**THE SKEPTIC ARENA**

**July 25, 2015**

**My plea to atheists:**

**We must let go of the model "religion is a mental illness"**

**by Euphemism Treadmill**

***Religion is a delusion,***

**Treadmill, religion is quite real - but religious belief is delusional.**

**According to dictionary.com, "delusion" is defined in psychiatry as "A fixed false belief that is resistant to reason or confrontation with actual fact ...."**

**Now Treadmill ... hold that thought.**

***but it is not a mental illness.***

**Treadmill, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ... delusion is a mental disorder (and therefore, a mental illness).**

[**http://www.theravive.com/therapedia/Delusional-Disorder-DSM--5-297.1-(F22)**](http://www.theravive.com/therapedia/Delusional-Disorder-DSM--5-297.1-(F22))

[**http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mental%20illness?s=t**](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mental%20illness?s=t)

**Since you claimed above that "religion is a delusion" and now you claim that "it is not a mental illness" ... you have contradicted yourself.**

***If someone who is otherwise perfectly normal***

**Treadmill, what does that even mean? How would you make such a determination? How many thousands of possible mental traits would you have to analyze before you could even begin to assess whether or not someone is "perfectly normal?"**

***tells you they don't believe in climate change, this person is not mentally ill, but they are deluding themselves (most likely have been deluded / indoctrinated by others).***

**Treadmill, delusional thinking IS a mental illness.**

**However, it should be noted that in the case of climatologists who do not agree with the consensus, but that disagreement is not based on religious or politically ideological grounds, but solely on a scientific disagreement about the interpretation of data, then they should not be considered delusional on this subject.**

***This is NOT the same as having a mental illness.***

**Treadmill, only if you ignore the definition of words; which you apparently are willing to do.**

***If you tell your kid Santa Claus is real, and the kid believes you, and you keep up the lie well into their teens, your kid is not mentally ill. They just have a jerk for a parent.***

**Treadmill, you got the second half right.**

**As for the first half, the source of the delusion does not negate the fact of the delusion, and hence, the mental disorder.**

***Now look at religion. If you are raised in a cult, you can be de-programmed. You can find your way back to reality by talking to rational people who help you make sense of the world now that you aren't under the thumb of the cult. You shed your old misguided beliefs and take on a realistic view of the world.***

**Treadmill, you seem to be ignoring the fact that the mental illness was present during the time spent in a cult. Being cured doesn't erase the past ... it only opens up a new future.**

**Oh I see, you need to ignore that fact in order to support your assertion that religion is not a mental illness.**

***How does that compare to the experience of autism, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, PTSD, Tourette syndrome.... These are not things you can just be talked out of, or something you can reason your way out of.***

**Treadmill, to support that assertion, you would have to produce evidence that no one, who has ever been afflicted with any of those problems, has ever been helped by healthcare professionals or other caring individuals. That's a tall order Treadmill. But take all the time you need to gather your evidence ... I'll wait.**

***They are serious mental disorders that, in most cases, will never go away even with treatment.***

**Treadmill, the key word there was "most." Just because science has not yet advanced to the point where everyone can be cured doesn't mean that progress isn't being made.**

**And just because an ailment doesn't "go away" doesn't mean that it can't be brought under greater control to provide the sufferer with a much better quality of life than was previously experienced before getting help.**

***Like the child who is told Santa is real, religious folk are surrounded by literally MILLIONS of people telling them "this is real." Their teachers are religious. Their neighbors are religious. The police and firemen are religious. The President of the United States is religious. So, of course people are going to get sucked into it. It doesn't mean they have a mental disorder.***

**Treadmill, actually it does. All the excuses you provided for them failed to refute the fact that they are delusional (as you yourself admitted at the beginning of this essay).**

***In some cases it means they lack strong critical reasoning skills.***

**Treadmill, it only means they lack strong critical reasoning skills in the area of religion. It says nothing about their reasoning skills in any other area.**

**You can easily find on the net, Atheists who believe in 9/11 conspiracy theories, alien abductions, homeopathy, and all kinds of other assorted bullshit. And, you can find Christians who don't. Atheism only guarantees rationality in one area, and one area alone ... religion (and that is by definition).**

***In some cases it means they've been denied education. But in no cases does it mean they are mentally ill.***

**Treadmill, you need to review the definitions. You don't have the authority to make words mean whatever you need them to mean. Words have meanings. Those are the rules we all abide by.**

**When people try to change or ignore the rules, I have found that it is usually because their argument is bankrupt.**

***My grandmother with Alzheimer's is mentally ill.***

**Treadmill, I prefer the phrasing "has a mental illness." Alzheimer's robs her of her memories. But there are hundreds of other disorders that she may not have. So on what basis do you assign her the label of "mentally ill?"**

**If having one mental disorder is sufficient to label someone "mentally ill" (as you just did), then good luck finding that rare human who is perfect and free of all mental disorders.**

***My manager at work with Catholicism is not.***

**Treadmill, I doubt you are qualified to make such an assertion, and even if you were, it would still require that you learn a tremendous amount about her thinking. Have you done that?**

**However, based on the fact that she holds Catholic beliefs, it is fair to say that she has a mental illness (religious belief) which encompasses multiple mental disorders.**

***She is merely deluded and misinformed.***

**Treadmill, delusion is only one form of mental illness related to religion. Hallucinations (often reported by believers) are another common claim that indicate an impaired contact with reality.**

***I seen a lot of folks on this sub use the "Religion is a mental illness" argument,***

**Treadmill, it isn't an argument ... it is a fact.**

**(and I am referring to "religious belief" not "religion")**

***and while it is certainly funny, and there are actually a lot of similarities there, in the end it is simply incorrect.***

**Treadmill, definitions from both the dictionary and The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ... disagree with you.**

***It is, in reality, just an insult.***

**Treadmill, if I ever run into your grandmother, I'll be sure to let her know how you feel.**

***"My grandmother with Alzheimer's is mentally ill."***

**Treadmill, regardless of whether or not someone finds it insulting, calling religious belief a mental illness is based on provable fact. But calling your grandmother mentally ill because of her misfortune is only insulting ... to you.**

***And because it is incorrect, we as atheists should not propagate this spurious notion.***

**Treadmill, I agree that we should not propagate spurious notions. But it is not the Atheists on Reddit, whom you are chastising, who are guilty of doing that.**

**Tell you what Treadmill, in your sentence above, replace the word "Atheists" with "Believers."**

***Now* it makes sense, Treadmill.**

***So please, use your reason. Use your logic. And stop equating ignorance or delusion with mental illness. It isn't the same at all.***

**Treadmill, I've already proven that it is. Maybe you are the one who should be reevaluating your position ... on a lot of things.**

[**https://www.reddit.com/r/atheism/comments/3ee53y/my\_plea\_to\_atheists\_promote\_atheism\_with\_logic/**](https://www.reddit.com/r/atheism/comments/3ee53y/my_plea_to_atheists_promote_atheism_with_logic/)

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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**Scientists pinpoint the start of the aging process**

**and discover that it is not a slow series of random events**

**A genetic switch starts the aging process by turning off cell stress responses that protect the cell by keeping important proteins folded and functional. The switch is thrown by germline stem cells in early adulthood, after the animal starts to reproduce, ensuring its line will live on.**

**In the worm, C. elegans, the decline begins eight hours into adulthood -- all the switches get thrown, to shut off an animal's cell stress protective mechanisms. Researchers found that it is the germline stem cells responsible for making eggs and sperm that control the switch. While the studies were conducted in worms, the findings have implications for humans. The genetic switch and other components identified by scientists as playing a role in aging are conserved in all animals, including humans, offering targets for future study.**

**In animals, including C. elegans and humans, the heat shock response is essential for proper protein folding and cellular health. Aging is associated with a decline in quality control, so researchers looked specifically at the heat shock response in the life of C. elegans, and saw a dramatic collapse of the protective heat shock response beginning in early adulthood.**

**Using a combination of genetic and biochemical approaches, researchers found the protective heat shock response declines steeply over a four-hour period in early adulthood, precisely at the onset of reproductive maturity. The animals still appear normal in behavior, but the scientists can see molecular changes and the decline of protein quality control.**

**All these stress pathways that insure robustness of tissue function are essential for life, so it was unexpected that a genetic switch is literally thrown eight hours into adulthood, leading to the simultaneous repression of the heat shock response and other cell stress responses.**

**Researchers found that the genetic switch occurs between two major tissues in an organism that determines the future of the species: the germline and the soma (which are the body tissues of the animal, such as muscle cells and neurons). Once the germline has completed its job and produced eggs and sperm -- necessary for the next generation of animals -- it sends a signal to cell tissues to turn off protective mechanisms, starting the decline of the adult animal.**

**In one experiment, the researchers blocked the germline from sending the signal to turn off cellular quality control. They found the somatic tissues remained robust and stress resistant in the adult animals.**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**Winston Churchill**

**(no biography - previously quoted)**

**"If the human race ever reaches a stage of development –**

**when religion will cease to assist and comfort mankind –**

**Christianity will be put aside**

**as a crutch which is no longer needed,**

**and man will stand erect on the firm legs of reason."**