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New Atheism and its critics

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Abstract

What is the significance of the New Atheist movement? This essay argues that it has hindered rather than advanced the philosophical debate, presenting a one-sided caricature of religion rather than serious intellectual engagement with the topic.

1 | INTRODUCTION

It has now been over a decade since the publication of Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* in 2004, inaugurating what has come to be known as the "New Atheist" movement. The New Atheists declared that the debate about religion is now settled. As Dawkins concluded: "God almost certainly does not exist" (2008, p. 189). The vigorous resulting controversy has largely died down by now and it is possible to attempt an overall assessment of what it accomplished or failed to accomplish. Here, we analyze the movement from two very different perspectives, the intellectual and the political. On the intellectual side, one may ask what if anything New Atheism has contributed to the debate. The political aspect raises the question of the effectiveness of the distinctive New Atheist strategies for attacking religion. This essay addresses both of these questions in turn, arguing that overall, the movement must be deemed a failure.

2 | NEW ATHEISM EVALUATED FROM A SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVE

It is I think fair to conclude, as have many commentators, that the New Atheists have contributed little if anything to the debate from an intellectual or scholarly perspective.¹ The New Atheists seem largely uninterested in exploring the philosophical arguments for and against religion, indeed tend to insist that there is no real debate to be had. In fact, the label "New Atheism" is misleading insofar as it suggests a novel set of arguments against religion; the label was first applied in a strongly pejorative sense by the journalist Gary Wolf in a 2006 article in *Wired Magazine*, called "The Church of the Nonbelievers." Wolf wrote: "The irony of the New Atheism—this prophetic attack on prophecy, this extremism in opposition to extremism—is too much for me."² Wolf criticizes its strident tone, its self-righteousness, its uncompromising extremism, and its lack of interest in practical, realistic solutions to the social problems in which religion is so heavily involved. Harris, Dawkins, and company however adopted the label in a non-pejorative and even laudatory sense, though Wolf seems more accurate in that what is new in New Atheism is not its intellectual content but its shrill tone and militant extremism.

This tone is revealed in the language used by New Atheists to describe religion and religious belief:

Dawkins: "mendacious," "lazy and defeatist," "fools," "infantile," "sanctimonious," "amazing blindness," "weird," "con job."

Stenger: "shoddy," "lazy," "warped," "bizarre," "insane," "egocentric," "God-lover venom."

Coyne: "toxic," "not honest," "useless," "superstitious," "never right," "devious," "brainwashed," "contrived," "mental gymnastics."

Grayling: "mental enslavement," "unlettered peasants," "superstitions of illiterate herdsmen," "egocentric," "blood-soaked history," "oppressive," "hypocrisy," "hangover from the infancy of humanity," "always propagandistic," "domination of the mind," "selective blindness." (Grayling, 2013)

It is sometimes said that the "second wave" of atheists has toned down the rhetoric, but in fact Grayling and Coyne belong to the second wave. What characterizes the New Atheism as a distinctive movement, I would argue, is above all this rhetorical strategy rather than genuine intellectual engagement.³

The New Atheist position has had occasional philosophically informed defenders. Andrew Johnson for example claims that the New Atheists have successfully made the case that atheism is "presumptively true" (Johnson, 2013, p. 13). However, Johnson relies on arguments that even he admits are not found in the New Atheists, including arguments made long before the New Atheists (Johnson, 2013, p. 13).⁴ And even if Johnson were right (which is itself dubious), "presumptive truth" is very different from the New Atheist insistence that God's existence is "almost certainly" false (let alone their claim that belief in God is "delusional"). From reading the New Atheist works, one would get the impression that any respectable scientist must be an atheist. In fact, this is surprisingly far from the case. A 2009 Pew survey of members of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science asked these scientists the status of their religious belief (the 2009 date of the survey is after the publication of books by all of the "Four Horsemen"). The survey found that 33% of scientists claimed to believe in God, a further 18% believed in a "universal spirit or higher power," and only 41% of scientists took the position that there is no god nor any higher spiritual power.⁵ Thus, even among scientists, who are substantially less religious than the larger population, and who are trained in a culture of physicalism and naturalism, only a minority are atheist. If science can definitively demonstrate the truth of atheism, then apparently, most scientists have not yet received this message.

The guiding philosophical premise of the New Atheism, to the extent it has one, is that the existence of God is a scientific hypothesis to be assessed just like any other scientific claim. Jerry Coyne writes that "the most novel aspect of 'New Atheism' ... is the observation that most religions are grounded in claims that can be regarded as *scientific*. That is, God, and the tenets of many religions, are *hypotheses* that can, at least in principle, be examined by science and reason" (2015, p. xii). Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* claims that "God's existence or non-existence is a scientific fact about the universe, discoverable in principle if not in practice" (2008, pp. 72–73). Victor Stenger in *God: The Failed Hypothesis* agrees that "God should be detectable by scientific means simply by virtue of the fact that he is supposed to play such a central role in the operation of the universe and the lives of humans" (2007, p. 13).

In fact, the claim that religious belief can be analyzed as a scientific claim is highly dubious. The central doctrines of Christianity, for example, are that there is just one God, the maker of all things; that Jesus is his only-begotten son, who by his death took away our sins—are not ordinary empirical claims that can be assessed by observational tests. In practice, New Atheists make virtually no use of the scientific method to assess religion, apart from a cursory mention of studies failing to demonstrate the empirical efficacy of prayer (Coyne, 2015, p. 116, Dawkins, 2008, pp. 87–88). Critics have pointed out the flaw in seeing religion as an empirical discipline like science, for religion is the study of transcendental questions rather than empirical ones, such things as meaning, purpose, and value—precisely the sorts of things that are outside the competence of science (see, e.g., Reitan, 2008, p. 98; Haight, 2006, p. 17). Now of course it may be that there are no such transcendental entities, but determining whether such entities exist or not is itself by no means simply an empirical question within the scope of the sciences.

This empiricist assumption leads inevitably to the New Atheist caricature of religion as based on mere blind faith and wishful thinking. But a more sophisticated view of religion would suggest that it should be seen as more like the humanities as an *interpretive* rather than an empirical discipline.⁶ Just as the literary critic examines the physical text of *Hamlet* and tries to interpret the meaning of the text, so too the believer looks for evidence of meaning and

purpose in the physical world. Again, this is not to defend the claim that religion is true, but only to say that it is by no means unproblematic to insist that religion must provide the same sort of evidence that one would expect in science or that scientists bring any special expertise to this question.

The New Atheists have occasionally claimed that their declaration of victory in the religion debate is motivated by and justified by recent developments in the sciences. Thus, Stenger in 2007 insisted that “by this moment in time science has advanced sufficiently to make a definitive statement on the existence or nonexistence of a God” (2007, p. 11). Coyne, writing in 2015, refers vaguely to “new developments in science, in areas like cosmology, neurobiology and evolutionary biology” (2015, p. xiii). However, neither identifies just what these specific new developments are, or just what they have added to the debate. There is however one incident in which the New Atheists pointed to a specific, recent scientific discovery as evidence that science has finally achieved a definitive answer to religion. Lawrence Krauss published *A Universe From Nothing* in 2012, addressing the age-old question, why is there something rather than nothing? This question, he claims, has been a basic support for the theistic view, in that it is claimed we need a creator to explain why the world exists at all. But Krauss insists that science has now answered this question so that a deity is no longer needed. “Over the past two decades,” he explains, “an exciting series of developments in cosmology, particle theory, and gravitation have completely changed the way we understand the universe, with startling and profound implications” (2012, p. xvi). In a nutshell, his argument is that the laws of quantum mechanics can be understood as giving an account of how the universe could originate from nothing. Richard Dawkins added a glowing afterward to the book, even comparing Krauss to Charles Darwin in the scientific dismantling of religion. Dawkins wrote that “the last remaining trump card of the theologian, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing’, shrivels up before your eyes as you read these pages. If ‘On The Origin of Species’ was biology’s deadliest blow to supernaturalism, we may come to see ‘A Universe From Nothing’ as the equivalent from cosmology. The title means exactly what it says. And what it says is devastating.”

However, in a scathing book review in the *New York Times*, philosopher David Albert demolished Krauss’ (and Dawkins’) extravagant claims. Albert wrote:

The particular, eternally persisting, elementary physical stuff of the world, according to the standard presentations of relativistic quantum field theories, consists (unsurprisingly) of relativistic quantum fields. And the fundamental laws of this theory take the form of rules concerning which arrangements of those fields are physically possible and which aren’t, and rules connecting the arrangements of those fields at later times to their arrangements at earlier times, and so on—and they have nothing whatsoever to say on the subject of where those fields came from, or of why the world should have consisted of the particular kinds of fields it does, or of why it should have consisted of fields at all, or of why there should have been a world in the first place. Period. Case closed. End of story. (Albert, 2012)

In short, the objection to Krauss’ argument is one that any student of an introductory philosophy class could recognize: this cannot be an account of creation from nothing, if it starts not from “nothing” but from a highly complex set of physical laws. It only pushes the question back: where did those laws come from? Hence, it says nothing at all about the ultimate origin of the universe or whether a God is needed to explain it.

The New Atheist position may be characterized as “scientism”: the conviction that science is the only true source of knowledge, a position overwhelmingly rejected by contemporary philosophers.⁷ Jerry Coyne even insists that no other academic disciplines such as social science, literature, philosophy, and even mathematics can produce any knowledge at all, *except* when they use the methods followed by “professional scientists” (2015, p. 186). Dawkins goes so far as to characterize scientists as a “specialists in what is true about the world” (2003, p. 284). The unfortunate result is that the New Atheists largely dismiss or ignore the philosophical and theological traditions on the grounds that science is all one really needs. Dawkins even proudly celebrates his almost total ignorance of theology: “Most of us happily disavow fairies, astrology and the Flying Spaghetti Monster without first immersing ourselves in books of Pastafarian theology, etc.” (2008, p. 15). Dawkins also demonstrates his contempt for philosophical argument in his brusque dismissal of the classic philosophical arguments for God’s existence as “logomachist trickery” (2008, p. 105). A look at the extremely thin bibliographies in books such as *The God Delusion* or Coyne’s *Faith versus*

Fact reveals almost a complete lack of works of theology or philosophy, even the classic philosophical defenders of atheism such as John Mackie or William Rowe. In effect, scientists like Dawkins, Coyne, and Stenger rely on the Argument from Authority, using their status and prestige as scientists to claim that they can definitively answer the question of the existence of God.

Perhaps the best illustration of the philosophical superficiality of New Atheism is pointed out by John Haught (2008). Haught characterizes the New Atheist movement as “soft-core atheism” (2008, p. 23) or as we might put it, Atheism Lite. Unlike past philosophical atheists—for instance Nietzsche—who made a serious attempt to address what would be left of our culture once we lose any transcendental values, the New Atheists seem comfortably secure that in a post-religion world, things can basically go on just as before, only without belief in God. Thus, Coyne asserts that “Secular morality and nonreligious forms of communal experience are perfectly able to fill in the gaps when religion wanes” (2015, p. 261). Dawkins thinks that Darwin has revealed that altruistic ethics is merely a “Darwinian mistake” (2008, p. 253)—but that somehow ethics can go on as usual, and even better once religious violent tribalism is gone. We get a few vague references to “Humanism” as a substitute philosophy and to the powers of “reason” to make us better people. But there is no serious attempt to address the problem pointed out by many philosophers, the nihilistic implications of the materialist/Darwinist worldview, if it turns out there are no transcendental moral values, no meanings, no purpose to existence (e.g., Rosenberg & Sommers, 2003).

3 | THE CLAIM THAT RELIGION IS HARMFUL

New Atheism claims not merely that religion is obviously false but also that it is positively harmful, a distinct intellectual argument. Victor Stenger suggests that this rather than the falsity claim is the key argument against religion: “the strongest case against religion is its unbroken history as a major source of the most horrible evils that the world has seen” (2009, p. 107). Religion, we are told, is the source of most wars and human conflict, the basis of oppression and exploitation, and also the untold psychological harm involved in feelings of guilt and terrifying fear of being damned eternally. Thus, Sam Harris writes: “A glance at history, or at the pages of any newspaper, reveals that the ideas which divide one group of human beings from another, only to unite them in slaughter, generally have their roots in religion” (2004, p. 12). Coyne even warns of the potential destruction of civilization by religion: it “might ultimately contribute to the demise of our own species and much other life on earth” (2015, p. xvi).

This argument too raises questions about the New Atheist competence to address this historical and sociological claim, as does their tendency towards wild hyperbole (Dawkins produced a 2006 television documentary on religion entitled “The Root of All Evil,” though he later insisted that the choice of title was not his own, and the subtitle of Hitchens’ book is “How Religion Poisons Everything”). Perhaps needless to say, there is nothing remotely resembling an attempt at a systematic accounting of the costs and benefits of religion today and throughout history. Mostly what we get is a vitriolic diatribe against religion, a laundry list of atrocities such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Witch Hunts (and even practices that have nothing to do with religion, such as honor killings). As historian Nathan Johnstone demonstrates definitively in his new book, the New Atheist grasp of history is as bad as their grasp of philosophy (Johnstone, 2018).⁸ Not surprisingly, the New Atheists barely acknowledge even a single benefit of religion, wholly ignoring the tradition of charitable works, peacemaking, moral reform, antislavery campaigns, as well as psychological benefits of meaning and purpose (in *The God Delusion*, I do not recall that Dawkins concedes even a single positive influence of religion). As Jonathan Haidt warns, “You cannot use the New Atheists as your guide to these lessons. The New Atheists conduct biased reviews of the literature and conclude there is no good evidence of any benefits except the health benefits of religion” (in Schlosser & Murray, 2009, p. 290).⁹

Consider for example the connection between religion and violence, an issue the New Atheists make central to their argument. In the 20th century, we saw for the first time in history governments run on explicitly atheist principles, providing a test case for the New Atheist claim that religion is primarily responsible for war and violence. In fact, Marxist regimes turned out to be among the most murderous in history, with such luminaries as Stalin (death toll as

much as 60 million); Mao Zedong (death toll: 20–70 million); Pol Pot (death toll 2–3 million). But rather than question their conclusion that religion is the fundamental source of evil in history, the New Atheists insisted that the Marxist regimes only prove that religion is to blame, for these atheistic ideologies should be construed as essentially “quasi-religions” (Dawkins, 2008, p. 315) or “political religions” (Harris, 2004, p. 79) or “replacements” for religion (Hitchens, 2007, p. 246). But the Marxist experience suggests that the source of violence is ideology or fanaticism, not religion, and that fanaticism is just as bad whether it is theistic or atheistic. Indeed, even science itself can be used for violent, genocidal aims, as witness Hitler's use of Darwinist ideas to justify the elimination of the Jews and other “inferior” peoples (unsurprisingly the New Atheists blame Nazi atrocities entirely on Christian antisemitism). In short, the New Atheist argument is circular, indeed itself a form of ideology: religion is the source of evil, so if a regime produces evil, it must be religious.¹⁰

4 | NEW ATHEISM AS A POLITICAL STRATEGY

As we have emphasized, what is new in New Atheism is not its arguments but its use of rhetorical techniques—shaming, ridiculing, blaming—rather than intellectual ones (perhaps because of a condescending view that religious believers are unlikely to respond to philosophical arguments?). One of the repeated themes in New Atheism is a rejection of the traditional “grand bargain”: that nonbelievers will refrain from publicly criticizing religion, so long as religious believers do not try to impose their beliefs on others. Dawkins objects to the “weird convention, almost universally accepted, ... that religious faith is uniquely privileged: above and beyond criticism” (2008, p. 16). Sam Harris notes that “criticizing a person's faith is currently taboo in every corner of our culture” (2004 13). Jerry Coyne complains that “religion occupies a privileged place in our society” and that “Attacking it is off-limits” (2015, p. 6).

The stated rationale for this shift is the 9/11 Islamic terror attacks (incidentally refuting the claim that New Atheism is a response to new scientific discoveries). Though New Atheism is usually said to originate with the 2004 publication of Sam Harris' *The End Of Faith*, one might equally say the origin is found in Richard Dawkins' essay “Time To Stand Up,” published in 2001 in *Freethought Today* (in Dawkins, 2003). In this essay, Dawkins declares war against religion: “It is time to stop pussyfooting around. Time to get angry. And not only with Islam.” “Until now,” he writes, atheists have “moderated our language for reasons of politeness.” But it is now time “to stand up and break this absurd taboo” in light of the 9/11 attacks: “My last vestige of ‘hands off religion’ respect disappeared in the smoke and choking dust of September 11, 2001.” He ends the essay with a call to arms: “Those of us who have for years politely concealed our contempt for the dangerous collective delusion of religion need to stand up and speak out.”

It is unclear if Sam Harris read this essay, and in any case, he claims to have started his own book *The End of Faith* on September 12, 2001.¹¹ Though the book is a critique of “faith” in general and hence of Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam, in fact, most of the book's harshest critiques of religion are aimed at Islam. His book commences with a story of a young man wearing a suicide bomb vest who gets on a bus and blows himself up; Harris asks us, based on these facts, “why is it so trivially easy—you-could-almost-bet-your-life-on-it easy, to guess the young man's religion?” (2004, p. 12). A whole chapter of the book is entitled “The Problem with Islam” (there is no comparable chapter for Christianity or Judaism). Harris explains: “While my argument in this book is aimed at faith, the differences between faiths are as relevant as they are unmistakable.” While there are good beliefs and bad beliefs to be found in all religions, he says, “it should now [i.e. after 9/11] be obvious to everyone that Muslims have more than their fair share of the latter” (2004, p. 108). Islam, he tells us, is a “thoroughgoing cult of death” (2004, p. 123); it is the “specific tenets of Islam” that make Muslims so prone to violence (2004, p. 233). Hence, he declares, “We are at war with Islam” (2004, p. 109).

Dawkins in *The God Delusion* compares those who accommodate religion to Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler (2008, p. 90)—making religion of course equivalent to Nazism in this analogy. Jerry Coyne, writing well after the 9/11 furor had died down in 2015, does not mention 9/11 or Islamic terrorism (and seems more concerned about Creationism than terrorism). Nonetheless, the sense of urgency persists, as do the military metaphors. Coyne, as

noted above, suggests that religion might help bring about the “demise of our own species” and that “religion and science are engaged in a kind of war,” if only a war of “understanding” (2015, pp. xiv, xii). The time of “accommodationism” is over, and “you *must* choose” between religion and science (2015, p. 96). The only reasonable conclusion, writes Coyne, is that “no faiths are privileged, none should be trusted, and all should be discarded” (2015, p. 86).

Those not around in 9/11/2001 may have trouble imagining the level of societal hysteria in the United States and the widespread sense of impending apocalypse, as if the final battle between Islam and the “forces of freedom” (as the Bush administration liked to say) were imminent. A few wiser voices tried to explain that this attack was a unique occurrence and that terror attacks, as serious as they are, were not an existential threat (causing far fewer deaths and destruction than do automobiles, for example). Nonetheless, the Bush administration used the general hysteria as justification for starting two different wars, including one with a country that had no connection to Al-Qaeda. Simultaneously, the New Atheists started their own war of ideas against religion. It would not be unfair to suggest that, no less than George Bush, they exploited 9/11 for their own purposes, even if they, like George Bush, acted in good faith in doing so. But the fundamental premise of New Atheism, that we must eliminate religion or die, would appear to be equally a naïve and unjustified overreaction.

One might therefore question whether this sense of urgency justifies the adoption of the ethically questionable rhetorical tactics we have been discussing: the use of shame, ridicule, and vilification, the insistence that religion has no use, the comparison of religious belief to mental illness (a “delusion” in Dawkins' title; cf. Harris, 2004, p. 72), and the lack of interest in providing a balanced, factually accurate account of religion. This approach is sometimes defended on grounds that it aims at a popular audience, yet the strategy of vilifying the ignorant masses for their beliefs is unlikely to be effective. Portraying science as incompatible with religion could easily have the effect of driving more people away from science, rather than driving them away from religion. As psychologist Jonathan Haidt warns, “A militant form of atheism that claims the backing of science and encourages ‘brights’ to take up arms may perhaps advance atheism. But it may also backfire, polluting the scientific study of religion with moralistic dogma and damaging the prestige of science in the process” (in Schlosser & Murray, 2009, p. 291). Michael Ruse worries that the New Atheists “are doing terrible political damage to the cause of Creationism fighting” (Ruse, 2009). Moreover, this is a risk that is arguably unnecessary since it is far from obvious that religion is in fact incompatible with science. Further, New Atheism has been widely criticized for its inability to see the enormous psychological benefits that people get from religion and for naively assuming that religion can simply be given up or that science can serve as a substitute (e.g., Kitcher, 2014).

It is thus ironic that a group devoted to touting the superior epistemic virtues of science undermines their own cause by their sloppy, careless, and biased use of evidence against religion. Their argument that religion is the source of all tribalism, division, and conflict is in fact self-refuting, given their own clear tendency to tribalism and demonization of the religious Other.¹² Indeed, their movement has no small resemblance to an apocalyptic sect, including the dire warnings of imminent catastrophe, the call for battle, the need for moral repentance, and the promise of a future, scientific utopian golden age.¹³ To be sure, their war is one of words not weapons—but can one be confident that if they had political power they would restrict themselves to verbal battles? Ominously, Sam Harris declares that “certain beliefs are *intrinsically* dangerous” (2004, p. 44) and, (in another disturbing parallel with the Bush administration policy), insists that torture is rationally justified (2004, p. 197 ff.). Richard Dawkins also claims that the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests was “arguably” less damaging than the “long term psychological damage inflicted by bringing the child up Catholic in the first place” (2008, p. 356)—with the obvious implication that we should begin prosecuting of parents for teaching religion to their children.

Whether the New Atheist movement will have any long-term political or social effects of course remains to be seen. While there has been a long-term decline in the number of people in America and Europe affiliated with a religious group, there is no evidence of a spike in these numbers resulting from the publication of the New Atheist books. Nor has the movement noticeably changed the debate in scholarly circles. If anything, it has led to a lowering of the level of debate and increased polarization, at least as judged by the increasing presence of militant atheism online, though the New Atheists might still claim victory just in that they were able to present their views in a highly

public forum and as a semi-organized movement, gaining attention and a public voice for atheism that is more or less unprecedented in history.¹⁴ Nonetheless, there is serious doubt whether it is a good long-term strategy to gain attention by polarizing the debate and ridiculing and demonizing one's opponents. There is no doubt that religion has much to answer for, that it should be subject to critical inquiry like any other discipline, and that there are superstitious aspects in all religions that may reasonably be rejected. But to dismiss it wholesale as pure irrationality and the source of most of the evil in history is, I would suggest, neither productive nor intellectually honest and hinders rather than supports a genuine debate, one which will and should continue for the foreseeable future.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See, e.g., Haught, 2008 (New Atheists are “no more reflective” than religious fundamentalists); Orr, 2007 (questioning why Dawkins' *The God Delusion* was written, as it has “little new to offer”); Reitan 2007 (the New Atheists are “puerile” in comparison with sophisticated atheist philosophers); Atran, 2006 (Dawkins' account of the evolutionary origins of religion is “scientifically baseless and psychologically uninformed”); Ruse, 2009 (“I am indignant at the poor quality of the argumentation in Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens and all of the others in that group.”); D.S. Wilson 2008 (Dawkins has “not done any original work” on the scientific study of religion, and “he has not fairly represented the work of his colleagues”); Eagleton (the New Atheists present a “worthless caricature” of the New Testament (Eagleton, 2009, p. xi).
- ² <https://www.wired.com/2006/11/atheism/>
- ³ The one arguable exception is Dawkins' relatively novel argument from the origins of complexity that the hypothesis of a creator god cannot explain the origins of complexity in the world, since such a creator would have to be just as complex, hence cannot explain complexity. But as Nagel (2006) and Gutting (2010) explain, Dawkins fails to see that the religious explanation accounts for material complexity in terms of mind, the latter being something that is intrinsically complex. Hence, Dawkins' argument is question-begging.
- ⁴ Moreover, Johnson embraces some of the same caricatures of religious belief as the New Atheists, such as his claim that “all religious beliefs are based on insufficient evidence” and therefore constitute “intellectual sloth” (Johnson, 2013, p. 18).
- ⁵ <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/11/05/scientists-and-belief/>. Coyne distorts the findings of this poll (2015, p. 12) by counting those who believe in a “universal spirit or higher power” as nonbelievers.
- ⁶ This is not to claim, as Johnson charges, “separate epistemic standards” (2013, p. 23). Rather, it asserts that religion and science are on a continuum of rationality, rejecting the extreme dichotomy between rational science and irrational religion. Thus, as literary critic Eagleton sensibly remarks: “Life for Dawkins would seem to divide neatly down the middle between things you can prove beyond all doubt, and blind faith. He fails to see that all the most interesting stuff goes on in neither of these places” (2009, pp. 6–7).
- ⁷ See, e.g., Pigliucci, 2013.
- ⁸ See also Cavanaugh, 2009, who traces back to the Enlightenment the myth that religion is the source of violence.
- ⁹ For an attempt to provide a more balanced accounting, see Ward, 2007.
- ¹⁰ Analogously, moral heroes like Martin Luther King, even though they acted in the name of religion, are declared not to be religious. Thus, Hitchens claims that, even though King was a Baptist minister, he was not a “real” Christian, apparently because he did not display enough hatred of his enemies (Hitchens, 2007, p. 176).
- ¹¹ As reported by Segal, 2006.
- ¹² Johnson defends New Atheism by accusing Christianity of “abound[ing] in oversimplified dichotomies” (2013, p. 19), apparently not noticing how the entire New Atheist project is based on a crude dichotomy between reason and faith.
- ¹³ See, e.g., Dawkins, 2008, p. 22 ff. and Coyne, 2015, p. 250 ff. for a utopian picture of a future world without religion.
- ¹⁴ Keeping in mind of course the enormous world power wielded by the officially atheist Marxist philosophy for over 100 years.

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