

Opinion: Non-believers as generous as people of faith

By Richard Dawkins, Washington Post

Freethinkers, atheists, agnostics, secular humanists – whatever name non-believers go under, are not America’s most popular minority. They are also, not a small minority. According to Gallup, in 2011, and Pew in 2012, they comfortably outnumber Mormons, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists all put together. One reason for our unpopularity is the widespread belief that you need God in order to be good. Going along with that misconception is further belief that atheists are less generous than religious people, less philanthropic, less likely to donate to charity. Even if that were the case it would, of course, have no bearing on the truth of religious beliefs.

I would hypothesize that the difference in giving between the religion and nonreligious is negligible if you only count donations to pure charity and discount donations to atheist advocacy organizations, or to churches (including tithes) and “charities” that unscrupulously use their resources to proselytize rather than bestow real charitable benefits.

Incidentally, because churches are automatically classified as charities for taxation purposes is a disgrace. Nobody denies that some churches do charitable work. But that doesn’t mean that any organization should automatically qualify for tax-free status simply by calling itself a church. Each church organization separately should make the case that it does charitable work, just as anybody else has to when seeking tax exemption.

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