doctrine -

### **Hitchens**

All right, all right, I'll phrase -

### **D'Souza**

So even if you could show it was believed in the 3rd Century AD it doesn't follow it's the Catholic position.

### **Hitchens**

Well, people used to lose their lives on these propositions, let's not be frivolous about them.

**D'Souza**

I'm not.

**Hitchens**

Then if you want to be ecumenical, I'll be ecumenical then. Do you think that it is better to be, more likely to lead to your salvation, to be a Christian than another kind of monotheist?

**D'Souza**

Of course I believe that.

**Hitchens**

Can I ask you on what grounds that your superior claim rests, that makes you better than a Muslim or a Jew?

**D'Souza**

Certainly. Give me a minute to lay it out.

**Hitchens**

By all means.

**D'Souza**

And I'm going to try to - I'm going to tie my hand behind the back by doing it in purely secular terms. Let me start with a proposition I think no one in this room would disagree with: things in the world are not what they ought to be. Anyone

disagree with that? No. That means we live on two levels, don't we? We live on the - this is the level of the way things are. Let's call it the human level. But we all know that there is a second level: that's the way things ought to be. It's just perfect goodness, perfect beauty, truth and so on. So, you have these two levels - let's call them for a moment the human level and the divine level.

Now all the religions in the world are aimed at trying to ask how can this chasm between the human level and the divine level be bridged? You ask about Judaism and Islam so I'll refer to those two. The Eastern religions have one solution, I'll set it aside for a moment. Judaism and Islam jointly believe - and I say jointly: they believe in slightly different ways but the solution is similar - that the way for this chasm to be closed is for human beings to build a certain kind of a ladder from man to God.

What is the shape of this ladder? In Islam it's the five pillars. Pray five times a day, observe Ramadan, do charity, go to Mecca. In Judaism it may be different: diet, dietary regulations and so on. But the idea is these are human efforts to ascend to God.

Christianity is different - maybe not better but it certainly is different - in declaring this project wonderful and noble but impossible. That this human effort, however gallant, cannot close this enormous gap. If the gap is to be closed - now maybe as an atheist you say "it can't be closed" - but if it is to be closed, the Christian belief is it has to be done from the other side. In some mysterious way, God has got to condescend to the human level and that's the role that Christ plays. He's the emissary, if you will, from God to man.

Now, notice that here I haven't appealed to Scripture, I haven't quoted the book of Leviticus or the Gospel of Matthew, and given in my own best way a certain anthropological account of the human problem, I've given the ways in which different solutions are proposed and I leave it to you to examine which solution is the most plausible. I'm saying the Christian view seems to me to make the most sense - if indeed this great gap can be closed it seems to me that it has to be closed the Christian way. The other way can make progress but even though good it isn't going to be good enough.

## **Hitchens**

Fantastic. So you'd make a really good Muslim. In that the main profession of faith, the only real profession of faith the Muslim has to make is there is one God and his

messenger, his emissary. The crosser[?] of the gap is the prophet Muhammad. You have just as perfectly stated that - restated it as one could have wished. I wish you joy -

**D'Souza**

I'm sorry, you're, you're -

**Hitchens**

I wish you joy of it.

**D'Souza**

Either I didn't hear you or you have just issued a whopping non-sequitur so I'll give you the benefit of repeating it. Which is a perfect point to segueway.

**Hitchens**

You said that the gap could only be closed if God sent an emissary. That's what makes Christianity different. I appeal to the audience: did I misstate that? Did he not say that? Did you not say that?

**D'Souza**

I did say it, but -

**Hitchens**

What is the profession of faith of Islam? There is but one God and Muhammad is his messenger to us. That's all you need to be a Muslim.

**D'Souza**

Here, if I can briefly answer then we'll go to questions -

**Hitchens**

Do you think Islam is man-made or God-made? Do you think that God spoke through [to] us by Muhammad? Or that only Muslims are under this wrong impression? That God's only appeared to us once through the Nazarene?

**D'Souza**

Here let me give the Muslim answer, which is that Muhammad was solely a man. That's not my answer. That's the Islamic answer. Islam is different from Christianity. In Islam, Muhammad is in no way considered to be God's special messenger. Muhammad is believed to be the illiterate and unworthy recipient of Allah's revelation. He does in no way occupy the same position in Islam as Christ does in Christianity. So the equivalence that you're suggesting between Christ and Muhammad is simply wrong.

**Hitchens**

It's crossing the gap in the same direction though, isn't it? Surely. You said that the gap had to be crossed not by humans building up towards heaven but heaven coming down towards us. Well, quite plainly, the Koran is the same in that respect.

I'm asking you a different question now. I'm saying, do you think that those who believe that God ventriloquized himself through the archangel Gabriel, oddly enough, through this illiterate - that that's a true statement? That that did happen? Might have happened? Could have happened? Or didn't happen?

**D'Souza**

I don't believe it did happen but the point I'm trying to make that you're missing -

**Hitchens**

It gives us something in common.

**D'Souza**

Obviously I don't accept the revelations of other religions but the point I'm trying to make here is that the Islamic solution is radically different from the Christian one. Whatever Allah's revelation to Muhammad, it was not vicarious atonement, it was not the idea -

**Hitchens**

Same direction.

**D'Souza**

- that God is closing the gap. It was rather that human beings have these social and legal and civic duties. In other words, in Christianity you have the idea, for example, that morality is intentional. If you've contemplated the sin, Christ says in a sense you've committed it. In Islam it's very different.

**Hitchens**

Thought crime.

**D'Souza**

One second. The mullah -

**Hitchens**

Thought crime. Totalitarianism again. Thought crime.

**D'Souza**

Whether it is or not -

**Hitchens**

"We know what you're thinking. And we can punish you for it." Totalitarianism defined. Tyranny defined. Thought crime.

**D'Souza**

It might -

**Hitchens**

You said it for me.

**D'Souza**

It might be a thought crime. Christ says nothing about punishing one's thoughts. Christ basically is simply defining the nature of sin. Our legal system is based on the idea that offences rely in part on the intention. That's why a first degree murder is different from a crime of passion for example. That's another example of the way that Christianity has shaped our legal culture. So -

**Hitchens**

"No one comes to the Father except by me"? That's not judging you on what you think?

**D'Souza**

But it's one thing to say - it's one thing to say that Christ is the means by which people get to heaven. And it's quite another thing to say that everyone who hasn't explicitly accepted Christ is damned. In fact, the Bible itself disputes that. In the book of Luke we know that Abraham - Abraham is said to be in heaven - well, Abraham lived before Christ. He obviously didn't accept Christ and yet he's in heaven. So the Bible itself confutes your assertion that a positive affirmation of Christ is a prerequisite for salvation.

**Hitchens**

No-no-no, the Bible is incoherent. That's a quite different statement.

**D'Souza**

Well, you're just choosing the parts that you can -

**Hitchens**

The Bible is thoroughly, thorough-goingly through and through incoherent. That doesn't make *me* inconsistent.

**D'Souza**

Not inconsistent, only selective.

**Moderator**

Gentlemen, I'm feeling a little like Gwen Ifill here, you know? But why don't we do this round of applause for both gentlemen and we'll go to questions. Fantastic. As I mentioned earlier both gentlemen have given up some of their time so we'd have more time for questions. We'd ask the questioners to be as focused, precise as you possibly can and put it in the form of a question please. Sir? Very nice, [unintelligible]

sir?

### **Question 1**

Thank you gentlemen both for your wonderful remarks tonight. My question may be an entirely whole new debate, I'd like to hear both of you respond, but in particular Mr. Hitchens, I address this question to you if I can't get [a] response from both. Mr. Hitchens, how would you define or delimit what we mean by a person and what is our innate duty to another person?

### **Hitchens**

Well, I think the word 'individual' is a well chosen word for our description otherwise you can't boil it down any further. However much you talk about the society, the tribe, the species and so forth, you're stuck with the fact that it has to be made up of members who are a bit more than atoms, so an individual is a person, someone who can't be further subdivided. Hope that will meet your rather bizarre question, I have to say.

The second is "How do we know what our duties to one another are?". Well - what we know is that without a certain - 'solidarity' is my preferred word for it - without an understanding that there's a common interest as well as one's own raging individual demands and needs which have always been understood at all times to be in any - the case of any one person insatiable; then lest these can be married in some way to a concept of the common good then the enterprise isn't possible. And if this wasn't true then of course we couldn't have had a human society, however primitive, to begin with. And the same conclusion is observable among other primates who have families, tribes, And some other mammals, too. There's no reason to suppose that evolution has given us any special privileges in exchange for our recognition of these facts.

### **D'Souza**

Left unanswered is the issue of how evolved primates develop either individualism or solidarity. I've watched the Nature Channel a few times and I don't see much of either. So that, it seems to me that there's a missing element here and I think Jefferson,

who was by the way a man of the enlightenment, not a particularly devout Christian, nevertheless asked “where do we as individuals get inalienable rights?”. In other words, where are the obligations, the mutual obligations to each other? Where do those come from? And he could have said any number of things but he could think of only one: the unalienable rights are ours because we are created, we have a creator.

That’s where they come from. And I think to this day we haven’t had a better source of rights and of these individual dignities that Christopher Hitchens takes for granted but makes no effort to ground.

## **Hitchens**

Okay, then. I’ll have to if you don’t mind because as a minor member of the Jefferson biographer club I’ll just have to say what I think about that.

It is true that the Declaration speaks of inalienable rights from a creator. But in my opinion this is a negation of what had been up ‘til then the only way ‘right’ was ever mentioned which was that there was a divine right of kingship. If you recall, that’s what was being overthrown, had already been overthrown in part in Britain and was being overthrown in the United States. The claim of the King to have *his* authority from the Creator was false. Now if that claim is false, and I believe that it is, there is no divine right of kings. You can do one of two things. You can either say “Well, if there are rights then everyone should have them and claim them from the Creator” which is a sort of tautology. Or you could say that “rights don’t come from a Creator, that they are innate in us and in our species and we’ll get the ones we fight for and defend; we won’t get the ones we don’t, and most of the time we’re defending these rights against theocracy.

## **D’Souza**

If I - may I be able to just - one thought? I think you are right that Jefferson is opposing divine right but here’s the truly profound thing: rather than deny divine right completely, Jefferson makes a very different move. He transfers divine right from the one to the many. In other words, Jefferson shows by his statement that he agrees with divine right, but the divine right is not conferred on the monarch, it is conferred on the people as a whole.

## **Hitchens**

But that's precisely the error I was just identifying. If you can suck one right out of your thumb and call it divine why can't you say, "Well then, oysters have the same right, that it comes from their creator." There is as your yourself have pointed out with the rights industry no real limit to this, especially if you attribute it to the divine. Generally speaking though, the struggle for rights is the struggle for humans to assert themselves against other humans who want to oppress them in the name of God.

## **Question 1**

Do you mean sir that we do not have an - it's me again, the questioner.

## **Hitchens**

Yes, sir.

## **Question 1**

Do you mean that -

## **Hitchens**

You suddenly seemed a little, what shall I say...

## **Question 1**

Omniscient?

## **Hitchens**

It just came from somewhere else. Gave me a nasty turn. Yes please, go ahead.

## Question 1

Do you mean then that we do not have any innate rights towards each other other than what we assert by force? Did I hear you right? Or did I hear you wrong?

## Hitchens

I tend to agree with those who've said that the concept of right, of *recht*, is a human creation. That it's an arbitrary creation, yes. And that we'd be better to say that we get the ones we fight for, that we don't get the ones we don't and that our duties are - and solidarities with each other - are mandated by evolution and are not in any sense predicated on anything supernatural.

## Moderator

Thank you. Sir?

## Question 2

My question's looking a little bit more forward. You mentioned earlier, imagine if Jesus Christ was not - had been proven to no longer be God, or God's son. Imagine if you will a future where science is accepted as a total dogma of thought, and reason is the ultimate arbiter. In that world, would humanity not find its own ways to tribalize again and have its own strife? There's a TV show, *South Park*, that has a funny episode about this, where they actually say, in the future they fight over science as opposed to fighting over God.

And for you, Mr. D'Souza in the same way, in a world without God is it really so unimaginable? I mean, is there a possible way? Could you imagine a future without it in the sense of humanity still being humans? And I'd also be remiss to say, in the great tradition of these debates, is it possible that you gentlemen might be able to go to a pub after this and continue over beers? I'd be happy to buy.

## Hitchens

On the *second* point... It's as certain as anything can be that I'll be in a bar and Dinesh quite often -

## D'Souza

Christopher and I -

## Hitchens

Dinesh and his wife have often joined me there.

On your point. My view of the mammalian evolution of our species is that we are programmed to be superstitious. Religion is unvanquishable, unbanishable, as long as we're partly irrational, as long as our pre-frontal lobes are too small, our adrenaline glands are too large and our opposing thumbs are still too clumsy. Of course, people can be sold every kind of delusion.

I half agree with G. K. Chesterton when he said that people don't believe in God, they don't believe in nothing but in anything. I believe that the belief in God is a belief - willingness to believe *in anything*.

But if you take orthodox religion away you may very well find someone worshipping a pet rock or a tame fish or a crystal or some New Age nonsense healing process. Yeah, that's the way a lot of people are. I'd just like to say that there's a solid minority of us who are not impressed by any of this. And we're citizens, too, and deserve that much respect.

A tiny thing just to re-ignite the disagreement that Dinesh and I have. You said, science is based on reason. I don't think that's absolutely, necessarily true. Because humans aren't based on reason.

Newton for example believed that the Catholic Church was Antichrist. And that only Protestantism was true. And that the Trinity meant that you shouldn't be allowed to teach at Cambridge University if you believed in it, for example. Joseph Priestly, the discoverer of oxygen and carbon monoxide, believed in the phlogiston theory. Alfred

Russel Wallace, Darwin's great collaborator and maybe progenitor, was never happier than by going to spiritualist seances. A lot of these religious people - scientific minds, terrific crackpots. It's not until Einstein really that you get something like pure mind as a scientific expression.

I would prefer to say that science bases itself on *evidence* as well as reason and that's the missing term in Christianity and Islam and Judaism and the rest of it. A good scientist will say, "Here's what I'll tell you now in advance would prove me wrong. Here's what I think is the case, but if you find this, I'll tell you now, I'll climb down." So for evolution there is no religious believer, there is no religious believer who can do you that service. Who can say to you, "Show me this and I'll stop believing." It's never been done in the *nature* that it couldn't be done. The 'E' word for religious people is essentially meaningless. It's occasionally convenient. Sometimes they think they'd like some evidence - usually in the form of miracles. Because faith always turns out to be not quite enough. "Let's have a bit of evidence. A tiny bit."

### **D'Souza**

Christopher, you're going a little -

### **Hitchens**

I forget which scientist said - scientist of evolution said, okay, what would make you stop, what would make you say you were wrong? "Rabbit bones in the pre-Cambrian layer. That would do it. Find me a rabbit bone there, it's all over." The debate between Dawkins and Gould on punctuated evolution, for example, are as intense as any debate that's ever been between schismatic Catholics and Protestants, Sunni and Shia Muslims or anything of this sort, except that they are all decidable on evidence as well as reason. That's what makes all the difference. All, *all* the difference. Okay.

### **D'Souza**

Here's the problem with that statement. There are the biggest questions of life: 'Who are we?' 'Why are we here?' 'Why is there a universe?' 'What's our purpose?' 'What comes after death?' These questions, if you think about it, are in some senses as much in the dark as they have been since the time of the Babylonians. Science has left them

completely unanswered and untouched. This is why the philosopher Wittgenstein said that even if all possible scientific questions have been answered, the main problems in life remain.

So what do we do with issues that are of vital importance to us but not susceptible to the kind of empirical evidence that Christopher Hitchens demands? For example, how do we know if there's life after death? We don't. None of us have met a dead guy. What possible empirical test could we devise -

**Hitchens**

That's not what you say.

**D'Souza**

One second.

**Hitchens**

That's not what you say.

**D'Souza**

Let me finish. You've been going on a bit so let me have my turn.

**Hitchens**

All right. If you all agree that dead people don't come back I'll hold it right there. I didn't think that was your view.

**D'Souza**

The point I'm trying to make is this -

## **Hitchens**

It's all I could have hoped for.

## **D'Souza**

No possible empirical test can resolve the question of whether there's an afterlife. So in the absence of evidence, I believe that there is an afterlife on faith. In the absence of evidence, Christopher Hitchens does not believe that there is an afterlife. The difference between us is not that he knows and I don't. Or I know and he doesn't. He is labouring under the delusion that his position is based on reason and my position is based on faith, when the truth of it is neither of us know, both of us are guessing, both our positions are based on faith and he would do well to have the honesty to admit that.

## **Hitchens**

There's a strong clap-anything faction here tonight. Apparently even I can appeal to it.

## **D'Souza**

Perhaps the word for it is 'converts'.

## **Hitchens**

Since you've just said to me and to the audience and I think it's so recent, moments ago that people will remember it: you believe that on faith - the afterlife - and I don't. Then you say we're the same because we're just as faith-based as each other. That's what got the applause. I would just like to say that I think that that's an unholdable, untenable position. If I say that given that there's absolutely no evidence, which you also rather too willingly conceded, that you're ever likely again to see a dead person or be re-united with one, that I decide on that basis, that absolutely no-exceptions

basis - I doubt an exception will be made in my own case - I don't think my position is faith-based at all. I think it *is* somewhat evidence-derived if I would say that only for myself. Clap all you like!

### **Moderator**

Let's try to get in as many questions as we can. We'd ask that the next round of questions come from students in particular. We'll try to get everybody in. The woman in the red?

### **Question 3**

Oh, my question was just in regards to a couple of the point you made, Mr. Hitchens. In light of the first point that if certain historical figures weren't to exist, Jesus and Mohammed, and that would leave us, you know, to a belief in atheism most likely. Or you mention that we wouldn't necessarily become thieves or murderers if those historical figures didn't exist. I'm curious that, you know, if a lack of belief in God were not to convince me to become a thief or a murderer, isn't it also true that people commit abuses such as the religious mandates you mentioned, such as circumcision etc. in the name of Christianity everyday, doesn't that not necessarily change the objective meaning of the cross, and if it does, isn't atheism responsible for thievery and murder?

### **Hitchens**

Even the clap-anything faction had a slight... false start there I think. They knew what you wanted of me but I don't. How would this change the meaning of the cross? I throw myself on your mercy. I don't understand the grammar of the question.

### **Question 3**

My basic point is that under your understanding of atheism, atheism is not responsible for thievery and murders that, you know, result from lack of belief in God; then isn't it also true that people who commit abuses in the name of the cross, in the name of Christianity, those abuses don't change the objective meaning of the cross or

the heart of Christianity.

### **Hitchens**

It depends what authority they think they're obeying. I mean if the Pope says, "You must go on crusade, and this is a war for God, and you will be rewarded in paradise if you undertake it," if you believe what the Pope says, I think it's not inconsistent with being a Christian as I understand it, you are, to me, responsible for all the crimes you thereupon commit.

I'm not going to claim more for atheism than it will bear. I mean you can be an atheist and you can be a psychopath. You can be an atheist and be a sadist. You can be an atheist and be a fascist. That's actually quite uncommon, the latter, most fascists actually were Catholics, but you can be an atheist and be a Stalinist[?] - in fact it's almost mandatory the other way 'round. All it says is you don't believe in God.

Now, I don't - some people think there shouldn't be a special word for it. I don't believe in the Tooth Fairy, either. Or in Santa Claus. I don't have a special word for saying I don't believe that.

### **Question 3**

But wasn't your -

### **Hitchens**

There doesn't need to be a special ontological category. But Dinesh is right and we've actually both stated this in different ways. The original arguments, what is the good, what is the bad, what are our duties to each other, is there a point to our existence, the questions of philosophy - religion is fossilized philosophy, mind you, but it is still philosophy, with most of the questions left out or claimed to be answered - must be asked.

### **Moderator**

Question from the back, please.

**D'Souza**

May I take a quick shot at it?

**Moderator**

Please, Dinesh.

**D'Souza**

See, I think, Christopher I must say I think you are in this debate you are not rising to the seriousness of the issue. When you say, "religion is the same as the Tooth Fairy," - look -

**Hitchens**

I didn't say that.

**D'Souza**

Many of the - you said I should no more credit it empirically than I would credit the Tooth Fairy.

**Hitchens**

I'm sorry, I said I don't have a special word for saying "I don't believe in the Tooth Fairy." I do have a special word which I own to for saying why I'm an atheist or I don't believe in religion.

**D'Souza**

The point I'm trying to get is this: if one makes a list of the greatest scientists of all time, a list that would surely include Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Boyle, Leibniz, Pascal, Faraday, Newton, you would find that the vast majority of them believe in God. If you made a list of the greatest philosophers of all time, a list that would surely include Plato, Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Kant, Kierkegaard, Hegel, they believed in God. So for you now, writer for Vanity Fair, to say, "all of this is an illusion" and dismiss it without taking it seriously seems to me intellectually a little bit shameful, don't you think so?

### **Hitchens**

Well, then I just said, first - I'm beginning to narrow down the HQ of this faction.

### **D'Souza**

Do you know more science -

### **Hitchens**

I took particular care to say that I don't, I don't have a way, in a word, of saying why I don't believe in Tooth Fairies or any other kind of fairies or anything of the supernatural. But with religion I say that it's like engaging with philosophy except philosophy frozen by dogma. Thus all the original arguments we have are to do with whether or not there's been a supernatural intervention in these questions or not.

I also took particular care to say before you did that a great number of scientists were subject to one form or another of religious belief. In the case of the greatest one you instance, Sir Isaac Newton, one who thought your Church was the work of the devil, for example - your problem, not mine. I don't read Newton for his theological opinions. Newton thought that if you could find the true measurements of the temples in ancient Rimmon and so forth, you'd know more than you could if you'd measured the gravitational field. I don't agree with him. He wouldn't be remembered if that's what he was remembered for. Or he'd be remembered as a crackpot. Same with Alfred Russel Wallace being a spiritualist. However, yes, you're right, I would

give - I'd give a page of Spinoza for any of those people when it comes - or of David Hume - for any of those people when it comes to reasoning whether or not we are objects of supernatural guidance and divine intervention. And I maintain -

**D'Souza**

You'd give a page of Spinoza for Plato, Locke and Kant combined?

**Hitchens**

I maintain that we are not and that it's a good thing that we are not because if we were we would be living under a celestial dictatorship from which there would be no appeal. That would mean our lives were essentially servile. Now is that plain? Not - is it - not "do you agree" but is it at least plain what I say and how I say it?

**Moderator**

Let's go to our friend in the mezzanine.

**Question 4**

My question is to both of the speakers. Does religion provide a survival advantage? And I - either one. And if you do think it provides a survival advantage that implies that it's purely a construct of the human mind and - I mean it - I think you can argue both sides and it might lead you to a big problem.

**D'Souza**

Well, I do think that religion provides a survival advantage but it in no way follows that religion is untrue. I think that reason provides a survival advantage. We develop large brains, for example, to elude woolly mammoths and so on. Or at least the challenges of nature. And yet that doesn't mean reason is untrustworthy as a means of doing logic or trying to understand planetary rotations and so on.

So religion could be both a source of solidarity which it clearly is. Look, the vast majority of people from the beginning of history in all cultures have been religious. So from a Darwinian point of view you have to concede that religion has a powerful survival advantage.

Now, earlier, a young lady asked a question that was treated as silly when she was talking about lying and stealing. But I think the deeper import of that question is: religion is ultimately a reason for hope in the idea of cosmic justice. And what I mean by that is that life is very unfair. We believe in justice, and we say, "What goes around, comes around" and stuff like that, but we know it's not true, right? Many times the bad guy ends up on top and many times the good guy comes to grief. So all of the religions of the world are in some senses asserting that that may be the terrestrial word on things but it's not the final word.

I mean, look at Hinduism: if you are a lousy guy in this life, hey, we're going to be seeing you as a cockroach in the next life. Cosmic justice. So the survival advantage of religion is multiple.

I mean, number one, it is the sole, tested means of transmitting morality to the young, right? In every culture if you ask someone, "Where did you learn about right and wrong," he says "I'm a Muslim, I'm a Hindu." Now, true, we can probably do it by philosophy but I'm yet to meet a guy who says "I got my morality from Hegel." So we can talk all we want about philosophy but the truth of it is, religion has delivered the goods as being the transmission belt of conveying morality.

What about hope in life and a sense of purpose? When there was the Virginia Tech massacre, how come that secular campus suddenly became a kind of cathedral in which everyone was invoking consolation and God? In other words, my point is religion, by giving a sense of purpose and meaning to life, by ultimately answering the large questions that science has proved radically incapable of even entertaining - I mean, science doesn't even ask *why* there is a universe, and only purports to describe *how* we got a universe. So science is answering in this case a very different question than the one posed by religion. So if you imagine two tribes, a secular tribe that basically says, we're descended from the amoebas, we've come from nowhere, we're going nowhere, morality is stuff we make up as we go along. And another group of people who believe we're the special creation of God, history has a purpose, your life has a purpose, that even if no-one else loves you there's a God who loves you and that there is an eternal life to reward the just. Which of those two camps is more likely to survive and prosper?

## Hitchens

Dinesh was doing very well for the first half[?] of that and I completely agree with him. My friend and ally, Daniel Dennett in his book on belief in belief says that - he thinks it's extremely likely that religious faith gave people advantages in survival. If you go to the witch doctor and you think he is a real doctor, everyone knows that there's an element of morale involved in recovery and it may be a very small advantage based on an illusion, but these are areas where even a tiny advantage may indeed help.

However, rather than confining himself to that, Dinesh goes on to say, "But wouldn't it be *nice* if it *was* true what the witch-doctor said." He just - you just heard him say it. I mean, after all, you'd feel a huge amount better if there was life everlasting as a reward for virtue. Well that's known as wish-thinking.

I phrase it like this - I take up your Jefferson challenge again if you like. Thomas Jefferson says in Notes on the State of Virginia, about the slavery question, he says "I tremble for my country when I reflect" - you've all read it - "that God is just." If you haven't read it you'll remember I said it. You'll go and read it now. "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just." Who can forget? But if there is a just God, what is there to tremble about? If there's a God who really loves you and knows that you're there and cares for you and looks out for you and is interested in how you're getting on and how you're *going* to get on and wants the best for you, what is a small question like slavery? All your feelings of responsibility and care about that are dissolved. You're bathed in the refulgence of an absolutely wonderful thing.

## D'Souza

Well, maybe the -

## Hitchens

The only price of it would be - unfortunately because nothing comes without a price - you'd have to submit to a celestial dictatorship. But hey, what's that in return for a tonne of love?

## **D'Souza**

Well, I'll answer your question very briefly. Why did - why was Jefferson trembling? Well, Jefferson was a slave owner. He owned about 200 slaves. And he never freed any of them before his death. He understood - he didn't have to be told - the tremendous, innate power of human selfishness. You don't need theology to explain the slave-owner. Slavery is rooted in human selfishness. Jefferson knew that and how powerful that was. He trembled that that instinct, so rooted and so powerful, would prevail over what Lincoln would later call the better angels of our nature. So he trembled because man, although he knows better, is inclined to pick ultimately the - in the short term, the more profitable, the more convenient choice. But ultimately, the terrible choice.

## **Moderator**

Gentlemen we only have about ten minutes before Father Kevin comes back up and declares the winner. So why don't we try to get as many students as we can in -

## **Hitchens**

Okay, very, very, very quick: Jefferson did free the ones who he'd fathered and he did free their mother. He freed the ones who looked like him.

## **Moderator**

On the mezzanine.

## **Question 5**

I'm going to ask this question wrong because I'm from CSU. This is for Hitchens. You said it is not unusual for people to die for a myth in reference to the Muslims and the Christians. However, don't historians generally agree that all the twelve disciples were martyred and killed - eleven of them? And wouldn't it be much more strange for

first generation Christians to be tortured when they know it's a lie?

**Hitchens**

It doesn't challenge what I said at all. I take it as a compliment. No, there's no historian who would say that - not that I know of. It's not - these things are not historically established.

**D'Souza**

And no-one every died for anything they knew to be a lie. Even if you think of the Islamic radicals, they are dying for an imagined promise -

**Hitchens**

I didn't say they knew it to be a lie. I said the whole story is a legend.

**D'Souza**

But if the whole story is a legend then the early Christians, having no basis for their -

**Hitchens**

May have been under another impression. I can't know the subjective views of somebody else. I don't - it's the same as someone saying they saw the stigmata. If I wasn't there I can't say to them they didn't. I can only say I think it's much more likely they were under a misapprehension.

**D'Souza**

Exactly. Well we're talking about plausibility of motive here -

## **Hitchens**

Yes.

## **D'Souza**

And, you know, for example, Paul, in discussing the issue of Christ's death says that he has 500 witnesses. He says some of them are dead but some of them are alive. And this is by the way in a book written about 30 years after the crucifixion. So, my point is, we're talking about historical documents in historical time and we're trying to attach motives and plausibility to them.

I also want to point out: you mentioned a moment ago wishful thinking. Somebody asked me about the survival advantage and so I answered in those terms. But I do want to point out that wishful thinking is always punished in evolutionary terms. From an evolutionary point of view it makes absolutely no sense to entertain a set of beliefs about the afterlife that are in fact illusionary. To see this, imagine two rabbits. One of which is, you might say, the religious rabbit and the other is the atheist rabbit. And they are both being pursued by a lion. The atheist rabbit goes, "I've only one life to live, I better run like hell." The religious rabbit goes, "I got another life waiting for me that's even better." Which rabbit is more likely to survive?

Point I'm trying to make is from an evolutionary point of view religion is very expensive. People who are much poorer than we are built pyramids and cathedrals. They invested a lot of money in this. My point is, why would these things survive if they were illusions? Why wouldn't evolution encourage atheist points of view to survive, because they are based on a more hard-headed assessment of the world in front of us.

## **Hitchens**

That's a good question. One, answering you in reverse, and assuming the question is to me, and trying not to take up too much time: the huge majority of people in the educated, developed world, have become at least secular. You can certainly plot it along a graph of development - church attendance, religious fundamentalism and all these kind of things - have declined as we've evolved in that sense, if you want to put it that crudely.

The second though is that I don't think that - there are certain lessons that are not transmissible. Just as you said that only religion can provide morality to children, a very dangerous proposition, I think people will agree if they think about it - anyone who does think it might want to look at Mary McCarthy's *Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood*, for example, when she was told by her priests, at the age of nine, that her favourite uncle was going straight to hell because he was a Protestant. That's not teaching children morality. And morality is teachable to children, I can tell you, I've seen it done. I won't say I've done it myself, and I've seen it done without recourse to the supernatural. But that certain lessons have to be learned by each generation each time. Every generation has superstitions to combat. There will always be people who afresh will believe in ghosts, who will afresh believe in things we thought we'd dismissed: spiritualism; table-rapping - table-turning; conjury; levitation; all this nonsense has to be refuted in every generation.

We don't evolve out of this. It's an argument we have to have anew every time. As we do the argument about whether or not there is a supernatural dimension instead of a philosophical one and you now know which side of that I take.

### **Moderator**

To everybody in line we know you've given your questions a lot of thought. I takes real courage to get up there but we're just flat out of time.

### **Hitchens**

Oh, no.

### **Moderator**

I apologize. Blame me but we wanted to get -

### **D'Souza**

Let me take one more question, give us a chance to wrap up.

**Moderator**

I was just going to say - well I was just going to say I wanted to give you each a chance to wrap up.

**Hitchens**

I'd rather have a question, I really would.

**Moderator**

Okay.

**Hitchens**

Because we both I think would have to be acquitted - no, *couldn't* be acquitted of having given rather long answers.

**Moderator**

Which is great. And gentlemen in the front, if you'd be kind enough - and we'd be grateful for it - to defer to... student appears to be an underclassman, I may be wrong, thank you for your indulgence on that. Sir, you'll be the last question.

**Question 6**

I'm a student from CU. My question is for Mr. Hitchens. If we use the scientific method to test the power of prayer and there was enough evidence for the scientific community to create a theory about it, would you consider the existence of God?

**Hitchens**

Well, there are two answers to that question. One is that this has actually been minutely studied. And you can read the findings - the study of intercessory prayer, that's to say, prayer that is designed to affect an outcome, in other words to make someone in hospital get better. And it's been found - I used to think that they would find there was no effect of it at all which was what was found with one slight variable - that very often the person being prayed for the most did slightly worse. The reason being that they felt bad for all the people they knew were praying for them and the fact they weren't getting any better. Now -

### **Question 6**

Though I'm just saying if the scientific community had

### **Hitchens**

Well, I'm just saying -

### **Question 6**

- enough evidence would you [unintelligible]...

### **Hitchens**

Well, you're asking me, if my aunt had bollocks would she be my uncle. My answer to the question is if she did grow testicles I think she still wouldn't be my uncle.

The British royal family - I was raised an Anglican as you may possibly guess - the British royal family has prayers mandated for it, to be said. Prayers every, single day by every, single Anglican in every, single service. Prayers for that family, okay? Have you read about the doings of this family lately? The most prayed for family in the world. I would take that as the control experiment if I was you. I'm so glad you asked!

### **Question 6**

I'm not saying that we've done it yet but if-

**D'Souza**

Let me take a shot.

**Hitchens**

If you're saying, what would it take to convince me, okay, I won't be -

**D'Souza**

Well, I think -

**Hitchens**

I won't be frivolous. If I thought I saw a miracle -

**Question 6**

Just using the scientific method.

**Hitchens**

If I thought I saw a dead person walking, for example, I would be much more inclined to think that I was the victim of a hallucination than that I had seen the laws of nature suspended in my favour. That's just the way I am. I think David Hume was right. The laws of nature have just been suspended apparently in front of your very eyes. Which nonetheless is likelier: that they had been suspended? In your favour, almost always, by the way. Or that you are under a misapprehension? *Always*, to me, the first explanation would be the least probable one. The likelihood that I was having a hallucination would have to occur to me.

**D'Souza**

The problem -

**Hitchens**

Because it wouldn't occur to me if I was undergoing a hallucination that that's how these ideas get spread around.

**D'Souza**

The problem is that we don't have final knowledge of what the laws of nature are. If at the time of David Hume you had said to him, "Light is both a particle and a wave," he would say that that was contradictory. If you had described to him even the most elementary operations of computers or quantum mechanics he would have dismissed them as ridiculous. That's not because these are contradictions of the laws of nature, they are in *fact* the laws of nature unknown to David Hume.

The question that you asked I think is very powerful because you didn't say - you weren't claiming an empirical proposition. You were really asking Hitchens a different question: "Is your mind open to being changed? If evidence shows one thing are you willing to change your mind?" To which his answer was a resounding *no*.

**Hitchens**

No-no-no-no, he started at the other end. He said, "Suppose the scientific proof occurs." And I had to say what I thought what the probabilities of that were. And I hope with sufficient -

**Question 6**

How many tests should there [have] been done?

## **Hitchens**

Now, wait a minute, you've got one more chance to put those paws together. Are you going to take it or not? The hardcore? No. Even the - no, I didn't say the [unintelligible].

## **D'Souza**

Let's take a final question if we can.

## **Hitchens**

I did say how my mind works, not how it would be changed. I would still say, faced with a supposed miracle, it's much more likely that I'm under a misapprehension.

Now it is an absolute slander to say of David Hume that confronted with evolution of scientific method based on what little he had known of it projecting it exponentially or in any other way, that he would have said, "No, that can't be right because I don't know about it." That is totally to misunderstand the way that Hume thought and wrote. Utterly to misunderstand the whole proposition of skepticism.

## **Moderator**

The gentlemen have asked to finish with a question. Sir, would you be willing to defer to the student behind you?

## **Question 7**

Sure.

## **Moderator**

Thank you very much. Really appreciate it. I know you've waited a long time.

**Question 7**

I am a student.

**Moderator**

Pardon me?

**Question 7**

I am a student.

**Moderator**

Let her rip!

**Hitchens**

So are we all. So are we all.

**Question 7**

Yes, thank you. There's been a lot of talk and question tonight about morality and justice. Well I am a student. My work mostly is in Los Angeles in the criminal justice system where I am a forensic specialist and investigator. When I go to work I put my hand on the Bible and the questions are asked, "Will you tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" To which I comfortably have to say "I do." In those trials, most of which are murder trials, and capital trials -

**Moderator**

Sir, do apologize but they're going to turn the lights out on us. Is there a question?

### **Question 7**

Give me - very quickly.

### **Moderator**

Great.

### **Question 7**

I see a lot of people lying in that situation to answers. And it bothers me greatly. Fast-forward - or backwards - to a class year where I have a theology teacher saying to me that I can not -

### **Hitchens**

There's always one.

### **Moderator**

Sir, I do apologize, but -

### **Question 7**

Can I ask the question?

### **Moderator**

That's what happened to the 'don't taze me, bro' guy. No -

### Question 7

Professor, it's his decision.

### Moderator

No, I'm sorry sir I've -

### Hitchens

[That was]? the big one.

### Moderator

[Unintelligible] pay me for. Sorry we've got to... Ma'am, do you want to ask the last question? And sir, [I] respect your passion but we've got to get a question going here. Ma'am, go right ahead.

### Question 8

My question is for Mr. Hitchens. Mr. Hitchens, you have said that -

### Moderator

Don't boo *her*! Hey, just give her a chance. Go ahead, please.

### Question 8

Mr. Hitchens, you have said that [unintelligible] the current science from embryology makes clear that pre-born humans are children deserving some protection. Correct? My questions for you as an atheist are as follows: first, what exactly do you think the nature of pre-born humans is? And second, on what grounds do you argue with your

materialist friends who disagree with you that they are deserving of some protection and that they have value?

### **Hitchens**

Right. It's a materialist question to begin *with*. I mean, embryology is a materialist science and even if you didn't think that before the recent discoveries about, say, the early viability of an unborn child - or fetus, embryo, whatever you wish to call it - there was no question that it was alive. It wasn't just a jungle of cells or a tumour or an appendix as some feminists used to refer to the unborn. In my memory it was simply a growth on and of the woman's body, not a separate thing, not a living thing.

### **Question 8**

Aren't the early feminists -

### **Hitchens**

The question resolves itself to me like this: it's obviously alive. There's an element of casuistry in asking, "Well, what kind of alive is it?" I mean, if it's a life it must be a human one, it can't be a non-human one. So all these questions are decided that way. I'm not a pacifist. I don't think there are no circumstances in which a human life can be taken or the balance of one life doesn't have to be measured by all kinds of means against another. But I think it's extraordinarily objectionable to exclude the occupant of the womb from this as if they weren't candidate members of the human race.

### **D'Souza**

Christopher, I want to say I was tempted to glibly congratulate you for finally getting something right. But I actually want to go much further. And -

### **Hitchens**

That's how we met.

## D'Souza

I want to commend you for really a courageous statement in this setting. I do want to offer a thought, though. A few times in this debate you've used the phrase 'celestial dictatorship'. And I think it's a telling phrase because it gets a little bit, I think, to what's going on here.

In thinking about this issue of God, we have to ask, "What is the reason for our resistance to God?" And then what are the reasons we give in public? The reasons we give in public have to do with things like science, and the absence of evidence implies the evidence of absence and this sort of thing. But in reality that may not be the real source of our opposition. In fact I don't think it is. I think ultimately it's not that you don't *believe* in God, and it's not even that you don't believe in the resurrection. I don't even think you care one way or another. It seems to me that what you really worry about are the strictures of Christian morality.

And ultimately that's probably what a lot of us in the audience also worry about. "If Christianity is true, gee, then morality isn't something that I make up as I go along, there really are some commandments I need to follow and there are certain ways in which I may have to constrict my lifestyle. In other words, I can't live exactly the way I want. The freedom I enjoy in college doesn't necessarily entail complete *moral* freedom."

So Christianity in this sense is viewed not as untrue but as oppressive. As, in a sense, being an inconvenience to your life as the way you want to live it. And so you resist it. But now that you resist it you can't say that you actually don't want to live by a moral code or by an external or a traditional moral code, and so you've got to convince yourself that it's really *brilliance* that's bringing you to this position and not a resistance to Christian morality. And so you begin to spout off a bunch of physics you don't know, and a bunch of history that you don't know, and a bunch of theology that you don't understand. And it's all aimed at affirming that "There *is* no God, so I don't really have to follow his rules." In a sense you get rid of the idea of moral judgement by abolishing the judge.

So in some senses I think these debates are not just about winning arguments, they're also about a certain kind of psychological introspection in which we ask what are - we know the motives for belief, right? Wishful thinking. What are the

motives for unbelief? What pay-off does that give you? Why do you feel better by not believing? I think when we examine these things, where we complete the circle that I think this debate began, namely the idea of applying skepticism and criticism in the best way that a university can. Which is to say, to make it self-criticism. Thank you.

## Hitchens

Well. It seems as if all our - Dinesh's and my self-denying attempts to spare you our closing perorations have been negated somehow. You're going to get them whether you want them or not.

Again, Dinesh is so nearly right and I'm reminded by the last questioner that we actually first met because when he was working for President Reagan and I was writing for *The Nation* magazine, I wrote a piece about abortion that called itself to his attention and he invited me to lunch. It seems like a long time ago, now. But there was a nice meeting of minds that time. And there's no reason why this one shouldn't be the same.

But I don't think I spoke in such a way tonight, or in any other occasion, or have written in such a way as to lay myself open to that last piece of misrepresentation. It is certainly true that I consider that the question of liberty of the mind is involved in the repudiation of theism, yes. I think that we *would* be living in a celestial dictatorship if we accepted the authority scripturally revealed, of a divine will. And I think this not because under the inconvenient scrutiny of this eye, I'm not free to rape and pillage and lie as I might wish, because there are other things, I assure you, as I'm sure you will say for yourselves - or those of you with any self-respect - that stop me from doing that.

But because - and I don't mind admitting this is true - once you grant that there's been a revelation of God to some humans, sometimes, in some places, to be interpreted by a priesthood, then the next thing you will find is that you *are* being told what to do, what to eat, what you can read, who you can go to bed with, by someone who is no better a mammal or primate than yourself, but who claims to be doing this... who claims the right to run your life and your sex life and your mind and your reading matter in the name of God. And I won't *have it*, okay?

And the next thing they'll tell you, the next thing they'll ask you for, the next thing, it'll just be a little thing, is "Well, go and live on this piece of someone else's territory.

God wants you to settle it." The next thing will be, "Ah, you're called to Holy War now, because we can't coexist with the infidel." The next thing will be... Let it in once and you let it in - all of it.

Of all the questions of mine that Dinesh didn't even attempt to answer this evening, because we were talking not about Christianity but about religion, was: is this only true for one sect or is it true for all of them? If it's only true for one, on what grounds is that the case? If it's true for all of them, where would that leave us as a species? Think on these things, ladies and gentlemen. Think on these things as you go home. Thank you.

**D'Souza**

As the opening speaker I get the chance to very briefly close, and -

**Hitchens**

You do?

**D'Souza**

These are from very old rules, they might be Christian rules but they also have been embedded in Western civilization for a long time.

**Hitchens**

[Unintelligible] calling a lot on my Christian forebears[?].

**D'Souza**

Besides, they are on our program. I'll be very brief.

First of all, I do want to say that that statement I made a moment ago was not directed at you. I was actually doing something that is traditionally done in debate. I was

actually turning the camera to the audience and I was actually asking, particularly young people, that we know that college is the time when many people who are raised with religious beliefs relinquish them. And one possible explanation is that young people go to science classes and get a heck of a lot smarter. But there is a second explanation. And that is, that you are living in a condition where morality becomes an encumbrance. And religion becomes inconvenient and begins to say things that you would rather not believe and prescribes ways of living that you'd rather not live.

Now, Christopher Hitchens implies that this is done by force. I think you know from your own life it is not. It is not. The reason that you want to shake off religion is because it is not done by force, it is only done by your own consent. So in other words, in some senses, this is the Christian way. Are you made to follow it? No. You have every freedom to do it.

Even in Islam, by the way. Islam is easily maligned, I know, but even in Islam, as someone who grew up in a world that's largely Hindu and Muslim, Islam has all kinds of sanctions, licenses for conquest. But what it does not give license for is forceable conversion to Islam. That is specifically forbidden.

Now, the point I'm trying to get at here is we may or may not - in both cases, we are asked to make a voluntary choice. And I think in making this choice there have to be consequences. All we're saying is, there are good reasons to be a believer. It's not obvious what comes after death. Ultimately you have to look at the world and your place in it and make your decision. But just remember, ultimately, that it is your own happiness that is at issue. And it's the claim of religious believers, not that you are forced into it, but that if you accept it, ultimately you'll live a more complete, a more balanced, a more decent, a more just, and yes, a more happy life. Thank you very much.

### **Moderator**

Gentlemen, I think I speak for everyone here by saying it's been a real privilege to have you with us tonight. I don't think anybody here will forget this night for a long time.

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