

## BYSTANDER EFFECT - WHEN RELIGIOUS PEOPLE LET THEIR FAITH DO HARM

An individual can be held to blame in some way, but not fully, for the vile acts of the religion, political system or society he is part of for no person is truly an individual. This is not incurred by but not just by refusing to try to do something about the bad actions. Failing to disavow them is another and deeper way to become partly to blame. The partly is a serious thing. It is because of the partly that some get the strength to go out and wreak religious terror on others. Partly in no wise minimises anything.

The bystander effect is interesting. People will not help a person even who has been stabbed if there are some other people around.

The bystander effect can come about a number of ways:

- + The rank and respect you have for the other who will not react – you look up to them thus you are influenced by what they do
- + The number of the bystanders which must be at least two – you feel it is not much about you when you are not the only one who will not get involved: diffusion of responsibility
- + Anything that makes you see the victim as not being a proper member of society – eg an unborn baby outcast
- + The feeling that most other people would not help either
- + The feeling that good will come from the harm you witness - faith

We can see how having a sense of God's presence can lead to you feeling not responsible or not very responsible. Indeed it should lead which is why the doctrine is intrinsically bad. And more so when religion sees evil more in terms of lawbreaking than in terms of a person being hurt. The slate cannot be wiped clean though religion lies that it can.

If you feel responsible at the time, faith can soothe that and have you telling yourself: "It is in the past and I am no longer to blame for I cannot go back and fix it." And you can tell yourself, "And why would I worry when it was not just me?"

With the bystander effect it takes one person to help before anybody else will do it. The reason is that we don't feel very responsible for what happens to the victim if other people are around. We feel that responsibility is shared among us all. That is cognitive dissonance at work.

One person among many who does not help is no more or less responsible than if he were on his own. If you do not help, you are the cause of that person's suffering as much as you would be if you were the only person there. The presence of others is not even relevant. Your responsibility is not reduced by other people being around. You are all individuals who can act. Our failure to recognise this is the number one reason why dangerous political parties and religion thrive so well. The members stay in them instead of looking for something better. That makes them complicit in the risk of harm and the harm done. Unless they are doing a lot to challenge the evil and the problems, they are complicit.

There is enough to promote the bystander effect without religion. To be in a religion is to help others to

embrace the lack of responsibility that shared responsibility offers and it is to pave the way for their victims to suffer.

We all have the delusion that bad things happen to others and not us. Feeling that God protects you and that the religion blesses you makes it worse. Believers even imagine that the Hell of eternal torment is for other people and not them. Even those who do terrible things feel like that. They may live in sin with somebody's wife or husband and think that it is other people who commit this sin that have to worry about Hell not them. What is wrong with that? It means they think others should go there and they should not. Not nice!

Religion makes us feel less responsible if a baby dies because we preferred to spend the money that might have saved her or him. We will feel that way if our family and friends worry as little about the baby as we do. But we will be worse if our family and friends are part of a religion that we consider good.

### *Diffusion of responsibility*

The secret of getting “good” or “ordinary” people to facilitate or conduct grave evil is to make them feel the responsibility is not all theirs. Diffusion of responsibility is the chief or essential secret. It makes the individual feel better about the evil because he or she feels the evil is shared with others so he or she is not so bad or no worse than anybody else. It makes the individual feel supported. It make the individual feel stronger to be part of something bigger, in this case, this nasty group.

When we go to such lengths to think ourselves good that we would distort the truth and warp our own minds it shows the importance of having the truth even if that means being in a religion. Any false ideology or religion is a menace. If it simply false and nothing else it empowers bad people for lies are easy to use for evil even if they are not your lies.

We all feel that the harm we do is okay or just naughty when we see other people doing it. That is what bad example is all about and why example is so powerful.

Diffusion of responsibility works not just with harm but with good too. You may do nothing for others but if your group does it you get a nice rewarding glow and feel part of it all. That is in its own way bad for why should you feel that way when you don't deserve to? It paves the way and makes it easier for you to condone the harm say our religion or political party does.

### *Diffusion of responsibility at work in religion*

God is another way to avoid feeling much responsibility for as creator God is ultimately and foundationally the cause of all. Even the choices we make are not in spite of him but because of him. He creates our choice.

Diffusion of responsibility can happen if you feel you share your part in something bad with God.

Diffusion of responsibility is a very common thing. Somebody is in serious trouble. Diffusion of responsibility happens when everyone assumes that someone else will intervene and you may think God can get involved or get others who are better than you to get involved. If you trust God is wise then it may be that they are the best person. Belief in God does not diminish the bystander effect as studies show. Are we surprised?

Religion has a huge problem with creating diffusion of responsibility. It explains why religions of a certain type particularly Catholicism and Islam are immune to destruction or dismantling. Usually

Ideological empires based on lies and rubbish and dangerous doctrines come crashing down which is why they need to act religious and have a God devotion to avoid this fate. This is frightening for something like that should not last!!

If you create a form of religion or faith that leads to trouble or damages the environment you will feel okay about that as long as you think religion is something that is going to appear in one form or another sometime so if you don't found the religion somebody else will do it. That creates a feeling of diffusion of responsibility.

To unnecessarily promote an entity, such as religion, that thrives on cognitive dissonance, is paving the way for violent people to argue say that they are good Catholics and that their going out to bomb Protestants and Muslims is part of their faith. And especially when Jesus said the Old Testament was infallible and the word of God though he knew fine well that it justifies murder and bloodletting in the name of God and contains commandments from him that endorse violence. And the pope does not excommunicate Catholic extremists who are violent.

There is enough in the world to create diffusion of responsibility without religion. It is so damn good at it that it is scary. Religion means you have gods and angels or God to share responsibility with you if you don't have the people in the religion. Plus as the one who sees the big picture he can command things that terrify us so there is no reality check. Religion is so prevalent that it can be considered to have given the world an education in diffusion of responsibility.

Diffusion of responsibility is a terrible thing but especially if it is over a version of God that is not real or true. As religion risks diffusion of responsibility and its a huge and real risk the default presumption when you consider religion is, "It is a creation of human beings. It is not of God." The bigger the claims made by the religion and the more demands it makes the crueller it is. It is not for the truth though it says it is, so it is against it. If the man-made religion claims to administer the will of God then we have man controlling people in the name of God and leading them astray. If God is merely man's idea and not revealed from Heaven then nobody who says that God punishes people and uses suffering to make people more virtuous should be left unchallenged and should be sternly corrected. They are being deplorable - only a real God giving a real revelation would have the right to say such a thing and delegate that right to people clearly and undeniably. Even if there is a God, that will not stop people inventing a God who could be very like the real one but it is still invented. If you don't know Anna personally you can invent her. If religion is of man then in reality, man's word is honoured as God's word. Man's authority is mistaken for God's authority. That would be horrendous considering nothing man-made should be considered immune from leading to violence or harm. It often does lead to harm. If there is a God the counterfeit religion of God objectively insults him and mocks him.

Religion can thrive on people's feelings that they want it to be true even if it is not. Faith can be about needs and feelings despite itself. Diffusion of responsibility is about feelings. You have this deadly feeling that you are okay when you do evil in unison with others.

If a huge number of people are murderers, that makes you feel better about being a killer. Being in a religion that generally judges everybody as a sinner makes you feel part of a community of sinners. You feel better about your sin. Some don't but most do or feel less bad than they would if they were not in the religion. A religion of sinners encourages your sin when it makes you feel better about it. It does not have much respect for those whom you hurt though it will fake it! A religion of sinners encourages the sins that are socially acceptable. For example, Christians don't seem to worry if you have sex outside marriage as long as you don't do it during rush hour on the pavement in the town. To worry not about sin but about some forms of sin is a sin itself.

If you are in a religion and some members do great evil, eg rape children and tell them it is God's will, murder people of other religions in terrorist attacks, you will tell yourself, "It does not indicate my religion and my faith in it is bad. I am not those people. They are not me." But if it is down to luck that you are not like them then it follows that faith can be dangerous. You are encouraging faith and that puts people at risk.

Nathan Phelps in the book *Christianity is Not Great* makes the excellent point that "individuals can easily dismiss the harm others have committed in the name of a God because it wasn't them and they don't condone it." I would like to explore this implications of this statement. If belief in God leads some to do harm, then you need to change the belief in order to stop that harm. Most believers being good is no excuse for holding a belief that may lead some people to do harm. If you fix the belief and harm still happens at least the belief will be completely innocent. If your religion's claimed divine revelation consists of violent scriptures and is soft on sins like child sex abuse then it is your duty to leave it. No excuses.

Why must you not stay in a lying or corrupt religion? If atheists are no better or worse than religious people, "it's no argument to say that evil will exist anyway, therefore we should let an existing justification for it continue." Phelps means religious organisation by justification. Atheists are individuals not a religious institution so if atheism does harm and is imperfect that is not a reason to refuse to consider supporting atheism. It is true that evil will happen anyway. However we can make it worse by being in something that can be done without. Nobody dies from having no religion.

In fact, if a religion is not improving people's morals and their knowledge of morals and has official teachings that teach moral error then you should not be in it. It is something extra for people to quarrel and cause division over. It is a threat to truth and knowledge. A religion with excellent teaching that makes little difference in its people compared to non-believers should be walked away from. One that has official teaching that is wrong should be ran away from.

Phelps says that believers may keep their own hands clean but they protect the hands of those who dirty them and give "tacit approval" to nasty doctrines and Bibles. "If you proclaim allegiance to the Bible, you claim responsibility for its content and the injustice it perpetuates in society."

He says, "It is faith that not so much causes, but allows evil to flourish." It certainly does both. And allowing evil to flourish is trying to cause it even if nothing happens. If you think your local Church does good works, think about the evil it enables. That should balance your view. Don't let their goodness butter you up to the religion.

No judge will be impressed if you stand up in court and say, "I don't normally murder people. I deserve to get away with killing that girl in cold blood for I am not a killer. Killing once does not mean I am just a killer. There is more to me than just that! There is more to me than the mistakes or wrongs I have done." In fact saying that will land you a heavier sentence. Yet the Church endorses that kind of attitude by urging you to love sinners including yourself and hate the sins. It is no wonder that Christianity's record in making people holy shows nothing remarkable. The goodness and badness is just what you would expect from something that wasn't really getting any grace from God. And we must remember that though it is true that an organisation cannot be blamed for everything its members do, it can if it offers grace to help when there is no grace.

All the corruptions of religion can be traced to diffusion of responsibility.