

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**TO BELIEVE, OR NOT TO BELIEVE?**

**A SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION ON CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL ISSUES  
IN CHRISTIAN AND ATHEIST THINKERS  
BACHELOR THESIS**

**Bratislava 2015**

**Lukáš Siegel**

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## **Declaration of originality**

I declare that this Thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used literature and other sources are attributed and properly cited in references.

Bratislava 29/04/2015

Lukáš Siegel

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## Abstrakt

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Práca bude pozostávať z rozboru dvoch svetonázorov, ateistického a náboženského (kresťanského). Absolútnu morálnu nadradenosť, neschopnosť chápať iné názory a celkovo popierať protichodné pohľady reprezentujú autori exkluzivistického smeru, ktorých nájdeme na oboch stranách. Demonštrácia vyššie spomínaných javov je ukázaná prostredníctvom praktických príkladov ako homosexualita, potraty a eutanázia. Daná analýza poskytne základné vzory a spôsoby, ktoré sú používané exkluzivistickými autormi. Tento typ analýzy vyúsťuje do teórie spoločnej pôdy, ktorá sa zaoberá spôsobom ako umožniť exkluzivistickému autorovi komplexnejšie vnímanie sveta a názorov, ktoré sa v ňom nachádzajú.

**Kľúčové pojmy:** exkluzivizmus, náboženstvo (kresťanstvo), ateizmus, teória spoločnej pôdy, absolútna morálna nadradenosť, neschopnosť chápať iné názory, absolútne popieranie protichodných názorov,

## Abstract

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As the title suggests the aim of this thesis is to provide an analysis of two worldviews. These are the atheistic and the Christian (religious) worldviews, which are crucial for this thesis. We focus on exclusivists who propose absolute moral superiority in their views and show a lack of understanding and tolerance for opposing views, which comes hand in hand with denial of opposing views. In addition, these will be demonstrated on practical examples, such as abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia. This analysis will provide basic patterns and arguments with which these authors argue. Similarities will be shown and then the common ground theory will be proposed: this theory deals with the description how it is possible to change contemporary exclusivist approaches into more moderate approaches.

**Key words:** exclusivism, religion (Christianity), atheism, the common ground theory, absolute moral superiority, lack of understanding, denial of opposing views

## **Preface**

This thesis will consist of an analysis of exclusivist atheist and religious authors. The final part will describe a common ground theory which is aimed at resolving the conflict between these exclusivists. The beginning of this thesis was a very significant event for me because I once was an atheist exclusivist and the process of my own transformation took several years. That is why I was fascinated by the dilemma of this process, and wondered how could my own understanding of this process help others to achieve this more peaceful and merrier state of mind. And that was the impulse that motivated me to pick this theme and start reading articles, books and study it in more detail.

The method that is used in this thesis is a method that analyses arguments of various authors and tries to find similarities in their argumentation, and then proposes common points, which can be applied to any exclusivist author. And this thesis aims to establish a basic understanding of how should one begin with the understanding of a common ground theory for such a complex question. The findings of this thesis will hopefully help with solving further discussions on issues that are presented by such exclusivists.

Various people helped me shape this thesis and I am much grateful for their support and help in this struggle to fulfill my dream and wish in giving life to this work. My tutor professor Peter Šajda was a great support to me and he gave me a courage to overcome many difficulties that I had during a formulation of this thesis. He motivated me to stay on the right path to actualize this dream. Another influential professor was Egon Gál whose course motivated me to create the common ground theory, which serves as a role model to solve the crisis between exclusivists.

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## **1 Introduction**

If one has a look at the ethical conflicts in our age, one can see the huge clashes between the moral radicals, while the moderates do not concern themselves with these types of conflicts. And so the task of this thesis is to analyze two kinds of these radicals or, how are they called in this thesis, exclusivists, and see whether there can be anything done about them. Even if we look across the globe one can find that many pursue homosexuals as criminals because of their personal religious beliefs. Example of such countries are Uganda, Angola and Egypt but also other countries where radical religious beliefs dominate the governing of a society. The same it was with countries that mainly depended on a radical atheistic approach towards governing. Such countries as China, former USSR and North Korea are prime examples of what an oppressing radical atheistic approach can do to a free society. And these horrible situations happen also because of absolutizing one set of personal beliefs about world (worldview) above another. And so for this thesis a crucial theme is that one should realize that people will never have the exact same worldview about the universe, its meaning and their meaning in the universe. Diversity is an important feature of the people and so one should realize how important it is to promote it in a society. The analysis of the exclusivist positions will help us to discover the potential hidden in all human beings, whether they are capable of tolerance and understanding of each other. And if there is a theoretical possibility that people can learn to tolerate and understand each other. But how to achieve something in practice, especially with human beings is often a mystery. Young people are more likely to change their minds, but in such a highly intolerant, aggressive and competitive world, it is very difficult to estimate whether young people will rather be influenced by a radical worldview, which often promises a salvation from this system but every time fails and leads to more destruction. But what needs to be said that in general changing a perspective is often a difficult process and must be approached with careful analysis.

The first theoretical chapter will consist from analysis of the two worldviews that are presented in this thesis. That is the Christian religious worldview and the atheistic worldview. Then authors like Michael Novak or Cardinal George Pell will represent the religious position and authors like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris will

demonstrate the atheistic position. And these authors have a competitive relation because they argue about how their morality is superior, their worldview is radically better solution to this world and clash in conflicts on a moral and ethical issues. And therefore this thesis will focus in the end on a creation of a common ground theory, which aims to provide a sort of understanding how and why this society and world should work on these issues. Here authors like Jonathan Haidt, Thomas Nagel and Joshua Greene will play a crucial role because their positions help to demonstrate this common ground theory. In an ideal state something like a separation of private issues from the issues of society (public issues) is the best scenario but something like that is hard to achieve. And because one should not absolutize one set of personal beliefs in relation to another, and we live in a society, so in order for us to live comfortable lives we need to put the fundamental things aside that divide us and work on those which we can agree on. And therefore by putting aside these fundamental things we enter a common ground theory which tries to demonstrate how it is possible.

## **2 The theoretical chapter concerning the explanatory terms**

This chapter aims to discuss the terms that are used in this thesis and require detailed explanation and analysis in order to understand further development of this thesis. First the religious terms need to be explained as the next chapters is about the exclusivist religious authors. The first definition will be from Émile Durkheim and there will be an analysis of what actually religions are and how a religious worldview can be interpreted. Then the definition from Max Weber will be put on the table and atheism and secular viewpoint will be defined mostly from philosophical dictionaries because the modern definition of secularism from present authors do not fit quite precisely as much as the concrete definition in these philosophical dictionaries. These definitions of religious worldview an atheistic worldview will help to explain what one should imagine under these and more specifically how one should imagine the exclusivist religious or atheistic positions.

Durkheim in his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* describes religion and in this process he begins by saying that “religion cannot be defined except by the characteristics which are found wherever religion itself is found”. (Durkheim, 1964, p. 24). Durkheim says that religions have something in common and that it is the aspect of supernatural (Durkheim, 1964, p. 24). And he continues by saying that the idea of the supernatural is a very old one and that if we say that something is supernatural it means that “it is necessary to have the sentiment that a natural order of things exists, that is to say, that the phenomena of the universe are bound together by necessary relations, called laws.” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 26). And he mentions a very important factor and that the essential feature of all religions is to “maintain, in a positive manner, the normal course of life.” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 29). As he speaks about definition, he mentions that a minimum for the definition of religion is a belief in spiritual beings (Durkheim, 1964, p. 29). However, as he later on continues he arrives at point where he says that these things cannot ultimately be a good definition of a religion (Durkheim, 1964, p. 35). He claims that religions are a complex system of “myths, dogmas, rites and ceremonies.” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 36). In addition, they according to him presuppose a “classification of all the things, real and ideal” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 37). And that real characteristic of religious view or phenomena

is that they have a conception of bipartite division of universe as a whole. Moreover, there they divide known and knowable into two classes but they exclude each other. And these are sacred and profane, sacred things are “those which the interdictions protect and isolate; and profane things, those to which these interdictions applied and which must remain at a distance from the first.” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 40). Also religion is always associated with a group and the group practices because these are not associated with individuals but with groups. These practices and rites are part of group and make the unity in the group (Durkheim, 1964, p. 43). And this common idea (the understanding) of practices is what we now according to Durkheim call a Church (Durkheim, 1964, p. 44). About the Church, he says that it is a community more specifically “a moral community formed by all the believers in a single faith, laymen as well as priests.” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 45). These initial descriptions of religion help us to illustrate what Durkheim then proposes and help us to give an idea what religion is about.

After these initial descriptions Durkheim proposes a holistic definition of a religion and that is “a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. The second element which thus finds a place in our definition is no less essential than the first; for by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing.” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 47). In addition, this definition helps us describe the few basic pillars of what is actually religion. These are the “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 47) and the “single moral community called a Church” (Durkheim, 1964, p. 47). And these are the most important aspects of a definition of religion in order to understand the religious worldview.

The next definition is by Max Weber who also defined religion in his writings and was concerned with religions in general and how they relate to world and how they influence and are influenced by the world. The definition that will be used is from *The Max Weber Dictionary* written by Richard Swedberg who introduces the central concepts and key words used by Weber in his works. Swedberg says that “Weber also notes that ‘the essence of religion is not ...our concern, as we make it our task to

study the conditions and effects of a particular type of social action' ” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 229). Also that “For Weber’s purposes in his studies, religion and magic primarily have to do with the ordering of the relations between gods, demons, and the like, on the one hand, and humans on the other.” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 229). What is important is that there is tension between ordinary reality and the realm of religion and he adds “the way that this tension is handled has an important impact not only for the personality of the believer but also for society.” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 229). This could be one of the conditions for religion presented by Weber that there is influence on the personality of a religious believer caused by their beliefs. And religion in a modern society has a tendency to be more irrational in nature and also to be more private (Swedberg, 2005, p. 230). Weber distinguishes between two kinds of “religious capacities” and that one is what he calls religious virtuosi and that they have “a distinct religious status and are characterized by their capacity to work methodically on their salvation.” and on the other hand the so called mass religiosity and by this he means those who are religiously “unmusical” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 230). What is meant by this is that this second “mass religiosity” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 230) appears to be very incoherent and without harmony and system. Therefore, this serves as another characteristic, which will help to illustrate the exclusivist religious worldview.

The definition of atheism given in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion* by Anthony C. Thiselton claims that “in the broadest terms, atheism denotes the denial of existence of God. Broadly also, it is to be distinguished from agnosticism, the belief that to know whether or not God exists is impossible.” (Thiselton, 2002, p. 18). Also important is that there are two kinds of atheism and that is the distinction between “‘avowed’ atheism that positively affirms the assertion ‘God does not exist’, and a broader atheism that negatively denies the existence of a deity or divine beings.” (Thiselton, 2002, p. 18). The former kind of atheism is the essence of exclusivist contemporary authors who write in such manner. Thiselton says about modern atheism that “the impetus towards ‘avowed’ atheism derived its force from two occurrences in the late eighteenth century. First, the French enlightenment and French revolution nurtured a mind-set which, in effect, gave an obsessively high place to autonomy. It was not in fact the progress of science as such that turned a tide. Many leading scientists were committed theists, including for example, Newton (1642-

1727).” (Thiselton, 2002, p. 18). The good summary of exclusivist approach to religion and knowledge is when Thiselton argues “the obsession with ‘autonomy’ encouraged the view that scientific method could be extended to constitute a self-constrained autonomous theory of the world, or world-view: comprehensive account of all possible knowledge.” (Thiselton, 2002, p. 19). These interpretations describe what is understood here by atheism and especially on what form of atheism is this thesis going to focus. What is important to realize is that the atheism, which completely denies all divine beings, is the one that most likely belongs to the exclusivist atheist authors. Also exclusivists believe that science can provide sufficient worldview although the point of science is not to provide one but that science provides the understanding of how humans, the world and the universe work.

The second definition of atheism stems from the book by Donald M. Borchert called *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and there he writes “it seems to be agreed that an atheist can be a good person whose oaths and promises are no less trustworthy than those of other people, and in most civilized lands atheists have the same or nearly the same rights as anybody else.” (Borchert, 2006, p. 356). This first description of who an atheist is helps with the perception about how the atheists were viewed in the past and this helps to understand some of his sentences about present atheists. The historic perspective about atheism was not certainly very good and as he says that in “earlier ages. One could fill many volumes with the abuse and calumny contained in the writing of Christian apologists, learned no less than popular. The tenor of these writing is not simply that atheism is mistaken but also that only a depraved person could adopt so hideous a position and that the spread of atheism would be a horrifying catastrophe for the human race.” (Borchert, 2006, p. 357). The historic perspective is pessimistic since it appears that many people were persecuted and harassed for their worldview which was different from a religious one. And maybe because of these reasons atheism became to a certain sense as radical as other religions and worldviews. Borchert offers a summary of the history of atheism and writes “a comprehensive entry on atheism would, among other things, trace the history of the persecution of real and alleged atheists, of the changes in public attitudes, would also inquire into the psychological sources of the hatred of atheists that it sometimes found in otherwise apparently kindly and sensible men.” (Borchert, 2006, p. 358).

Moreover, Borchert presents the definition of a modern atheism and argues that “according to the most usual definition, an atheist is a person who maintains that there is no God, that is, that the sentence ‘God exists’ expresses a false proposition. In contrast, an agnostic maintains that it is not known or cannot be known whether there is a God, that is, whether sentence ‘God exists’ expresses a true proposition. On our definition, an atheist is a person who rejects belief in God, regardless of whether or not the reason for the rejection is the claim that ‘God exists’ expresses a false proposition. People frequently adopt an attitude of rejection toward a position for reasons other than that it is as false proposition.” (Borchert, 2006, p. 359). The other reason might be a simple hatred of religion for some bad personal experience and this might influence a person to adopt such a complete rejection. As he correctly distinguishes from an agnosticism and atheism, the proposition, that atheism thinks in terms that there is no God is a correct analysis. Atheists, especially the exclusivists deny the existence of any sort of creator, or God and claim that such beliefs are foolish and unnecessary. In addition, this denial is one of the characteristics of this exclusivist atheist worldview. And as he correctly adds that people often do not need to exclusively hold that the proposition of existence of God is wrong, simply sometimes people tend to reject beliefs on a certain basis and claim to completely deny something although their inner reasons may differ.

The definitions and their meanings, which we established in this chapter, are meant to elucidate the meaning of religious worldview and atheistic worldview and how will they be perceived in this thesis. And it was said that the definitions will mostly apply to the exclusivist contemporary authors that this work is dealing with. Now to give more concrete account it is needed to start with one of the groups of authors and these are the religious, in this work the Christian authors.

### **3 Exclusivist approaches**

#### **3.1 Religious worldview presented by exclusivist thinkers**

To understand the importance of more moderate approach towards the ethical questions in society, one needs to look at what this thesis calls the exclusivist thinkers. These thinkers presents their worldviews as morally absolutely superior to others. They claim that they are unable to accept different positions from those of themselves or similar ones. These claims will be justified by these authors with arguments in which they demonstrate such behavior. Such arguments are presented when for example, Michael Novak demonstrates his opinion about secularism, or when he depicts the benefits of Christianity for society. Then several direct impacts on ethical issue of society will be analyzed such as euthanasia, abortion or gay marriage. Again in these examples the exclusivists present arguments and opinions heavily based upon their specific religions, and do not consider any different worldviews or religions to be as reasonable as their own.

#### **The superiority of religious worldview and the lack of understanding in exclusivist religious thinkers**

Michael Novak who was already introduced argues that there are many problems in our modern society and therefore we need to make changes, to make it work better. In one of his essays called *Catholic Social Teaching and These Changing Times* Novak claims that we need to realize that the problem of modern world is the problem of secularism (Novak, 2011). Irving Kristol sums up Novak's view in this way "the age of secular humanism is over, he argued, because it cannot supply a common social ethic or public morality, cannot defend reason against its enemies; cannot give comfort to those who grieve; and cannot give meaning to life." (Novak, 2011). And here the problem is connected with the main question of this thesis. Secularism argues that it represents no religious opinion about politics in general but it can also be dangerous, in its own way, to have solely secular society. As can be seen in former USSR where the religion was oppressed by the regime. But Novak point is to make most likely Christian morality a main factor while making political decisions concerning society which is also very problematic . No society can work upon one set



of beliefs alone. And here what Novak basically does, is that he presents his own religious worldview as morally absolutely superior to the secular one. To continue this argument Novak in the essay called *The Troublesome Term "Secular"* argues that religion should play a key role in decision-making process on ethical topics (Novak, 2007). This claim is supported by Novak's own arguments such as "prior to the ideological secularism of the last three centuries, there was a Christian humanism, deeply knowledgeable about the way of this world, often highly sensual, and with a great lust for life. Christian humanism had emphatically a dimension of worldliness." (Novak, 2007), or that "there have always been arrogant and haughty churchmen. But it is easily pointed out that such men are living contrary to the example of their Teacher. Our Lord would have Christians converse with all others in humility and with mutual respect. For now we are entering a new post-secular age. On what other basis can we learn from one another?" (Novak, 2007). Such arguments strengthen the view that Novak certainly feels that religion as such provides a more moral basis for a society and helps govern it. What is important here is that whether it matters what a religious teaching is teaching for a society. If the religious teaching is intolerant and cannot be critically examined then it is very damaging to society and therefore it does not matter what this teaching or practice is teaching since it does not benefit the society. If this world wants to be truly good, free and peaceful, the people need to realize that they have to cooperate with each other. That means that different groups have to cooperate with each other and respect each other and that is the true meaning of liberty. And in order to do that we need to tolerate, criticize and examine our values and morality, whether religious or secular. Novak argues that "atheism is a fundamental error about the possibilities open to humankind. Like a guillotine, it cuts off horizons that are in fact open. It foreshortens the human perspective. The religious impulse is as universal and deep in humans as the love for music." (Novak, 2007). He also links atheism with communist regimes "atheism is like a snake's skin, unable to contain the bursting dynamism of the human mind, communism made one other thing clear: that a city organized solely as a state is bound to be tyrannical" (Novak, 2007). These kinds of claims surely show that Novak does not view secularism as a worldview that is on the same level as his own religious worldview. And this supports the argument that he once again views his own religious worldview as morally

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absolutely superior and he clearly lacks any kind of will to understand opposing views.

**Direct impact of religious worldview upon the ethical problems of society; issues of euthanasia, abortion and gay marriage**

There are many authors who deal with the question of concrete ethical issues and Christian religion. The new Vatican finance minister George Pell wrote several letters and articles that address such issues. In his letter *Submission on Marriage*, he states his position very clearly “I make the following submission regarding the nature of marriage and why the laws of the Commonwealth of Australia must continue to recognise and support marriage as meaning the exclusive and permanent union of one man and one woman.” (Pell, 2012). Pell defines marriage as a “natural institution whereby a man and a woman give themselves to each other for life in an exclusive sexual relationship that is open to procreation.” (Pell, 2012). This condition of procreation is crucial for Pell as he later argues and serves as a crucial reason why this marriage between a man and a woman is special and different from others, and needs to be treated this way. According to Pell the homosexual marriage does not have a “unique kind of physical and emotional union which is open to the possibility of new life.” (Pell, 2012). Concerning the heterosexual couples who cannot bear a child he says that they are not excluded because they still have a unique capacity to create a child but this capacity is only not actualized (Pell, 2012). Plus he also adds that marriage between one man and one woman also offers perfect conditions for raising a child which is the most irreplaceable contribution to the society (Pell, 2012). Therefore as Pell at the end of his rejection says “I urge you once again to recognise that marriage is an institution between a man and a woman, uniquely designed for the gift of children, and to support the essential and irreplaceable contribution marriage makes to our society.” (Pell, 2012). Pell in his arguments clearly states that his religion and God is the source for his morality which he tries to impose on the rest of the society. This is a demonstration of clear impact that religion can have on an individual and how it can influence his worldview. Proposing one kind of worldview while suppressing the other ones is not the way that ethical questions in society should be handled. Society needs more varied and moderate approach when dealing with such problems.

A similar issue is with euthanasia where religious worldview argued again by George Pell presents itself: “the unique status of every human being explains why pro-lifers

do not support mercy killing, sometimes called euthanasia. We might shoot a dying dog, but no human, no matter how old or sick, is just an animal. It is wrong to kill innocent human life.” (Pell, 2011). Pell argues that those who support euthanasia don't view euthanasia as killing someone, while actually euthanasia means killing someone. But can one make decision for other people who choose death voluntarily to end their suffering and also can one dictate his view on morality and values on others? If we are to live in a free society, where people can have any religious beliefs they want, then we must respect such a choice. After this he claims that his opponents “prefer to emphasise the suffering euthanasia is intended to eliminate, and the freedom to ‘die with dignity’. Whatever arguments are used however, euthanasia means the killing of an innocent person, and usually one who is weak and vulnerable because of illness or disability.” (Pell, 2011). Pell mainly ascribes to Christianity that it helps the people, who are seriously ill or have a strong disability and claims “in human history Christian care for the sick, especially those who had no one to care for them, was an innovation. The pagan attitude to suffering was to deny, avoid, and eliminate it. The old and the poor were left to fend for themselves, and disabled, sick is dangerous or unpleasant, is the natural thing to do. This is largely because Christianity has shape our culture and consciences so deeply.” (Pell, 2011). Pell is proposing an argument, that according to his view those who should undergo an euthanasia are basically viewed as burdens. And Pell proposes a way how to help the seriously ill and says “one of our duties to the dying is to ensure that pain is managed effectively, and that any underlying depression or mental illness is identified and treated. We also have to ensure that the dying are not abandoned. We can understand that those who are sick, in pain, depressed or anxious, approaching the end of life and left alone in a hospital, can be tempted to despair. But when pain, depression, and loneliness are responded to effectively the wish to die often recedes. Visiting the dying, keeping them company, praying with them and for them is a powerful way of letting them know that they are not alone and unloved.” (Pell, 2011). In Pell's arguments there are plenty of good methods how to ease the pain and suffering of dying. His biggest issue seems to be the involuntary euthanasia of those people did not agreed themselves to be killed. He seems to propose another way how to approach this problem of suffering and that is by the teaching of Christianity. And Pell concludes his argument by saying that “the task of young Catholics is to explain to the

wider society why it is wrong to kill the sick and the dying; why it is wrong to take innocent human life. It can be hard to stand up for the truth. But the attacks on human life will become much worse if we don't." (Pell, 2011). But still the main question is whether by forbidding euthanasia the rights of those who want to undergo it cannot be denied because of Pell's personal beliefs of what is natural right of human beings. Or because of Pell's religious belief, and this is a big issue in a society which consists of many different worldviews. Pell provides one-sided arguments concerning the ethical issues in society, and he seems to forget or ignore that there are other groups who disagree with him. And to hold less exclusivist position Pell should include more understanding of other positions in his views or else it is just plain exclusivism.

Concerning abortion Novak expresses similar attitude as Pell in his argument on euthanasia. Novak also refers to his personal beliefs and argues that it is a natural right to life given by the Creator that we are taking away by euthanasia or abortion. And Novak creates a connection between abortion and slavery and argues that both are against the natural rights of an individual. He argues "what the question of slavery and the question of abortion have in common is their basis in natural right. Just as every human beings is endowed by his Creator with the natural right to liberty, even more so is he endowed by his Creator with right to life." (Novak, 2009). Modern science according to Novak is providing an evidence against abortion as he states "public discussion of basic embryology has only made the reality in the womb much more vivid - older siblings now see photographs of the budding sister or brother within their mom on the refrigerator - what embryology had long taught: viz., that from the moment of conception, the organism growing in the womb of its mother is human." (Novak, 2009). Throughout this article Novak seems to argue against president Barack Obama's support of abortion. He several time mentions that because of abortion we waste human lives who could effectively serve the society (Novak, 2009). So these are the arguments presented by another exclusivist religious writer and he holds similar views as Pell on these ethical issues. But all these points are from his Creator as he says himself and therefore they must be the teaching of his Church. However can one teaching absolutely prevail over another and how can we decide upon such matters, maybe tolerance and putting fundamental differences aside would help solving this situation. Novak also presents only one side of the argument and forgets to look at other arguments.

What can be said about these authors is that they have a lot in common in their positions towards ethical questions in society. We call these Christian authors exclusivist because they present only one part of their own worldview, and that is the more intolerant and extreme part. They argue in very similar fashion and have similar arguments. They present their position as morally absolutely superior to other that are present in our society. The authors do seem to argue that abortion and euthanasia are against natural human right given by a God, which signifies that their religion influences their views on ethical issues in society because when they argue they refer to their religious teachings. These authors do not seem to be willing to listen to the other side of the arguments, and seem to lack any will towards understanding of what others think about these issues. They also claim that their religion has a lot to offer to modern world but they based this upon their own religious beliefs which are rooted in the teachings of Christianity. And Christianity is only one of the religions in this world and preferring one set of religious beliefs over others is exactly what the term exclusivist stands for.

### **3.2 Exclusivist atheistic thinkers and ethical values**

#### **Moral superiority and lack of understanding and denying of opposing values**

Now the same approach will be applied to the atheistic exclusivist authors. First, we will demonstrate how they handle moral superiority and lack of tolerance and understanding. Secondly, we will give some concrete views on homosexuality, abortion and see how they react to these issues and what their position towards them is. Then there will be a comparison of all authors and what is left is the last and final chapter on the common ground theory. The first thing that exclusivist atheists share with religious ones is the rejection of opposing views. For example, Sam Harris who is a neuroscientist and one of the defenders of atheism claims that “most sensible people advocate something called ‘religious tolerance.’ While religious tolerance is surely better than religious war, tolerance is not without its liabilities. Our fear of provoking religious hatred has rendered us incapable of criticizing ideas that are now patently absurd and increasingly maladaptive. It has also obliged us to lie to ourselves — repeatedly and at the highest levels — about the compatibility between religious faith and scientific rationality.” (Harris, 2011). Harris continues in this direction and claims that “the success of science often comes at the expense of religious dogma; the maintenance of religious dogma always come at the expense of science.” (Harris, 2011). He adds to this that for him it is also the issue of the faith which is presented as a “license that religious people give one another to believe such propositions when reasons fail.” (Harris, 2011). In these arguments what can be seen is that Sam Harris clearly presents kind of an absolutized secular position. He puts religion aside in the understanding of the world and argues that we do not need it anymore. Surely, by this he means science and reason and therefore secularism, which does promote this attitude towards the world and our understanding of it. He demonstrates in these passages the lack of tolerance and understanding for any kind of religious belief and wants to have a solely rationalistic and secular morality, which demands absolute moral superiority. This is a typical approach of an exclusivist author. One more remark by Harris was made towards this and there he adds that “religion is fast growing incompatible with the emergence of a global, civil society. Religious faith - faith that there is a God who cares what name he is called, that one of our books is

infallible, that Jesus is coming back to earth to judge the living and the dead, that Muslim martyrs go straight to Paradise, etc. - is on the wrong side of an escalating war of ideas.” (Harris, 2011). Harris sums his argument in this article by this few sentences which describe the argument as “to win this war of ideas, scientists and other rational people will need to find new ways of talking about ethics and spiritual experience. The distinction between science and religion is not a matter of excluding our ethical intuitions and non-ordinary states of consciousness from our conversation about the world; it is a matter of our being rigorous about what is reasonable to conclude on their basis.” (Harris, 2011). What can be seen in Harris’s arguments is that he again presents a kind of absolute moral superiority of secular morality over a religious one. He certainly rejects that religious morality is a sufficient one and claims that the only thing that can provide a sufficient morality is a human reason and evidence. He thinks that religion is not rational and this again demonstrates the absolute moral superiority and the lack of tolerance. Throughout this text there is not even a single argument which is aimed at understanding the different position. Harris views religion as something lesser to human reason and believes that modern society can do much better without it.

To continue with this logic of argument the exclusivist atheistic author Richard Dawkins who is an evolutionary biologist argues a very similar position to the one presented by Sam Harris. In the book *The God Delusion* by Dawkins there are many arguments in favor of atheism and in the chapter called *The roots of morality: why are we good?* he explains what seems to be the issue for him with a religious teachings. He begins by suspecting that “quite a lot of religious people do think religion is what motivates them to be good, especially if they belong to one of those faiths that systematically exploits personal guilt.” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 227). Dawkins elaborates on this claim and to him it seems to “require quite a low self-regard to think that, should belief in God suddenly vanish from the world, we would all become callous and selfish hedonists, with no kindness, no charity, no generosity, nothing that would deserve the name of goodness.” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 227). And he asks an important question which is “do we really need policing - whether by God or by each other - in order to stop us from behaving in a selfish and criminal manner? I dearly want to believe that I do not need such surveillance - and nor, dear reader, do you.” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 228). To analyze these paragraphs it is important to remind ourselves that



what is discussed here is a position of an exclusivist author. And in such a position it is important to realize that the author clearly is not interested in different opinions than his own. Dawkins therefore not only criticizes religions and a religious way of thinking, but dismisses it as useless. Such usage of words as low self-regard or policing by God suggests that Dawkins does not view religious morality as a legitimate one. He refers to an example to strengthen his position and that is the strike of police in the Montreal. In this part, he discusses an event that happened “on October 17, 1969, when the Montreal police went on strike. By 11:20 A.M. the first bank was robbed. By noon most downtown stores had closed because of looting.” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 228). And Dawkins comments on this behavior in a surprise because “the majority of the population of Montreal presumably believed in God. Why didn’t the fear of God restrain them when earthly policemen were temporarily removed from the scene? Wasn’t the Montreal strike a pretty good natural experiment to test the hypothesis that belief in God makes us good? Or did the cynic H. L. Mencken get it right when he tartly observed: ‘People say we need religion when what they really mean is we need police.’ ” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 228-229). But the mass can certainly choose otherwise, if one is not a true believer he will do many bad things. And the same can go for any religion or ideology. Dawkins sets atheistic morality above the religious one by suggesting that he believes that the number of atheists in prison is very low and although he is not “necessarily claiming that atheism increase morality, although humanism - the ethical system that often goes with atheism - probably does.” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 229). And to remind ourselves he seems to only believe that the role of God is to police us and our behavior but that might not essentially be so. It can serve as motivation for people to overcome the difficulties that every human being faces like working with someone you utterly do not like, and religion might help in this cause. He also mentions another aspect he ascribes to atheism, “another good possibility is that atheism is correlated with some third factor, such as higher education, intelligence or reflectiveness, which might counteract criminal impulses.” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 229). By arguing in such a matter it can be clearly seen that Dawkins truly proposes also absolute moral superiority of secularism. Interestingly, to him religion itself is something absolutist which cannot argue with a reason about morality which for him is crucial. Another statement by him confirms this hypothesis “moral principles that are based upon religion (as opposed to,

say, the "golden rule", which is often associated with religions but can be derived from elsewhere) may be called absolutist. Good is good and bad is bad, and we don't mess around deciding particular cases by whether, for example, somebody suffers." (Dawkins, 2006, p. 231). And so religion for Dawkins is a cause of great suffering in our world and he believes that rules in religion about good and bad cannot change. On the one hand Dawkins offers an interesting criticism of a mass religion but on the other hand, he himself invokes a kind of exclusivist position when he says that their position cannot be changed and that secularism is essentially a savior of our world. Dawkins places emphasis only on masses and their understanding of religion, and from history one knows that masses often misinterpret different teachings.

### **Practical example of exclusivist's position on abortion and homosexuality**

Another exclusivist atheist author Christopher Hitchens describes in his book *God is not great* a position in a support of homosexuality and abortions. What is important is that how he reacts and sees different views, and the method he chooses in order to change views and positions of others. Hitchens demonstrates his position by arguing against those who condemn such a behavior and strongly criticizes them, since they do not appear to understand different opinions from their own. As Hitchens begins some of his arguments towards religion itself he says things like "I do not have to travel to all these exotic places in order to see poison doing its work. Long before the critical day of September 11, 2001, I could sense that religion was beginning to reassert its challenge to civil society." (Hitchens, 2007, p. 28). As he continues with his criticism of religion, especially Islam and the Muslims, he states that "the disappointment was, and to me remains, acute. Within hours, the 'reverends' Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell had announced that the immolation of their fellow creatures was a divine judgment on a secular society that tolerated homosexuality and abortion." (Hitchens, 2007, p. 32). Hitchens later on adds on homosexuality that "in the recent division in the Anglican Church over homosexuality and ordination, several bishops made the fatuous point that homosexuality is 'unnatural' because it does not occur in other species. Leave aside the fundamental absurdity of this observation: are humans part of 'nature' or not? Or, if they chance to be homosexual, are they created in god's image or not? Leave aside the well-attested fact that numberless kinds of birds and mammals and primates do engage in homosexual play. Who are clerics to

interpret nature?” (Hitchens, 2007, p. 48). From these arguments a conclusion is that Hitchens is supporter of homosexuality and views it as something natural. In addition, he criticizes negative views of abortion and therefore it means that he most likely does have an understanding for woman’s right to choose the abortion. These arguments against this anti-gay thinking is not something that Hitchens as an atheists supports because as we saw in this reactions, he certainly appears to be more supportive of homosexuals and of woman’s right to choose an abortion. We can see how different his opinion is from exclusivist Christians. And therefore we can see how one group of these authors approaches another. Perhaps if the exclusivist atheists chose a different approach in arguing with the Christian authors it might create a smaller conflict. But they mainly attack each other which seems counterproductive.

Hitchens describes his attitude towards religion and its role in this world, and he thinks that the role of religion is not useful anymore for our modern world. As he says, “since religion has proved itself uniquely delinquent on the one subject where moral and ethical authority might be counted as universal and absolute, I think we are entitled to at least three provisional conclusions,. The first is that religion and the churches are manufactured, and that this salient fact is too obvious to ignore. The second is that ethics and morality are quite independent of faith, and cannot be derived from it. The third is that religion is - because it claims a special divine exemption for its practice and beliefs - not just amoral but immoral. The ignorant psychopath or brute who mistreats his children must be punished but can be understood. Those who claim a heavenly warrant for the cruelty have been tainted by evil, and also constitute far more of a danger.” (Hitchens, 2007, p. 52). These arguments again show the lack of tolerance and how he views religion as morally absolutely inferior. The third point when he says that religion is genuinely immoral says it clearly.

## **4 The Common Ground Theory**

This thesis must end with an analysis of problems that atheism and religion have in general in order to illustrate why we need a milder approach and why we need to have a common ground on certain issues and also understand that sometimes we are fundamentally different.

### **The complexity of religious beliefs and problems within the exclusivist atheistic understanding**

Therefore, firstly, there needs to be a description of the problems and benefits of religion and atheism, or similar features which are required to be described in order to understand the common ground theory more clearly. Jonathan Haidt who is a sociologist wrote a book called *The Righteous Mind* in which he deals with the above mentioned problems. If one looks at the position of Dawkins and Harris, Haidt says that “a belief is a lever that once pulled, moves almost everything else in a person’s life. For Harris beliefs are the key to understanding the psychology of religion because in his view, believing a falsehood (E.g., martyrs will be rewarded with seventy-two virgins in heavy) makes religions people do harmful things (e.g., suicide bombing).” (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). There is a clear pattern here that Haidt identifies: if one really believes he must act in a same way. Therefore what Dawkins and Harris or others exclusivist authors argue is that believing means doing what you believe. This pattern also applies to the atheists since atheists do believe that because they have certain arguments or reasons for their morality. But this has the same pattern for them as for the believers. If I believe in my morals I must have a reason. Whether I am an atheist or believer my morality must have some reason and arguments behind them. Therefore I in a sense do believe that my reasons for having a morality are good. By having these therefore I do things which I believe are justified by my reason and arguments. To continue with Haidt’s point is that Dawkins also proposes in his books the same justification as mentioned above. Haidt says that “He defines the ‘God Hypothesis’ as the proposition that ‘there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us’ The rest of the book is an argument that ‘God, in the sense defined, is a delusion; and, as later chapters will show, a pernicious delusion.’ Once again, religion

is studied as a set of beliefs about supernatural agents, and these beliefs are said to be the cause of a wide range of harmful actions.” (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). And this is the same argumentation that can also be identified for every human being, as was already mentioned.

Also he argues that for example Dennett also proposes an argument in which he gives a reason why religions survive for so long. And it is because “like those parasites, they make their hosts do things that are bad for themselves (e. g., suicide bombing) but good for the parasite (e.g., Islam). Dawkins similarly describes religions as viruses. Just as a cold virus makes its host sneeze to spread itself, successful religions make their hosts expend precious resources to spread the ‘infection’.” (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). And these exclusivist atheistic authors often argue that the scientists and humanists must unite in order to stop the infection and break the spell and destroy the delusion and ultimately destroy the faith (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). Such is the approach of exclusivists to one to another, because these kind of argumentation belongs to the both, religious and atheistic authors, as was demonstrated in the previous chapters. Haidt supports his thesis on other authors, he quotes two anthropologists Scott Atran and Joe Henrich who argue that “religions are sets of cultural innovations that spread to the extent that they make groups more cohesive and cooperative.” (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). And this is one of the benefits of religion that it gives people an idea that they can work as a group but the problem on the other hand is that they might work under a false idea. A problem for the other side arises when one realizes that a religion is a solution to the problem of a cooperation without kinship, which the New Atheists do not seem to realize (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). They do not see how can one achieve a cooperation where there are no common interests and religion does seem to be one of the possible answers. Another interesting account presented by Haidt stems from David Wilson who is a biologist at Binghamton University, and he argues that religion allows individuals to do things that they would not be able to achieve on their own (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). And this also seems as a good point for bringing a society together and making it more cohesive. The point of these arguments is not to give a religion some special place and argue that religion is a sort of the true path for humanity. The point is to show that religion as such has good parts about it and not even scientists or the New Atheists cannot disprove it. Haidt also introduces two US political scientists Putman and Campbell and they argue “by many different measures

religiously observant Americans are better neighbors and better citizens than secular Americans - they are more generous with their time and money, especially in helping the needy, and they are more active in community life.” (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). And as Haidt summarizes these arguments he says that “we humans have an extraordinary ability to care about things beyond ourselves, to circle around those things with other people, and in the process to bind ourselves into teams that can pursue large projects. That’s what religion is all about.” (Haidt, 2012, chap. 11). The only thing we are trying to demonstrate is that the human being should not delude itself that only the empirical and observable is the true. Because human capacity to observe is limited by his potential and capabilities, although we invent devices to change it, it does not mean that the limited human being can create devices that can discover the unlimited things. Surely a common worldview whether it is religious or political can make individuals, who would normally do cooperate, more cohesive and inclined to cooperation because they do share in a common something important for them.

### **The importance of cosmic question**

Another author Thomas Nagel writes that there is a problem with atheism that it forgets to answer certain important questions. Nagel begins by describing what religion satisfies in human life and says “The desire for such completion, whether or not one thinks it can be met, is a manifestation of what I am calling the religious temperament. One way in which that desire can be satisfied is through religious belief. Religion plays many roles in human life, but this is one of them.” (Nagel, 2010, p. 4). He says that a space remains empty if secularists deny these questions that religion provides answer to and therefore we have to use philosophy and occupy that space by it, and that “it is a question of making sense not merely of our lives, but of everything.” (Nagel, 2010, p. 4). Nagel presents a concept of harmony with the universe and discusses this idea. He says that “the question I have in mind is a general one about the relation of individual human life to the universe as a whole. The question is pointed to by its religious answer: namely, that our lives are in some way expressions or parts of the spiritual sense of the universe as a whole, which is its deepest reality, and that we must try to live them in light of this, and not only from the point of view of our local purely individual nature.” (Nagel, 2010, p. 5). The question as such is very interesting but it still remains open to both possibilities “is there a way

to live in harmony with the universe, and not just in it?" (Nagel, 2010, p. 5). The atheists according to him have three types of answers to these questions "(a) those that reject the question; (b) those that construct an answer from the inside out, that is, starting from the human point of view; and (c) those that construct an answer from the outside in, starting from a cosmic point of view." (Nagel, 2010, p. 6). For us the first kind of answer (complete rejection) is important because that is the basic approach to such questions by exclusivists. Nagel mentions certain outlook from a viewpoint of science and "the universe revealed by chemistry and physics, however beautiful and awe-inspiring, is meaningless, in the radical sense that it is incapable of meaning. That is, the natural science, as most commonly understood, presents the world and our existence as something to which the religious impulse has no application." (Nagel, 2010, p. 7-8). But as he says that even if modern science says this question is useless, that does not mean that this question disappears, and even if science replaces religion this question still exists (Nagel, 2010, p. 8). For atheists an answer could be a humanism, at least it tries to fill the gap and says that "humanism, the view that we ourselves, as a species or community, give sense to the world as a whole. Human beings collectively can fill the place of the world soul." (Nagel, 2010, p. 10).

But the question is whether that is enough, whether humanism can produce such an answer that most human beings can find a meaning in such world, and if it is not only a worldview for certain people. Still secularism does propose an interesting view about life and what it means as Nagel says "Since God does not exist, everything is permitted, but in choosing what to be, I must think of myself as choosing for everyone. This shares with other humanisms the principle that we are the source of all values, which replaces the value not given to our lives by the nonexistent creator." (Nagel, 2010, p. 11). This is a very good point of view when one looks at other human beings as himself and tries to understand them. And so Nagel asks still whether there is some secular worldview that can provide us with a larger perspective than our world. He mentions evolutionary biology which may have a possibility to offer a large picture of us in relation to the universe but still it only may (Nagel, 2010, p. 12). And to this scientific perspective Nagel says in conclusion that "the recognition that we are the products of biological and cultural evolution does not give us a task, a significant role in this larger process. The genealogical facts are interesting, and may lead to some significant self-conscious modifications of what we

have been given, but for the most part we take what has resulted from the process as our starting point and live from there forward. Each of us is only a small drop in the evolutionary and historical river. Even if we recognize the importance of our origins to self-awareness, it is hard to see ourselves as expressions of the will to power. Modern evolutionary self-understanding is typically more passive than that.” (Nagel, 2010, p. 14). And he quotes Daniel Dennett who says that “if naturalism means that everything reduces to physics, then there is not naturalistic answer to the cosmic question. So the next question is whether there is any secular alternative to this kind of reductive naturalism.” (Nagel, 2010, p. 16). Nagel mentions the Platonic alternative but for the purposes of this thesis it is not relevant. But what is relevant is that if the religious and Platonic alternative fails about this cosmic question of meaning we are left with “hardheaded atheism, humanism, and the absurd. In the case, since the cosmic question won’t go away and humanism is too limited an answer, a sense of the absurd may be what we are left with.” (Nagel, 2010, p. 17). And so the question of meaning remains a mystery if we look at it from a perspective of atheist exclusivists. But that does not mean that secularism is completely wrong. The same could be said about religion, that if we have a brutal and savage understanding of religion and we do more harm to fellow human beings by our actions, which are based on religious teaching it is very similar. Because we do not have sufficient answers for the basic questions if they only apply to a certain behavior, or certain individuals. We must look for a broader perspective if we want to be satisfied by the meaning we find.

### **The Basis of Common Ground Theory**

This chapter aims to illustrate a sort of psychological possibility of a human mind to absorb different ideas. This capability is crucial for understanding opposite views and it offers a possibility of creating a more moderate and tolerant society. But for this one must indulge in a study of ethics, morality and psychology in order to transform himself into a more tolerant and moderate human being. In a book by Joshua Greene *Moral Tribes* there is an idea of a capability of a human mind based upon psychological analysis which supports this point of view. Greene argues that a human brain is a like dual-mode camera with “both automatic settings and a manual mode.” (Greene, 2013, p. 133). About these settings he says that the automatic ones are not very flexible but highly efficient and for the manual mode the opposite is true



(Greene, 2013, p. 133). In this sense he ascribes emotions which are automatically present in our behavior and argues that “emotions are automatic processes. You can’t choose to experience an emotion in the way that you can choose to count to ten in your head.” (Greene, 2013, p. 134). And he adds certain characteristics which are very significant for emotions “emotions as automatic processes, are devices for achieving behavioral efficiency. Like the automatic settings on a camera, emotions produce behavior that is generally adaptive, and without the need for conscious thought about what to do.” (Greene, 2013, p. 134). As he summarizes the automatic processes, or in other words emotions, wield a certain amount of pressure on behavior and basically tells us what to do (Greene, 2013, p. 135). But the important thing is that one must realize that he needs to learn how to control these automatic emotions because they are not always correct. These processes are also crucial for understanding of opposite views. Because by emotions you can feel empathy towards others and you can then imagine the situation in which the other person might be. These things may seem trivial and simple but they are much harder in practice and are not always easily realized. The importance is that one cannot entirely understand other people simply by rationalizing their positions. One also needs to image the feelings of others in order to grasp their positions and ideas more clearly. Greene says that you cannot choose your emotion the way we can choose some rational arguments and therefore one cannot expect others to feel the same way as he does. Therefore people also need empathize while forming any kind of values system because otherwise it might become a very tyrannical values system. But in order to properly use our emotions one needs reason.

Concerning the manual mode or reason he argues that “reasoning like emotion, is a real psychological phenomenon with fuzzy boundaries. If one defines "reasoning" broadly enough, it can refer to any psychological process that leads to adaptive behavior.” (Greene, 2013, p. 136). And for him the reasoning behind this is that when one behaves “based on reasoning, one knows what one is doing and why one is doing it; one has conscious access to the operative decision rule, the rule that maps the relevant features of the situation onto a suitable behavior.” (Greene, 2013, p. 136). And Greene proposed a concept of what he calls unlimited reasoning where he says that in this sense reason is “as Hume famously declared, a ‘slave of the passions.’ ” (“Passions” here refers to emotional processes in general, not exclusively to lusty

feelings.) (Greene, 2013, p. 137). In the end the “reason is the champion of the emotional underdog, enabling what Hume called “calm passions” to win out over ‘violent passions.’ Reasoning frees us from the tyranny of our immediate impulses by allowing us to serve values that are not automatically activated by what’s in front of us. And yet, at the same time, reason cannot produce good decisions without some kind of emotional input, however indirect.” (Greene, 2013, p. 137). And this is connected to the previous discussion about emotions because emotions as such are not always so much correct. If one does not control his emotions you cannot expect to understand opposite and different views. Example of this process might be a natural disgust with certain sexual behavior. Such disgust is an automatic emotion that is not controlled by reason and many people simply hate or condemn certain behavior on these automatic emotions. But if they use reason and try to imagine that the other person’s behavior is natural and that the other person was born certain way, then the one who condemns and hates can imagine him being in the same situation and can try to accept the way the other person is. This kind of understanding is important because we live in a diverse society and need to tolerate other people’s behavior and understand it. But this task is often very problematic because many people in society seem to fail to certain degree in this. One might be naturally tolerant to a certain degree but there are always things one has hard time tolerating. This does not necessarily mean that one cannot learn how to tolerate and accept them. That is why we aim at establishing basis that would allow to explain such process.

So by this time there should be a clearer understanding of the position we are promoting, but before reaching a final conclusion a summary of the common ground theory is in place. The whole point was to raise important questions which empirical sciences often seem to forget and dismiss them as useless for our world. These were the questions of meaning and our role in the universe and the questions about how we can make any meaning about morality on a basis which is applicable (theoretically applicable) to everyone. Such questions do play a major role in our understanding of the world. Every person asks these questions from time to time and they deserve proper answers. But to dismiss these questions as foolish is foolishness itself. So as was seen in this chapter the theory presented by Joshua Greene offers one of the possible ways in which a human being can relate to other human beings. By controlling our emotions and by our reasoning which is also based upon empathy we

understand others on a better basis. And only if people are able to understand each other we can have possibility of creating "universal" morality. But if there is no understanding of others one cannot argue for creating a "universal" morality. This whole approach might serve as a theoretical basis for exclusivist authors who have problems understanding each other and are fighting meaningless battles over fundamental differences of human beings.

## **5 Conclusion**

The foundation laid down in the final part of this thesis provides a basis for further analysis of common ground theory. We wanted to demonstrate that it is possible to create some basic structure for a transformation of contemporary exclusivist approaches. Such possibility exists and each intellectually open human being is capable of it. The comparison between religion and atheism is a very good start because it compares direct opposite beliefs. If it was for example, done with only two religions, the effect might not be so clear. Naturally, this analysis is not a complete one because there are many more factors, religions and worldviews to consider but it tried to provide a good starting point for this transformative approach. The exclusivists are people who are generally present in many important discussions and often start initiatives with intent to damage different groups. And that is why such a theory is important because it tries to find a method how to transform this type of attitude and behavior.

## 6 Resumé

Ako názov práce už predpovedá táto práca sa zaoberá dvomi názormi, a to náboženským, konkrétne kresťanským svetonázorom a ateistickým svetonázorom. Tieto pojmy sú vysvetlené v prvej kapitole, a na ich vyjasnenie boli použité autori Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Anthony C. Thiselton a Donald M. Borchert. Podľa jednotlivých autorov je ukázané, že pod nábožensky - kresťanským zmysľaním sa rozumie systém ucelených praktík a presvedčení, ktoré vytvárajú jednu veľkú morálnu komunitu (Durkheim, 1964, s. 47), zatiaľ čo Weber sa pozerá na vplyv náboženstva na jednotlivca, jeho vieru a komunitu (Swedberg, 2005, s. 229). Taktiež prezentuje istý typ náboženstva - masový typ, a jeho postoj k tomuto druhu náboženstva je viac kritický, nakoľko toto náboženstvo nepracuje metodicky na spáse človeka (Swebergd, 2005, s. 230).

Veľmi podobným spôsobom sa dá pozrieť aj na ateistický prúd myslenia a zistiť ako autori, ktorí sa zaoberajú touto problematikou vidia tieto pojmy. Napríklad Anthony C. Thiselton vraví, že najbežnejší spôsob akým sa môže charakterizovať ateizmus je, že je to pozícia, ktorá popiera existenciu Boha. Extrémnejší prípad, teda prípad, ktorý uprednostňujeme v tejto práci je popretie akejkoľvek vyššej existencie, či vyššej bytosti (Thiselton, 2002, s. 18). Autor Donald M. Borchert hovorí niečo veľmi podobné a to, že ateizmus tvrdí, že hypotéza "Boh existuje" je falošné tvrdenie (Borchert, 2006, s. 359). Avšak prezentuje zaujímavú úvahu, že určití ľudia v ateistickej komunite, ktorí zastávajú túto vyššie uvedenú hypotézu, ju môžu zastávať aj z iných dôvodov ako sami tvrdia. Môžu tu byť aj nejaké iné, skryté dôvody, ktoré daná osoba nevyjadrí, napríklad negatívne skúsenosti (Borchert, 2006, s. 359).

Ďalšia kapitola sa zaoberá už konkrétnym náboženským prúdom a to kresťanským. V tejto kapitole sú analyzovaní autori Michael Novak a kardinál George Pell. Obaja autori reprezentujú takzvanú exkluzivistickú pozíciu, ktorá sa vyznačuje práve tým, že celkovo odmieta opačné postoje a vyjadruje absolútnu morálnu nadradenosť. Tieto teoretické pojmy sú ilustrované na praktických príkladoch ako potraty, homosexualita, a k tomu patriace manželstvá rovnakého pohlavia. Napríklad Novakove vyjadrenia na adresu ateizmu a odporu voči potratom poukazujú na vyššie spomínaný typ správania sa. Na adresu chýb svojej viery a cirkvi poukazuje ako na ojedinelé javy, ktoré sú v

rozpore s učením cirkvi a nevenuje im prílišnú pozornosť. Opisuje ateizmus ako niečo čo obmedzuje a ukracuje človeka o komplexné vnímanie sveta (Novak, 2007). Kardinál a súčasný minister financií Vatikánu George Pell tvrdí, že manželstvo je jedinečný zväzok medzi mužom a ženou. A vo svojich textoch odmieta možnosť, že páry rovnakého pohlavia majú rovnaké právo na manželstvo ako páry opačného pohlavia (Pell, 2012). Podobný názor vyjadruje k eutanázii a považuje ju za nemilosrdné zabíjanie. Pell neberie do úvahy žiaden protichodný názor pri svojom opise a prezentuje svoj postoj ako morálne absolútne nadradený, práve tým, že sa odvoláva na pojmy ako humánnosť a nevinnosť ľudského života (Pell, 2011). V týchto argumentoch vidíme presne danú morálnu nadradenosť a odmietanie protichodných argumentov, nakoľko vlastné pozície sú prezentované ako jediné morálne správne, a niet tu náznaku chápania druhej strany. Rovnakým spôsobom argumentuje Novak voči potratom, a neustále spomína autoritu Stvoriteľa ako svoj oporný bod prečo je potrat zlý a nehumánny (Novak, 2009). Rozbor dokazuje, že týmito črtami sa vyznačujú autori, ktorí využívajú exkluzivistický spôsob argumentácie.

Ten istý spôsob argumentácie využívajú aj autori výhradného ateizmu, ktorí rovnako ako náboženský myslitelia ukazujú neschopnosť a neochotu prijať iné názory a nárokuje si absolútnu morálnu nadradenosť. Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris a Christopher Hitchens, ktorí sú považovaní za popredných ateistov súčasnej doby vykazujú dané typy argumentácie. Napríklad Harris argumentuje, že náboženstvo a veda spolu nemôžu koexistovať a úlohou vedy je vyvrátiť a pokoriť náboženstvo. Spôsob akým Harris pristupuje k náboženstvu a názory, ktoré naň má poukazujú na to, že považuje náboženstvo za menejcenné a neužitočné, či už z vedeckého alebo morálne hľadiska (Harris, 2011). Dawkins vyjadruje podobný postoj ako Harris k otázkam týkajúcim sa náboženstva a morálnej nadradenosti a neschopnosti prijať protichodné názory. Dawkinsov prístup poukazuje na veľmi skeptické vnímanie náboženstva a chápe ho ako kontrolu človeka ideou Boha. Podľa neho sú ateisti viac vzdelaní a menej participujú na zločinoch a dodáva, že náboženstvo je príliš striktné a neschopné akejkolvek zmeny (Dawkins, 2006, s. 227-231). Christopher Hitchens, ktorý poukazuje na praktické príklady a venuje sa homosexualite a potratom, vyjadruje svoj názor kritikou práve spomínaného náboženského prístupu k týmto témam. Vidí problém v náboženských pozíciách k týmto témam a nepovažuje za

správne nazývať homosexuálne konanie neprirodzeným. Taktiež poukazuje na neochotu pozrieť sa na ľudské práva ženy a jej voľbu potratu a nepáči sa mu vnucovanie etických a morálnych hodnôt zo strany cirkvi a náboženstva všeobecne (Hitchens, 2007, s. 28-52). A toto je tiež jeden z dôkazov, že exkluzivistickí ateistickí autori odmietajú využívať iné spôsoby vnímania a argumentácie a používajú v debata útok a degradáciu ako zbraň. A tieto argumenty poukazujú na absolútnu morálnu nadradenosť, nedostatok porozumenia a striktné odmietanie opozičných pozícií.

V poslednej časti tejto práce sa analyzuje teória spoločnej pôdy a nedostatky, ktoré má náboženstvo aj ateizmus. Tieto nedostatky poukazujú práve na potrebu spoločnej pôdy a na to, že o exkluzivistickom názore pri diskusiách o fundamentálnych rozdieloch ľudí sa často nedá debatovať, a preto porozumenie a akceptácia býva najlepším riešením. Jonathan Haidt poukazuje na problém kedy exkluzivistickí ateisti chápu náboženstvo ako systém, kde veriť niečomu, znamená vykonať ihneď niečo. A poukazuje aj na kladné stránky náboženstva, na ktoré často ateistickí autori zabúdajú a to je schopnosť náboženstva vytvárať koherentné celky, ktoré sú schopné pracovať efektívne. No však Haidt istým spôsobom práve touto argumentáciou voči spôsobu veriť a ihneď konať, poukazuje aj na zlý systém, ktorý využívajú exkluzivistickí náboženský, teda kresťanskí autori (Haidt, 2012, k. 11). To znamená, že veľakrát exkluzivisti zabudnú, že svoje morálne postoje treba podrobiť kritike a analýze. Ďalší autor Thomas Nagel, ktorý sa zaoberá taktiež problémom ateizmu poukazuje na dôležitosť kozmickej otázky. Tvrdí, že ateizmus mnohokrát popiera akékoľvek otázky zmyslu a považuje ich za bezpredmetné a absurdné. Exkluzivistický ateizmus im pripisuje malú úlohu, no neprichádza so všeobecne akceptovanou morálkou a tým neukazuje ako môže byť spoločensky prospešný. To je taktiež jeden z problémov súčasného ateizmu (Nagel, 2010, s. 4 - 17). Posledným autorom tejto práce je Joshua Greene, ktorý poskytuje spôsob ako sa dopracovať k teórii spoločnej pôdy, a poskytuje dobré základy, ktoré by táto teória mala mať. Ukazuje schopnosť ľudského mozgu chápať iné názory, schopnosť racionalizovať si pozície druhých a použitím kontrolovaných emócií (empatie) vcítiť sa do pozície druhého človeka. Tieto prístupy ukazujú schopnosť človeka, pri dostatočnom tréningu, byť viac otvorený voči ostatným ľuďom na tomto svete a vidieť svet z mnohých perspektív a nielen z tej svojej. Práve v tomto prístupe, ktorý spomína Greene spočíva základ teórie spoločnej pôdy a na základe tohto prístupu sa môže človek pokúšať o niečo také, ako

naformulovať spoločnú reč medzi fundamentálne rozdielnymi ľuďmi (Greene, 2013, s. 133 - 137). Argumenty, ktoré prezentuje Greene poukazujú na schopnosť človeka, ktorý sa intelektuálne a emočne rozvíja, chápať a akceptovať iné pozície. Tento prístup umožňuje transformáciu súčasných exkluzivistických autorov a pomáha riešiť morálne a etické konflikty, ktoré vedú. Avšak analýza dvoch svetonázorov, respektíve myšlienkových prúdov je len začiatok. Táto práca by sa dala neskôr obohatiť rozborom iných svetonázorov a analýzou súčasných exkluzivistických autorov, ktorí ich zastávajú.



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