

**The Irrational Atheist**

*Dissecting the Unholy Trinity of Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*

Vox Day

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BenBella Books, Inc.  
6440 N. Central Expressway, Suite 503  
Dallas, TX 75206  
Send feedback to [feedback@benbellabooks.com](mailto:feedback@benbellabooks.com)  
[www.benbellabooks.com](http://www.benbellabooks.com)

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**NOTE: THIS IS AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF *THE IRRATIONAL ATHEIST*. THE COMPLETE E-TEXT CAN BE PURCHASED FOR \$1.99 AT AMAZON.COM AND OTHER LOCATIONS.**

## PREFACE

*Get ready for the throw down. . . .*

—TUPAC SHAKUR, *2 Of Amerikaz Most Wanted*

“What’s your obsession with these guys?” a reader e-mailed to ask after my fourth column addressing the intellectual sins of the three leading New Atheists was published on WorldNetDaily, the independent news site where I write a weekly opinion column. After all, the Creator God of the Universe is presumably capable of defending himself, and the elephant is what it is, regardless of what I, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, or anyone else might imagine it to be based upon our different experiences of it.

When it comes to understanding God, are we not all blind men feeling up an oversized mammal?

And while I am a believer, a non-denominational evangelical Christian to be precise, my purpose in writing this book is not to defend God, or even to argue for the truth of my particular religious faith. Instead, I intend to defend those who are now being misled into doubting their faith or being misguided into feeling more secure in their lack of faith on the basis of the fraudulent, error-filled writings of these three men. I do not make this triple charge of fraudulence lightly, nor is my doing so a fearful response to their churlish disregard for what to me and millions of other individuals is the central element of human existence.

There is simply no more fitting description of the cerebral snake oil that Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens are huckstering to the unwary reader—and the media—under the false label of science and reason. I am confident that no one, not even the most purely rational, über-skeptical agnostic or card-carrying ACLU atheist, will take serious exception to my charge by the time they finish this book.

It took me some time to decide what this book should be titled. Part of the challenge was due to the fact that it addresses the philosophical and ideological arguments of three very different men. If the

book were to solely address Sam Harris, I should likely have entitled it *The Incompetent Atheist*. In the case of Christopher Hitchens, I could have reasonably named it *The Irrelevant Atheist*. And given the way in which the eminent Richard Dawkins has apparently decided to abandon empirical evidence, the scientific method and Reason herself in embracing a quasi-medieval philosophical ontology, *The Ironic Atheist* would surely have been most fitting.

In the end, I settled upon *The Irrational Atheist* for the following reason. This book is a direct challenge to the idea that atheism is the proper philosophical standard for human reason, that being an atheist is an inherently rational perspective, and that religion has no place in a rational, civilized society.

This is not a theological work. The text contains no arguments for the existence of God and the supernatural, nor is it concerned with evolution, creationism, the age of Earth, or intelligent design. It contains no arguments from Scripture; in attacking the arguments, assertions, and conclusions of the New Atheists, my only weapons are the purely secular ones of reason, logic, and historically documented, independently verifiable fact. This is not a book about God, it is about those who seek to replace Him.

At first glance, it may seem crazy that a computer game designer, one whose only significant intellectual accomplishment of note is to have once convinced Michelle Malkin to skip an opportunity to promote herself, should dare to dispute an Oxford don, a respected university professor, a famous French philosopher, a highly regarded journalist, and an ecstasy-using dropout who is still working towards a graduate degree at forty . . . okay, perhaps that last one makes sense. As Gag Halfrunt is reliably reported to have said of the immortal Zaphod Beeblebrox, I'm just zis guy, ya know?

But don't be tempted by the logical fallacy of the Appeal To Authority; after all, in this age of academic specialization, an evolutionary biologist is less likely to be an expert on the historical causes of war and religious conflict than the average twelve-year-old wargamer, and even a professor in the field of cognitive studies may not have spent as much time contemplating the deeper mysteries of

intelligence as a game designer who has seen many a sunrise while experimenting with the best way to make the monsters smarter.

So, I should like to encourage you to think of this book as an intellectual deathmatch, keep track of the frags, and see if I don't manage to exorcise the unholy trinity of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens once and for all.

## Chapter I

### A PRIDE OF ATHEISTS

*“Vox Dei, as every philosopher knows, cannot be trusted in science.”*

—CHARLES DARWIN, “Organs of Extreme Perfection and Complication”

I don't care if you go to Hell.

God does, assuming He exists, or He wouldn't have bothered sending His Son to save you from it. Jesus Christ does too, if you'll accept for the sake of argument that he went to all the trouble of incarnating as a man, dying on the cross, and being resurrected from the dead in order to hand you a Get Out of Hell Free card.

Me, not so much. I don't know you. I don't owe you anything. While as a Christian I am called to share the Good News with you, I can't force you to accept it. Horse, water, drink, and all that.

So, it's all on you. Your soul is not my responsibility.

I am a Christian. I'm also a libertarian. I believe in free will and in allowing you to exercise it. I believe that our free will is a gift from our Creator and that He expects us to use it. I believe in living and letting live. If you'll leave me alone, I'll be delighted to do you the courtesy of leaving you alone in return. I have no inherent problem with atheists or agnostics, I have no problem with Muslims or Jews or Hindus or Pastafarians, and I have no problem with the crazies who believe that humanity is the result of ancient alien breeding experiments. To be honest, I rather like the crazies, their theories are usually the most entertaining of the lot. I believe what I believe, you believe what you believe, and there's no reason why we shouldn't both be perfectly cool with that.

Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens are not so much cool with that.

I'm not asking you to respect my beliefs. Why should you? Maybe you think I'm insane because I believe that Jesus is coming back one of these days, but does my insanity actually affect you

in any material way? Is my religious madness really all that much more out there than my faith that the Minnesota Vikings will win the Super Bowl someday? Talk about the substance of things hoped for . . . Vegas will give you better odds on J.C. this year. As for your beliefs, I really don't care if you want to question God's existence or criticize the Pope or deny the Holocaust or declare that Jesus was an architect previous to his career as a prophet. Every member of humanity is at least a little bit crazy in his own special way, some of us just happen to make it a little more obvious than others.

Vox's First Law: Any sufficiently advanced intelligence is indistinguishable from insanity.

All I ask, all the vast majority of the billions of people of faith on the planet ask, is to be left alone to believe what we choose to believe and live how we decide to live. But the Unholy Trinity have no intention of leaving me alone. Richard Dawkins accuses me of child abuse because I teach my children that God loves them even more than I do. Sam Harris declares that I should not be tolerated and suggests that it might be ethical to kill me in preemptive self-defense. Christopher Hitchens asserts that I am a form of human Drāno, poisoning everything I encounter. A fourth New Atheist, the philosopher Daniel C. Dennett, is less judgmental, but even he, bless his heart, wants to save me from myself.

And now we have a problem.

That's why I'm writing this book. I'm not trying to convince you that God exists. I'm not trying to convince you to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. I'm not even trying to convince you that religious people aren't lunatics with low IQs who should be regarded with pity and contempt. But I am confident that I will convince you that this trio of New Atheists, this Unholy Trinity, is a collection of faux-intellectual frauds utilizing pseudo-scientific sleight of hand in order to falsely claim that religious faith is inherently dangerous and has no place in the modern world.

I am saying that they are wrong, they are reliably, verifiably, and factually incorrect. Richard Dawkins is wrong. Daniel C. Dennett is wrong. Christopher Hitchens is drunk, and he's wrong. Michel Onfray is French, and he's wrong. Sam Harris is so superlatively wrong that it will require the



development of esoteric mathematics operating simultaneously in multiple dimensions to fully comprehend the orders of magnitude of his wrongness.

You make the call.

## **THE CHURCHES OF ATHEISM**

The idea that he is a devotee of reason seeing through the outdated superstitions believed by less intelligent beings is the foremost conceit of the atheist. This heady notion was first made popular by French intellectuals and deistic ur-atheists such as Voltaire and Dennis Diderot, who ushered in the so-called Age of Enlightenment. That they also paved the way for the murderous excesses of the French Revolution and dozens of other massacres in the name of human progress is usually considered an unfortunate coincidence by their philosophical descendants.

Atheism is not new. It predates Christianity by at least 400 years according to the account of the trial of Socrates recorded by Plato in his *Apology* back in 399 B.C.<sup>1</sup> While the Athenian philosopher denied the charge of disrespecting the gods of Olympus, the fact that both Socrates and his accuser Meletus recognized the concept of *atheos* and argued over whether it was an accurate description of Socrates's beliefs or not is sufficient proof that there were those who did not believe in divine beings long before Richard Dawkins left the lab at Oxford and took up his cross to follow Darwin.

In his review of the history of atheism, French atheologist Michel Onfray dates its explicit inception to 1729 and a book published posthumously by the Abbè Jean Meslier, the parish priest of Etrépigny in northeastern France.<sup>2</sup> His *Memoir of the Thoughts and Feelings of Jean Meslier: Clear and Evident Demonstrations of the Vanity and Falsity of All the Religions of the World* is less interesting for its historical noteworthiness than for the way it shows how little atheism has changed over the last 278 years. Meslier is perpetually indignant, he denies miracles, free will, and the soul, asserts the superiority of atheist morality and looks forward to the “happy and great revolution” to

1 Spare me that B.C.E. BS. You would think historians, of all people, would have some respect for historical tradition.  
2 Onfray, Michel. *In Defence of Atheism: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism and Islam*. London: , 2007. 29.

come when reason replaces religion. According to Onfray, he even calls for an “international communalism.” It’s really quite extraordinary.

Still, one may be excused for not being aware of atheism’s historic intellectual lineage, considering the copious media coverage that has been devoted to the discovery of the three men *Wired Magazine* breathlessly dubbed “the New Atheists,” Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. With the recent addition of Christopher Hitchens, the New Atheists are nearly as inescapable these days as they are incestuous;<sup>3</sup> here Dawkins is lionizing Harris’s “wonderful little book,” there he is favorably quoting Dennett favorably quoting himself, while the works of Dawkins and Dennett top Harris’s list of recommended reading. Only Hitchens, ever the iconoclast, doesn’t join the endless circle jerk, keeping his references to the others at a minimum and showing the good sense to be embarrassed by the two professors’ insistence on calling themselves “brights.”

These days atheism is, like the atheist’s ultimate destination, hot indeed. Not since the 1920s, when the faux scientific writings of Freud and Marx were inspiring European intellectuals and artists, and the latter part of the 1960s when the American intellectual elite belatedly caught up, has there been so much enthusiasm about the non-existence of God. This is somewhat bewildering, as no one appears to be nearly as excited about a similar absence of belief in unicorns, vampires, werewolves, astrology, nation-building, or the Labor Theory of Value. Nor is anyone dedicating much of their time to writing books and giving speeches at universities and conferences with the avowed goal of convincing others not to believe in them either. On the other hand, unicorn fanciers don’t possess a great deal of influence with either of the two American political parties, vampire enthusiasts don’t commit honor killings,<sup>4</sup> and astrologers are seldom known to launch global holy wars based on the relative positions of Mars and Venus.

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3 Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion* London: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. In a book largely dedicated to attacking Christianity and the Bible, Richard Dawkins refers to the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John a total of twelve times. He cites Mr. Harris and Professor Dennett twenty-two times, only twenty times more than the influential Christian intellectuals G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis.

4 They do, however, commit rather more murders than one might suspect. And rather nasty ones too.

So perhaps it's not entirely unreasonable that those concerned with the collective clout of the billions of individuals who believe in the spiritual sovereignty of a formerly deceased Jewish carpenter should seek to reduce that influence by undermining those beliefs. It is certainly in keeping with the best practices of Western intellectual debate; Adam Smith similarly attacked the French physiocrats by pointing out the divergence between their theoretical system and the way in which the various national economies had been observed to operate.<sup>5</sup>

However, it is not only nature that abhors a vacuum. The human intellect is not well-suited to stop believing in one thing without replacing that belief, nor is it comfortable for an individual to drop his self-identification without selecting an alternate. While the New Atheists express some faint hope of converting the religious faithful into disbelievers, this is not the primary focus of their works. Dawkins and Dennett both express a degree of skepticism that theists will ever start reading their books, let alone find the courage to finish them. The atheist evangelism of *The God Delusion*, *The End of Faith*, and *god is not Great* is directed at the irreligious reader; for all that *Letter to a Christian Nation* is nominally aimed at Christian readers, the Sunday School theology it contains makes it clear that it is actually written for the benefit of atheists whose lack of faith is weak. New Atheism is a militantly fundamentalist call to arms intended to wake up the wavering, it is a godless jihad waged under a scarlet flag<sup>6</sup> with a cry of *Deus n'existe pas*.

But negation serves poorly for inspiration, so simply making the negative case against religion is not enough. To convert the godless into raging, red-letter infidels, the New Atheists attempt to make a positive case for something that goes well beyond not being something else. Not even the most ardent non-stamp collector is likely to take much action involving his hobby of not collecting stamps, after all. So, is there more to atheism than the simple meaning of the word, which literally means "without the

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5 "The great body of the party are commonly intoxicated with the imaginary beauty of this ideal system, of which they have no experience, but which has been represented to them in all the most dazzling colours in which the eloquence of their leaders could paint it." Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford, 1976 ed.), 232.

6 The Scarlet A seen on the back cover is the symbol of Richard Dawkins's OUT campaign. It's like the Campus Crusade for Cthulhu, only sillier.

belief in the existence of a god or gods”? The concept appears simple enough. A-Theism. Without theism. As Brent Rasmussen, an atheist who writes at *Unscrewing the Inscrutable*, describes it:

*Atheism describes a person in which god belief is absent. That's all. Nothing more. Black or white. On or off. There or not there.*

This is a perfectly reasonable definition in theory, but in practice it's not quite that simple. As bizarre as it may sound, researchers have learned that nearly half of those who describe themselves as atheist or agnostic nevertheless believe in life after death as well as in Heaven and Hell, beliefs that have historically been considered to be a fairly strong indication of theism. The Christian pollster George Barna somewhat sardonically notes that given this apparent lack of consistency about their stated beliefs on the part of those questioned (this was far from the only serious contradiction revealed by the polling), the significance of the labels with which individuals identify themselves may not be as relevant as is ordinarily assumed.<sup>7</sup>

Barna's skepticism regarding self-identification appears to be justified, for it turns out that there are not only atheists who believe they will go to Heaven, there are also those who lack god belief but who do not describe themselves as atheists. In fact, if one did not turn a jaundiced eye upon the presumed accuracy of religious self-identification, it would be very difficult to account for the large discrepancy between the number of self-identified atheists and the much larger group of people who keep turning up in polls under the group described as “no religion.” Now, there are three ways to interpret these two data points: (1) there is a substantive difference between being an atheist and not being religious, (2) many people without religion still cling to a belief in God, or (3) there are a large number of individuals who simply don't know what to call themselves.

Given the large number of American voters, 26 percent in the 2004 election,<sup>8</sup> who cannot figure out if they are Democrats or Republicans even after making a selection between the two parties,

Occam's Razor suggests that the third explanation is the one most likely to be correct. Richard

<sup>7</sup> “Americans Describe Their Views About Life After Death.” The Barna Group. 21 Oct. 2003.

<sup>8</sup> According to the 2004 CNN exit polls.

Dawkins would surely concur, as one of the stated purposes of his book is to encourage those who are not avowed atheists to come forward and publicly identify themselves as such.<sup>9</sup> But this is likely to be a vain endeavor. Since the normal individual tends to put significantly more time into living his life instead of thinking about it and cataloging its abstract aspects, one can hardly expect him to devote the time and effort required to assemble an internally consistent belief system that is labeled correctly according to objective definitions approved by intellectuals.

The New Atheists themselves are of little help. They, too, muddy the water as they thrash about in their various denials of God. Richard Dawkins begins reasonably enough by suggesting that one's theistic tendencies may be viewed on a gradient of seven degrees, ranging from complete certainty in the existence of God to complete certainty in His non-existence. However, he promptly disappoints the reader by rating himself a six, or an agnostic who believes there is a very low probability of God's existence. But how could this be? Why, it's as if the Archbishop of Canterbury were to declare that all Christians should doubt the existence of God!<sup>10</sup>

While Richard Dawkins's confession of *de facto* weak atheism in the place of *de jure* strong atheism is a little surprising, coming as it does in a section entitled "The Poverty of Agnosticism," Dawkins's expressed doubt that there are many who would qualify for the perfect seven of the strong atheist is even more eyebrow-raising. This hedging, although commendable for its honesty, is in marked disharmony with the cocksure tone of *The God Delusion*, and indeed, Dawkins's public persona as the great evangelist of atheist pride.

Daniel Dennett's take on the matter is a simpler one, although his call for the need to conduct a proper scientific inquiry into various matters of faith does not amount to making a serious case against religion so much as it lays a structural foundation for someone else to begin assembling the information required for one. As for the alternative, Dennett is content to note that atheism is the negation of

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<sup>9</sup> "The reason so many people don't notice atheists is that many of us are reluctant to 'come out'." Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, Rowan. "Of Course This Makes Us Doubt God's Existence." *The Telegraph*. 2 Jan. 2005. Yes, that would be sarcasm.

theism; he cannot be bothered to either delve into definitions or construct much of a positive argument for non-belief. Despite his complaint about the way in which debates about God “tend to take place in a pious fog of indeterminate boundaries,” Dennett leaves it unclear whether his refusal to believe in lesser supernatural forces such as witches, Santa Claus, and Wonder Woman should properly be considered an aspect of his atheism or merely an adjunct to it.

The reader might well question any need for this distinction based on the assumption that atheists reject not only God, but all aspects of the supernatural as well, were it not for Sam Harris. While Harris rejects all gods and the entire concept of faith itself on the one hand, he embraces “spiritual possibilities” and harbors a personal dedication to the esoteric teachings of the Buddhist<sup>11</sup> faith on the other. One might assume that this would disqualify the man as an atheist even by his own lights, but Harris adroitly evades the apparent dichotomy by redefining Buddhism as a non-religion of faith, its many faithful adherents who believe otherwise notwithstanding.<sup>12</sup> This is a rather neat trick, if more than a little intellectually shabby, and one wonders if the entire conflict between the New Atheists and the religious folks who fill them with such fear could not be brought to a peaceful end by a similar redefinition of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and even Hinduism. After all, there are surely a higher percentage of Jews who don’t believe in a literal God of Abraham than Mahayana Buddhists who lack faith in the divine ability of the Amitabha Buddha to aid them in their soul’s journey to Sukhāvātī. However, the ongoing travails of the circus formerly known as the Episcopalian church strongly suggest that redefining religion as a social club is unlikely to prove a viable strategy in the long run.

Harris’s own version of atheism conveniently encompasses his unusual beliefs, as he asserts that an atheist is nothing more than a person who has read the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures,

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1 <sup>1</sup> “I have been very hard on religious of faith—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and even Hinduism—and have not said much that is derogatory of Buddhism. This is not an accident. While Buddhism has also been a source of ignorance and occasional violence, it is not a religion of faith, or a religion at all, in the Western sense. There are millions of Buddhists who do not seem to know this. . . .” Harris, Sam *The End of Faith*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004. 293. I’m sure those millions of Buddhists must be deeply appreciative of a Jewish-American atheist informing them that their 2,500-year-old religion is not a religion at all.

1 <sup>2</sup> Harris’s attempt to redefine Buddhism as a non-religion is also in conflict with Dennett’s definition of religion: “social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents. . . .”

considered the claims that they were written by an omniscient deity, and found them to be ridiculous.<sup>13</sup>

Happily for Harris, this leaves the door open for atheists to devote themselves to beliefs culled from sacred texts such as the Bhagavad Gita, the Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra, or the Tibetan Book of the Dead while remaining godless in good standing. It seems as long as the atheist is only expanding his consciousness, transcendental meditation is laudable, although one assumes the exercise must be stopped at once should any thought of salvation, celestial buddhas, or reaching the Pure Land happen to enter the mind of the meditator.

However, Harris offers a very different definition of atheism in his *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

Two different definitions, actually:

*An atheist is simply a person who believes that the 260 million Americans (87 percent of the population) claiming to “never doubt the existence of God” should be obliged to present evidence for his existence—and indeed, for his benevolence, given the relentless destruction of human beings we witness in the world each day. An atheist is a person who believes that the murder of a single little girl—even once in a million years—casts doubt upon the idea of a benevolent God.*<sup>14</sup>

The evidence also suggests that an atheist is not a person who subscribes to the concepts of consistency or precision, at least not if his name is Sam Harris. One wonders where these 260 million Americans will be expected to present their evidence, and to whom, especially in a democracy where 87 percent of the population presumably has some say in what they are obliged to do. But these mysteries notwithstanding, it should be obvious that even among the New Atheists, the nature of atheism varies somewhat depending upon the imagination of the individual infidel. And although atheism is neither a religion nor a philosophy in its own right, the attentive observer will notice that atheists can nevertheless be divided into a variety of “churches,” each distinct from the other and yet as internally uniform and readily identifiable as any Christian denomination or Islamic sect.

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup> Harris, Sam. “10 myths—and 10 Truths—About Atheism” *The Los Angeles Times*. 24 Dec. 2006.

<sup>1</sup> <sup>4</sup> Harris, Sam. *Letter to a Christian Nation*. New York: Knopf, 2006. 51. I note that by Harris’s logic, the Archbishop of Canterbury is an atheist. Of course, given the current state of the Anglican church, it’s entirely possible that Harris is correct.

## **The High Church Atheists**

The middle-aged man enters the room at the top of the hour. He wears a sports coat with corduroy patches on the elbow. Beneath the sports coat are an open-collared shirt and a pair of faded jeans. His pony-tail is streaked with grey and accentuates his receding hairline. The faint scent of bean curds on his breath hint at his vegetarian diet.

The room is crowded and takes little notice of his entrance. The middle-aged man takes his place at the front of the room. He will wait for the crowd to fall silent. A couple in the back row are talking about where they will go to the movies that night. The girl has decided she would like to go to see the new Nicole Kidman film, but her boyfriend worries that there will not be enough mindless violence for it to be entertaining. The students finally notice the middle-aged man standing behind the lectern. The professor smiles. Turning his back, he begins to sketch the outline of a forty-five-minute diatribe on the chalkboard, which, among other things, will touch on the wonders of socialized medicine in Holland, homophobic semiotics in modern American cinema, and the squamous evil of the Fox News channel. Despite the fact that this is supposed to be an English class, none of it has anything to do with the plays of William Shakespeare.

The middle-aged man's students quickly discern that their grades will depend upon telling him what he wants to hear. Although saddened to have lost an opportunity to learn anything about the classic English literary canon to which the course is nominally devoted, they feel a tremendous delight at the inflated grades he distributes. The man's professional peers envy his tenure, although they don't approve of the way he often spends his evenings with a sensitive Gay Studies major prone to wearing black fingernail polish.

These are the facts. This is all we know for certain about the middle-aged man. Is there anything else we can infer about him on the basis of his behavior? Was he good at sports? Is he left-handed or right-handed? Can he juggle? His actions leave no clue at all. Does he enjoy jigsaw puzzles? His behavior is simply mute on questions of this sort and hundreds like them. Why is it so easy, then,



so trivially easy—you-could-almost-bet-your-life-on-it-easy—to guess the middle-aged man’s religion, or rather, his lack thereof?<sup>15</sup>

The fact is that a professor at an elite university is as likely to be an atheist as a suicide bomber is to be Muslim;<sup>16</sup> a 2006 paper by Neil Gross of Harvard and Solon Simmons of George Mason University reported that 72.9 percent of the professors they polled described the Bible as “an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts,” compared to 17.5 percent of the general population. In the same paper, 34 percent of all university professors described themselves as “not religious” and 31.2 percent specified “none” when asked about their current religious preference.

As any self-professed “bright” will be more than happy to inform you, those who call themselves atheists tend to be more intelligent, better educated, and wealthier than the norm, assuming that one equates education with pieces of paper collected from paper-selling institutions.<sup>17</sup> It is no coincidence, then, that the New Atheist triumvirate should be comprised of two university professors and a third fellow working towards his doctoral degree.

Intelligence, education, and high incomes are not the only marks of the High Church Atheists. They are also extremely law-abiding, as there were only 122 atheists, two-tenths of one percent of the 65,256 prison population, being held in English and Welsh jails in 2000. They tend to lean politically left, often possess a marked interest in the sciences, and are overwhelmingly confident that the various fine-tunings of Darwin’s theory of evolution over the years suffice to explain the origins of Man as well as a whole host of other mysteries.

And that’s not all! Sam Harris is kind enough to inform us that self-professing atheists are not

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1 <sup>5</sup> There’s mediocre prose, there’s bad prose, and then there’s Sam Harris waxing creative. How he didn’t win a Bulwer-Lytton award for that ghastly first page of *The End of Faith*, I’ll never know. When he’s not being self-consciously literate, his writing is all right, but light a candle to St. Darwin and pray that he never decides to inflict a novel on humanity.

1 <sup>6</sup> Until very recently, two-thirds of all historical suicide bombings had been perpetrated by the Tamil Tigers. Harris, unsurprisingly, declares this secular Marxist group to be religious despite their direct statements to the contrary. So, Buddhism≠religion, but secular Marxism=religion. Got it?

1 <sup>7</sup> As I shall demonstrate in the following chapters, an impressive academic pedigree does not necessarily indicate the possession of a decent education in the liberal arts and sciences, or even a basic ability to examine the available evidence and reach a rational conclusion.

arrogant, dogmatic, lacking in a basis for morality, closed to spiritual experience, or responsible for the greatest crimes in human history.<sup>18</sup> American Atheists, a political organization set up to protect the civil rights of atheists, chimes in with alarming cheerfulness in its declaration that atheists are also “POSITIVE! . . . ECLECTIC! . . . INNER-DIRECTED! . . . INDEPENDENT! . . . HAPPY!”<sup>19</sup>

They certainly enjoy exclamation points, anyhow. But not every shared trait of the High Church atheist is quite as superlatively wonderful as atheists might have one believe. For example, fresh from a visit to England for an inspiring sermon from the High Church’s own Archbishop of Oxford, *Wired Magazine* writer Gary Wolf found himself noting that atheists are almost always enthusiastic, defiant men who “enjoy pissing people off.”<sup>20</sup> Another Dawkins interviewer, Simon Hattenstone of *The Guardian*, reached a similar conclusion: “I agree with virtually everything he says, but find myself wanting to smack him for his intolerance.”

This is not unusual, as the High Church atheist’s undeveloped social skills are often so dramatic as to be reasonably described as a form of social autism. The atheist tends to regard every statement with which he disagrees in much the same manner that a bull views a matador’s red flag, viewing even the most cherished myths held by his friends and family as little more than imperative targets of opportunity. It is no wonder that the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey reported that atheists are one-third as likely to be married as the average American; these are the sort of men who believe that boring a woman with lengthy explanations of why her opinions are incorrect is the best way to her heart.

There is even evidence to suggest that in some cases, High Church atheism may be little more than a mental disorder taking the form of a literal autism. On one of the more popular atheist Internet sites, the average self-reported result on an Asperger Quotient test was 27.9.<sup>21</sup> The threshold for this

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1 <sup>8</sup> Harris, Sam. “10 myths—and 10 Truths—About Atheism.” It seems Harris is under the impression that Mao was a Methodist, Stalin an Evangelical Lutheran, and Pol Pot a secret 7th Day Adventist.

1 <sup>9</sup> <http://www.atheists.org/visitors.center/intro.html>

2 <sup>0</sup> Wolf, Gary. “The Church of the Non-Believers”: *Wired Magazine*, Nov. 2004. This explains Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens, anyhow, as well as the complete absence of female writers addressing the subject.

2 <sup>1</sup> “I’m mostly normal!.” Pharyngula.

syndrome, described as “autistic psychopathy” by its discoverer, Dr. Hans Asperger, is 32, whereas the average normal individual scores 16.5. In light of Wolf’s observations, it is interesting to note that those diagnosed with Asperger’s tend to be male, intelligent, impaired in social interaction, and prone to narrow, intense interests.

This may explain why the following pair of definitions have proven to be useful in distinguishing between the High Church atheist and the agnostic.

Agnostic: “I don’t believe there is a God. Because I haven’t seen the evidence.”

Atheist: “There is no God. Because I’m an asshole.”

### **The Low Church Atheists**

After the Protestant Reformation fractured Christendom, the various Christian churches were deeply divided as to the proper way to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the Reformed Church, better known to us today as the Puritans, rejected the Catholic Church’s priestly model of worship, it saw no need for the liturgies, vestments, and ceremonial trappings that had become an integral part of Catholic ceremony over the centuries.<sup>22</sup> Churches that retain these formal elements, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, and the Church of Sweden, are today known as High Church, while Puritans, televangelists, snake-handlers, Billy Graham crusades in football stadiums, Jesus freaks, and Southern Baptists can all be described as Low Church.

And just as an Anglican bishop in his beautiful vestments has a tendency to look somewhat askance on the crazy evangelicals who open up their services with giant black singers backed by

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[http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2007/08/im\\_mostly\\_normal.php#comments](http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2007/08/im_mostly_normal.php#comments). 1 Aug. 2007. Fifty-nine readers volunteered their results on the AQ test; the average did not include several individuals who mentioned having been medically diagnosed with the syndrome but did not report a test result. Obviously, an amount of scientific research would need to be done in order to establish any causal relationship between Asperger Syndrome and atheism, but it is an interesting hypothesis since a similar poll of 165 readers at my blog, Vox Popoli, revealed an average score of nineteen for theists and twenty for agnostics.

2 <sup>2</sup> This rejection of Popish vanity can in some ways be seen as a revival of the ascetic poverty doctrine of the Fraticelli, a broad label describing several groups of monks linked with the Franciscan order who were chiefly united in their harsh criticism of the Catholic Church, its corruption and its wealth from the late thirteenth century until the middle of the fifteenth century. The more literarily inclined may recall that these “brothers of the poor life” played a significant role in a certain Umberto Eco novel.

electric guitars and the preacher on the drums,<sup>23</sup> the High Church atheist isn't particularly keen on being lumped in with his godless brethren of the Low Church.

The contradictory relationship between the High and Low Churches of atheism can perhaps be best understood by looking at the makeup of the American Democratic party. While Democrats are heavily favored by highly educated individuals<sup>24</sup> of the sort described at the beginning of the previous section, the party's support from society's least-educated individuals is not only every bit as strong, but is more electorally important. Voters with postgraduate schooling were only 25 percent more likely to vote for the Democratic party presidential candidate in 2004;<sup>25</sup> while those who did not complete high school were 90 percent more likely to identify themselves as Democrats.<sup>26</sup> Since there are 75 percent more Americans who have never completed high school (16.4 percent of adults over twenty-five) than who possess an advanced degree (9.4 percent) this means that despite their reputation for being the party of the most highly educated, a Democrat is nevertheless more than twice as likely to be someone who has dropped out of high school than to be an individual with a Master's Degree.<sup>27</sup>

So while it's perfectly true to say that the Democratic party is the party of the intelligent and the educated, such a statement doesn't tell the whole story and is more than a little misleading. The same is true of atheists.

The most easily identifiable factor separating Low Church atheists from their High Church brethren is neither educational nor liturgical, but eponymical. They simply don't describe themselves as

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2 <sup>3</sup> I was signed to both Wax Trax! and TVT Records at the end of their industrial heyday and only once have I ever seen a band rock harder than the Woodland Hills Church worship team in the late 90's. Norm, Greg, Tim, Slick, I miss you guys!

2 <sup>4</sup> "Of the 17 states (including D.C.) with an above average percentage of citizens with advanced degrees, 13 (76.5%) voted for Kerry. Of the 34 states with a below average percentage of citizens with advanced degrees, 27 (79.4%) voted for Bush." About.com: "Educational Attainment and 2004 Vote." Attempting to characterize individual behavior by statewide statistics is a bizarre way to go about it, the only real significant information here is the fact that according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percent of the U.S. population holding advanced degrees in 2003 was 9.4 percent.

2 <sup>5</sup> *Kerry 55 percent, Bush 44 percent.* CNN Election 2004.  
<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/epolls.0.html>

2 <sup>6</sup> *Republican 21 percent, Democrat 40 percent.* TRENDS 2005 The American Public: Opinions and Values in a 51%-41% Nation.

2 <sup>7</sup> Note: I didn't vote for Bush or Kerry. I'm a libertarian, so I had no dog in that hunt.

atheists. Instead, they show up on various religious surveys as “no religion” or occasionally “secular.”<sup>28</sup> Their beliefs are distinctly recognizable as atheistic, as they don’t believe in God, they don’t attend religious services, they don’t believe in the supernatural, and they don’t belong to religious organizations, but a failure to openly embrace an atheist identity is not the only significant distinction of the Low Church atheist.

I previously referenced the number of atheists being held by the prison system of England and Wales, where it is customary to record the religion of the prison population as part of the Inmate Information System. In the year 2000, there were 38,531 Christians of twenty-one different varieties imprisoned for their crimes, compared to only 122 atheists and sixty-two agnostics. As Europe in general and the United Kingdom in particular has become increasingly post-Christian, this would appear to be a damning piece of evidence proving the fundamentally criminal nature of theists while demonstrating that atheists are indeed more moral despite their lack of a sky god holding them to account.<sup>29</sup>

However, there also happened to be another 20,639 prisoners, 31.6 percent of the total prison population, who possessed “no religion.” And this was not simply a case of people falling through the cracks or refusing to provide an answer; the Inmate Information System is specific enough to distinguish between Druids, Scientologists, and Zoroastrians as well as between the Celestial Church of God, the Welsh Independent church, and the Non-Conformist church. It also features separate categories for “other Christian religion,” “other non-Christian religion,” and “not known.”

At only two-tenths of a percent of the prison population, High Church Atheists are, as previously suggested, extremely law-abiding. But when one compares the 31.6 percent of imprisoned no-religionists to the 15.1 percent of Britons who checked “none” or wrote in Jedi Knight, agnostic,

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<sup>28</sup> I am not describing those who call themselves agnostics here, as in most of the various surveys and polls, they tend to either be lumped in with atheists or as part of a separate “don’t know” category.

<sup>29</sup> There are some silly bits of information floating around the Internet claiming to prove that Christians are fifty times more likely to go to prison than atheists. Of course, by cherry-picking this data, one could claim that English and Welsh Christians are 315 times more likely to go to prison than atheists and be superficially correct. One would have to be an intellectually dishonest ass to do so, though.

atheist, or heathen in the 2001 national survey, it becomes clear that their Low Church counterparts are nearly four times more likely to be convicted and jailed for committing a crime than a Christian.<sup>30</sup>

Studies have shown that those without religion have life expectancies seven years shorter than the average churchgoer,<sup>31</sup> are more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol, and be depressed or obese,<sup>32</sup> and they are much less likely to marry or have children. Their criminal proclivities strongly suggest that they are less intelligent on average than theists and High Church atheists alike, and they also outnumber their High Church counterparts by a significant margin, as the following table of various polls demonstrates:

<b>Atheist</b>	<b>Agnostic</b>	<b>No Religion</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Year</b>
2.9%	—	11.9%	Encyclopedia Britannica	Global	2005
2.4%	—	12.5%	CIA World Factbook	Global	2004
0.4%	0.5%	13.2%	American Religious Identification Survey	U.S.A.	2001
10.4%	—	6.3%	What the World Thinks of God (BBC) <sup>33</sup>	U.K.	2004
—	—	18.0%	Eurobarometer <sup>34</sup>	E.U.	2005
32.0%	32.0%	—	Financial Times / Harris <sup>35</sup>	France	2006
—	—	11.7%	Federal Census <sup>36</sup>	Switzerland	2000

Data about religious beliefs are notoriously difficult to obtain with any degree of accuracy and can be

<sup>30</sup> 3.84 times more likely, to be precise. Census, April 2001, Office for National Statistics. While Christians account for 39.1 percent of the English and Welsh prison population, they make up 71.8 percent of the total population.

<sup>31</sup> “Religious attendance is associated with U.S. adult mortality in a graded fashion: People who never attend exhibit 1.87 times the risk of death in the follow-up period compared with people who attend more than once a week.” Hummer R, Rogers R, Nam C, Ellison CG. “Religious involvement and U.S. adult mortality”: Population Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Although it seems that Baptist women who read Left Behind novels but don’t go to church regularly are the most at risk for excess poundage. Krista M.C. Cline and Kenneth F. Ferraro, “Does Religion Increase the Prevalence and Incidence of Obesity in Adulthood?.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2 (2006): 269.

<sup>33</sup> This is a good example of the difference between High Church atheists and Low Church ones. High Church atheists would be very excited about a BBC show on God, Low Church atheists would rather watch *Eastenders*.

<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, the question in the Science, Technology, and Social Values section wasn’t very specific, as the individuals polled were offered three choices between (1) belief in God, (2) belief in some sort of spirit or life force, or (3) don’t believe in any god, spirit, or life force.

<sup>35</sup> It is France, not any of the Scandinavian countries, that reliably shows up in various polls as the most atheistic country in the West, but there is good reason to be skeptical of the Harris poll numbers because the numbers of non-believers reported in it are between three and ten times higher than the number reported in other polls of the same countries. To give one example, the 64 percent sum of reported atheists and agnostics is almost twice as high as the number of French respondents answering that they did not believe in a god or life force in the Eurobarometer poll.

<sup>36</sup> This figure was confirmed by the 1998 Schweizer Arbeitsmarktsurvey which found 11.5 percent of the working population did not belong to a church or religious group.

complicated by government policies that dictate either an official religion or an official lack of religion, but the more polls one examines, the more a pattern becomes discernible. In most countries, the number of High Church atheists is similar to the number of self-declared agnostics, and the total of the two combined are but a small fraction of the number of Low Church atheists.

One interesting aspect of the European Union poll was its question about how often an individual thinks about the meaning and purpose of life. Those who don't believe in a god or life force were 27 percent less likely to say that they spent any time thinking about such things than those who do, which tends to support the idea that Low Church atheists are Low Church precisely because they are less interested in dwelling on their disbelief and its implications than High Church atheists, who seldom appear to be interested in anything else.

### **Agnostics: the Unitarians of Atheism**

I once attended a friend's pagan wedding in a Unitarian church. It was both creepy and disappointing. I would have felt much more comfortable if we'd all stripped naked, painted our butts blue, and danced around a burning tree or something instead of sitting through what felt like a straight-faced parody of a Christian ceremony. Listening to the pastor appealing to our collective love for the couple to bless their union was like a religious stroll through the Valley of the Uncanny, wherein the very similarity between the imitation and the real thing is the cause of the creep factor.

Unitarianism offers religion without faith. In a similar manner, Agnosticism offers disbelief without arrogance. Whereas the atheist is always in the impossible position of trying to prove a negative, the agnostic is content to relax, kick back, and wait for others to demonstrate the proof of their assertions. And while agnostics have many things in common with High Church atheists, sharing both their disbelief in god and the supernatural as well as many of their secondary traits, it is nearly impossible to confuse the two types of nonbelievers.

The most obvious difference is that agnostics are not at war with anyone, whereas atheists are

prone to aggressively attacking just about everyone, including agnostics. Sam Harris accuses them of not being intellectually honest,<sup>37</sup> while Richard Dawkins considers their views to be fence-sitting PAP, an acronym of his creation which stands for Permanent Agnosticism on Principle that also happens to be a word meaning “to lack substance.” (How astonishingly witty!) Hitchens takes a more ecumenical approach to non-belief, viewing atheists, agnostics, and freethinkers all as one big faithless family, while Dennett is similarly open to allowing agnostics to join him and his fellow atheists in dubbing themselves “brights,” should they be so inclined.

Since one of the primary factors distinguishing agnostics from atheists is their disinclination to go out of their way to annoy people, it’s hardly a surprise that very few, if any, agnostics have taken the professor up on his gracious offer.

Agnosticism is actually a perfectly reasonable position, arguably the most reasonable position an individual can hold regarding things that cannot possibly be known with utter certainty by anyone at this point in the space-time continuum. Most atheists would be more accurately described as agnostics with personality problems, for as philosopher Scott Adams points out on his Dilbert Blog, a “weak atheist” is simply an ideological label for literal agnostics who want to stake out an anti-religious position despite their admission of uncertainty regarding God’s existence. The fact that even the world’s leading atheist confesses an inability to take a “strong atheist” position tends to support Adams’s conclusion.

I rather like self-identified agnostics. A conversation with an agnostic seldom causes anyone to get bent out of shape, and it’s almost impossible to imagine an agnostic regime fighting over Holy Lands, interfering with people’s lives, or slaughtering great quantities of people in order to destroy an existing society in an effort to create a utopian new one. No doubt it’s annoying to the New Atheists that so many avowedly godless individuals should roll their eyes at atheist histrionics and decline to sign up for any angry anti-theist jihads, but really, there are far worse creeds to live by than shrug and

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3<sup>7</sup> [http://www.truthdig.com/interview/item/20060403\\_sam\\_harris\\_interview/](http://www.truthdig.com/interview/item/20060403_sam_harris_interview/)



let live.

The problem for agnostics is that the High Church unholy warriors tend to live by the reverse of the old Arab proverb. Agnostics, despite their skepticism, are quite willing to be on friendly terms with everyone, but for the militant atheist, the friend of his enemy is his enemy too. Atheists find the easy tolerance of the agnostic intolerable; to paraphrase Sam Harris, certainty about the absence of the next life is simply incompatible with tolerance in this one.

This is why agnostics so often regard theists with puzzled bemusement while viewing their godless cousins, with whom they superficially appear to have far more in common, with a mix of embarrassment and unadulterated horror.

### **The Apocalyptic Techno-Heretics**

The award-winning<sup>38</sup> science fiction writer Bruce Bethke has a pet theory that science fiction, especially disaster-oriented hard science fiction, primarily exists to provide a mechanism for writing end-of-the-world stories sans theology. “*Left Behind* for atheists,” he calls it, pointing to Greg Bear’s deity-free apocalyptic novel *Forge of God* as being but one of many examples.

It sounds crazy, but then, it would be a mistake to discount the guy responsible for coining the term “cyberpunk,” because we are reliably informed that the world will end in neither ice nor fire, but in an explosion of processing power.

Thus sayeth the prophet of the Singularity, science fiction novelist Vernor Vinge, who has been predicting that superintelligent computers will surpass human intelligence, become self-aware, and begin designing their even more intelligent successors since 1993, when he published his famous essay “The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.” And while the Singularity sounds suspiciously like the plot line to the Terminator movies, it’s actually based upon an application of Moore’s Law, which states that the number of transistors on an integrated circuit doubles

<sup>38</sup> Mr. Bethke won the Phillip K. Dick award for distinguished science fiction published in paperback original form in the United States in 1995. He would really appreciate it if you would avoid making the obvious pun.

every two years.

Because increased transistor counts translate directly into processing power measured in millions of instructions per second, this means that more transistors means smarter computers. The Intel 4004 had only 2300 transistors executing 0.06 MIPS in 1971, while the Intel Core 2 Duo processor in the laptop with which I am now typing these words possesses 291 million transistors executing 21,418 MIPS. Exactly how many MIPS are required before a machine will awaken and become self-conscious remains unknown, but in his essay, Vinge wrote that he expected it would happen before 2030, if it happened at all.

Ray Kurzweil, on the other hand, gives humanity until 2035.

Ken MacLeod, a Scottish science fiction author, describes the Singularity as “the Rapture for nerds” and in the same way Christians are divided into preterist, premillennialist, and postmillennialist camps regarding the timing of the *Parousia*,<sup>39</sup> Apocalyptic Techno-Heretics can be divided into three sects, Renunciationist, Apotheosist, and Posthumanist. Whereas Renunciationists foresee a dark future wherein humanity is enslaved or even eliminated by its machine masters and await the Singularity with the same sort of resignation that Christians who don’t buy into Rapture doctrine anticipate the Tribulation and the Antichrist, Apotheosans anticipate a happy and peaceful amalgamation into a glorious, godlike hive mind of the sort envisioned by Isaac Asimov in his *Foundation* novels. Posthumanists, meanwhile, envision a detente between Man and Machine, wherein artificial intelligence will be wedded to intelligence amplification and other forms of technobiological modification to transform humanity and allow it to survive and perhaps even thrive in the Post-Human Era.<sup>40</sup>

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3 <sup>9</sup> Or the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, if you prefer. Preterists think he came back already in 70 A.D., premillennialists believe he’s coming after the Tribulation ends to establish his 1,000-year reign, and postmillennialists believe that he will come back after the forces of evil have already been vanquished and the Kingdom of God has been established gradually over time.

4 <sup>0</sup> *Accelerando* by Charles Stross and the Culture novels of Iain M. Banks are excellent novels and possibly the best explications of the posthuman possibilities. If the Singularity ever actually takes place, blame Scotland.

Although it is rooted entirely in science and technology,<sup>41</sup> there are some undeniable religious parallels between the more optimistic visions of the Singularity and conventional religious faith. Not only is there a strong orthogenetic element inherent in the concept itself, but the transhuman dream of achieving immortality through uploading one's consciousness into machine storage and interacting with the world through electronic avatars sounds suspiciously like shedding one's physical body in order to walk the streets of gold with a halo and a harp.

Furthermore, the predictions of when this watershed event is expected to occur rather remind one of Sir Isaac Newton's tireless attempts to determine the precise date of the Eschaton, which he finally concluded would take place sometime after 2065, only thirty years after Kurzweil expects the Singularity.

So, if they're both correct, at least Mankind can console itself that the Machine Age will be a short one.

### **The Atheist Creed**

In 325 A.D., Christian leaders found it necessary to convene a council at Nicaea in order to provide all Christendom with an ecumenical statement of Christian faith. Amazingly, they were successful, for despite the subsequent splintering of Christianity into hundreds, if not thousands, of churches and denominations, each with their own idiosyncratic customs and exotic dogmas, the Nicene Creed still serves very well to distinguish the Christian from the not-Christian.

Atheism has no such creed but it could certainly use one. Given the variety of atheisms already mentioned, we need one to serve as a legitimate and reasonable basis for discussing atheism throughout the course of this book. Fortunately, American Atheists has provided a clear and unambiguous statement that ecumenically encompasses the various core beliefs of the vast majority of atheists, High Church, Low Church, and Heretic alike, which I have taken the liberty of having translated into Latin

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<sup>41</sup> And, one can't help but suspect, a certain amount of chemical inspiration.

in order to give it the proper magisterial grandeur.

*Praeter res naturales, nihil exstat.*

*Cogitatio est proprietas materiae.*

*Singula animalia omninoque irrevocabiliter mors terminat.*

*Sunt nullae vires, nullae res, nulla entia, quae distant natura, vel extra naturam sunt.*

*Sunt nullae vires, nullae res, nulla entia, quae natura superant.*

*Sunt nullae vires, nullae res, nulla entia, quae supra naturam sunt.*

*Nec fieri possunt.*<sup>42</sup>

As the creed indicates, atheism of all variants requires a focus on material phenomena. High Church atheists, agnostics, and apocalyptics tend to enjoy contemplating some of the more esoteric manifestations, while Low Church atheists are inclined to focus on quotidian ones such as cars, clothes, and the stereo system next door. But because the New Atheists are uniformly High Church, their anti-theistic arguments are invariably intertwined with Man's primary method for comprehending and utilizing material phenomena, which is to say, science.

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<sup>4</sup> <sup>2</sup> *Nothing exists but natural phenomena. Thought is a property or function of matter. Death irreversibly and totally terminates individual organic units. There are no forces, phenomena, or entities which exist outside of or apart from physical nature. There are no forces, phenomena, or entities which transcend nature. There are no forces, phenomena, or entities which are supernatural. Nor can there be.*

## Chapter V

### SAM TZU AND THE ART OF WAR

*The rule with regard to contentious ground is that those in possession have the advantage over the other side. If a position of this kind is secured first by the enemy, beware of attacking him. Lure him away by pretending to flee—show your banners and sound your drums—make a dash for other places that he cannot afford to lose. . . .*

—SUN TZU HSU LU, Pi I-hsun

In the historical introduction to his famous military treatise, the Chinese general Sun Tzu advised the wise general to lure his opponent from ground where the opponent holds a strong position in the hopes of being able to attack him in a weaker one. It is interesting to see that Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins both make inadvertent use of this tactic with their mutual assertion that religious faith bears responsibility for enabling the making of war even when it is not, in itself, a primary cause of conflict. It is also ironic, given their near total ignorance of military history and the art of war.

On a superficial level, the assertion appears to make a good deal of sense. It is certainly reasonable to postulate that the religious individual who believes in some form of life continuing beyond death would be more willing to take the chances with his life that war demands than would the non-religious individual. The religious soldier is only risking a part of his existence, a rather small and unimportant part in the case of the Christian soldier who confidently expects eternal life awaiting him in the New Jerusalem. The *shaheed* finds courage in the prospect of seventy-two virgins and the delights of paradise. The pagan Norse warrior fearlessly anticipated endless feasting and battle in Valhalla; his only terror was an ignominious death in bed, far from the battlefields haunted by the Choosers of the Slain.

Even the Hindu soldier risks nothing but a single turn of the wheel, whereas the atheist stakes the totality of his existence. There is, then, an economic argument to be made in logical support of this claim of religious war-enabling, since the perceived cost of war is obviously much greater for the

atheist than for the theist.<sup>1</sup>

There is etymological support for this notion as well. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the word “fanatic” is derived from the following source:

*c.1525, “insane person,” from L. fanaticus “mad, enthusiastic, inspired by a god,” originally, “pertaining to a temple,” from fanum “temple,” related to festus “festive” (see feast). Current sense of “extremely zealous,” especially in religion, is first attested 1647. The noun is from 1650, originally in religious sense, of Nonconformists.<sup>2</sup>*

For who can today hear the term “religious fanatic” and not immediately think of the suicide bombers of the Islamic jihad, who have struck terror into hearts around the globe? Nor are the modern jihadists the first religious fanatics to be inspired to deeds of astounding horror, as witnessed by Raymond of Aguilers’s account of slaughter-maddened Christian knights riding through blood up to their knees after the fall of Jerusalem in the First Crusade, or the more recent example of the Basij Mostazafan, an Iranian teen militia famous for voluntarily clearing minefields with their own bodies during the Iran-Iraq war.

And yet, even in these examples, one can see the first visible cracks in the argument. The First Crusade was a long time ago, it has been more than a thousand years since the massacre at Solomon’s Temple took place. In that millennia, many wars have been fought, very few of which have involved unarmed youth militias inspired by insane devotion to a god. Moreover, from a military perspective, suicide attacks are a negligible tactic.<sup>3</sup> They are not intended to win battles, much less wars, and even if one goes as far back as the Japanese kamikazes of World War II, one will not find a single battle which is recorded as having been won by suicide tactics, with or without the presumed benefit of religious

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1 One wonders if atheists would be so swift to embrace this logic if they understood it could be used to assert an atheistic inclination towards cowardice just as easily as it supports a hypothetical theistic inclination for warmongering.

2 Speaking of etymology, it is no small irony that such a famous nonconformist as Richard Dawkins should be known by a phrase originally coined to describe clergy of the Church of England.

3 Suicide bombings and terror in general are not military tactics, but political ones. The reason terrorism is usually directed against civilian targets rather than military ones is not because the military targets are more difficult to reach, but because attacks on them are ineffective given the primary goal of influencing the political psychology of the situation. The bombing of the Italian carabinieri base at Nasiriyah on 12 November, 2003, and the Madrid train attacks of 11 March, 2004, are good examples of this.

fanaticism.

Even so, Sam Harris insists that religion is a uniquely dangerous source of the intersocietal tensions that produce wars:

*Religion raises the stakes of human conflict much higher than tribalism, racism, or politics ever can, as it is the only form of in-group/ out-group thinking that casts the differences between people in terms of eternal rewards and punishments. One of the enduring pathologies of human culture is the tendency to raise children to fear and demonize other human beings on the basis of religious faith. Consequently, faith inspires violence in at least two ways. First, people often kill other human beings because they believe that the creator of the universe wants them to do it.<sup>4</sup>*

There are four errors in these four sentences. (1) Harris implies a direct connection between the commission of individual crime and mass inter-group conflict, however, he never bothers to explain just what this connection might happen to be. And while I shall address both forms of lethal violence, I note that it is simply not credible to suggest that the same motivation guides the killer who rapes and murders a stranger and the national leader who orders his troops to defend against a military invasion by an enemy.

(2) It is impossible to raise the stakes of human conflict any higher than the total eradication of the opposing out-group. Due to the possibility of religious conversion present in most religions, it can be reasonably argued that religious conflict actually offers a less intractable form of conflict than that created by tribalism or racism; the release of Fox News journalists Steve Centanni and Olag Wiig after their coerced “conversion” to Islam is only one of the many examples of this. Whereas one cannot so easily change one’s skin color or one’s tribe, and one need merely cite the murderous deeds of the pagan Genghis Khan or the atheist Saloth Sar to prove that non-religious motivations are sufficient to raise the stakes to the highest level.

And while bringing children up to fear and demonize others may be a pathology of human

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4 Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 80.

culture, there is no shortage of evidence demonstrating that this is done more often, and to greater effect, for reasons other than that of religious faith (3). It is no coincidence, after all, that public schooling is one of the ten pillars of the Communist Manifesto, why Germany's National Socialist regime passed a compulsory school attendance law in 1938, and why the infamous Hung Wei Ping who launched the bloody Cultural Revolution in 1966 that killed 400,000 people<sup>5</sup> in only two years were children in junior high school<sup>6</sup> who had been raised from birth as atheists.

It is true, of course, that people have been known to kill other human beings because they believe that the creator of the universe wants them to do it. The Bible is replete with such examples, and there are a few pitiful specimens of humanity spending the rest of their lives in lunatic asylums<sup>7</sup> for this very reason. (4) But Harris's use of the word "often" is more than a little questionable here, given how much more often people are known to murder other human beings for reasons unrelated to religion.

Harris frequently points out the extreme religiosity of American society compared to the rest of the world, which therefore makes the United States an ideal subject of investigation on this particular point. Fortunately, the FBI not only keeps track of how many murders take place in the United States in its Uniform Crime Report every year, but also records who committed them, how they were committed, to whom, and why.

In 2005, there were 16,692 American murders.<sup>8</sup> Of these, precisely six<sup>9</sup> were attributed to hate crimes, a definition that encompasses all racial, religious,<sup>10</sup> sexual-orientation, ethnic, and disability motivations for criminal actions. Of the other 10,283 murders for which the motivations have been

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5 Agence France Presse, 3 Feb. 1979.

6 "The first Red Guards appeared on 29 May. They were from the middle school, aged about twelve to fourteen. . . . Soon they were joined by children from younger and older age-groups, by students and, most important, by members of the CCP Youth Leagues. . . ." Johnson, Paul. *Modern Times*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991. 556.

7 One hopes, anyhow.

8 Federal Bureau of Investigations, *Crime in the United States*. 2005.

9 Federal Bureau of Investigations, *Hate Crime Statistics*. 2005. Table 2.

10 There were 848 anti-Jewish hate crimes in 2005. 128 offenses were anti-Islamic, ninety-three were anti-Other Religion, fifty-eight were anti-Catholic, fifty-seven were anti-Protestant, thirty-nine were anti-multiple religions, and only four were anti-Atheism/Agnostism. When Dawkins's wrote that "the status of atheists in America today is on a par with that of homosexuals fifty years ago," he was apparently unaware that there were 1,017 anti-homosexual hate crimes in the same year as those four offenses.



determined, none were attributed to anything that could conceivably be related to a belief in a deity's desire to see a particular individual dead. Instead, the two most frequent motivations were Arguments (36.7 percent) and Felony Offenses such as Robbery and Narcotic drug laws (21 percent).<sup>11</sup>

Unless the vast majority of arguments that end with one interlocutor murdering the other are inspired by erudite debates between individuals belonging to divergent schools of soteriological thought,<sup>12</sup> it is obvious that Harris is wildly incorrect about the frequency with which religious faith inspires murderous actions. Even if we were to categorize every murderer who successfully pleads a “not guilty by reason of insanity”<sup>13</sup> defense among the religious faithful—a dubious proposition at best—this would only add an additional forty-one murders to the total that could conceivably be blamed on religion.

Since the maximum number of potential victims of religious faith is six percent of the number of American bicyclists killed annually, and only six-tenths of one percent of those killed by doctors with poor writing skills,<sup>14</sup> I wonder if we can look forward to a future book from Mr. Harris decrying the moral evil of the bicycle accompanied by a call for mandatory calligraphy classes for all medical professionals?

### **Kill Thy Neighbor**

If he is unsuccessful in demonstrating that the religious are unusually inclined to commit lethal hate crimes, Harris appears to find somewhat more promising ground on which to do battle with his concluding notion, wherein he blames intercommunal conflict on religion.

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1 <sup>1</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigations, *Supplimentary Homicide Report*. 2005. Expanded Homicide Data Table 11.

1 <sup>2</sup> Or one could simply say “people that have different ideas about salvation.” But I wouldn’t want anyone to be embarrassed by thinking they’re reading a book written by someone who isn’t, like, college-educated and everything.

1 <sup>3</sup> “*This is the reality of the insanity defense in America: difficult to plead, seldom used and almost never successful.*” The Crime Library. It is estimated that 0.25 percent of all murder defendants successfully plead “not guilty by reason of insanity.”

1 <sup>4</sup> According to the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute, 784 bicyclists died in 2005. The National Academies of Science’s Institute of Medicine published a study in July 2006 stating that prescription errors caused by poor handwriting kills 7,000 Americans every year.

*Second, far greater numbers of people fall into conflict with one another because they define their moral community on the basis of their religious affiliation: Muslims side with other Muslims, Protestants with Protestants, Catholics with Catholics. These conflicts are not always explicitly religious. But the bigotry and hatred that divide one community from another are often the products of their religious identities. Conflicts that seem driven entirely by terrestrial concerns, therefore, are often deeply rooted in religion. The fighting that has plagued Palestine (Jews vs. Muslims), the Balkans (Orthodox Serbians vs. Catholic Croatians; Orthodox Serbians vs. Bosnian and Albanian Muslims), Northern Ireland (Protestants vs. Catholics), Kashmir (Muslims vs. Hindus), Sudan (Muslims vs. Christians and animists), Nigeria (Muslims vs. Christians), Ethiopia and Eritrea (Muslims vs. Christians), Ivory Coast (Muslims vs. Christians), Sri Lanka (Sinhalese Buddhists vs. Tamil Hindus), Philippines (Muslims vs. Christians), Iran and Iraq (Shiite vs. Sunni Muslims), and the Caucasus (Orthodox Russians vs. Chechen Muslims; Muslim Azerbaijanis vs. Catholic and Orthodox Armenians) are merely a few, recent cases in point.*

This long list might appear to be persuasive, were it not for the fact that the list of potential examples to the contrary is considerably longer, to say nothing of the fact that nearly every example given here includes Muslims. To Sam Harris, all religions might be equally mythical and therefore the same, but it is hard to fail to notice that it is not the Jains, Mormons, Hindus, or Christians who are actively stirring up violence all over the world. In fact, Harris even left out a few relevant examples, such as East Timor, while mistakenly assigning religious motivations to at least four of the conflicts mentioned.

1. The conflict in Palestine is primarily ethnic, not religious. Atheist Jews, who represent 22.9 percent<sup>15</sup> of the Israeli population, are targeted by their Arab enemies as readily as the ultra-Orthodox. (Another 21 percent call themselves secular and do not practice any religion, but nevertheless profess to believe in God.) Moreover, the violence in Palestine began with the secular Zionists attacking the Christian British.
2. The conflict in Northern Ireland is primarily ethnic and political, not religious, being a holdover from the British colonial establishment of the Ulster Plantation in 1609. Indicative of this is the fact that more people were killed in the intra-nationalist Irish Civil War of 1922–23, which pitted Catholic against Catholic, than the 3,523 deaths resulting from the thirty-two years of the modern inter-denominational Troubles.
3. Although foreign Muslims have come to the aid of their co-religionists in the Chechen war, the cause has absolutely nothing to do with any religious conflict between the Chechen Muslims and the Orthodox Russians, but the fact that Chechnya has been seeking independence from Russia since it was forcibly annexed in 1870 by Tsar Alexander II. While the Chechens tried, and failed, to take advantage of the collapse of the Tsarist empire in 1917, they have been marginally more successful in the more recent set of wars for independence they have waged following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

4. In Sri Lanka, the political divide is linguistic, not religious. Tamil-speaking Hindus and Christians are allied against Sinhalese-speaking Buddhists and Muslims. The government's main rival, the revolutionary Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, are secular Marxists seeking political independence for a Tamil-speaking state. The LTTE's own Internet FAQ settles the matter conclusively, stating in no uncertain terms that the Tamil Tigers is not a religious organization.<sup>16</sup>

To list the many historical counterexamples that disprove Harris's contention would require a book of its own, but a short list of territorial conflicts between co-religionists would have to include the Roman wars of the Italian peninsula, the Renaissance wars of the Italian city-states, the wars of the Greek city-states, the wars of the petty German principalities, the eleven Russo-Swedish wars, the English War of the Roses; in short, nearly the entire history of European warfare.<sup>17</sup> It is simply not true that most conflicts that "seem entirely driven by territorial concerns" are "often deeply rooted in religion." They almost never are.

For as Jared Diamond, the author of the award-winning *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, informs us, territorial conflicts are predominantly rooted in geography, not religion. To suggest otherwise would be to eviscerate his explanation for how Europe's technological development managed to leapfrog that of China during the fifteenth century, as it was European political disunity created by geography that prevented the centralized stasis that left a backward-looking China mired in the past.

*Hence the real problem in understanding China's loss of political and technological preeminence to Europe is to understand China's chronic unity and Europe's chronic disunity. The answer is again suggested by maps. Europe has a highly indented coastline, with five large peninsulas that approach islands in their isolation, and all of which evolved independent languages, ethnic groups, and governments. . . . Europe is carved up into independent linguistic, ethnic, and political units by high mountains (the Alps, Pyrenees, Carpathians, and Norwegian border mountains), while China's mountains east of the Tibetan plateau are much less formidable barriers. . . . Unlike China, Europe has many small core areas, none big enough to dominate the others for long, and each the center of chronically independent states.*<sup>18</sup>

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1 <sup>6</sup> "Is the LTTE a religious organization? No. Most members of the LTTE are Hindus, however there are many members who are Christian. The LTTE does not have religious motivation for fighting against the government of Sri Lanka. The theoretician for the LTTE and one of the founding members is Anton Balasingham, who is a Christian." <http://www.tamiltigers.net> 2006.

1 <sup>7</sup> I shall concede the Thirty Years War and the eight French Huegenot Wars, and, in an ecumenical spirit of generosity, exclude the Peasant's War and the English Civil Wars from my list of counterexamples.

1 <sup>8</sup> Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999. 413.

In a continent with only four religions or religious denominations of note in 1400,<sup>19</sup> Europe was divided into over 1,000 independent political states.<sup>20</sup> This number was reduced by half only 117 years later, at the start of the Protestant Reformation. And while there was certainly an amount of violent interdenominational Christian conflict during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, it is difficult to imagine that even with the increase in the amount of potential religious conflict, more wars took place than occurred during the century leading up to it, wherein half of the political entities disappeared, swallowed up by their larger, more powerful neighbors.

Indeed, the contrast between the largely peaceful spread of Christianity throughout the continent of Europe with the violent migratory invasions that wracked it from 300 to 700 A.D. as the Goths, Vandals, and Franks moved westward, later followed by the Slavs, Alans, Avars, Bulgars, Hungarians, Pechenegs, and Tatars, underlines the fundamental absence of historical support for Harris's assertion.

### **In-Out Enmity**

But while the points raised by Harris on religion and the art of war are obvious and easily dismissed, Richard Dawkins is rather more subtle. Having wisely refrained from directly suggesting a causal relationship between religion and warfare (and in fact, as was previously demonstrated, he actually contradicts Harris on that very point<sup>21</sup>), he nevertheless cannot stop himself from slyly implying in numerous places throughout *The God Delusion* that this “divisive force” is nevertheless somehow responsible for the fact that wars take place, mostly due to the way in which it supplies labels for “in-group/out-group enmity and vendetta,” which aren't necessarily worse than other labels such as language and skin color, but are “often available when others are not.”

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1 <sup>9</sup> Catholic Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses in 1517.

2 <sup>0</sup> Diamond, 413.

2 <sup>1</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 259.

The problem with this is that in-group/out-group<sup>22</sup> enmity has next to nothing to do with either waging or inspiring war. Most endo-exo rivalries stem from basic territorialism and the will to power, not rival group identities; the champions of reason have it backwards. Consider the rival groups we currently identify as “French” and “German.” As recently as 814, they were a single ethnic group known as “the Franks.” While the French national identity was forged early on, thanks in part to the open geography of France, there was no German nation as such, instead there was only the multiplicity of principalities known collectively and inaccurately as the Holy Roman Empire, which over time came to be dominated by the Austrian Hapsburg dynasty in the south and the Kingdom of Prussia in the north.

It was not until after the Napoleonic wars and the Franco-Prussian wars that anything resembling what we would recognize today as being “Germany” came into existence, in 1871. By 1941, Germany had invaded France twice, conquered it once, and been defeated twice by France’s allies. France was estimated to have lost 1.4 million dead in the Great War, plus another 520,000 killed in round two.

Is it more reasonable, then, to assume that any latent French hostility towards Germans stems from an out-group identity that didn’t even exist for most of French history, or a simple and understandable distaste for being invaded and slaughtered by a group of distant cousins with a proven historical predilection for doing so?

### **Crusader or Conscript?**

The Crusades have long been the *sine qua non* of the atheist case against religion on the grounds of its causal relationship with war. And it would be foolish to insist that any war conceived by a monk, blessed by a pope, marked by the sign of the Cross, inspired by the battle cry *Deus le volt*,<sup>23</sup> and fought

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2 <sup>2</sup> There’s that phrase again. I don’t know why Harris and Dawkins are so fond of it. Reading these gentlemen one after another is disturbingly like being forced to watch atheist bukkake.

2 <sup>3</sup> God wills it!

against a rival religion in order to reclaim a holy site did not have anything to do with religion.

Still, it must be noted that the consensus among modern historians is that religion was not anywhere near as central to the Crusades as is customarily thought to be the case. Sir Charles Oman points out various times when, following the Crusaders' establishment of the four principalities of Outremer, alliances between Christian kingdoms and Muslim emirates flowed freely across religious lines; indeed, without the vicious internecine Muslim rivalries that existed at the time, the First Crusade would never have succeeded in taking Jerusalem nor would the Crusader lands carved out of Muslim territory have survived for nearly 200 years.<sup>24</sup>

While Oman sees religion as only one of the "many complicated impulses" that led the European nations to invade the Levant, John Julius Norwich goes so far as to write of the First Crusade: "The entire Crusade was now revealed as having been nothing more than a monstrous exercise in hypocrisy, in which the religious motive had been used merely as the thinnest of disguises for unashamed imperialism."<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, if we set aside the historians' pedantic insistence on detail for the moment and concede that the Crusades are quite reasonably considered to be the classic example of a religious war by the average individual, we may find them to be a very useful model in demonstrating how a religious war comes about, how religion can be used to inspire individuals to commit violence at the behest of religious leaders, and the impact such a religious motivation makes on behavior of the individuals so inspired. For by conceding the point, the Crusades thus provide us with a means of dividing the religious aspects of war-making from those aspects which have little or nothing to do with religion.

The salient features of the First Crusade that are relevant for considering the question of religious inspiration are the following:

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<sup>24</sup> Oman, Sir Charles. *378–1278 AD*. Vol. 1 of *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*. London: Cornell University Press, 1991. 233.

<sup>25</sup> Norwich, John Julius. *The Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean*. London: Pimlico, 2006. 119.

1. It was publicly advocated by religious leaders.
2. Its appeal transcended national and political boundaries.
3. Large numbers of civilians voluntarily took part.
4. Individuals with neither military nor organizational authority held prominent leadership roles.<sup>26</sup>
5. Professional soldiers volunteered to fight without demanding wages up front.

With the exception of the first great wave of Islamic expansion, very few wars in history can be described by any of these five features, let alone all of them. And it is this last aspect which is particularly intriguing, for while it was unnecessary to pay the soldiers who volunteered to take the Crusader's Cross, nearly every military leader before or since has found it to be an absolute requirement.

Livy informs us that the Romans found it necessary to begin paying wages to its knights as early as 405 B.C. as a result of the Siege of Veii, although the plebs' complaints<sup>27</sup> about the need to pay a war-tax in addition to being forced to serve in the military levy required for the four simultaneous wars in which Rome was engaged at the time make it clear that the infantry was being paid wages long before then. In the later Republican and Imperial eras, conscription was seldom required except in the event of civil war, although the standard legionary pay was 112.5 denarii per year (later doubled by Julius Caesar), which was almost twice the sixty-eight denarii it is calculated that was required for a family of four to live for a year.

Put in modern terms, this would equate to roughly \$32,471.71 in 2005 dollars. Considering that this was the annual salary of the lowest-ranking legionaries and that centurions drew annual wages equivalent to \$520,000,<sup>28</sup> it is not hard to understand why Rome had no need to play upon the religious

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2 <sup>6</sup> A French priest named Peter the Hermit led an "army" of 100,000 men, women, and children which outnumbered the nobles' Crusade led by Raymond of Toulouse, Bohemond, Godfrey, and Robert of Flanders. The fact that the nobles hailed from Northern France, Southern France, England, and Italy demonstrates the transnational appeal of the First Crusade. Of course, the Third Crusade demonstrated even broader appeal, featuring the King of England, the King of France, and the Holy Roman Emperor.

2 <sup>7</sup> Livius, Titus. Vol. 1 of *The History of Rome*. 5.10.

2 <sup>8</sup> That was actually on the low end! Under Domitian, centurions were paid between 5,000 and 20,000 denarii per year, which were sixteen to sixty-six times more than the 300 denarii annually paid to legionaries.

sentiments of prospective recruits in order to convince them to join the army.

Now, if it were true, as the New Atheists suggest, that religious faith is a source of military fervor, it logically follows that the militaries of avowedly religious countries would rely less heavily on conscription than do the militaries in secular countries. However, an examination of the world's militaries<sup>29</sup> reveals that even in Muslim countries, there is no correlation between religious fervor and a low rate of forced military service. The high rate of conscripts in the Islamic Republic of Iran is particularly worthy of note here, in light of Western fears of the warlike nature of its bellicose and theocratic government.

<b>Nation</b>	<b>Dominant Religion</b>	<b>Conscripts</b>	<b>Military Forces</b>	<b>Volunteers</b>
United States of America	Christian	zero	1,427,000	100 percent
Republic of India	Hindu	zero	1,325,000	100 percent
People's Republic of China	Atheist	1,275,000	2,840,000	55.1 percent
Republic of Turkey	Islam	295,000	514,850	42.7 percent
Islamic Republic of Iran	Islam	320,000	450,000	28.9 percent

It is also perhaps worth noting that the world's five largest militaries, those belonging to China, the United States, India, North Korea, and Russia, are controlled by two atheist governments, a country that was formally atheist until recently, and two legally secular governments.

### **The Silence of the Classics**

But the most conclusive evidence against the idea that religion is a vital aspect of the art of war can be found in the collective writings of Man's greatest military strategists. Or rather, it cannot be found. One will scour the works of Sun Tzu, Julius Caesar, Vegetius, Maurice, Leo the Wise, and Clausewitz in vain for instructions on how to make use of the gods, the faith of the soldiers, or anything even

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<sup>29</sup> Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 1997/98*. London, 1997.



remotely religious in their recommendations about how to best execute the art of war. If religion were an important element of war-making, one would expect to find a great deal of text commenting upon it. Instead, one finds that Sun Tzu devotes one of his thirteen chapters entirely to spies and fully half of another to instructions on starting fires.

Clausewitz dedicates entire chapters to military concepts such as friction, boldness, perseverance, and geometry, while Vegetius has sections dealing specifically with the importance of individualizing shields, what music is the most inspirational, and the proper way to combat elephants. The Emperor Maurice, in his *Strategikon*, addresses heralds and trumpets as well as “Dealing with the Light-Haired Peoples” and “Hunting Wild Animals Without Serious Injury or Accident,” while Caesar is predominantly concerned with chronicling the astonishingly heroic martial deeds of a certain Gaius Julius.

Of all classical military strategists, Machiavelli alone sees sufficient benefit in making use of religion to mention it in passing, as in *The Art of War* he reminds Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi of the way in which Sertorius assured his troops of a divine victory guaranteed by a talking deer, and how Charles VII of France found Joan of Arc to be of some utility in convincing his men that God was on their side. Machiavelli believed religion to be useful in much the same way that Richard Dawkins imagines it to be,<sup>30</sup> as a means of instilling morale and military discipline into the soldiery.

However, there is a fundamental contradiction between the idea that the same religion which produces unruly militias full of fanatics like the Basij Mostazafan will simultaneously provide the basis for the rigid military discipline required by elite troops. Given that the penalty for breaking military discipline has been death by execution in nearly every military force in history regardless of its religious identity, from Sun Tzu’s famous beheading of the King of Wu’s favorite concubines to the

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<sup>30</sup> “[Nations] whose infantrymen act on their own initiative rather than following orders will tend to lose wars”—Richard Dawkins. Dr. Dawkins’s statement directly contradicts the current military doctrine of the finest fighting force on the planet, as a reference to the manual MCDP1: Warfighting, the United States Marine Corps, shows “*The Marine Corps’ style of warfare requires intelligent leaders with a penchant for boldness and initiative down to the lowest levels.*” (Make it more obvious that these two statements conflict.)

U.S. Army's execution of Pvt. Eddie Slovik in 1945, it is clear that it is the very material fear of death at the hands of the military authorities, not religious faith, that provides the foundation for this discipline.

It is worth noting that Machiavelli is not only the lone classic strategist to see the military usefulness of religion, he is also the only one to have never held a combat command. His attempt to build a Florentine militia to replace the mercenary companies then ubiquitous in Italy was a failure, and the value of his military acumen can perhaps be best judged by the following anecdote from Bandello about the Florentine's famous visit to the mercenary camp of the condottiere Giovanni delle Bande Nere:<sup>31</sup>

*The men were training and Giovanni mischievously invited his guest to try out on the ground some of the formations he had described in The Art of War. The author accepted with delight, and in the course of the next hour reduced the troops to a chaos of puzzled and perspiring humanity, whereupon Giovanni tactfully intervened, murmuring that it was a very hot day and past dinner-time, unraveled the tangle with a few decisive orders and quickly produced the disposition Machiavelli had been trying to achieve.<sup>32</sup>*

I believe that on the basis of the historical evidence, the reasonable reader will correctly conclude that both Machiavelli and Richard Dawkins can be safely ignored with regards to their speculations about the source of military discipline as well as the utility of religion in maintaining it.

However, I should note that when I mentioned this significant omission of all things religious from the great works of military strategy and tactics in a column last year, I received an e-mail complaining that Sun Tzu, at least, had made mention of "Heaven," and in fact had laid some degree of importance upon it. While this is true, as Sun Tzu lists Heaven as one of the five constant factors<sup>33</sup> of the art of war that must to be taken into account when seeking to determine the conditions obtaining in the field, the general also goes on to explain in Chapter I, Section 7 that Heaven "signifies night and

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3 <sup>1</sup> Giovanni de' Medici, an Italian mercenary captain and father of the first Grand Duke of Florence. His company was known as "The Black Bands" due to the mourning markers worn on their insignia after the death of Pope Leo X.

3 <sup>2</sup> Tease, Geoffrey. *The Condottieri: Soldiers of Fortune*. New York, 1971. 339.

3 <sup>3</sup> The other four are Moral Law, Earth, The Commander, and Method and Discipline. I contend Moral Law is best translated as morale, as it is a vital strategical and tactical concern. Giles considers this possibility, but prefers "is in harmony with his subjects."

day, cold and heat, times and seasons.” In this particular case, “Heaven” merely means the environmental setting in which the battle takes place.

This demonstrates the importance of actually reading the text instead of merely running a word search on it or relying upon what one vaguely remembers seeing one evening on the History Channel.

However, it must be admitted that religion is not entirely without application in times of war. It is, after all, an extremely effective means of applying Sun Tzu’s Moral Law in order to inspire those who are not a part of the soldiery during wartime, quite possibly the most effective means. More than 2,000 years ago, after Hannibal crushed the Roman army led by the consul Gaius Flaminius at Lake Trasimene, a fearful and despairing Rome turned to Fabius Maximus to save it from the brilliant Carthaginian and his army. To the modern reader, the first actions of Fabius after being named Dictator might seem more than a little strange, but no doubt Sun Tzu would see the wisdom in them and agree with Plutarch’s verdict:

*After this, he made the best of beginnings, that is by turning his attention to religious matters, and he left the people in no doubt that their defeat had not been brought about by any cowardice on the part of their soldiers, but by their general’s neglectful and contemptuous attitude towards religious observances. . . . By encouraging the people in this way to fix their thoughts upon religious matters, Fabius contrived to strengthen their confidence in the future.*<sup>34</sup>

For what is the purpose of religious faith, after all, but to provide hope in a time of despair? The faith of the Roman people was rewarded in the end, as Fabius patiently wore Hannibal down over a period of fifteen years until the Carthaginian was finally forced to withdraw from Italy. But the agnostic reader will no doubt be pleased to learn that despite his ready willingness to make use of the religious superstitions of the Romans, Fabius Maximus himself chose to place his own trust in rather more material forces.<sup>35</sup>

Still, providing the promise of light when all seems dark and preventing the civilian population

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<sup>3 4</sup> Plutarch, *Makers of Rome* Ian Scott-Kilvert translator (1965), 57–58.

<sup>3 5</sup> “For his own part, however, he trusted entirely to his own efforts to win the victory, since he believed that the gods grant men success according to the courage and wisdom that they display. . . .” Plutarch, 58.

from sinking into a slough of desperation is a far cry from whipping the god-addled masses into a blood-maddened frenzy of slaughter. While religion can play an important role in the lives of noncombatants during wartime, history and the written works of Man's greatest military minds clearly demonstrate that religious faith is not a tool in the blood-stained hands of those who practice the arts of war.

## Chapter VI

### THE WAR DELUSION

*Religion makes enemies instead of friends. That one word, "religion," covers all the horizon of memory with visions of war, of outrage, of persecution, of tyranny, and death. . . . Although they have been preaching universal love, the Christian nations are the warlike nations of the world.*

—ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL, "The Damage Religion Causes"

Thus began an influential nineteenth-century essay by Ingersoll, the famous American freethinker and atheist. While Ingersoll's assertion might be contested by modern atheists who deny that America was ever a Christian nation, and by sociologists who have conducted numerous polls confirming European post-Christianity, many people surely agree with his general sentiment that religion is the primary cause of war throughout the world.

Sam Harris agrees enthusiastically, or at least he appears to do so at first glance:

*A glance at history, or at the pages of any newspaper, reveals that ideas which divide one group of human beings from another, only to unite them in slaughter, generally have their roots in religion. It seems that if our species ever eradicates itself through war, it will not be because it was written in the stars but because it was written in our books. . . .*

Because Harris is a careless writer, lurching from baseless assertion to errant conclusion with all the elegance of a drunken orangutan, it is always wise to examine his words closely. Most readers, scanning quickly over the paragraph, will conclude that Harris is stating that most martial slaughter has its roots in religion, and because of that, conclude that religion is a threat to eradicate humanity. But the fact that Harris attempts to condemn religion through implication instead of direct accusation is a clear indicator that Harris knows how weak his argument is, and the historical evidence proves that

both his statement and his subsequent conclusion are incorrect.

Religion does not endanger our species because religious faith does not cause war.

Harris is far from the only atheist who makes a habit of incessantly implying or even outright stating that religion is the cause of most military conflict, and he is not the only one expressing the belief that if only there was no religion polluting the planet, Mankind might finally know an end to war. It could even be plausibly suggested that adherence to this notion is one of the Ten Commandments of the High Church atheist: Thou shalt believe that religion causes war.

The concept is articulated at the heart of John Lennon's atheist anthem, "Imagine":

*Imagine there's no countries  
It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion too<sup>1</sup>*

Lennon, of course, is here blaming nationalism in addition to religion, but since both Harris and Dawkins tell us that nationalism is a function of religious belief, we know that from the atheist's point of view, the two are one and the same. Dawkins, for example, approvingly quotes a Spaniard who states that religion and nationalism operating in tandem "break all records for oppression and bloodshed." Ergo, without religion and its haphazard division of humanity into warring nations, there will be nothing to kill or die for and we can all live together in stoned and naked bliss.

However, it's more than a little risky to base one's basic concept of global geopolitics and world history on a folk song written by a college dropout who failed all of his O-levels.<sup>2</sup> I imagine few would consider it worthwhile to consult Britney Spears about the continual crisis in the Middle East; indeed, the mere fact of learning that one's understanding of the geostrategic situation is in accordance with a pop singer's, however successful, should serve to give one cause to reconsider the matter post-

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1 The end of the song reveals Lennon to have been a bit of an Apotheosan.

2 The U.K. General Certificate of Education Ordinary-level examinations, as opposed to the GCE Advanced-levels. Lennon was a talented musician, but he was also the English equivalent of the kid who has to take the GED instead of the SAT. And then fails it.

haste.

And yet Dawkins inadvertently reveals the illogic underlying this atheist dogma when he writes of how “thousands” of people have died “for loyalty to one religion against a scarcely distinguishable alternative.”<sup>3</sup> But these thousands of deaths, however tragic, are a trivial number, a statistically insignificant fraction of the billions of human beings who have been killed for reasons wholly unrelated to religion; World War II alone accounted for an estimated sixty million deaths while Hulagu Khan slew around 130 thousand in the 1258 sack of Baghdad.

### **A Very Short Military History of the United States**

The New Atheists are not very happy about the fact that the United States of America is the most religious nation in the Western world. This clearly annoys them, as they tend to dwell on the matter. But if the hypothesis that religion causes war is true, then we can safely assume that the U.S.A. must be a particularly warlike nation, and moreover, that it regularly goes to war for reasons associated with the strong religious faith of its people. In order to see if this is indeed the case, I have constructed the table below, which consists of all of the wars fought by the United States, the enemy against whom it was fought, the primary religious faith of the two sides and the number of American deaths as a result of the military conflict. Wars that can be considered attributable to religious faith are indicated by bold text.

<b>WAR</b>	<b>YEAR</b>	<b>ENEMY</b>	<b>RELIGIOUS FAITH</b>	<b>U.S. DEATHS</b>
Revolutionary War	1775–1783	England	Christian v. Christian	4,435
War of 1812	1812–1815	England	Christian v. Christian	2,260
First and Second Barbary Wars	1801–1815	The Barbary States	Christian v. Muslim	11
The Navajo Wars	1846–1866	Navajo and Apache	Christian v. Pagan	250
Mexican War	1846–1848	Mexico	Christian v. Christian	1,733
The Sioux Wars (3)	1854–1877	Sioux	Christian v. Pagan	500 <sup>4</sup>

3 Dawkins, Richard. “What Use is Religion?” *Free Inquiry*, Volume 24, Number 5.

4 Precisely how many U.S. fatalities occurred during the various Indian Wars is unknown, but they are generally estimated to be less than 1,000 in total. I have therefore distributed 1,000 deaths between the Navajo, Sioux, and Apache wars.

The Civil War	1861–1865	Confederate States	Christian v. Christian	214,938
The Apache Wars (2)	1871–1886	Apache	Christian v. Pagan	250
Spanish-American War	1898	Spain	Christian v. Christian	385
World War I	1917–1918	The Central Powers	Christian v. Christian & Muslim <sup>5</sup>	53,402
World War II	1941–1945	The Axis Powers	Chr. & Ath. v. Chr. & Pagan	291,557
The Korean Conflict	1950–1953	China	Christian v. Atheist	36,574
The Vietnam War	1954–1973	North Vietnam	Christian v. Atheist	58,209
The Invasion of Panama	1989–1990	Panama	Christian v. Christian	24
The Persian Gulf War	1990–1991	Iraq	Christian v. Muslim	529
<b>The Global Struggle Against Violent Extremism<sup>6</sup></b>	2001–present	Afghanistan, the global jihad	<b>Christian v. Muslim</b>	<b>3,302</b>
The Iraq War	2003–present	Iraq	Christian v. Muslim	2,711

In 232 years, the United States of America has fought seventeen wars. That’s about one new war every fourteen years it has existed, which isn’t exactly peaceful, but also isn’t anywhere nearly as aggressively martial as the pagan Roman Republic, which regularly launched simultaneous wars against as many as four different and unrelated foes in a single year, or the Assyrian king Shalmeneser III, whose Black Obelisk records his habit of regularly crossing the Euphrates and instigating twenty-three wars in the first twenty-three years of his reign.<sup>7</sup>

Of those seventeen wars, the only one that can properly be characterized as religious is the strangely named Global Struggle Against Violent Extremism, of which the invasion and subsequent occupation of Afghanistan has been an integral part. Due to the secular nature of Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist dictatorship, the fact that the current Iraqi War is technically a continuation of the Persian Gulf War, and the absence of a direct connection between Hussein and the 9/11 attacks, I deem the Iraq war to be a separate war to which it would be incorrect to assign a religious motivation, the various Muslim factions now battling for power in post-Hussein Iraq notwithstanding.

<sup>5</sup> The Ottoman Empire, today’s Turkey, was one of the Central Powers.

<sup>6</sup> This has got to be one of the nominees in the War, Dumbest Name Ever category. Although its other name, The War on Terror, is right up there too. But given how embarrassed they are about GSAVE, I insist on using it.

<sup>7</sup> In the twenty-fourth year of his reign he must have finally gotten bored with the Euphrates, as he crossed the Lower Zab instead and burned four cities belonging to King Yan’su of the Zimri.



Looking at the list, it is clear that Christian America was as likely to make war against other Christian nations as it was to fight pagan Indian tribes, Muslim pirate nations, or atheist Communist regimes. It even allied with an atheist regime to fight two historically Christian nations. After perusing the list, it should be clear to even the most casual observer that the United States does not go to war for reasons associated with the particular religious faith of its people

671,070 Americans have died fighting in its wars over the centuries. Less than one-half of one percent of those deaths, or 3,302, can be reasonably blamed on religious faith. Over the course of U.S. history, that amounts to 14.2 American deaths per year attributable to religion-inspired war, and while every American death is lamentable, it should be noted that religious war is actually less lethal to Americans than their dogs, as they annually suffer 15.7 fatalities due to dog bites.<sup>8</sup> And yet, I rather doubt that Dawkins and Harris will soon be publishing books entitled *The Dog Delusion* and *Letter to a Canine Nation* while angrily urging Americans to abandon their misguided attachment to Man's best friend.

## **War and Religion**

It would be foolish to insist that religion never causes war. The ongoing occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq clearly bear some relation to religion, as does the strangely named War on Terror. In this age of Islamic jihadist revival, it is easy to see why a theory of religious causation holds some appeal for the historically ignorant. The recent conflicts in the Sudan, Nigeria, East Timor, the Philippines, Kashmir, and Chechnya certainly have a strong Islamic element, and the thought of an army of the West swooping down on the Middle East cannot help but conjure up images of Raymond, Godfrey, and Bohemond before the walls of Jerusalem.

But much time has passed between the taking of Jerusalem in 1099 and the fall of Baghdad in 2003, and very little of it has been peaceful. Furthermore, Islam did not exist prior to the year 610, nor

<sup>8</sup> Jeffery J. Sacks MD, MPH, Richard W. MD Sattin, and Sandra E. Bonzo. "Dog Bite-Related Fatalities From 1979 Through 1988" *Journal of American Medicine*. 11 (1989).

did Christianity prior to 33 A.D. And yet, ancient documents such as the Chronicles of the Assyrian Kings are filled with descriptions of what certainly appear to be matters of martial concern. For example, the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III records some of the bloody-minded Assyrian king's martial deeds:

*In my 24th year, the lower Zab I crossed. The land of Khalimmur I passed through. To the land of Zimru I went down. Yan'su King of the Zimri from the face of my mighty weapons fled and to save his life ascended [the mountains]. The cities of 'Sikhisatakh, Bit-Tamul, Bit-Sacci, Bit-Sedi, his strong cities, I captured. His fighting men I slew. His spoil I carried away. The cities I threw down, dug up, [and] with fire burned . . . The cities of Cua-cinda, Khazzanabi, Ermul, [and] Cin-ablila with the cities which were dependent on them I captured. Their fighting men I slew. Their spoil I carried away. The cities I threw down, dug up [and] burned with fire. An image of my Majesty in the country of Kharkhara I set up.*

To cite a more recent example, historians record that all of Europe anticipated that Charles VIII of France, upon coming into his own in 1491 (he had been subject to an eight-year regency upon inheriting the crown at thirteen), would launch a military campaign because that was what was expected of young, energetic kings with armies. And within three years, Charles had invaded Italy and laid the groundwork for thirty years of war on the Lombard plain. This was not war caused by religion or even economics; it was simply war for war's sake.

But there is no point to arguing from anecdotal evidence. A more systematic review of the 489 wars listed in the Wikipedia's list of military conflicts, from Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars to the 1969 Football War between Honduras and El Salvador, shows that only fifty-three of these wars—10.8 percent—can reasonably be described as having a religious aspect, even if one counts each of the ten Crusades separately.

Of course, Wikipedia is not an ideal foundation on which to base an argument, not if one wishes it to be taken seriously. I have no doubt that my contention that religion does not cause war in the overwhelming majority of circumstances would meet with more than a little skepticism were I content to rely on an open-access encyclopedia as the primary support for it. Still, it served as a reasonable starting point. I was not looking forward to the arduous task of sitting down amidst a mountainous pile

of military histories and painstakingly assembling a more comprehensive list of wars, nor did I have much confidence that anyone would take it very seriously given my lack of academic standing, but I was fully prepared to do so since there didn't seem any other way to prove my hypothesis.

I had barely begun separating the teetering stacks of books dedicated to ancient and medieval warfare when Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod fortuitously happened to publish their three-volume *Encyclopedia of Wars*,<sup>9</sup> a massive 1,502-page compendium compiled by nine reputable professors of history, including the director of the Centre of Military History and the former head of the Centre for Defence Studies, of what amounts to a significant percentage of all of the wars that have taken place throughout recorded human history.

America's seventeen previously mentioned wars account for less than one percent of the 1,763 wars chronicled in the *Encyclopedia*. These 1,763 wars cannot be considered entirely comprehensive—for example, Shalmaneser III's thirty-four campaigns against various Syrian kingdoms are included in the single entry entitled "Assyrian Wars (c. 1032–c. 746 B.C.)." If one considers that Shalmaneser, despite his martial success, managed to conquer less territory than his father, Ashurnasirpal II, did, we should probably note that what is counted here as a single war could cover as many as 250 separate Assyrian conflicts. But we shall leave that for the compilers of a future military encyclopedia that will surely require another volume or ten, as the current encyclopedia contains more wars than anyone but a military expert has ever heard of. In any event, the very large size of the sample set definitely provides enough detail for the purpose of determining what percentage of Man's wars are caused by his diverse religious faiths with some degree of accuracy.

At the risk of providing significantly more ammunition to those who argue that religion causes war and invariably cite 1) The Crusades, 2) The Wars of Religion, and 3) The Thirty Years War, here is a list of all of the wars that the authors of the *Encyclopedia of Wars* saw fit to categorize as religious wars for one reason or another:

<sup>9</sup> Phillips, Charles and Alan Axelrod. *Encyclopedia of Wars*. New York: Facts on File, 2005. It's a rather handsome set, and although the summaries of the various wars are necessarily brief, it makes for some fascinating reading.

Albigensian Crusade, Almohad Conquest of Muslim Spain, Anglo-Scottish War (1559–1560), Arab Conquest of Carthage, Aragonese-Castilian War, Aragonese-French War (1209–1213), First Bearnese Revolt, Second Bearnese Revolt, Third Bearnese Revolt, First Bishop's War, Second Bishop's War, Raids of the Black Hundreds, Bohemian Civil War (1465–1471), Bohemian Palatine War, War in Bosnia, Brabant Revolution, Byzantine-Muslim War (633–642), Byzantine-Muslim War (645–656), Byzantine-Muslim War (688–679), Byzantine-Muslim War (698–718), Byzantine-Muslim War (739), Byzantine-Muslim War (741-752 Byzantine-Muslim War (778-783), Byzantine-Muslim War (797-798), Byzantine-Muslim War (803-809), Byzantine-Muslim War (830-841), Byzantine-Muslim War (851–863), Byzantine-Muslim War (871–885), Byzantine-Muslim War (960–976), Byzantine-Muslim War (995–999), Camisards' Rebellion, Castilian Conquest of Toledo, Charlemagne's Invasion of Northern Spain, Charlemagne's War against the Saxons, Count's War, Covenanters' Rebellion (1666), Covenanters' Rebellion (1679), Covenanters' Rebellion (1685), Crimean War, First Crusade, Second Crusade, Third Crusade, Fourth Crusade,<sup>10</sup> Fifth Crusade, Sixth Crusade, Seventh Crusade, Eighth Crusade, Ninth Crusade, Crusader-Turkish Wars (1100–1146), Crusader-Turkish Wars (1272–1291), Danish-Estonian War, German Civil War (1077–1106), Ghost Dance Uprising, Siege of Granada, First Iconoclastic War, Second Iconoclastic War, India-Pakistan Partition War, Irish Tithe War, Javanese invasion of Malacca, Great Java War, Kappel Wars, Khurramite's Revolt, Lebanese Civil War, Wars of the Lombard League, Luccan-Florentine War, Holy Wars of the Mad Mullah, Maryland's Religious War, Mecca-Medina War, Mexican Insurrections, War of the Monks, Mountain Meadows Massacre, Revolt of Muqanna, Crusade of Nicopolis, Padri War, Paulician War, Persian Civil War (1500–1503), Portuguese-Moroccan War (1458–1471), Portuguese-Moroccan War (1578), Portuguese-Omani Wars in East Africa, Rajput Rebellion against Aurangzeb, Revolt in Ravenna, First War of Religion, Second War of Religion, Third War of Religion, Fourth War of Religion, Fifth War of Religion, Sixth War of

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<sup>10</sup> Just being generous here. See Chapter XII.

Religion, Eighth War of Religion,<sup>11</sup> Ninth War of Religion, Roman-Persian War (421–422), Roman-Persian War (441), Russo Turkish War (1877–1878), First Sacred War, Second Sacred War, Third Sacred War, Saladin’s Holy War, Schmalkaldic War, Scottish Uprising against Mary of Guise, Serbo-Turkish War, Shimabara Revolt, War of the Sonderbund, Spanish Christian-Muslim War (912–928), Spanish Christian-Muslim War (977–997), Spanish Christian-Muslim War (1001–1031), Spanish Christian-Muslim War (1172–1212), Spanish Christian-Muslim War (1230–1248), Spanish Christian-Muslim War (1481–1492), Spanish Conquests in North Africa, Swedish War, Thirty Years War, Transylvania-Hapsburg War, Tukolor-French War, Turko-Persian Wars, United States War on Terror, Vellore Mutiny, Vjayanagar Wars, First Villmergen War, Second Villmergen War, Visigothic-Frankish War.

That is 123 wars in all, which sounds as if it would support the case of the New Atheists, until one recalls that these 123 wars represent only 6.92 percent of all the wars recorded in the encyclopedia. However, it does show that skeptics would have been right to doubt my Wikipedia-based estimate, as I *overestimated* the amount of war attributable to religion by nearly 60 percent. It’s also interesting to note that more than half of these religious wars, sixty-six in all, were waged by Islamic nations, which is rather more than might be statistically expected considering that the first war in which Islam was involved took place almost three millennia after the first war chronicled in the *Encyclopedia*, Akkad’s conquest of Sumer in 2325 B.C.

In light of this evidence, the fact that a specific religion is currently sparking a great deal of conflict around the globe cannot reasonably be used to indict all religious faith, especially when one considers that removing that single religion from the equation means that all of the other religious faiths combined only account for 3.35 percent of humanity’s wars.

The historical evidence is conclusive. Religion is not a primary cause of war.

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> Ironically, the Seventh War of Religion was not a religious war. The *Encyclopedia of Wars* has this to say: “The Seventh War of Religion in 1580, also known as the ‘Lovers’ War’ had little to do with hostilities between the Catholics and Protestants. Instead fighting was instigated by the actions of Margaret, the promiscuous wife of Henry IV of Navarre.”

## **The Ontological Argument for Religious War**

An ontological argument is one that depends solely on reason and intuition rather than observation or evidence. Its most famous application is an argument for the existence of God, first used by St. Anselm of Canterbury, and it states that because we can conceive of God, something of which nothing greater can be imagined, God must exist. Rene Descartes also made use of a variant of this argument, but it has never been an important part of Christian theology due to its rejection by Thomas Aquinas. Its fame is more due to its later resurrection and rejections by David Hume and Bertrand Russell.

Richard Dawkins describes the ontological argument for the existence of God to be an infantile one. He pronounces himself offended at the very idea that “such logomachist trickery” could be used to produce such grand conclusions.<sup>12</sup> And he’s correct to reject it, in my opinion, as ontological arguments boil down to the idea that if something can be conceived, it therefore must exist. No supporting evidence is necessary, mere reason and intuition suffice to prove the matter. Daniel Dennett scorns it as well, describing it as the logical equivalent of a carnival fun-house illusion.

It is curious, then, that Dawkins, like Sam Harris, so blithely subscribes to an ontological argument in support of the idea that religion is the implicit cause of war. While both men are too cautious to ever come right out and state that they believe religion is the direct and primary cause of war, most likely due to the fact that it is so easy to disprove such a belief, they nevertheless attempt to insinuate that this is the case by repeatedly associating religious faith with group violence and military conflict. For example, despite admitting that “wars . . . are seldom actually about theological disagreements,” Dawkins makes nineteen specific connections between religion and war in *The God Delusion* while Harris does likewise on twenty-nine occasions<sup>13</sup> throughout *The End of Faith*.

They justify these accusations by insinuation on the basis of an argument concocted in order to

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<sup>12</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 81.

<sup>13</sup> To be fair to Harris, I must note that many of these twenty-nine references are to specific connections between Islam and war.

attack religion as “one of the most pervasive causes of conflict in our world.”<sup>14</sup> This is done by claiming that while religion is not the *explicit* cause of most wars, it is still responsible for the fact that those wars are taking place because religious faith is the reason there are two different sides in the first place. Of course, this is nothing more than an ontological argument based on their ability to imagine why war happens to exist in the first place, but both men try to conceal that fact by constructing a pair of shaky parallel arguments based on the idea that religion causes division.

Their arguments go like this:

  **Religion causes division between people.**<sup>15</sup>

*“Religion is undoubtedly a divisive force”*

—DAWKINS

*“The religious divisions in our world are self-evident”*

—HARRIS



  **Religion provides the dominant label by which people are divided into groups.**

*“Without religion there would be no labels by which to decide whom to oppress and whom to avenge.”<sup>16</sup>*

—DAWKINS

*“The only difference between these groups is what they believe about God.”<sup>17</sup>*

—HARRIS



  **Wars are fought between divided groups of people with different labels.**

*“Look carefully at any region of the world where you find intractable enmity and violence between rival groups. I cannot guarantee that you’ll find religions as the dominant labels for in-groups and out-groups. But it’s a very good bet.”*

—DAWKINS

*“Religion is as much a living spring of violence today as it was at any time in the past.”*

—HARRIS

  **Therefore, religion is the implicit cause of war.**

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1 <sup>4</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 27, 29.

1 <sup>5</sup> This is an ontological argument in itself. There is plenty of evidence that religion tends to *unite* people.

1 <sup>6</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 259. Using this quote here might appear to be a little unfair, as Dawkins is only referring to the conflict in Northern Ireland, except that he is doing so as part of an example which he subsequently applies to “any region of the world where you find intractable enmity and violence between rival groups.”

1 <sup>7</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 27.

*“The problem’s name is God.”*<sup>18</sup>

—DAWKINS

*“Faith . . . the most prolific source of violence in our history”*

—HARRIS

*Quod istis erat demonstrandum.*

Superficial thinkers who know very little history find this argument compelling because the statements flow nicely from one into the other, and because there is a certain amount of truth in each of the assertions which lead up to the final conclusion. It cannot be denied that religion HAS been known to divide friends and families as well as entire nations. Religion HAS provided a marker by which opposing groups identify each other. War IS fought between divided groups of people bearing different labels; it takes two to tangle. The problem is that merely stringing together three statements that are factually true in some circumstances does not always lead to a logical conclusion.

Consider the same argument, only this time substituting three similarly valid assertions.

1. Pelicans eat sardines.
2. Pelicans improve the sardine species through aiding natural selection.
3. Natural selection is the mechanism through which evolution occurs.
4. Therefore, pelicans are the implicit cause of evolution.

Now, I’m no evolutionary biologist, but I’m fairly certain that human evolution is not dependent upon pelicans. Or elephant evolution, penguin evolution, or even, for that matter, the intelligent machine evolution<sup>19</sup> that will lead us all into joyous mental union with Gaia in the next three decades. The fourth statement cannot be logically concluded from the preceding three assertions, no matter how much these great rationalist champions of reason would like to pretend it does.

This lack of a logical conclusion is not the implicit argument’s only flaw, because the first two

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<sup>18</sup> Dawkins is quoting Salman Rushdie here, but he is doing so approvingly.

<sup>19</sup> Although if Charles Stross could work lobsters into the Singularity, I have no doubt that he could find a role for pelicans too.



assertions are demonstrably more false than true. For example, in *Breaking the Spell*, Daniel Dennett informs us that language is far older than any current religion or religion for which we possess historical evidence. If Dennett is correct, then it is obvious that the existence of diverse languages (and therefore different human groups) in the absence of different religions slashes the legs out from under this surreptitious attempt to blame the reality of war on religious faith by way of the back-door.

Consider the division of the Franks, a single nation ruled by Charlemagne, as he is known today in France. Karl der Grosse, as Charlemagne is known in Germany, died in 814 A.D., whereupon Louis le Débonnaire (or if you prefer, Ludwig der Fromm) inherited the Kingdom of the Franks, which thanks to Charlemagne/Karl der Grosse's conquests, was now styled an empire. Louis/Ludwig had four sons and his ill-considered attempts to divide the empire between them led to four civil wars which finally came to an end with the Treaty of Verdun in 843. His eldest son, Lothar, received the Middle Frankish Kingdom, which is now Italy, the Netherlands, Alsace-Lorraine, Burgundy, and Provence, while his third son, Louis the German, inherited what is now, unsurprisingly, known as Germany, and his youngest son, Charles the Bald, ended up with the lands west of the Rhône, or France. (Pepin, Louis/Ludwig's second son, died before his father.)

When Lothar died in 855, he divided his kingdom into three more parts, one for each of his three sons, Louis II, Charles of Provence, and Lothar II. As one might expect, by 858 war had broken out, with Louis II allying with his uncle Louis the German against Lothar II and Charles the Bald. More wars were fought over the centuries, the Eastern and Western Franks grew more and more apart, until finally it reached the point where they spoke separate languages, possessed separate identities, and, in the end, adopted different forms of Christianity. But the division of the Franks into Germans and Frenchmen predates the division of Christendom into Catholics and Protestants by more than 675 years.

Religion obviously had no more to do with the division of the Franks than it did with the 1993 division of Czechoslovakia into Slovakia and the Czech Republic or last year's divorce between Serbia

and Montenegro. It couldn't have, because there was no religious difference between the divided parties.

Regardless of whether one argues that religion is the explicit cause of war or the implicit one, the argument simply does not stand in the face of the historical evidence. History shows very clearly that the vast majority of divisions between different groups of people are not based on religious faith, and that religion is not the dominant label by which most distinct groups are identified. The New Atheist argument that religion is the implicit cause of war fails in every single way.

And it is more than ironic, it borders being completely bizarre that both Dawkins and Harris should insist on the absolute need for scientific evidence to prove God's existence while simultaneously basing the major part of their case against religious faith on arguments that are ontological, illogical, and empirically incorrect.

The historical evidence is conclusive. Religious faith very seldom causes war, either implicitly or explicitly. God is not the problem.

## Chapter VII

### THE END OF SAM HARRIS

*If I could wave a magic wand and get rid of either rape or religion, I would not hesitate to get rid of religion.*

—SAM HARRIS

Sam Harris is a grave embarrassment to atheism, intellectuals, and the Stanford University philosophy department. The awarding of the 2005 PEN/Martha Albrand award for Nonfiction to *The End of Faith* bears more than a little resemblance to Columbia University's decision to give the 2001 Bancroft prize to Michael Bellesiles<sup>1</sup> for his alternate history novel, *Arming America*. Harris's basic thesis, which asserts that religious faith poses an imminent danger to humanity, is every bit as demonstrably incorrect as Bellesiles's argument ever was. If his arguments in support of that thesis are less intentionally fraudulent than those presented by Bellesiles, they are no less invalid.

Harris isn't attacking any specific religious faith, but all of them at once.<sup>2</sup> However, his definition of religious faith is as prone to bursts of punctuated mutation as are his multiple definitions of atheism quoted in the first chapter. His ignorance of the basic tenets of the faiths he targets most directly is astonishing, especially considering that he's not attacking obscure Iraqi Mandaean or Bakongolese worshippers of Nzambi Mpungu, but the world's two most popular religions. For example, Harris repeatedly demonstrates an inability to distinguish between the relative significance of the Old Testament and the New Testament to Christians, while raising issues that have been debated by theologians and philosophers for nearly 2,000 years as if they were new and no one had ever thought of them before. Reading Harris, one would never know that the evidential problem of evil, or reconciling

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1 The Bancroft award was rightly rescinded the following year later for "scholarly misconduct" and Bellesiles resigned his position as a tenured professor of history at Emory University after a pair of university inquiries examined his research. Bellesiles was claiming that widespread gun ownership in America dates from the Civil War, not its founding.

2 Except Buddhism, naturally.

the idea of a benevolent God with the fact that evil exists, is considered to be one of the principle intellectual puzzles of Christianity and *has been for centuries*.<sup>3</sup>

To put into perspective how completely Harris ignores the active and ongoing intellectual debate that has continued within the Christian community since the apostles Paul and Peter were arguing over whether Jewish Christians—about the only Christians at the time—were required to keep kosher, I note that my friend and pastor, Dr. Greg Boyd, published a book on the subject entitled *Satan & the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*<sup>4</sup> in 2001. He then published *Is God to Blame?: Moving Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Evil* in 2003. His 1997 book, *God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* also went into the subject in some detail, while *Letters From a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions about Christianity*, published in 1995, provided a less arduous look at some of the same issues. And Dr. Boyd is far from the only theologian to examine the subject. In addition to the many other Christian authors who have also addressed it, you may remember there was a very popular book entitled *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People* written by a rabbi, Harold Kushner, back in the early 1980s.

It's clear from both the nature of his arguments and the absence of any relevant references in his bibliography that Harris has never bothered to examine these specific and, in some cases, incredibly detailed responses to the old dichotomy; instead, he merely repeats it and prances away congratulating himself for having posed what he declares is an “insurmountable” conundrum. But how can he possibly know that, considering that he clearly hasn't even looked at most of the proposed answers? This behavior demonstrates Harris's intellectual immaturity as well as his irresponsible failure to do even the most rudimentary research into his chosen subject.

But perhaps that's not entirely fair. While Harris doesn't once cite minor Christian intellectual

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3 “The problem of vindicating an omnipotent and omniscient God in the face of evil (this is traditionally called the problem of theodicy) is insurmountable.” Harris, *The End of Faith*, 173. And yet it's not insurmountable, but very easily solved, at least from a Christian perspective. It's interesting, though, that he considers free will to be an incoherency.

4 And yes, it's about as light and fluffy read as the title suggests. Start with *Letters From a Skeptic* if you're interested.

figures such as Tertullian, Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, John Wesley, G.K. Chesterton, or even C.S. Lewis, he does find it relevant to provide one reference to Tim LaHaye, thirteen references to Hitler, Himmler, and Hess, and six whole pages dedicated to Noam Chomsky. Because, after all, no one is more suited to explain the Christian faith quite so well as an elderly author of pop religious fantasies, a trio of dead Nazis, and a left-wing Jewish linguist.<sup>5</sup>

Harris is also shamelessly intellectually dishonest. Anyone planning to debate Sam Harris would do well to ensure that there is a moderator, preferably one with a shock collar, as Harris is one of those slippery characters who invariably attempts to avoid answering all questions posed to him while simultaneously accusing the other party of arguing in bad faith and failing to address his points. I haven't been pursuing a doctoral degree in neuroscience for the last twenty years or anything, but I seem to recall that "projection" is how psychologists describe that sort of behavior. It doesn't matter whom he's debating, Harris will invariably declare himself to be misrepresented and misunderstood, usually by his second response. It seems to escape him that if he's so often misunderstood, the only solution is to express himself more clearly.

Finally, for an individual who claims to be passionately dedicated to reason and names one section of his book "The Necessity of Logical Coherence," Harris is an appallingly incoherent logician. He frequently fails to gather the relevant data required to prove his case, and on several occasions inadvertently presents evidence that demonstrates precisely the opposite of that which he is attempting to prove. His postulates are often only partially true, and even when the information on which he bases an argument is reliable, the conclusions he draws are seldom reasonable.

But there is no need to take my word for any of this. Unlike Sam Harris, I believe in offering substantial support for my assertions. One might even dare to call it an empirical approach. So, in the best spirit of scientific inquiry, here is the hypothesis: Sam Harris is an ignorant, incompetent, and

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<sup>5</sup> In fairness to Harris, he has clearly at least paged through St. Augustine's *Confessions* and *City of God*. I merely note that Augustine is considered one of the FOUR Latin Fathers of the Church and that there has been the occasional book written about the Christian faith since 430 A.D. But seriously, how could anyone possibly write an entire book attacking the modern Christian faith without even glancing at *Mere Christianity*?

intellectually dishonest individual who attacks religious faith because it stands in the way of his dream of the ultimate destruction of America. While this may sound more than a little extreme at the moment, allow me to present the evidence, and you, the reader, shall be the judge.

### **The Ignorant Atheist**

In his two books, Harris commits dozens of easily demonstrable factual and logical errors. While detailing these errors in their fullness would fill a book in its own right, perhaps highlighting a few of the more obvious mistakes will suffice to illustrate the case.

**1) Factual error.** Harris begins *The End of Faith* by strongly implying that almost all suicide bombers are Muslims. Jane's Intelligence Review reports that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who are not Muslims but a Marxist liberation front that committed 168 of the 273 suicide bombings that took place between 1980 and 2000, have historically been the leading practitioners of suicide bombing.<sup>6</sup> Harris tries to cover up his blunder in the Notes section of the paperback edition by claiming that to describe the Tigers as secular "is misleading" because they "are Hindus who undoubtedly believe many improbable things about the nature of life and death." But the Tamil Tigers themselves expressly claim secular status, a declaration supported by the fact that the recently deceased Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief political strategist and ideologue, was a Roman Catholic.<sup>7</sup> It's also worth noting that slain Tigers are buried rather than cremated according to Hindu ritual. More importantly, there is no definition of "secular" that precludes a belief in improbable things about the nature of life and death or anything else, including the Labor Theory of Value,

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<sup>6</sup> Gunaratna, Rohan. "Suicide Terrorism, a Global Threat." *Jane's Intelligence Review*. 20 Oct. 2000. The Karim Puligal are known to have committed 244 suicide attacks prior to the 2001 ceasefire, invented both the suicide vest and the naval suicide attack, and are considered to be the world's most effective suicide strike force due to their discipline and lack of religious fanaticism.

<sup>7</sup> Balasingham died of cancer in London on 14 December, 2006. A BBC editor described him as the only man within the organization who had any influence on Tiger leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran and regretted his death as the only moderating element within the militant group.

String Theory, or multiple universes.

**2) Logical error.** In *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Sam Harris borrows from Stephen F. Roberts in challenging Christians with a variant of the One Less God argument.<sup>8</sup> He informs Christians that they reject Islam in “precisely the way” that Muslims reject Christianity, which is also the same reason he rejects all religions.<sup>9</sup> So, either Harris believes that the Christian God exists and is a powerful spirit of evil or he doesn’t know what is almost literally the first thing about Christian theology. Christians WORSHIP the one Creator God, but they BELIEVE in the supernatural existence of many spiritual beings that are often worshipped and are legitimately described as gods. Harris has not read the Bible very closely if he is under the impression that Christians do not believe in “the god of this age,” “the prince of this world,” or any of the rulers, authorities, and powers mentioned in Ephesians 6:12.<sup>10</sup>

**3) Factual error.** Harris claims “religion has been the *explicit* cause of literally millions of deaths in the last ten years” in these places: Palestine, the Balkans, Northern Ireland, Kashmir, Sudan, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Caucasus.<sup>11</sup> However, even if we accept his assertion that these conflicts are all religious in nature, the sum total of deaths in all these places since 1994 is most likely below 750,000. Palestine is often in the headlines, but there have only been about 7,500 deaths on both sides combined over the last ten years. In the

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8 “I contend we are both atheists, I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours.” This is probably the most ignorant argument for atheism in common use today, stating that Christians are ur-atheists who only believe in one more god than the atheist. It is the result of confusing belief with worship and taking the concept of monotheism too literally.

9 I note that Christians do not reject Islam for the same reason Muslims reject Christianity. Christians do not believe that Mohammed was a prophet, whereas Muslims do not believe that Jesus Christ was the resurrected Son of God, the Word made flesh. There is a considerable difference there, especially since Muslims honor Jesus as a prophet.

10 There’s plenty of room for Christian debate on the essential difference between God and gods, but the relevant point here is that Christians believe in the literal existence of multiple supernatural beings that are worshipped by human beings. By every atheist standard, that’s a god.

11 Harris says these are merely a few cases in point, but given that there haven’t been enough explicitly religious-related killings in the entire world over the last decade to reach the smallest number that can qualify as literal millions, it’s clear that he is simply making up these numbers. The emphasis on “explicit” is his.

Balkans, there were 96,495 deaths (most of which occurred before 2004), while fewer than 100 of the 3,225 deaths in Northern Ireland since 1969 occurred in the last decade. The Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation reports that most of the 102,800 deaths in formerly Indonesian East Timor took place in the 1970s, and the estimated 150,000 fatalities in the 1998–2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean war pale in comparison with the 1.5 million deaths attributed to the “Red Terror” previously committed by Ethiopia’s atheist Derg regime.

**4) Factual error.** Harris says that certainty about the next life is simply incompatible with tolerance in this one. But since Sam Harris is tolerated and allowed to live unmolested in a nation where 150 million people, by his account, possess such certainty, this is obviously wrong. The statement is particularly ironic given how he argues explicitly *against* tolerance for the religious faithful.<sup>12</sup> Given the evidence of Harris himself, it is certainty about the nonexistence of the next life that is incompatible with tolerance in this one.

**5) Factual error.** Harris claims that human standards of morality are what Christians use to establish God’s goodness.<sup>13</sup> This is incorrect. Christians do not believe that God is subject to human morality. This should be obvious from considering the Ten Commandments. Is God prone to have another god before Himself? Does God have a neighbor whose wife he might covet? Who is God’s father and how might He fail to honor him?

**6) Factual error.** Harris states that “questions about morality are questions about happiness and suffering.”<sup>14</sup> They are not. Questions about morality concern what action is correct in light of

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<sup>1 2</sup> Harris has subsequently claimed that he only advocates “conversational intolerance.” But it strikes me as supremely counterproductive for an already unpopular minority to try to win friends and influence people by behaving in an even more obnoxious manner than they do already. As to whether this is evidence of Harris’s irrationality or merely his social autism, I shall leave it to the reader to decide.

<sup>1 3</sup> Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 55.

<sup>1 4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



the moral system to which the individual subscribes. Questions about Christian morality, the specific moral system Harris is addressing in *Letter to a Christian Nation*, are questions about what actions are deemed right in the eyes of God. In any case, morality should never be confused with a hedonic metric of happiness or suffering.

**7) Logical error.** Harris claims religious moderates are responsible for the actions of religious extremists. But no individual can possibly be held responsible for the actions of another individual over whom he has no authority or influence and has never even met.

**8) Logical error.** Harris asserts that competing religious doctrines have shattered the world into separate moral communities.<sup>15</sup> He also claims that the objective source of moral order is distinguishing between better and worse ways of seeking happiness.<sup>16</sup> However, he cites no evidence that Christians seek happiness any differently than Hindus, nor does he explain, precisely, how Jews seek happiness differently than Muslims. It's worth noting that Harris has probably caused greater human unhappiness with his books than his fellow atheist, Jeffrey Dahmer, ever did with his exotic diet, so by his own reckoning, Harris is less moral than Dahmer.

**9) Logical error.** Harris claims that religious prudery contributes daily to the surplus of human misery while bemoaning the existence of AIDS in Africa and other sexually transmitted diseases in the United States. But this widespread disease is the direct result of the sexual promiscuity that Christians condemn as immoral and which Harris praises as the pursuit of happiness. More to the point, scientific research shows that religious individuals are both happier<sup>17</sup> and more

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1 <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 79.

1 <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 23.

1 <sup>7</sup> “*This kind of pattern is typical—religious involvement is associated with modest increases in happiness.*” Nielsen, M.E. (2006) “Religion and Happiness.” Retrieved 20 May 2007 from <http://www.psywww.com/psyrelig/happy.htm>.

sexually satisfied<sup>18</sup> than non-religious individuals.

**10) Factual error.** Harris asserts that the entire civilized world now agrees that slavery is an abomination. Given that there are 700,000 slaves<sup>19</sup> being trafficked across international borders every year, this is a significant exaggeration. In September 2003, *National Geographic* reported that “there are more slaves today than were seized from Africa in four centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.” Obviously, more than a few people in the civilized world disagree.

**11) Logical error.** Harris says Muslims have “far fewer grievances” with Western imperialism than the rest of the world and that these grievances are “purely theological.” As of this writing, the United States and twenty-one other countries have more than 225,000 troops occupying Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. Regardless of one’s opinion about the wisdom of the ongoing occupations, one should be able to recognize that there’s nothing theological about being aggrieved at the military occupation of your country.

**12) Factual error.** In *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris twice cites the high American rate of infant mortality in a disingenuous attempt to associate poor health and/or inferior medical science with the American rate of religious adherence, despite his subsequent claim that he isn't actually making any such argument. Regardless, he neglects to mention that this rate—the second highest in the developed world—is primarily due to the fact that the U.S.A. has the best neonatal care in the world, with the most neonatologists and neonatal intensive care beds per

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1 <sup>8</sup> “Previous research has produced mixed results. Davidson et al. (1995) reported that religious commitment (as measured by frequency of church attendance) did impact on “physiological” sexual satisfaction, but not “psychological” satisfaction. Davidson and Moore (1996) found no relationship between sexual satisfaction and religiosity among female undergraduates. . . . The three items related to religiosity, when considered together, did account for a small, but statistically significant amount of the variation in sexual satisfaction.” M. Young, G. Denny, T. Young, and R. Luquis. “Sexual Satisfaction in Married Women,” *American Journal of Health Studies* 2000.

1 <sup>9</sup> Trafficking in Persons Report, 2006.

capita. Premature babies have a fighting chance to live in the United States; whereas in other developed countries, most live births below 3.3 pounds are not registered and never appear in their infant mortality statistics. Religious America's superior medical technology likewise accounts for the world's highest five-year cancer survival rate, which at 64.6 percent for all cancers is as much as 81 percent higher than some European countries and 22.5 percent higher than the acclaimed Dutch health care system. More importantly, while comparing American societal health to that of "the most atheist societies," Harris forgets that he has defined Buddhism as a form of atheism, therefore the societies to which religious America's health must be compared are not historically Christian countries like Norway, Iceland, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, and Belgium, but rather heavily Buddhist countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Laos, and Vietnam. The U.S.A.'s Human Development Index rank is 10, significantly better than the average rank of 114 for the seven "most atheist" countries, so both Harris's implied and explicit arguments fail based on his own measures and definitions.

### **The Incompetent Atheist**

One of the most oft-cited passages in *Letter to a Christian Nation* is Harris's Red State-Blue State argument, in which he purports to prove that there is no correlation between Christian conservatism and social health. Richard Dawkins found the data to be "striking," so much so that he quotes the following paragraph from Harris's book in its entirety.

*While political party affiliation in the United States is not a perfect indicator of religiosity, it is no secret that the 'red [Republican] states' are primarily red because of the overwhelming political influence of conservative Christians. If there were a strong correlation between Christian conservatism and social health, we might expect to see some sign of it in red-state America. We don't. Of the 25 cities with the lowest rates of violent crime, 62 percent are in 'blue' [Democrat] states and 38 percent are in 'red' [Republican] states. Of the twenty-five most dangerous cities, 76 percent are in red states, and 24 percent*

*are in blue states. In fact, three of the five most dangerous cities in the U.S. are in the pious state of Texas. The twelve states with the highest rates of burglary are red. Twenty-four of the twenty-nine states with the highest rates of theft are red. Of the twenty-two states with the highest rates of murder, seventeen are red.*<sup>20</sup>

There are several layers of problems with this apparent proof of Christian immorality. The first is that political identity is a very poor substitute for religiosity. As the 2001 ARIS study showed, only 14.1 percent of Americans are adherents of one of the various churches of atheism. Since about half of eligible Americans bother to vote, the maximum potential number of godless blues in the country is 28.2 percent of the total, which would have accounted for 29.4 percent of John Kerry and Ralph Nader's combined 59,028,109 votes, if every atheist, agnostic, and non-believer in God had voted Democrat or Green in 2004.

But they didn't. In fact, the exit polls indicated that atheists were less likely to vote than the religious faithful, as only ten percent of voters in the CNN exit polls described themselves as "no religion."<sup>21</sup> That godless 10 percent did lean heavily "blue," as more than two-thirds voted for Kerry or Nader,<sup>22</sup> but a third went "red" without an imaginary friend providing them with instructions to vote for George W. Bush.

This means that out of a potential 17,338,916 godless voters in 2004, only 12,148,002 showed up to vote, of whom 8,260,641 can reasonably be described as "blue." This leaves another 51,178,772 voters who are "blue," but not godless. Setting aside the fact that Harris provides no evidence indicating that the 121.4 million Americans who voted committed all, or even any, of the violent crimes, burglaries, and thefts he mentions—there were another 80,451,439 eligible Americans who didn't vote, not including the 2,861,915 felons out on parole or probation who couldn't vote<sup>23</sup> and just

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<sup>20</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 229.

<sup>21</sup> Given Nader's success among the most highly educated voters, I would guess that High Church atheists voted more heavily than the norm, but their high level of participation was outweighed by the relative lack of participation by their more numerous Low Church counterparts. You may recall that the broad spectrum of atheism accounts for about 14 percent of the American population.

<sup>22</sup> 67 percent for Kerry, 1 percent for Nader, to be exact.

<sup>23</sup> McDonald, Michael, PhD. "2004 Voting-Age and Voting-Eligible Population Estimates and Voter Turnout." George Mason University. <[http://elections.gmu.edu/Voter\\_Turnout\\_2004.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/Voter_Turnout_2004.htm)>

might have committed a crime or two that year—it is absurd to credit all of the supposedly law-abiding behavior of “blue” voters to the 16 percent of them who lack religious faith.

If this isn’t sufficient evidence of the foolishness of trying to equate Democratic votes with atheism, the ARIS 2001 survey reported a higher *percentage* of Democrats among Jews, Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, Buddhists, and Muslims than among the not religious, of whom only 30 percent reported a preference for the Democratic Party. (However, the not religious tend to describe themselves as political independents, not Republicans.)

So while the data may be striking, the argument based upon it can only be described as strikingly stupid. But just for kicks, let’s pretend that it is not a measure so ridiculously inaccurate as to be completely useless. Let’s imagine that Harris’s metric really is relevant, that an American voter’s 2004 presidential vote truly is indicative of his religious faith, or the lack thereof, and that statewide criminal statistics are a reasonable measure of an individual’s predilection for immoral behavior.<sup>24</sup> This exercise in imagination is necessary, in fact, because only by accepting his measure at face value and examining it in detail can one fully grasp the true depth of Harris’s exceptional incompetence.

Richard Dawkins may be excused for his ignorance of the American governmental structure since he is not an American, but rather a subject of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, in right of the United Kingdom. But Sam Harris has no similar excuse for overlooking the fact that there is a unit of regional self-government below the state level, a useful little unit by which both electoral votes and criminal acts are recorded.

In other words, Sam Harris should have been looking at the electoral and criminal data by county, not by state.

Consider the “red” state of Florida. Its eleven “blue” counties account for 44 percent of the

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<sup>24</sup> This is a common statistical error known as the Ecological Fallacy. Harris appears to be particularly susceptible to it.

state’s population, but more than 50 percent of its murders and 60 percent of its robberies.<sup>25</sup> The bluest county, Gadsden, voted for Kerry by a 70–30 margin and had the state’s highest murder rate at 12.8 per 100,000, while the two reddest counties, Baker and Okaloosa, averaged a murder rate of 0.7 per 100,000 to go with their identical 78–22 margins for George Bush. And this was the case even though the population of the two “red” counties is more than four times that of “blue” Gadsden.

This tendency for “blue” counties to be home to higher crime rates is true in “blue” states as well. For example, the “blue” state of Maryland’s five “blue” counties possessed an average murder rate of 13.22 per 100,000 residents, which is nearly fifteen times higher than the 0.89 murder rate in Maryland’s nineteen “red” counties. And the District of Columbia, which voted 91 percent “blue” in 2004, also happened to possess the highest murder rate in the nation, which at 35.7 per 100,000 was nearly seven times the U.S. national average of 5.5.

Given that “red” counties have murder rates which tend to range from five to twenty times lower than “blue” counties, this is a pretty powerful sign that the “strong correlation between Christian conservatism and social health” which Harris claimed to be unable to find does, in fact, exist. But in case you’re not convinced yet, consider the cities to which Harris refers and see what the red-blue divide reveals once one looks at the political orientation of the county in which those safe and dangerous cities are located instead of the state.

**25 Safest and Most Dangerous Cities in 2005, with State and County Voting Percentages<sup>26</sup>**

<b>25 Safest Cities</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>County</b>		<b>25 Most Dangerous Cities</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>County</b>
Newton, MA	Blue 62	Blue 76		Camden, NJ	Blue 53	Blue 63
Clarkstown, NY	Blue 60	Red 50		Detroit, MI	Blue 52	Blue 70

<sup>25</sup> Having spent several years living near Jacksonville, I can personally attest to the fact that most of Duval County’s nominally “red” violent crime in fact takes place in its “blue” urban strongholds. So the “blue” responsibility for murders and robberies taking place in Florida is probably closer to 61 percent and 68 percent respectively.

<sup>26</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> Annual America’s Safest (and Most Dangerous) Cities. Morgan Quitno Press. This is the same source to which Harris refers in *Letter to a Christian Nation* on page 45, although unfortunately he does not specify the year. <<http://www.morganquitno.com/cit06pop.htm#25>>. The rankings are based on FBI data for 2005 released on September 18, 2006.

Amherst, NY	Blue 60	Blue 58		St. Louis, MO	Red 53	<i>Blue 80</i>
Mission Viejo, CA	Blue 55	<i>Red 61</i>		Flint, MI	Blue 52	Blue 61
Brick Township, NJ	Blue 53	<i>Red 60</i>		Richmond, VA <sup>27</sup>	Red 54	<i>Blue 70</i>
Troy, MI	Blue 52	Blue 51		Baltimore, MD	Blue 57	Blue 83
Thousand Oaks, CA	Blue 55	<i>Red 52</i>		Atlanta, GA	Red 59	<i>Blue 59</i>
Round Rock, TX	Red 62	Red 66		New Orleans, LA	Red 57	<i>Blue 78</i>
Lake Forest, CA	Blue 55	<i>Red 61</i>		Gary, IN	Red 60	<i>Blue 61</i>
Cary, NC	Red 56	Red 51		Birmingham, AL	Red 63	Red 54
Colonie, NY	Blue 60	Blue 63		Richmond, CA	Blue 55	Blue 63
Fargo, ND	Red 63	Red 60		Cleveland, OH	Red 51	<i>Blue 67</i>
Irvine, CA	Blue 55	<i>Red 61</i>		Washington, DC	Blue 91	Blue 91
Orem, UT	Red 73	Red 87		West Palm Beach, FL	Red 52	<i>Blue 61</i>
Dover Township, NJ	Blue 53	<i>Red 57</i>		Compton, CA	Blue 55	Blue 75
Warwick, RI	Blue 60	Blue 59		Memphis, TN	Red 57	<i>Blue 58</i>
Sunnyvale, CA	Blue 55	Blue 64		Dayton, OH	Red 51	<i>Blue 51</i>
Hamilton Township, NJ	Blue 53	Blue 62		San Bernardino, CA	Blue 55	<i>Red 56</i>
Parma, OH	Red 51	<i>Blue 67</i>		Springfield, MA	Blue 62	Blue 72
Canton Township, MI	Blue 52	Blue 70		Cincinnati, OH	Red 51	Red 53
Greece, NY	Blue 60	Blue 62		Oakland, CA	Blue 55	Blue 63
Simi Valley, CA	Blue 55	<i>Red 52</i>		Dallas, TX	Red 62	Red 51
Coral Springs, FL	Red 52	<i>Blue 65</i>		Newark, NJ	Blue 53	Blue 71
Port St. Lucie, FL	Red 52	<i>Blue 52</i>		Hartford, CT	Blue 56	Blue 84
Centennial, CO	Red 52	Red 51		Little Rock, AR	Red 54	<i>Blue 56</i>
	17 Blue	<b>13 Red</b>			13 Red	<b>21 Blue</b>

The first thing one notices is that Sam Harris can't even manage elementary school math. The percentage for the safest cities determined by state voting patterns is not 62 percent; seventeen blue state cities divided by twenty-five total cities equals 68 percent safe blue cities. (Apparently it's only division that gives him trouble because he does manage to subtract 62 from 100 successfully, which explains his incorrect percentage of 38 percent safe cities located in red states.)<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Don't confuse Richmond County with Richmond City if you're checking this out yourself. The city is much more populous than the county and is more than fifty-three miles away.

<sup>28</sup> It's clearly a math problem, not a question of state identification or data from a previous year, because the only other mathematical possibilities are 64–36 and 60–40.

His math issues are minor. What is much more important is the way in which using the more accurate county data demonstrates that Harris's conclusions are precisely backward. Thirteen of the twenty-five safest cities are situated in RED counties and twenty-one of the twenty-five most dangerous cities are located in BLUE counties. This provides precisely the information that Harris claimed to have sought in vain, it is definitive proof that the social health of Red America is significantly superior to that of Blue America *by Harris's own chosen measure*.<sup>29</sup>

By applying his metric to the state-wide voting instead of the more precise and relevant county, Harris exaggerates the number of safe blue cities by 20 percent and minimizes the number of dangerous blue cities by an astounding 70 percent! How Harris could possibly have made such a mistake is a mystery indeed, since the fact that a) crime rates are higher in urban areas, and b) Christian conservatives are usually denigrated as rednecks, not sophisticated big city dwellers, should have alerted him to the probability that something was wrong with his calculations.

The question that remains to be answered is if Harris published these misleading conclusions through innocent incompetence or not. Was he being knowingly deceptive in attempting to blame religious red staters for the crimes committed by their godless blue county residents? While it's possible that he wasn't aware that the county data was readily available on CNN's Election 2004 site, there are troubling signs that his decision to use the misleading statewide data instead may have been intentional.

It is Harris's reference to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report on page 95 of *The End of Faith* that shows he must have been aware that the statewide data was not the most accurate available, since he cannot have examined it without seeing that the FBI records crime by state *and by county* throughout the UCR. That's where I got the county data for Florida and Maryland myself. It's also worth noting that if Harris was primarily interested in examining the difference between "red" states and "blue" states, there was never any need to bring cities into the discussion at all, because Morgan Quitno also

<sup>29</sup> I repeat: it's a stupid measure. But Harris chose it, which speaks volumes about both his incompetence and his ability to reason.



publishes a separate report on which states are the most and least dangerous. However, because a 63 percent “red” state, North Dakota, was named the safest in the nation, that particular report would not have served Harris’s purpose in trying to prove that religious red staters commit more crime than their supposedly godless blue state counterparts.

Perhaps Sam Harris has a good explanation for what appears to be either total incompetence or some very shady statistical shenanigans. If so, he would do well to provide it.

### **The Intellectually Dishonest Atheist**

By this point, it should be clear to the rational reader that Sam Harris cannot be trusted with statistics, or even to correctly calculate a tip. But because his many factual and logical errors, however suspicious, could merely indicate that he is careless, proving intellectual dishonesty requires evidence of a deliberate intent to deceive. Of course, intent isn’t always easy to discern, let alone prove, as there must be at least some indication that the deceiver knows the truth that would weaken his argument but is electing to intentionally hide it.

Sometimes such deception is easy to detect. While talking about the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases in *The End of Faith*, Harris cites a study showing that abstinence-pledged virgin teens were more likely to engage in oral and anal sex in an attempt to create the impression that those teens were more likely to contract an STD. What he neglected to mention was that while the study showed that 4.6 percent of the abstinence-pledged teens contracted an STD, this was 35 percent less than the 7 percent of non-pledged teens who also acquired one.<sup>30</sup>

When the deception is not so obvious, one way of detecting if someone is arguing in good faith or not is to see if their argument has been constructed as a tautology, or in other words, presented in the form “heads I win, tails you lose.” Since a tautology cannot, by definition, be contradicted because it is universally true, presenting a tautology as if it were a legitimate matter for debate is inherently

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<sup>30</sup> Martin, Samuel. “A two-letter word for Little Miss Pure: it begins with N.” *The Times*, 26 June, 2007.

dishonest. One form of argument by tautology is known informally as the “No True Scotsman” argument, courtesy of a British philosopher named Anthony Flew. It goes like this:

Assertion: “No Scotsman drinks Jack Daniels.”

Response: “But my uncle Angus is from Glasgow and he drinks Jack Daniels.”

Rebuttal: “Then your uncle Angus is no true Scotsman!”<sup>31</sup>

Because the historical record of atheism is so bloody, so recent, and so well known, Harris is forced to construct a No True Atheist argument in a preemptive attempt to ward off the inevitable response to his assertion that religious faith causes murder and genocide.

*. . . the most monstrous crimes against humanity have been inspired by unjustified belief. This is nearly a truism. Genocidal projects tend not to reflect the rationality of their perpetrators simply because there are no good reasons to kill peaceful people indiscriminately. . . . Consider the millions of people who were killed by Stalin and Mao: although these tyrants paid lip service to rationality, communism was little more than a political religion.*<sup>32</sup>

In order to deflect attention from the obvious fact that Stalin and Mao, both undeniably atheists, killed tens of millions of people despite a complete lack of the religious faith that Harris claims is necessary to commit such monstrous acts, Harris constructs a No True Atheist argument.

Harris: Atheists don’t kill people because they have no good reason to do so.

Response: Stalin and Mao were atheists and they killed millions of people.

Harris: Then Stalin and Mao were No True Atheists.

Of course, Harris doesn’t come right out and present this argument directly, because even a militant atheist would laugh in his face. Instead, he uses several deceptive techniques to try to disguise the fact that he is defending his thesis with a No True Scotsman argument. Notice how much deceptive

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3 <sup>1</sup> The actual No True Scotsman example is as follows: “*Imagine Hamish McDonald, a Scotsman, sitting down with his Press and Journal and seeing an article about how the “Brighton Sex Maniac Strikes Again.” Hamish is shocked and declares that “No Scotsman would do such a thing.” The next day he sits down to read his Press and Journal again and this time finds an article about an Aberdeen man whose brutal actions make the Brighton sex maniac seem almost gentlemanly. This fact shows that Hamish was wrong in his opinion but is he going to admit this? Not likely. This time he says, “No true Scotsman would do such a thing.”*” Flew, Antony, *Thinking About Thinking—or do I sincerely want to be right?*, London: Collins Fontana, 1975.

3 <sup>2</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 79.

tap-dancing takes place in just this single paragraph.

- Harris surreptitiously substitutes “unjustified belief” for “religious faith.” Now, “unjustified belief” is one of his many descriptions of religious faith, but obviously there are many unjustified beliefs that are not related to religious faith in any way.<sup>33</sup> The subset is not equal to the entire set, and since the two are not synonymous they cannot be exchanged in this manner; this is the logical fallacy known as the Undistributed Middle. Harris also implicitly swaps “an absence of rationality” for “religious faith,” once more swapping the specific subset in favor of the broader set that includes it.
- Harris states there are no good reasons to kill people indiscriminately, just twenty-six pages after writing that “Some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them.”<sup>34</sup> So it’s okay to kill people who believe in dangerous propositions, Harris just wants to make sure that you kill them in a discriminating manner. Unfortunately, he does not inform us precisely which propositions justify execution in his mind, although given the context of the statement and the title of his book, it’s apparent that he has intransigent religious belief in mind.
- Harris states that Stalin and Mao only paid lip service to rationality, but their murderous actions were perfectly rational given their goals. Stalin was seeking to destroy Ukrainian national identity, while Mao was trading agricultural products for the atomic weapons technology. It was his “Superpower Programme” that was the motivation behind the Great Leap Forward, sending food that the Chinese peasantry required to survive to Hungary, East Germany, and the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> Considering that Mao had hundreds of millions of peasants that he didn’t value and lacked the powerful weapons development capacity that he badly wanted, it was an entirely reasonable exchange, if a diabolical one.
- Harris claims that Communism was a religion. But however convenient and necessary to his argument this claim might be, it still isn’t true. Communism is a political ideology, not a religion, and moreover, the communisms of Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Mengistu, and Kim Il-Sung all differed in the details. While each of the six dictators identified themselves as communists, the only belief these mass murderers held completely in common was an atheism more militant than that of Harris himself.

Harris’s attempt to gloss over this giant, gaping hole in his thesis was a complete failure, which is why he begrudgingly made a half-hearted stab at addressing it again in the Afterword to the paperback edition of *The End of Faith*:

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3 <sup>3</sup> Such as my aforementioned belief that the Minnesota Vikings will win the Super Bowl. Although I am reliably informed that this is more accurately described as a “forlorn hope.”

3 <sup>4</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 53. Harris’s apologists invariably attempt to spin this as referring to self-defense, but if that were the case, Harris need not have even brought up the “dangerous propositions” in the first place. Harris is not talking about killing in self-defense when attacked, but rather killing on the basis of beliefs which he suspects could lead to future attacks due to the connection he draws between belief and behavior. To put it more plainly, Harris is making a case for lethal preemptory self-defense.

3 <sup>5</sup> Chang, Jung and Jon Halliday. *Mao: The Unknown Story*. London: Anchor, 2007. 465.

*This is one of the most common criticisms I encounter. It is also the most depressing, as I anticipate and answer it early in the book (p. 79.) While some of the most despicable political movements in human history have been explicitly irreligious, they were not especially rational.*

This time, he tries to substitute “not especially rational” for “religious faith” and insinuates an *implicit* case because the *explicit* one didn’t go over so well on the previous attempt. (You may recall that Harris tried the same trick in trying to blame religion for war.) Notice that his claim that Communism is a religion has now disappeared, although it isn’t clear whether he is actually recanting his earlier position or simply does not consider Communism to be one of the most despicable political movements in human history.

Of course, the simplest explanation for this mystery of why so many people believe that citing the historical atheist predilection for mass murder is a devastating retort to the assertion that religious faith is dangerous for mankind is because it *is* a devastating retort that demolishes the argument. The obvious explanation also happens to be the correct one. After all, if religious faith is the root cause of violence, then it should not be so easy—so trivially easy—to find so many historical examples of individuals who lacked religious faith and still managed to commit large-scale acts of lethal violence. While Harris may have anticipated the criticism and provided an answer, the only relevant point is that he did not provide a credible answer on either of his two attempts!

Harris's fellow atheist, Christopher Hitchens, serves as the final witness for the prosecution here as the lapsed Marxist doesn't hesitate to admit that Marxism – and therefore Communism – cannot be reasonably described as a religion, or even a faith. “No, it’s not a religion; it is defined as a non-belief in the supernatural and as a repudiation of anything could be called a faith. Marxism’s great mistake was it believed it had found material evidence for a past, a present and a future; and that material means alone could install it. You could say that that was a terrible idea, but you can’t call it a religion.”<sup>36</sup> Still, Harris’s repeated attempts to disguise the obvious flaw in his argument are useful in the way they

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3<sup>6</sup> “An Evening With Christopher Hitchens”, [FrontPage Magazine](#). June 1 2007.

reveal his habitual intellectual dishonesty. For now that we are familiar with his unscrupulous methodology and willingness to play semantic games, it is easy to demonstrate how Harris's entire case against religious faith is nothing but a thinly disguised tautology.

Early in *The End of Faith* Harris writes: "As a man believes, so he will act"<sup>37</sup> and he goes into some detail explaining how an individual's actions are dependent upon the beliefs he holds. "A belief is a lever that, once pulled, moves almost everything else in a person's life." In light of this, it is important to recall that Harris repeatedly defines atheism as being a lack of a belief,<sup>38</sup> primarily a lack of belief in the existence of God. This allows him to inoculate atheism against the historical crimes of known atheists and blame them on the religious faithful in the following manner.

1. Belief is required for action.
2. Atheism is a lack of belief.
3. Therefore, an individual's atheism cannot cause him to act in a harmful manner.
4. Belief is synonymous with faith
5. Therefore, all negative actions stem from faith

It's a truism! It is self-evident! Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, etc. may have all been atheists, but because they are known to have taken action, they must have believed in something besides their atheism that caused them to act, therefore atheism cannot possibly be blamed for the actions of these so-called atheists.<sup>39</sup>

Hallelujah, peace on Earth is in our grasp! Of course, the only way to achieve it is to somehow get rid all of those troublemaking believers . . . now how would one go about doing that?

And this is where Harris ceases to be an amusing figure blundering about taking incompetent and illogical potshots at religion and becomes something ominous, something malicious, in which the shadowy seed of the atheists whose monstrous crimes he disavows can be discerned. For if, as I have shown there is some reason to suspect, Harris is aware there are no rational grounds for his case against religious faith, then why is he making it? What is the point? What is his purpose in declaring faith itself

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<sup>37</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> In addition to his many other definitions, of course.

<sup>39</sup> This is merely a sophisticated version of the "in the name of" fallacy.

to be an enemy?

Given his declarations that a diversity of religious beliefs cannot be tolerated, that not every human being should be free to believe whatever he wants, and that the killing of those who harbor intolerable beliefs can be ethically justified, the following statement betrays the evil root of his hatred for religion, for the U.S. Constitution, and for the very concept of America itself.

“We can say it even more simply: we need a world government. . . . The diversity of our religious beliefs constitutes a primary obstacle here.”<sup>40</sup>

So you see, the atheist Sam Harris is a believer after all, a utopian would-be philosopher-king cut out of the very same intellectual cloth as those who murdered more human beings in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than every war, civil war, and criminal act<sup>41</sup> combined. And in a manner that Harris echoes most disturbingly, they did not commit their crimes in the name of their atheism, but rather in the name of building a new and better humanity to replace the old one.

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<sup>40</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 151. His words almost precisely mimic those of Kim Jong Il in justifying the concentration camps in which tens of thousands of North Koreans, many of them Christians, are currently being martyred.

<sup>41</sup> In 2004, I did some research into murder rates and global population growth which led me to conclude that around 11.9 million murders were committed by individual criminals in the twentieth century, which is 6.43 percent of the 185 million individuals murdered by their own governments from 1900 to 2000. If one adds the estimated 38.5 million victims of all the wars and civil wars during the century to that 11.9 million, the logical conclusion is that global government of the sort Harris advocates can be expected to be at least 3.7 times more deadly than the war, civil war, and crime it is supposed to resolve. Or, as it would be more accurate to say, replace.

## Chapter VIII

### DARWIN'S JUDAS

*Evolution isn't a cause of anything; it's an observation, a way of putting things in categories. Evolution says nothing about causes.*

—Scott Adams, *God's Debris*

Scientists come with a sell-by date. The mathematician G.H. Hardy declared that math is a young man's game while Albert Einstein formulated the mass-energy equivalence at twenty-six and Sir Isaac Newton's famous *annus mirabilis*<sup>1</sup> occurred when he was only twenty-three. A California researcher has estimated that the mean age of a biologist's first noteworthy contribution to science takes place when he is 29.4 years old.<sup>2</sup> So, at sixty-six, three decades after publishing the controversial bestseller *The Selfish Gene*, it's clear that Richard Dawkins is well past his scientific expiry, and his latest book, *The God Delusion*, offers copious evidence that Dawkins has become as careless as he is crotchety in his old age.

But this does not mean that either he or his recent works should be dismissed out of hand. His oft-acerbic literary persona notwithstanding, it is impossible to dislike anyone so utterly sound on the destructive academic drivel of post-modernism, still less a man who harbors such genuine appreciation for beauty and the arts. His writing style remains as approachable as ever, but what he no longer possesses is a firm grasp of the very Reason of which he believes himself a champion.

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1 In his "extraordinary year," which was more like eighteen months spanning 1665 and 1666, Newton laid the groundwork for his eponymous system of physics. This included calculus, optics, gravitation, and the laws of motion. I enjoyed my twenty-third year, unfortunately it revolved around a Porsche, a record deal, alcohol, and models. *Sic transit gloria mundi*. . . .

2 Dean K. Simonton of UC-Davis studied the contributions of nearly 2,000 famous scientists. He found that while biologists made their first historically noteworthy contribution at a mean age of 29.4 years, their contribution most often cited by historians and biographers occurred at a mean of forty years, six months. Of the eight scientific fields studied, mathematicians burned out the quickest at 27.3 and 38.8 years respectively. 24 May 2007  
<<http://sps.nus.edu/~limchuwe/articles/youth.html>>

Even more strangely, the world's foremost spokesman for secular science, that method of advancing human knowledge based upon the primacy of empirical evidence, increasingly shows a tendency to ignore mountains of conclusive evidence in favor of mystical pronouncements about ontological possibilities. Whether this drift into what could reasonably be described as metascience is a function of Dawkins's boredom with science proper or merely an age-related disinclination for doing the required intellectual heavy-lifting is impossible to say, but it is readily apparent to anyone who has read a substantial portion of his published *oeuvre*. The witty, meticulous, and inventive Dawkins of *The Selfish Gene* is simply not the clumsy, error-prone Dawkins of *The God Delusion*.

This is in part due to the fact that in his most recent book, Dawkins is not only operating outside of his area of professional expertise, he is actually pitting himself directly against it. Whereas he describes himself as a "passionate Darwinian" as an academic scientist, he calls himself "a passionate anti-Darwinian" with regards to the proper conduct of human affairs.<sup>3</sup> This naturally puts Dawkins in an untenable position, as he not only lacks both education and professional experience in the academic fields which relate to human conduct, such as history, philosophy, political science, literature, psychology, and theology, but it also renders his book somewhat of a fraudulent bait-and-switch.

In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins is using his reputation as a famous Darwinian scientist to sell a propagandistic vision that is directly opposed to that very science as well as the religions it purports to attack. In fact, the entire book can be summarized as a version of the fallacious argument that Dawkins himself labels "The Argument From Admired Religious Scientists." It is the book's foundation in emotional anti-science that explains Dawkins mysterious failure to make significant use of the important scientific tool known as evidence, as he prefers instead to rely on pure reason even when the relevant empirical evidence is readily available. Interestingly enough, this substitution of logic in the place of evidence is not new for Dawkins, as he confesses in the essay "Human Chauvinism and Evolutionary Progress" that whereas his long-time nemesis, Stephen Jay Gould,

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3 Dawkins, Richard. *A Devil's Chaplain*. Boston, 2003. 10–11.



prefers to make an empirical case against the concept of evolutionary progress towards humanity, he would prefer to attack it on logical grounds.<sup>4</sup>

It is most unfortunate for Dawkins, then, that it is not at all difficult to demonstrate his logical incompetence with empirical evidence.

It is a real pity how most of Dawkins's critics have completely failed to notice the way in which Dawkins's abandonment of science has rendered him naked and vulnerable. While there have been a number of critical books written about Dawkins, including *The Dawkins Delusion*, *Dawkins's God* and *Letter to an Influential Atheist*, most of this criticism revolves around Dawkins's ignorance of Christian theology rather than his anti-science. It is true that the criticism is well-founded, as his dearth of knowledge on the subject is exceeded only by Sam Harris, but it is still mostly irrelevant regarding the question of God's existence as well as the substance of Dawkins's case against religion.<sup>5</sup>

For example, the citations of the fourteen arguments for the existence of God in *The God Delusion*, Thomas Aquinas's Five Proofs, the Ontological Argument, the Argument from Beauty, the Argument from Personal "Experience,"<sup>6</sup> the Argument from Scripture, the Argument from Admired Religious Scientists,<sup>7</sup> Pascal's Wager, and the Bayesian Arguments, are as spurious as Dawkins believes the arguments themselves to be. They are tempting honey-traps in which the Dawkins critic is all too easily caught; because Dawkins is convinced that God almost certainly does not exist, attempting to engage him in a reasonable discussion of theological proofs is like trying to mathematically prove the speed of the Earth's rotation to someone who does not believe in numbers, and furthermore, is utterly convinced that the Earth is a disc mounted on the back of a very large turtle. Trying to debate the existence of God with Richard Dawkins is ultimately pointless, because for Dawkins, not even Jesus

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4 Ibid., 208.

5 It is important to note that Dawkins's case against religion differs subtly from Sam Harris's campaign against religious faith. While there is a substantial amount of overlap between the two atheists, Dawkins is far more focused on specific religions and their idiosyncracies, while Harris is attempting—however incompetently—to attack the very concept of faith itself.

6 I find it amusing that Dawkins should see fit to put scare quotes questioning the very concept of personal experience, especially in light of his own tendency to instruct by sharing his own.

7 His response to this is even more amusing, considering how he disproves this argument by constructing an Argument from Admired Atheist Scientists, as if the truth of God's existence is best determined by scientific democracy.

Christ's triumphant return in front of a crowd of tens of thousands would suffice to prove anything to him, not with his "familiarity with the brain and its powerful workings."<sup>8</sup>

Dawkins is not actually interested in genuinely considering the question of God's existence, as evidenced by his cursory perusal of a few of the less complicated arguments for the existence of God. His dismissal of the 3,020 pages of the *Summa Theologica* in less than three pages is no demonstration of surpassingly brilliant logic; it's merely waving a dead chicken over the keyboard in an attempt to deceive the ignorant into believing that the argument has been seriously considered and found wanting.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly egregious given that part of those three pages is devoted to a tangent that is entirely unrelated to the *quinquae viae*!<sup>10</sup>

The only reason Dawkins even bothers to go through the motions is because without providing at least a nominal pretense at addressing a few of the many reasons religious people believe in God, not even his most mindless cheerleaders could find his case convincing. But he's knowingly setting fire to strawmen, for as he admits at the end of the three pages nominally dedicated to attacking Aquinas's Five Ways, "the argument from design is the only one still in regular use today." This causes the observant reader to wonder: If he's so terribly upset about why people believe in God today, then why is he attacking the reasons some people used to believe in God more than 700 years ago? And why does he expend more effort explaining that he is not attacking Einstein's metaphorical God than he does actually considering any of the many current beliefs of Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus, let alone Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists? It's strange, but *The God Delusion* features four times more references to Albert Einstein than to Allah, and devotes the same number of pages to discussing Adolf Hitler as it does to considering Jesus Christ.

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8 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 92. It's always impressive how scientists can diagnose mass hallucination without ever speaking with a single eyewitness. A pity they're not as good at identifying cancer from a distance.

9 For example, the third objection to Question 2, Article 1, "Whether the existence of God is self-evident" raises some interesting questions about whether scientific truth is more properly considered a false god or an aspect of God. Dawkins doesn't so much as mention the Article or even the obviously pertinent Article 2, "Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists." The Five Proofs he dismisses so readily are from the third article.

10 I address this childish tangent, which is related to the assumed contradiction between divine omnipotence and divine omniscience, in Chapter XV.

While Dawkins incessantly complains about the lack of evidence for God, he never quite gets around to explaining precisely what proof, presumably scientific, would be sufficient for him. He poses no potentially falsifiable experiment that would suffice to prove or disprove God's existence nor does he even consider the question of whether any such experiment would conceivably be possible. But if rabbit fossils found in a Pre-Cambrian strata would suffice to disprove evolution, then surely a brilliant scientist like Richard Dawkins should easily be able to come up with a few propositions that would suffice to falsify a specific religion such as Christianity. I suggest a few possibilities:

- The elimination of the Jewish people would falsify both God's promise to Abraham and the eschatological events prophesied in the Book of Revelation.
- The discovery of Jesus Christ's crucified skeleton.
- The linguistic unification of humanity.
- An external recording of the history of the human race provided by aliens, as proposed by science fiction authors Arthur C. Clarke and James P. Hogan.
- The end of war and/or poverty.
- Functional immortality technology.

Dawkins is so unimaginative that he even regards the theoretical question about his response should he one day find himself confronting God as being "so preposterous that I can hardly grace it with a hypothetical answer."<sup>11</sup> And yet, he has no trouble whatsoever in believing seven impossible things on the basis of even scantier evidence.

### **Atheism's Red Queen**

*Looking for art in science  
Is a peculiar aspiration,  
For there is little wonder  
Once Man denies Creation.  
And his reduction to mere numbers  
O'er the passing of the years,  
Leaves us with naught but the aesthetics  
Of damned chess club pamphleteers.*

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<sup>11</sup> "Richard Dawkins: Beyond Belief." *The Guardian*. 10 Jan. 2006.

## (1) THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR SCIENCE-INSPIRED ART

In *Unweaving the Rainbow*, Dawkins writes: “By more general implication, science is poetry’s killjoy, dry and cold, cheerless, overbearing and lacking in everything that a young Romantic might desire. To proclaim the opposite is one purpose of this book, and I shall here limit myself to the untestable speculation that Keats, like Yeats, might have been an even better poet if he had gone to science for some of his inspiration.”

Of course, this speculation is as improbable as it is untestable, given the centuries of evidence demonstrating that science is largely incapable of providing the inspiration for passable poetry, much less the sort of great art that religion has reliably inspired for millennia. Forget Irish astronomical telescopes and D.H. Lawrence’s hummingbirds, what could be more profoundly inspirational than the dystopian prospect of Man’s suicidal annihilation by the deadly fruits of his own mind? And yet, in six decades of science’s glorious Atomic Age, the only memorable pronouncement that comes to mind is J. Robert Oppenheimer’s invocation of the ancient verses of the Bhagavad Gita!

While one can, with some effort, envision Byronesque epics dedicated to the tortile beauties of the DNA helix or dolorous quatrains lamenting the darker aspects of apoptosis, it would require Oscar Wilde’s proverbial heart of stone to do so with a straight face. Consider an actual example of science-inspired poetry: Edmund Halley’s unforgettable “Ode on This Splended Ornament of Our Time and Our Nation, the Mathematico-Physical Treatise by the Eminent Isaac Newton”:

*From this treatise we learn at last why silvery Phoebe moves at an unequal pace,  
Why, till now, she has refused to be bridled by the numbers of any astronomer,  
Why the nodes regress, and why the upper apsides move forward.  
We also learn the magnitude of the forces with which wandering Cynthia  
Impels the ebbing sea, while its weary waves leave the seaweed far behind  
And the sea bares the sands that sailors fear, and alternately beat high up on the shores  
The things that so often vexed the minds of the ancient philosophers  
And fruitlessly disturb the schools with noisy debate  
We see right before our eyes, since mathematics drives away the cloud.*

Great stuff, that scientific poesy! It's undeniably entertaining, in a sort of an Adamsian "Ode to the Lump of Green Putty I Found in My Armpit One Midsummer Morning" manner. Still, I daresay it's not on quite the same artistic level as Alexander Pope's rather more succinct and religious tribute to the very same gentleman.

*Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night;  
God said 'Let Newton be' and all was light.*

At Richard Dawkins's core is a band geek who is unable to accept the reality that marching tubas and embroidered uniforms will never impress the girls. For all its passionate and detailed explanations of water droplets and entirely new variants of suns, *Unweaving the Rainbow* ultimately amounts to little more than an unconvincing and repetitive refrain of "This one time, at band camp . . ." Still, Dawkins's belief in the artistic possibilities of science is rather sweet. It is, as I believe I have read somewhere before, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.<sup>12</sup>

It is also worth noting that Dawkins's insistence that science not only leaves room for poetry<sup>13</sup> but is more capable than religion of inspiring it, flies directly in the face of his claim to suspect any form of argument that reaches a significant conclusion "without feeding in a single piece of data from the real world."<sup>14</sup>

The inadequacy of science and other secular replacements for religion has not escaped the notice of one of the more enthusiastic champions of the arts, Camille Paglia, who despite her atheism insists that religion is an artistic necessity. She explains that whereas the first generation of secular artists, such as James Joyce, Igor Stravinsky, Pablo Picasso, and Marcel Proust, achieved greatness through their rebellion against religious tradition, it is their very success that has crippled their successors. She complains that "today, anything goes, and nothing lasts" before declaring that secular

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1 <sup>2</sup> That would be the Apostle Paul's definition of faith.

1 <sup>3</sup> Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, 180. Sadly, there is no room for religion at the inn.

1 <sup>4</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 82.

humanism has reached a dead end and that religion must be taught in every school.<sup>15</sup>

## **(2) MARTIAL VICTORY THROUGH BLIND OBEDIENCE**

Dawkins stated belief that religion is a primary cause of war has already been dealt with and refuted in no little detail. But his similarly groundless belief that nations “whose infantrymen act on their own initiative rather than following orders will tend to lose wars” is worthy of highlighting for the way it will be met with a great deal of amusement by anyone familiar with USMC war fighting doctrine<sup>16</sup> or even general military history.

*The Marine Corps’ style of warfare requires intelligent leaders with a penchant for boldness and initiative down to the lowest levels.*<sup>17</sup>

His theories about war’s implicit causes notwithstanding, it’s obvious that Dawkins hasn’t paid any attention to developments in warfare over the last 150 years, because the Third Generation Warfare waged by the Kaiserheer, the Wehrmacht, and the U.S. Marines is designed around the very concept of personal initiative he claims to be martially ineffectual. Fourth Generation Warfare, which describes the decentralized war of the sort waged by the Viet Minh, the Mujahideen, or al-Qaeda doesn’t even possess a central command structure capable of giving the orders that Dawkins believes are so vital to martial success. As for the relevant empirical evidence, it is almost unanimously contrary to Dawkins’s epistemological assertion in light of how 4GW forces designed around independent low-level initiative have been extraordinarily successful, so much so that the martial theoretician who articulated the concept, William S. Lind, gloomily notes that “Almost everywhere, the state is losing.”<sup>18</sup>

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1 <sup>5</sup> Paglia, Camille. “Art movies: R.I.P.” *Salon*, 8 Aug. 2007.

1 <sup>6</sup> “In war games in the 19th Century, German junior officers were routinely given problems that could only be solved by disobeying orders. . . . Initiative is more important than obedience.” Lind, William. “Understanding Fourth Generation War.”

1 <sup>7</sup> MCDP1: Warfighting. The United States Marine Corps.

1 <sup>8</sup> Lind, William. “Understanding Fourth Generation War.” Most state militaries, like Dawkins, are stuck in 2GW, based on a centralized, hierarchic, order-dependent organization.

### (3) ATHEIST RESPECT FOR ARCHITECTURE

It's not hard to demonstrate that Richard Dawkins has been almost as successful in remaining as ignorant of world history as he has of warfare. He betrays an astonishing lack of knowledge about the Spanish Civil War or the atrocious acts of the previous century's most notorious atheists when he declares with great confidence:

*I do not believe there is an atheist in the world who would bulldoze Mecca—or Chartres, York Minster or Notre Dame, the Shwe Dagon, the temples of Kyoto or, of course, the Buddhas of Bamiyan.*<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Mikhail Mashin, the director of the ZIL, has built a thriving business on the refutation of this particular Dawkinsian myth. Under Soviet rule, ZIL made cars, but the competition ZIL faced from Western automotive manufacturers after the fall of the Soviet Union forced the company to creatively explore other markets. ZIL now manufactures church bells because there is a booming business in church construction due to the fact that from 1917 to 1969, the atheist Soviets destroyed 41,000 of Russia's 48,000 churches, including Christ the Savior Cathedral, a Moscow landmark that was built to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon's invasion. This massive destruction of religious art and architecture was neither ideological nor political in nature, it was *The God Delusion* in action, a material atheist argument for the non-existence of God.

*During early Soviet times, thousands of churches, monasteries and convents across the country were destroyed by the Bolsheviks in their drive to cleanse the Soviet Union of religion. . . . Across the country, bells were pushed from their belfries and destroyed. Russian author Inna Simonova calls it the "aggressive atheism" that was practiced by the Bolsheviks to sway Russians. "They said, 'Look, you believe in God, and yet we've thrown these bells off the roof and nothing has happened,'" said Mrs. Simonova. . . .*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 249

<sup>20</sup> "Saved by the Church Bell." *Cox News Service*. 25 April, 2004. The Commission for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repression reported in 1995 that a similar percentage of Jewish and Islamic buildings had also been destroyed.

The empirical evidence simply blows away another of Richard Dawkins's ontological arguments. Dawkins isn't just wrong, he is spectacularly incorrect. In place of the 41,000 Soviet churches destroyed between 1917 and 1969 I could have as easily cited any of the many thousands of historical examples of similar behavior in atheist-run Spain, Poland, Romania, or East Germany to prove that not only are there many atheists in the world who have done exactly what Dawkins believes to be inconceivable, but that architectural devastation is far more likely to be committed by atheists than by the believers of all the various religions in the world combined.<sup>21</sup> Dawkins's mention of the "temples of Kyoto" is especially ironic,<sup>22</sup> considering the way in which atheists have been responsible for destroying seven thousand temples and monasteries in Tibet, 440 of the 500 Buddhist temples in North Korea and 240 of the 700 Buddhist temples in Vietnam. The only reason that Mecca, York Minster, and Notre Dame survive today is that they are located in nations where atheists have not possessed control of the government for an extended period of time.

#### **(4) THE INHERENT GOODNESS OF HUMANITY AND MORAL GRADIENTS**

Dawkins finds it hard to believe that people would become callous, selfish hedonists without God. Setting aside the fact that his most successful atheist counterpart, Michel Onfray, is arguing specifically for a philosophy of hedonism to replace Dawkins's own compromise with Christian morality, the evidence suggests that this is exactly what should be expected. Dawkins may even suspect as much, since he refers to himself as perhaps being naïve and a Pollyanna while relating a tale of the massive disorder that accompanied a strike by the Montreal police in 1969.

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2 <sup>1</sup> "In the interest of recreating proletarian states, ruthless killings of the intelligentsia and peasants were combined with leveling indigenous and religious architecture to re-create a 'utopia on the ruins of the past'." Hayeem, Abe. "Destruction as Cultural Cleansing": *Building Design*. 3 Feb. 2006.

2 <sup>2</sup> "The government from the province of Henan has in fact decreed that the historic sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel will be blown up with dynamite; a complete ban on Catholics organizing their annual pilgrimage; a complete ban on any religious gathering or function being celebrated in the area." *AsiaNews*. 21 June 2007



It has been established that Christians give three times more to charity<sup>23</sup> and are less criminal than the broad spectrum of atheists; experiments at the Economic Science Laboratory suggest that this might be because they believe that their actions are known to God. In variations on an envelope experiment designed to test random charity on the part of a subject who was given ten dollars as well as the opportunity to share it anonymously, the knowledge that the experimenter was watching increased the subject's likelihood of giving by 142 percent and the amount given by 146 percent.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Dawkins erroneously states that behaving in a traditionally moral manner in the absence of policing is somehow “more moral” than the very same behavior when it is witnessed. This confuses action with intent and reveals a basic misunderstanding of the nature of Christian morality. It is an aspect of the common atheist fallacy that I describe as the Argument from Superior Morals in Chapter XIV.

## **(5) THE EQUATION OF CHRISTIAN THEOCRACY WITH ISLAMIC FASCISM**

Dawkins claims that the goal to have a Christian nation built on God's Law and the Ten Commandments “can only be called a Christian fascist state” and claims that it is “an almost exact mirror image” of an Islamic fascist state. This is preposterous on several levels. There have been hundreds of Christian kingdoms and principalities that incorporated the Ten Commandments and aspects of Biblical law into the foundation of their legal systems, and a tiny fraction of them have been fascist. Dawkins himself lives in one such historically Christian nation; Queen Elizabeth II also happens to be the current Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

Fascism is not merely a word that means “scary,” it is a specific historical ideology no less readily identifiable than Marxism or Communism. While there were avowedly fascist governments in

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<sup>23</sup> <sup>3</sup> “In 2000, religious people gave about three and a half times as much as secular people—\$2,210 versus \$642.” Ben Gose, “Charity's Political Divide,” *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. 23 Nov. 2006.

<sup>24</sup> <sup>4</sup> Landsburg, Steven. “Stuffing Envelopes”: *Reason*, March 2001. The dollar difference increased from \$1.08 to \$2.66 if the subject thought the amount of his contribution would be known to the observer.

the Christian nations of Italy and Austria, there is no such thing as Islamic fascism. Islamic fascism does not exist and it has never existed, either as a political ideology or a practical system of government. The concept is a meaningless term of propaganda used primarily by American neocons and third-rate political pundits seeking to stir up public support for the Global Struggle Against Violent Extremism during the lead-up to the Iraqi invasion; it is already falling out of the political discourse.

## **(6) CATHOLICISM IS MORE DAMAGING THAN CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE**

Richard Dawkins is perhaps one of the last men on Earth who should be discussing what is the right and proper way to raise children, given that the number of his wives outnumber his offspring. But while he can accept both child abandonment and childhood sexual abuse with dispassionate fortitude, it is the horrible crime of raising children in the faith of their fathers that upsets him due to his belief that the fear of Hell is more psychologically damaging than childhood sexual abuse in the long term.<sup>25</sup>

In his letter to his daughter Juliet, addressed to her at the age of ten and published in *A Devil's Chaplain*, there is little mention of love, no admission of regret, and no paternal promises. As one British journalist noted, the letter is “coldly impersonal” and “authoritarian.”<sup>26</sup> There is no expression of interest in what might be important to her. But Dawkins loses no time in informing her what is important to him, and that is “evidence.” One has to pity the poor girl, who at ten would have surely rather been assured that she was beautiful in his eyes and of supreme importance to him despite his absence instead of receiving a tedious seven-page lecture on the need to believe in evidence that is not based on tradition, authority, or revelation.

But that's her problem and her therapist's profit. What's much more interesting is the way

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2 <sup>5</sup> “Once, in the question time after a lecture in Dublin, I was asked what I thought about the widely publicized cases of sexual abuse by Catholic priests in Ireland. I replied that, as horrible as sexual abuse no doubt was, the damage was arguably less than the long-term psychological damage inflicted by bringing up the child Catholic in the first place.” Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 317

2 <sup>6</sup> “The letter highlights his own complex, often contrary, nature—it is intimate and coldly impersonal, humble and pompous, innocent and calculated, chummy and authoritarian.” Hattenstone, Simon. “Darwin's Child.” *The Guardian*. 10 Feb. 2003.

Dawkins closes “A Prayer for My Daughter” by writing: “And next time somebody tells you that something is true, why not say to them: ‘What kind of evidence is there for that?’ And if they can’t give you a good answer, I hope you’ll think very carefully before you believe a word they say.” The scientist may not be much of a father, but as it turns out, this particular advice is excellent.

For what kind of evidence is there for Dawkins’s controversial assertion of the greater long-term psychological damage inflicted upon children who are raised Catholic than upon those who are sexually abused? He first provides anecdotal information from one woman who was raised Catholic, was sexually abused by a priest, and later had nightmares about Hell. And in the unlikely event that one woman’s bad dreams are not enough to completely convince the reader, Dawkins goes on to mention an apocryphal story about Alfred Hitchcock driving through Switzerland, a Protestant haunted house, a letter from a woman seeking a therapist, an American comedienne’s routine, and a letter from an upset American medical student whose girlfriend is breaking up with him. Despite posing the proposition as a comparison, Dawkins does not bother to consider what, if any, the negative effects of childhood sexual trauma might happen to be in order to compare them with this comprehensive list of Catholic horrors.<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Jonathan R.T. Davidson of the Duke University Medical Center is not quite so blasé about the psychological damage of sexual abuse, as his 1996 study found that the chances of sexually abused women attempting suicide were three times higher if they had been sexually abused before the age of sixteen.<sup>28</sup> In the same study, Davidson determined that women who had been sexually assaulted were six times more likely to attempt suicide than those who had not. As for long-term effects, the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* reported that 67 percent of women over fifty diagnosed with major depression who had been sexually abused as children had made multiple suicide attempts, compared

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<sup>27</sup> Half of which aren’t even related to Catholicism.

<sup>28</sup> J.R. Davidson, D.C. Hughes, L.K. George, and D.G. Blazer, Department of Psychiatry and Behavior Sciences, Duke University Medical Center. “The association of sexual assault and attempted suicide within the community” *Archives of General Psychiatry*. 6 (1996).

with 27 percent of depressed women over fifty who had not been abused.<sup>29</sup> The study also found that middle-aged women who were sexually abused were more likely to suffer at least one other major mental disorder and possess a lifetime history of substance abuse.

As for the proposed psychological damage of being raised Catholic, all of the scientific evidence directly contradicts the notion, despite those compelling anecdotes about filmmakers and failed Romeos. A report in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* concluded that the religious faithful, most of whom were presumably raised religious, were much psychologically healthier than the irreligious.

*Religiously unaffiliated subjects had significantly more lifetime suicide attempts and more first-degree relatives who committed suicide than subjects who endorsed a religious affiliation. . . . In terms of clinical characteristics, religiously unaffiliated subjects had more lifetime impulsivity, aggression, and past substance use disorder.*<sup>30</sup>

In fact, if suicide is a reasonable metric for long-term psychological damage, and it is hard to imagine a better one, then there is evidence to suggest that children raised Catholic suffer from less long-term psychological damage than the average *religious* individual and much less than the average child raised as an atheist. A 1986 American study showed that the proportion of Catholics in a region was negatively correlated with suicide rates,<sup>31</sup> while the World Health Organization's most recent national suicide statistics shows that heavily Catholic countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Italy, and the Philippines have an average suicide rate of 4.2 per 100,000, while historically Protestant countries such as Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands were more than three times higher at 13.8. And it is the countries of the former Soviet Union that have some of the highest rates of suicide, as Russia,

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2 <sup>9</sup> N.L. Talbot, P.R. Duberstein, C. Cox, D. Denning, and Y. Conwell, "Preliminary Report on Childhood Sexual Abuse, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicide Attempts Among Middle-Aged and Older Depressed Women," *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 12 (2004): 536–538.

3 <sup>0</sup> K. Dervic, M.A. Oquendo, M.F. Grunebaum, S. Ellis, A.K. Burke, J.J. Mann, "Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 161 (2004): 2303–2308.

3 <sup>1</sup> David Lester, "Religion, suicide and homicide," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 2 (1987).

Ukraine, Latvia, and Estonia average 31.1 suicides per 100,000 population.<sup>32</sup>

While there is no evidence that being raised Catholic is more psychologically damaging than being sexually abused as a child, there is a great deal of evidence proving the opposite. I suggest, therefore, that the reader would do very well to follow Richard Dawkins's paternal advice and think very carefully before believing a single word that Dawkins says.

## **(7) THE INFALLIBILITY OF SAM HARRIS**

As was demonstrated by the unfortunate citation of Harris's erroneous Red State-Blue State argument vivisected in the previous chapter, Dawkins's faith in Sam Harris is both ill-founded and poorly rewarded. Even more damaging to Dawkins's credibility, though, is the Forward to the British edition of *Letter to a Christian Nation* in which he writes:

*If you are part of the target, I dare you to read this book. It will be a salutary test of your faith. Survive Sam Harris's barrage, and you can take on the world with equanimity. But forgive my skepticism: Harris never misses, not with a single sentence, which is why his short book is so disproportionately devastating.*

While my faith has been tested on more than one occasion, I cannot say that the short slog through *Letter to a Christian Nation* was one of them. I survived the barrage, but it was admittedly difficult to maintain my equanimity and refrain from laughing when informed that the only known cure for poverty is the empowerment of women and their emancipation from reproduction.<sup>33</sup> Take that, Joseph Schumpeter and your crazy theory of creative destruction! You too, Hernando de Soto and your whacky ideas about property rights! And someone do tell that silly old Scot that it's girl power, not self-interest and the division of labor, that produces the wealth of nations!

As the reader has probably come to expect by now, Harris has it backwards again. Not only has

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<sup>32</sup> "Suicide rates per 100,000 by country, year and sex." World Health Organization, December 2005. Suicide rates for the atheist-run states of Laos, North Korea and Vietnam were not provided, the rate for China only represented Hong Kong and unidentified other parts of the country.

<sup>33</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 35. Harris is actually quoting Hitchens, in another example of the atheist circle jerk.

a causal link between women's suffrage and an immediate increase in the size and spending of government, (which decrease societal wealth through their disruption of the free market forces and strictures on private property rights), been proven,<sup>34</sup> but the influx of women into the American labor market has been the primary factor in the 16.8 percent decline in weekly real wages since 1972.<sup>35</sup> This is not a complex issue; because women were already active in the market as consumers, the only significant quantitative effect of the doubling of their participation in the work force since 1950 was to reduce the price of labor without an ameliorating increase in demand. If America had been an immature export-driven economy, this could have been a very positive development, not so much in a mature import economy.

So Harris not only misses on a regular basis, he usually misses by a wide margin when he's not actually shooting himself in the foot. Similar factual errors can be found on pages 7, 20, 39, and 43,<sup>36</sup> to give just a few of many examples.

### **Fractal Intelligence and the Complex Designer**

The anthropic principle has been an embarrassing problem for secular scientists in recent decades due to the way in which the probability of the universe and Earth just happening to be perfectly suitable for human life is very, very low. The extreme unlikelihood of everything being not too hot, not too cold, not too big, and not too small, to put it very crudely, has often been cited as evidence that the universe has been designed for us, presumably by God. Now, Richard Dawkins is arguably not an individual

3 <sup>4</sup> John R. Lott and Lawrence W. Kenny, "Did Women's Suffrage Change the Size and Scope of Government?" Part 1 of *The Journal of Political Economy* 6 (1999), 1163–1198.

3 <sup>5</sup> In 1972, the average weekly wage was \$331.59 (in 1982 constant dollars), which equaled an annual salary of \$34,979 in 2005 dollars. But the weekly wage in 2005 was only \$275.90 (in 1982 constant dollars), which works out to \$29,105 per year. The negative effect on wages caused by women entering the work force was largely hidden until 1972, when men finally stopped leaving the work force in numbers sufficient to conceal the trend. One could accurately characterize the period from 1950 to 1972 as women from 18–35 going to work so that men over 60 could play golf. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

3 <sup>6</sup> (7) The way Harris views all religions is not how Christians view Islam. (20) The first four Commandments do not have "nothing whatsoever to do with morality," Harris is improperly defining morality as "a search for happiness," not "a standard of correct conduct." (39) American teenagers have nearly twice as many sexual partners as European teens, 80 percent more than the famously libertine Dutch. (43) The least religious societies are not the healthiest; the atheist nations of China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Laos are much less religious than the historically Christian nations listed by Harris and rank 54, 83, 110 and 151 in terms of life expectancy.

particularly well suited to play around with probability. He may not be quite as mathematically handicapped as Sam Harris, but he is known to have some issues in this regard, being openly mocked for his “comic authority” and “fatal attraction” to mathematical concepts by the French mathematician Marcel-Paul Schützenberger.<sup>37</sup>

Schützenberger’s contempt for Dawkins’s mathematical abilities is well-founded, as it’s generally not considered to be a good idea to adopt a casual approach to mathematical probability, as Dawkins does with the “one in billion” chance of something like DNA spontaneously arising which he invents *ex nihilo*, before reaching the shocking statistical conclusion that if there are a billion billion planets and a one in a billion chance of life spontaneously arising on a planet, then life must exist on a billion planets throughout the universe! Dawkins is genuinely surprised by his astonishing discovery of long division, so much so that he repeats it twice.

Did you know that if there are four fours<sup>38</sup> of books and a one in four chance of a book being written by a New Atheist, then there must be four New Atheist books? Sweet St. Darwin of the Galapagos, is this really what passes for a public intellectual today?

Encouraged by this successful foray into the realm of higher mathematics, Dawkins is convinced that his response to the anthropic principle, somewhat confusingly named the argument from improbability for the nonexistence of God, is a serious, even un rebuttable,<sup>29</sup> refutation of the argument from improbability for the existence of God. Since he informs us that this is the central argument of his book, it behooves us to examine his summary of the argument in detail.

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3<sup>7</sup> “But look, the construction of the relevant space cannot proceed until a preliminary analysis has been carried out, one in which the set of all possible trajectories is assessed, this together with an estimation of their average distance from the specified goal. The preliminary analysis is beyond the reach of empirical study. It presupposes—the same word that seems to recur in theoretical biology—that the biologist (or computer scientist) know the totality of the situation, the properties of the ensemble of trajectories. In terms of mathematical logic, the nature of this space is entirely enigmatic.” —Schützenberger, Marcel-Paul. “The Miracles of Darwinism.”  
<<http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od172/schutz172.htm>>

3<sup>8</sup> Or sixteen, as we non-dysnumeric individuals usually describe it.

2<sup>9</sup> Or so Dawkins quotes Daniel Dennett “rightly” describing it, in yet one more example of the endless circle jerking.

📁👉 *One of the greatest challenges to the human intellect, over the centuries, has been to explain how the complex, improbable appearance of design in the universe arises.*

📁👉 *The natural temptation is to attribute the appearance of design to actual design itself.*

📁👉 *The temptation is a false one, because the designer hypothesis immediately raises the larger problem of who designed the designer. The whole problem we started out with was the problem of explaining statistical improbability. It is obviously no solution to postulate something even more improbable. We need a 'crane', not a 'skyhook', for only a crane can do the business of working up gradually and plausibly from simplicity to otherwise improbable complexity.*

It would be hard to take any serious issue with step one or two, but in step three, Dawkins's train of thought tumbles off the logic rails, not once, not twice, but thrice. His first mistake is the assumption that the designer is inherently more improbable than the design, based on the assumption that the designer of the universe must be more complex than the universe itself. But because Dawkins does not define complexity, he provides no means of calculating the statistical improbability of the designer, whereas the statistical improbabilities of the design are clearly defined in no little detail in the cosmological applications of the anthropic principle, as Dawkins concedes in his citation of the six fundamental constants examined by the physicist Martin Rees.

While Dawkins's complaint that the theistic answer to the design's improbability is unsatisfying because it leaves the existence of the designer unexplained is fair, his subsequent assertion that "A God capable of calculating the Goldilocks values for the six numbers would have to be at least as improbable as the finely tuned combination of numbers itself"<sup>30</sup> is not. This is his second error, as the statement is certainly true of Rees, who is both capable of calculating the numbers and is a part of the design, but it cannot be true of the designer because the latter fact does not apply. Third, does Dawkins seriously wish to argue that Martin Rees is more complex than the universe? We know Rees calculated the Goldilocks values, so if he can do so despite being less complex than the sum of everyone and everything else in the universe, then God surely can too.

There is no reason why a designer must necessarily be more complex than his design. The

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<sup>30</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 143.



verity of the statement depends entirely on the definition of complexity. While Dawkins doesn't specifically provide one, in explaining his "Ultimate 747 gambit," he refers to the argument from improbability as being rooted in "the source of all the information in living matter." Complexity, to Dawkins, is therefore equated with information.

But as any programmer knows, mass quantities of information can easily be produced from much smaller quantities of information. A fractal is perhaps the most obvious example of huge quantities of new information being produced from a very small amount of initial information. For example, thirty-two lines of C++ code suffice to produce a well-known fractal known as the Sierpinski Triangle. In the Triangle, each triangle divides into four smaller triangles. As the size of the new triangles progresses towards zero, the total area of the set tends to infinity. What contains more information and is therefore more complex, an infinite total area or thirty-two lines of C++? A BASIC program generating the gorgeous recursive images of the famous Mandelbrot Set is even simpler:

CLS

```
FOR i = 1 TO 300
  FOR j = 1 TO 150
    c1=-2+4*i/300
    c2=2-4*j/300
    x=c1
    y=c2
    FOR n = 1 TO 30
      x1=x*x-y*y+c1
      y1=2*x*y+c2
      r=x1*x1+y1*y1
      IF r > 4 THEN GOTO 1000
      x = x1
      y = y1
    NEXT n
```

```
PSET(i, j)
PSET(i,300-j)
1000 NEXT j
NEXT i
END31
```

Despite their informational simplicity, fractals are not only considered to be complex, but infinitely complex. Nor do they require human intelligence or computers to produce them, as approximate fractals can be found in clouds, snowflakes, lightning, mountains, and other natural examples. This demonstration of complexity from simplicity could be termed the Fractal Intelligence response to the theoretical problem of the Complex Designer posed by Dawkins.

But there are other means of proving the relative probability of the designer versus the design. The human genome possesses 30,000 genes while the *indica* rice genome possesses between 46,022 and 55,615 genes. However, the average length of those rice genes is only 4,500 gene pairs, one-sixteenth the length of the average human gene at 72,000 gene pairs. While the Chinese scientists developing a rice known as Xa21, a new strain of genetically modified rice resistant to bacterial blight, have not yet published the exact number or length of Xa21's genes, it almost surely possesses more and shorter genes than the scientists who developed it. So, in terms of genetic information, the design may or may not be more complex than the designer, depending on whether we choose to define information in terms of genes or gene pairs. In any case, it proves that the designer does not have to be more complex than his design if information is the measure.

Dawkins makes three even more serious mistakes in attempting to demonstrate the improbability of divine complexity when he argues that a designer capable of not only designing, but continually monitoring and controlling the individual status of every particle in the universe must be complex, especially if the designer's consciousness is also occupied with the activities of every single

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3<sup>1</sup> <http://library.thinkquest.org/3493/src/fractal/mandelbrot.bas>


sentient being across the billions of galaxies, answering their prayers, inflicting suffering on them and so forth. But here he is confusing the design of the universe, which is the topic under discussion, with the active management of the universe, which is not.

The designer of the universe need not monitor it, in fact, the concept of a hands-off Creator God has been around for centuries, it is the deity of the nineteenth-century Deists whom today's atheists regard as spiritual ancestors. A distinction between the divine designer and an active divine monitor is not only inherent to the Gnostic heretics, but to Bible-believing Christians as well. The common, but misguided, concept of divine puppet mastery, or omniderigence, is addressed in detail in Chapter XV, but for now it is sufficient to state that because Christian and other theologies do not require any belief in ongoing divine monitoring or active control (even if they permit it), that particular aspect of God's supposed complexity does not belong in any argument from improbability.

Third, the network analyzers known as packet sniffers, which capture each packet from the data stream passing through the network and can log, analyze, or decode the information contained therein, are orders of magnitude smaller in terms of digital bytes than the information they are monitoring. They are much less complex by Dawkins's definition, therefore, one would also expect a universal Divine monitor to be significantly less complex than the universe monitored.

His supposedly "irrefutable" argument is already refuted at this point, but it's only fair to follow its last three steps.

 *The most ingenious and powerful crane so far discovered is Darwinian evolution by natural selection. Darwin and his successors have shown how living creatures, with their spectacular statistical improbability and appearance of design, have evolved by slow, gradual degrees from simple beginnings. We can now safely say that the illusion of design in living creatures is just that—an illusion.*

 *We don't yet have an equivalent crane for physics. Some kind of multiverse theory could in principle do for physics the same explanatory work as Darwinism does for biology.*

Dawkins visits the wreckage of his train of thought, pours lighter fluid over it, and sets it on fire by

bringing up the multiverse concept, an utterly non-scientific theory invented solely to get around the problem of the anthropic principle. The anthropic principle is an explanation for the great mystery of physics: the improbable coincidence of various fundamental constants being set at just the right levels in order to support life in the universe. First announced by astrophysicist Brandon Carter in 1973 at a symposium celebrating the 500th birthday of Nicolas Copernicus, the principle suggests that the tremendous improbability of life in the universe suggests that its existence is not an accident. In explaining this principle, which is an extremely embarrassing thorn in the side of secular science, a former atheist named Patrick Glynn, comments wryly that “the more physicists have learned about the universe, the more it looks like a put-up job.”<sup>32</sup> Carter conceived the anthropic principle based on the odds against a relatively small number of fundamental constants being set precisely enough to permit life, but the current count is reportedly up to 128 of these fortuitous coincidences.<sup>33</sup>

Those indisposed to accept the anthropic principle attempt to get around the massive improbability problem it presents by imagining that there are billions and billions of universes, for all things are possible through the scientist who postulates very large numbers. Only by postulating a potentially infinite number of universes can our wildly improbable universe become mathematically probable. Of course, there are no signs of any of these other universes, nor did science ever take the idea of parallel universes seriously until the alternative was accepting the apparent evidence for a universal designer. But not only is multiverse theory every bit as unfalsifiable and untestable as the God Hypothesis, it is demonstrably more improbable. If we accept Dawkins’s naked assertion that a universal designer is more complex than the one known universe, a designer is probably less complex than any two universes and infinitely less complex than an infinity of them.

Dawkins does not inform us of the degree to which God’s complexity exceeds the complexity of the universe, but if we concede, for the sake of argument, that a universal designer must be 1,000

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3 <sup>2</sup> Patrick Glynn, *GOD The Evidence: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World* (Rocklin, 1999), 22.

3 <sup>3</sup> Ian Wishart, *Eve’s Bite* (North Shore, 2007) 77.

times more complex than the universe in order to create it, and therefore 1,000 times more improbable, a universal designer is still more mathematically likely than the squared improbability of there being two universes of similar complexity. For example, if the probability of one universe is one in one million, then the probability of the universal designer would be one in one billion, but the probability of there being two universes of similarly complex natures would be a much more improbable one in one trillion.

*6. We should not give up hope of a better crane arising in physics, something as powerful as Darwinism is for biology. But even in the absence of a strongly satisfying crane to match the biological one, the relatively weak cranes we have at present are, when abetted by the anthropic principle, self-evidently better than the self-defeating skyhook hypothesis of an intelligent designer.*

Dawkins's "irrefutable argument" ends laughably with a desperate appeal to the reader not to give up the faith, even though evidence, logic, and mathematics all refute this crown jewel of *The God Delusion*. Lacking any means of proving his conclusion, Dawkins simply throws up his hands and declares it to be self-evident!<sup>34</sup> I ask you this, dear atheist reader, would you accept an argument this poorly constructed as conclusive and irrefutable evidence of the existence of God?<sup>35</sup> And yet, on the basis of this burned-out train wreck of an argument, Dawkins declares the God Hypothesis to be untenable. I believe, on the other hand, that on the basis of this argument and the many errors mentioned previously in this chapter, any reasonable individual, regardless of his religious faith or lack of religious faith, can only conclude that it is Dawkins's entire foray outside of his realm of scientific expertise that is hopelessly untenable.

Sir Isaac Newton was fortunate that his obsessions with alchemy and occultic rediscovery did not tarnish his splendid record of intellectual achievement. Unfortunately for Richard Dawkins, his penchant for publishing his cognitive indiscretions make it unlikely that his reputation will survive

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<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> Sam Harris likes this "argument" too. So do I. I am a super sex machine to all the chicks. It is self-evident. QED.  
<sup>3</sup> <sup>5</sup> How is the hypothesis of an intelligent designer "self-defeating" anyhow? Some arguments for an intelligent designer make use of the anthropic principle, but the two are not the same. Dawkins's logic isn't so much incompetent here as it is simply weird.

similarly unscathed. But if science cannot inspire great art, never let it be said that a scientist cannot inspire great comedy, for who can possibly forget the classic episode of *South Park* featuring the famed evolutionary biologist getting his gene-replicating groove on. For inspiring that, if nothing else, we owe him an eternal debt of gratitude.

*A fish-squirrel boned a monkey in the Cambrian stream;*

*Satan shrieked 'Let Dawkins be' and brought forth a meme.<sup>36</sup>*

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<sup>36</sup> This isn't precisely the original form, but I am informed that certain words are frowned upon at Westminster Abbey and I shouldn't wish to deprive the Dawkins family of the chance to use this tribute to the great man on the occasion of his demise. Should the families of Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, or Daniel Dennett find themselves requiring a similar epitaph, they may rest secure in the knowledge that my poetic services are available.

## Chapter IX

### A MARXIAN APOSTATE

*“One of Lenin’s great achievements, in my opinion, is to create a secular Russia.”*  
—CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, *Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism*

Christopher Hitchens is the last and least of the Unholy Trinity. A respected political journalist, iconoclast, and, according to the *Economist*, one of the greatest living English conversationalists, he has neither the professional authority of Richard Dawkins nor is he accorded the scientific caché preposterously granted to Sam Harris. However, his book, *god is not Great*, has the virtue of being presented to the reader in a commendably honest and straightforward manner. Hitchens is not marketing humanism with a scientific brand, he is not pushing for global government under the guise of godlessness, he is merely venting about his personal hatred for religion in general and Christianity in particular.

And he vents well. Hitchens is a literary creature and the effortless prolixity of his acidulous anti-religious ranting betrays his familiarity with some of the great writers of the past. The self-righteousness of his outrage does credit to his Marxist background;<sup>1</sup> throughout the thunder of his prose one can feel the same burning sense of indignation that previously fueled Eugene Debs, Upton Sinclair, and the great prophet of scientific socialism himself. But Hitchens is seldom overly bombastic and he remains entertaining even at his most vicious, as there is more Wodehouse than Brecht even in his most pointed wit.

A globe-traveling journalist, Hitchens has seemingly been almost everywhere. He has had personal experience of the religious faithful from Protestant Unionists in Ulster to Buddhist monks in

<sup>1</sup> To this day, the former Trotskyite still “won’t have a word said against Marxist dialectical materialism.” Nor will he accept it being described as a religion, although he admits that one can call it “a terrible idea.”

Tibet. But as with most journalists, his knowledge is far wider than it is deep and his unsophisticated reasoning reflects this superficiality.

To the journalistic mind, to have heard of something is to know it and to write about something is to understand it. This is absurd, as anyone who has ever read a newspaper account of their own doings or even a story related to an area of their expertise well knows; I am hardly a public figure, but I have noticed that every single time a media publication has done a story or broadcast related to me, it has contained at least one major error and more often than not betrays a failure to understand something significant about the subject.<sup>2</sup>

Because Hitchens is more intelligent than the average journalist, his personal experiences do tend to shed a degree of relevant light on the topics he is discussing; even so, he is obviously subject to the common journalistic misconception that the plural of anecdote is data. While Harris constructs incompetent arguments and Dawkins constructs illogical ones, Hitchens doesn't even attempt to construct an intelligible case at any point along the way; instead he relies on argumentation by anecdote, avoidance, and aspersion.

Like any good storyteller, Hitchens sees no problem in casually adjusting the facts in order to make for a more entertaining story. When he relates how radio host Dennis Prager once asked him about whether the knowledge that a large group of men approaching him at night were coming from a Bible class would make him feel safer or less safe, Hitchens changes the words "Bible class" to "prayer meeting" and then "religious observance" in order to give himself an excuse to spend eleven pages rambling on about his negative experiences with militant religious extremists in Belfast, Beirut, Bombay, Belgrade, Bethlehem, and Baghdad.<sup>3</sup> Given his alliterative theme, you'd think he would have been happy to stick with the Bible scenario, but then, that would have eviscerated the story and shortened the book by nearly 4 percent.<sup>4</sup>

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2 This includes *The New York Times*, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, Knight-Ridder, and the Twin Cities NBC-affiliate.

3 Prager, Dennis. "10 Men Approaching in a Dark Alley." *WorldNetDaily*. 2 July 2007.

4 When called on this substantive substitution, Hitchens simply asserted that he still would not feel safer in the knowledge that he was encountering a Bible study group and not, say, a set of the Gangster Disciples or Venice 13. Of course, this is merely his



Hitchens writes as he debates, as if there is a team of judges keeping track of the total number of punches thrown and awarding points for each one landed. While this is entertaining and an effective means of rousing the already convicted rabble, it is entirely useless in attempting to present a coherent and convincing case to either the neutral or the dubious reader. Because of this pugnacious approach, he always seeks to come up with a rationale to avoid answering even the most direct questions instead of taking them on in a headfirst manner that will allow him to defend his assertions.

For example, when asked on another occasion about his theoretical reaction to a dozen black men appearing on a deserted subway platform late at night, Hitchens is delighted to relate that he once found himself in just such a situation when he happened to encounter a repair crew and “felt instantly safer.” But his response is just an evasion, and the question is not, as Hitchens describes it, a “trick” one; it is merely a simple and somewhat silly question designed to determine whether the supposedly color-blind individual is, in practice, free of racial prejudice.<sup>5</sup>

This preference for intellectual evasion is harmless enough when it comes to unimportant matters such as one Englishman’s embrace of multiculturalism. It is much more significant, however, when Hitchens exhibits the same behavior when dealing with one of the central issues involved in the ongoing debate between Christians and the New Atheists, especially one that Hitchens discusses in some detail in *god is not Great*, namely, the inability of atheists to hold others accountable to a universally applicable moral standard.

The two senior members of the Unholy Trinity deal with this inherent problem in a perfectly reasonable manner, as they have embraced, however surreptitiously, secular humanism as a replacement religion in the place of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> While the humanist standard can be legitimately criticized as nothing more than warmed-over utilitarianism with a flower child’s face, it must

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characteristic iconoclasm for iconoclasm’s sake and should not be taken as evidence that he is a complete moron.

5 Hitchens does seem to get asked a lot of stupid questions. I’m not sure if that reflects more poorly on his choice of interlocutors or his decisions regarding which of his past triumphs he wishes to share with the reader.

6 I admit that only Dawkins has done so in an explicit manner, but the theoretical morality described by Harris is implicitly humanist given that it is based on precisely the same happiness-suffering metric as Russell’s and Dawkins’s secular humanism. And, as previously shown, he has the same ultimate goals in mind.

nevertheless be recognized as an alternative moral system by which one individual can judge another's behavior and hold him accountable.<sup>7</sup> But Hitchens, being more concerned with avoiding concessions than making any sense, repeatedly failed to grasp this point in his 2007 debate with theologian Douglas Wilson hosted by *Christianity Today*.<sup>8</sup>

From the very first of his six responses to Hitchens, Wilson is forced to repeatedly ask Hitchens for his atheist basis of respect for the individual, for the reason why an individual should care one way or another about what Hitchens, or anyone else, happens to believe is good or evil, and exactly what the fixed standard by which Hitchens declares Christianity to be not good happens to be. After initially ignoring the question, followed by evasive digressions into everything from etiquette to Epicurus, from Spinoza to innate human solidarity, from slavery to stem cell research, Hitchens finally breaks down under the unrelenting pressure and answers:

*Quo warranto is a very ancient question, meaning "by what right?" You ask me for my "warrant" for a code of right conduct and persist in mistaking my answer for an evasion. I in turn ask you by what right you assume that a celestial autocracy is a guarantee of morals, let alone by what right you choose your own (Christian) version of it as the only correct one. All deities have been hailed by their subjects as the fount of good behavior, just as they have been used as the excuse for inexcusable behavior. My answer is the same as it was all along: Our morality evolved.*<sup>9</sup>

The reason Hitchens was so reluctant to provide this answer, which the reader can confirm that he most certainly did not provide at any previous point during the debate,<sup>10</sup> is explained by the logical hammer which Wilson drops on Hitchens as the debate comes to a close. Wilson's correct response is

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7 Indeed, this is where the danger of humanism becomes evident, as humanism provides for both moral accountability and moral authority without ever providing an objective device to which the moral authority can be held answerable. Theoretically immutable holy texts, however nonsensical they might appear, actually tend to provide a means of limiting authoritarianism, not increasing it.

8 "Is Christianity Good for the World": *Christianity Today*. 8 May 2007.

9 I note that Hitchens doesn't seem to understand what a warrant, or universally applicable moral standard, is. The fact that the claimed issuing authority cannot be confirmed to either exist or be the proper authority does not call into question the undeniable *existence* of the Christian warrant. To summarize: Hitchens is questioning the legitimacy of Wilson's warrant, Wilson is looking at Hitchens's empty hands and asking where his warrant is.

10 In the fifth exchange, Hitchens does quote Charles Darwin and spends two paragraphs discussing evolution in connection with morality, but he never does so in the context of a direct answer to Wilson's question.

that a constantly evolving standard is, by definition, not a fixed one, and moreover, the less-evolved cannot be reasonably held to the same standard as the more highly evolved. We do not put cats on trial for murdering mice. These are not only flaws in Hitchens's belated answer, for he has no explanation for the unknown mechanism for moral evolution in the apparent absence of a morality gene, nor does he explain the evidence that the pace at which morals "evolve" must be variable and speeding up dramatically of late if one is to accept some of the newly evolved "morals," such as the sin of being insufficiently enthusiastic about homosexual activity, as genuine.

Strangely, not long after being roundly thumped by a pastor from a small church in Idaho, this international public intellectual boasted that he has never been asked a question about religion and morality that surprised him. Like Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens does not seem to understand that it is not the ability to foresee a question that counts, but the ability to respond to it with a convincing answer.

### **An Exercise in Self-Evisceration**

It is a bit disappointing that for all his famously intransigent iconoclasm, Hitchens's attacks on religion are nearly identical to those made by Dawkins and Harris, aside from a bizarre little chapter in inexplicable defense of *S. domestica* entitled "Why Heaven Hates Ham."<sup>11</sup> There are the expected complaints about the Christian church's failure to embrace homosexuality or stem cell research, the supposed threat to science, the defense of abortion,<sup>12</sup> the half-hearted attempt to connect religion with war, the usual hand-wringing over sexual moderation, and, of course, the desperate attempt to blame Josef Stalin's evil deeds on his youthful religious training.<sup>13</sup>

To his credit, however, Hitchens doesn't worry overmuch about what he terms the "inculcation

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1 <sup>1</sup> This porcine digression is apparently supposed to demonstrate how religion interferes with even the most trivial aspects of life, but the point is more than a little muddled when Hitchens admits that humanists aren't particularly seeing pigs farmed for food either. (I don't understand the second part of this sentence)

1 <sup>2</sup> Surprisingly moderate, though.

1 <sup>3</sup> Of course, there's no mention of Mao, Mengistu, Sar, Hoxha, or any other atheist fellow traveler, who, unlike Dawkins and Hitchens himself, never belonged to any Christian church.

of compulsory ‘creationist’ stupidity in the classroom” despite his general enthusiasm for evolutionary theory. Perhaps this is because, unlike Dawkins, Hitchens does not sell DVDs marketed to schools and libraries from his Web site,<sup>14</sup> or more likely because the highly literate Hitchens recognizes that it does not matter if school children who cannot read or do arithmetic are taught that they were created by Natural Selection, God, or space aliens.<sup>15</sup>

There are some noteworthy aspects to *god is not Great*, however, particularly on page 150, where Hitchens performs an epic feat of intellectual self-evisceration that is impressive even by the lofty standards of one who has survived the tedious slog through the morass of Sam Harris’s two exercises in self-parody. Incredibly, Hitchens declares that “what can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence,” thus granting the critic carte blanche to legitimately dismiss the greater portion of Hitchens’s own book.

One would assume that having staked out such a position, Hitchens would have been careful to supply substantial evidence in support all of his arguments. This is not the case. Here is a table of fifty-one assertions made by Hitchens, each made completely sans evidence, taken from every single one of the nineteen chapters of *god is not Great*. The astute reader will note that many of these auto-refutable statements are not only made without any support whatsoever, they can often be confirmed to be downright incorrect should the reader trouble himself to examine the relevant evidence.

Page #	Quote from <i>god is not Great</i>
5	(1) Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. . . . (2) What we respect is free inquiry, openmindedness, and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. . . . (3) We do not believe in heaven or hell, yet no statistic will ever find that without these blandishments and threats we commit more crimes of greed or violence than the faithful. <sup>16</sup>

1 <sup>4</sup> “Richard Dawkins, author of the New York Times bestseller *The God Delusion*, and now the *Galaxy British Book Awards AUTHOR OF THE YEAR*—brings you the first DVD from *The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science: Growing Up in the Universe*. Order the *Growing Up in the Universe 2-Disc DVD Set Now! All proceeds go to the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science.*” From <http://www.richarddawkins.net> on 2 April 2007.

1 <sup>5</sup> I am an evolutionary skeptic myself, but I could not care less what is taught in the public schools. It’s like worrying about what cattle are being taught in the meat-packing factory (kind of offensive to public schools).

8	(4) Past and present religious atrocities have occurred not because we are evil, but because it is a fact of nature that the human species is, biologically, only partly rational.
17	(5) [Religion] <i>must</i> seek to interfere with the lives of nonbelievers. . . . it wants power in this [world]. . . . (6) [I]t does not have the confidence in its own various preachings even to allow coexistence between different faiths. <sup>17</sup>
40	(7) Nothing optional is ever made punishable unless those who do the prohibiting have a repressed desire to participate.
41	(8) In the hands of eager Christian fanatics, even the toothsome <i>jamón Ibérico</i> could be pressed into service as a form of torture. <sup>18</sup>
46	(9) It is a certainty that millions of other harmless and decent people will die, very miserably, and quite needlessly, all over the world as a result of this obscurantism [AIDS denial]. (10) The attitude of religion to medicine, like the attitude of religion to science, is always necessarily problematic and very often necessarily hostile. <sup>19</sup>
48	(11) To accept the spread of cervical cancer in the name of god is no different, morally or intellectually, from sacrificing these women on a stone altar. <sup>20</sup>
63	(12) Faith of that sort—the sort that can stand up at least for a while in a confrontation with reason—is now plainly impossible.
64	(13) All attempts to reconcile faith with science and reason are consigned to failure and ridicule. . . .
71	(14) If one must have faith in order to believe something, or believe in something, then the likelihood of that something having any truth or value is considerably diminished. The harder work of inquiry, proof and demonstration is infinitely more rewarding. . . . <sup>21</sup> (15) [Religion] often doesn't rely on "faith" at all.
74	(16) Since human beings are naturally solipsistic, all forms of superstition enjoy what might be called a natural advantage.
86	(17) However, all these disputes [between evolutionists], when or if they are resolved, will be resolved by using the scientific and experimental methods that have proven themselves so far.
98	(18) The syncretic tendencies of monotheism, and the common ancestry of the tales, mean in effect that a rebuttal to one is a rebuttal to all. <sup>22</sup>

1 <sup>6</sup> It seems Mr. Hitchens didn't look very hard. Or, in light of how easy it was to find several such statistics, at all.

1 <sup>7</sup> I note that religion is strikingly busy for an inanimate, abstract concept. Forget the absence of evidence, this is simply anthropomorphizing run amok.

1 <sup>8</sup> One wonders which of the three approved means of inquisitorial torture Hitchens has in mind: the *garrucha*, the *toca*, or the *potro*. Was the cured ham suspended as a counterweight on the *strappado*? No, it's merely rhetorical silliness.

1 <sup>9</sup> This historical antipathy for medicine is no doubt the reason so many religious individuals and organizations founded hospitals.

2 <sup>0</sup> Despite discussing condoms in this very paragraph, Hitchens conspicuously fails to mention that condoms are useless at even slowing down the transmission of the HPV virus, that this miraculous vaccine only targets two of the nineteen strains of the virus that cause cancer, and that most sexual education programs fallaciously teach that condom use will stop HPV transmission. It is Hitchens and his advocacy of sexual license combined with a vaccine that the *New England Journal of Medicine* determined to be applicable to only 18 percent of infected women that is much more likely to cause women to die of cervical cancer than the religious advocates of abstinence.

2 <sup>1</sup> Hard work to which Hitchens is demonstrably not amenable.

2 <sup>2</sup> This is just stupid. Certain proof that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead would encourage, not dishearten, a Jew. And there is no shortage of Christians who do not believe that Allah is the same god as Jehovah.

102	(19) The Bible may, indeed does, contain a warrant <sup>23</sup> for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre, but we are not bound by any of it because it was put together by crude, uncultured human mammals.
111	(20) <i>The Passion of the Christ</i> . . . is also an exercise in sadomasochistic homoeroticism starring a talentless lead actor who was apparently born in Iceland or Minnesota. <sup>23</sup>
115	(21) The contradictions and illiteracies of the New Testament have filled up many books by eminent scholars and have never been explained by any Christian authority except in the feeblest terms of ‘metaphor’ and ‘a Christ of faith.’
125	(22) All religions take care to silence or execute those who question them.
129	(23) There is some question as to whether Islam is a separate religion at all.
133	(24) The Christian world was so awful in this respect, and for so long, that many Jews preferred to live under Ottoman rule and submit to special taxes and other such distinctions.” <sup>24</sup>
150	(25) Miracles are supposed to happen at the behest of a being who is omnipotent as well as omniscient and omnipresent. (26) The 'Argument From Authority' is the weakest of all arguments.
151	(27) When I was a Marxist, I did not hold my opinions as a matter of faith.
158	(28) Is it not further true that all religions down the ages have shown a keen interest in the amassment of material goods in the real world?
160	(29) the whole racket of American evangelism was just that: a heartless con run by second-string characters from Chaucer's “Pardoner's Tale.”
169	(30) And we shall not hear again, in any but the most vestigial and nostalgic way, of Pan or Osiris or any of the thousands of gods who once held people in utter thrall.
176	(31) In no real as opposed to nominal sense, then, was he [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.] a Christian.
180	(32) Even a glance at the whole record will show, first, that person for person, American freethinkers and agnostics and atheists come out the best.
181	(33) As far as I am aware, there is no country in the world today where slavery is still practiced where the justification of it is not derived from the Koran. <sup>25</sup>
195	(34) the numberless ways in which religious morality has actually managed to fall well <i>below</i> the human average.
198	(35) the mind and the reasoning faculty – the only thing that divides us from our animal relatives

2 <sup>3</sup> Hitchens simply does not grasp what a warrant is. A specific order to kill Amalekites, for example, should not be confused with the right to commit ethnic cleansing at will. Christians are not bound by the Old Testament “warrants” he cites because we’re not Mosaic-era Jews living in Canaan.

2 <sup>3</sup> James Caviezel may be a handsome fellow, but he doesn’t look the least bit Minnesotan or Icelandic. Josh Harnett and Scarlett Johanssen, on the other hand, look like they should be walking hand-in-hand through Southdale. I grew up surrounded by Johnsons, Johnsens, Olsons, Olsens, Swensons, and Swensens, and believe me, I know what a Minnesotan looks like.

2 <sup>4</sup> No doubt this is why 40,000 of Spain’s 80,000 Jews elected to convert to Christianity rather than accept exile across the Straits of Gibraltar. Jews were seldom permitted residence in medieval Christendom; as soon as they were permitted to re-enter a kingdom from which they had previously been expelled, they usually did.

2 <sup>5</sup> I’m sure those Eastern European atheists who buy and sell thousands of women every year would be very surprised to know that their acts are justified by the Koran, not *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Origin of the Species*.

205	(36) There are, indeed, several ways in which religion is not just amoral, but positively immoral.
208	(37) [Suttee] was put down by the British in India for imperial as much as for Christian reasons.
213	(38) Humans are not so constituted as to care for others as much as themselves: the thing simply cannot be done.
214	(39) Perhaps we would be better mammals if we were not “made” this way, but surely nothing could be sillier than having a “maker” who then forbade the very same instinct he instilled. <sup>26</sup>
217	(40) We can be sure that religion has always hoped to practice upon the unformed and undefended minds of the young, and has gone to great lengths to make sure of this privilege by making alliances with secular powers in the material world.
218	(41) The museums of medieval Europe, from Holland to Tuscany, are crammed with instruments and devices upon which holy men labored devoutly, in order to see how long they could keep someone alive while being roasted. <sup>27</sup>
220	(42) If religious instruction were not allowed until the child had attained the age of reason, <sup>28</sup> we would be living in a quite different world.
223	(43) As to immoral practice, it is hard to imagine anything more grotesque than the mutilation of infant genitalia. <sup>29</sup>
232	(44) the object of perfecting the species – which is the very root and source of the totalitarian impulse – is in essence a religious one. <sup>30</sup> (45) In the early history of mankind, the totalitarian principle was the regnant one. <sup>31</sup>
247	(46) There is nothing in modern secular argument that even hints at any ban on religious observance. . . .
250	(47) Totalitarian systems, whatever outward form they may take, are fundamentalist and, as we would now say, “faith-based.”
254	(48) [Atheists] have in all times and all places been subject to ruthless suppression. <sup>32</sup>
259	(49) Atomism was viciously persecuted throughout Christian Europe for many centuries, on the not unreasonable ground that it offered a far better explanation of the natural world than did religion.
278	(50) It is better and healthier for the mind to choose the path of skepticism and inquiry in any case
280	(51) Until relatively recently, those who adopted the clerical path had to pay a heavy price for it. Their societies would decay, their economies would contract, their best minds would go to waste or take themselves elsewhere, and they would consistently be outdone by societies that

2 <sup>6</sup> And yet even Christopher Hitchens seems to be able to manage the supposedly impossible task of keeping his hand out of his pants when he’s on national television.

2 <sup>7</sup> See Chapter XII on the Spanish Inquisition.

2 <sup>8</sup> Which is what?

2 <sup>9</sup> Hitchens objects to both male and female circumcision. Based on the increasing popularity of Brazilian waxes and labiaplasty, porn will likely have a greater influence on the future of male circumcision than religion anyhow.

3 <sup>0</sup> How strange, then, that it’s atheists like Lenin, Russell, and Harris who always go in for that sort of thing. It’s not the Pope and the Southern Baptists who are pushing for eugenics these days.

3 <sup>1</sup> Hardly, as the word wasn’t even needed until the twentieth century.

3 <sup>2</sup> Drama queen much? Precisely what “ruthless suppression” has Hitchens ever suffered?

had learned to tame and sequester the religious impulse.<sup>33</sup>

Since we are reliably informed that assertions made without evidence can be refuted without the need to supply any refuting evidence, all fifty-one statements listed above are hereby dismissed with prejudice. *Qui nimium adseverat sine indicio nihil adseverat.*

## **Holistic Toxicity**

Even the most skilled polemicist occasionally gets carried away on the winds of his own rhetoric. It happens; one minute Ann Coulter is the shining blonde star of National Review Online, and the next she is gone, blown off the pixel pages due to the fallout from her notorious post-9/11 column.<sup>34</sup> It is rare, though, that a writer manages to get so completely carried away on the cover of his own book.

The first reaction to the subtitle of *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* is one of mild surprise. Everything? Seriously? While one is rather unlikely to begin reading the book under a misapprehension that an atheist attack on God is going to be especially enthusiastic about religion in general, blaming it for poisoning literally everything should strike even the most avowedly militant atheist as perhaps being a bit of an exaggeration. And although one hardly expects Hitchens to provide an encyclopedic demonstration of religion's destructive venom, the truth is that once one finishes reading his book, one is forced to conclude the Sports Guy makes a much more convincing case in support of his mantra that it is, in fact, women who ruin everything.<sup>35</sup>

The problem is not that Hitchens doesn't make an effective argument that religion ruins everything, it's that he doesn't even try make the case that it ruins much of anything except possibly

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<sup>3</sup> <sup>3</sup> That's why Christendom was so notoriously backwards compared to non-clerical Africa.

<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> "*We know who the homicidal maniacs are. They are the ones cheering and dancing right now. We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity.*" Although in fairness to Miss Coulter, whom I admire greatly, I note that invading their countries, killing their leaders, and handing government authority over to Shiite mullahs hasn't turned out quite as well as George W. Bush and Christopher Hitchens had hoped. And in fairness to NRO, Jonah Goldberg, and Rich Lowry didn't kick Miss Coulter out, she reached the reasonable conclusion that they didn't have her back and elected to end the relationship.

<sup>3</sup> <sup>5</sup> "*The lesson here, as always: Women ruin everything.*" The Sports Guy, ESPN.



one's sex life.<sup>36</sup> Nearly everything about which he complains continues apace despite religion's baleful influence: stem cell researchers are still researching, circumcised penises are still functioning,<sup>37</sup> homosexuals are still homosexualizing, people are still masturbating; really, the only point he substantiates is the way he personally witnessed how religion interfered with the polio eradication programs in India in 2001. And even this turns out to have been a minor setback, as the World Health Organization declared in June 2007 that "in all four endemic countries, type 1 polio has been successfully cornered."<sup>38</sup> This is no credit to the religious lunatics who interfered and delayed this success, but it also shows that religion is not the lethal obstacle to manifestly decent and worthwhile human endeavors that Hitchens portrays it to be.

Hitchens does not mention any aspect of economics, any science except evolutionary biology and cosmology, he makes no references to sport, to technology, or to fashion. While he mentions literature, he does not claim that religion threatens it in any way even though he proposes it as a substitute for the holy texts from which it borrows so liberally. The truth is that not even Christopher Hitchens believes religion poisons everything, or else he would not volunteer his opinion that he would not prohibit religion even if he thought he could. It is a pity that not all of his fellow New Atheists are willing to follow his unexpectedly gracious example.

While the titular case for the holistic toxicity of religion is nowhere to be found in *god is not Great*, Hitchens does mention four irreducible objections to religious faith. If these four objections are truly the basis for Hitchens's hostility towards God and religion, then the irrepressible atheist may be

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3 <sup>6</sup> And even there his assertion flies in the face of the evidence which reports that married religious couples are the most sexually satisfied. Remember that for every well-satisfied single swinger, there's probably twenty losers making do with romance novels, chocolate, and pixels.

3 <sup>7</sup> And, incidentally, proving more resistant to AIDS and other venereal diseases than the untrimmed variety.

3 <sup>8</sup> "In all four endemic countries, type 1 polio has been successfully cornered, a major step towards a polio-free world, given type 1's historically higher disease burden and potential to spread internationally. This year: in western Uttar Pradesh, India, only one type 1 case has been reported (compared to 18 type 1 cases for the same period in 2006); in northern Nigeria, from the three highest-risk states of Jigawa, Kano and Katsina, only one type 1 case has been reported (compared to 256 type 1 cases for the same period in 2006); Pakistan marked its longest period of time ever without type 1 cases—14 weeks between 30 January and 14 May; and in Afghanistan, only three type 1 cases have been reported this year (compared to 10 type 1 cases for the same period in 2006)." Global Polio Eradication Initiative, Monthly Situation Report, June 2007, World Health Organization. 19 June 2007.

much closer to returning to the faith of his fathers than anyone suspects, because one of these objections is trivial, one is irrelevant, and the other two are simply wrong.

1. *It wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos.*

Hitchens might as reasonably reject science on the same petty basis, considering the wide range of abiogenetic hypotheses, cosmological creation myths, and astrophysical fiction currently on offer. Is he similarly opposed to DNA because Francis Crick subscribed to the Directed Panspermia hypothesis and an *X-Files* variant of Intelligent Design dependent upon space-traveling aliens?

2. *It combines the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism.*

This is alliteration, not a genuine objection. And it is incorrect. Orwell's "boot in the face forever" is arguably the best conceptual expression of the maximum of servility and it is a secular one, given religion's preference for eschatological scenarios over steady-state theories.

3. *It is the cause of dangerous sexual repression.*

There is loads of evidence that it is not sexual repression, but the absence of sexual repression that is dangerous. Abstinence never killed anyone, but AIDS certainly has. Male homosexuals are the least sexually repressed humans on the planet; they also happen to enjoy the shortest life expectancy.<sup>39</sup> While sexual repression might explain the horrific history of sexual abuse committed by Catholic clergymen, it does not explain the much greater incidence of sexual abuse by secular educators in the public school system.<sup>40</sup>

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3 <sup>9</sup> While the studies by Hogg and Cameron that conclude male homosexuals live between eight to twenty years less than their heterosexual counterparts are angrily disputed by a homosexual population which is by all accounts inordinately disposed to snorting meth, committing suicide, and trading venereal diseases, I was unable to find any scientific studies indicating otherwise. (offensive to homosexuals)

4 <sup>0</sup> "The physical sexual abuse of students in schools is likely more than 100 times the abuse by priests." Shakeshaft, C. PhD. U.S. Department of Education report. 2002.

4. *It is ultimately grounded on wish-thinking.*

This is an irrelevant and tautological statement. “I object to something in which I don’t believe because it is not true.” All human action is ultimately grounded on wish-thinking, indeed, all technological advancement is. It is not a reasonable basis for an objection to religion; the statement might as easily be applied to the airline industry.

*god is not Great* reveals another fundamental limitation of the journalistic mindset in Hitchens’s over-reliance on personal observation and perfunctory sourcing.<sup>41</sup> This professional habit leads him into error after error, as he is usually content to rely on a single source without ever considering readily available information to the contrary; in many cases, that single source is himself. Consider the similarities in the way he approaches three very different issues: historical Biblical accuracy, child abuse, and charity.

In discussing the Bible, Hitchens claims that the four Gospels were not in any sense a historical record and claims their multiple authors “cannot agree on anything of importance.” His only source is Bart Ehrman, an apostate former evangelical whose *Misquoting Jesus* is an interesting and respected textual criticism of the inerrant inspiration of the New Testament. But Hitchens is apparently unaware that Ehrman has been forced to admit that the Gospels are in accordance that 1) Jesus was crucified and buried, 2) his tomb was discovered to be empty, 3) his disciples believed they encountered him after his death, and 4) his disciples sincerely believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.<sup>42</sup> The reason Ehrman claims these are not reliable historical accounts is because there is divergence between details relating to what time of day Jesus died, whether he carried his cross alone or not, who went to the tomb, and

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4 <sup>1</sup> Hitchens’s statement about the weakness of the Argument from Authority is particularly amusing considering his background as a journalist, since it is the sole basis for most news reporting. Journalist: “Is it true the DEA is breaking the law, Mr. DEA Press Agent?” DEA Press Agent: “No, that is not true.” Newspaper the next morning: “Accusations of DEA wrongdoing are unfounded.”

4 <sup>2</sup> Craig, William Lane and Bart D. Ehrman, “Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus?” College of the Holy Cross, 28 March 2006

whether the disciples went to Galilee and then returned to Jerusalem. But as the journalist Hitchens should be aware, even eyewitness accounts tend to vary greatly when it comes to the particulars. In any case, it is a substantial exaggeration to state that the Gospels do not agree on anything of importance.

This is especially true because by the standards normally used by historians to evaluate ancient texts, the fact that there are several texts written by multiple primary sources within decades of the historical event strengthens the historical case for the Bible. The textual case for the historical Jesus is orders of magnitude stronger than the one for the historical Alexander the Great,<sup>43</sup> and as archeologists have learned the hard way, it is unwise to assume the historical inaccuracy of the Bible based on missing evidence. While it's true, as Hitchens happily points out, that Israeli archeologists haven't located archeological evidence of the exodus from Egypt, this was also once true of the "mythical" Nineveh, discovered in 1850,<sup>44</sup> and the "nonexistent" Hittite Empire discovered in 1906.

Even worse, Hitchens revealed in a debate with Dr. Mark D. Roberts on the Hugh Hewitt show that his reliance on Ehrman for New Testament criticism was misplaced because he did not know that Ehrman has been an agnostic for more than twenty years. Roberts, a seminary professor, also explains that Hitchens made fifteen factual errors and sixteen substantial distortions or misunderstandings of the evidence in *god is not Great*.<sup>45</sup> He lists the fifteen factual errors as follows:

1. Scholars estimate the date of Jesus's birth to be 6 B.C., not 4 A.D.
2. Bart D. Ehrman's name is not Barton.
3. The four Gospels are in accord regarding thirty-three key facts about Jesus, not zero.
4. Not all four Gospels are supposed to be based on Q, only Matthew and Luke.
5. Jesus was not the only one to mention Hell. Paul, Peter, Jude, and John did as well.
6. Jesus did not invent the concept of Hell. It is mentioned in earlier Jewish writings.
7. The Nag Hammadi "Gospels" were codices, not scrolls, and they were not written in the same period as the canonical Gospels, but later.

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4 <sup>3</sup> There are no primary sources for Alexander and the most trustworthy of the five secondary sources was written by Arrian approximately 470 years after Alexander's death.

4 <sup>4</sup> Prior to the discovery of King Sennacherib's palace in 1847, the "missing" city of Nineveh was cited as reason for doubting the Old Testament books of Jonah and Nahum.

4 <sup>5</sup> <<http://www.markdroberts.com/htmlfiles/resources/godisnotgreat.htm>>

8. No one was killed over the debate regarding which of the Gospels should be considered divinely inspired. Hitchens writes that “many a life was horribly lost.”
9. H.L. Mencken was a journalist who had no capacity for judging whether the New Testament documents were tampered with or not. His assertion is by no means “irrefutable.”
10. Tacitus does mention an Augustan Census in the *Annals*. Augustus himself mentions three, 28 B.C., 8 B.C., and 14 A.D., in his *Acts of Augustus*.<sup>46</sup>
11. Scholars do not consider the eyewitness claims to have witnessed the Crucifixion to be fraudulent, let alone patently so.
12. The Apostle Paul never expresses either fear of women or contempt for them.
13. It is not true that no Christian authority has ever addressed the perceived “contradictions and illiteracies of the New Testament” except in terms of “metaphor” and “a Christ of Faith.”<sup>47</sup>
14. All scholars agree that the nature of the Gospels is at least partially literal.
15. Hitchens invents and exaggerates disagreements about the Gospels. The “disagreement” about Peter’s denial is whether the cock crowed once or twice; it is not a matter for scholarly theological debate.

In addition to these demonstrable errors, Hitchens doesn’t provide a single source or even anecdote for his absurd declaration that charity and relief work are “the inheritors of modernism and the Enlightenment,” he merely draws upon his recollection of the relief workers he has personally encountered. Not only have Christians operated under the mandate of Jesus Christ to heal the sick and feed the hungry since the Crucifixion, but to this day, relief work around the world is dominated by Christians. The fact that the name “Red Cross” is synonymous with disaster relief is not exactly a coincidence.

And Hitchens abandons even personal experience when he declares that revulsion for various forms of child abuse is innate and does not need to be taught. Instead, he dramatically informs the reader that if he were to harm a child, he would commit suicide, indeed, he might even consider it if he were wrongly suspected of it. But this moral posturing notwithstanding, the literally millions of such crimes that have taken place during the twentieth century, to say nothing of the large market for child prostitutes that exists today in countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand, a significant percentage of whom were sexually abused prior to being forced into prostitution,<sup>48</sup> proves that not

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<sup>4 6</sup> If Jesus was born in 6 B.C., the census announced in 8 B.C. would appear to be the likely culprit.

<sup>4 7</sup> Many have, including two published theologians with whom I am personally acquainted. Hitchens simply hasn’t read them. I’d be happy to send him their books if he likes.

<sup>4 8</sup> “*In Vietnam 49% of girls in prostitution were victims of prior sexual abuse.*” “Asia’s Child Sex Victims Ignored.” BBC News, 15 Sept. 2000. Of course, prostituting children is itself a form of sexual abuse.

everyone is so morally evolved as to be gifted with the same innate revulsion. Hitchens then proceeds to announce that religion's failure to protect children from abuse is "uniquely delinquent," *and on that sole basis* claims justification to conclude that religion is manufactured, that ethics and morality are independent of faith, and that religion is not just amoral, but immoral.

His argument, if one can even call it that, isn't even wrong, it's not coherent enough to be described as incorrect. It is nothing less than a revelation of a deep-rooted irrationality that harks back to the teary-eyed emotionalism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, not cold, dispassionate reason.

It is this emotional aspect that redeems Hitchens as a human being even as it precludes any possibility of taking *god is not Great* seriously as an attack on religion. The theist critic is left to conclude—and oh, the irony!—that one cannot dismantle an argument that does not exist. For where there is no logic, there can be no logical analysis. And if Hitchens reveals himself to be a snide, petty, self-righteous, and superficial character throughout the course of the book, he also comes off as an eminently likeable individual, even charming at times. Whereas one finishes *The God Delusion* and *The End of Faith* resenting the author for forcing one to immerse one's mind in such a sneering slough of asininity, the third member of the Unholy Trinity rather makes one feel like buying him a drink and asking if the subject of total consciousness ever came up when he was playing golf with the Dalai Lama.<sup>49</sup>

In the first chapter of his book, Christopher Hitchens asks an important question.

*Religious faith is, precisely because we are still-evolving creatures, ineradicable. . . . For this reason I would not prohibit it even if I thought I could. Very generous of me, you may say. But will the religious grant me the same indulgence?*

I cannot speak for those who follow other religions, but for the Christian there is only one answer: by all means!

If God, whose power is infinitely greater than my own, does not see fit to force

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4<sup>9</sup> Big hitter, the Lama.

Christopher Hitchens to worship him, then how can I, or any other Christian, fail to do other than follow that divine example? Free will is at the heart of the Christian faith. To follow or not to follow is a choice, and I would not, indeed, I could not, rob Christopher Hitchens of his right to make that decision on his own.

## Chapter X

### THE PRAGMATIC PHILOSOPHER

*When the gods are toppled, new ones will soon be invented.*

—CAMILLE PAGLIA

This book did not proceed exactly according to plan. Originally inspired by a trilogy of columns entitled “The Clowns of Reason,” it was supposed to be devoted to dissecting the anti-theistic arguments of Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, and Sam Harris. However, when Christopher Hitchens appeared on the scene and began wreaking such a wide path of intellectual devastation by trouncing noted theologians such as the Rev. Al Sharpton and Chris Hedges, the author of *The Christian Right and the Rise of American Fascism*, it became clear that Hitchens was an atheist *tour de force* that must be addressed at all costs!

Also, when I finished reading *Breaking the Spell*, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, and *Freedom Evolves*, I was embarrassed to discover that I had done Dr. Dennett somewhat of a disservice by lumping him in with those who can more legitimately be described as Reason’s clowns. It may be a forgivable error, given Dennett’s public anointing as a New Atheist of note by *Wired* magazine and the way in which he shares top billing with the Unholy Trinity at events such as the 2007 Atheist Alliance International convention, but it was a mistake nevertheless. My apologies to the good professor, and I hope the excellent rating I gave *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* in a subsequent column<sup>1</sup> may have in some small way alleviated the deep anguish he surely suffered.

*Breaking the Spell* is substantially different than any of the four books on religion written by the Unholy Trinity. Despite being every bit as ignorant of the theological, historical, and demographical basics as Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens, Dennett’s book is far from a polemic, even if he can’t quite

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<sup>1</sup> It wasn’t really a book review, but I did give *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* a rating of nine out of ten. The book is well worth reading regardless of your position on evolution.



resist giving in to the customary atheist chest-thumping.<sup>2</sup> I suppose if one shouldn't condemn a man who believes he descended from apes<sup>3</sup> for behaving like one; at least the feces-flinging is kept to a minimum. For in *Breaking the Spell*, instead of assuming that God is a delusion, asserting that religion is bad, and announcing that science is finally on the verge of bringing an end to faith, Dennett merely argues for putting both our positive and our negative assumptions about religion aside in order to take a rational scientific look at precisely what religion offers mankind.

This is an eminently reasonable perspective, especially in contrast with the wild-eyed scaremongering of the Unholy Trinity, although it is a little strange that it should take an academic philosopher to remind the ex-scientist and the would-be scientist that if one hopes to make a convincing scientific case, it helps to actually gather the evidence and examine it. Dennett's intellectual honesty, at least in comparison with his peers, is also refreshing. After being forced to endure Harris's sophomoric deceptions and Dawkins's incessant shell games, it is a sheer pleasure to consider the fair and sometimes even insightful questions that Dennett poses relating to the potential costs and benefits of the God hypothesis. Whereas the Unholy Trinity attempt to browbeat the unthinking reader into unquestioningly accepting their assertion that Man is on the verge of vanishing in nuclear fire unless billions of idiots can be forcibly stripped of their belief in non-existent sky fairies, Dennett calmly asks the thoughtful reader to consider why religious faith exists in the first place, why it persists so stubbornly, and why so many individuals place such a high value upon it.

Dennett is also forthright about the arbitrary nature of his own beliefs. He admits to holding sacred values and declares that he would never consider abandoning them, although one wonders if he may not want to give some thought to demoting democracy from his list of the unquestionable in light of the results of various elections across the Middle East. His other values are justice, life, love, and truth, and although he puts them in no order of priority, it would have been most enlightening to know

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2 Yes, professor, in spite of my Eschatonic beliefs, I was somehow able to reach deep inside and summon the "intellectual honesty and courage" required to read your book all the way through. Including the Appendices and Notes!

3 I know, I know. Shared a common ancestor and all that. I claim the right of rhetorical license.

which of these values trumped the others, and why. It's also interesting to see that he left out liberty and equality as well as the humanist happiness/suffering quotient; one suspects that being a competent philosopher, Dennett is aware of the ultimate moral bankruptcy of utilitarianism. Unlike many intellectuals, Dennett is quite willing to admit when he doesn't know something or has no opinion on it—in one long interview with an obnoxious interviewer far more interested in talking about his own ideas than asking questions about Dennett's,<sup>4</sup> the philosopher responds with no less than ten variants on a neo-Socratic theme, repeatedly stating "I have no idea," "I haven't a clue," and "I have nothing to say about this."

And while Dennett's declaration of unabashed atheism leaves no doubt about his personal opinion regarding the existence of the supernatural, which he equates with the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy, he is at least open to the possibility that there are numerous aspects of religion that neither he nor anyone else truly understands. It is this recognition of the near-complete scientific ignorance on the matter that inspires Dennett to propose that scientists make a serious effort at investigating religion instead of merely insulting it. His confidence that the evidence collected will eventually support his hypothesis appears to ebb and flow throughout the book, but it is to his credit that he never asks his reader to accept it at face value or on the strength of his rhetoric.

In looking at the matter from an evolutionary perspective, Dennett suggests several possibilities to explain how religion might be of benefit to someone, somewhere. *Cui bono?* he asks. His first suggestion is to consider the way it can bring out the best in individuals. Religion may not be the only phenomenon to do so, but Dennett does not question that it does. While he suggests that it could be possible to design a synthetic replacement that would do so even more efficiently, the suggestion is weakened by his incorrect insistence that atheists are more law-abiding, more sensitive to the needs of others, and more ethical than others. While this may be true if one cherry-picks the data and looks only

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4 "The M&C Interview 2: Daniel Dennett," *Monsters and Critics*. 1 July 2007. And to Dennett's additional credit, he declines to take the opportunity to agree with the interviewer's ridiculous assertion that it is "wholly inaccurate" to equate Communism with atheism because Communism "was really a secular religion." Apparently it was just an amazing coincidence that every Communist of historical note publicly declared his atheism. See chapter XIII.

at the High Church atheist, there is a plethora of evidence that a comparison of all atheists to all Christians will not favor the former, whether one looks at crime rates, divorce rates, birth rates, democratic participation, or charitable giving.<sup>5</sup>

His second suggestion is that religion could be a memetic symbiont or parasite, which benefits itself at the expense of humanity. This is an intriguing concept, but largely a pointless one since there is absolutely no evidence that memes even exist and the idea smacks of confusing metaphor with reality. Consider the protests from his fellow atheists if Dennett had instead tried to argue that religion exists in order to benefit God. It's certainly an unusual argument for a materialist to make, given the obvious difficulties presented in trying to weigh religion or measure the wavelength of a meme.

His third suggestion is that if religion benefits any human group, the important question would be to determine whom. He suggests three possibilities: all the individuals in society, the members of the controlling elite, or societies as a whole, and while he doesn't answer the question himself, he expresses a certain skepticism of the last one due to his doubts about evolutionary group selection. The evidence, however, suggests that his first and third options are the strongest here. The idea that religion exists to benefit the elite is weakened by the fact that the ranking members of one of the eldest and most powerful religious elites, the Catholic Church, are neither allowed to have genetic heirs or enjoy many material benefits from their elite status, whereas the competing concept of societal benefit is supported by the evidence that irreligious individuals and societies do not show much enthusiasm for propagation.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, he raises a fourth possibility that religion is merely a by-product of evolution, otherwise known as a spandrel. It's here that the philosopher finds himself in logical trouble. Both of Dennett's memetic proposals and his subsequent argument against Starke and Finke's economic case for the

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5 See chapters IV and XIII for evidence in support of this statement.

6 Dennett presumably considers this, since he mentions cultural as well as genetic heirs, but seriously, no one goes into the priesthood to have a good time. There's a reason it's considered a renunciation. And even the life of a Protestant minister leaves much to be desired, as anyone who has ever survived a Sunday basement buffet in the Midwest well knows. Life is too short to eat microwaved casseroles topped with Corn Flakes.

rational value of religion directly contradict his assertion of the way that evolution's remarkable efficiency means that a persistent pattern amounts to proof—"we can be quite sure"—that the pattern is of benefit to something in the evolutionary currency of differential reproduction.<sup>7</sup> How, one wonders, does Dennett fail to grasp that a creed which explicitly states "go forth and multiply" is likely to be inordinately successful in evolutionary terms, genetic or memetic?

And yet, the philosopher shows himself to be repeatedly susceptible to missing similarly obvious things, usually due to a failure to draw a correct logical conclusion from the evidence on hand. Consider, for example, the way Dennett attempted to explain the ant analogy with which he begins *Breaking the Spell* to an interviewer for Salon:<sup>8</sup>

**Tell us the story from your new book about the ant and the blade of grass.**

*Suppose you go out in the meadow and you see this ant climbing up a blade of grass and if it falls it climbs again. It's devoting a tremendous amount of energy and persistence to climbing up this blade of grass. What's in it for the ant? Nothing. It's not looking for a mate or showing off or looking for food. Its brain has been invaded by a tiny parasitic worm, a lancet fluke, which has to get into the belly of a sheep or a cow in order to continue its life cycle. It has commandeered the brain of this ant and it's driving it up the blade of grass like an all-terrain vehicle. That's how this tiny lancet fluke does its evolutionary work.*

**Is religion, then, like a lancet fluke?**

*The question is, Does anything like that happen to us? The answer is, Well, yes. Not with actual brain worms but with ideas. An idea takes over our brain and gets that person to devote his life to the furtherance of that idea, even at the cost of their own genetics. People forgo having kids, risk their lives, devote their whole lives to the furtherance of an idea, rather than doing what every other species on the planet does—make more children and grandchildren.*

It somehow escapes the professor's attention that it is not the religious portion of the population that is having trouble doing what every other species on the planet does, but rather, the irreligious one.<sup>9</sup> If

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7 Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 62

8 Slack, Gordy. "Dissecting God." *Salon*. 8 Feb. 2006.

9 "Conservative, religiously minded Americans are putting far more of their genes into the future than their liberal, secular counterparts." Longman, Phillip. "Political Victory: From Here to Maternity." *The Washington Post*, 2 Sept. 2004.

there is a metaphorical lancet fluke to be blamed for anti-evolutionary human behavior, then it is atheist secularism that most accurately fits the analogy now that the Shakers and Skoptsi are no more. Indeed, the demographic performance of secular post-Christian societies over the last fifty years suggests that from a grand historical perspective, modern atheist secularism will be seen as a fluke indeed.

Dennett also digs another logical hole for himself when he admits that only a tiny fraction of humanity understands what he describes as “the ultimate talismanic formula of science,” Einstein’s  $E=mc^2$  equation. He has no problem with the fact that most people are content to accept this scientific dogma on faith and leave the burden of understanding the details to the priesthood of scientific experts, then, seventy-seven pages later, turns around and declares that it is personally immoral for the religious faithful to practice this very same division of doxastic labor by placing trust in their pastors, priests, rabbis, and imams to make their moral decisions for them. Dennett attempts to justify these contrary stances by stating that the difference is that the scientific priesthood really know what they’re doing, that they understand their formulas and use them to achieve amazingly accurate results, while the religious priesthood does not.

But Dennett is demonstrably incorrect on both scores. Dennett’s two favorite sciences, cognitive science and evolutionary biology, are primarily distinguished by the way in which no one understands exactly how anything works nor has managed to construct any significant formulas, let alone achieve any results demonstrating the precision of the quantum electrodynamic calculations cited in Dennett’s example. Dennett himself confesses that human consciousness is a mystery, a phenomenon that people don’t even know how to think about yet,<sup>10</sup> and while he is rather more sanguine about the achievements of evolutionary biology, he admits that the science which began with the *Origin of the Species* still regards the way in which species begin to be a mystery too, albeit one with more of the details filled in.<sup>11</sup>

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So while some sciences have proven themselves worthy enough of our complete confidence

<sup>10</sup> Dennett, Daniel C. *Consciousness Explained*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Dennett, Daniel C. *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1996. 44.

that we need not trouble our pretty little heads about them, to claim that we are justified in placing blind trust in cognitive scientists, evolutionary biologists, and sociologists because physicists really know what they're doing is absurd. It's a bait-and-switch worthy of Dawkins. And Dennett offers absolutely no evidence that any religious faithful are any more prone to unquestioning obedience of their priesthood than science-fetishists are of the various secular bulls issued regularly from the archbishoprics of Oxford, Cambridge, M.I.T., and Stanford.

Conversely, the very existence of the Protestant church and the ubiquitous suburban Bible studies held across America on weekday evenings prove that the majority of Christians do not subscribe to any doxastic division of labor regarding either their fundamental beliefs or their individual moral decisions. And how could they, considering their belief that their every act will one day be judged before the throne of the Almighty? One could even argue that the belief of the average secular non-scientist in science's latest mystical pronouncements is far more blind than that of the average churchgoer, who usually knows his pastor well enough to know when even the most firmly held pastoral opinion is best disregarded. I very much like and admire Greg Boyd, who was my pastor when I attended Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul a decade ago, and I tend to agree with him on a number of theologically controversial matters such as Open Theism and warfare theodicy. This did not stop me from rolling my eyes when Greg decided that it was necessary to publicly apologize to the blacks of the congregation for eighteenth-century slavery and beg them for forgiveness; my amusement devolved into inappropriate laughter when my wife chose that deeply emotional moment to whisper an apology for the sins her Viking ancestors committed against my English forebears.

The reality is that no one ever stops and reasons for himself from first principles on every issue, be it scientific, religious, or moral. Dennet points this out himself in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* as the reason behind humanity's need for a moral first aid manual, because it will not do for people to waste time philosophizing instead of acting in response to every new moral dilemma that presents itself.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 504.

The occasional logical errors and assertions in the face of evidence such as these show that while *Breaking the Spell* is unquestionably superior in almost every way to the Unholy Trinity's four books on religion, the scientific-sounding speculation that fills it is nothing more than that, speculation. The literary editor of *The New Republic* underlined this point in an utterly brutal review of the book which appeared in the *New York Times*, reminding the reader that at the end of the day, *Breaking the Spell* is not science, but a book of speculative philosophy written by a science-fetishist.

There is no scientific foundation for its scientific narrative. Even Dennett admits as much: "*I am not at all claiming that this is what science has established about religion. . . . We don't yet know.*" So all of Dennett's splashy allegiance to evidence and experiment and "*generating further testable hypotheses*" notwithstanding, what he has written is just an extravagant speculation based upon his hope for what is the case, a pious account of his own atheistic longing.<sup>13</sup>

## Lifting the Curtain

*"I'll have you hung, drawn and quartered! And whipped! And boiled . . . until . . . until . . . until you've had enough. . . . And then I'll do it again!" yelled Arthur. "And when I've finished I will take all the little bits, and I will jump on them!"*

—DOUGLAS ADAMS, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Universe*

Leon Wieseltier's review is too hard on Dennett in my opinion; one shudders to think what he might have done to *The God Delusion*, let alone *The End of Faith*, but it's hard to argue with his conclusions when Dennett himself can't offer a better defense than to suggest that his matter-of-fact, non-disrespectful approach to religion has somehow frightened Wieseltier.<sup>14</sup> But this is a response better suited to a rejected forty-something blaming her single status on being too strong and independent for prospective suitors than to a philosopher and serious intellectual disputant. Wieseltier sums up his

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup> Wieseltier, Leon. "The God Genome." *The New York Times*. 19 Feb. 2006.

<sup>1</sup> <sup>4</sup> "(Somebody asked me if perhaps I'd stolen his wife or raped his daughter, but no, his loathing for me and my book is, I gather, entirely generated by the book itself.) I can only guess why he was rattled. Some people are deathly afraid that if religion falls into disrespect, the world of morality and goodness will collapse—the moral heat death of the universe! To somebody of that conviction, my matter-of-fact attitude towards religion (not DISrespectful, but not displaying the standard hyper-respect religion tries to command in our society) is scary indeed." The M&C Interview.

review by stating that the most conclusive thing proved by Dennett is that there are many spells which need to be broken, and *Breaking the Spell* indeed inspires one to conclude that everything from material reductionism to moral relativism to science itself would probably benefit from a good dose of the scientific analysis that Dennett recommends for religion.

If Dennett's weak logic merely provided some ironic amusement with regards to his parable of the parasitic ant, it threatens to become problematic when he attempts to solve the dilemma of moral origins by positing an evolved free will that gives humanity the opportunity to usurp the Blind Watchmaker of natural selection and begin to guide its own evolution. For when asked where society will find its moral foundation, if not from religion, Dennett responds with a tautology:

*Rules that we lay down ourselves. . . . Now we can continue to expand the circle and get more people involved, and do it in a less disingenuous way by excising the myth about how this is God's law. It is our law.*

As evidence that moral democracy is theoretically functional, he asserts without evidence that the prison population is distributed according to religious affiliation in the general population, an incorrect assertion that was belied in Chapter I. Dennett further claims that "brights" have better family values than born-again Christians based on "the lowest divorce rate in the United States" which depends on the flawed 1999 Barna study<sup>15</sup> instead of the 2001 ARIS study he makes use of later in the book, a much larger study which reaches precisely the opposite conclusion. It is certainly a quixotic assertion, considering that these family values atheists are half as likely to get married, twice as likely to divorce, and have fewer children than any other group in the United States.

Another obvious flaw is that moral democracy suffers from the same structural weakness as its political counterpart, an inherent mandate to appeal to the lowest common denominator. This should be

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<sup>15</sup> Barna calculated divorces as a percentage of the entire group, not as a percentage of marriages within that group. Since according to ARIS 2001 more than half of all atheists and agnostics don't get married, this is an apple-orange comparison. If one correctly excludes the never-married from the calculation, then atheists are 58.7 percent more likely to get divorced than Pentecostals and Baptists, the two born-again Christian groups with the highest rate of divorce, and more than twice as likely to get divorced than Christians in general.



clear to anyone who has entered a voting booth and looked upon his choices with despair; Is the opportunity to select between the moral equivalents of George W. Bush and Al Gore really to be considered a step forward for mankind? And yet, not even the electoral horrors of 2000 come close to representing the historical dregs of democracy—it's worth remembering that the National Socialists not only won more seats in the Reichstag than the eight political parties with whom they competed in the three parliamentary elections between July 1932 and March 1933, but also won more than 95 percent of the vote in the four plebiscites held to confirm popular approval of the withdrawal from the Geneva disarmament conference, Hitler's assumption of dictatorial rule, the seizure of the Rhineland, and the annexation of Austria.<sup>16</sup>

When one considers that Hamas won a 56 percent majority of the Palestinian parliament with 75 percent voter turnout in 2006, one is forced to conclude that an atheist would not only have to be irrational, but entirely insane to even consider embracing the concept of moral democracy.

Of course, it's also possible that despite his elevation of democracy to sacred status, Dennett isn't actually envisioning democratic morality per se when he refers to getting more people involved, but was merely thinking of an expanded circle of elders who would take responsibility in laying out this new self-determined morality for the rest of mankind. It's not exactly unheard of for philosophers to reach the conclusion that rule by philosopher-kings is the ideal form of human governance, after all.

Dennett doesn't ignore the possibility that looking too closely at religion could blow up in the examiner's face; he even has a section entitled "Wouldn't neglect be more benign?" But he is ultimately convincing when he points out that simply ignoring the issue and hoping it will go away really isn't much of an option, since whatever evidence that is turned up by the curious is bound to eventually find its way in front of anyone who is interested. His case is bolstered by the recent admission of a senior Chinese Communist Party member that not even a ruthless totalitarian

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<sup>16</sup> What's staggering about Hitler's democratic appeal is not that he managed to win an average of 95.9 percent of the vote in the four plebiscites, but that he did so with 95.5 percent of the registered voters showing up to vote. That's a serious democratic mandate!

government is capable of controlling the news any longer.<sup>17</sup>

The biggest problem is that even if Dennett is correct and there is no magician behind the moral curtain, the positive consequences of revealing this absence may well outweigh the negative ones. Needless to say, philosophers from Socrates to Voltaire and Nietzsche have strongly disagreed with Dennett's optimistic view despite their similar skepticism about the truth of God's existence, and what historical and scientific evidence exists tends to support their pessimism. Given that Dennett is not dogmatically opposed to the idea that some knowledge is simply too dangerous to be freely shared with all humanity, it is surprising that he is so willing to roll the dice with civilization in this regard.

In considering the operation of a functional moral system, Dennett simply ignores the practical need for an objective basis and claim to universal authority, Wilson's "warrant," if you will. Theists have a perfectly logical and objective basis for the application of their god-based moralities that even the most die-hard rational atheist cannot reject, given the theistic postulate that God actually exists and created the universe. In short, God's game, God's rules. If you're in the game, then the rules apply to you regardless of what you think of the game designer, your opinion about certain aspects of the rulebook, or the state of your relationship with the zebras.

Atheists, on the other hand, enjoy no similar logical basis, no objective foundation or universal warrant, which leaves every individual playing his own game and making up his own rules as he goes along. So Dennett finds himself caught in the seemingly senseless act of lauding atheists for behaving in a moral manner according to a morality that he considers groundless and in need of democratic modification.

This is somewhat less senseless than it initially appears, because the primary alternative is to pursue the Harris strategy and claim that atheists are behaving according to a morality that someone could invent if he were to sit down and think hard about it, although no one ever seems to actually have done so. This alternative leaves the atheist to decry actions performed by Muslims and Christians

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Censorship is Failing, Says Chinese Official." *The Times*, 16 July 2007.

McCartney, James. "Web

inspired by the dictates of imaginary beings on the basis of a hypothetical morality. Of course the imaginary aspect of his morality does not stop the Harrisian atheist from asserting ontological proof of its existence, to say nothing of its obvious superiority to Christian morality because he hasn't personally engaged in any Crusades or Spanish Inquisitions. And yet, not only do we know these reason-based moralities don't exist, we are informed by an unimpeachable source that it is "quite obvious" that they do not exist and have never existed:

*"I do not intend this to be a shocking indictment, just a reminder of something quite obvious: no remotely compelling system of ethics has ever been made computationally tractable, even indirectly, for real world moral problems. So, even though there has been no dearth of utilitarian (and Kantian, and contrarian, etc.) arguments in favor of particular policies, institutions, practices, and acts, these have all been heavily hedged with ceteris paribus clauses and plausibility claims about their idealizing assumptions."*<sup>18</sup>

That's Professor Daniel C. Dennett his own godless self in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*. In that passage, Dennett sounds much more like the great anti-socialist von Hayek demonstrating the impossibility of socialist calculation than a committed socialist desperate to prove socialism is capable of rationally determining necessary price information. But reason can no more deliver functional moral systems than socialism can provide functional pricing models.

One must give Dennett his due for his honesty in admitting that the "universal acid" of Darwin's dangerous idea tears a huge and gaping hole in the universal moral fabric, and he deserves credit for manfully attempting to lay the groundwork for a means of addressing that hole in the seventeenth chapter of *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*. And if in the course of *Breaking the Spell* he happens to fall into the very trap he previously had described so eloquently, well, it has happened to many an intellectual before.

## **Science, Satan, and the Neo-Newtonian Synthesis**

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<sup>18</sup> Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 500.

*I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia.*

—C.S. LEWIS, *The Silver Chair*

The most interesting thing about *Breaking the Spell* is not the way it differs from the other three atheists' cases against religion, but the way it specifically refutes them. After Harris does his excellent Chicken Little imitation by clucking about how religion is going to end life on the planet at any moment, Hitchens metaphorically calls the poison control center on it, and Dawkins slanderously asserts that it is worse than child molestation, it comes as a bit of a shock to read Dennett's calm declaration that the secular proposition that religion does more harm than good, to an individual or to society, "has hardly begun to be properly tested," let alone conclusively proved.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, when asked by the *Salon* interviewer if he would recommend that a believer abandon his faith in favor of presumably more rational truths about the universe, Dennett's reply was that he does not pretend to have the answer yet. It is this lack of pretense and, yes, intellectual courage that makes it necessary for the honest truth-seeker of any faith to respect him, regardless of his occasional shortcomings, and his restraint makes the Unholy Trinity's histrionics look all the more contemptible in comparison. Dennett's position, that religion interacts with many of the world's major problems, is a much more reasonable and defensible point than the idea that religion causes all of them. And the distinction is vital, because interaction indicates that while in some cases religion may be a causal factor, in others religion could prove to be part of the solution.

Given Dennett's flexible approach, the title of his latest book is unfortunate, because *Breaking the Spell* tends to lead one to believe that Dennett is attempting to break the spell that religion has cast over mankind by eliminating religion entirely. But Dennett specifically denies this<sup>20</sup> and shows some genuine sympathy for various religious traditions that he himself values; the appendix of *Darwin's*

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<sup>19</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 311.

<sup>20</sup> "I'm proposing we break the spell that creates an invisible moat around religion, the one that says, 'Science stay away. Don't try to study religion.'" Daniel Dennett. "Dissecting God."

*Dangerous Idea* consists solely of a Sunday School song that closes with the words “Because God made you, that’s why I love you.”<sup>21</sup> And he demonstrates genuine compassion for the defensive feelings of the religious faithful when he imagines his own reaction to a hypothetical scientific assault on the social costs of music. On the other hand, the distinction Dennett makes between good spells and bad spells such as Jonestown, jihad, and abortion clinic bombings, and his reference to the desirability of breaking the latter, indicates that the title may actually have multiple layers of significance.

Whatever its true meaning, *Breaking the Spell* is obviously the expansion of the final two chapters of *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, which are entitled “Redesigning Morality” and “The Future of an Idea.” But in some ways, it also represents somewhat of a retreat from the more militant message with which the previous book was concluded eleven years before. Whereas the younger Dennett pugnaciously threatens the keepers of the wild, untamed religious memes with combat, caging, disabling, and intellectual disarmament, the older and presumably wiser Dennett refrains from such language of conflict. Instead, he advises open inquiry and education.

It would be interesting to know what has inspired this apparent mellowing on the part of the philosopher. Was it his recognition of the difficulty in designing a morality capable of functioning as well as those laid out centuries, even millennia ago? Has the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and Christian evangelism caused him to recognize that utopian Enlightenment is not inevitable and looks increasingly less likely with every passing year? Or is it merely a pragmatic realization that it is the height of foolishness for a small and unpopular minority to declare intellectual war on the rest of the human race?

Whatever his reasons, Dennett’s call for an open spirit of inquiry into religion is worthwhile and should be welcomed by Christians and other religious individuals. I like the idea of a rapprochement and find the idea of a neo-Newtonian synthesis as the basis for mutual exploration of the unknown to be tremendously appealing. However, Dennett’s admirable call for science and religion to lay down

<sup>21</sup> Richard Dawkins must not have read the Appendix or else he surely would have called Child Protection Services on his old friend.

their arms and proceed in a spirit of amiable curiosity is subject to one final logical flaw, from at least one religious perspective. Many religious worldviews postulate the existence of intelligent, supernatural beings whose actions affect the physical world, but the Christian view, in particular, puts forth the disturbing notion that our present world is not ruled by God, but by an evil supernatural being, one who long ago usurped humanity's God-given sovereignty. This being, Satan, is not only self-aware, but has been intelligent enough to fool the mind of Man from the very start, beginning with the first temptation in the Garden of Eden.

There can be no doubt that Satan, if he exists, is a powerful being. When Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and offered them to him, Jesus did not question that this was a meaningful offer, nor did he dispute that the world was Satan's to give. If it was not, then it wouldn't have been much of a temptation. Jesus also indicated that Satan was skilled in the arts of deception and specifically referred to Satan as the Deceiver on several occasions. And significantly, the apostle Paul mentions how the "god of this age" has exerted himself to blind the minds of unbelievers.

So put yourself in the hypothetical position of this evil being ruling over all the earth. Is it in your interest to reveal yourself to humanity? Or is it better to lie in wait, hidden in the shadows, as the mortal world convinces itself that neither you nor your plane of existence is real? Given the disastrous results of this past century in parts of the world that intentionally turned away the Christian God and His truth in favor of Man and his scientific proofs, the evidence would seem to suggest that unbelief in the supernatural serves the interests of this evil being.

If, for the sake of argument, we postulate that this is the case, the next question naturally follows: Does this Deceiver possess the power to hide the spiritual world from us? The logical answer, given his apparent power over the physical world, would appear to be yes, which Dennett would no doubt consider to be a sophisticated version of the diabolical lie used to shut down skepticism and prevent the weak believer from encountering the fatal doubts that might kill his faith. In fact, it's nothing of the kind, although I cannot blame the atheist who is inclined to scoff at this objection based

on its absurdity from a purely materialistic standpoint. Still, the spirit of open inquiry demands that when viewed from a purely logical point of view, the obstacle presented is a formidable one.

Fortunately, the Bible offers a way out of this apparent dilemma. It teaches that although the Deceiver rules over the Earth as the god of this age, he does not have the authority to prevent God from manifesting power on Earth through the person of Jesus Christ. It is here, then, to Jesus and those who worship him as Lord and Savior, that science will have to turn if it is to truly put Christianity to the scientific test and glimpse behind the veil of the supernatural. Following this logic, it becomes clear that scientists will find nothing if they continue to seek for evidence of the supernatural by examining occult phenomena such as ESP, telepathy, fortune-telling, and witchcraft. Satan is the lord and master of such things, and he does not deign to be unmasked, at least, not yet.

And we can also be sure that no amount of scientific evidence will ever convince those who are determined not to believe. There will always be socialists no matter how many times socialism is proven to be bankrupt, there will always be atheists, and as the Marshwiggle says, there will always be Narnians too. Science, for all of its magnificent accomplishments, is merely the epitome of Man's knowledge, and by itself it is incapable of seeing through the Deceiver or understanding the will of God. Even so, I propose that the religious faithful accept Daniel Dennett's reasonable proposal, for Christians have nothing to fear from the truth. The Biblical injunction was not to put the Lord your God to foolish tests, not to shy away from trying to understand the world that He created, and Jesus Christ himself instructed us to ask and seek, with the promise that we would find the answer. Surely the God who created Man and blessed him with intelligence expects him to make use of it!

But let there be just one caveat. Let us reach a mutual agreement to examine the available evidence and use the scientific method to study religion and all three aspects of science as well, so that we might best learn what is truly of lasting benefit to all humanity.

## Chapter XIV

### OCCAM'S CHAINSAW

*Rational ignorance cannot explain why people gravitate toward false beliefs, rather than simply being agnostic. Neither can it explain why people who have barely scratched the surface of a subject are so confident in their judgments—and even get angry when you contradict them.*

—BRYAN CAPLAN, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*

Since Richard Dawkins was thoughtful enough to devote an entire chapter to arguments for God's existence, I thought it was only right to return the favor and take a look at some of the most common arguments one hears from atheists. Some of these are arguments justifying their belief in God's non-existence, others are those made in counterpoint to various theistic arguments. All of them are at least partially logically fallacious. However, I don't intend to precisely follow Dawkins's example, as I shall focus on current arguments made by living atheists, not archaic ones made by long-dead men and refuted by famous philosophers more than 200 years ago.

#### THE ARGUMENT FROM AUTHORITY

There are three versions of this. The first is based on the partially accurate but misleading claim that atheists are more intelligent than theists, a claim which depends on altering the definition of atheist from "an individual who does not believe in God" to "an individual who calls himself an atheist." This is an implicit argument from authority because there is no point to making any reference to this theoretical superiority except to put pressure on the non-atheist to stop thinking for himself and accept the view of his intellectual superiors.

Sam Harris makes the second version of this argument in *Letter to a Christian Nation* when he writes that 93 percent of the members of the National Academy of Science do not accept the idea of God.<sup>1</sup> Again, this has no significance regarding the fact of God's existence or non-existence, it is

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1 Note that Harris doesn't state that they are atheists, only that they "do not accept the idea of God."



simply intended to pressure the non-atheist to accept the opinion of the elite academy members in lieu of his own. Harris might as meaningfully report that 84 percent of the academy prefers the color blue. Dawkins puts even greater weight behind this argument, spending four pages citing everything from the National Academy of Science members, a survey of the Royal Society, the negative correlation of religion with education, and Mensa meta-studies.<sup>2</sup>

The third variant, of course, is the invocation of famous atheist scientists such as Albert Einstein, James Watson, and Richard Dawkins.

### **THE ARGUMENT FROM LACK OF EVIDENCE**

This argument is particularly superficial, given the obvious impossibility of personally examining all of the evidence relevant to the matter and the equally obvious reality that every individual unquestioningly accepts information without demanding supporting evidence every single day. Daniel Dennett observes that the division of labor is applauded when it comes to the delegation of decision-making in everything from science and politics to legal and medical issues, to which I add that most of this delegation is based on an unquestioning faith in the authority to which the decision is delegated.

No normal individual actually examines more than a very small percentage of the authoritative information that they are provided on a daily basis, as evidenced by the explosion of low-fat foods that were soon followed by the ongoing obesity epidemic. Even though the evidence was easy to obtain—I'm eating this fat-free food, but I'm getting fatter instead of losing weight—millions of people chose to blindly trust scientific studies rather than their mirrors and weight scales.

The fact that you may not have seen any evidence of God is meaningless; you probably haven't seen any evidence of evolution or quantum mechanics either, and aside from a very few highly intelligent, well-educated exceptions, you're not capable of accurately judging the evidence even if you

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<sup>2</sup> Speaking as a member of Mensa myself, I can state with some authority that most of my fellow Mensans are functional idiots, their high IQs notwithstanding. These are the same sort of clueless intellectuals who were convinced that a centrally-planned socialist economy was a great idea fifty years ago. Intelligence is like firepower: unless you learn how to use it properly, you'll never do anything with it but shoot yourself in the foot.

did examine it yourself. There is no shortage of those who testify to their personal experience of God, and it is both ironic and an error of logic to argue that their evidence is irrelevant due to your blind faith in something else for which you have seen no evidence. While it is reasonable to state that you have not seen any evidence for God's existence, it is illogical and incorrect to assert that no such evidence exists. One can certainly state that no scientific evidence for God exists, based on its absence from the scientific literature. But then, there is no scientific evidence that your mother exists either, much less that she loves you. From my perspective, there's not even any scientific evidence that you exist. Science is an excellent tool for increasing knowledge, but it is far from the only means of obtaining it.

In almost every case, an argument from lack of evidence merely indicates in whom one has elected to place one's unquestioning trust.

## **THE ARGUMENT FROM HALLUCINATION**

This is the atheist's counter to the theistic argument from personal experience. In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins puts scare quotes around "experience," by which he means to indicate that evidence based on personal experience is unreliable and even irrelevant. He bases this argument, amusingly enough, on psychology, which is one of the few scientific fields that makes even less use of the scientific method than evolutionary biology. But to simply state, on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, that "mass hallucination" caused 70,000 people in Portugal to simultaneously see the sixth apparition of the Lady of Fatima is not an explanation, it is merely an evasion. Dawkins's invocation of David Hume proves nothing, except that from the atheist's perspective Hume might as well have ended his statement at the comma: "No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle." This isn't logic, it's merely a demonstration of a mind shuttered closely to ward off any evidence it cannot explain in terms it understands.

Being one who has personally experienced both what appears to have been a supernatural phenomenon as well as a few chemically induced hallucinations, I can testify that the two are about as likely to be confused as *Halloween* and Christmas. And by *Halloween*, I mean the movie, not the

holiday. It is certainly reasonable to doubt any one individual's perceptions, but it is intellectual cowardice to arbitrarily declare all human perception itself to be completely meaningless outside of the scientific researcher's laboratory.

### **THE ARGUMENT FROM TEMPORAL ADVANTAGE**

One of the obvious weaknesses in the atheist concept of the conflict between science and religion is the fact that many, if not most, of the great scientists in history were religious men. Even the first great martyr of Science, Galileo Galilei, was not an atheist but a Christian. For every Watson and Einstein, there is a Newton, a Copernicus, a Kepler, and yes, a Galileo. Atheists deal with this in two ways, either by simply co-opting them—I have seen lists of famous atheists on the Internet that include Galileo—or by claiming them post-facto. Dawkins, for example, implies that had these great religious scientists only been privy to the information available today, they would have abandoned their faith; other atheists come right out and state this directly.

What this argument neglects to take into account is that nearly all of the great religious scientists were not merely religious, but Christians, and that there were far fewer scientists than there are today. The first fact is significant because it indicates that there is likely a difference between the Christian worldview that supported a search for scientific truth and the various non-Christian worldviews which did not. The second fact is even more interesting, as it suggests that the non-Christian worldview of today's science may in fact be hindering the pace of scientific development rather than helping it. The fact that today there are far more scientists accomplishing far less in terms of significant scientific developments could indicate, as John Horgan has suggested, that science is close to its goal of explaining nature and that there is simply not much more for scientists to do except learn how to make practical use of their theoretical knowledge. Alternatively, one could argue that the religious scientists of the past had it easy, working with a relatively blank slate, and have left only the most difficult tasks for their secular successors.

But the more we learn, the less we actually seem to know. Just this year, we were informed that what had been the accepted model of gene regulation may be less complete than was previously thought, when researchers on the Encyclopedia of DNA Elements project discovered twice as many RNA transcripts and ten times more DNA transcripts than expected. Astrophysicists tell us that either 96 percent of the universe is missing or there is something wrong with our understanding of how gravitation affects the 4 percent we can see. And few can manage to keep up with adaptive devo punk-echthroï neo-quasi-Darwinism, or whatever the evolutionary biologists are calling this week's spin on St. Darwin's dangerous idea.

To assert that the greatest minds of the past, the original thinkers who weren't afraid to challenge either orthodox dogma or the intellectual conventions, would automatically abandon their faith in favor of a status quo professed by the masses of over-specialized, under-achieving scientific mediocrities of today is not only a completely baseless assumption, it is egotistic wishful thinking.

## **THE ARGUMENT FROM FICTION**

This argument states that because the Bible and every other sacred text is wholly man-made and as fictitious as anything written by Shakespeare or any other classic from the literary canon, there is no reason to take them seriously, much less base moral systems or societal structures upon them. The problem here is that the Bible has not only proven to be a more reliable guide in many instances than the current state of secular science as well as an accurate historical document, but sometimes a better predictor of future events than the experts on the subject. I bought Euros back when they were worth just over ninety cents on the dollar because of the eschatological interpretations of the Book of Revelation that the European Common Market would one day become a single political entity, the endless vows of the European elite to the contrary notwithstanding. Now, the EUR/USD rate is bouncing around 1.36. Maybe it was just a fortuitous coincidence, but on the other hand, if a northern country shows signs of invading Israel, let's just say I won't hesitate to short their currency.

It is not an ability to explain past events, but its predictive value that proves the value of a model. And whether one considers geopolitics, psychology, or child development, the ancient text repeatedly proves itself to be a better predictive model than those supplied by the scientific experts

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that the earth is flat. But Jesus's statement in John 8:58, "before Abraham was born, I am!" is a very strange thing for an itinerant first-century rabbi to say,<sup>3</sup> given the way it presages the twentieth century concepts of multiple universes and existence outside the space-time continuum.

### **THE ARGUMENT FROM THE UNFAIRNESS OF HELL**

This argument takes the possibility of the supernatural a little too seriously for any of the New Atheists, but one probably encounters it more often from Low Church atheists than one hears all the previous five arguments combined. And since it's a Low Church argument, it is naturally a particularly stupid one that manages to ignore huge quantities of readily available evidence pertaining to human behavior while simultaneously assuming perfect long-term rationality on the part of every individual human being. This argument states that because Heaven is really good and Hell is really bad, the purported choice that God offers between the two really isn't a choice, because what sort of idiot would choose to go to Hell? Therefore, it would be unfair for God to send anyone to Hell, and therefore neither God nor Hell can possibly exist.

The answer is the same sort of idiot that chooses to buy lottery tickets, smokes meth, has premarital sex, gambles in Vegas, buys technology stocks, or cheers for the Minnesota Vikings. In short, human idiots, which we all are to greater or lesser degrees. Everyone makes foolish decisions that combine short-term pleasure with long-term pain, and the fact that a correct choice should be completely obvious to any rational individual doesn't mean that the choice is not a genuine one.

Therefore, God is being fair in presenting the choice . . . which is really neither here nor there since

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3 One could argue that "I am that I am" is an even stranger thing for a burning bush to say.

God's theoretical fairness or unfairness has nothing to do with the fact of His existence or non-existence.

Just as the fact that an argument is ridiculous doesn't mean it doesn't exist or that you're not going to hear it again and again.

## **THE ARGUMENT FROM GOD'S CHARACTER**

This is another superficial argument popular with Low Church atheists, although it pops up from time to time among the more militant High Church breed. It states that even if God exists, the morality He dictates is so abhorrent to the atheist and inferior to the atheist's own moral sensibilities that the atheist cannot believe in Him. And in the unlikely event that the atheist is ever confronted by God, he will refuse to acknowledge His divine status let alone His right to rule over Mankind.

I find it very difficult to take this argument seriously, given how the first words out of every angel's mouth seems to be "Fear not!" I am as arrogant as anyone (and more than most, I'm told), but on the day when I meet my Maker, the Creator Lord of the Universe, I fully intend to set new speed records in performing a full proskynesis complete with averted eyes.<sup>4</sup> It's not so much the Biblical confidence that "every knee shall bow" that makes me skeptical about this theoretical atheist machismo in the face of the Almighty, it's the part about how even the demons believe . . . and tremble. I don't know what it takes to make a powerful fallen angel shake with terror just thinking about it, but I have a feeling that neither Richard Dawkins nor Bertrand Russell will be wagging their fingers at God and criticizing Him for insufficient evidence on the day their disbelief is conclusively destroyed.

The argument is totally specious from the logical perspective, of course, because the fact of God's existence no more depends on the quality of His character than does Charles Manson's. Things exist or don't exist regardless of whether we wish them to be or not.

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<sup>4</sup> No doubt this is why God prefers the faith of little children. A little girl once told me that when she goes to Aslan's country, she will run to him and give him a big hug because she loves him so much. Shocking abuse on the part of her parents, I thought. Those books should be banned, really.

## THE ARGUMENT FROM MORAL EVOLUTION

The idea that morals are not defined by sacred texts but have instead evolved naturally is the subject of much pseudo-scientific speculation and a few books, such as Marc Hauser's *Moral Minds*, have been written about it. Christopher Hitchens is the foremost advocate of this idea among the New Atheists. While they admit that morality exists, they argue that it has evolved naturally through a material process, therefore it cannot have been acquired through divine revelation. However, like Richard Dawkins's concept of the meme, the idea of moral evolution is little more than the use of an applied metaphor, a fundamentally unscientific concept that appears to be increasingly popular in the softer sciences today. Hauser articulates a concept of "primitive detectors" that are suspiciously similar to Dawkins's imaginary "original replicators" that he supposes to have started the process of our moral evolution.<sup>5</sup> But referring to these *principles* as DNA—Darwinian Nodes of Action—only makes them sound scientific, it does not magically endow them with the material properties of Deoxyribonucleic acid.

There are a number of problems with the idea of moral evolution if we pretend that it is not a metaphor but literal evolution. First, if the mechanism of evolution takes place at the gene level, it is very difficult to understand how one moral would mutate and replicate itself genetically. Second, it is easy to observe that the pace of moral transformation is rapidly accelerating. Less than forty years ago, homosexuality was universally considered an immoral action. Today, there is a substantial minority in the West that insists that belief in either the immorality or the psychological abnormality of homosexuality is itself immoral, a rapid notional transformation that is consistent with neither past moral transformations nor biological evolution. Furthermore, moral evolution depends upon the group selection aspect of evolutionary theory that has largely fallen into disfavor among modern evolutionary biologists.

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<sup>5</sup> Hauser, Marc D. *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*. New York: Ecco, 2006. 314.

Either mankind should expect to start sprouting wings within the next century, or the process of human moral development cannot be reasonably described as evolution.

## **THE ARGUMENT FROM THE GOLDEN RULE**

It is often asserted that Christian morality is no different than other ethical systems that are based on the Golden Rule. And it is true that one can find pre-Christian examples of the same concept in the Analects of Confucius, in the Mahabharata, the Dhammapada, the Udanavarga, and even the histories of Herodotus. Still, there are two errors in this argument because Christian morality is not based on the Golden Rule, and because the Golden Rule, which states that a man should not do to others what he would not have them do to him, cannot provide a basis for a functional moral system.

Jesus Christ's version of the Golden Rule, given in Matthew 7:12, is merely summary advice, not the basis of Christian morality. "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." This is practical advice given in the context of a general admonishment and it cannot possibly be the essence of Christian morality, for in the very same chapter, Jesus informs his listeners that "only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" will enter that kingdom. He did not say, "only he who does to others what he would have them do to him." This mention of the Heavenly Father's will, which also appears in the Lord's Prayer, foreshadows the true foundation of Christian morality, which was articulated when Jesus answered an expert in Jewish law in Matthew 22:37:

*"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

Obviously, a moral system based on loving the Lord your God and obediently submitting your will to His is a very different moral system and a far more objective one than the Golden Rule, which is not only entirely subjective, but incapable of accounting for either rational calculation or human



psychopathy. It provides no moral basis to criticize a man for crawling into Adriana Lima's bed unannounced so long as he harbors no desire to bar Miss Lima from doing the same to him, and sanctions a thief to steal on the grounds of a belief that he wouldn't miss that which was stolen were the thief himself the prospective victim. The Golden Rule is also too easily transformed into the idea of doing unto others as they wish to do unto you, which was the basis for the Holocaust as well as Sam Harris's proposed ethic of mass murder in preemptive self-defense.

### **THE ARGUMENT FROM SUPERIOR MORALS**

There are many atheists who live lives that are morally exemplary according to religious standards. This causes some atheists to claim that this exemplary behavior is evidence of atheist moral superiority, because the atheist is behaving in a moral manner of his own volition, not due to any fear of being eternally damned or zapped by a lightning bolt hurled by an offended sky deity. However, this is a logical error, because while motivation plays a role in how we judge immoral actions, there are no similar gradations of that which is morally correct. There are many evils, there is only one Good.

For example, the act of stealing a loaf of bread is considered more immoral if the theft was committed by a rich thief who simply didn't feel like paying for it than if the bread was stolen by a poor man who needed to feed his two hungry children. But the act of driving an injured person to the hospital is no more right when performed by a good Samaritan who just happened to be passing by than by a paramedic team who will be financially compensated for their actions. We may find the one more admirable, being less expected, but it cannot be more morally correct because that would imply that there was some degree of moral incorrectness to a correct action. To do right is to do right, the amount of rightness in the action no more depends upon the motivation than the amount of a woman's pregnancy depends upon whether she is a married woman whose third round of I.V.F. treatment has finally proven the charm or a high school senior knocked up by the varsity quarterback on prom night.

An atheist can certainly behave better than a theist by the theist's own moral reckoning. But it is

logically incorrect to insist that identical moral behavior on the part of an atheist and a theist is proof of the atheist's moral superiority.

### **The Irrationality of Atheism**

*Our actions generally satisfy us. . . . But that does not mean they are rational in a narrower sense: the product of serial reasoning.*

—DANIEL C. DENNETT, *Consciousness Explained*

High Church atheists regard themselves as supremely rational individuals. They have from the very start. History's first confirmed atheist, Jean Meslier, wrote that banishing the "vain chimeras" of religion would be enough to cause rational opinions to fill the minds of the formerly faithful, and anticipated Sam Harris by several centuries with his announcement that the moral precepts of Christianity were no better than those that every rational man could imagine.<sup>6</sup>

Almost 300 years later, forty-three commenters at the militantly atheist science blog Pharyngula reported the results of an online personality test they had taken. Similar to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator survey, the test was hopelessly transparent and subjective, but provided a useful means of examining how these predominantly atheist individuals view themselves. They reported an average Rational rating of 94 out of 100, compared to an Extroverted rating of 32 and an Arrogance rating of 49. They do not see themselves so much as champions of reason, but paragons! Is this a justified belief?

While the atheist may be godless, he is not without faith, because he puts his trust in the scientific method and those who use it whether he understands their conclusions with regards to any given application or not. But because there are very few minds capable of grasping higher-level physics, for example, let alone understanding their implications, and because specialization means that it is nearly impossible to keep up with the latest developments in any of the more esoteric fields, the

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6 Meslier, Jean. *Superstition in All Ages*, Anna Koop trans. (1878 ed.)

atheist stands with utter confidence on an intellectual foundation comprised of things of which he himself neither knows nor understands.

In fairness, he cannot be faulted for this because there is simply too much information available for all of it to be processed by any individual. He can, however, be legitimately criticized when he fails to admit that he is not actually operating on reason in most circumstances, but is instead exercising a faith that is every bit as blind and childlike as that of the most thoughtless, Bible-thumping fundamentalist. Still, it can be argued that this is not necessarily irrational, it is only ignorance and a failure of perception.

The fundamental irrationality of the atheist can primarily be seen in his actions, and it is here that his general lack of intellectual conviction is also exposed. Whereas Christians and the faithful of other religions have rational reasons for attempting to live by their various moral systems, the atheist does not. Both ethics and morals based on religion are nothing more than man-made myth to the atheist, he is therefore required to reject them on rational materialist grounds. He can, of course, make a perfectly rational decision to abide by ethics and morals to which he does not personally subscribe because it would be dangerous to do otherwise in a society where he is outnumbered. This is W. Somerset Maugham's semi-rational atheism, which states "do what thou wilt, with due regard for the policeman around the corner."

So the atheist seeks to live by the dominant morality whenever it is convenient for him, and there are even those who, despite their faithlessness, do a better job of living by the tenets of religion than those who actually subscribe to them. But even the most admirable of atheists is nothing more than a moral parasite, living his life based on borrowed ethics. This is why, when pressed, the atheist will often attempt to hide his lack of conviction in his own beliefs behind some poorly formulated utilitarianism, or argue that he acts out of altruistic self-interest. But this is only post-facto rationalization, not reason or rational behavior.

One need only ask an atheist what his morality is, and inquire as to how he developed it and

why it should happen to so closely coincide with the dominant societal morality to discover that there is nothing rational about most atheists' beliefs. Either he has none and is "immorally" practicing Dennett's doxastic division of labor<sup>7</sup> by unquestioningly accepting the societal norms that surround him, or he is simply selecting which aspects to credit and which to reject on the basis of his momentary desires. In neither case does anything that can legitimately be described as reason enter into the picture. The same is often true of his atheism itself; it is telling to note that Hitchens and Dawkins became atheists after long and exhaustive rational inquiries into the existence of God, both at the age of nine.<sup>8</sup> The idea that there is any rational basis for atheism is further damaged due to the way in which so many atheists become atheists during adolescence, an age which combines a tendency towards mindless rebellion as well as the onset of sexual desires which collide with religious strictures on their satisfaction.<sup>9</sup>

With this in mind, it's interesting to note that intelligent men of intellectual repute such as Francis Collins and Anthony Flew should have rejected atheism at the tender ages of twenty-seven and eighty-one, respectively. Atheism is not only irrational, it is quite literally childish in many instances.

But the ultimate atheist irrationality is the idea that Man himself is rational. Despite the fact that many of our behavioral sciences are founded on this principle, including the dismal science so dear to me, almost all of the observable evidence, scientific and casual, forces one to conclude otherwise. Consider how the way in which the educated Western voting class manages to combine total ignorance with fundamental misconceptions to achieve a higher state of irrational consciousness that is breathtaking in its delusionary confidence, the miracle of aggregation notwithstanding.<sup>10</sup> And in

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7 Immoral in Dennett's eyes, not mine. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 295.

8 Atheism didn't initially take in Dawkins's case, as he bought in to the Argument from Design until he was sixteen. No wonder he's so obsessed with the topic. Apparently I was significantly "brighter" than both Hitchens and Dawkins, my father tells me that I was five years old when we came home from church one afternoon and I told him that "I don't believe that." After having twenty-one years to think about it and learn how the world operates, I changed my mind.

9 I'm referring to sex here. Is there any doubt that most college-age atheists would have no problem believing in a God who permitted them to get laid at will? This is why even the most idiotic forms of paganism compete so favorably with atheism.

10 Caplan, Bryan. "The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies." *Cato Unbound*. 29 May 2007.

*Consciousness Explained*, Daniel Dennett describes a Multiple Drafts model of consciousness that renders the most basic concept of Man's rationality suspect; he notes that the closer one examines the human mind, the more its fragmented and internally competitive nature becomes apparent.<sup>11</sup>

You need only look around to see hundreds of examples of totally irrational human behavior every single day. Indeed, you need only spend a moment of honest introspection to find dozens of examples in your own life. Perhaps you bought an Internet stock in late 1999, or are dating a girl who cheated on her last boyfriend with you. The chances are good that you spent tens of thousands of dollars on a college degree that not only cost you five years' worth of wages and work experience, but has nothing to do with your job now. You probably vote in presidential elections even though it is statistically improbable and logically impossible for your one vote to have any impact on the final result.<sup>12</sup> And yet despite the irrationality of your activities, you will continue to vote, invest, love, and live because you are not a robot, you are a human being. Man is not a rational animal, he is a rationalizing one who uses his intellect to construct reasons in post-facto defense of his irrational desires.

Predicated on an unreliable human attribute that may not even exist, rejecting the foundation of Man's most successful civilization, trusting a notoriously quixotic institution for a miracle as a means of replacing that foundation and refusing to learn from its past disasters, atheism is not so much the basis for an irrational philosophy as for an insane one. Attempting to build a society on reason is like waging a war on terror; the effort is doomed to failure because it's a category error. There is no evidence, scientific or historical, that any human society can survive its establishment on an atheist foundation, let alone thrive, and a fair amount of evidence to the contrary.

We are fortunate, therefore, that so many atheist individuals nevertheless continue to openly

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1 <sup>1</sup> “*The intentional stance presupposes (or fosters) the rationality, and hence the unity, of the agent—the intentional system—while the Multiple Drafts model opposes this central unity all the way.*” Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 458.

1 <sup>2</sup> Regardless of whether your candidate wins or loses by more than one vote, your vote was irrelevant. In the highly unlikely circumstance that your candidate happens to win by the one vote you cast, the courts will arbitrarily determine the outcome.

adhere to conventional religious morals and ethics that they have no rational grounds for respecting. This irrational, if pragmatic, compromise between a public nod to morality and its private dismissal is an ancient one. When Socrates taught his students that knowledge is the only good and ignorance the only evil more than 2,000 years ago, he was fully aware of the potentially dangerous repercussions of this teaching and argued in *The Republic* that it was necessary to keep such virtuous knowledge to the ruling elite. The knowledge of the nonexistence of morality was the great secret to which only the rulers were to be privy and the justification for keeping their subjects in ignorance for their own good, lest the herd break out into rebellion.

The ever-practical Romans understood this too. Seneca the Younger described religion as being regarded as true by the common folk, false by the wise, and useful by the rulers. But as an aristocrat in a cruel and brutal culture, he may have understated religion's importance to social stability, because it is more than useful for the peaceful maintenance of a civilized society, it is a downright necessity. Even the greatest champions of reason reluctantly accepted this bitter reality. Despite his distaste for Christianity and contempt for the Catholic Church, Voltaire regarded the belief in God and in an afterlife of rewards and punishments to be the basic requisites of ethical behavior.

Still, the irrationality of the New Atheists and their faithless flock does not mean that there are no atheists who are rational, or that there are none who are true to their godless convictions. Friedrich Nietzsche is the foremost example, but there is certainly no shortage of other individuals who do not fear to determine their own moral compass in the absence of God. We call them sociopaths and suicides.

### **Three Rational Atheisms**

*His nature being what it is, man is born, first, with a desire for gain. If this nature is followed, strife will result and courtesy will disappear. Second, man is born with envy and hate. If these tendencies are followed, injury and cruelty will abound and loyalty and faithfulness will disappear.*

—HSÜN TZU

While most atheisms are irrational regardless of whether they are considered from an individual or a societal perspective, this is not always the case. There are three variants of atheism that can be considered at least partly rational: these can be described as Somerset atheism, Nietzschean atheism, and Post-Nietzschean atheism.

Somerset atheism is the common practice of moral parasitism described in the previous section. It is a partially rational atheism that functions perfectly well on an individual level but cannot function on a societal level because it depends entirely on the existence of an external morality to support it. In the West, it amounts to Christian atheism, in which the atheist accepts the entire body of traditional Christian morality less whatever elements do not appeal to him, so long as the subtraction does not land him in jail. This is entirely rational behavior for the atheist who wishes to participate in society as a member in good standing, but it cannot reasonably be described as having its ultimate basis in reason because it has no essential foundation of its own.

Somerset atheism is a pragmatic variant of the atheism of Aleister Crowley and Friedrich Nietzsche, which takes no account of society's mores in stating that "do what thou wilt" based on the individual's will to power is the whole of the law. This is entirely rational from the individual's perspective and it is the variant to which history's great killers have subscribed. Three years before he joined the Communist Party, Mao Tse-Tung articulated his personal morality in his commentaries on Friedrich Paulsen's *A System of Ethics*:

*I do not agree with the view that to be moral, the motive of one's actions has to be benefiting others. Morality does not have to be defined in relation to others. . . . [People like me want to] satisfy our hearts to the full and in doing so we automatically have the most valuable moral codes. Of course there are people and objects in the world, but they are all there only for me. . . . I have my desire and act on it. I am responsible to no one.*<sup>13</sup>

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1<sup>3</sup> Chang and Halliday, 15.

Mao is unconsciously echoing the pagan philosophy of the Noble Soul, which Nietzsche adopted and transformed into his doctrine of the *übermensch*, thus he wrote “Egoism is the very essence of a noble soul.” The Nietzschean atheist refuses to recognize the limits of either God or Man on his desires, the very possession of which is proof of his superiority and inherent right to fulfill them regardless of the cost to others. Although not an atheist, Hitler fully subscribed to this philosophy which is why he is often confused with one; in truth, his paganism was more true to the philosophy’s source than the atheist variants of Lenin, Mao, and the many other communist killers.

This philosophy is rational, but it is literally psychopathic in the sense described by Dr. Robert Hare, developer of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised, a clinical scale used to diagnose psychopathy. He describes psychopaths as predators who use intimidation and violence to satisfy their own selfish needs. “Lacking in conscience and in feelings for others, they take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without guilt or remorse.”<sup>14</sup>

While it is not possible to diagnose the mental health of a dead man, the tens of millions of Chinese murdered by the Mao regime tend to indicate that the close correspondence between the words of the twenty-four-year-old philosophy student and Dr. Hare’s description of psychopathy is not entirely coincidental.

The Post-Nietzschean atheism of Michel Onfray is also entirely rational. Onfray recognizes that if one rejects the source of a moral system, one has no logical basis for retaining that which derives from it. For example, if all men are created equal, removing the Creator from the equation therefore requires abandoning the idea that men are equal unless another basis for that equality can be provided. This is the reason for his contempt for the irrational New Atheists, who attempt to maintain most of the traditional Christian moral structure while simultaneously kicking out its support. Onfray may be completely unreliable when it comes to facts, but his logic is much stronger than any of the New Atheists, including that of his fellow philosopher, Daniel C. Dennett.

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1<sup>4</sup> Robert D. Hare, “Psychopaths: New Trends in Research.” *The Harvard Mental Health Letter*. Sept. 1995



But where Nietzschean atheism limits its psychopathy to the individual, however powerful he might be, post-Nietzschean atheology expands the primacy of desire to a societal level. It is social psychopathy that is an order of magnitude beyond that envisioned by the most rabidly psychopathic intellectual. Not even Leon Trotsky's vision of an international communism is as ambitious in its ghastly grandeur as Onfray's sociopathic philosophy of desire. Nietzsche only wished to slay God and rule over His Creation, the post-Nietzschean dreams of total destruction so that he might build a new creation from the ashes.

It is not the irrational atheist who is dangerous to those around him; the very unreason that makes him a part of the human race renders him mostly harmless. It is the towering narcissism that follows from his strict and logical devotion to pure rational materialism that causes the rational atheist to disavow his connection to humanity and calmly embark on a well-reasoned descent into inhuman madness.

## APPENDIX A

### MURDERER'S ROW

This is the list of the fifty-two atheist leaders who personally presided over the non-martial murders of at least 20,000 human beings. Most, though not all, served as the heads of the regime responsible for the slaughters; for example, d'Herbois and Billaud-Varenne were only two members of the nine-man Committee of Public Safety which launched the revolutionary Reign of Terror in France. Some names that one might expect to see, such as Nicaraguan Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega, are missing because the confirmed number of government killings do not rise to the 20,000 mark. In other cases, such as that of Zimbabwean dictator Robert Mugabe, there is sufficient evidence to indicate a leader is not an atheist despite his nominal Marxism.

Afghanistan	Nur Muhammad Taraki, Babrak Kamal
Albania	Enver Hoxha
Angola	Agostinho Neto, José Eduardo dos Santos
Bulgaria	Vulko Chervenkov, Todor Zhivkov
Cambodia	Pol Pot, Heng Samrin
China	Mao Tse-Tung, Hua Guofeng, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao
Cuba	Fidel Castro
Czechoslovakia	Klement Gottwald, Antonín Zápotocký, Antonín Novotný, Gustáv Husák
East Germany	Walter Ulbricht, Erich Honecker
Ethiopia	Tafari Benti, Mengistu Haile Mariam
French Republic	Jean-Marie Collot d'Herbois, Jacques Nicolas Billaud-Varenne
Greece	Nikolaos Zachariadis
Hungary	Mátyás Rákosi
Laos	Kaysone Phomvihane, Khamtai Siphandone

Mongolia	Khorloogiin Choibalsan, Yumjaagiin Tsendenbal
Mozambique	Samora Machel
North Korea	Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il
Poland	Władysław Gomułka, Bolesław Bierut
Romania	Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Nicolae Ceausescu
Soviet Union	Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev
Spain	Manuel Azaña, Francisco Largo Caballero
Vietnam	Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Truong Chinh, Nguyen Van Linh, Do Muoi, Le Kha Phieu, Nong Duc Manh
Yugoslavia	Josip Broz Tito