

Why I believe Religion should be Abolished

Spot the thinking errors in the passage below

'Firstly, all wars have been caused by religion. This can be shown by listing wars of religion such as those in Northern Ireland and those in the Middle East. Secondly, all religious people are bigots and hypocrites, just look at my next-door neighbour Mr Christian. Thirdly, if we don't abolish all religions we will have to tolerate all weird cults and we will end up condoning human sacrifice and cannibalism. Fourthly, we have to choose between living in a free western style democracy and living in a country subject to fanatical religious leaders. Clearly no one wants the latter so we have no choice but to abolish religion. Moreover the harmful effects of religion are evident when we consider the number of unhappy adults who had a religious upbringing. Clearly their unhappiness is a result of their upbringing. Furthermore those people who urge toleration for religions are generally ill educated and reactionary-the kind of people who support fox hunting and other cruel sports. Another important point to note is religious people tend to be obsessed with saving their souls and fixated on the next life and therefore ignore the concerns of this world and are of no real practical help. Many famous writers, poets and musicians are opposed to religion. Freud argued that religion is a neurosis. If he is right, then it should be stamped out. So it should be stamped out. I rest my case.'

Answers

1. Overdrawn conclusion – examples of a few wars is not enough to justify claim that all wars caused by religion.
2. Generalisation – if Mr Christian is a bigot and hypocrite this does not suggest this is true of all religious people, it does not even suggest that it is true of all Christians
3. Slippery Slope – tolerance of Christianity does not inevitably lead to tolerance of all belief and then cannibalism and sacrifice
4. Restricting the options – allowing religion and living in a free society are not mutually exclusive nor are the options as the writer describes them the only options
5. Cum hoc – even if unhappiness correlates to a religious upbringing, it is not necessarily caused by that upbringing. We also have no data about levels of happiness in non-religious people
6. Ad hominem – attacks the character of those who support religion – ill educated etc – rather than engaging with their argument
7. Straw man/straw person – the claim that religious people are only focused on the next life misrepresents religion (Marx has a similar argument) and paints it in a deliberately poor light.
8. Appeal to authority – the use of Freud is an appeal to authority. We should agree with the point because Freud says so. This is different from considering the merits of Freud's argument.