

A LIE IS ALWAYS BAD IN ITSELF AND IN WHAT IT MAY LEAD TO AND A PLACEBO IS NO EXCEPTION

"Faith helps Christians because faith is just like a placebo prescribed by a doctor, the intent of which is to deceive patients into thinking it will solve their ills...The healing is therefore self-caused".

From Christianity is Not Great (All Quotes are from this excellent book, edited by John Loftus)

PLACEBO ALWAYS BAD

I take the stand that religion is a placebo and a placebo is harmful. So what is harmful about the placebo?

Well for me, even if it seems to be good for the person, it is still lying. Lies will be found out. The placebo always threatens the good it does. You need to know what really cures you of anything - if you self-cause your cure you need to know that.

A big placebo versus a small placebo? No ethical person advocates telling a cancer patient they are better when they are not. That lie is just too big to do much good. It may make the liar feel better but the patient will be the one who suffers. Placebos tend to cover smaller matters such as pain relief. It is not one placebo a person needs but a number of them. The danger with too many is that it will backfire.

The placebo takes away your chance to be more realistic. It robs you. It may feel good now but what about tomorrow? The quote from Christianity is Not Great, "unrealistic views of the world cause unnecessary pain and suffering, and those views should be rejected" could be understood as the ultimate reason the book was written. And it is a very sensible line.

To it I would add that the risk is not worth it. If the views make you feel good, they can destroy you in the long-term. They destroy many. Because of how lies and errors lead to more lies and errors, religion can spin into extreme and detrimental detachment from reality.

NEEDS FREQUENT RENEWAL

I would add that having a placebo creates a need for new placebos that seem to validate it and creates an unhealthy fondness for placebos and fantasy based thinking. Religion encourages prayer which deepens and prolongs the hold the placebo has over you. Religion claims that faith fades away without prayer to nourish it. It is no wonder prayer nourishes faith when believers praise God for giving them what they pray for and when prayer doesn't work they pretend that it is working for God must have better plans and is using their prayers for something better than what they prayed for. Prayer is an exercise in escapism and cognitive dissonance.

Catholic quackery insists that the sacrament of baptism heals the tendency to sin and is so effective that you only need it the once.

Yet the baptised and unbaptised are no better than each other.

Unsurprisingly the Church has devised other sacraments to be received on a regular basis.

The reason is simple.

When you are taking sacraments every day and you believe in them, it is more effective than an occasional sacrament. With faith in the sacraments, you are triggering and renewing the placebo effect every day. You are maximising the effect.

FOOLS PEOPLE

The placebo is faith in faith itself.

To have faith in faith leaves one vulnerable to religious and medical charlatans. Those who take advantage of desperate people looking for hope are the lousiest scum imaginable. Religious placebos are dangerous as they are encouraged and reinforced by being part of a community held together by placebos. Religion defeats the need to outgrow placebos. Also, religion is dogmatic about its placebos - it does not let you go to other religions for spiritual placebos.

A placebo is manipulative - but a placebo that is presented as the only effective or divinely approved one is worse.

With the religious placebo, you end up saying that it is the only one that works properly for anyone because it works for you. Or you think it works! The religious placebo enables and reinforces the problems caused by religion. As each person is part of a community or society, you must see that the evils or harms that come on them have a wider impact. The person attached to a placebo will ignore or dismiss or avoid any evidence that disconfirms his placebo.

A religion that tells very obvious lies such as that it cures paedophilia or possession or cancer when anybody comes to it for healing or that it is the only way to God and that God does all he can to help people find this religion is clearly getting away with it for it knows its audience goes into fantasy land and enjoys the placebo. Obvious lies told by a religion are placebos. That is how it gets away with talking rubbish.

The placebo is not simply a matter of giving somebody a sugar pill and telling them it is a cure all. The diagnosis is very important too. The more an interest is shown in the patient and her or his problems, the better the chance that the sugar pills will seem to work! The diagnosis makes the patient feel helped and cared about and empowered. Unless you know what is wrong with you and how it affects you as a person you cannot feel happy enough for it to have a placebo effect.

The placebo effect can fool anybody into thinking a treatment works when it is in fact useless. And bringing in the supernatural into it is a placebo in itself.

You get hope from the thought that the laws of cause and effect may not apply in your case and your problem may lessen or vanish which is not the norm.

You get hope from feeling that God is going to miraculously cure your black heart and soften your hard heart and do nothing or too little about war-crazed demagogues - you feel that special and that important.

Perhaps religion can be a placebo for people who have psychological problems. The placebo can only last for so long. Then the person is back to square one and needs another placebo. This cycle can hide the damage that the religion is doing to the person. People tend to be impressed by the placebo and that leads to people becoming inspired to adopt placebos and they may end up hooked on them. The book is right that "we cannot easily separate individual benefits and harms from societal ones, since what causes individual harm also causes societal harm to some degree, and vice versa."

Needing religious or spiritual placebos leads to needing more religious or spiritual placebos and risks becoming a victim of charlatans. If there is a magic power interfering in the world all the time, how you can know what is real? If your strength is an illusion created by a placebo that is no substitute for real strength and you are cheated of the opportunity for real strength and you will end up being bigoted, fearful and hostile if you think somebody is going to challenge your placebo.

Religion is not the only case where faith functions as a placebo. The old woman may need a loaf but spend the money on a lottery ticket. She seems to believe that she will win though it is extremely unlikely. The soldier going to war thinks he will come back alive and a hero. Notice that if you act like you think the impossible lotto win or whatever will happen to you, the underlying assumption is that God or magic is going to make it happen. All those other faith placebos show that religion can only be a placebo itself.

A placebo is bad and a religious placebo is bad for what are we doing with it when a natural one would do? It is like double the bad.