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Articles

Guest Editor's Comments

Dr. Ronald L. Mercer Jr. is our guest editor for our special Spring 2011 issue entitled "A Christian Philosophical Response to the New Atheists." Dr. Mercer is the Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Chapman Seminary of Oakland City University. A continental philosopher at heart, he is a member of the Society for Continental Philosophy and Theology as well as the North American Levinas Society. Recently, Dr. Mercer designed and gained approval for a Philosophy Minor now offered at OCU.

Randy Mills, Editor
Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences

Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Averroes, Avicenna, Descartes, Spinoza, John Locke, George Berkeley are just a few from the philosophical tradition who wrote unashamedly concerning their ideas about god. While pagans, Christians, Muslims, and Jews comprise this list, clearly not necessarily agreeing with the views of the others, it is unwise to believe that philosophy or the philosophical tradition in any way disparages belief concerning god. However, to the eyes of those unfamiliar with this tradition, the present media attention given to a group of men known as the New Atheists might lead one to believe that the smart people who fill the academy are quite done with faith, religion, and God. Walk into any mega-bookstore with attached coffee shop and one will find on prominent display such books as *The God Delusion* or *God is not Great*. No longer content to simply argue about the existence of God, the New Atheists are boisterously calling for an end to religion in general, which they see as irrational, dishonest, and brutally violent. This present issue of the *Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences* intends to address this atheistic demand from a Christian perspective.

Before introducing the contributions for this issue, one word in our working title needs to be explained. "A Christian Philosophical Response to the New Atheists" uses the word Christian in two distinct ways. On the one hand, Christian

distinguishes the religious orientation of our respondents. Each writer, save one, approaches the problems proposed by the New Atheists as a believer in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Christian distinguishes the manner in which our response is made. When one's religion is criticized, a very natural response is to attack from a position of hurt and, possibly, even fear. Nevertheless, in an effort to love our enemies, the essays offered in this present journal do not seek to heap curses on those joining this unbelieving movement but, rather, to join in genuine dialogue. With such a view in mind, the last word of the journal goes to Dr. Connolly, a philosopher and atheist at the University of Evansville. Such an inclusion may seem odd or simply token, but the editors' hope is to embrace the dialogue, which admittedly begins here with multiple visions of how Christian thinkers should approach the issue but does not desire to marginalize the atheist perspective.

The contributors to this journal have taken John F. Haught, Distinguished Research Professor at Georgetown University, as a point of reference. His works consistently address the encounter between atheism and Christianity, whether on theological or scientific grounds, and include *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science*, and *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospects for Religion in the Age of Evolution*.[1] Most related to this particular issue, however, is Haught's new work, which directly responds to the New Atheist challenge, *God and the New Atheism*.[2] In his introduction to this book, he states:

> I must confess, however, my disappointment in witnessing the recent surge of interest in atheism. It's not that my livelihood as a theologian is remotely at stake – although the authors in question would fervently wish that it were so. Nor is it that the treatment of religion in these tracts [the work of the New Atheists] consists mostly of breezy overgeneralizations that leave out almost everything that theologians would want to highlight in their own contemporary discussion of God. Rather, the new atheism is so theologically unchallenging. . . By using the term "theological" here I mean to indicate, first of all, that my reflections arise out of my belonging to a theistic religious

> tradition, that is, one that professes belief in a personal God . . . Second, theology, as I use the term, is an appreciative but also critical, philosophical reflection on religions that profess belief in God.

These words frame the goal of this particular journal, to critically and philosophically reflect on faith and atheism, willingly pointing out strengths, weaknesses, and compatibilities in both, but never losing sight of our own profession of belief in a personal God.

In response to the New Atheists' desire to use reason and spread science, two contributors, Hal Poe and Brian Austin, confront the limits of this desire in their respective essays: "The New Atheism; Or, the Old Enlightenment Revisited" and "Of course, You Mean 'Swimming': Why Science Cannot Determine Values or Explain Experience."

While the New Atheists attempt to build their argument on a rigorous adherence to science, Poe challenges their understanding of science and declares their scientific view of reality as outdated. He demonstrates the manner in which Dawkins (and other New Atheists by association) "describes the universe as a closed, deterministic system of cause and effect the way the great 'clockwork' scientists and philosophers of the Eighteenth century saw it." Such an understanding of nature would be readily acceptable to anyone who casually picks up Dawkins, but, unfortunately for the New Atheist argument, Poe shows how this view of science has been long discarded. He goes on to argue that today's scientist holds views that do not see the universe in tight mechanistic terms, which leaves room for the work of "any personal being, including God."

Austin's approach to the question of science begins with his appreciation for the many answers to modern problems for which science is responsible, but when New Atheists like Sam Harris attempt to discuss the nature of ethics and values by means of science, Austin argues forcefully that a category mistake has been committed by arriving at conclusions about values from statements of fact. Such a move is extraordinarily odd since it was David Hume, a noted philosopher and atheist, who argued convincingly for the incommensurability of the world of what "is" with the world of what "ought" to be. When faced with human

experience that confronts a world of facts AND values, Austin is able to reopen the question of religion.

The essays contributed by Mark Gedney, "The New Atheism: the Roots of the Problem," and myself, "Faith Beyond Belief: A Phenomenological Response to Dawkins's Definition of Faith," address the need to reopen the question of religion in new ways rather than what has been the standard Christian response to atheism in the past. A common element of both is the need to make clear how transcendence is meaningful in the conversation.

Gedney's essay undeniably moves toward the goal of reinvigorating the church with a palpable sense of God's sovereign transcendence that can be experienced immanently in the believer's daily life. However, on the way to this inspiring goal, he crosses territory that clearly links the growth of Christian ideology with the emergence of secular humanism. In other words, when Christians are confronted with atheistic claims, they must realize that the intellectual history of Christianity has made these claims possible. The manner in which Christianity has emphasized God's transcendence served to bifurcate reality into the realm of the natural and the supernatural, and rarely the twain shall meet. Consequently, it is only a short step away from declaring that the twain never meet or that there should not be a supernatural world at all. Answering the New Atheists has less to do, then, with addressing faulty claims or presuppositions and more to do with Christianity recovering the powerful immanence of a transcendent God.

My own essay seeks to welcome talk of transcendence by reconfiguring the discussion of faith. Like Haught, I take issue with the New Atheist understanding of faith as "belief without evidence," but the typical orthodox notion of faith as a commitment to God with one's whole being does not protect the idea of faith from the accusation of wishful thinking. I argue in line with later 20th century continentalists that human beings are constituted as always, already open to an otherness that cannot be wrapped up in neat boxes of comprehension. Such openness to what is never fully graspable allows believers to talk about faith as a fundamental orientation towards transcendence that is both describable and based in experience. Faith, in these terms,

has clear roots in the biblical text in both the Hebrew and Greek as the texts' authors understood faith as one's foundation.

The final three essays from the Christian responders have in common an attempt to find common ground between Christians and the New Atheists. While each submission recognizes serious points of disagreement, these problems do not automatically rule out ways in which dialogue can be achieved.

Keith Putt's essay, "Rightly Passing Beyond New Atheism: Continental Connections and Disconnections," approaches the problems proposed by the New Atheism from the point of view of three contemporary postmodern thinkers: John Caputo, Richard Kearney, and Merold Westphal. Putt argues that both postmodernism and the New Atheists find common ground with respect to movement away from superstitious beliefs and religiously motivated violence. On an even more surprising level, postmodernism finds room to place some basic tenets of classical theism into question as well. However, in contradistinction to many readers who find this philosophy and anything remotely connected to one Jacques Derrida as atheistic by its very nature, Putt uses the three thinkers mentioned above to encourage how religion and theology edify one to become more human. In the end, the hope is to come to a common ground where questions are seriously considered while dogmatic force, whether religious or atheistic, is placed aside.

The desire for dialogue at a common table is the focus of the next essay by Dan Stiver, "A Common Table: The Hermeneutics of Atheism and Faith." However, setting a place for each participant, both Christian and Atheist alike, appears difficult given the New Atheist penchant for only finding people of a scientific mind to be rational. Stiver first argues that the scientific mindset fails to come to terms with its inability to show the irrationality of religion. The New Atheists must realize, in his reading, that every individual is a hermeneutical being who confronts the world with a set of presuppositions and a worldview that precludes the possibility of achieving a God's-eye-point-of-view, which the New Atheists attempt to take up with their scientism. Consequently, following Habermas, Stiver concludes that the world is full of diverse visions of reality, each of which has a right to come to the table and discuss.

Finally, Jeff Poole goes beyond coming to a common table and attempts to address the possibility of finding common cause in "Toward a Conspiracy of Doves: Seeking Common Cause with the New Atheism." The New Atheists collectively agree that one reason for their near militant call for the abolishment of religion arises from the rising violence of religious extremists. While Poole recognizes that major obstructions exist that would derail any coming together, he desires to argue for those of "moderate" religious perspective to join in a denunciation of violence and work toward making this world a better place. With more than theoretical argument, Poole lays out practical criteria for achieving a "conspiracy of doves."

The final word in this issue, as promised above, goes to Richard Connolly in his essay, "The New Atheism." Having once been quoted as saying that he does not attend church because religion requires one to believe too many unbelievable things, Connolly lays out his reasoning behind such a claim in the first part of his essay. With full disclosure out of the way, he carefully takes up some of the arguments John Haught makes in a series of books on religion and science, of which *God and the New Atheism* is one. These critiques provide ample proof that far from being refuted by Christian responses, atheists remain confident in their claims. Keeping this in mind, the "Christian Response" here in the *Journal of Liberal Arts and Sciences* recognizes that the conversation is only just begun.

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Notes

[1] John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2007); Haught, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Haught, *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospects for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Boulder: Westview, 2003).
[2] John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

The New Atheism; Or, the Old Enlightenment Revisited

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When *Wired* magazine coined the term "new atheism" in a story it ran in November 2006, many people took the media hype seriously. The new atheism refers to the confluence of several people who attacked religion and the idea of God in the middle of the first decade of the new century. Rather than profoundly new voices with new arguments, the new atheists appear to be the last gasp of the eighteenth century Enlightenment with its closed, deterministic system of cause and effect. In many ways the new atheists share the deficiencies of Process Theology that embraces a Darwinian view of Natural Selection while failing to understand what cosmology, physics and chemistry tell us about how open the universe actually is for divine involvement.

The Players

Daniel Dennett, the philosopher, has a project to prove that human consciousness and reason can be explained by natural selection. The problem of human reason haunted Darwin who regarded consciousness and reason as the great problem for an exclusively naturalistic explanation of the evolutionary process.[1] C. S. Lewis seized on this problem as the central argument in his last philosophical apologetic work *Miracles* (1947). In *Breaking the Spell* (2006), Dennett attempted to explain the phenomenon of religion in exclusively naturalistic terms without reference to deity. He argues that belief in deity provided an evolutionary advantage until the modern era, but now this belief has outlived its usefulness, like the appendix or tonsils, and must be put away. In the future, those who do not believe in God will have the evolutionary advantage.

Sam Harris goes beyond Dennett in his argument. Whereas Dennett argues that religion has outlived its usefulness, failing the test of pragmatism, Harris argued in *The End of Faith* (2004)

and *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006) that religious belief and the God of the Bible are evil. Harris regards religion as a public danger that corrupts society.

Christopher Hitchens, the journalist, built a career as a sensationalist and provocateur. He earned a place for himself as a leader of the new atheism on the basis of his skill at emotional invective more than for his skill at well-reasoned argument which he displayed in *God is not Great* (2007). A champion of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, Hitchens regards religion as one of the greatest evils in the world because of its propagation of violence and hatred. In his personal experience, he has encountered the violent side of religion up close. During his early career, Hitchens was a news correspondent on Cyprus where he met his first wife, a Greek Cypriot, in the aftermath of the war there between Muslim Turks and Orthodox Greeks. An outspoken critic of Islam and an advocate of the war in Iraq, Hitchens regards monotheism as a form of totalitarianism.

Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist at Oxford, has the strongest credentials for offering the foundational argument of the new atheists: science disproves the existence of God. Dawkins came to popular prominence through *The Selfish Gene* (1975) in which he developed an elaborate metaphysical mythology of anthropomorphized genes that intend to establish a dynasty that will continue on after them and supplant all rival genetic dynasties in their struggle to conquer the world. Dawkins's genes are sneaky and ruthless in their determination not only to survive but to prevail.

In *The God Delusion* (2006) and in public debates, Dawkins bases his view of God on his understanding of how the universe works. At this point, it is important to distinguish between science, which describes what it observes about the universe, and philosophy, which draws metaphysical conclusions about the nature of reality. Dawkin's philosophical assumption is that the existence of God is a scientific question. When he says "scientific question" he means that the existence of God can only be determined by empirical observation because his philosophical assumption is that sensory evidence is the only valid basis for knowledge. Dawkins goes on to argue that a miracle, by any standard, is a scientific violation because it would violate the laws of physics. Though Dawkins used the term

miracle in his Oxford debate with Alister McGrath, he makes clear in the body of his writing that he means any activity by God in the physical universe would constitute a violation of the laws of physics.[2]

The great problem with the argument of Dawkins the biologist, who drapes himself in the authority of modern science and the credentials of Oxford University, is that his physics have not caught up with his biology. Dawkins describes the universe as a closed, deterministic system of cause and effect the way the great "clockwork" scientists and philosophers of the Eighteenth century saw it. In response to this view, the theologians proposed a new conception of God as the great watchmaker in the sky. It was all right for God to set the universe in motion, but physics allowed no place for God to act once the train had left the station. No doubt Dawkins knows about relativity, the Big Bang, quantum mechanics, and chaos theory, but they appear to have had no impact at all on his philosophical assumptions. Worse yet, they seem to have had no impact on how he conceives of genetics.

Whether in a materialistic universe or a theistic universe, genes are merely a biological mechanism for storing and communicating information that they release at the right time. Genes have no intentions, hopes, dreams, desires, or aspirations. They do not even seek to do their job well. They simply do their jobs, because genes do not think. Genes do not have brains.

Instead of the closed deterministic view of genes that Dawkins seems to have, almost anything can throw a gene off its game. They are a bit like the P. G. Wodehouse character whose golf game could so easily be thrown off, but especially by the hullabaloo of the butterflies in the adjoining meadow. Genes do not decide to evolve to a superior animal. Genes have no plans for improving so that they can beat out the competition. Genes do not cause mutations. Mutations happen to genes. The genetic code is altered due to interference from a variety of causes. For this reason, pregnant mothers are warned not to drink or smoke or take drugs. These behaviors and any number of other external factors may cause a mutation in the genetic code.

The scientific issues raised by the new atheists are the most important aspects of their argument because even in the

postmodern world in which we live, most Americans continue to live in a Newtonian universe. Modern education mitigates against a person having a broad education. If Dawkins continues to think in eighteenth century categories with his education, we can hardly expect the average American to grasp the extent to which we live in an open universe. Before turning to the scientific issues, however, we should acknowledge the sociological issues raised by the new atheists.

The most strident charge that Hitchens and Harris bring is that religion and the belief in God is the cause of great evil and violence in the world. They speak of "cause" in a free handed way that is common in our culture. It might be more appropriate to say that religion and belief in God accompanies great evil and violence in the world. A casual reading of the daily news suggests that people grew evil and violent over sports, politics, jobs, families, trade and commerce, property and possessions, love, jealousy, envy, power, and any threat to survival. A careful reading of Dawkins and the issue of the human competition for advantage should have made this feature of human life evident. People are religious, so we should expect that religion and a belief of God would accompany any and all aspects of human life as humans seek the support of deity as they try to do unto their neighbors before the neighbors do unto them.

In his Oxford debate with Dawkins, Alister McGrath pursued a strategy of making the case for the beneficial aspects of religion in general and Christianity in particular. In contrast to the "source of evil" argument advanced by Harris and Hitchens, Dawkins insisted that whatever good religion might do does not really matter if it is not true. Dawkins is interested in ultimate truth, which places him amongst the last of the old Enlightenment thinkers of Modernity. Dawkins correctly understands that the dangers of religion and the positive good of religion as arguments do not address the question of the existence of God any more than the existence of any other cultural institution does.

In *Atheism Remix* (2008), Al Mohler identifies eight characteristics that set the new atheists apart from older forms of atheism:[3]

1. New boldness
2. Rejection of the Christian God of the Bible

3. Rejection of Jesus Christ
4. Based on scientific argument
5. Intolerant of moderate or liberal belief
6. Opposition to the protection of religious speech
7. Criticism of the religious instruction of children
8. Conviction that human freedom depends upon the demise of religion

While this list helpfully identifies the principal features of the new atheism, nothing about it seems particularly new. The new atheists are no more scientific than Hume, Gibbon, or Huxley. They are no bolder than Marx or White. They are no more intolerant than Mao or Stalin. They rehash the problem of suffering, which is a perfectly legitimate project. They are committed to a deterministic universe. They have no nostalgia for the positive contributions of Christianity. The new atheists prompt one to agree with Solomon that there is nothing new under the sun. The new atheists provide an opportunity, however, to examine how the scientific revolution of the twentieth century completely changes the old assumption that God's activity in the world would somehow violate the laws of nature. Physics repealed all the old laws.

The Twenty First Century Universe

The twin philosophies of naturalism and materialism gained their respectability in the eighteenth century largely due to the success of chemistry and physics in describing how the world works. The clock-work universe fit together tightly, like a series of gears and wheels in constant motion. The mechanical model of the universe provided absolute certainty and absolute predictability. One set of laws governed all action. Laplace (1749-1829) argued that if he knew all current conditions, he could calculate or predict all future events. With his confidence in the certainty of scientific knowledge, Laplace could reason that the present state of the universe is "the effect of its anterior state and as the cause of the one which is to follow."[4] When Napoleon asked where God fit into the nebula hypothesis, Laplace famously replied that he had no need of that hypothesis. The mechanical model of the universe simply had no place for God to fit.

When Christian philosophers in the seventeenth century set out to discover the laws of nature laid down by God, their method involved the examination of nature to determine the natural laws of God. With the development of the mechanical model, however, God as law giver stood outside the gears and wheels of nature. In keeping with the tradition of the English Calvinists, God determined the laws of nature from the foundations of the earth and his eternal decree sustained them. An uninvolved deistic God made perfect logical sense.

It is only a short step under the influence of the mechanical model to shift from the idea that science is concerned with describing natural causes to the conclusion that only natural causes exist. We refer to this view as naturalism. Materialism is a logical consequence of naturalism. If only natural causes exist, then only physical matter exists. Within the framework of naturalism and materialism, we have only two ways of knowing anything: through our senses (empiricism) and through our reason (rationalism). People who inhabit the eighteenth century intellectual world might logically be expected to be materialistic naturalists who only accept knowledge acquired through empiricism and rationalism. The new atheists inhabit an eighteenth century intellectual world.

In *God and the Comos*, Jimmy H. Davis and I have argued that our universe is unusually suited for God's involvement.[5] Unlike the closed, mechanical universe of the Enlightenment, our universe reveals an openness that invites interaction.

A Universe with a Direction

In many ways, Richard Dawkins inherited the mantle of Carl Sagan, the great Enlightenment mind of the 1980s. Sagan's popular PBS series on *The Cosmos* stressed that the cosmos is all there is or ever will be. From a materialistic perspective, the universe and everything in it simply exists. Nothing has purpose or meaning. The problem of suffering is no problem in a universe where no one suffers. Things just happen. Suffering implies a value judgment, and the universe has no values. Nothing is good or bad. Things just are.

The problem with this view lies in the nature of the universe itself. The Enlightenment could say of Aristotle's eternal universe that it just is, but our universe is much younger than Aristotle's

universe. Our universe is only about 14 billion years old. Unlike the infinite universe of the Enlightenment, our universe is quite small: perhaps as small as only 18 billion light years across. Unlike the static universe of the Enlightenment, our universe is going somewhere. From the tiniest level of organization to the largest, the universe has a direction. It has been moving from simplicity to complexity.

The universe as we know it began with a sudden, terrific expansion of energy that began to cool. As it cooled, it condensed into matter. As it continued to cool, the four fundamental forces emerged as discrete aspects of the universe and began to exercise their influence on matter. First gravity and then the strong nuclear force appeared, followed by electromagnetism and the weak nuclear force. As the four forces had their influence on matter and energy, the universe took on a new form: elementary particles appeared that began to form into protons and neutrons. This expansion and cooling lasted for eons of time, relatively speaking, but by three minutes after the Big Bang the universe had expanded to a vast enough space and had cooled sufficiently for protons and neutrons to form nuclei. After 400,000 years of this state and a further expansion and cooling, electrons and nuclei have enough elbow room to form atoms.

Initially the matter of the universe consisted of three kinds of atoms: hydrogen with one proton, helium with two protons, and lithium with three protons. At this stage, matter had grown to sufficient size and complexity that gravity began to exercise an influence on the atoms. Gravity drew atoms together into clouds of gas which only intensified the effect of gravity. Eventually the friction of the collected masses of matter caused the hydrogen and helium atoms to fuse into the first stars. A billion years into the existence of the universe, the first stars had been collected by gravity into galaxies.

As it turned out, as the stars blazed away, their heat transformed the three elements that made up the universe into twenty six. After ten billion years or so, the first generation of stars ended as supernovas that magnified the number of elements from twenty six to ninety two, and scattered the elements abroad when they exploded. From this star dust of many elements, the second generation of stars as well as the

rocky planets that orbit stars were formed by the force of gravity. About twelve billion years after the Big Bang, yet another new thing appeared on a rocky planet orbiting an average star that lay in the relatively empty zone between two giant arms of the Milky Way galaxy: life. Ironically, Big Bang cosmology and Genesis 1 agree that life comes from the dust of the earth.

The universe not only has a direction in terms of the arrow of time, it also has a direction in terms of its change from simplicity to complexity at every physical organizational level. Within the context of the upward movement of the universe, the laws of physics have changed four times since the beginning and we can expect at least one more major change. The universe has behaved differently as a result of each of these changes until now with four fundamental forces in effect, the forces operate against and in concert with each other producing the laws of nature. At some point in the future the universe as we know it will all come to an end when all the energy/matter has extended itself. The universe will be left a cold, motionless extension of energy, and matter as our universe has experienced it since sub-atomic particles began to condense will assume a new, motionless form. Matter is simply the solid form of energy ($E=mc^2$). When matter has become so extended, the physics of the universe will behave in a new way. The strong nuclear force, the weak nuclear force, and gravity will no longer have the effect that we experience today. Motion will cease. In the twinkling of an eye, the universe will cease to exist as it has for so long, and time will be no more.

The universe displays internal values. The universe at every level always moves from simplicity to complexity. Complexity leads to further complexity in the interrelationship of the growing diversity of the universe from one thing (energy) to many things. The universe does new things from time to time that it had never done before. The static universe of the Enlightenment had no meaning or purpose because it just was; it had always been and would always be. In a deterministic, static universe, one old thing does not lead to something new. It only does the same things the same way. Our universe has a brief span of time, and it does something. It operates with a purpose of producing a more complicated form of matter. It is not simply the fact of a beginning that has worrisome theological implications, but what

has happened with the trajectory of the universe in its tenacious journey to complexity has equally unavoidable theological implications that call for notice.

A Relative Universe

A century after Einstein proposed his two theories of relativity, the average person has not yet moved into his universe. Most of us still live in a universe in which the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. We live in a universe in which two straight lines cannot enclose a space. If you draw two straight lines around a basketball, however, you begin to grasp Einstein's notion of the curvature of space. Two straight lines drawn around a basketball will enclose four spaces.

An Uncertain Universe

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Planck, Niels Bohr, Louis de Broglie, Erwin Schrodinger, Max Born, and Werner Heisenberg made a number of important discoveries about the nature of atoms and sub-atomic particles. These discoveries led to what we now call quantum mechanics because of Plank's view that atoms radiate energy in discreet bundles called *quanta*.

Aristotle taught us that something cannot be *a* and *not a* at the same time. This law of non-contradiction represents a fundamental aspect of western logic and scientific thinking. It is this logical law that rebels against the notion that Jesus of Nazareth could be fully human and fully divine at the same time. Humanity and deity are mutually exclusive concepts. The philosophers of the Enlightenment inhabited such a universe, but that universe disappeared a hundred years ago.

In spite of the plastic model of atoms that school children grew up seeing, atoms are not actually like billiard balls stuck together with sticks like tinker-toys. Atoms involve relationships of energy in the form of electrons, protons, and neutrons which are all composed of relationships of energy in the form of sub-atomic particles which are relationships of energy. In 1913, Niels Bohr proposed that electrons may orbit the nucleus of an atom at a lower energy orbit close to the nucleus or a higher energy orbit farther from the nucleus. When an electron moves from one orbit distance to another, electromagnetic radiation is emitted when

the electron makes its “quantum leap” in orbit. Instead of the steady, perfect circles that Aristotle led scientists to believe, the orbits of electrons oscillate. Twirling a weight tied to the end of a string will create the perfect orbits of Aristotle. Twirling a sparkler at night creates the effect of an oscillating circular orbit like the one Bohr proposed.

J. J. Thomson won the Nobel Prize in 1906 for proving that the electron is a particle, and in 1937 his son George Paget Thompson along with Clinton Davisson won the Nobel Prize for proving that the electron is a wave. A particle occupies a discrete point while a wave has an extended continuous existence. In 1924 Louis de Broglie had argued that in its orbit around the nucleus, an electron’s leap from an inner orbit to an outer orbit constitutes a wave and that it must be able to complete whole wavelengths in each orbit. The conclusion of this mysterious world of quantum physics is that electrons behave as both discrete particles and continuous waves. Electrons are both *a* and *not a* at the same time.

The advances in quantum understanding collapsed the old certainty of physics. Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) observed in his famous Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle that one could observe the location of an electron but not its velocity, or one could observe the velocity of an electron but not its location. The more one can know about one property, the less one can know about the other property. Physics moved from a science of certainty to one of probabilities. The quantum world is an open world to future contingencies. The old determinism of the Enlightenment was dead, but the mindset continued in the popular imagination. Einstein had great difficulty giving up the certainty of Aristotle’s universe, even after he had overthrown Aristotle’s concept of absolute time.

One of the strangest aspects of quantum mechanics involves the idea of action at a distance. At the quantum level of the universe, the problem of quantum entanglement occurs whereby measurements performed on one quantum object will have an instantaneous effect on another quantum object spatially at distance from it. In spite of the individual components of an atom, they function as a unity. Moreover, they are open to action at a distance.

A Chaotic Universe

Within the laboratory where experiments can be controlled in such a way that only one cause and one effect may be observed, the deterministic universe of Laplace makes sense. The closed universe of Laplace, however, only exists within the laboratory where a barrier may be placed around the laws of nature. Within the closed confines of the laboratory, accurate predictions may be made because no other causes are allowed to interfere with an effect.

The universe is a much messier place than a scientific laboratory. Whereas the laboratory provides an uncontaminated environment for isolating properties and phenomena, it gives a false picture of how the universe actually works once the dyke has been removed. In the universe, everything acts upon everything else in a grand game of paper-rock-scissors. One law of nature trumps another law of nature. We can take measurements and in retrospect describe how the laws of nature operated to slam Hurricane Katrina into New Orleans, but the chaotic interaction of the vast complexity of the universe makes it difficult to predict the effect that the laws of nature will cause. The universe of Laplace with its deterministic predictability does not exist. This intricate interaction of the complexity of the universe is called Chaos Theory. The chaos does not mean that the laws of nature have ceased to operate, but it does mean that the complex interaction of the whole creates an indeterminate future.

Edward Lorentz (1917-) did the most important early research on chaos. Perhaps the most well-known popular version of chaos theory comes from a comment by Lorentz that the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Brazil would change the weather in unexpected ways in the United States. The idea of the "butterfly effect" captures the enormous tentativeness of the present to the future in the vast interrelatedness that marks a chaotic system. It also demonstrates the indeterminateness and openness of the universe at the macro level as well as at the quantum level.

DNA

Perhaps the strangest example of how the new atheists are out of step with modern science rests with the case of DNA and

the advances in genetics. Richard Dawkins has studied and taught evolutionary biology at Oxford University. The way he talks about DNA and the whole genetic field, however, betrays his commitment to his philosophical system as the matrix for interpreting reality.

Darwin's theory had an embarrassing hole that Darwin acknowledged until Mendel's experiments with beans led to an understanding of how heredity works in living organisms. Darwin provided a theoretical basis for thinking of evolution, but Mendel provided the biology. DNA proved to be the mechanism by which heredity passed on traits from one generation to the next. Mixed with the philosophy of the Enlightenment, however, DNA and the genetic code becomes a deterministic mechanical conception that flies in the face of its organic nature.

If the DNA of the parents determined the DNA of the offspring, then the evolutionary process as understood by many people would be closed and deterministic. In fact, if the hereditary process were closed and deterministic, then no evolution would occur. Instead of a closed deterministic system, the hereditary process from parent to child is open to alteration which is called *mutation*. Mutations occur as a result of changes in the base sequence of the DNA molecule. DNA molecules do not cause the mutation in an effort to improve the offspring. Mutation happens to the DNA molecules. With 3,000 base pairs in the average human gene, and the largest gene having 2.4 million base pairs, DNA has an enormous number of base pairs exposed to the possibility of mutation. Any number of things within the chaos system that makes up the human environment can cause mutation: such as cell division copying errors, ionizing radiation, chemical mutagens, and infectious diseases.

In addition to the hardware of the DNA is the software of the *epigenome*. The epigenome refers to the collective instructions that tell the cells what to do as the body develops from a simple two cell organism into something much more complex. Environmental factors like hunger and plenty affect the instructions of the epigenome. Rather than a dictator that determines the biological future of an organism's descendents, DNA is a servant at the disposal of other influences. The genetic structure is an open system to outside influence.

Openness and Revelation

The very idea of revelation from God and the Bible as a source of authority does not mesh with a closed universe. Any involvement of God within the natural order would represent a violation of the laws of nature, and humans are part of the natural order. The nature of scientific discovery, however, demonstrates that humans have a capacity for knowledge and understanding that transcends the physical world. Just as humans have the capacity for receiving knowledge of the physical world through their senses, humans also have the capacity for receiving knowledge of a metaphysical nature through the imagination. The same capacity that allows people to day dream, fantasize, and innovate provides an avenue of access between God and people. A damaged imagination provides the venue for hallucination and schizophrenic episodes, but a healthy imagination provides the basis for spiritual experience and scientific discovery.

There are two kinds of scientists: 1.) those who preserve the received tradition and 2.) those who discover new knowledge. The first group are the worker bees who rely on empiricism and rationalism to repeat the received tradition and use it. The second group relies upon imagination to see what has never been seen, to hear what has never been heard, to understand what has never been understood. The imagination carries the discovering pioneer across the universe and across time to see the beginning of time and the depths of matter. Rationalism and empiricism cannot take them there. Rationalism will allow them to record, calculate and transmit the empirical observations that imagination made possible, but rationalism and empiricism do not open the door to knowledge.

Calculation could never take Copernicus from the universe of Aristotle to the universe we now inhabit. Calculation could never take Newton from the Universe of Aristotle to the universe we now inhabit. Calculation could never take Einstein from the universe of Aristotle to the universe we now inhabit. Calculation could never take Bohr from the universe of Aristotle to the universe we now inhabit. Calculation could never take Hubble from the universe of Aristotle to the universe we now inhabit.

Poor Aristotle. Without defenders like the new atheists, his influence would have declined by now.

Rationalism and empiricism allow the pioneering scientist to mark out the trail that imagination has revealed to them. Not every idea that passes through the imagination has validity, and the tools of rationalism and empiricism provide help in sorting knowledge from fancy. The test for verification of the experience for the prophets in the Bible was empirical. Do their prophecies come to pass? The fulfillment of the prophecies is the feature that distinguishes the Hebrew Scriptures from the holy books of other cultures. The followers of the pioneers see the marks and sign posts of scientific formulations, but they do not use their imaginations to do it.

In *Eureka* (1848), the treatise in which Edgar Allan Poe first proposed the Big Bang Theory and the basic ideas of relativity, Poe remarked that science is poetry. All discovery of new knowledge comes from the imagination in analogical models, like poetry.

In a closed universe of cause and effect, God has no access to communicate with people. Revelation has no theoretical basis. In a universe in which imagination is the primary source of all knowledge and understanding, however, the biblical description of how revelation occurs has perfect validity in keeping with the common experience of everyone who has ever “had an idea” or experienced having a thought “come to them.” All people have spiritual experience, but not all people are religious.

Intervention without Violation of Nature

One of the most remarkable features of the universe involves its accessibility for observation, measurement, manipulation, alteration, interference, redirection, and other forms of involvement without actually violating the laws of nature. In fact, the laws of nature seem suited to allow for this wide array of interventions. Whatever humans go looking to find, they somehow discover lying right out on the table for anyone to see.

The most compelling case for the absence of God from nature is the view that God’s involvement in nature would constitute a violation of the laws of nature. The history of science over the last five hundred years, but particularly in the last hundred years lays this argument to rest as having no validity. The discipline of scientific inquiry and experimentation represents a blatant interference with nature at every level, yet

without violating the laws of nature. The growth of human civilization from the very simple to the very complex is the story of human interference with nature. We defy the forces of weather with houses and clothes. We defy the caprices of food availability by domesticating plants for crops as we alter their “natural” way of growing. We defy the calamities that affect our bodies by creating artificial limbs, from walking sticks to prosthetic arms to false teeth to hearing aids, to glasses. We split the atom and we engineer our own genes. We defy the laws of gravity. We breathe underwater. At every turn we discover that though the laws of nature are never suspended, they do not form the barrier that we supposed. Instead, we discover that the laws of nature seem designed for interaction, interference, manipulation, contradiction, and employment to our purposes.

Scientific discovery and technological progress would not be possible except for the openness of the universe to intervention. In half a millennium, humans have only just begun to realize the flexibility of the universe and its openness to interaction. We have only just recognized that the universe is not the closed, deterministic machine with no place for God to relate. Rather than no place for God to be involved, the universe seems designed for involvement. It has ready accessibility at every level of organization. Quantum mechanics has demonstrated that action at a distance is the everyday norm in our universe. If humans are free to intervene in nature, it would seem that God would have at least as much ability as us.

Bad Philosophy

The new atheists repeat a concern voiced many times in the past about the way religion inhibits the advance of science and progress. Some forms of religion certainly do, but the Christian faith has not. Instead, the greatest hindrance to the advance of science is the stubborn adherence to a philosophical system that predetermines how the world must work and what can be known.

Galileo’s Christian faith did not inhibit his discoveries, but the official Aristotelian philosophy of the academy threatened to destroy his work. Since Galileo, some of the most important work in science has been hindered because of the commitment of the scientific community to a philosophical perspective. Einstein could not accept the idea of quantum mechanics because it

violated his deeply ingrained assumptions of how the world works as inherited from Aristotle. Einstein went so far as to "fudge" his conclusions by introducing the cosmological constant to make his theory work with the received philosophical tradition. Edgar Allan Poe first proposed the Big Bang Theory in his solution to Obler's paradox in *Eureka* published in 1848. The scientific community regarded him deranged for denying Aristotle's eternal universe with its infinite size. Because of its refusal to question the philosophical biases that permeated the scientific world, the progress of science suffered a setback of almost a century.

These examples are the most conspicuous of many cases in which science was hindered from pursuing knowledge because of philosophy. The new atheists have just such a commitment to a philosophical system based on outmoded eighteenth century science that has long since been discredited.

Conclusion

The new atheists have continued in the tradition of the Enlightenment that they publicly revere. During a time of rapid cultural change of global proportions, many people take comfort in the familiarity of the past. Tradition provides a way of ordering our lives against the onslaught of uncertainty. The new atheists have found comfort in their idealization of the intellectual respectability of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Unfortunately for them, the scientific assumptions upon which the naturalism and materialism of Enlightenment philosophy stand no longer have any validity within the scientific community. Physics and cosmology have said, "Oops! Sorry about that."

Physics is a much humbler discipline after the revolutions of the twentieth century, and much more tentative about its assertions, while being much more open to new ways of understanding the world. Having had a giant like Newton to lay down the foundational principles of classical physics, by the end of the nineteenth century the discipline tended to think it had nothing more to learn. Then, along came Einstein, Bohr, and Hubble.

Dawkins is handicapped in his perspective because his discipline has had its Newton in the form of Darwin, but it has not yet had its Einstein, Bohr, and Hubble. Epigenetics is opening a

door that will lead to many marvelous discoveries about life, but it will also require a re-thinking of fundamental understandings that continue to be based on the Enlightenment framework within which Darwin operated.

The quantum behavior of electrons, the macro behavior of chaotic systems, and the instructional behavior of the epigenome do not give us a picture of a tight fitting mechanical model of cause and effect, but of broad patterns of behavior that interact holistically with enormous openness to personal influence by cognitive beings. The universe is not the tightly sealed machine the new atheists still suppose. It is open to the initiatives of any personal being, including God.

Notes

[1] Darwin never published his doubts. Instead, he stated that the eye was the great problem, largely as a straw man since the eye was a fairly easy thing to account for in naturalistic terms. Darwin's concern about the reliability of human reason may be found in his letters.
[2] The Oxford debate between Dawkins and McGrath on October 12, 2007, was posted online.
[3] R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 54-63.
[4] Pierre Simon Marquis de Laplace, *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, 6th ed., trans. by F. W. Truscott and F. L. Emory (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1961), 4.
[5] See Harry Lee Poe and Jimmy H. Davis, *God and the Cosmos* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).

"Of Course, You Mean 'Swimming'": Why Science Cannot Determine Values or Explain Experience

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The Discovery Channel's 2010 series *Through the Wormhole*, starring Morgan Freeman, introduces the "Is There a Creator?" episode with Mr. Freeman reflecting on an ant farm that he was given as a gift when he was a child. He examines the ants behind the glass, working away at their complex series of tunnels and wonders what the ants might possibly make of the face outside the glass. None of us knows what it's like to be an ant, but we can be pretty confident that the ants do not have much of a clue about the nature of the being that created the little world they live in and set up the boundaries of their existence. Could it be that we are in a similar situation when we try to reflect on the existence and nature of whatever or whoever has established our world? And how much would a most thorough examination of our ant-world finally tell us about the kind of being or beings, or non-being or non-beings, that account for why there is a universe for us to live in? Not much, this essay will argue. Some, but not much.

Modern natural science has provided us with the tools to solve innumerable human questions and problems. It has revealed our history back billions of years, and it has provided technology to save lives and to destroy lives beyond what anyone could have imagined a mere hundred years ago. It has plumbed the depths of the very small and looked to the edges of the observable universe. It has answered questions about the nature of matter and the building blocks of life itself. But there remain important questions that it is not equipped to answer, and pointing out this fact is among the most important responses that Christians, indeed religious believers from any number of faith traditions, can bring to the "new atheists." There are key human

questions about which the natural scientist *qua* scientist must remain agnostic. There are, in fact, a multitude of such questions, but this essay will focus on two categories of them: questions of *value* and questions of human *experience*.

Since one of the characteristics of the "new" atheism is a rather strident insistence that natural sciences have answered (or might someday answer) the human questions that religious belief claims to answer, showing the limits of science in these arenas is most valuable for the religious believer. And to argue for the existence of these limits is not to commit a "god-of-the-gaps" fallacy (basing religious conviction on mysteries that science hasn't solved yet, but might). My argument is not that religious belief is rational because science leaves explanatory gaps that only God can fill (an ill-advised strategy employed by many proponents of Intelligent Design, for example); but that our deepest human longings, quests, and questions are not of the *type* that the natural sciences can fulfill. If the answers to these questions and longings suggested by religious belief are like answers to a crossword puzzle, then science is like a calculator. It offers answers to different kinds of questions.

This difference in *kind* of question as it relates to the new atheism can be well illustrated by examining a couple of arguments from two of the most widely read and influential of the new atheists, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins. The majority of what follows will address Sam Harris's argument that science can determine human values as presented in his monograph *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. [1] Then attention will turn to Dawkins's reductionistic analysis of human experience as expressed in passages from *The God Delusion*[2] and *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion, and the Appetite for Wonder*[3]

After a brief introduction to the philosophical issues involved, this essay will address the specifics of these key arguments. In many ways these two issues, the nature of values and of experience, are emblematic of other issues in the recent debates between atheism and religious belief. In these questions and others, the science-inspired atheists claim that science has answered questions which I argue are not properly within the domain of the sciences. In making these claims, the new atheists are elevating the unarguably powerful *tools* of the

sciences into an *ontology*, or theory of ultimate reality. This essay seeks to expose the fallaciousness of this promotion in the two key areas addressed by Harris and Dawkins.

Facts and Values: The "Is" and the "Ought"

Eighteenth century philosopher and historian David Hume is usually cited as one who forever divorced fact and value. In his attempt to give morality an objective, scientific foundation, Sam Harris disagrees with Hume's splitting asunder of the "ought" from the "is."[4] Following is Hume's argument as it appears in *A Treatise of Human Nature*:

> But can there be any difficulty in proving that vice and virtue are not matters of fact, whose existence we can infer by reason? Take any action allowed to be vicious: willful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice.* In whichever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions, and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but it is the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it.[5]

Hume's example can be updated readily in a society that is regularly exposed to television crime dramas. Imagine a police report that describes in meticulous detail every fact discovered at the scene of a particularly heinous murder. The report conveys information about the manner of death, positions of objects in the room, including the disfigured corpse, timelines, even forensic information about blood and other body fluids. Hume's point, one accepted by most philosophers since his time, is that *nowhere* on this list of facts will one find the *awfulness* of the

crime. And this is the case even if everyone who finds out about the crime agrees that it is awful. The moral blameworthiness of those who have committed the crime is nowhere among the *facts* that can be recorded about the crime. The moral outrage, the repulsion towards one who would commit such an act, the conclusion that something immoral has happened here—these all come from somewhere other than the objectively available facts of the case. Whether or not Hume is correct in finally locating our moral judgments in the sentiment of the observer, he has nearly unanimously been affirmed by subsequent thinkers that these moral judgments are not to be found in any objective reporting of facts.

Harris quotes, disapprovingly, physicist Sean Carroll's positive assessment of Hume's is/ought distinction: "Attempts to derive ought from is are like attempts to reach an odd number by adding together even numbers. If someone claims they've done it, you don't have to check their math; you know they've made a mistake."[6] Such a derivation is exactly what Harris attempts, but it is important to "check his math."

In my view, Harris does not ever quite address Hume's question head-on, but rather seeks to evade the question by invoking the "well-being" of conscious creatures as the only possible meaning of the word "good" (used in the sense of morally good). His key move in addressing the fact/value split is stated this way: "Meaning, values, morality, and the good life must relate to facts about the well-being of conscious creatures—and, in our case, must lawfully depend upon events in the world and upon states of the human brain."[7] And he laments the status quo that affirms, he says, "that science has nothing to say about what constitutes a good life."[8]

There are actually two logical moves at work here. One says that "well-being is all that can constitute goodness" and "science has much to say about how to achieve well-being." Though these claims are controversial, even if granted they do nothing to bridge the fact/value divide. In the first claim, the meaning of "well-being" is crucial, and Harris fails to provide a sufficiently robust definition to underwrite his project. The second claim, if we have reached a working agreement on the meaning of well-being, becomes less problematic. In fact, if we are in agreement about the meaning of "well-being," then the

second claim seems unarguably true. But that is because it is quite vague. Harris vacillates in his argument between claims like "science can determine human values" and "science has much to say about the achievement of human well-being." These claims are importantly different, and to characterize his opponents as denying the second claim is to commit a straw man fallacy. One might very plausibly argue that science cannot *determine* human values, while strongly affirming that science can *help us* to understand better what makes a good life, once we settle on at least some part of what "good life" means. But what we mean by "good" must come from somewhere besides science. So what is "well-being"? Harris's project turns on this question.

Harris claims that "the concept of 'well-being' captures all that we can intelligently value. And 'morality'—whatever people's associations with this term happen to be—*really* relates to the intentions and behaviors that affect the well-being of conscious creatures."[9] Thus Harris concludes that many different religious and philosophical ethical systems, despite their claims to the contrary, really do come down to the attempt to bring about the well-being of conscious creatures. Again, even granting him this conclusion, we must immediately ask what is meant by "well-being," and whether science can provide that meaning.

I happen to agree with Harris that history's best religious and philosophical ethics are aiming at maximizing "well-being" of conscious creatures (at least humans, maybe more). But what is "well-being"? Harris admits the difficulty of pinning down this term by pointing out its similarities with ideas of "health": "It seems to me [. . .] that the concept of well-being is like the concept of physical health: it resists precise definition, and yet it is indispensable. In fact, the meanings of both terms seem likely to remain perpetually open to revision as we make progress in science."[10] True enough, but progress toward what end? How does one define or recognize "progress"? This is the kind of question that science itself cannot answer, especially when one recognizes the deep kinship between the "scientific" notion of health and the "religious" notion of salvation.

In most major religions, the terms "salvation" and "health" are closely related. For religious believers of various stripes,

progress toward enhanced human well-being is the very *raison d'etre* of the religion. What is salvation except fully optimized "health" or "well-being"? And if we are to make progress toward better understanding and achieving this worthy goal, then mustn't someone, somewhere, posit a standard by which progress may be measured? Among other things, this is what religion proposes to do. Every major religion has an idea of salvation as the final goal of human well-being. Obviously the substance of this state differs from religion to religion, but they all see optimal well-being as their goal (or at least such could be argued). So Harris's glossing over the defining of "well-being" as a minor issue belies the centrality of this issue in the fact/value relationship. Is "well-being" a state of communion with God, the extinction of the flame of desire in *Nibbana*, the final realization that *Atman=Brahman*, the alignment with what is most real in human consciousness with what is most real in the universe, or the achievement of some measure of happiness for one's self and one's community? These are all options suggested by different worldviews, and the answers given in each case may *guide* the sciences as they illuminate the world and the brain, but in no case can the sciences that describe the world *determine* which of these (or some other) shall be the real meaning of "health," "well-being," or "salvation." And it is precisely our answers to *these* kinds of questions that determine our values.

Oddly enough, Harris realizes the very point made above when he reflects on the justification for doing science itself. "Science is defined with reference to the goal of understanding the processes at work in the universe. Can we justify this goal scientifically? Of course not."[11] Harris is a man of deeply held values, among which are rational inquiry and an honest search for truths about nature and human beings. But he sees clearly that science, *qua* (purely as) science, cannot justify scientific inquiry, that rational inquiry and its quest for truth cannot tell us *why* we should seek truth. "Science cannot tell us why, *scientifically,* we should value health."[12] He is exactly right, and this is why his project fails.

Science can describe the neurological state of a person who self-reports his or her well-being. It cannot tell us that well-being is the highest good or define the nature of that well-being. By

saying that science cannot tell us why we should value health, Harris illustrates very well the divide between facts and values. Beliefs about facts and beliefs about values may involve very similar brain circuitry, but philosophically they remain quite distinct.

So what reasons *do* we give to justify our quest for truth and our method of honest and rigorous inquiry? This is a question that interests philosophers and religious believers. Not that religion and/or philosophy can lay claim to the definitive answer to the question, but the question goes to religion's conceptual side—the side that postulates an ultimate source of value around which one may organize one's journey through life. Does truth really matter to you? Then doesn't it make sense to live in a world where truth *really* matters, even if our claims to understanding the truth are always tentative and grasping, like the ants in the ant farm, perhaps? Religious belief serves to posit a world in which our searching for truth and well-being makes sense, because it describes a world in which truth and well-being (salvation) are *real* (even if mysterious and forever beyond our complete understanding). To Isaac Newton, for example, the quest to uncover the hidden springs and principles of nature made sense because he believed that the rationality of the world reflected the rationality of its Creator. His overall worldview, including the *value* he placed on mathematically investigating nature, was undergirded by his belief in a cosmic geometrical genius behind it all.

Religious convictions provide provisional answers to "big-picture" questions and provide a framework for our valuations of ideals, including scientific truth and moral goodness. Unfortunately, like the other new atheists, Harris rarely considers this type of humble, provisional, open religious belief. Instead, he focuses his attacks on those forms of religious belief and practice that are fundamentalist, dogmatic, triumphalist, and violent. He accuses religious morals of being absolutist and legalistic, as sanctioning morality by appeal to divine legislation alone. Of course there are religious beliefs like this and not a few believers who hold them. But there are also many quiet and humble believers who live (like Socrates, for example) by faith in a goodness whose complete description lies beyond our linguistic capacities, but that/who calls for our allegiance.

Explanation and Experience

Individual human experience is another area where the natural sciences have comparatively little to say. All the neuroscience in the world will never convey what it is like to see the face of a loved one, to be in the presence of immediate injustice, or to be affected by the arcing hues of the rainbow. The philosophical movement that eventually came to be known as existentialism arose, in part, as a reaction against the increasingly popular notion that *everything* in the universe could (at least potentially) be explained by reductionistic, mechanistic laws. Nineteenth century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is usually called the first "existentialist," even though the term did not exist during his time. He is so named partly because he was among the first influential modern thinkers to focus much of his energy toward showing that the explanations, predictions, and proofs of the scientific method were all but powerless to address the most pressing concerns of the *existing individual*.[13] Central to his argument is the idea that a *person* is a fundamentally different kind of being than is any *object* that might normally fall under rational (and thus scientific) scrutiny. The essence of rationality, logic, and by extension the sciences, is to identify and to elucidate pattern: to find exactly those characteristics of objects and events that are *shared* with other objects and events.

But each *actually existing individual*, and each of her/his experiences, memories, motivations, moments of decision, etc., is importantly *sui generis* (of its own kind, without another like it). Admittedly there are plenty of characteristics that humans share in common, and their collective behavior can be predicted statistically with sometimes uncanny accuracy, but insofar as we are picking out commonalities, we are ignoring the individuality of each person; and it is exactly out of that individuality (always in community, of course) that our very identities take shape and our lives are constructed. Put another way, my *experience*, even of the simplest kind, like my experience of the oil lamp burning on my desk, has only happened once, has never happened to anyone else, and will never happen again, either to me or to anyone else. My consciousness of the gentle source of light and

heat *means something* to me that can never be replicated or described accurately by the methods of natural science. A neuroscientist might describe in incredible detail my brain states as I ponder the lamp, its shape, its designs, the uncle who gave it to me twenty years ago. But the electrochemical processes that may be necessary to support such an experience *are not the experience itself*. I am not experiencing a brain state. I experience a lamp, and the countless associations that instantaneously cascade to form my interpretation of that experience.

In fact, *every* actual event and object in the world is partly categorizable (i.e. potentially scientifically understandable) and partly not. Not only is every human being and every human experience importantly different from every other one, every place on earth is different from every other place on Earth; every spot in the universe is importantly different from every other one. The only things that are *identical* to any other things are abstractions, like money or numbers or geometrical shapes or Plato's forms. Of course it is very helpful to us to find those characteristics that are (roughly) shared by similar objects and events. Progress in finding these shared characteristics has allowed great advances in everything from space travel to medicine. But to think that the intellectual and technological tools that have created these advances can tell *the whole story* about any particular actual object, and especially about human personal experience, is to require of those tools something that they were never equipped to deliver. To grant reductionistic explanations priority over all other modes of thought is to elevate a tool to the level of an ontology (theory of ultimate being). This is something like the carpenter who relies exclusively on his hammer for all tasks. He may really love his hammer, but it is not helpful at all in squaring a corner or raising a wall. Not every task of carpentry is like a nail that needs to be driven. Explaining some aspect of complex phenomena by reference to their component parts is a tool that has built many amazing cultural edifices and solved many a difficult human problem. But there are other kinds of questions that need other kinds of tools. The burden of proof lies with the one who claims that scientific reductionism is more than one kind of tool that answers one set of questions.

Every event or object in the world is partly categorizable and partly not, but some are more categorizable than others. For many reasons, human experience profoundly resists categorization. Apparently the widely-read atheist Richard Dawkins disagrees. For he argues that our experiences are not really what we think they are, that many of our judgments about our experiences are mistaken because we fail to realize that these experiences are always examples of physical stuff obeying physical laws. Though he mentions these convictions in his recent book *The God Delusion*, they are more explicitly stated in his 1998 book, *Unweaving the Rainbow*. In *The God Delusion* he states his agreement with Julian Baggini that "there is only one kind of stuff in the universe, and it is physical,"[14] and that everything in the universe, including human experiences and judgments about objects of experience can always be, at least in theory, explained by natural science because "everything ultimately obeys the laws of physics."[15]

For Dawkins, even if we expose the "real" nature of experience and its objects, the sense of wonder we feel will not be diminished. "As ever when we unweave a rainbow, it will not become less wonderful."[16] And this is exactly because the *experience* of the rainbow, as much as the *experience* of unweaving it, is precisely not explicable, even in theory, by the laws of physics, because important parts of that experience remain *sui generis*.

In *Unweaving the Rainbow* Dawkins notes,

> [. . .] the colours that we finally think we see are labels used for convenience by the brain. I used to be disappointed when I saw 'false colour' images, say, satellite photographs of earth, or computer-constructed images of deep space. The caption tells us that the colours are arbitrary codes, say, for different types of vegetation, in a satellite picture of Africa. I used to think that false colour images were a kind of cheat. I wanted to know what the scene 'really' looked like. I now realize that everything I think I see, even the colours of my own garden through the window, are 'false' in the same

> sense: arbitrary conventions used, in this case by my brain, as convenient labels for wavelengths of light.[17]

A simple question suggests itself in response to this account of the experience of color: how is the experience we name "purple" any more or less "false" than the experience we name "electromagnetic radiation at approximately 4000 angstroms wavelength"? In each case we are using a linguistic "label" of a certain kind to report an experience that is not itself the same as the label. And the report of the experience will differ depending on the purpose for which it is offered (poetry vs. lab report, for example), but in either case we employ a label to convey some portion of an experience to another human being (or to ourselves in a subsequent moment). To say that someone is not "really" seeing purple is no more justifiable than saying someone is not "really" seeing radiation at 4000 angstroms. We see what we see and label it for the purposes of classification and communication. As a human being I label the experienced object "purple." Philosophers for centuries have known that the label is not the experience itself, and that we often label things incorrectly (based on some standard of "truth"—a debate we can't enter into here), but to tell me that my experience is not really my experience is very much akin to trying to convince me that I am not in pain when I think I am. Neither Richard Dawkins nor anyone else can ever assume a perspective from which he can tell me that I "only think" I see a color. My experience of purple is not rendered fallacious just because someone else, labeling objects for different purposes, says that purple is a name for a certain wavelength of light. To do so seems to me to be like correcting someone for calling something "purpurado" rather than "purple." Different labels are used for similar experiences for different purposes in different communities.

The argument that our experiences are mistaken because they are "really" brain events is an acid that dissolves all knowledge claims, including those made about brain events. To Dawkins's way of thinking, the rainbow is not "really" immobile as it seems, but our senses and brain patterns, conditioned by evolution to react in certain ways, make it seem so. Thus Dawkins speaks of the "illusion of the rainbow."[18] Presumably, once we reach a full understanding of all the evolutionary-

physical (if we ever do) operations of "brains-perceiving-rainbows" we will have the correct picture. But that explanation will also be (according to this line of thinking), no less than my experience of the unmoving rainbow, the result of evolutionary-physical laws. So should not our "corrected" understanding of "brains-perceiving-rainbows" be just as suspect as the original experience of the immobile spectral sky-bow? And this brings us back to the crucially important distinction between explanation and experience.

The rainbow, whether seen as God's forsaking of violent treatment of humans (as in Genesis 6), or as refracted light through trillions of droplets of water vapor, or as a pretty adornment of a pre- or post- storm horizon, is an object of experience. Every human being who sees a rainbow has an experience that is hers or his alone. It will be interpreted according to that person's individual filters, born of her unique genetic inheritance and lived history. A psychologist may try to explain why that rainbow means what it does to her. A neuroscientist might try to explain the operations of the brain as the rainbow is experienced or remembered. But those explanations are *not* the experience itself. As the existentialists have argued, the experience of the rainbow is that of a unique individual, part of our universe that is importantly uncategorizable.

Put very simply, the person who experiences an object like a rainbow is not herself an object in this encounter. *As* one who experiences, she is *subject*, not *object.* She is a *person*, a center of experiences unique in the world. Scottish countercultural and philosophically-minded psychiatrist R. D. Laing has expressed this feature of being human very effectively. Laing points out in many of his books the fallacy of considering a *subject* solely as an *object*. The natural sciences, Laing points out, deal with objective truth—truth that is the same (at least in theory) from any possible perspective. Behavior, the personal response to experience that becomes public, can be objectively described. But public behavior is not the same as personal experience. Laing asserts that "Natural science knows nothing of the relation between behavior and experience. The nature of this relation is mysterious . . ."[19] Echoing Kierkegaard and Martin Buber, Laing contends that the world of experience, the

arena of meaning for individual human beings, can never be seen through the lens of objectivity. Experience and what it means to each of us always hides at least part of itself from the documentary efforts of objectivity.

Efforts to delve into subjectivity with the tools of objectivity will always come up short. Neurologists and endocrinologists can provide some fascinating information about a person in love. But they cannot, as scientists, reduce the experience to the neurology and endocrinology. My experience of being in love is *not*, emphatically ***not***, an experience of elevated hormone and serotonin levels. When I'm in love, I experience the other person and her perceived wonder; I know nothing of testosterone or neurochemicals. Those are surely present in elevated levels during my experience, and are very probably thus in *every* experience that someone labels "being in love," but the *experience* of being in love is not the same as the biochemistry.

Laing was not only influenced by the work of Kierkegaard, but also by the work of Scottish philosopher John MacMurray, who argued in the early 20th century what this paper seeks to argue today: that natural sciences are not equipped to explain *experience*. Dawkins's arguments that what we make of rainbows are mistakes wrought by evolution's preference for certain brain-habits, if they are true, cannot be true. MacMurray, in *The Boundaries of Science*, says,

> From the scientific point of view, all beliefs, including scientific beliefs, occur to people. The processes which cause them to occur are unintentional, and therefore, the beliefs are not the realization of a human intention to achieve knowledge. If the belief that all beliefs are brought about in this way is true, then, since it is a belief, it cannot be true. For to say that a belief is the product of the operation of objective forces which necessitate its occurrence under certain conditions, is clearly incompatible with holding that it is believed because it is true.[20]

To say that all beliefs are brain states (which, incidentally, Sam Harris also affirms) and that brain states are the results of the laws of physics (even when writ large in evolutionary history),

strips all possible meaning from the word "true" when applied to these beliefs. If the "delusions" of religion are explained away as delusions by recourse to their evolutionary (either biological or social) history and their dependence on (or identity with) brain states, then so are the "delusions" of science.

Conclusion

"True" is a value judgment, much in the way that "morally good" is a value judgment. And these judgments have their fount in humans' *experience* as subjects, not objects. A brain state cannot be "true" or "false"; it is a brain-state. *Beliefs* are designated as true or false, even if we do not know now which is which, or if we never will. But the meaning of true/false or moral/immoral can never be determined by the sciences. Those valuations come from somewhere else. So we will always need religion and philosophy to conjecture and to argue about which of the various "big-picture" scenarios best explains the human condition in the universe we try to navigate together.

Many have accused the new atheists of succumbing to their own brand of fundamentalism. I think this is only partly a fair assessment. If fundamentalism is primarily characterized by a rigid dogmatic commitment to received doctrine, then Dawkins and Harris are not fundamentalists. Both are clearly committed to a search for truth, even if that means the overturning of the received wisdom. But I do think that the new truths to which they are open lie in a very narrow range. Dawkins and Harris both argue very effectively against a God whose chief description is super-intelligent designer. If there is such a being, they concur, then science should lead us to discover Him/Her. Science has not led us there, so there is likely not such a being. As a Christian believer, I agree with this conclusion. If God's primary attribute we should find is "engineer," then I, with Dawkins and Harris, don't see the evidence to support such an inference.

But this is where the charge of fundamentalism against Dawkins and Harris does gain some traction. For them, it seems that all questions and answers must conform to those recognizable by the leading scientific journals of our day. The possibility that there may be questions of an entirely different sort, whose answers may be best expressed in poetry, parable, or myth, seems absent from their radars. This is a kind of

fundamentalism: one that may not claim to have all of the answers, but *does* claim to have discovered the kinds of questions for which there may be answers. Their refusal to engage other possible kinds of questions recalls an ancient Buddhist story about the turtle and the fish.

In lamenting the human tendency to become trapped in words and existing categories, the Buddhist parable tells of a fish and a turtle who were fast friends. The turtle undertakes a journey to a different place. He is gone for several months. Upon his return, his friend the fish inquires, "Where have you been all this time, my friend?" The turtle responds, "I have been walking on the dry earth above." The fish replies, "Of course, you mean 'swimming.'"

The fish did not have the conceptual equipment to process the idea of "walking," so he denied that there was such a place, where one could walk. Thus, can the mechanical and reductionistic metaphors of the natural sciences, indispensable tools that they are, trap us into denying the existence of realities and potential experiences beyond mechanism and reductionism, which may in fact house the best clues of all about human *experience, well-being,* and *salvation.* When we look through the glass of our ant-farm and try to discern by whom, for what, we were made, we must ask questions of a different sort than "where do we start the next tunnel?"

Notes

[1] Ron Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010).
[2] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).
[3] Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion, and the Appetite for Wonder* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).
[4] Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 10.
[5] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 520.
[6] Harris, *The Moral Landscape* , 203.
[7] Ibid., 6.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 32-3. Emphasis in original.
[10] Ibid., 11-12.
[11] Ibid., 37
[12] Ibid.

[13] For example see *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 199ff.
[14] Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 14.
[15] Ibid., 181.
[16] Ibid., 14.
[17] Dawkins, *Rainbow*, 57.
[18] Ibid., 47.
[19] R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1967), 19.
[20] John MacMurray, *The Boundaries of Science: A Study in the Philosophy of Psychology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 129.

The New Atheism: The Roots of the Problem

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The ubiquity of books like Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great* is only matched by the vitriol of his opponents. Many critiques have been written of the general arguments proposed by these "new" atheists, and many have noted their general lack of theological sophistication.[1] Rather than join in this task of rebuttal or defense, I would like in this essay to examine what I take to be one of the roots of this assault on religion and argue that these attacks are troublesome not only, or not even fundamentally, for the challenge they pose to God's existence or goodness but rather because they expose a fundamental failure of (particularly) Christian thinking to address its own contribution to the rise of modern versions of atheism. I will begin by briefly tracing out one of the main arguments that undergirds much of the current criticisms of religion as an introduction to my main claim that it is not really a question of defending divine transcendence *against* materialist invaders, but rather a matter of recognizing and working through the problematic nature of transcendence in Christian theology itself, especially as mediated by the philosophical and theological debates of the 19th and 20th century.

I will begin by examining one of Hitchens's core arguments, in order to show that it only goes wrong if we are willing to risk asking the question of what "greatness" or true transcendence might mean for 21st century believers. The key principle or axiom upon which many of Hitchens's arguments are built is Occam's Razor (after the 13th century Franciscan theologian in England). I'll quote Hitchens's version of it: "When two explanations are offered, one must discard the one that explains the least, or explains nothing at all, or raises more questions than it answers."[2] The basic idea here is that one should accept the minimal account or theory needed to explain some fact or

situation. So, for example, if I come home and find the kitchen trash strewn all over the floor, it is most reasonable to assume that our dog is responsible rather than that Martians landed on my back lawn, slipped through the molecules of the wall and conducted experiments on my trash to further their knowledge of human eating habits. Both explanations are possible, but the first is preferable because it is the simplest and requires the fewest and least exceptional beliefs.

Now, the most basic argument of the new atheists against belief in God is this:[3] The normal beliefs, concerns and values of everyday human life do not require an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent being as their source; it is much easier and simpler to posit natural and finite causes. For example, children should honor and obey their parents because this ensures their survival at a young age and provides for the overall stability (and thus happiness) of the community. Or societies defend business contracts because without them people cannot trade effectively and get what they want. In short, self-interest explains why we do these things in ways that do not require extraordinary beliefs about an invisible and perfect being. As Hitchens argues: "Religion has run out of justifications. Thanks to the telescope and the microscope, it no longer offers an *explanation of anything important*."[4] In short, the things most people value in life—health, good job, family, friends, etc.—do not require a "Great God" to explain them, and, in fact, we have perfectly good explanations for these desires in our own natural psychology.

One could give many more examples of this sort of argument, but the basic point is clear: All the seemingly complex structures of nature and institutions of civilization do not *need* the visible hand of God to explain them any more than the cohesive and reasonably smoothly operating global markets need one. As Adam Smith pointed out long ago, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker [or we might say, "God"] that we expect our dinner, but from their regard for their own interest."[5] God's visible hand is replaced by the invisible hand of self-interest. We have insurance in case of accidents, IRAs for our retirement, doctors for our pains, and friends, movies, books and vacations for our enjoyment. Certainly, we could picture a God who is better at this sort of thing than human professionals, but—so this argument goes—isn't it a surer and less

controversial wager to bet on the doctor or your best friend (even if they fail you sometimes)? The point is that such desires and beliefs do not require anything beyond human ingenuity to be achieved (perhaps, as it seems, science will even extend our human life to the point of practical immortality). As Pierre-Simon La Place reportedly said to Napoleon when asked where God was in his theory about the orbits of Saturn and Jupiter, "*Je n'ai pas eu besoin de cette hypothèse"* ["I had no need for this hypothesis"].

How might a believer escape this sharp razor? On the one hand, it needs to be pointed out that such arguments as these do not prove that God could not be the correct or true explanation of human existence and desire, and it is a basic mistake or fallacy for authors like Hitchens to assume (as he and others sometimes do) that it does. On the other hand, it is worth recognizing the power of his argument, not in the name of atheism but rather in the name of a deeper sense of God. We must confess, I think, that the God who is reflected too often in our prayers and desires is not really that *great*. Certainly, God may exist and may help me get a good job, but it seems just as likely that a 4.0 GPA or a great internship would do the trick. We don't need a great God to explain the ordinary; other explanations will do.

So, have we done away with God, as Nietzsche—one of the original and more interesting of the atheist critics—suggested? This would be true only if our aspirations and beliefs require simply a *somewhat* powerful force or cause. Hitchens concludes his own book with an examination of what I take to be the key example from Matthew's Gospel: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:44).[6] Hitchins's response to this passage is markedly different from his critique based on Ockham's Razor. He no longer tries to claim that natural or finite forces could account for such charity but rather

that humans "are not so constituted as to care for others as much as themselves: the thing *simply cannot be done* (as any intelligent "creator" would well understand from studying his own design). Urging humans to be superhuman, on pain of death and torture, is the urging of a terrible self-abasement at their repeated and inevitable failure to keep the rules."[7] The key here is the *What* that needs to be explained. If the essential thing to be explained is the love that a person has for friends and neighbors, then no great God is needed. If, however, we take as the fundamental reality the need for human beings to love their enemies, this is superhuman and indeed requires a God who in some fashion transcends human comprehension or power. As Jesus says to those who cry out "Who can be saved" after they hear how difficult—if not impossible—it is for those who have wealth to achieve eternal life, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God" (Luke 18:27).

Hitchens, of course, would reject this as a convincing argument for God's existence, since he rejects any experience of such extra-ordinary desires or goals (loving our enemies, giving the naked the cloak off our backs, tending to the stranger, etc.). And in fact, it is not a proof in this sense. It is, however, the first move in making room for God. The remission of cancer may be the result of super natural intervention, but this is, from our finite point of view, undecidable (there may be some natural cause), but if Christians honestly proclaim the values of the Sermon on the Mount as their fundamental values then only a contra or super natural force would be a sufficient explanation. One who believes this might be wrong, but if they are right then only a great God will do. This radical character of Christian belief also turns aside the force of Hitchens' other main critique: namely, that religious folk only use their faith to manipulate other people into satisfying their selfish desires for power and wealth. Of course, this has been the case far too often in the history of religion in general and the Christian Church in particular, but it is the atheist/naturalist point of view that actually enshrines such human selfishness as the best that we can do. We are condemned on such a view to a kind of *realism* that can only hope for an uncertain peace or justice that may arise from the intersection of our mutual self-interest. The atheist faith in this

invisible hand does not guarantee relief from vicious attempts to seize power, but accepts it as part of human nature.

One might think that the religious, or more specifically Christian, response is simply to re-assert the hunger for the transcendent (or spiritual) and to point to the resurgence of spirituality not only among everyday believers but even among many in philosophical circles thought to be alien to religious belief (even those in postmodern circles!). This, however, not only simply leaves one locked in a never ending battle, but it also, I think, misses the key point. The key element it misses is Christianity's complicity in the challenge to the transcendence and alterity of God.

For example, how should a Christian philosopher or theologian react when he or she comes across something like the following, from the pen of committed Marxist, Slavoj Zizek?

> One of the most deplorable aspects of the postmodern era and its so-called "thought" is the return of the religious dimension in all its different guises: from Christian and other fundamentalisms, through the multitude of New Age spiritualisms, up to the emerging religious sensitivity within deconstruction itself (so-called "post-secular" thought). How is a Marxist, by definition a "fighting materialist," to counter this massive onslaught of obscurantism? The obvious answer seems to be not only ferociously to attack these tendencies, but mercilessly to denounce the remainders of the religious legacy within Marxism itself. Against the old liberal slander which draws on the parallel between the Christian and Marxist "Messianic" notion of history as the process of the final deliverance of the faithful…should one not emphasize how this holds only for ossified "dogmatic" Marxism, not for its authentic liberating kernel? Following Alain Badiou's path-breaking book on Saint Paul, our premise here is exactly the opposite one: instead of adopting such a defensive stance, allowing the enemy to define the terrain of the struggle, what one should do is to reverse the strategy by *fully endorsing what one is accused of:* yes, there *is* a direct lineage from Christianity to Marxism; yes, Christianity and Marxism *should* fight on the same side of the barricade against the onslaught of new spiritualisms—

> the authentic Christian legacy is much too precious to be left to the fundamentalist freaks.[8]

What such materialists like Zizek and Badiou are exploiting here (and I don't mean this in a strictly pejorative sense, as I hope will become clear later) is an ambiguity that lies at the heart of the reception and development of Christianity, specifically in the West. Stated baldly, Christianity, in its fundamental doctrines defends both a radical view of the transcendence of God over all natural and temporal manifestations—Christ is the *only* true Son of God—*as well as* an account of the Christ event as revealing once and for all God's fundamental relationship to and in human history, namely, that God's kingdom is ultimately to be found only *in* a transformed world (the view that Zizek recognizes). What I shall argue for here (in a sketchy and hopefully provocative way) is that Christianity provoked one of the most powerful and continuous critiques of our secular human experience, *while at the same time* it provided the basis for secularism in its absolute endorsement of the role of everyday human action and experience in the immanent fulfillment of the expressed purposes of God.

I would like to organize my reflections around the work of Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling: three roommates at the Tübingen Stift or Seminary who came of age at the end of the 18th century when the powerful forces shaping the late Modern period were coming into a combustible interaction. Rigorously studying scripture and theology, these young men also read and argued over the revolutionary thinking of Immanuel Kant and debated the historical import of the revolutions (in America and France). They were also in the thick of the philhellenism exemplified by von Humboldt, Schiller, and others. In fact, all three had undertaken major translations of Greek Tragedy before even arriving at Seminary. In these figures, so central to the history of philosophy and theology, we can find clues to our current struggles with the concepts of transcendence and immanence. We can see this struggle most dramatically in the poetry of Hölderlin.

Hölderlin, steeped in the richness of Greek mythology and culture but raised in an enlightened, middle class family in the heart of Protestant Germany, wrote of his ambivalence about the

modern world in his poem, *Bread and Wine.* In the first stanza he speaks about the end of the workday in a pleasant town as ordinary folk head off to bed in order to sleep the peaceful sleep of the just—free, by God's grace, from superstitious fears and dreams.[9] For such modern and rational folk, it "is the will of the most high God, who loves [them] very much, that [they] prefer reasonable day to the night." Hölderlin continues, however, by wondering if it might be possible that a clear eye might "love the shadows as well, [might] seek sleep just for pleasure and before need, or else…gaze directly into the Night: Surely it's right to dedicate wreaths and songs to her, … [for] she must also be our safe haven in the uncertain between-times and the dark, granting us forgetfulness and holy drunkenness; even as she grants us flowing words, that like lovers, must be sleepless and overflowing and full of life; so even a holy remembrance, to stay wakeful at night" (*Bread and Wine,* Stanza II).

Hölderlin, recalling perhaps his own youthful "drunkenness" or enthusiasm for the ancient Greek poets, takes the reader on a "phantastical" trip to Ancient Greece [*die Schwärmerische* or "the phantastical" is a crucial idea here with its connection to the debates among Protestants concerning the Anabaptist "enthusiasts", *die Schwärmer*]: "Thus playful madness may mock mockery itself, seizing singers suddenly in the holy night. So let's be off to the Isthmus! There, where the open sea roars at Parnassus, and the snow shines around the Delphian cliffs, there in the land of Olympus, on Cithaeron's peak, under the pines, amid vineyards, from which Thebes and Ismenos roar in the land of Cadmus. From whence the coming God comes and to which he calls" (Stanza III). In these stanzas, Hölderlin speaks lovingly of the golden halls and feasts, of the beautiful gods and demi-gods, and he writes wonderingly of the poets' fine words of praise.

Suddenly, however, a worrisome note sounds as dawn beckons: "But where are they—these famous sites, the glory of the festivals? Thebes and Athens are fading. Where is the crash of weapons at Olympus or the roar of golden chariots at the games? Are there no longer wreaths to decorate the ships of Corinth? Why are the ancient holy theaters silent? Why is the holy dance no longer celebrated? Why do the gods no longer mark our brows, setting their seal on us with their touch? Or

even come themselves in human form to bring consolation, as they complete and close the divine festival" (Stanza VI)? For Hölderlin, after years of theological study and philosophical enlightenment, this question is a harsh one, and he opens the seventh stanza with these mournful words: "But friend, we come too late. It's true that the gods live, but high over our heads in a different world. Tirelessly they work still, but caring little it seems if we live or die, so much do they avoid us. A weak vessel cannot sustain them forever; only for a time can mortals hold the fullness of the divine. And so life becomes a dreaming of the gods" (Stanza VII). For Hölderlin, the modern world has plenty of workers, parents, teachers, political rulers and preachers, but what of poets and prophets?

"But for now I often think it better to remain asleep, than to be without companions, waiting thus, in these times not knowing what to do or say. What use are poets in such a diminished age" (Stanza VII)? Hölderlin, however, is not simply a romantic enthralled by ancient times. He is also steeped in Christian theology, and he knows that this demythologizing of the world was done in the name of the perfected or absolute revelation offered in the person of Jesus Christ. Rather, than demi-gods—human all to human gods—we have the one true God who fully appeared in the person of Jesus. So, Hölderlin continues his poem reflecting on the Son. "At last a peaceful Spirit appeared with heavenly consolation who announced the end of the day and disappeared; though he left signs of his visit and his return given as gifts from heavenly choirs, so that one might freely partake of it as in days past but in mortal fashion" (Stanza VII). We have the sacraments, says Hölderlin, that appear in "mortal fashion" but which are symbols of the true God who has finally reconciled, as Hölderlin notes, "day with night, eternally leading the heavenly bodies hither and yon, joyful always, like the boughs of the evergreen pine that he loves, and the wreath he chose of ivy, since it endures, and brings a trace of the fugitive gods down into the dark to those who live in their absence" (Stanza IX). This is surely a sign of God's great and complete work of salvation fulfilled in this world by the work of God made flesh, but Hölderlin, the poet, concludes his poem in ambiguous fashion: "Let those believe who've examined the matter. But so much goes on, yet nothing succeeds: we are heartless,

shadows, until our Father Aether recognizes and joins us all. Even so, the Son, the Syrian, comes down among the shadows, as torchbearer of the Highest. A blessed sage sees him and a smile from his captive soul shines forth, and the light thaws his eyes. Softly the Titans dream and sleep in the Earth's bosom and even jealous Cerberus drinks and falls asleep" (Stanza IX). The ancient world where the sacred and the ordinary blurred and twisted like the confusing phantoms of dreams or madness has been replaced by a modern world where the bright light of reason and/or perfect revelation has once and for all marked the clear limits of the divine/human interaction; this age has been truly set aside, delimited once and for all; that is, it is *secular*.

I use the world, "secular," here on purpose to bring to a head the problem at hand. For Hölderlin, as for Schelling and Hegel, there has been a sea change with the advent of Christianity that is reaching its full effect in the modern culture of their day. As we have seen, the first casualty for Hölderlin (but also for Schelling and Hegel) is the power of poetry to bespeak the gods. Though revelation tells us of a harmonious time in which human beings knew the one true God [in the Garden of Eden], the earliest common experience of fallen humanity is with a cosmos that affects one as a raw and dark force and before which it trembles. As Schelling notes, Oldest mankind "finds itself in a state of unfreedom, finds itself posited outside itself, which is to say outside its own self-dominion—it finds itself in a state that we, living under the law of an entirely different time, cannot immediately understand, a condition of mankind struck (*stupefacta quasi et attonita*) with a type of *stupor* and seized upon by an alien dominion."[10] It is the poets, with an authority that we can barely comprehend, that struggled with this dark force—Nemesis or Fate—and constructively responded:

> Because consciousness chooses or invents neither the ideas themselves nor their expression, mythology emerges immediately *as such* and in no other sense than in which it articulates itself. In consequence of the necessity with which the *content* of the ideas generates itself, mythology has from the beginning a *real* [*reelle*] and thus also *doctrinal* [*doctrinelle*] meaning. In consequence of the necessity with which also the *form* emerges, mythology is thoroughly

> actual—that is, everything in it is thus to be understood as mythology expresses it, not as if something else were thought, something else said. Mythology is not *allegorical* [11]

In a very real way, the poet gave "birth" or "shape" to the inchoate gods and made them available to heart and mind. The enthusiasm of the poet, his or her commerce with the unfettered and wild, was a holy thing and a great service. It is this service that Hölderlin believes is denied him, but it is not philosophy primarily that is the force of demythologizing. The great force that is prepared (according to these three classmates) by this struggle to convert natural/cosmic forces into human speech in the mythical systems of polytheism is the voice of the one true God whose truth is not represented in poetic image but in the lawful word directly uttered.

For all three thinkers, it is the Revelation to the Jews that begins the great demythologizing struggle insofar as it finally distinguishes the created, the natural, from the creator.[12] Here, God is revealed as the Master of the Universe, who is not part of the cosmos—being neither wind nor water nor earth nor fire—but rather is the free creator. It is only because God is other than his creation that he can reveal his purposes (rather than *be* his purposes). The law of God exceeds what it shapes, just as God's power exceeds what he has empowered (created). In other words, the transcendence of God is now understood to be absolute in relation to the natural and finite gods of polytheism. However, this cannot be simply a sort of acosmism (rejection of the world). What transcends representation is revealed: first in the spoken covenant with Abraham and then in the revelation of the law of that covenant to Moses and the other prophets. In fact, it is the prophet who is the central figure here rather than the poet. The prophet is the one in whose mouth God has placed his own very words (See Jeremiah 1:9).

We have here for Schelling and Hegel the first true monotheism, but the consequences and true nature of this single, all-powerful God is only gradually developed. It is not, as Schelling argues, immediately an "absolutely unmythological one."[13] This conception is still bound to understanding this God and his laws, as represented by, and limited to, the particular time and place of the people of Israel. This tension, created by

this coupling of the absolute scope and freedom of monotheism to the finite realm of the singular people of Israel, is spelled out by Schelling as follows:

> This being bound to the relative One God is a limitation, which must also be perceived as such, and beyond which consciousness strives. But it cannot sublate the limitation for the present: therefore, it will overcome this limitation only to the extent that it, to be sure, knows the true God as the one merely appearing at the moment, but at the same time as the one who *will be* in the future. Seen from this perspective, the religion of Abraham is monotheism pure and proper; but to him this is not the religion of the present; in this present his monotheism stands under the condition of mythology; but this monotheism is to him the religion of the future. The true God is the one who *will be;* that is his name. When Moses asks by what name he is supposed to proclaim the God who will lead the people out of Egypt, he answers: "I will be who I will be."[14]

So, according to Schelling, "The Law represent . . . the relative One, but in Hebraic thought it is always pregnant with the future…In the prophets, the expectation and hope of the future, religion no longer breaks forth merely in isolated statements—it is the primary end and content of their speeches—and no longer is this the mere religion of Israel, but rather of all peoples or nations."[15] The essence of the revealed religion is prophetic and futural. It is thus open to the ecstatic experience of the prophet who may at any time irrupt with a new Word from the Divine.

We now come to the question of Christianity and transcendence. We have only time to pose it anew using the conceptual backdrop of this account of poetry and revelation arising out of the thoughts of Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel. As long as the law was grounded in the unsearchable depths of God the Almighty, the world stood under judgment and was incapable of fulfilling its destiny. Both in terms of the sense of original sin grounded in the haunted sense of primordial guilt, as well as in the anxiety and guilt of a duty unfulfilled because it extends out into the unknown future. In this manner, the law remained tied to that experience of Nemesis or Fate central to mythology. It was

like, as St. Paul noted, being "imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Galatians 3:23-24). The Son did not appear as the Master of the Universe, as a mysterious and forbidding power, but rather as a servant who, in perfectly obeying the law, freed us and intercedes perfectly for us. Schelling points explicitly to this kenotic element in his Christology: "The Son can exist independently from the Father in his own proper sovereignty. In fact, he can only be understood as independent, true and essentially God, if he is God himself. This sovereignty, however, he despises (*Diese Herrlichkeit verschmäte er*). He divests himself of it and thereby is the Christ. This is the completed notion [*Gesmatidee*] of revelation."[16] In Christ, the bond between God and humanity, promised in the law, is made manifest and real (truly possible). In the Holy Spirit we are always already freed from the wages of sin, raised to new life, and made into a new creation. We no longer wait anxiously for a new prophecy, word or law from the Master of the Universe, but rather, we are, as St. Paul says, "children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (Romans 8:14-17). In the place of the poet or the prophet, we commune directly with the Truth and Life of the Divine through the Holy Spirit.

It is at this point that we come back to Hölderlin's disquiet and the point at which his two friends came to a famous parting of the ways. Up to this point, granted a certain "poetic" license, one could argue that Schelling and Hegel agree on the eclipse of the poet and the prophet. Of course, they accept that we can speak of something like the poetic and prophetic function, but they no longer serve, according to this view, as possible moments of radical manifestation or revelation. Preaching, teaching, singing, building, ruling—what have you—are all *representations* or *expressions* of that inner Truth. The question

that served to separate and provoke a fierce rivalry between Hegel and Schelling concerned the possibility of God now irrupting in a new and wonderful way—creating a new form of ecstatic humanity. For Hegel, and one does not have to accept all of Hegel's rationalizing to be in his camp here, such an ecstatic experience is no longer possible. Rather, it is now a matter of taking up our cross and following Christ's commands in order to bring about the kingdom that is already among us in seed and simply needs to be brought to flower. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in 1827, he says the following about the Christian community in the modern world:

> In religion, the *heart* is reconciled. This reconciliation is thus in the heart; it is spiritual…The self that exists in this reconciliation, in this religious communion, is the pure heart, the heart, as such, universal spirituality; but at the same time the self or subject constitutes that aspect of spiritual presence in accord with which there is a developed worldliness present in it, and thus the kingdom of God, the community, has a relationship to the worldly. In order that reconciliation may be real, it is required that it should be known in this development and this totality; it should be present and brought forth [into actuality]. The principles of this worldly realm are there already in the spirituality of the community; the principle, the truth, of the worldly *is* the spiritual.[17]

What is required to fulfill the purposes of God are not some extra-terrestrial, extra-human act, but rather the actual loving of God and ones' neighbors—including the widows, orphans, and even the enemy. Certainly, this is not normal behavior (and is only possible through God's grace) but it is *not* non-human behavior. It awaits the final completion, but this does not require a new poetic shaping or prophetic pronouncement (though poetry and prophecy can assist the call of love even if they no longer reveal it fundamentally). In fact, it resists such a new mythology or revelation; for such a thing would repudiate the fullness and adequacy of God's revelation in Christ. Certainly, there remains a notion of transcendence, but it is certainly not radical or ecstatic, but rather the need to transcend our current

state by the power of the Spirit to that holy state fully revealed and made real to us in the new Adam.

After Hegel's death in 1831, Schelling—long since estranged from his one-time friend—was called to take up Hegel's Chair in Philosophy in Berlin by those who thought that Hegel's understanding of God's transcendence and liberty was unorthodox, even pantheistic. He didn't disappoint his patrons when he described Hegel's mundane understanding of the working out of God's purposes and plans in the Kingdom as follows:

> In the end therefore, whereas [Hegel's philosophy] had only demonstrated God as a necessary idea of reason, which of course was already *secured* by Kant, the necessary consequence of this laying claim to knowledge of God was to rob God of all transcendence and draw him into this logical thinking, into a merely logical concept, into an *idea itself.* And because the concept of *God* was once inseparably connected with the notion of existence and indeed that of the most dynamic, there thus arose those wrongful and improper expressions of a *self-movement* of the idea, words through which the idea was personified and ascribed an existence that it did not and could not have.[18]

Freed from the poetry of nature/mythology and the law of revelation, the modern person facing the cold reality of bureaucratic society would not find a new positive or real encounter with the Divine in Hegel's world, closed as it was to a radical, ecstatic, that is, truly free and new, encounter with God. What is needed is something similar to Hölderlin's dream or hope for a dangerous but renewing encounter with the Divine in the freedom of the spirit as expressed in his poem, *Patmos,* which was inspired by the visions of John—a poem, by the way, that was also a favorite of that close reader of both Hölderlin and Schelling, Martin Heidegger who believed so strongly in poets: "Near but difficult to grasp is the God; but where danger is, so too grows the saving power."[19] The key question for thinkers like Schelling, Nietzsche, Heidegger and others is whether or not Christianity contains new resources for asserting God's transcendence or not. For Schelling, Christianity does, in fact,

hold out the promise for new revelations and ecstatic encounters with the Divine that exceeds our human, all too human, condition and understanding, but for thinkers like Nietzsche and Heidegger (at least in most of his work) it does not. For such skeptics, the closing off of transcendence by Christianity means either accepting the radically immanent character of the human condition (Nietzsche) or the need for a poetic revelation of the transcendent that moves outside the circle of Western monotheism (Heidegger).

Such are the extremes found in a time that calls us to affirm the universal power of secular states (the gift of human rights) while also calling out for that which transcends the human all too human coils that tie us so tightly to finite goods and gods. We live in an age desirous of poets and prophets but skeptical of both. Certainly an anxious time, but what I have tried to touch on here is the unique ties that bind modernity, science, secularism and the question of transcendence to the development of at least one prominent set of Christian ideas. It is my belief that one of the fundamental tasks of Christian theologians and philosophers in the 21st century, particularly in the West, is to wrestle more directly and honestly with this complicated notion of a God who is both fully free and sovereign over (di-vested from) the world while at the same time fully immanent (in-vested) in it. It's hard to blame those materialists and secularists for all the world's problems when it may very well turn out, once we've taken a closer look at the family tree, that they are our cousins.

Endnotes

[1] Some examples of such responses are the following: John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Scott Hahn and Benjamin Walker, *Answering the New Atheism: Dismantling Dawkin's Case Against God* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2008); and Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicut McGrath, *The Dawkin's Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2010).
[2] Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great* (New York: Twelve—the Hachette Book Group, 2007), 148.
[3] The other key argument is a moral one, namely, that belief in God (or religious belief generally) leads to violence, intolerance, and the undermining of civil society.
[4] Hitchens, *God is not Great,* 282.

[5] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 1994), 15.
[6] All quotations from the Bible are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.
[7] Hitchins, 213, my emphasis.
[8] S. Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute, or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting for?* (London: Verso, 2000), 1 & 2.
[9] F. Hölderlin, *Brot und Wein* in *Hölderlin: Selected Verse*, ed. by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1985). Cited by stanza in the text and translated by the author.
[10] F. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (New York: SUNY, 2008), 134.
[11] Ibid., 196.
[12] Ibid., 143.
[13] Ibid., 119.
[14] Ibid., 120.
[15] Ibid., 121-22.
[16] Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung: 1841/42* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1977), 260.
[17] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One Volume Edition, the Lectures of 1827 Edition* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 481.
[18] Schelling, *The Grounding in Positive Philosophy* (New York: SUNY, 2008), 138-39.
[19] Hölderlin, *Patmos* in *Hölderlin: Selected Verse*, ed. by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1985). Cited by stanza in the text and translated by the author.

Faith Beyond Belief: A Phenomenological Response to Dawkins's Definition of Faith

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In 1996, the American Humanist Association named Richard Dawkins the Humanist of the Year. During his acceptance speech, he asked whether or not science could be considered a religion. He answered his own question with a "no," as religious believers and humanists alike might expect. As he argued, "Science is actually one of the most moral, one of the most honest disciplines around — because science would completely collapse if it weren't for a scrupulous adherence to honesty in the reporting of evidence."[1] He went on to claim that religion's effort to provide explanation, consolation, and uplift to people was surpassed by science's ability to offer the same on account of this honesty in evidence, presuming for his argument that religion has no such scruples. While Dawkins does not claim that science can answer everything, his statements do make the claim that anything for which we can have evidence will be given through science's method, honesty, and investigation. Such a viewpoint has been termed scientific naturalism by some and shortened to scientism by others. While understanding scientism is important for grasping all of Dawkins's points, this paper will focus directly on why Dawkins asked the question concerning science and religion in the first place and how this question illuminates his understanding of faith.

The question "Is Science a Religion?" came to him from his own experiences as a public lecturer, for whenever he finished speaking a religious believer would always approach and ask, "Of course, your science is just a religion like ours. Fundamentally, science just comes down to faith, doesn't it?"[2] The source of this question, as Dawkins goes on to explain, invariably came down to the believer's not-so-implied rejection of the theory of evolution and whether or not Dawkins's belief in evolution was a conviction held by faith in the same way as a

believer's faithful belief in God. To this line of questioning Dawkins responds:

> [T]he evidence that makes me believe in evolution is not only overwhelmingly strong; it is freely available to anyone who takes the trouble to read up on it. Anyone can study the same evidence that I have and presumably come to the same conclusion. But if you have a belief that is based solely on faith, I can't examine your reasons. You can retreat behind the private wall of faith where I can't reach you.[3]

This answer reveals two things concerning Dawkins's understanding of faith. In the first place, Dawkins never asks whether or not his scientism is a faith-filled belief. He is certainly correct when he denies that belief in evolution is akin to belief in God, for the first belief occurs within the established system of science while the second belief actually establishes the system of monotheism. However, he never seems to ask whether or not there is any faith that establishes his system of scientism.[4] In the second place, Dawkins's answer implicitly reveals what he says explicitly elsewhere in the article: faith is a belief that is not based on any evidence.

For Dawkins, as well as the other writers comprising the new atheists, faith – belief without evidence – is "the principal vice of any religion."[5] Constructing a response to such a view of faith will involve a two-fold approach. First, the question that Dawkins fails to ask, whether or not there is any faith grounding his belief in scientism, must be thoroughly investigated. This will be accomplished by looking at his claims by means of philosophy's analytic tradition, which is the tradition of logic and empiricism, out of which the modern idea of science has emerged. Herein, this essay will show that Dawkins cannot coherently hold that science is able to answer all that is answerable without relying on a dogmatic faith. Second, if it can be shown that faith in scientism is a grounding belief like faith in God, then little positive work has actually been done, for scientism and monotheism would simply be two competing worldviews with their own methods of interpreting experience. A Christian response to the new atheists must show how faith is not a vice, but that can only be done if it can be shown that Dawkins's understanding of faith

as a belief without evidence is fundamentally flawed. In order to affect this paradigm shift, the question of faith will be examined from the phenomenological tradition, which, much like empirical science, claims to look first at simple experience. However, unlike science, phenomenology recognizes the need to find a justifying ground for the dispositions taken up within experience, whether the experience is religious or scientific in nature. To respond to Dawkins completely, faith will no longer be defined as belief without evidence, but, rather, as a fundamental disposition of openness to that which is other than the subject having the experience. Faith turns out to be the very possibility of wonder, of recognizing mystery, which not only allows for science's endeavor to discover but also religion's endeavor to meet that which is most wholly other, God.

The Incoherent Faith in Scientism

When dealing with the question of faith in science, Dawkins, as well as many Christians, apparently does not understand the force of the critique. Returning to the question so often asked of Dawkins with respect to faith in evolution and faith in God, his answer that belief in evolution is not like belief in God should be made clear so as not to confuse the power of the true critique. Science has rules for what counts as evidence stemming from its basic method for examining the world. The proof for evolution to which Dawkins points meets science's criteria for evidence. While evolution may remain a theory, it is a theory that is well supported by the scientific community. For the monotheistic religious believer, belief in God is not one belief within monotheism to which various rules can be applied. Belief in God is the belief that makes monotheism possible in the first place as well as any principles of religious investigation. Consequently, comparing belief in evolution to belief in God is comparing apples to oranges. The true force of any question relating science and faith comes at the level of why one believes science can provide all the knowable answers in the first place.

John Haught has produced a steady stream of apologetics with respect to the new atheists, including articles, interviews, and his new book *God and the New Atheism*.[6] For *Christian Century Magazine*, Haught adapted from his book an article that

makes clear the stronger objection concerning the relationship between a practitioner of scientism and faith:

> [S]cientism tells us to take nothing on faith, and yet faith is required to accept scientism . . . Listen to Hitchens: "If one must have faith in order to believe in something, then the likelihood of that something having any truth or value is considerably diminished." But this statement invalidates itself since it too arises out of faith in things unseen. There is no set of tangible experiments or visible demonstrations that could ever scientifically prove the statement to be true.[7]

Haught clearly makes a more strenuous criticism than simply comparing belief in a scientific theory to a belief in God. If scientism claims that truth arrives from experiments and not by faith, then Haught challenges science to produce the experiment that justifies this claim. Since no such evidence can be found over a Bunsen burner or in a test tube, Haught draws the conclusion that faith must be at the source of any claims that champion the evidence of experiments over the claims of religious faith, thus showing the claim to be self-contradictory since it takes faith to claim that faith cannot make valuable claims.

Haught, however, has come to his conclusion a bit too quickly. The proponent of scientism who agrees with Hitchens's statement on faith above may justly argue that a belief in science's ability to discover truth is not a statement of faith but a practical conclusion at which one arrives after living in a world wherein the scientific method continues to produce tangible results. Confidence in science, it would be argued, can be undermined in ways that faith cannot, for if science quit producing tangible results, a new method would have to be considered. Faith in the divine, on the other hand, does not appear to have a comparable track record for tangible results. As Dawkins argues in his book, *The God Delusion*, a supernatural God who invests effort in the world should be recognizable by measurable actions if God truly does answer prayer, forgive sins, and punish sinners. However, unanswered prayers, the problem of evil, and a plurality of religions should count as evidence against God performing measurable, knowable actions, but when

the practical results of religion are questioned, faith simply allows the believer to keep on believing with no compulsion to change approaches or to question faith. Consequently, Haught's accusation that Hitchens's claim rests on faith need not be a blindly held presupposition but, rather, a belief held after careful consideration of success in predicting real world events. Nevertheless, Haught's position will be shown to be correct if we take more time to tease out the two foundations behind scientism: strong rationalism and strong foundationalism, both of which are found in Dawkins's claims about faith.

For the purposes here, rationalism refers to the use of reason or argument for determining one's beliefs and actions. A strong rationalist would demand that for a belief to be rationally acceptable, "it must be possible to prove that the belief system is true."[8] As Michael Peterson explains, the word "prove" is important for this definition, but it needs to be sketched out further. Simply and broadly put, "prove" would mean "to show that a belief is true in a way that should be convincing to any reasonable person."[9] Dawkins fits this profile when he claims that evidence for evolution is public and convincing: "Anyone can study the same evidence I have and presumably come to the same conclusion."[10] With respect to evolution, he argues that regardless of what alternative theories are there, others who look at the information available would "presumably" agree with his assessment that evolution is the best explanation for the evidence that has been given. What is "presumed" here, of course, is that the person who looks at the evidence would be capable of rationally evaluating the arguments and be capable of making the proper choice, which, according to Dawkins, would be in favor of evolution. In contrast, the irrational perspective arises from the religious viewer who refuses to accept, under any circumstances, the given evidence as creationist Kurt Wise appears to refuse in his statement: "If all the evidence in the universe turns against creationism, I would be the first to admit it, but I would still be a creationist because that is what the Word of God seems to indicate. Here I must stand."[11]

For Dawkins, the willingness of an individual to hold fast to belief while evidence appears to be to the contrary is the basis for any definition of irrational, and since he finds this to be the standpoint of so many religious believers, he chooses to agree

with the infamous quote of Robert Pirsig: “When one person suffers from a delusion it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion it is called religion.” However, with such a forceful condemnation of religion in general, cracks in Dawkins’s vehemence begin to show—two cracks to be precise: 1. Dawkins already assumes the identity of a “reasonable person” as a fellow practitioner of scientism. 2. He commits the informal fallacy of a hasty generalization when he judges religion in general to be untenable after finding scientific theory to be superior to religious arguments in some cases.

In the first place, Dawkins clearly anticipates that the “reasonable person” who is convinced by his argument is someone who understands the value of science in the same way as he does. A “reasonable person” like this would expect that everything, religion included, must be judged according to the scientific method, as Dawkins has already argued concerning the nature of a supernatural God who punishes sin and answers prayer. Such an understanding of God’s work in nature, however, anticipates God to act in the manner of a machine with simple inputs and outputs rather than as one party in a dynamic relationship who may alter actions with respect to the other parties in the relationship.[12]

Unfortunately, Dawkins does not view religion as a dynamic relationship but, rather, as a hypothesis to be tested.[13] As soon as religions like Christianity make claims about people being raised from the dead or virgins giving birth, he argues that the religion has made a factual claim that should be put through the rigors of scientific examination. However, science has nothing to test with respect to the virgin birth of Jesus of Nazareth or the resurrection of Lazarus, for these events are long past and nothing remains to be tested; consequently, Dawkins’s argument must turn from testable events back again to what he believes a reasonable person should believe. Virgin births are outside the scope of the reproductive process; dead people stay dead. Even the most devout religious believers recognize these statements as descriptive of the natural course of events. So why would a religious believer accept the resurrection of Lazarus, the virgin birth of Jesus, AND that these events just do not occur as a course of nature. Should they not, along with Dawkins, declare the first two to be too hard to believe? Because Dawkins has

already assumed that rational people are fellow scientific naturalists like him, he cannot admit that any religious claim could be rational, while the believer finds that knowledge of God allows for belief beyond the claims of science. The conclusion that must be drawn from reading Dawkins's demands for looking at the evidence is not that these atheists are concerned about a truly rational perspective but that they are concerned only for a perspective that meets their own presuppositions concerning the ability of science to provide truth with respect to any claim, even dynamic, divine, relationship claims, and that anyone who does not hold such a view is to be castigated as irrational. Such dogmatism begins to take on the appearance of a blind faith.

Nevertheless, regardless of the dogmatic insistence that rational people can only view the world through a scientific lens, do the new atheists not have a point when science and religion make opposing claims about the nature of the world? Does religion not rely too heavily on literal readings of scripture rather than evidence? So as not to rehash the volatile argument of creation versus evolution, take, for example, the argument between a flat-earth or a globe, or a sun-centered solar system versus an earth-centered system. Both the flat-earth and earth-centered hypotheses were vigorously defended by religious authorities. Galileo had to defend against those who read the Biblical story of Joshua's command for the sun to be still in order to lengthen the time of battle (Joshua 10:1-15) as a proof-text for the Ptolemaic system wherein the sun travelled around the earth.[14] If the earth was in motion around the sun, they argued, then Joshua would have ordered the earth to be still. John Hamden, in 1869, argued from scripture that the earth should be clearly understood as a flat plane and that any understanding of the earth as a globe was to deny the writings of Moses:

> How surprised would almost every individual of them be to be told that he himself was daily rejecting the testimony of the Mosaic records . . . However trivial or unimportant the subject [the idea of the earth as a globe] may appear in itself, yet the fact of its being unsupported by and directly contrary to the Word of God ought to render it of unspeakable interest to all who wisely consider that the minutest departure from the spirit of what Moses and the

> prophets have written, to be as prejudicial to the whole scheme of revelation as if it referred to an article of faith.[15]

While these arguments may look as though they are nothing more than issues from history, the contemporary Flat Earth Society still presses these points today.[16] Should present day astronomy not be enough to convince any rational person that the earth orbits the sun and that the earth is a globe rather than a plane? Does science's ability to investigate nature not trump a literal reading of scripture? It would seem as though the new atheists have a point with respect to looking to science for understanding nature rather than looking to literalist interpretations of the Bible.

Concluding that a literal interpretation of the Bible may not be the best interpretation of a scriptural passage and concluding that religion is irrational are, in fact, two completely different claims. Simply because science proves better at natural explanations than an ancient text should not be taken to mean that religion is debunked and scientism survives as the prevailing worldview. The error here is classically known as a hasty generalization and has occurred as Dawkins chooses to view the obvious examples of science's success while overlooking its failures and hastily generalizing from these successes that these natural explanations overturn all religious claims. Science clearly has many arguments from which it would be irrational to dissent on account of overwhelming evidence; however, Dawkins assumes that science, in general, is more than capable of presenting answers to just about any natural question, but this does not fit the facts of practicing science. When looking at broad hermeneutical worldviews such as a religiously held worldview or a scientifically held worldview, a trend toward rational consensus is hard to find. While the plurality of religions certainly attests to a lack of consensus on the part of believers, anyone who watches the news can discover dissent in the scientific field with respect to various claims from the usefulness of stem-cell research to the genesis of global warming (now titled "climate change" just in case things are not warming up in the manner once thought). Consequently, the worldview of scientism as a system for understanding reality "is just one theory among others and is no more capable of being 'proved to all reasonable

people' than are religious belief systems."[17] Once again, Dawkins's use of scientism cannot meet his own criteria of strong rationalism, consequently showing a strong measure of faith to cover this shortcoming.

As a strong rationalist, Dawkins also relies on the position of strong foundationalism, a popular variety of the rationalist position which features an even starker faith-based belief. His foundationalist position begins to be apparent with his claim that the evidence for evolution is extraordinarily strong and that faith does not provide evidence as a ground for any religious belief. The presupposed claim seems harmless: if anyone is to believe anything, there ought to be evidence, a conditional statement commonly known as evidentialism. However, in his book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins spends more time demanding that people accept evidence rather than defining what actually counts as evidence. What Dawkins appears to accept are three kinds of beliefs supported by evidence: 1. self-evident beliefs, 2. incorrigible beliefs, and 3. beliefs built on the first two. While there is simply not room to tease out these beliefs completely from Dawkins's text, which seems determined to critique religion and not itself, we can glean some ideas about evidence from his longest discussion of it in the text, a discussion which is still woefully short.[18] He claims that "all of us believe in evidence in our own lives," making a plea to common sense on which he elaborates to mean a clear expectation that my direct sensations are not to be skirted but taken as perceived. Beliefs supported by the evidence of one's immediate experience are "incorrigible beliefs." Dawkins also claims that "scientists are fundamentalists when it comes to defining in some abstract way what is meant by 'truth.'" While it is not clear in the least what he means here, one of his examples may provide insight. When he declares that it is true to say that New Zealand is in the southern hemisphere, he is stating an incontrovertible fact if the lines of longitude and latitude are accepted. Under the presently defined coordinate system, New Zealand is self-evidently south of the equator. Self-evident truths are those that anyone who understands the definitions of the system would hold as true. Mathematics is typically the model for expressing self-evident beliefs, for if one understands the numbers 1 and 2 and 3, then the equation

1+2=3 is indubitable. Any beliefs supported by either self-evident or incorrigible beliefs would also count as rationally held beliefs. These three beliefs are the core of strong foundationalism.

Dawkins's critique of faith arises from insisting that a person is only rational if scientific evidence is the standard of investigation, i.e. the held belief is self-evident, incorrigible, or derived from either of these two beliefs. Such an insistence on having these grounds of evidence is known as strong foundationalism. Unfortunately, such a position comes with a contradiction because the strong foundationalist position is self-referentially incoherent. If a given belief is only rational based on self-evident or incorrigible beliefs, then the question arises as to whether or not believing strong foundationalism passes its own credentials. The claim does not appear self-evident, even to those who thoroughly understand it, nor does it appear as something directly experienced. Consequently, a strong foundationalist would be forced to reject strong foundationalism on its own grounds. The only way for one to actually hold such a position would be by faith.

Faith beyond Belief

Regardless of the argument to this point and regardless of the possible ways that scientism has been undermined, none of these arguments suggest that faith in the divine is a better alternative to Dawkins's faithful adherence to science. At best, religious faith becomes a competing worldview if faith continues to be seen as a belief beyond the evidence. While this is certainly how Dawkins and perhaps how many Christians define faith, the Bible never understands faith in baseless terms. The book of Hebrews at 11:1 gives the following definition for faith: Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων. Taking a sampling of translations for this verse, some reputable renderings are: 1. Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (New International Version). 2. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (New American Standard Bible and New Revised Standard Version translates this verse in this manner). 3. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (New King James Version). Of these, only the NKJV gives a glimpse of something

more than wishful thinking. The first three translations can be interpreted as saying that faith gives warm and fuzzy assurance even though evidence is absent. Philosophically, one might explain these translations as describing Christian faith as nothing more than a set of basic unsupported beliefs that condition all other beliefs held. However, such interpretation completely misses the force of the term **ὑπόστασις**.

Commentators on Hebrews 11:1 recognize that **ὑπόστασις** is a carefully chosen word. The consensus understanding is that the word is a legal term that means a "title-deed," the absolute guarantee of a reality that, although not seen, is going to be delivered to the believer.[19] For a philosopher, however, **ὑπόστασις** does philosophical work beyond its usage as a legal term, and the great Greek commentator, A. T. Robertson, is quick to point this out.[20] The term, from Aristotle on, refers to the foundation or ground of a thing, the very reality of a thing, to which the NKJV alludes when it uses "substance" as a translation. The author of Hebrews has already shown this specialized understanding of the term in Hebrews 1:3 when he declares Jesus to be χαρακτὴρ τῆς **ὑποστάσεως** αὐτοῦ (θεοῦ), "the exact representation of His being." The connection between faith and firm ground not only shows here in the Greek but in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. אמונה, emunah, is built off of the root word for "support" or "confirm."[21] Faith, seen in these contexts, is much more than the assurance of things hoped for; it is the reality that grounds what is not yet seen. Faith is not just a belief but a real connection with transcendence beyond belief. The phenomenological program employed by Emmanuel Levinas discloses the structure of the human such that the connection between person and transcendence is revealed as open possibility.

Phenomenology relies on observation as its starting point in a manner that sounds identical to the natural sciences. Edmund Husserl, the German philosopher who instituted this methodology, describes the practice of studying phenomena in the following manner:

> I can do no other than honestly say (assuming that I am not already confused through superficially acquired theories): I now see things, these things here, they themselves; I do not

> see images of them, nor mere signs. Obviously, I can also be deceived. But on what basis does it prove to be deception? On the basis of a reliable seeing, tested time and again, that is a seeing of real things themselves.[22]

Husserl's assertion, on the surface, appears to be in line with Dawkins's claims concerning evidence. Reliable observation, the use of sense data, and the avoidance of superficial theories (much like any religious, faith-based theory would be) lead to a right seeing of the encountered world. However, Husserl does not equate phenomenology with the natural sciences because the natural sciences are already too far removed from unencumbered observation. In his analysis,

> the theoretical task and achievement like that of a natural science (or any science of the world) . . . can only be and remain meaningful in a true and original sense *if* the scientist has developed in himself the ability to *inquire back* into the *original meaning* of all his meaning-structures and methods, i.e., into the *historical meaning of their primal establishment*, and especially into the meaning of all the *inherited meanings* taken over unnoticed in this primal establishment, as well as those taken over later on. But the mathematician, the natural scientist . . . is normally not at all able to carry out such reflections.[23]

The scientist of Dawkins's "honest" stripe is indeed as honest with the scientific method and the data gathered there as can be. However, science is still a human endeavor that has grown from a historical context filled with unquestioned presuppositions, and because the scientist is not trained to question the history of meaning behind the scientific program, that scientist is not capable of achieving the pure and honest evidence Dawkins believes has been achieved. What needs to be done to overcome this shortcoming, according to Husserl, is a two-fold investigation into the fundamental, originating structures of given experience: 1. an "all embracing ontology" and 2. a science of the "transcendental intersubjectivity that synthetically comprises all *facta*."[24] When Levinas takes up phenomenology, his work generally focuses on the transcendental intersubjective, and the

result of his work discloses the originative ground of experience that allows for the real ground of faith.

By the time Levinas writes *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, his phenomenological investigation has lead him to a central problem. The subject, whose very nature is the making sense of the world – the most sophisticated, non-phenomenological effort of which would be the sciences – does not approach the world from a privileged position from which the world can be surveyed and rendered sensible as though from a God's eye view, free from influence. On the one hand, this problem echoes Husserl's insight into science as a fully contextualized endeavor that does not adequately critique its context, but Levinas adds a second and philosophically deeper problem to Husserls's. The problematic that surrounds the subject is the realization that oneself "is already constituted when the act of constitution first originates."[25] This means that the act of constitution performed by consciousness is being performed by that which is already constituted, already oriented in the world to experience it in a certain fashion. In Husserlian terms, Levinas sets before himself the task to discover that structure *from* which objects receive their possibility of being known.

Husserl describes four structural fields that provide the condition for the possibility of cognition. Our daily lived experience must be described in terms that capture the quality of experience, which is clarified and stripped of its mundane, naive attitude in phenomenology by uncovering the structure of phenomena. The first two structures are the bastion of the sciences, the discovering of what an object is and rendering that "what" as distinct from, if not separated from, the way it appears for a perceiver. Moving out from the specific object, more and more investigators in all disciplines are becoming aware of the greater context within which things appear. Things are surrounded by a horizon of other things which can, individually, be investigated until the entire horizon is put together. Such a process is slow, and given the fact that every time a piece of one horizon is investigated a new horizon appears on account of the shift in the looker's gaze, the task of completing even the full knowing of one horizon may be unending. To this point, the possibility of appearing occurs with the fulfillment of a "what" that manifests itself *as* something *for* a perceiver *in* a contextual field.

Each of these three elements to appearing is disclosable by the phenomenological attitude that reflects upon our consciousness of the world after one has enacted the phenomenological reduction, but the hidden structure *from* which the *in* structure receives its possibility of being is not disclosable by direct reflection. The problem is that as the eminent horizon of an object is possible *from* its transcendental conditions we are always already under these conditions and cannot gain a vantage point outside them in order to render them in an objective fashion.

Levinas does not immediately couch his philosophy in terms of the *from* structure of appearing, although his discussion of the other person suggests very early on the need to look past the horizon of egoic experience. When speaking of the phenomenology of an other person, Levinas distinguishes between recognizing the simple physical features of a person versus recognizing the other person as an encounter with a person:

> I do not know if one can speak of a "phenomenology" of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears . . . I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the other is not even to notice the color of his eyes.[26]

For Levinas, the other person, when considered as a person in all of its ethical implications, does not come to the subject like another object having certain features. To even notice the features of others is already to have placed that person within the contextual field of the subject, seen in terms of the subject, treated in terms of the subject, ignoring the manner in which the other person lives as wholly other than the subject.

In what Levinas will identify as the mainstream philosophical position, the subject imposes a totality that allows for whatever confronts the ego to be subsumed under its theoretical eye and to destroy, consequently, otherness. The face of the other, however, always signifies that which cannot be subsumed, for the other person cannot be made into a complete theoretical

object. The other is always there and demands its right to be so. Attending to the otherness implied by the face of another human being discloses the ethical relationship, a relationship that can never be satiated. No amount of attention will be enough; no amount of response will be sufficient. In this sense, the ethical relationship is infinite, for the task of respecting otherness is always incomplete; it is the infinite task that is imposed in facing the face. The subject in this instance cannot be identified with the powerful, world-making "I" of consciousness, but, in fact, embodies its etymological meaning. The subject is sub-jected, thrown under, put into question and called to account without asking, "What then is it to me? Where does he get his right to command? What have I done to be from the start in debt?"[27]

The ethical horizon that is more than theoretical consciousness can contain discloses a transcendent horizon as condition for the self to emerge as ethical. Levinas has been read to suggest that the transcendence behind the face of the other person is initiated at the advent of the other. While this reading is alluring and easily made due to the confusion between the face as seemingly both concrete and transcendental, it must be resisted in light of *Otherwise than Being*. The approach of the other opens the conscious subject to the realization of the excess that was already there as condition for the "I." The other is evidence of the binding between the self and the ethical call that transcends consciousness. The face, then, signifies as ethical because it orients the self to an excess of consciousness, which has already been shown to sub-ject the subject in responsibility."[28] The idea of transcendence opened up at the coming of the other ruptures consciousness, signals a breakup of the self's integrity, thinks more than can be thought. Such transcendence, unrecoverable in reflection, brings God to mind.

Transcendence gains its significance as God in the phenomenology of responsibility which discloses the subject as implicated in the excess of consciousness, implicated in what Levinas describes as "an obedience to the absolute order—to the perfect authority—an *originating* obedience to the perfect authority, *to the word of God*, on condition of *naming God* only in terms of this obedience."[29] When Levinas reaches the transcendent condition of ethical subjectivity, the origination of the ethical human, he names the ground God. "God is not

involved *as an alleged interlocutor*," Levinas claims. "The reciprocal relationship binds me to the other man [sic] in the *trace of transcendence*."[30] In one sense, naming this ground of subjectivity God is legitimate, for God is an enigmatic term that has the connotation of transcendence, but nothing of an empirical or scientific nature has taken place that would allow for such a use of this term which so often occurs in a religious context. If this is to prove a proper response to the new atheists, then it becomes imperative to show how this invoking of the name of God is a move that is both phenomenologically appropriate and religiously applicable.

If we are willing to understand Levinas's philosophy as a disclosoing of a transcendental otherness that is active in the self's encounter with another person, then we may begin to understand the naming of this condition as God as metaphorical. Husserl, in his explication of time as "absolute subjectivity" expresses the problem that "absolute properties" are to be "designated metaphorically" and "for all of this, we have no names."[31] Names, then, are given as they best describe what is absolute. In an interesting twist to our argument, the first use of God as such a phenomenological metaphor for something absolute does not come from Levinas but from Eugen Fink, Husserl's last assistant, who would never be accused of importing a hidden theological agenda. Fink writes that even though the absolute cannot be brought directly into view, phenomenology transforms philosophy such that "philosophy is the manifestation of God in us. God is not a transcendent idol, but rather is the me-ontic depth of the world and existence." In this disclosure of the manifestation of God, there is an "un-nihilating of the Absolute" which Fink recognizes as "true theogony."[32] Certainly, when Levinas employs the term God, he does so with respect to the origin of the self as ethical rather than Fink's depth of the world, but the temptation to use the name of God with respect to something transcendent and originative is great. The horizon that is more than consciousness lies in the transcendent as condition for the self to emerge as ethical.

While our analysis accepts that the term God has been used as a descriptive device for a recovery of the transcendental absolute, the disclosing of a fundamental openness to that which

is other than ourselves, what cannot be recovered in the phenomenological field but always leaves a "trace" of its absolving away, offers a new possibility for understanding faith. If we can define faith as an openness to that which is beyond evidence in experience, but grounded as the very structure of human origination, then we have uncovered a faith that is contrary to Dawkins's understanding and more in line with the Biblical association of faith as the **ὑπόστασις** of our knowledge. Certainly, from the position of an uncritical scientism that refuses to question its starting points, faith will always appear as belief without evidence, but when faith is seen as an expression of the human structure, then the possibility of relationship with the divine occurs in that openness that allows for the approach of the wholly other. Faith, in these terms, does not equate with belief at all but is beyond belief, making possible the relationship that makes a supported belief possible in the first place.

Endnotes

[1] Dawkins's speech regarding the question of science's relationship to religion was published the next year in *The Humanist*. Richard Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?" *The Humanist* (January/February 1997). http://www.thehumanist.org/humanist/articles/dawkins.html (accessed July 7, 2010).

[2] Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?"

[3] Ibid.

[4] Dawkins's position from the time of his address in 1995 until the time of the paperback printing of his best-selling book, *The God Delusion*, 2008, did not change. In the "Preface to the Paperback Edition," Dawkins again compares his passion for science and evidence to a creationist's passion for creationism and denies that there could be any undergirding faith-filled "fundamentalism" to his own position. Richard Dawkins, "Preface to the Paperback Edition," in *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 18.

[5] Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?"

[6] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

[7] John Haught, "Amateur Atheists: Why the new atheism isn't serious," *The Christian Century Magazine* (February 26, 2008). http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=4497 (accessed July 7, 2010).

[8] Michael Peterson, et al., *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 54. John Haught has made the claim that faith should be tested by the best atheists but that these new atheists with whom we are dealing would not even make the reading list of his introductory course. See "Amateur Atheists." Following this

reasoning, I am using the very text I use from my introductory course on *Faith and Reason* to show how the new atheists' claims have arrived stillborn. Strong rationalists and strong foundationalists have already proven insufficient objectors to religion, as we shall see.

[9] Ibid. These definitions clearly leave out any direct reference to evidence because they are epistemological in nature, which refers solely to knowledge claims. Evidence, or metaphysical claims, will be spelled out when dealing with foundationalism. Nevertheless, a strong rationalist would certainly make claims about the evidence that lead him or her to a belief. We will simply have to wait and see what counts as evidence later.

[10] Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?"

[11] Here, Dawkins quotes Kurt Wise in *The God Delusion*, 19 and 323.

[12] The book of *Jonah* provides just such an example as God promises to destroy Nineveh only to forestall judgement in response to the Ninevites plea for mercy. Science simply cannot predict such actions on God's part for God's actions are in response to the people asking for forgiveness and only God could know the true worth of the people's prayers. Dawkins's mistake, here, has plagued previous atheists, as is the case with Antony Flew and his parable of the "invisible gardener": Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, eds. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 96. In Flew's story, two people arrive in a field where certain plants are thriving in unexpected ways. One traveler assumes a gardener tends the plot, while the other traveler disagrees. They agree to set up tests to catch any gardener arriving to care for the plants, but when no gardener is ever discovered, the disbelieving traveler asks what would shake the faith of the traveler who believes. Flew, like Dawkins who succeeds him, expects that the evidence has made the situation clear – no gardener exists – and, by analogy, no God either. The analogy, though, has already been written in such a way as to foil the investigation, for those who would best know the state of any gardener are kept silent. The plants themselves would be the ones with first-hand knowledge of any relationship, but Flew, like Dawkins, refuses to view anything other than through the lens of the scientific method, which assumes predictable patterns, an assumption which fails in personal relationships where the dynamics of the relationship always allow for surprise.

[13]For his argument on how religion should be subjected to the scientific method see chapter two: Dawkins, "The God Hypothesis," in *The God Delusion*, p. 51-100.

[14] Galileo, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), 211-215.

[15] John Hamden, "The Popularity of Error and the Unpopularity of Truth," (1869). http://www.theflatearthsociety.org/library/John_Hampden_-_The_Popularity_of_Error_bw.pdf (accessed August 5, 2010).

[16] See the Flat Earth Society's home page at: www.theflatearthsociety.org.

[17] Peterson, *Reason and Religious Belief*, 57.

[18] Dawkins, "Fundamentalism and the Subversion of Science," in *The God Delusion*, 319 – 323.

[19] Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 192 ff.

[20] A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), 418.
[21] George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment, and Conclusions*, in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972), 182.
[22] Edmund Husserl, Manuscript, "Einleitung in die Philosophie," F I 29 (1922/23), 3a; transcription, 33.
[23] Edmund Husserl, "The Mathematization of Nature," in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), §9 k.
[24] Edmund Husserl, "Phenomenological Psychology and Transcendental Phenomenology," in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, ed. Peter McCormick and Frederick Elliston (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
[25] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 105.
[26] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 85-86.
[27] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 87.
[28] Levinas is very emphatic about the sub-jection of the self, claiming that the "I" is a "being subject to everything." *Otherwise than Being*, 146.
[29] Emmanuel Levinas, "From the One to the Other," *Entre Nous*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998),152. Italics added.
[30] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 158.
[31] Husserl, Edmund, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, trans. John Barnett Brough (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 370.
[32] Eugen Fink Manuscripts, Z-VII XIV/4a.

Rightly Passing Beyond New Atheism: Continental Connections and Disconnections

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I begin with a confession: "I quite rightly pass for an atheist." These words belong to Jacques Derrida, but they adequately, if somewhat obliquely, express my own personal disbelief.[1] Indeed, I appropriate them precisely because of the semantically canted angle with which Derrida inscribes his complex theological incredulity. He does not state abruptly that he rejects the existence of God; he does not engage in the usual epistemological farrago of inferential proofs, evidentialist probabilities, or fideistic fiats; and he does not employ his "atheism" as an *apologia* for dismissing and deriding those who rightly pass for theists. On the contrary, Derrida constantly references, investigates, and affirms theological and religious language, even to the point, *mirabile dictu*, of offering provocative readings of "sacred" texts. No, he more modestly confesses that he "passes" for an atheist. Once, when asked why he refused simply to admit that he did not believe in the existence of any being, Being, Non-Being, or Beyond Being normally called God, Derrida responded,[2] "I think we may have some doubts about the distinction between atheism and belief in God. If belief in God is not also a culture of atheism, if it does not go through a number of atheistic steps, one does not believe in God. . . . I wouldn't say 'I am an atheist' and I wouldn't say, 'I am a believer' either. I find the statement absolutely ridiculous." Consequently, one might infer that were Derrida asked explicitly if he *was* an atheist, he could well reply, "*Je ne sais pas; il faut croire*—"I do not know; I must believe!"[3]

Accordingly, I repeat: "I quite rightly pass for an atheist." To be sure, in a certain manner, I do reject the existence of God, if by "God" one means, for example, Homer's pantheon of petty

Olympians, or if one means John Calvin's ungracious God of inequality and arbitrary favoritism, or if one means Fred Phelps's acerbic God of homophobia and hostility. I most assuredly believe that none of those deities exists—and this list certainly does not exhaust the non-existent gods that define my atheism. On the other hand, I also quite rightly pass for a theist regarding the compassionate theopassional God of love revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, a God who does not manipulate human beings for pleasure, who does not micromanage reality through some absolute sovereignty of will, and who does not withhold mercy and forgiveness from any creature. Undoubtedly, therefore, pagans, Calvinists, and Phelpsians would adopt an atheism regarding this God whom I *do* believe exists. Obviously, of course, such a position extends to almost everyone, since no one believes in every god; consequently, everyone rightly passes for an atheist when situated in some particular theological context, and most people quite rightly pass for some sort of theist.[4]

Most people rightly pass for a theist—but not all. The ersatz "New" Atheists insist that there are those who do not *rightly pass* for atheists, but who unequivocally *are* atheists. As Richard Dawkins, one of their primary champions, expresses it: "We are all atheists about most of the gods that humanity has ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further."[5] He asserts that he is "not attacking any particular version of God or gods [but is] attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural."[6] His "God Hypothesis" identifies the question of divine existence as specifically a scientific question, which must interrogate the empirical probability that a supernatural creator does, in truth, exist and does, in truth, affect the reality of the universe.[7] He argues, along with others such as Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris, that the scientific probability that God exists is so close to zero that any intelligent and open-minded person should reject the unfounded and naïve superstition that the complexity of nature should be explained by positing the *über*-complexity of a supernatural, infinite, omnipotent creator. No matter what scientific improbabilities, that is, irreducible complexities, the God Hypothesis ostensibly explains, that hypothesis itself introduces a supernatural

complexity and an experimental improbability that require a *sacrificium intellectus* in order to defend.[8]

Although New Atheists raise various arguments against belief in a god, arguments ranging from probability to psychology, from homosexuality to hermeneutics, and even from pork to prophylactics(!),[9] the two foci around which the preponderance of the debate revolves are evolution and theodicy, that is, the accepted success of Darwinian thought for explaining the development of life and the problems of evil and violence that plague human existence. First, with reference to Darwin, Dawkins admits that the traditional arguments for God originating from the question of cosmic design present the strongest and most tenacious alternative to atheism. He also maintains, however, that any such teleological argument ironically suffers from an autoimmune deficiency that results in its own dismissal. Using Fred Hoyle's analogy of the probability of life developing on earth as equal to that of a hurricane's constructing a 747 by blowing through a junkyard, he contends that such a creative intelligence would indicate a complexity that would more likely be the final cause of a process and not the efficient cause.[10] In other words, in the main event between Darwin and the Deity, Dawkins decides that Darwin has won the bout, not by a split decision but by a knockout. He firmly believes, along with creationists and ID theorists, interestingly enough, that God functions as a scientific theory postulated to be the best explanation for the elaborate order of nature. Unlike the latter two, however, he argues that the theory simply cannot conform to the verification criteria of science. Granted, some critics, such as David Berlinski, diminish this Darwinian rejection of the supernatural as yet another weak expression of the "God of the gaps" mentality; nevertheless, New Atheists allege that they are simply responding to the traditional literalism that grounds theistic faith and its conjectures about observable experience.[11]

When one turns to the second issue of the traditional problem of evil and suffering, one immediately recognizes that the New Atheists confront the problem from a different and narrower perspective. Their protest atheism does not track the logical difficulties inherent to traditional theodicies—how does the idea of a good and powerful God cohere with the quality and

quantity of evil in the world—nor does it even correspond to the moral rebellious character of anti-theism—the refusal to acknowledge God out of solidarity with the innocent and oppressed sufferer, as in Camus or Dostoevsky. Instead, their assault on theism in the name of evil concentrates specifically on the violence and evil perpetrated, endorsed, provoked, or empowered by religion and belief in God themselves. Dawkins concedes that religious violence may be more ideology than theology at times; however, he also maintains that religion may actually influence people to do violence. The same cannot be said for atheism. Although particular atheists may commit evil against others, atheism does not function as a motivation for such evil.[12] Religion, on the other hand, does often overtly condone and compel evil and violence. Dawkins substantiates this by examining the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and the resulting traditions that ensue from them.[13] He summarizes the violence and evil intrinsic to theism with an extended characterization of the God of Hebrew scriptures: ". . . a vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, [and] capriciously malevolent bully."[14] OK . . . well, praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Evidently, the "going further" that Dawkins proclaims as the New Atheist's step beyond mere contextual disbelief does not terminate there. They take another step past rejecting every God to rejecting every form of religion and theology, along with any toleration of either. With the exception of Daniel Dennett, who denies being an enemy of religion or harboring any hatred for it,[15] the New Atheists foment a disdain for and a repudiation of religion as purely dysfunctional and destructive. They proclaim that religion, in its conventional expressions, is, at worst, evil, and in its isolated moments of benevolence, it is still, at best, potentially the provenance of violence, oppression, and irrationality. As Hitchens condenses it, religion "*poisons everything*."[16] He illustrates this toxic effect by mentioning Pat Robertson's and Jerry Falwell's post-911 testimony to a brutally punitive God.[17] Since fundamentalists are always good illustrations of religion's funereal malice; one might suppose that atheists and anti-religionists should thank God for them!

The repudiation of religion continues unremittingly. Dawkins laments that "no known culture lacks some version of the time-consuming, wealth-consuming, hostility-provoking rituals, the anti-factual, counter-productive fantasies of religion."[18] Hitchens certainly corroborates these sentiments, considering religion to be "[v]iolent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children."[19] Yet, that corroboration fails to provoke a genuine catharsis; consequently, he continues condemning religion as "an enemy of science and inquiry . . . [subsisting] largely on lies and fears . . . the accomplice of ignorance and guilt as well as slavery, genocide, racism, and tyranny."[20] Indeed, he even has an entire chapter in his book devoted to religion as child abuse.[21] Such a claim does not fixate only on the recent revelations of systemic pedophilia among abusive priests, but it also extends even to the intellectual abuse that fundamentalism administers to the youth. For example, Dawkins indicts dogmatic faith for "ruining the scientific education of countless thousands of innocent, well-meaning, eager young minds."[22] Furthermore, he identifies the evil of unquestioned faith as the motivation for children "to grow up into potentially lethal weapons for future jihads or crusades."[23] As an expression of self- justification, however, Dawkins does attempt to mitigate his hostility toward religion by restricting it to the linguistic, claiming that it would never extend to literal acts of violence.[24]

Yet, although it may not involve literal violence, the New Atheist's contempt for religion and theology extends its discursive disdain further to encompass anyone who has the audacity to acknowledge a functional and therapeutic capacity to religion, even to those who may share their disbelief in God but who do not share their prejudice against religion. Dawkins criticizes the latter's "ingratiating broad-mindedness" in tolerating belief and believers,[25] a tolerance that he claims could even extend to "the faith of Osama bin Laden and the suicide bombers."[26] Consequently, even respecting moderate belief could involve one in a conspiracy with extremism. Hitchens agrees that credulity may be considered "a form of innocence, and even innocuous in itself, but it provides a standing invitation

for the wicked and the clever to exploit their brothers and sisters."[27]

Dawkins specifically directs his ire against the religious tolerance expressed in Stephen Jay Gould's idea of NOMA, "non-overlapping magisteria," the idea that science and religion do not ask the same questions nor conflict over the same values.[28] According to NOMA, there need be no animosity between the two cultures of science and religion; they can co-exist benignly as non-competing perspectives on natural and human reality. For example, one can separate them with reference to the questions of "how" and "why," with science focusing on the former and religion on the latter. Yet, Dawkins insists that this apparent virtue of moderation and superficial reasonableness merely empowers the vice of unquestioned faith and of theological violence.[29] The intolerance *of* religion demands the response of intolerance *for* religion. The result is a certain evangelistic atheism. According to Ted Peters, the "spicy new breed of aggressive atheists . . . are out to convert religious persons to atheistic beliefs, and to convert our culture to a secular and scientific way of life."[30]

Not surprisingly, the New Atheists have incited a profusion of critiques, many of which reveal a passionate condemnation directly proportional to New Atheism's abhorrence of religion. These critiques often present with symptoms of having been envenomed with a toxic mix of scorn and acrimony equal to almost anything that might drip from Hitchens's literary fangs, for example, New Atheists as "underwear sniffers"[31] or as "televangelist channel-surfers!"[32] Naturally, there are some less corrosive criticisms. John Haught refers to them as "explanatory monists," well-schooled in stereotypical scientism but seriously lacking in theological sophistication, since they appear to know little outside of creationist ID theory or literalist fundamentalism.[33] Mark Johnston endorses Haught's perspective, referring to them as "undergraduate atheists," although he fears that this may be insulting to undergraduates.[34] One may also certainly find the usual apologetic indictments of New Atheism's bondage to 19th Century positivism, of their performatively contradictory "belief" in the miraculous power of sacrosanct rationality, and of their myopia in viewing the "Janus face" of religion, refusing to acknowledge its productive as well as destructive tendencies.[35]

Periodically, one finds a rewarding little surprise among the typical critiques, such as Haught's Nietzschean "mad man" censure of the New Atheists as peddling "soft-core atheism," by which he means that they do not have the "will-to-power" to carry their rejection of the supernatural to its ultimate conclusion of axiological nihilism. Their godless morality, in other words, looks amazingly similar to godly morality.[36] The New Atheists, therefore, have not successfully distanced themselves from the herd and become the "supermen" of hyperborean rationality.

Another interesting and rather unique critique comes from Tina Beattie, who also explicitly raises the issue of postmodernism, an issue that factors significantly into this essay's primary attempt to offer certain Continental philosophical attitudes towards New Atheism. From one perspective, Beattie's criticism appears to be merely one more dismissal of New Atheism as a form of reductionistic positivism; however, she moves a step beyond the typical when she diagnoses that reductionism as the characteristic of an "imperial world in which cultures dominated by a white male elite remain caught up in a territorial battle of colonization and conquest."[37] The "linguistic" violence of New Atheism, therefore, is but another attempt by an arrogant "civilization" to carry the "white man's burden" and to colonize the intellectually weak and rationally barbaric adherents to religious superstition. She identifies this culture of atheism as cerebral superiority to be "the product of a post-Protestant intellectual environment associated with white conservative men . . . primarily concerned with questions of evidence, proof and rationality." Furthermore, she distinguishes this species of atheism from the continental approaches that "are often informed by Jewish and Catholic perspectives [which] place a strong emphasis on language and symbolism."[38] This "continental" approach, for example, could be illustrated by Derrida's "Jewish" confession that he "rightly passes for an atheist."

Undoubtedly, one can move from "continental" atheism to Continental philosophy quite easily, which can, in turn, broach the issue of postmodernism. And, indeed, Beattie does address that issue somewhat extensively, interpreting postmodern thought as both positively and negatively affecting the question of religion and theistic belief. She describes postmodernism as "a world-view which asserts that there is no world-view . . . laying

claim to the universal truth which asserts that there is no universal truth."[39] This somewhat stereotypical comprehension of postmodernism as relativism results in Beattie's contention that it actually promotes both the religious fanaticism that New Atheists decry and the secular extremism that New Atheists espouse. Both react against the incipient nihilism that "conceals an abyss of meanings and values."[40] Since fundamentalists and New Atheists share a yearning for objective, literal, absolute truth and knowledge, they also share an antipathy for postmodern theories of socially- constructed truths and for its aversion to foundational metanarratives. Clearly, Dawkins confirms her opinion when he accuses postmodernism of training people to respect different cultures and to accept alternative religions to the point that they develop a tolerance that allows and excuses religious violence.[41] For him, postmodernism is just so much "haute francophonyism."[42]

Nevertheless, Beattie also argues that postmodernism may be salvific for establishing the context in which voices long silenced and positions long ignored may once again be welcomed.[43] It may establish ethical visions that can cultivate the humility and openness necessary, *pace* Dawkins, for peaceful and respectful encounters with alterity—whether that alterity be religious or scientific. To be sure, if one re-scales her mapping of postmodernism and enlarges the details, one will find that there are avenues that do not lead to relativism but actually offer routes to religious and ethical destinations that transcend the disjunctions between theism and atheism, tolerance and naiveté, nihilism and absolutism. Certain postmodern pathways may actually intersect with New Atheism, allowing a shared journey, while also diverging and redirecting the traveler to pass beyond New Atheism and visit locations where religion and theology continue to promote both meaning and knowledge.

An alternative cartography of postmodernism is the basic purpose of this essay. I wish to explore a few areas where Continental thought and New Atheism both converge and diverge, places that offer common ground and places that offer crossroads where one does not have to continue down the path of atheism or the path of absolutism—either in its supernatural or natural form. By examining the theories of John Caputo, Richard Kearney, and Merold Westphal, I presume to show how

postmodernism may connect with New Atheism at the point of questioning classical theism and at the point of establishing valid grounds for critique of violence and superstition. Furthermore, I endeavor to show how postmodernism disconnects from New Atheism, enabling people to navigate away from post-Enlightenment reductionism toward a renewed appreciation of religion and theology as conducive to becoming more human. In other words, this essay attempts to accompany Derrida and offer a way whereby one may quite rightly pass for an atheist and a theist simultaneously.

Connection I: The Ascesis of Atheism

The faux nouveau atheists do not stutter when they articulate their acrimonious dismissal of religion, theology, and all those who tolerate either. Although ostensibly proffering a redemptive affirmation of reason, science, and common sense, the New Atheists' contributions tend to be more condemnation than emancipation. Surprisingly, it is precisely when they wield their pens as swords that they inscribe the first connection with Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal. Although none of these Continentalists will embrace the reductionistic materialism that grounds New Atheism, they all, in various ways, do embrace the critical dynamic at work in its fundamental negation. In other words, all three contend that atheism offers a certain religious and epistemological ascesis, a discipline of diffidence with reference to hyperbolic claims of absolute certainty and incorrigible knowledge.

Ironically, although the New Atheists themselves appear to have immunized their own beliefs against the virus of humility, Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal do not fear the contamination of atheism's modesty. Channeling the spirit of his mentor Arthur Holmes, Westphal insists that one should not obsess over the pedigree of truth but obtain it from whatever source one can. Since all truth is God's truth, perhaps God can reveal the truth of epistemic humility and of the potential for systematically-distorted communication not only from the mouths of babes but also from the mouths of unbelievers.[44] Westphal argues that the *skepsis* ensuing from a certain methodological atheism establishes the interrogative context necessary whenever one scrutinizes religious faith.[45] Of course, he does not believe in atheism's

disbelief; however, he appreciates the "Kierkegaardian" structure that it supplies—the constant reproachful refrain reminding human beings that they are finite and, consequently, limited in knowledge and denied an all-access pass to absolutism.[46] Granted, Westphal refuses to accept the "fallacy of misplaced transubstantiation" that results in the mistaken assumption that the impossibility of human beings occupying an absolute position logically or empirically implies that no such position obtains.[47] Nonetheless, he approves of atheism's constant reminder of the finitude of human discourse, which for him is not a bad translation of a theological anthropology of the human as creature and not creator.[48]

Given Paul Ricoeur's contention that one must choose between absolute knowledge and hermeneutics, one could consider Westphal's position on the ascesis of atheism to be an expression of a particularly temperate hermeneutic.[49] Indeed, his most significant encounter with atheism centers on its relevance for both a hermeneutics of finitude and a hermeneutics of suspicion. He specifically concentrates on the three masters of suspicion, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, whose atheism evades traditional evidentialism—which one may find in the old atheists of the eighteenth-century and in the new ones of the twenty-first! For these three unbelievers, atheism acts as a reflection on a secular doctrine of original sin, by which Westphal means the human propensity to rationalization, the constant masquerading of narcissism and power-mongering behind the masks of "truth" and "virtue."[50] Suspicious atheism is not so much an issue of arguments about the ontic possibilities of supernaturalism or a divine entity. Instead, it is more an issue of atheism as a hermeneutic, an interpretive strategy providing an *Ideologiekritik*, the intimation that religion and theism traffic in error and deceit to the extent that misinterpretation offers self-righteous believers their most desired meaning.

Caputo would certainly agree with Westphal's perspective regarding the ascesis of atheism as a hermeneutic providing a potent obstacle to the arrogance and violence of theological triumphalism. Caputo's reliance on Derridean deconstruction, supplemented, like Westphal, with large doses of Kierkegaard, leads him to conclude that religious faith is itself a *hermeneusis*, a way of construing existence in the midst of undecidability. It

does not depend on special information dispatched from a God who privileges certain individuals or communities with occult knowledge.[51] On the contrary, faith stumbles through the contingencies of existence trusting that a loving power accompanies it; however, it never sees that power through clear and distinct ideas nor has conclusive proof that such a power is anything other than a projection of faith's own will-to-comfort. Indeed, Caputo advocates a certain uncertainty as the essence of faith, that is, belief always comes in tandem with disbelief so that faith can never escape a residual atheism. In other words, he argues that a believer might well be someone who is more keenly aware of the divine absence, sensitive to the reality that the reality of God has withdrawn from the world and, consequently, not knowing whether s/he believes in God or not.[52] Faith, thereby, becomes something of a non-faith, an "I believe but help my unbelief," which is but another commentary on atheism as a hermeneutic, specifically as an interpretation of life as nothing but the ghostly anonymity of "the specter of a heartless world."[53]

For Caputo and Westphal, atheism as a hermeneutic advances the positive implications of the negative bias inherent in the rejection of God. Caputo prosecutes this notion under the rubric of deconstructive dissemination, the unending play of interpretations aimed precisely at all "constellations of power . . . [that] dominate, regulate, [and] exclude."[54] Dissemination reminds us that nothing is pure or unambiguous—not theism or atheism, not belief or unbelief. [55] As a result, the negation of atheism as the affirmation that there is no absolute escape from the flux of existence prompts us to concede that one never stalls the hermeneutical circle, one never reaches total meaning, and one never can ensure that interpretations, especially religious or theistic ones, are not corrupted by false consciousness and deceptive veneers that hide the duplicity of arrogant and manipulative individuals. Just this recognition leads Westphal to his aggressive appropriation of the hermeneutics of suspicion in the atheism of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. He stipulates that one should always maintain the tension between suspicion and faith, never losing sight of the therapeutic benefits of the ascesis of atheism as the discipline of dissent.

To be sure, for Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal, atheism as a hermeneutic leads inevitably to atheism as protest or, in their chosen nomenclature, atheism as prophetic. Westphal actually accuses the masters of suspicion of plagiarism, contending that Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud offer a criticism of religion that may be found in the Hebrew prophets and in Jesus.[56] Consequently, their attacks need not establish a "dogmatic secularism," which New Atheism appears to do, but can open the possibility that the recognition of God's absence might well be a needed word of judgment against "domesticating the divine."[57] Kearney concurs with this prophetic atheism when he claims that extreme secularism should be avoided and not allowed to reduce religion to nay-saying and the dysfunctional, while concomitantly acceding to the prophetic demystification that prohibits religion and theology from deteriorating into dogmatic and fanatical structures of oppression and alienation.[58] Prophetic atheism can reinforce the structure of play that genuine religion should acknowledge in the world, the play of transfiguration and defiguration that offers the gift of a consistent iconoclasm, which never tires of destroying the false idols that human beings construct and call "Our God."[59] Kearney even goes far as to agree with Dawkins that any theology that construes of God as a cosmic "superintendent" micromanaging and manipulating reality should be denounced. When atheism protests against such aberrations, it performs the work of God and ushers in a religious ethic that denounces deception and domination.[60]

Caputo, too, embraces the notion of atheism as a prophetic protest against the evils of religion. For him, the prophetic is always subversive, always a word of accusation against the perverted interpretations of God as violent, controlling, and prejudiced.[61] In the context of confessional faiths that insist on imprisoning beliefs within the claustrophobic conceptual networks of orthodoxy, Caputo proclaims that atheism would be closer to the divine truth of the prophetic.[62] He confesses that God for him is the name of a subverting and disruptive force, a spirit of dissent that deconstructs and destabilizes every status quo, especially those that are oppressive and dehumanizing.[63] Although he tends to side with the atheist that God is no entity, that one cannot imprison the divine within the principles of Being or existence, he does not agree that one cannot name God as

the prophetic force that questions every pretension to truth and meaning. He actually claims that he would prove God's existence with an "ateleological argument," that in lieu of a theory of Intelligent Design, he would suggest that God be prosecuted under the rubric of an "Interruptive Dynamic."[64] In other words, he would subscribe to prophetic atheism as a "devilish hermeneutic" aimed at keeping individuals humble and ensuring that absolute authority remains relative.[65]

Connection II: Overcoming Ontotheology

All three Continentalists share the same passion with reference to atheism as hermeneutic and prophetic, and, consequently, all three connect with the fundamental protest that New Atheism advocates. Likewise, one may go farther and make the stronger case that Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal rightly pass for atheists regarding belief in the existence or being or realism of a particular identifiable deity. That is, the three of them do, indeed, reject a distinctive discourse by which God has stereotypically been named and characterized and, in doing so, affirm that there is no such God. Well, almost all three of them give that testimony. They do agree in rejecting traditional metaphysical theism, in denying the ontotheological hybridization of the deity as a mongrelized synthesis of philosophy and religion. They do desire to get beyond metaphysical speculation with its emphases on conceptual homogeneity and its intent to achieve a pure presence of absolute closure. All of them question whether theological language should be translated into ontological concepts and whether the dialect of Athens can be deciphered if one hails from Jerusalem. But one of them, specifically Westphal, refuses to allow the rejection of ontotheology to extend to the rejection of the God referenced by ontotheology. In other words, Westphal connects with atheism in denying a particular theological linguistic method, but he does not connect with it in denying that the God named through that method truly exists. Perhaps one should say, therefore, that Westphal rightly and wrongly passes for an atheist.

Of course, one could say that Caputo and Kearney also both rightly and wrongly pass for atheists, given that neither one of them wants to embrace the reductionistic materialism of radical atheism. Nonetheless, the "wrongly passing for an atheist"

applies far less to Caputo than to Kearney and certainly to Westphal. Caputo's critique of metaphysical theism leads him to reject the reality of any entitative deity, any interpretation of God as a discrete being, or as Being Itself, or as the Ground of Being, or as Beyond Being, or as Self-Subsisting Being, or as (Non)Being. He concedes that one may well interpret God in such a way and that, although he makes no such claim himself, those who do are not necessarily mired in superstition or supernatural fantasy. As a matter of fact, he even celebrates the medieval attempt to transform Being into "someone," *esse est deus*. He calls it a "beautiful idea" that informs an attractive basis for a life of virtue. Nevertheless, that "beautiful idea" just simply fails as an argument.[66] Functionally for him, any movement beyond ontotheology disenfranchises the continued belief in such a God; it logically rejects comprehending God as a divine agent who acts as a cosmic super force, as an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent heavenly sovereign who performs miracles, privileges one group of people over another, and who wreaks vengeance on everyone who does not perform up to the divine standards.[67] Such a God of metaphysical speculation is dead, and Caputo merrily dances on his grave.

In the interest of full disclosure, Caputo confirms that he must ultimately capitulate to metaphysics, since one can never totally escape its linguistic hegemony, given that language is saturated with metaphysical terminology.[68] He prefers, however, a "minimalist metaphysics" in which "God" names an event at work within the occurrences of existence, an e-vent, a "coming" (*venire*) out (*e*) of something ineffable that disrupts and confounds reality, that does not indulge in manipulation and coercion but identifies with suffering and oppression and sides with the nobodies and the weak.[69] The minimalist approach to God confesses that "there is a God," but the "there is," the *es gibt* or *il y a*, connotes an anonymity and a non-entity. God is not *Dasein*, not (a) being there. The world is there; we are there; and science does an excellent job of interpreting the "there" of existence. But God is there as not being there. Consequently, for Caputo the God of classical theism, the God who is there as the omnipotent sovereign is dead, that God is not there—*there* is

no such God. On the basis of overcoming ontotheology, therefore, Caputo rightly passes for an atheist.

Kearney agrees with Caputo that one can never twist free from metaphysical concepts, which implies, in turn, that one can never fully obviate ontotheological discourse when talking about God.[70] Nevertheless, one is not, thereby, obliged to surrender to conceptual idolatry and speak of God in the classical theistic sense of *Actus Purus, Summum Ens, Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, or *Ens Causa Sui*. [71] These (un)godly traits rightly demand the ascesis of atheism, the outright rejection of a Hellenistic divine half-breed of philosophical abstractions and religious ineffability.[72] As noted above, Kearney explicitly joins Dawkins in denouncing belief in such a false divine entity. Concurrently, he joins Caputo in seeking a vocabulary with which to talk about God as otherwise than Being, of acknowledging a minimalist metaphysics and discovering a different discourse for how to speak about God. Kearney finds it by moving from the ontological to the eschatological, actually moving to the onto-eschatological perspective where the usual present tense conjugation of being is transfigured into the future tense, even the future perfect tense, where it is no longer a question of who God "is," but who *will* God be, or who God will have been.[73] One should no longer believe in God as *esse*, a sovereign entity of being and power, but of God as *posse*, a God who may be, who *is* as *not yet being*.[74] This God beyond metaphysics and radical atheism is a messianic God who does not micromanage reality or magically transmute natural laws in *ad hoc* moments, but who intimately relates to reality as the power of imaginative grace whereby new potentialities may be actualized.[75]

For Kearney, the God-Who-May-Be is a *deus ludens*, a dancing God who opens the future for genuine novelty, a God who will have been as the God of "promise and powerlessness, fecundity and fragility."[76] Yet, this God also dances away from every attempt to confine God within linguistic categories that purport to give full presence to the deity. The God of the Divine Perhaps requires the discipline of a persistent atheism, of a hermeneutical affirmation of *je ne sais pas*, "I do not know"—I must continually confess that God never truly *is* what I say God *is*. I can only intimate who I think God *will be*; consequently, my belief in God remains always "to come," always contaminated by

disbelief, that is, always an *a*-theism. But unlike the New Atheism of Dennett and Dawkins, Kearney's *a*-theism is one of freedom and the potential for genuine novelty—perhaps, ironically, a better (non)theistic structure for evolutionary thinking![77]

Westphal also accedes to Caputo's and Kearney's insistence that one does "God's" work in overcoming ontotheology. Indeed, the phrase itself, "overcoming ontotheology" is Westphalian, actually the title of one of his essays and of the volume that anthologizes it. Overcoming ontotheology serves as a recurrent motif in Westphal's philosophy of religion and pertains explicitly to the notion of atheism as a hermeneutic, that is, paraphrases the idea that human reason should not be granted the approbation of absolutism, of achieving an exhaustive explanation of reality. Yet, his position on transcending ontotheology separates him significantly from the conclusions reached by Caputo and Kearney and results in his critique of the concept as sustaining, at best, a tenuous connection with atheism.

Westphal boldly states that ontotheology should not be interpreted as a synonym for metaphysical theism. One can continue to hold that God is a personal, creative, and redeeming entity—even to the point of retaining classically theistic discourse such as omnipotence, *Causa Sui*, and *Esse est Deus*—and likewise reject the hubris of ontotheology. Such rejection simply does not necessarily entail the rejection of classical theism.[78] Westphal centers ontotheology expressly within a Heideggerian context, in which ontotheology refers to the philosophical requirement that talk about God must conform to philosophy's own conceptual networks. By importing God into the philosophical constructs of sufficient reason or of pretensions to holism, ontotheology serves as yet another expression of human epistemological arrogance and another attempt at rationalizing human domination of reality.[79] The renunciation of ontotheology is the renunciation of both Cartesian foundationalism and Hegelian holism; it is not the rejection of God, nor does it supply any rational or empirical justification for renouncing a theology that speaks of God in classically theistic terminology.[80] In other words, ontotheology does not so much address *what* one says about God but *how* one says it.[81]

Certainly Westphal conserves a subtle alliance with atheism by admitting that the world could well be Godless, that there is the possibility that there simply is no reality whatsoever to the being of God.[82] He also admits, however, that the God who may come after metaphysics could well be the God of Augustine—a personal creator and redeemer, one who acts, who reveals, and who intervenes in the world.[83] Consequently, *pace* Caputo and Kearney, he insists that as long as one maintains the ineffability of the deity, defends divine mystery and cognitive transcendence, and repudiates that God can ever be reduced to human discourse, one can harmonize both owning up to metaphysical theism and also overcoming ontotheology.[84] As a result, perhaps the best one can say is that Westphal passes for a *quasi*-atheist, Kearney *rightly* passes for an atheist, and Caputo *quite* rightly passes for an atheist!

Disconnection I: Displacing Disjunctions

Conversely, one may also claim that Caputo passes for a theist, Kearney *rightly* passes for a theist, and Westphal *quite* rightly passes for a theist! As should be apparent from the above two connections, one cannot identify the three Continentalists as in any way accepting New Atheism's complete denial of God nor its sardonic censuring of religion and religious tolerance. Kearney goes so far as to indict the New Atheists for engaging in hermeneutical violence when they reduce faith to its abuses and dismiss believers as a "virus" that needs eradication. Replace "believers" with "blacks" or "Jews," he writes, and one gets a sense of New Atheism's dangerous prejudice.[85] Caputo and Westphal would agree unequivocally with Kearney that, although atheism prescribes a therapeutic theological humility, New Atheism poisons that prescription with its scientistic insolence. Not surprisingly, therefore, significant disconnections obtain between the theories of Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal and the dogmas of the New Atheists.

One such disconnection concerns the "Enlightenment" predisposition to binaries, that is, the divinization of disjunction desired by Modernist rationalism. The principle of sufficient reason appears to thrive whenever one can reduce topics to the "either/or" and the "yes/no," what traditionally functions as the basic principle of non-contradiction. In this specific essay, that

Modernist prejudice against the excluded middle comes to expression in the definitive decision that must be made between theism and atheism. Being good Continentalists, however, Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal are not as sanguine as the New Atheists in conserving that polarity. As expected, Caputo attacks the distinction on the basis of deconstruction's skepticism toward metaphysical polarities, reminding us that opposites can cross-contaminate each other, leaving open the possibility that reversal may give way to displacement.[86] Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, Westphal, too, rejects this propensity on the basis of a desire to remain "radical!" He contends that a radical perspective on the reality of God would escape the *status quo* duality of belief and unbelief in order to move beyond the binary and reject the simplicity of the disjunction. Only then does one get to the root (*radix*) of the issue.[87] He concludes that having to "prove theism or atheism before thinking within that framework is a prejudice of Enlightenment evidentialism."[88]

For Kearney, the disconnection with New Atheism at the point of moving beyond theism/atheism centers on finding a middle way between the absolutism and relativism commonly associated with belief and unbelief. In one text, he calls this third way "metaxology," and defines it as presuming that "God is and is not [and] neither is nor is not."[89] This is his theology of the conditional nature of God's "existence," that the divine *is* only as the one who *may be*. This theology of the divine "perhaps," then, indicates that there is no simple rupture between the absolute enlightenment of certainty or the total darkness of incomprehensibility.[90] Dogmatism and desolation are not the only alternatives.[91] Of course, he recognizes that the metaxological position has gone under the name of agnosticism at times; however, he considers this terminology too neutral and, in his most recent text, chooses to prosecute the displacement of theism/atheism under the rubric of "anatheism." This word names the return (*ana*) to God (*theism*) after the death of God, the repetition of theology beyond the recognition of divine absence.[92] This third way passes beyond "both dogmatic theism and militant atheism," without passing beyond the necessity for a continued communication between the two.[93] Ironically, his desire to subvert the theism/atheism dyad results in his proliferating new polarities. He now distinguishes between

"anatheist atheism and anti-theist atheism" and "anatheist theism and dogmatic theism," with the former in each pair grounding the salvific context for open dialogue and critique![94]

Caputo engages the displacement of the disjunction by repeating an "old-fashioned" definition of religion as essentially the "love of God."[95] He cannot imagine why anyone would balk at this amorous affirmation of the deity, presuming that any individual who was so cold as to deny loving God could only be "a selfish and pusillanimous curmudgeon [and] a loveless lout who knows no higher pleasure than the contemplation of his own visage."[96] He considers the loving passion for God to be a passion for the impossible, a desire beyond desire for what is always "to come," for Derrida's notion of the undecidable future perfect that cannot be programmed or manipulated by human ingenuity.[97] The passion for the impossible yearns for the in-coming of the event, the event that is astir in the name of God, the event that cannot be domesticated or coerced by science or metaphysics. The name of God names that transforming potential that lies latent within all human experience—characterized as theistic or atheistic—resulting in "God" as the cipher for something of a "ghostly quasi-being, a very holy spirit."[98]

Quite clearly, Caputo does not mean by the "holy spirit" that God is some real entity, some being or Ground of Being that exists in any immanent or transcendent sense. Simultaneously, however, he testifies that he does not intend to deny the validity of the event that "God" names by rejecting God in the radical manner of New Atheism. He seeks to find his own metaxological or anatheistic middle way between "the dogs of fundamentalism and the hounds of reductionism."[99] He appropriately abstains from both theological realism and theological anti-realism, opting, instead, to enact a theological hyper-realism, not in tandem with the apophatic notion of God as the hyperessential, but in the sense of the impossible, the unimaginable, and the "excess of promise" that calls human beings from the real to the "not-yet-real" much like Kearney's God-Who-May-Be.[100] Such a hyperbolic hyper-realistic theology of the event no longer agonizes over archaic questions of whether God exists or not, over whether one can prove the divine or not, or over whether "God" must name a specific reality or not. The issue is no longer

one of knowing what one knows but now becomes one of knowing whom one loves. The religious does not inquire into whether we believe in God or not, or whether what we believe in is God or not; the religious spirit now interrogates what it is we love when we love our God.[101] And for Caputo, all of this redemptively "complicates the distinction between theism and atheism."[102]

Disconnection II: Theology as Pharmakon

Several connections have heretofore been made with the second disconnection between the Continentalists and New Atheism. The former undeniably hold a functional view of religion and theology in distinction to the latter's contentious censure of religion and theism as dysfunctional, ignorant, and violent. Of course, the former also recognize that the latter's denigration is not unfounded, for as the idea of "atheism as prophetic" has shown, they, too, acknowledge that religion and God may be used as a subterfuge for manipulation and oppression. Yet, the issue for them remains, as always, one of reductionism, of a myopic examination of theism whereby only its duplicitous and despotic abuses are examined. Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal have read their Derrida—who has, in turn, read his Plato—and they recognize that calling religion a poison, as does Hitchens, may require recourse to the originary language of philosophy, a return to the Greek idea of *pharmakon*, which means both poison and medicine, that which may destroy and which may also heal. [103] Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal, therefore, are more complex pharmacists of religion, better situated to administer the proper doses of recrimination and reconciliation. To be sure, the Continentalists do not hesitate to accompany the New Atheists as they walk away from belief in God as superstition or as subjugation or as savagery; however, they eventually veer off toward another direction, making a step beyond New Atheism, in order to follow God, under various names, as good disciples moving toward a justice, and a grace, and a love that are always "to come."[104]

Kearney's step beyond New Atheism clearly follows the choreography of the dancing God-Who-May-Be, the God of potentiality and promise, the *deus adventurus* who *is* in the present the spirit of transfiguration that is always "to come" in the

future.[105] The absent God present as *posse* is an infinitely personal God of healing and grace;[106] therefore, the divine possibility depends upon the ethical actualization of divine love and gift through the enfleshed actions of human beings. Finite individuals incarnate the infinite God through acts of justice and mercy, actually join God in the Sabbath of creation by doing the work of redemption through compassionate responses to the call of the oppressed, the anguished, and the vulnerable.[107] In opposition to the New Atheists who indict theism for its complicity with violence and dehumanization, Kearney celebrates how belief in God can empower human beings to perform acts of liberation and benevolence. Yet, this empowerment does not depend upon omnipotence or divine sovereign manipulation. Kearney insists that God "persuades rather than coerces, invites rather than imposes, asks rather than impels."[108] God as *posse* is a God of powerlessness, the apparent weakness of love in lieu of compulsion, the dynamic of *kenosis* through which God empties the divine self in order to allow human beings to incarnate in the little things of life the forces of righteousness and goodwill. This is not the "kind of monotheistic tyranny that leads to religious wars" but is the expression of "tiny, almost imperceptible acts of love or poetic justice."[109] Kearney categorically states that this anatheist interpretation of the weak force of a possible God enfleshed in ethical action "answers many of the objections . . . leveled against believers by recent militant atheists like Hitchens, Dennett, and Dawkins."[110]

Caputo shadows Kearney at several significant points along the path beyond New Atheism. He, too, accentuates the future perfect tense of the messianic God, the impossible possibility that endures by never exhausting itself in a metaphysics of presence, but persists in luring others into the mystery of an undecidable future always "to come," a future of gift and forgiveness, of passion and compassion. In other words, in Caputo's theological nomenclature "God" names the event that systemically portends the unexpected, that which eye has not seen nor ear heard, the promise of a justice to come that can never be totalized in any one empirical moment but that invigorates an endless yearning for grace.[111] He warrants that the name of God "is very simply the most famous and richest name we have to signify both an open-ended excess and an

inaccessible mystery."[112] Instead of "God" naming the unscientific superstition of a first cause or the psychologically dysfunctional solace of a cosmic comforter, "God" is an endlessly translatable name for both the "excess of grace and love" and also for the "mark of contradiction . . . that contradicts our own . . . self-gratification and self-love."[113]

For Caputo, God does not so much "exist" as "calls"; that is to say, God operates as a summoning spirit that does not proceed from some singular supernatural entity. When an individual hears the divine call and responds in faith by committing her/himself to express God's grace and justice in acts of mercy and empathy, her/his faith remains a *hermeneusis*, a particular interpretation that "reads" an experience with the abyss of suffering and oppression as potentially revelatory of the event of "someone" who identifies with the sufferer. But Caputo makes it clear that by "someone," he does not mean "some permanent presence beneath the flux of time . . . [or] something Infinite or Sacred, or Supersensible."[114] He means the voice of "God" that always comes in the human voice of the other, the other who cries or screams out for justice, forgiveness, freedom, or healing.[115] He cannot say if the call truly is from God, or if the originary promise and affirmation of life that serve as quasi-transcendental grounds for ethics issue from the creative voice of a personal deity. Who really can say that?[116] Perhaps the New Atheists are correct and nothing is truly there. That is the specter of Nietzsche that haunts Caputo.[117] Yet, who really can gainsay that? With absolute certainty? As an objective and exhaustive explanation of the event?

Caputo's *hermeneusis* of faith assumes that the name "God" may well designate a spirit of partnership with those who suffer, the event of a weak force that "acts" unconditionally but without sovereignty in order to summons forth the kingdom of God. That kingdom represents a poetic hyper-reality of "*non-coercive heteronomy*" that calls for individuals to give and forgive, to love both neighbor and enemy, and to go the second mile in order to let justice flow like a river.[118] Still, one should not misinterpret that the kingdom of God is analogous to the intimidating regulatory structures of earthly kingdoms, or that the fulfilled time of the kingdom tracks the chronology of worldly time, or that the space of that kingdom lies vulnerable before the prying

experiments of omnipotent physics. On the contrary, the kingdom of God only "exists" in aleatory moments, in the temporal interstices where justice and grace may find a small purchase on reality in anonymous acts of kindness and mercy.[119] For Caputo, such a "science" of the kingdom of God best comes to expression in the Christian idea of a theology of the cross. He does not mean the cross as the site of some divine transaction between an angry paternal deity and a compliant, innocent filial sufferer. No, the cross is that "perverse core of Christianity" where one may encounter the manifestation of the weak force of God, the "no" to suffering that itself suffers, the divine disavowal of injustice. The cross does not reveal a God of "pagan violence, brute power, or vulgar magic"[120]—the God that New Atheism is so fond of deriding—but a God of love and grace and unconditional promise.[121] And, with all due respect, atheists who refuse to love that God are a heartless bunch of narcissists![122]

Although Caputo more closely personifies the non-supernaturalism of New Atheism, he refuses to accept their assimilating the rejection of a certain type of metaphysics to a certain type of scientific materialism, a position that he finds arrogantly reductionistic. For him, the name of God names something, but he does not know what that "something is," although he "knows" that it is not a something that acts as an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, impassible, and sovereign entity. In other words, it is not ontological for him, although it does have certain ontic implications.[123] He complies with Jean-Luc Marion's Heideggerian conceit to write God as

G☒d, as *sous rature*, under erasure, not in the sense of the *hyperousiology* or the *nomen innominabile* of mystical theology but as a "graffiti that defaces standard theological writing."[124] God *sous rature* would be a cipher that indicates God as neither Being nor *a* being but as a genuine passion that lures and attracts individuals toward the impossible possibility of justice, gift, and faith—faith in something unknown and systemically unknowable. Such would be Caputo's gloss on Augustine's *cor inquietum*, a deconstructive, post-secular version of the restless heart that is continually impassioned to be there as a compassionate healer.[125] Consequently, for Caputo, "God" does not name *this* thing and does not name *that* thing, but does not name *no*thing.[126]

Finally, Westphal's position on the issue of naming God should be quite clear at this stage of the essay. In distinction to Caputo and Kearney, he wishes to continue using classical theistic language in order to talk about God, justifying that that discourse is both hermeneutically applicable to speaking about the God revealed through the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and also independent from ontotheology as defined by the propensity toward conceptual idolatry. One can certainly name God as Creator, as Redeemer, and as Comforter; one can certainly characterize God as omnipotent, as holy, and as personal; and one can assume through faith that such a God can and does intervene in the structures of reality, affecting both nature and history in concrete actions. Of course, he does agree with Caputo, for example, that the classically theistic God is a God of love, of promise, and of direct address.[127] He, too, considers God to be an interlocutor, one who exists but exists as one who calls, one who summons the human other to obedience and commitment.[128] He also agrees with Caputo and Kearney that any talk about God must endorse an epistemic and linguistic humility, which acknowledges the hermeneutics of finitude and suspicion and never pretends to absolute certainty or final meaning.[129] Needless to say, therefore, Westphal joins Caputo and Kearney in the second disconnection between Continentalism and New Atheism. He refuses to accept the prejudice that all religious and theological interpretations are dysfunctional, violent, or intellectually shallow. He would have no problem with the New Atheists' critical, read "prophetic," denunciations of various religious abuses; however, he would quickly admonish them for the fallacy of performative contradiction that mars their theological contempt. In doing so, he articulates a fundamental rebuke of New Atheism found in both Caputo and Kearney and, thereby, summarizes quite nicely the significant differences that separate the two perspectives.

Westphal's discrimination between ontotheology as human epistemological arrogance and classical theism as supplying suitable categories for interpreting God may actually be aimed at the "ontotheological" dynamics at work in the thought of the New Atheists. When New Atheists rely on the metanarratives of science or brook no alternatives to their conclusion that the probability of divine existence is functionally nil, they are, in

essence, expressing a closed system of dogma that simulates fundamentalism. They differ little from religious fanatics, theological dogmatists, or Intelligent Design theorists in *how* they force theological discourse into the hegemonic categories of science. The substance of their orthodoxy certainly differs from that of the former three communities; however, the form of their arguments and the nature of their presuppositions do not.

Ironically, Westphal's fivefold critique of the ersatz infallibility of ontotheology can be applied with little or no changes to New Atheists. He impugns onto-theologians for: first, assuming that their theological framework is final; second, acting aggressively to criticism of their position; third, discrediting their critics *ad hominem*; fourth, appealing to cultural stereotypes in order to cast aspersions on those critics; and fifth, to develop a fortress mentality in which those who disagree are the enemy that must be defeated in order to restore common sense and the common good.[130] It should appear obvious from the brief précis of New Atheism given at the beginning of this essay that the New Atheists are closer kin to their human targets than they might wish to admit! One could say that the struggle between New Atheism and Old Christian Apologetics is an internecine conflict between ontotheologians—with the caveat that one of the gangs is composed of onto-*a*theologians!

Perhaps we would all be better served to heed the call of Caputo, Kearney, and Westphal and become their disciples, turning away from the broad path that leads to dogmatism and hubris, whether the path includes a God or not. As disciples of the Continentalists, we may be able to journey beyond both pretexts of absolutism and embrace the limitations of our existence, with reference to both faith and reason. Perhaps, we can find the journey much more pleasant when we rightly pass for atheists or rightly pass for theists, according to whichever ontotheological cult attempts to evangelize us. And perhaps, only down that narrow path will we walk and talk with God.

Notes

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Circumfession*: *Fifty-nine Periods and Paraphrases*, in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 156.
[2] John D. Caputo, Kevin Hart, and Yvonne Sherwood, "Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, eds. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005), 46-47.
[3] Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1, 129.
[4] Robert B. Stewart, ed. *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 3. Hereafter cited as FA.
[5] One finds this as a blurb inside the cover of the paperback edition of *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008). Ostensibly, he first said this on a television program entitled "The Root of All Evil," UK Channel 4, 2006.
[6] Ibid., 57.
[7] Ibid., 77, 82.
[8] Ibid., 138.
[9] The "pork to prophylactics" phrase might appear somewhat flippant; however, it should be taken quite literally. Hitchens actually spends several pages of his book dealing with the religious prohibition against both eating swine and distributing condoms. See Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), 37-46.
[10] Dawkins, pp. 137-38, 171-72.
[11] David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 183.
[12] Dawkins, 309, 315-16.
[13] Ibid., 268-316.
[14] Ibid., 51.
[15] Dennett and McGrath, "The Future of Atheism: A Dialogue," in FA, 22.
[16] Hitchens, 13. Of course, this phrase serves as the subtitle of his book, further evidence of its centrality to his atheism.
[17] Ibid., 32.
[18] Dawkins, 194.
[19] Hitchens, 56.
[20] Ibid., 229.
[21] Ibid., 217-28.
[22] Dawkins, 323.
[23] Ibid., 347-48.
[24] Ibid., 318-19.
[25] Ibid., 13.
[26] Ibid., 345-46.
[27] Hitchens, 161.
[28] Dawkins, 78-79.
[29] Ibid., 84.
[30] Ted Peters, "The God Hypothesis in the Future of Atheism," FA, 163.
[31] Berlinski, 52.

[32] Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2008), 4.
[33] John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), xi, 16-17, 86.
[34] Mark Johnston, *Saving God: Religion After Idolatry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 37-39.
[35] Keith Parsons, "Atheism: Twilight or Dawn?" in FA, p. 65; Tina Beattie, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 169.
[36] Haught, 21. Berlinski makes something of a similar argument, *sans* the usual sarcasm (36).
[37] Beattie, 46.
[38] Ibid., 5.
[39] Ibid., 132.
[40] Ibid., 133-35, 137-38, 146-47.
[41] Dawkins, 369.
[42] Ibid., 388.
[43] Beattie, 133.
[44] See B. Keith Putt, ed. *Gazing Through a Prism Darkly: Reflections on Merold Westphal's Hermeneutical Epistemology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 181-82.
[45] Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian* Faith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 39-40. Hereafter cited as OO.
[46] Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 92. Hereafter cited as KCRS.
[47] OO, 291.
[48] Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the* Church (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 59. Hereafter cited as WCWI.
[49] Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 153.
[50] Merold Westphal, *Suspicion & Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 77. Hereafter cited as S&F.
[51] John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 281-82. Hereafter cited as RH.
[52] Ibid., 279, 288.
[53] John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 125. Hereafter cited as OR.
[54] RH, 260.
[55] John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 225. Hereafter cited as PT.
[56] S&F, 10-12, 265.

[57] Merold Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in* Dialogue (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 33. Hereafter cited as LKD.
[58] Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 153.
[59] Richard Kearney, *Poétique Du Possible: Phénoménologie Herméneutique de la Figuration* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 271. Hereafter cited as Poétique,
[60] Kearney, *Anatheism*, 167-68.
[61] John D. Caputo, AIn Search of a Sacred Anarchy: An Experiment in Danish Deconstruction,@ in *Calvin O. Schrag and the Task of Philosophy After Postmodernity*, eds. Martin Beck Matuštík and William L. McBride (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 30.
[62] OR, 35-36.
[63] John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 287. Hereafter cited as WG; John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 218. Hereafter cited as MRH.
[64] WG, 14.
[65] John D. Caputo, AIn Praise of Devilish Hermeneutics,@ in *Thinking Difference: Critics in Conversation*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 121-22.
[66] John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 70-71. Hereafter cited as AE.
[67] WG, p. 39; John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 64-65. Hereafter cited as AD.
[68] RH, p. 239; AE, 221.
[69] WG, 23-24, 32.
[70] Richard Kearney, "Between Being and God," in Richard Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 257.
[71] Poétique, 224. See also Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 16-17.
[72] Richard Kearney, "The God Who May Be," in *Questioning God*, eds. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 157.
[73] Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutic of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 37. Hereafter cited as GWMB.
[74] Ibid., 38.
[75] Ibid., 80-84.
[76] Ibid., 107.
[77] Ibid., 110.
[78] OO, 22-23.
[79] Ibid., 5-6, 289.
[80] Ibid., 74; LKD, 10.
[81] OO, 4.
[82] LKD, 72.
[83] OO, 273.

[84] LKD, 110; Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 94. Hereafter cited as TST.
[85] Kearney, *Anatheism*, 169-70.
[86] PT, 220.
[87] OO, 132-33.
[88] Ibid., 190.
[89] GWMB, 6-7, 38.
[90] Richard Kearney, "Theorizing the Gift," in *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, 296.
[91] Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Ideas of Otherness* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 211. Hereafter cited as SGM.
[92] Kearney, *Anatheism*, 102, 141.
[93] Ibid., 166; Richard Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology," in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Panteleimon Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 9.
[94] Kearney, *Anatheism*, 184.
[95] OR, 1.
[96] Ibid., 3.
[97] Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, eds. Thomas
Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 146.
[98] WG, 9.
[99] Ibid., 119.
[100] Ibid., 11-12, 123.
[101] John D. Caputo, "Laughing, Praying, Weeping Before God: A Response," in *Styles of Piety: Practicing Philosophy After the Death of God*, eds. S. Clark Buckner and Matthew Statler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 254.
[102] John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 58. Hereafter cited as WWJD?
[103] See Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 95-117.
[104] WWJD?, p. 44.
[105] Richard Kearney, "Desire of God," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 114.
[106] SGM, 218.
[107] Poétique, p. 239; SGM, p. 228; Richard Kearney, "Against Omnipotence: God Beyond Power," in *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, 237.
[108] GWMB, 30.
[109] Kearney, "Theorizing the Gift, 292.
[110] Kearney, *Anatheism*, 137.
[111] John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997, 173; AD, 52, 64.
[112] AD, 53.

[113] B. Keith Putt, "What Do I Love When I Love My God? An Interview with John D. Caputo," in *Religion With/Out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*, ed. James H. Olthuis (New York: Routledge, 2002), 167.
[114] AE, 244-45.
[115] John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 100.
[116] John D. Caputo, "Without Sovereignty, Without Being: Unconditionality, the Coming God, and Derrida's Democracy to Come," in *Religion and Violence in a Secular World: Toward a New Political Theology*, ed. Clayton Crockett (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 147.
[117] Caputo actually frames his little primer on theology and philosophy by confessing how the issue of Nietzsche's potential cosmic loneliness haunts him. See John D. Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 1-2, 74. Hereafter cited as P&T.
[118] MRH, 186; OR, 123; WG, 12.
[119] PT, 187.
[120] WG, 42-43.
[121] Ibid., 90.
[122] OR, 134.
[123] WG, 116.
[124] Ibid., 36.
[125] P&T, 72.
[126] See Robert P. Scharlemann, *The Being of God: Theology and the Experience of Truth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 60-93; Robert P. Scharlemann, *Inscriptions and Reflections: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 16, 79.
[127] LKD, 107.
[128] Ibid., 78.
[129] OO, 5-6.
[130] Ibid., 191.

A Common Table: The Hermeneutics of Atheism and Faith

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Richard Dawkins as much as any other person represents the face of the so-called new atheism.[1] As a prominent scientist, he has more "street-cred," one might say, than others such as Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens. When he speaks of the advantages of scientific reason, he speaks with authority. His attacks on the abuses of Christianity are also difficult to surpass—and to refute—and his extensive experience with vitriolic responses by Christians further feeds the fire. His refusal to deal with the best of Christian theological positions but rather with popular Christianity because the latter represents the common face of Christianity has a certain persuasiveness. His claims, along with other strident atheists such as Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens, are not just defenses of atheism but go on the offensive to suggest that religious belief is a kind of virus that is threatening to the wellbeing of the human race. When criticisms are brought in turn to the excesses of atheists, he generally dismisses them by turning to the best of atheists. One could, however, question the omission of theologians and also point out that popular Christianity does not always fit his generalization such as the Emergent Church movement. And one would think the equivalent approach to looking at the best of atheism would be to look at the best of Christianity. What I want to address, however, is not Dawkins at his weak points such as these but at his strengths, namely, his appeal to science and beyond that to reason more generally.

A Hermeneutics of Science

John Haught is a Roman Catholic priest who has taught a class on atheism annually for many years at Georgetown

University. He has argued that the new atheists are not as challenging as the “old” atheists such as Nietzsche, Freud, and Sartre.[2] For instance, he points out that the students, after reading these earlier atheists, would not take that seriously the “new atheism.” Why is this, when the scientific credentials of a Dawkins are much superior to those earlier thinkers? This issue gets to the heart of what is troubling about Dawkins’s charge, even for atheists knowledgeable of philosophy (and also of theology). And it is striking because it responds to Dawkins not at his weakest but his strongest point, namely, his scientific credentials. The interesting thing is that some of the earlier atheists attacked not only religion but also the hegemony of a scientific view of reason. In this sense, they are much more radical than the new atheists.

They were at a disadvantage in the latter critique of reason, however, because the massive criticisms of scientific reasoning that were launched in the latter twentieth century had not yet occurred. Moreover, the weight of these criticisms that dismantled a long-held view of science rested not on external perspectives but came from within the camp, so to speak, from an analysis of science itself. Criticisms of similar philosophical positions such as Logical Positivism that privileged scientific reasoning also came from within the twentieth century. Even Karl Popper's popular falsification approach to science, which was supposedly limited just to science and not seen as relevant to other domains of reality, can be severely questioned, especially when it was extended to issues of meaning, ethics, and religion.[3] What would the “old atheists” have done with such weapons in their arsenal?

The irony, though, is that Dawkins and the new atheists in general do not criticize the traditional view of scientific reason but appeal to it, implying that it is sufficient for all areas of reality. It is as if a century of philosophy of science and epistemology had not occurred. This is significant in that the trump card to which Dawkins especially appeals is science. What I wish to point out more fully is that it is fairly well recognized that his trump card is not an ace but something much weaker and much more limited than he suggests. In fact, the general direction of philosophy of religion is to see that scientific reasoning is much closer to reasoning in the humanities, and religion in particular, than

heretofore thought. On the other hand, when practiced as a particularly successful method in the area of physical reality, it actually exhibits serious limitations for other major domains of reality. As the existentialists would point out, it is most limited when dealing with the most humanly "important" areas of reality.

Showing that Dawkins's reliance on scientific reason is flimsier than he thinks and not as distinct from religious reason as he thinks, of course, is not somehow to vindicate a particular religious faith or religious faith in general. What it does, however, is to welcome Dawkins to the game. It is to overcome the supposed superior epistemological standpoint to which he appeals, ironically in philosophy often called a God's-eye-point-of-view, and to bring him into the wider conversation and the fallible human condition. In other words, even when one is not speaking of religion but, say, of any large narrative to which humans appeal, say, a particular atheistic story, we are not in the realm of proof, of coercive evidence, of verification, or of falsification. It is to say that even the foundations of science cannot be validated by science itself. As we shall see, this does not automatically lead to relativism (or to fideism in religion), a tendency to which the earlier, and some later, atheists often succumbed. Dawkins seems in no hurry to go there, hence his appeal to a strong, traditional view of reason as the bulwark of atheism. Nevertheless, any such larger narrative cannot claim an objective, neutral superiority over all others. Dawkins is therefore welcomed to a post (classically) foundationalist, postmodern, post-scientistic world where he has firm ground on which to stand—but so do many other others, including religious folk, at least according to the best in philosophy in general and in philosophy of science. Let us extend the welcome further.

Verification

The high valuation of science reached perhaps its apex in the development of positivism in the nineteenth century and the wider philosophical movement of logical positivism in the early twentieth. The Vienna Circle, as the latter was more specifically called, arose in the twenties and was composed of scientists, philosophers, and logicians.[4] The aim in many ways was to take science as the prime example of legitimate, meaningful language. They drew on what has been called Hume's Fork,

which took the conclusion from his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

> When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number*? No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence*? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.[5]

The Logical Positivists carried this "incendiary" language even further, if it is possible. Drawing on developments in symbolic logic since Hume and especially the work of the young Ludwig Wittgenstein, they also stressed that there were only two types of meaningful statements. They agreed that mathematics and logic do not make statements about the external world but about the way humans have chosen to use symbols. In other words, they tell something about us but not the world. The other kinds of statements that are about the world, empirical statements, they saw in scientific terms as statements that can be verified, in particular, verified through sense experience. They thus notoriously saw God-talk as not just false but as not even rising to that level; it was meaningless or nonsense. Moreover, they applied this verdict not only to religious language but to metaphysics and to ethics.[6] An explanation of ethics was that it has no cognitive content but expresses emotional feelings—an approach that seemed distinctly inadequate in the face of the coming onslaught of Nazi Germany.[7]

The movement that was brash and evangelistic in the twenties and earlier thirties succumbed for many reasons in the thirties, not the least of which was the impending world war. A philosophical reason, however, was that they were not able to respond to what seemed a fatal flaw in their "verification principle." If there are only two kinds of meaningful statements, then it must be a logical statement or an empirical statement. If a logical assertion, it then does not correspond to the world and only tell us about the way the Positivists have decided to define terms, which seemed ungrounded and arbitrary. On the other

hand, it is not clearly an empirical statement but is a definition *about* empirical statements. Since it only counts empirical statements at the outset, it seems to beg the question of whether there are other kinds of meaningful language about the world. They never found a solution to this problem, and to be fair, they were their own most stringent critics.[8]

Beyond this problem about the verification principle per se, they struggled with what kinds of verification is objective enough for empirical statements. Some turned to immediate sense impressions to verify an experience, but that seems quite subjective (much like appealing to inner religious experience!) and it was difficult to specify exactly what one was experiencing. These are also discrete sensations of color, of sound, of texture, that are secondarily "assembled" into a whole—which quite quickly raises the problem of interpretation and the conflict of interpretation? Phenomenologists and gestalt theorists insisted against this view that our experience is first of meaningful wholes that we then only secondarily "disassemble" into discrete parts—making the latter again a somewhat subjective, interpretive act.[9] Thus the objective basis for the positivist becomes an issue of subjectivity. Or does one depend on intersubjective instrumental tests that different people could agree upon—which is often limited, not immediate, and also does not ultimately solve the problem of the conflict of interpretations in complex cases? This problem, too, was never solved. Despite the fact that, philosophically, positivism has been discredited, it lives on in many ways in assumptions about science, on the part of some scientists and popular thought about science.[10] This is true of Dawkins. Science as the standard of objectivity and reliability seems to be an assumption of Dawkins, but one does not hear of these challenges for science in his arguments against religion, even though his own branch of science particularly involves hermeneutical judgments and the conflict of interpretations.

Falsification

A further development in response to Logical Positivism came from the Viennese Karl Popper as someone who was in discussion with and familiar with the Vienna Circle. He argued that "verification" was not a reliable criterion for science because one can never conclusively verify anything. More and more

positive examples of a hypothesis do not rule out a possible negative, falsifying example. Logically, he affirmed, “falsification” is the much stronger criterion.[11] One falsification of a hypothesis outweighs a thousand positives. On the logical side, he is correct; practically speaking, it is not difficult to see that a falsified test is also subject to question and interpretation. The more important practical implication, however, is that Popper emphasized that the “demarcation criterion” for science is testability in terms of sense experience and experimentation. He himself did not think that this ruled out other areas of life or language as meaningless—this was just an aspect of science—and was much more cautious. As such, there is much to commend this principle, although again there are scientific disciplines that are difficult to test directly, such as much theorization about quantum reality such as string theory and multiple dimensions. Ironically, again, Dawkins's own discipline is one that is more hermeneutical and theory-driven because it is less subject to controlled experimentation. The more disciplines engage human consciousness, the less controllable they are, so that one might find objective experiments in terms of brain states but not so easily experiments in terms of what humans report and show of their experience.

The more serious problem for Popper is that his demarcation criterion is broadly helpful but specifically does not aid in many cases to adjudicate scientific disputes. This led one of his students, Imre Lakatos, to move to a much more hermeneutical approach to the philosophy of science, conceding that there is no simple, non-hermeneutical way to adjudicate major scientific theories that are contested.[12] In brief, he suggested that scientists should think in terms of a kind of planetary metaphor of “research programs,” where each has a major hypothesis or belief that is a hard core around which there is a protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses. Such a research program is progressive if the supporting hypotheses lead to novel facts or predictions that are confirmed. It is degenerating if it runs into many troublesome predictions or facts, or anomalies, that call for increasing numbers of ad hoc hypotheses (face-savers) to maintain the model. Nancey Murphy has interestingly appropriated this model as a way of thinking about theology’s rationality, also.[13] In short, one can see how there is no hard and

fast point at which one could judge a research program as progressive or degenerating. In fact, it likely depends on the individual scientists and his or her tradition, community, and perspective.

This leads to the point made most prominently by Thomas Kuhn in the sixties who argued similarly, if not more extravagantly, in terms of paradigms.[14] He pointed out that there is a sociology of knowledge, so to speak, that shapes convictions of scientists in times of major changes in science, which he called revolutionary science. Scientists are shaped by their education, tradition, and community as well as wider beliefs. He notably pointed out that scientists have a tenacity of belief where they are actually reluctant to give up major paradigms even in the face of contrary evidence. Lakatos's model also implies such tenacity of belief in the face of anomalies. This point is also dramatically made by the philosopher of science Mary Hesse, who pointed out that at mid-century, one could sharply distinguish characteristics of faith and of science in two lists. By the eighties, the characteristics of science almost down the line fit the earlier characteristics of faith, namely, influences of tradition, community, education, personal experiences, personal beliefs, context, and so on.[15]

Kuhn made a rough distinction between revolutionary science and normal science. When scientists are largely working within a common paradigm, there is a great deal of agreement on decision procedures in evaluating data and hypotheses. When there is unrest within a paradigm and competing paradigms arise, it is not so easy. People often think of science in terms of "normal science," which is the picture that Dawkins projects. In fact, much of the energy and excitement of science comes in so-called revolutionary science. Both, however, are important. The point is that the establishment of a paradigm is a matter of hermeneutical judgment that is not easily determined apart from interpretation. An interesting note is that, just as Lakatos's model can be applied to theology, one can also see how in theology that within a certain paradigm or research program, there is a great deal of certainty and ways to adjudicate difficulties. For example, a strong Calvinist will interpret passages in Romans as supporting predestination and will take anomalous verses that seem to suggest God desires all to be

saved as meaning “all of the elect” or “all kinds of people.” This is not unlike a political party or an ethical theory being able to answer challenges in their own way with much agreement. This is what Lyotard calls “local determinism,” within a narrative, so to speak.[16] The sharp distinctions that Dawkins and Harris suggest between science and the reasonings of faith do not hold up well even in the philosophy of science.

One final chapter is a particular application of Popper’s Falsification Principle to religious belief in the fifties by Antony Flew.[17] In a parable, often called the Parable of the Invisible Gardener, he suggested that the decision of whether a garden plot found in the woods was cultivated by a gardener should be easily settled by empirical means. Hypotheses should be easily falsifiable or tested, in other words. But when someone appeals to an invisible gardener that cannot be detected by any means, he wonders if they are making even a meaningful assertion. This recalls, of course, the Logical Positivist claim that religious language is not false but meaningless. Flew related it to the religious claim of God caring for people that is challenged by the problem of evil and suffering. He challenges that the various ways of making God’s existence and love compatible with any state of affairs is to kill a fine, brash hypothesis by inches, “the death by a thousand qualifications.” And he provocatively adds, “In this, it seems to me, lies the peculiar danger, the endemic evil, of theological utterance.”[18]

It has been pointed out that this set the challenge for philosophy of religion for a quarter of a century, at least in the Anglo-American world. In actuality, it was a replay of the earlier positivist and falsification discussions but without their benefit. In the first place, it did not deal with the enigma at the roots of a purely empiricist approach to reality that the positivists themselves ran up against. In the second, in using falsification, it omitted the careful qualifications that Popper had set around it—as a means for demarcating scientific investigations from other kinds of investigations. The same philosophical issues had to be dealt with again. This is quite important because Dawkins himself does essentially the same thing. He tends to rely on science as a standard for all knowledge; he also specifically mentions Popper's testability criterion but does not mentions

Popper's restrictions on it. In a sense, the same philosophical issues need to be dealt with yet again!

A couple of notes of interest also arise from this wider debate. One is that Flew's challenge presupposes that nothing can be said that is plausible in light of the problem of suffering and evil, yet a vigorous discussion around that issue has been going on, with important new developments in the last half of the twentieth century. Alvin Plantinga's point that has been convincing to many is that it is quite difficult to demonstrate that evil and suffering disproves the existence of God on any kind of strict logical basis, sometimes called the deductive challenge, which is however the dominant form in which the argument has been posed.[19] The other is that new forms of response in light of contemporary philosophy and science have been posed that do not attempt on the other side to prove God's existence but to make somewhat more plausible the compatibility of the world in which we live with the existence of God. Flew's challenge was not able to take these into account at the time, and Dawkins ignores such reflection because it does fit his image of popular religion—which is the only kind with which he wants to deal.[20] A second point is that Flew also predated the sociological and hermeneutical developments in the philosophy of science mentioned above that showed falsification to be quite limited even in the area of science itself.

Since Dawkins himself tends to suggest only science as the alternative approach to reality, it is significant to see the developments in philosophy of science that show science itself to be hermeneutical at bottom and subject to more interpretation than he suggests. In Kuhn's language, Dawkins generally points to “normal science” that is more settled and not as open to the conflict of interpretations that is often related to people's traditions, religions, and philosophies. When he does turn to the area of contested science such as quantum physics, his language interestingly becomes much more exploratory and open, suggestive of both wonder, uncertainty, and the limits of human perspectives.[21] An “old” atheist such as Nietzsche would question any attempt to find a fixed point of reason that was not subject to what we would now call deconstruction, a la Jacques Derrida, the French poststructuralist. This is true of the dimension of reality most amenable to verification and

falsification, namely, physical reality. It is much more radically true whenever we move beyond it to the realms of values and convictions about any kind of broader philosophical or religious perspective.

The Limits of Science

This is the last point on science that is crucial to realize, one not indicated by Dawkins, namely, the limitations of science. To be fair, this is often not recognized in part due to the prestige that science has had in our culture. It has been realized more than before in the latter part of the twentieth century when the use of scientific results has enabled humans for the first time in history to threaten the existence of all human life on the planet as well as possibly any life—through nuclear warfare, biological warfare, and despoliation of the planet in a variety of ways. The last refers to global warming, to destruction of the rain forests and adequate oxygen for the planet, to nuclear waste, and so on. The threat of science also refers to the Pandora's Box nature of scientific findings such as genetic manipulation that constantly seem to outstrip human ethical capabilities to use it responsibly. Sometimes it is not clear at all what “responsible” even means at this point. Science is seen as both too powerful and too limited. It is powerful in that it can save us and destroy us; it is limited because it cannot answer the questions of how to use its immense power.

Science is powerful in part because it restricts itself to what can be more easily tested intersubjectively. In doing so, it tends to leave out the most important aspects of being human such as the meaning of life; experience of human consciousness, love, beauty, and purpose; and even rational reflection and comprehension. It is quite limited in dealing with reality. One of the shocks of chaos theory in the twentieth century was the realization that most science up to that time was predicated on focusing on the dimensions of reality that are predictable and deterministic, which are rarely encountered in the wild, so to speak. Much physical reality is unpredictable, with the weather being the prime example in chaos theory, but one could also look at boiling water, the dripping of a faucet, or the behavior of crowds—the latter being the bane of the predictions of economists who tend to fare as well as meteorologists. The

discovery of deep structures beneath the chaos is fascinating but does not eliminate chance.[22]

Alfred North Whitehead, one of the coauthors of the major work on symbolic logic in the twentieth century and who especially developed process philosophy that builds chance into its deep structure, called the mistake of seeing scientific accounts of what science can control as what is most real "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness."[23] We are sometimes unaware that scientific descriptions are relative abstractions that omit much of concrete reality. Science in fact is much more limited than we often think. It is like a microscope that in its minute focus helps us see one aspect while making it almost impossible to see the whole. As is often pointed out, science has had a very difficult time dealing with human consciousness, choice, and free will. In fact, many scientists question whether there is choice or free will—at the very moment that they are making choices and urging others to make choices, which assumes freedom to make the choice. Whatever the final verdict on those difficult issues, science itself tends to leave out the question and deal with what it can control. For example, in the classes in the psychology department at the college where I received my degree with a heavy emphasis on experimental psychology, we were forbidden to talk about feelings or experiences. We could only speak of what could be measured and quantified, for example, the measurements of brain states, neurons firing, and so on. Of course, it took human consciousness, language, and reasoning to make sense of such experiments, but we could not deal with the latter scientifically. This approach can deliver quite amazing results; it is powerful. This deceives us, however, into missing how limited it is and how much it leaves out—leaving out what many would call the most important dimensions of reality, certainly of human life. One might think of a key that is very effective in the right keyhole but is not that helpful for other keyholes—or for much else. We have found that science can unlock many doors, but we often lose sight of how many other doors it cannot unlock. And an important thing to realize is that it is in a sense by definition unsuited for those other doors. It limits itself in order to be effective but renders itself useless for many other things. In this light one can see how unstable a foundation this is for the new atheists to use

as a basis for dealing with all human issues. Here is where the plot thickens.

A Hermeneutics of Faith—or Unfaith

The implication of Dawkins's rhetoric is that reliance on science and reason leads us to good morals without the help of religion. He is surely right that an atheist can be moral—and he is right to protest the discrimination that atheists receive because of a common assumption that they cannot be.[24] It is quite another step, however, to assume that the only rational position is to be an atheist and that it will lead to morality and justice, especially when the rationality one assumes is scientific rationality. There has hardly been any other religion more contested by reason than Christianity in the modern period. The upshot is on the one hand that Christianity cannot prove itself to be true in any neutral, objective way. On the other hand, neither science nor philosophy has been able to disprove religious faith in general. Science, as we have seen, is not fitted for the task, one way or the other. Philosophy has now seen the limits of Enlightenment reason, an aspect of which is the incapacity of any reason to be neutral and to speak, as we noted above, from a God's-eye-point-of-view. Reason and science do not lead ineluctably to religion—but neither do they lead ineluctably to atheism. We are all in the same boat, as it were. There is not a superior boat with science and atheism, as Dawkins presents it. There is one boat, and we are all on it. We might call this a hermeneutical boat. Let me explain further.

The upshot of philosophy at the end of modernity is to realize that in one way or another, we are all hermeneutical beings, a point that Martin Heidegger made early in the twentieth century.[25] We have seen that this true even in science at a basic level. It is even more true in other areas of human life. And we are not yet talking about religion; this would include ethics very importantly but also politics, literature, art, and much of philosophy as it pertains to the ultimate nature of reality and worldviews. In fact, politics is a good example. People have strong convictions; it's not that everyone is a relativist and wishy-washy. And people give arguments and evidence for their views. Yet we are aware that there are no knock-down arguments that can coerce everyone else to one position. Politics involves

values and a view of meaningful reality that is too complex for such a view—even though at times many like to think that theirs is the only rational view! In short, objective arguments and evidence "underdetermine" the conclusions. The equivalent to Dawkins's view in the political realm is to choose one narrow view and argue that it is the only rational, scientific one. Most would see quickly through such a ploy. One of Heidegger's students, Hans-Georg Gadamer developed Heidegger's seminal insights in terms of the universality of hermeneutics.[26] His major book, *Truth and Method*, was an extended argument to show that one cannot answer the major questions of the human sciences, much less the natural sciences, by appeal to a neutral method. He challenged the Enlightenment ideal of a capacity to have a presuppositionless perspective, in other words, a God's-eye-point-of-view, by calling it provocatively the Enlightenment prejudice against prejudice."[27] His larger point was to agree that these prejudices or preunderstandings can sometimes be harmful, but the answer is not to convey the illusion that one can transcend them but to see that they are also helpful. They are what give us an initial interest and purchase on anything. The answer is not to pretend to an ahistorical standpoint, which actually leads to blindness to the effects of our contextual influences and so to increased bias, but to work critically with our standpoints.[28]

Human life is too complex for such an easy answer as we saw above, namely, that if we just turn to "reason," of course defined in terms of the proponent's individual conception of reason, all will go well without much disruption. The "old" atheists saw through the deceptiveness of this very well. In fact, they saw that things get more difficult, not less, without God, precisely because God is a ground of certain values. Nietzsche expressed this vividly in his Parable of the Madman:

> *The Madman*. Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Why, did he get lost? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Or

emigrated? Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his glances.

“Whither is God” he cried; “I shall tell you. *We have killed him*--you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the while? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. "How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us—for the sake of this deed he will be part of a higher history than all history hitherto.”

> Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out. “I have come too early,” he said then; “my time has not come yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering—it has not yet reached the ears of man. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds require time even after they are done, before they can be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than

> the most distant stars---*and yet they have done it themselves*."
>
> It has been related further that on the same day the madman entered divers churches and there said his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said to have replied each time, "What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"[29]

One can imagine that Nietzsche's reaction to the optimism of a Dawkins or Harris that simply getting rid of belief in God would leave everything as it nicely is.

Jean-Paul Sartre similarly excoriated those who were blissful about getting rid of belief in God thinking to render things much simpler and easier. He said,

> In other words – and this is, I believe, the purport of all that we in France call radicalism – nothing will be changed if God does not exist; we shall rediscover the same norms of honesty, progress and humanity, and we shall have disposed of God as an out-of-date hypothesis which will die away quietly of itself. The existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. . . . . Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism – man is free, man *is* freedom. Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour. Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. – We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free.[30]

As one can see, both Nietzsche and Sartre were especially critical of those like the new atheists who thought that one can discard God without dealing with the serious consequences—for reason itself. What both Nietzsche and Sartre are also stressing is how difficult it is to determine what is ethical without God. Religious believers can attest to how difficult it often is even with belief in God. In both cases, hermeneutical judgment is involved that is not rationally coercive upon others. And what is more, even the judgment that there is or is not a God, or a specific God, is such a judgment. There is no neutral, scientific, rational position above the hermeneutical fray. There is no place outside the hermeneutical boat, especially when it comes to such judgments about the basic meaning and nature of reality.

The hope that Dawkins seems to express is that ridding ourselves of religion would eliminate the cause of much evil in the world and leave ethical mores more or less alone. This is not to say, here agreeing with Dawkins, that atheism per se cannot be moral (again raising the question, however, of "Whose morality?"). It's just that atheism per se does not give any guidance about morality, either, despite Dawkins's thought that atheists are highly moral—and, as Nietzsche and Sartre point out, raises severe challenges for the foundations of morality, albeit challenges that they thought humans may be able to surmount. The problem is that getting rid of God does not rid us of human beings. There is little reason to think that atheism per se is a panacea, given the track record of strongly atheist regimes such as Nazi Germany, Communist Russia, or Communist China. Dawkins wants to distance himself from these by saying that they are not atheists like him, but it is not clear why certain religious believers who fight against such violence and injustice could not similarly distance themselves from religious perpetrators.

An aspect of Dawkins's distancing maneuver is also significant. He says that Stalin did not wreak his evil because of his atheism; it was because of his Communism.[31] This is a fair point, but it also brings up a difficulty with Dawkins's position. Atheism is difficult to generalize about because it is a negative. It's a lack of belief in something, not an indication of what one does believe. It's like a religious person saying that they and

many others are non-Communists (which in the Soviet Union was a kind of state atheism predicated upon science). One would be hard put to generalize about all such “non-Communists.” Even if one is an atheist, one will have values, meanings, and a worldview. To say that one cannot generalize about atheists, as Dawkins asserts here, undermines his other attempts to suggest that atheists are more moral than others.[32] Maurice Merleau-Ponty was a close colleague of Sartre and a fellow atheist, but he expressed Sartre's phrase in this way, “Man is condemned to meaning.”[33] People will come up with certain values, and there is no secure standpoint in science or in reason to show what those values must be. Religious folk cannot thus be ruled out on the basis of reason or science, but neither can Dawkins and atheists be ruled out. Is there some alternative to prohibiting one group or another from coming to the table or climbing into the boat?

A Hermeneutical Alternative

One might draw the conclusion from the discussion above that there is little place for reason or argument at all in discussions of human values and meaning. This is not necessarily the case, although relativism is a constant specter that neither Nietzsche nor Sartre could be said to avoid. Another approach is to recognize that discussions of ethics, of politics, of beauty, and of ultimate reality is inescapably complex. Even the Apostle Paul could say that we see through a glass dimly. Many of the most admired spiritual and theological figures in many religions emphasize the mystery of God or of ultimate reality and the way that it strains human capacity to speak and to understand. It calls for a different kind of reason than the more limited instrumental reason of science.

Paul Tillich called it ontological reason.[34] One could call it hermeneutical reason. It is closer to the kind of reason and judgment in art and literature than in “normal science.” It allows for one to draw on science insofar as it is relevant but sees how such external reasons and arguments underdetermine the conclusions. It sees how one's larger view is more of a pattern that is grasped as a whole rather than by adding up the parts. The Oxford philosopher Basil Mitchel put it once by saying it is more like the legs of a chair than the links of a chain.[35] It then

allows that people of good will may have different judgments, but they are not thereby seen as irrational. This is a significant shift from much of the Western tradition where to be rational was to have the truth. One can be rational and still be wrong—or partially wrong and right.

Habermas is one of the most prominent philosophers, an atheist, who has sought for a way to deal with such diversity and plurality in the public sphere. He was in the tradition of Critical Theory who lamented the over-dependence upon scientific, instrumental reasoning, although he championed its value in its sphere.[36] At a certain point, he seemed to search for a neutral, objective standpoint. Yet he has moved to an approach to truth in terms of discourse with each other. He thinks that the way forward, and the way closer to the truth, is to talk with one another. More than that, it is to welcome all to the table and give all an equal voice, to hear all reasons and arguments. More recently, he has been newly open to welcoming those with religious perspectives to the table. The hope is that we can learn from each other. From another perspective, Ricoeur argued at one point that religious believers need to pass through the fires of atheism as part of the strenuous process of belief. He pointed to a postcritical faith that had worked through the infantile and immature aspects of faith with the help of atheists such as Nietzsche, Freud, and Sartre, which often have led to the notorious excesses of religion.[37]

Unlike Habermas, I am not as sanguine that this will lead to agreement. He is still more confident of reason to lead to a common conclusion than I am in these complex areas of values, politics, and ultimate reality. Yet I think in the public sphere, his approach is much more promising than the desire of the new atheists to rid the table of religious believers—and than the desire of perhaps the old religionists to rid the table of atheists and every other religion but their particular brand.

Religious believers have often failed to treat atheists as a "neighbor." In this, Dawkins and others are right to lament the hypocrisy of religion. Yet Dawkins is much too quick to dismiss religion, and even popular religion, as being unreasonable and cruel. It stands to reason that a religious person would be more aware of the multitude of believers through the centuries who have opposed evil and violence. It is not just a few ivory tower

intellectuals who have been more “moderate,” as Dawkins puts it.[38] It is has often been non-intellectuals who have led the way for peacemaking rather than warmaking. Those with faith such as most of the founders of the great religions and many followers have sacrificed greatly for the sake of peacemaking. And they still have much to bring to the table, as Habermas acknowledges. As Dawkins points out, atheists like him also have much to bring to the table. We have seen that Dawkins's modernist presumption that there is one rational, scientific table just for atheists is untenable or scientific and philosophical grounds themselves. Rather than attempting to restrict the table in turn, it seems much more promising in the public sphere to welcome Dawkins to the postmodern, hermeneutical table at which we all sit where we can continue, peaceably we hope, to make our various cases to each other—which might often be made better in story and poem than in prose—and also to make our various contributions to each other.

Notes

1 See especially Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).
2 John F Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), chap. 2. In many respects, I am just filling out in some aspects the incisive remarks of Haught.
3 Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 37.
4 See for fuller discussions A. J. Ayer, “Editor's Introduction,” in *Logical Positivism* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 3-10; Dan R Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol, and Story* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 37-47.
5 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, Great Books of the Western World 35 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 509.
6 Peter Achinstein and Stephen Francis Barker, eds., *The Legacy of Logical Positivism: Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), v.
7 A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1946), 107-9; C. E. M. Joad, *A Critique of Logical Positivism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 9.
8 Ayer, “Editor's Introduction,” 15.

9 A major critique of this positivist viewpoint is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method (New York: Humanities Press, 1962).
10 For example, see Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology*, trans. H. F. Snijders (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 4.
11 A. J. Ayer, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 131-4; Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 41.
12 Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974, 1974).
13 Nancey C. Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
14 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
15 Mary Hesse, *Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 171-72.
16 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Frian Massumi and Geoff Bennington, Theory and History of Literature 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1984), xxiv.
17 Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Alasdair C. MacIntyre and Antony Flew (London: SCM Press, 1955), 96-99.
18 Ibid., 97.
19 Alvin C Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974).
20 Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990); Brian Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering, and Religion* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976); John Hick, *Evil and the God of love*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship Between Science and Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 81-84; E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence: The Jesus Story of the Compassion of God* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995).
21 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 406-20.
22 James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987); John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005), 5.
23 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1953), 51.
24 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 26, 67.
25 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Edward Robinson and John Macquarrie (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 188-95.
26 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. David E. Linge, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 3-17.
27 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 270.
28 Ibid., 269.

29 Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Gay Science,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann, The Viking Portable Library (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 95-96.
30 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: New American Library, 1975).
31 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 315-16.
32 It is almost humorous when Dawkins suggests at one point that atheists are “better” because they are probably more educated and/or intelligent! Ibid., 262.This would suggest that rank and file Communists must have been very smart for an entire population! But Dawkins would be hard put to show, “scientifically” of course, that higher intelligence or education is correlated with higher morality. And then one must deal with the question, “which morality” and “whose education”? Haught does quite a good job of dealing with the issue of Dawkins's parochial view of morality when considered worldwide and also his attempt to ground morality in evolutionary ethics. Haught, *God and the New Atheism*, chap. 5-6.
33 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xix.
34 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 71-75.
35 Basil Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Beliefs* (New York: Oxford Universtiy Press, 1981), chap. 3.
36 For an excellent recent summary of his works and its development, see Lasse Thomassen, *Habermas: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010).
37 He often referred to Freud's language of “working through” (Durcharbeiten) psychological suffering towards health. Paul Ricoeur, “Religion, Atheism, and Faith,” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde, trans. Denis Savage, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 440-67.
38 In another strange argument, which Dawkins connects with Harris, they maintain that moderate faith makes the problems of faith more likely, so we should not have moderate faith. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 342. This presents a Catch-22 for religion. If it lives up to the expectations of Dawkins, it only perpetuates bad religion. It cannot win. Yet when problems of atheists, bad atheism, so to speak, are raised, such as Stalin, we have seen how Dawkins is quick to distance himself from them and to promote “good atheism.”

Toward a Conspiracy of Doves: Seeking Common Cause with the New Atheism

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Introduction

People with religious commitments or spiritual orientations of any kind can learn much about their own religious communities and traditions, the larger universe, and themselves from the "*New Atheism*,"[1] even if *religious* disciples of the movement, for various reasons, do not ultimately convert to this anti-religious perspective. Beyond the obvious reasons that religious persons may perceive for disagreement with this anti-religious trajectory of thought, however, the neo-atheists themselves have placed some additional and unnecessary obstacles along the route to the very conversation and common cause with religious persons and communities that this atheistic movement requires to achieve the most important of its own aims. Rather than focus upon those additional obstacles, though, I draw attention instead to a point of contact within the perspective of the New Atheism at which point religious people can meet with the neo-atheists to cooperate in a shared aim.[2]

This essay, therefore, briefly explores *that point of contact in the basic claims of the New Atheism* where both religious persons and the new atheists might meet to initiate *creative conversation* and to develop *common cause*, an exercise that holds potential for realizing the most important goal of the New Atheism.[3] In this respect, my assaying or weighing of the New Atheism will suggest a constructive possibility, proposing a practical experiment toward that common cause. In this sense, my essay *poetically suggests a world* in which the new atheists and religious persons may benefit from one another in cooperative purpose.[4]

A. Three Relevant Major Claims of the New Atheism

Three of the most fundamental claims that the New Atheism makes disclose the fundamental point of contact in the primary aims of New Atheism at which religious persons and the neo-atheists might meet.[5] Although I cannot provide accounts here of all arguments or evidence with which the neo-atheists support their claims, they develop extensive arguments and supply numerous forms of evidence as warrants for the following claims.[6]

1. The new atheists strongly claim that one major factor has motivated them to communicate systematically and publicly their anti-religious, scientific-materialistic perspective. The urgency of the present global crisis—particularly with respect to the key role of violent religious extremism at least in exacerbating if not producing this current situation—has obligated the neo-atheists to employ science and reason both to study religion and to expose the untruthfulness and harmfulness of religious beliefs and practices. According to the neo-atheists, given the existing technologies that already possess the potential "to cause global catastrophe," "a toxic religious mania," which can arise from the beliefs about God and reality that religious extremists hold, can multiply the world's jeopardy "to the maximum," putting "at risk what *we* hold dear," ending "human civilization overnight."[7]

2. Due to the role of religion in the contemporary global crisis, the New Atheism explicitly calls *religious* people to responsibility as well. Daniel Dennett has formulated this claim most carefully. Although the neo-atheists as a whole intentionally do not engage to any significant degree with those whom they describe as "moderate" religious persons or scholars, as Dennett says, neo-atheists claim that all religious persons have an obligation to participate "actively and publicly" in "the unpleasant and even dangerous work of desanctifying the excesses in each [religious] tradition *from the inside*." In other words, the neo-atheists hold "moderate" religious people "responsible for reshaping their own religion," whatever the religious tradition or community.[8]

3. In light of the contemporary threat to human survival that has motivated the movement of New Atheism and the intention of the neo-atheists to encourage if not to inaugurate a new and an anti-religious enlightenment, the neo-atheists also claim that

they aim "to make the world a better place for people to live" and to contribute to resolving global problems. The neo-atheists also assert that science and reason, the primary tools for that work, improve the world for people as well, aiding the neo-atheists themselves in accomplishing this larger goal. Dennett, for example, wants "… the resolution to the world's problems to be as *democratic* and *just* as possible," both of which require "… getting on the table for all to see as much of the *truth* as possible," even when "the truth hurts." Furthermore, in order to realize this goal, Dennett and other neo-atheists advocate (a) having open and calm discussion, (b) maintaining "faith in our open society," because "the security of a free society" underwrites "[s]uch open discussions," and (c) vigilantly "protecting the institutions and principles of democracy from subversion."[9]

B. Point of Contact with the New Atheism

The neo-atheists have constructed a network of many claims, which they support with substantial research, evidence, and argumentation. Religious people can (and even must) agree with many aspects of several claims by the new atheists, even though retaining reservations and questions both about many of the basic claims themselves and about the range of research or evidence that the neo-atheists deploy to support those claims. Among the major claims of the New Atheism, however, a significant point of contact appears where religious people, most especially people with "*moderate*" religious perspectives, may meet with the neo-atheists to initiate creative conversation with the aim of finding and pursuing a common goal, aim, or cause.

Stenger states that "[the neo-atheistic] dispute with believers is purely an intellectual one."[10] According to major claims in the movement of the New Atheism, to the contrary, the intellectual dispute appears to revolve around a more fundamental disagreement about the nature of community itself. Thus, when the neo-atheists announce that they have begun their own work because they perceive an urgency that results from the role of extremist religion in the contemporary threat to global community, when the neo-atheists claim that religious people must work within their religious communities to de-sanctify and to eliminate such religious excesses, and when the neo-atheists

aim to make the world a better place for people, a point of contact has opened for creative conversation and discovery of common cause with religious people, at the very least with people of "moderate" or progressive religious perspectives.

With this goal, the neo-atheists endeavor passionately to improve the global human community, even to heal a *dis*-eased world, and finally to nurture a healthy global community. By listening carefully to the neo-atheists and taking appropriate measures, especially to fulfill the responsibilities that the neo-atheists claim belong to people with moderate religious perspectives, religious people can work toward this end as well. As Dennett clearly indicates, this goal constitutes a *political* pursuit, in the most basic and positive meaning of concern about the *polis* ("the city" or, by a broad metaphorical extension, the global community), an aim that requires patience and intention to make the world a better place for people.[11]

The three major claims that I have summarized from the larger perspective of the New Atheism together form the point of contact at which religious people and neo-atheists can meet constructively and beneficially for conversation, in order to pursue a common cause with one another.[12] Thus, although the New Atheism unnecessarily obstructs progress toward conversation and common cause between religious people and the neo-atheists themselves, the New Atheism simultaneously and generously offers resources for progress toward that goal as well. In this regard, I very much proceed in the way that John D. Caputo claims to deal with tradition more broadly construed: "dealing with [the New Atheism] opportunistically, taking what [religious people] can use, while declining to offer a general theory [or theology] that [the New Atheism] is either deeply true on the one hand or deeply fraudulent on the other hand." In other words, although I perceive problems of consistency and coherence within the larger perspective of the New Atheism, I have not conducted an examination to refute or to invalidate this intellectual and political movement. By contrast, more than ever, I envision the development of common cause between religious people and the neo-atheists as a promising possibility. Thus, I also adopt an exploratory, hopeful, and pragmatic strategy, one that resembles Caputo's own "Derridean deconstructive strategy": "proceeding on the basis of what we ourselves have

made *questionable*, using something about which we ourselves have urged *vigilance*, depending on something about which we can offer *no assurances*, noticing that the limb upon which we are perched is *breached* in a critical place."[13]

Although the neo-atheists genuinely endeavor to demonstrate the irrationality, falsity, harmfulness, and immorality of religion (most especially fanatical and extremist forms of religion), and contrastingly to demonstrate the rationality, truth, helpfulness, and morality of the New Atheism, their claims and arguments serve a larger cause. *They aim to resolve global problems and make the world a better place for people, specifically and most pressingly by resisting and inhibiting, if not eliminating entirely, the potent role of religion in the urgent, contemporary, threat to survival of humanity, indeed of the entire global community*.

In the claims and major aim of the neo-atheists, of course, religion already plays a significant role, but largely as the one major element (religious extremism) in the global threat that the neo-atheists rightly fear. By the claims of the neo-atheists themselves, this factor (as most powerfully represented by the catastrophic events of 11 September 2001) largely motivated the inauguration of this neo-atheistic movement. Because the neo-atheists have summoned religious people to assume responsibility for curtailing or eliminating extremist religion within their own traditions and communities, the neo-atheists have effectively, even if implicitly, invited the religions and religious people to join in this larger political goal of the New Atheism. Nevertheless, the neo-atheists, notably Dennett, have asked that responsible religious people assume this task themselves, working and moving on a separate track entirely from the scientific-materialistic neo-atheists themselves.[14]

Against that background, my proposal includes two major components. (a) I propose that religious people (and organized religions themselves) intentionally and courageously, *on the basis of both key religious values and other values that they share with the neo-atheists*, respond to this neo-atheistic call and explicitly join in this larger political cause of the New Atheism. (b) Correspondingly, I also propose that the neo-atheists themselves, *also on the basis of correlative key scientific values and other values that they share with religious people*, welcome

such committed religious people and organized religions into the work with the neo-atheists themselves, not merely acknowledging this work by religious people as occurring independently on some sort of parallel track to the work of the neo-atheists. In order for this proposal to succeed, it must hold potential for both religious people and neo-atheists. *Only through such a cooperative endeavor can both religion and the New Atheism hope to avert the catastrophic threats to human survival and the global community that remain not only possible, but probable as well, in a world where religious extremists can acquire and deploy the various forms of technological mass-destruction that science has produced*.

C. Poetic Possibility

Historically, conceptual, linguistic, rhetorical, and political conflict and warfare have characterized the relationship between science and religion. The neo-atheists certainly have retrieved and re-activated that rich yet tragic tradition. Additionally, however, the neo-atheists have also quite accurately in most cases demonstrated real problems within religion as well. Religion has aggressively played its own role in engendering, deepening, and expanding this conflict with science. The growing body of contemporary religious literature *against* the New Atheism provides recent and ample support for this claim. In spite of this mutual aggression, what sort of constructive results has such conceptual conflict in the current debates between religion and the New Atheism produced?

In answer to that question, I explore a simple analogy to a law from physics. According to the law of the conservation of energy, "[e]nergy can neither be created nor destroyed." In any process or event, an isolated system always conserves the total energy of the system. The system neither makes new energy nor loses existing energy. An event, though, can change energy "from one form to another." For example, imagine two trains, travelling from opposite directions toward one another on the same track at high velocities, that collide with one another and then come to a stop. The system conserves the total energy of that collision. According to this physical law, while the system does not *conserve* the kinetic energy of the event, the system does *convert* that kinetic energy into other forms of energy:

sound, heat, or another form. The existing relationship between religion and science, as posed by both the neo-atheists and many conservative, traditional, or fundamentalist religious people and scholars, resembles such a wreck. In the most recent collision between religion and science, much of the kinetic energy of both neo-atheists and religious people has already converted into heat and sound, but has produced very little light. This collision has not achieved many of the larger aims from either side, even when considering this collision in terms of the scientific definition of work: "[w]ork is done upon a body when a force causes the body to move along the line of force."[15] Thus, neither have religious scholars yet surrendered to scientific atheistic arguments nor have neo-atheists yet conceded to religious counter-arguments. The relationship between neo-atheists and religious people continues to proceed as a war in which both parties define one another as enemies, in which one opponent aims to defeat the other opponent, in which a clear winner and a clear loser must emerge.

I propose an alternate possibility, an experiment in practical reason, the analogy for which I have borrowed from the evolutionary research of Dawkins himself.[16] This experiment proceeds by moving beyond that which game-theorists define as a "zero sum game": a game in which one player wins, and the other player loses. As Dawkins expresses it, because one player aims to win, that player must make the other player lose. Contrastingly, I suggest that religious people (especially "religious moderates") and neo-atheists play a "non-zero sum game," in which the two players join together in a common goal against a shared challenge.[17] In this case, however, religious extremism in itself does not appear as the sole shared challenge. Rather, all religious people (including violent religious extremists), all neo-atheists, indeed all humans, face a much more serious common challenge: an immediate threat to human survival, indeed a threat to the entire global community. Religious extremism contributes only one major, yet an energizing or a motivating, component to that threat, with scientific knowledge, technology, existing "weapons of mass destruction," human needs, economic exploitation, political ambitions, environmental degradation, among a variety of other factors, providing a few of the other major components.

Dawkins argues that studies of human evolution have demonstrated that "all life evolves by the differential survival of replicating entities." Biologically, life evolves through genetic replication or transmission of successful characteristics: a gene, of course, serves as the basic unit of biological transmission. Dawkins, however, has hypothesized an analogous replicator of ideas and concepts that he has called a "meme," the basic "unit of cultural transmission," "defined as an entity that is capable of being transmitted from one brain to another." According to Dawkins, "[j]ust as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation." In the same way that genes become part of an evolutionary stable strategy, the evolutionary process chooses memes. Memes must compete with one another for survival in the "meme-pool," dominating "the attention of a human brain … at the expense of 'rival' memes." Accordingly, memes share with genes the same three qualities "that make for high survival value": (a) "longevity" or strength for persisting over time; (b) "fecundity" or their "speed of replication" in, or acceptability to, a population; and (c) their "accuracy of replication" or "copying-fidelity."[18]

According to Dawkins, like genes, memes replicate blindly, unconsciously, and without foresight. Also like a gene, therefore, a meme or "… a cultural trait may have evolved in the way that it has, simply because it is *advantageous to itself*." A replicator, whether a gene or a meme, will tend towards the evolution of "selfish" qualities, not foregoing "short-term selfish advantage even if it would really pay it, in the long term, to do so." Moreover, Dawkins follows Juan Delius in understanding memes on analogy with parasites, on a continuum that runs from "malignant parasites," on one end of the spectrum, to "benign 'symbionts,' " on the other end. In a brief consideration of malignant memes, Dawkins introduces the term, "memeoids," a term that Keith Henson coined to denominate " 'victims that have been taken over by a meme to the extent that their own survival value becomes inconsequential.' " Thus, while one might describe a meme as "good" (as Dawkins so describes the meme of "meme" itself) because of the qualities that give it a high

survival value in a population, the meme might actually function malignantly in its human host.[19]

Despite the ways in which replicators can exploit their environments (most specifically to the point here, the ways in which memes evolve fully to exploit the human brain's capacity for imitation), Dawkins identifies one "unique" human feature that offers hope against malignant memes or "the worst selfish excesses of the blind replicators" and their memeoids: the human "capacity for conscious foresight," the human "capacity to simulate the future in imagination." Accordingly, as Dawkins expresses it, "[humans] have at least the mental equipment to foster [their] long-term selfish interests rather than merely [their] short-term selfish interests"; "[humans] have the power to turn against [their] creators [genes, biologically, and memes, culturally]"; "[humans], alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators." Not only do humans already rebel in small ways against the tyranny of selfish memes, Dawkins says that humans have "no reason why [they] should not rebel in large ways too."[20] Not only from the perspective of my values as a progressive religious person, but also on the basis of Dawkins' own scientific research into replicators (especially memes), I propose precisely such a rebellion.

In studies of strategies by which members of a species pass on their genes to the next generation, Dawkins examined evidence that researchers have gathered through the use of game-theory. The research indicated that "nicer" strategies tended to have more long-term success than "nastier" strategies. The research yielded three characteristics of a "winning" or "successful" strategy, meaning "one that dominates the population" in terms of "offspring": (a) "niceness" or the tendency of never becoming the first one to refuse cooperation with competitors, but doing so "only in retaliation"; (b) "forgivingness," the possession of "a short memory for past misdeeds," or a tendency swiftly "to overlook old misdeeds"; and (c) non-enviousness or the willingness for one's competitor to succeed as well as one does, so long as both competitors win more from the larger challenge to the success of both competitors.[21]

According to Dawkins, for an evolutionary stable strategy, "the best strategy for an individual depends on what the majority of the population are doing." In an account of the application of

this finding to research on aggression, Dawkins examined research on hypothetical strategies for fighting in a species. In one model, two strategies existed in a hypothetical species, which the researchers designated respectively as "*hawk* and *dove*," although the two names refer only "to conventional human usage," without scientific connection to the actual "habits of the birds" from which the researchers derived the names. In this hypothetical pair of fighting strategies, "[h]awks always fight as hard and as unrestrainedly as they can, retreating only when seriously injured," while "[d]oves merely threaten in a dignified conventional way, never hurting anybody." In this model, the research indicated that an evolutionary stable strategy would include an almost equal number of doves and hawks, with a slightly larger ratio of hawks. Dawkins notes, however, that, if everyone in the model "would agree to be a dove, every single individual would benefit." In other words, although "a conspiracy of nothing but doves is not quite the most successful possible group," an "all-dove conspiracy" provides greater benefits for every individual than a ratio of hawks to doves in an evolutionary stable strategy or "a stable polymorphism." Dawkins argues that, even though conspiracies remain "open to abuse" or vulnerable to "treachery from within," humans can enter into pacts or conspiracies that work to every individual's advantage, even if unstable in the sense of an evolutionary stable strategy, precisely "… because every individual uses his [or her] *conscious* foresight, and is able to see that it is in his [or her] own long-term interests to obey the rules of the pact." With respect to memes, Dawkins also writes optimistically in this regard: "We can see the long-term benefits of participating in a 'conspiracy of doves,' and we can sit down together to discuss ways of making the conspiracy work." Accordingly, Dawkins claims, [w]e have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary, the selfish memes of our indoctrination." Based on his own evolutionary research, he concludes that, "…even with selfish genes at the helm, nice guys can finish first," instead of "last," as the popular saying goes.[22]

Inspired precisely by the optimism of Dawkins, I propose a possibility that he has imagined in its most general and metaphorical form as "a conspiracy of doves." The English word, "conspire," originates from a Latin word, "*conspirare*," a

combination of the preposition "*com*" and the verb "*spirare*," which means "to breath with" or "to breath together."[23] With the use of the term "conspiracy," I set aside, at least temporarily, the negative sense that people most associate with this word and re-appropriate the more original and positive sense of people conspiring: breathing together, agreeing with one another, communicating with one another, planning and working together, sharing and exerting breath in a common task, endeavor, or cause.

Specifically, in order for this strategy to succeed, it must assume the form of a non-zero sum game from the beginning, in which both religious doves and neo-atheistic doves honestly, optimistically, energetically, and urgently join together in their work to meet the shared threat to global community and human survival. Incidentally, on the basis of both scientific and religious research and values, the conspiracy of doves requires both general criteria and specific responsibilities for both religious and neo-atheistic doves.

I. Criteria for Con-Spiring Doves

The scientific research and conclusions of Dawkins suggest a need for seven general criteria. Those criteria include qualities for the survival of the conspiracy of doves, characteristics for the success of the conspiracy, and one fundamental condition for the possibility of the conspiracy.

As a meme itself, the proposed conspiracy must possess the qualities that ensure its survival, if both players in this game really expect to benefit practically from the shared endeavor. From this requirement, emerge the first three criteria: (a) *longevity* to persist over time in the face of many obstacles; (b) *fecundity* or the ability to replicate rapidly in, and to receive acceptance by, the larger population; and (c) *accuracy of replication* among those who join this conspiracy as it persists and functions to fulfill its purpose. Ultimately, the first three criteria function evaluatively, following the initial employment of this strategy.

Moreover, for this conspiracy of doves to work, it must possess the additional characteristics of a successful strategy. Those characteristics supply the second three criteria: (d) *niceness* or the commitment never to initiate refusal of

cooperation with competitors, doing so only as a default to refusal from those competitors; (e) *forgivingness* or the commitment to overlook past wrongs and misdeeds of the other conspirators; and (f) *non-enviousness* or the willingness for all conspirators to succeed, as long as all conspirators overcome the greater challenge to the success of all conspirators. This second triad of criteria permits the strategy to function and defines the character of its operation.

As the final general criterion for the conspiracy of doves, (g) both religious doves and neo-atheistic doves must acknowledge and employ the unique human capacity to remain committed to this pact: *the capacity for conscious foresight*, the capacity to simulate the future in imagination, the capacity to perceive the long-term benefits in fidelity to the rules of the pact. In a conspiracy of doves, without this criterion, the conspiracy of doves cannot succeed as a human endeavor. This criterion supplies the condition of possibility for a genuine conspiracy of doves.

II. Responsibilities for Con-Spiring Religious Doves

Beyond the general criteria for the pact, religious doves themselves have responsibilities that remain specific to them. I suggest only a few key examples.

On the basis of the claims about religion that the neo-atheists have advanced, in light of the criteria for the operation of this conspiracy, religious doves genuinely must initiate the invitation to the conspiracy of doves, most obviously exercising two of the criteria for the operation of this conspiracy from the beginning. First, and most importantly, this conspiracy of doves can only commence when religious doves acknowledge the capacity for conscious foresight that humans possess and exercise that capacity, envisioning precisely the real potential of a conspiracy of doves to achieve a common aim with the neo-atheistic doves. Second, and virtually simultaneously with that initial step, religious doves must begin with the second operational characteristic of the pact: *forgivingness*, overlooking the deplorable history of attacks and recriminations that religion has experienced from science, keeping a short memory about past misdeeds of atheists and even neo-atheists.

Fulfilling the two previous responsibilities will enable religious participants in the conspiracy of doves to open themselves fully to their neo-atheistic co-conspirators. The religious doves of this conspiracy must genuinely listen to the larger complaints about the abuses of religion that the neo-atheists have articulated: for example, Stenger's claim that "Christians have a lot to apologize for"; or Hitchens' assertion that "organized religion ought to have a great deal on its conscience."[24] Extremely important for the coherence of the conspiracy itself, religious doves must hear the more specific complaints about "prejudice against atheists," their marginalization, suppression, exclusion, and mistreatment by religion, both historically and especially in the contemporary setting of the United States.[25] Indeed, religious doves must take seriously the historical evidence for and acknowledge the painful truth of such claims.

Especially within this conspiracy of doves, religious co-conspirators may increase their sensitivity as well as their rational resolve most by regarding the genuine concern for human survival that has motivated the neo-atheistic movement, even understanding the deep and genuine criticisms of religion from this movement as lamentation—and precisely these neo-atheistic forms of lamentation as *prayer*. Precisely the neo-atheistic complaints or lamentations cross paths with specific forms of religious prayer. I recall here a paradigmatic example: Psalm 22 in the Hebrew scriptures of Christian bibles and its key role in biblical accounts about the crucifixion of Jesus. In order to approach genuine empathy with the neo-atheistic doves of this proposed conspiracy, Christian religious doves specifically must find the courage to recover a tradition of lamentation from their own scriptures that biblical writers placed even within the mouth of Jesus: a psalm of lament that expresses a sense of divine silence and even abandonment, that genuinely agonizes over or struggles with claims about divine justice and compassion, that discovers in such struggle a kinship with a divine lamentation itself, and that perceives therein an accompanying "call for a personal and communal practice of compassion in regard to our human brothers and sisters who are not so much guilty as suffering."[26] In this respect, the religious doves of this conspiracy need to receive the neo-atheistic complaints as both

an alert to all religious people about the role of religion in the contemporary crucifixion of the world itself and as *a plea* for an authentic set of criteria by which to measure and to transform the abusive core and forms of religion.

Perhaps as importantly for the religious doves of this conspiracy, such a comportment toward their neo-atheistic co-conspirators may inspire the most original sense of prayer itself, at least as suggested by the etymological history of the English term, "prayer." The infinitive, "to pray," originated from the Latin verb "*precari*," which means "to implore," to "beseech," "to entreat," or to beg, while the English noun, "prayer," originated from the corresponding Latin noun "*precarius*," which refers to that which one does in praying. As etymologists indicate, the Latin noun for prayer or entreaty also provides the basis for the English adjective "precarious." This adjective derives its meaning from the situation of uncertainty, insecurity, or dependence upon "the will or favor of another person," "circumstances," "chance," or even "mere assumptions" in the experience of a person who prays in any sense whatsoever. As Joseph T. Shipley notes about the adjective "precarious," "if [one is] in doubt as to the outcome of a situation, [one is] likely to be full of *prayer*," prayerful, or precarious![27]

From this comportment, religious doves will genuinely acknowledge the problems within religion itself and develop strategies that will correct those problems in healthy and not ultimately reductive ways. Jewish and Christian religious traditions describe such a shift in orientation as repentance: on the one hand, *acknowledging transgression* and *turning from* arrogance, covetousness, laziness, and dishonesty; on the other hand, *avowing transformation* and *turning toward* humility, generosity, responsibility, and honesty. With repentance, therefore, arises genuine moral, social, political, epistemological, axiological, and ontological humility, humility in all forms. From such humility, religious doves can exhibit gratitude for the neo-atheists themselves and that which the New Atheism has to teach all religious people about both religion and the larger world.

Despite the obstacles that have emerged from the New Atheism, religious doves should promote mutual respect in the conspiracy of doves by living and responding respectfully to their

co-conspirators, not responding with anger, resentment, or acrimony. In all cooperative endeavors with the neo-atheists, religious doves must remember to engage in *civil* discourse about shared ultimate values, in order to develop a focused and consistent approach to the common cause of this conspiracy of doves.

Finally, as the primary partners in conversation with religious communities about religious extremism and violence, religious participants in this conspiracy of doves must remember to interact and to communicate with kindness, fairness, mutuality, understanding, shared values and practices, and appeals to shared concern about the urgency of global threats and their religious causes and implications. In such work with other religious people and communities, religious doves must remember to avoid condescending postures of intellectual and moral superiority, maintaining humility toward even religious people and communities with which some religious doves may disagree. Moreover, such an approach to religious people and communities will also engender gratitude for their perspectives from religious people who have joined the conspiracy of doves. Only by diminishing the anxieties and real human needs that exist in many religious communities can a conspiracy of doves, at least from its religious doves, hope to contribute eventually to transforming religious communities and eliminating destructive religious teachings and impulses.

Religious doves in the conspiracy of doves, therefore, must envision new possibilities of cooperation with neo-atheistic doves toward the cause of overcoming global threats to the survival, not only of humanity as a whole, but of the entire ecosystem of life on this planet. Additionally, though, religious doves must continue and expand the many different approaches that they have already taken toward this goal on their own initiatives: inter-religious dialogues at the scholarly level to deepen mutual understanding among the many religious traditions; comparative religious studies and dialogues that seek conceptual and moral points of contact among the many different religious traditions; inter-faith cooperative projects in service to address many other global concerns and to deepen understanding through shared aims; and even the continuing multi-disciplinary, scientific studies of religions and their scriptural traditions.

III. Responsibilities for Con-Spiring Neo-Atheistic Doves

Beyond the general criteria for the pact, of course, a conspiracy of doves requires corresponding specific responsibilities from neo-atheistic doves as well, only a few of which can I suggest here. On the basis of the scientific claims about human life that the neo-atheists employ in support of their arguments, if neo-atheists genuinely seek to eliminate the urgent threat to the survival of the global community and humanity in which they have already invested so much energy, then they will also take steps toward realizing a conspiracy of doves as well.

Again, first, such a conspiracy of doves can only materialize when neo-atheistic doves correspondingly acknowledge and employ the human capacity for conscious foresight to which Dawkins himself has referred and through which he has optimistically claimed that humans can rebel against the most destructive or unhelpful of their genetic and memetic replicators or their biological and cultural creators. In other words, the neo-atheists themselves must envision the real potential of a conspiracy of doves that includes religious doves as well in pursuit of a common political aim.

Second, although neo-atheistic doves also must meet all of the criteria for a conspiracy of doves, the neo-atheists may want to initiate this conspiracy from their side with a different operational criterion. Rather than initially emphasizing the second operational criterion of forgivingness, especially through reflection about the obstacles that neo-atheists have placed along the route toward a common cause with religious doves, the neo-atheists need to indicate that they genuinely welcome religious doves into this conspiracy, emphasizing instead the third operational criterion for the conspiracy of doves: *non-enviousness* or the willingness for religious co-conspirators to succeed, as long as all conspiring doves achieve success against the greater challenge to the global community and human survival. In order to initiate the conspiracy from the other side, neo-atheistic doves will need to find within religion and among religious people that which makes them valuable partners in conversation and contributors to this common cause.

Fulfillment of those two initial responsibilities in the conspiracy of doves will enable neo-atheistic participants in the

conspiracy to open themselves fully to their religious co-conspirators as well. Neo-atheistic doves must genuinely perceive and appreciate the struggles of religious people, but for the sake of the conspiracy itself especially the efforts of religious doves, to overcome the obstacles to this conspiracy that the neo-atheists themselves have left along the path to pursuit of this common goal. The neo-atheists who genuinely want to achieve the ultimate aim of avoiding the threat to global community and human survival will want to remove as many of the obstacles to a conspiracy of doves as possible. I mention a few key considerations to illustrate the character that such accountability from the neo-atheists themselves will need to reflect for a genuine conspiracy of doves to succeed.

Neo-atheists will need to acknowledge that an ambiguity attends the work and contributions of science itself, no less than suffuses the religious history of humanity. For example, even *if* religion carried the full responsibility for motivating terrorism and threatening destruction on a global scale and even the extinction of humanity as a species, religion would still require the means to fulfill that sinister possibility. Religion has not produced the technological, biological, or chemical means of mass-destruction that exist already and have received at least limited employment thus far. The sciences themselves have produced the research and technology for weapons of chemical, biological, and nuclear warfare, as well as the immensely-destructive technology for weapons of more conventional contemporary warfare. Neo-atheists cannot *reasonably* absolve even the so-called pure research of the sciences from its moral responsibilities. Perhaps neo-atheists can theoretically define the methods of the sciences as *a-moral*. Such methods, however, do not function abstractly: *human* scientists, with the faults and frailties that they share with all humanity, apply methods and achieve results, producing new knowledge and technology that they must aid technicians, politicians, and military forces to apply. In other words, the neo-atheists will need to reflect moral as well as epistemological humility about their own claims.

Additionally, if the neo-atheists genuinely intend to thwart the urgent threat to global community and human survival, then they will also need to acknowledge that the impulse of religious doves to form a conspiracy with neo-atheistic doves constitutes a

rational and pragmatic proposal with at least some hope of success. Even if religious doves pursue this goal on the basis of religious values alone, the pursuit and the goal themselves exhibit *rationality* in the *religious* commitments of religious people. For this reason, in order for a conspiracy of doves to succeed, all co-conspirators must recognize the rationality of one another, without intellectual and moral condescension.

Of course, other responsibilities rest on neo-atheists in a conspiracy of doves as well. Chiefly, however, neo-atheistic doves truly must abandon the hostility that they have toward religion in general. They will need to pursue the ultimate goal of this conspiracy of doves with research, evidence, and reason, as they already claim, but set aside their approach to this end as a zero-sum game or a war in which one opponent must win and the other opponent must lose. Should the conspiracy of doves succeed, both religious people and neo-atheists will win against the larger threat to humanity and global community.

I have posed a poetic possibility, in the most basic sense of the English word, "poetics," which originates from the Greek noun, "*poiesis*," and means "creation" or "production."[28] Thus, I have created, produced, or constructed an alternate vision of the world, as a conspiracy of doves, yet a vision that still requires verification through experimentation. I have intentionally borrowed this meme or idea from a neo-atheist, Richard Dawkins, permitting this metaphor to open into a wider sense that includes religious as well as neo-atheistic doves, and to serve as a vehicle to move both religious and neo-atheistic doves beyond the obstacles with which neo-atheists themselves have impeded the route toward their own ultimate goal or cause. For this reason, a conspiracy of doves, a metaphor from scientific studies of evolution, poses another possibility for life together in the world, for shared work in a common cause, for both religious people and neo-atheists.

Conclusion

A practical and not purely theoretical aim has motivated my rather simple, poetic proposal to develop a *conspiracy of doves*: most generally, the aim to join the neo-atheistic cause of making the world a better place for people, and, most specifically, to do so by contributing to the transformation of extremist, violent, and

destructive religion. My proposal, of course, rests on an underlying claim or hypothesis. A conspiracy of doves will come much closer to realizing the ultimate goal of the neo-atheists (thwarting the ultimate threat to global community and human survival) than the present hostility of neo-atheists to the religion that they interpret as almost entirely, if not completely, irrational. Moreover, the present approach of neo-atheists primarily constructs obstacles to a conspiracy of doves that will prevent even the neo-atheists themselves both from remaining consistent with their own claims and from realizing their ultimate aim.

As William James said, "[e]xperience, as we know, has ways of boiling over, and making us correct our present formulas." The poetic proposal to form a conspiracy of doves, one composed of both neo-atheistic and religious doves, illustrates just how experience boils over the sides of its normal containers and may even require such correction of the present rendering of the relationship between religion and science in terms of hostility, warfare, acrimony, aggression, reprisal, and recrimination. Only testing this poetic hypothesis by experimentation with an *actual* conspiracy of doves will reveal the truth or falsity of the *idea* or "*meme*" that Dawkins has postulated.[29]

Also according to William James, "[o]ur obligation to seek truth is part of our general obligation to do what pays." From the perspectives of religious doves, neo-atheistic doves plead precisely this pragmatic point. Beyond all of that which humanity already has at stake in the face of the current global threat, what do neo-atheists and religious people have to lose by experimenting with a conspiracy of doves? Neither neo-atheists nor religious people risk anything new by conducting such an experiment, except perhaps their pride: inevitably, however, they have everything to lose, if they refuse to try something different in the face of such an urgent global threat. Again, the pragmatism of James provides a helpful guideline:

> The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*.[30]

In other words, in order to verify or to falsify the claim to truth of the proposed conspiracy of both neo-atheistic and religious doves, those who desire to thwart the threat to the global community *must conduct the experiment*. The neo-atheists claim that religion (especially extremist religion) functions as the key to the threats against the global community and the survival of humanity. The neo-atheists hypothesize that they can reduce this global threat, if they can discredit, disprove, or invalidate religion scientifically and logically in the minds and lives of most people. By contrast, religious people like me perceive that the neo-atheists have placed unnecessary obstacles along the route to realizing their larger political aim of making the world better by averting disaster. Thus, I have proposed another possibility: *the conspiracy of doves*.

In a sense, then, an experiment always resembles gambling to some degree. If the current situation reflects the ultimate urgency that both neo-atheists and many religious people as well perceive, then the question of whether or not to experiment with a conspiracy of doves very closely resembles Blaise Pascal's famous wager: if the conspiracy of doves succeeds, then everyone wins, except the threat itself; if the conspiracy of doves fails, then no one has lost anything from the experiment itself. As a matter of *fact*, in the face of such a grave threat, would not refusal to conduct such an experiment constitute an even less scientific and less rational response than faith in this possibility itself?[31]

Notes

[1]Victor Stenger, a neo-atheist himself, describes the perspective and summarizes the arguments of this popular, contemporary, intellectual, anti-religious phenomenon. The movement of New Atheism refers primarily to the similar aims and arguments of the following writers: Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Victor Stenger (Victor J. Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* [Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2009], 11-13). Nevertheless, while the new atheists share the same overall perspective, differences on various issues do remain among them.

[2]In my approach to this issue, however, I assay the potential for cooperation between the neo-atheists and religious persons from a particular religious perspective. Without developing a full exposition of my own religious

commitment in this essay, I note that my own religious perspective automatically locates me within a category of religious people that the neo-atheists identify as "revisionist" or "moderate" religious people or "religious moderates," whom the new atheists specifically indict and conversation with whom they intentionally eschew. According to Sam Harris, "[r]eligious moderates are, in large part, responsible for the religious conflict in our world, because their beliefs provide the context in which scriptural literalism and religious violence can never adequately be opposed" (Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* [New York, New York: W. W. Norton, 2004], 45). Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Victor Stenger make similar and related claims: Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, A Mariner Book, 2006), 342, 346, 347; Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London, England, United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 2006), 291, 300; Christopher Hitchens, *god Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York, New York: 2007), 33, 96, 281, 283; and Stenger, *New Atheism*, 111, 238.

[3]David E. Klemm and William Schweiker describe the literary genre of "essay" as follows: "in its original sense," an "*essai*" means "a trial or testing of oneself in response to various topics, subjects, and situations"; "an essay aims at understanding self and others" (David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism*, Blackwell Manifestos Series [Oxford, England, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2008], 4). In terms of usage, the French noun, "*essai*," reflects the following meanings: "trial; attempt, endeavor; experiment, testing, assaying; sample" (*Cassell's French Dictionary: French–English, English–French*, rev. by Denis Girard [New York, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1981], 317). Thus, the English noun, "essay," although coming into English from French, originates from a Latin term, "*exagium*," which designates "the act of weighing"; this Latin term results from the combination of the preposition "*ex*" (which means "out") and the verb "*agere*" (which means "to drive, lead, act, do") (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* [Springfield, Massachusettes: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1971], 17, 284). Thus, three different senses of the term "essay" may emerge, as one weighs or assays one's own perspective and the perspectives of other persons: (1) endeavor (effort or attempt); (2) examination (trial or test); and (3) experiment (sample). In this essay, while I will both "act out" (in terms of methodological exemplification) and "lead out" (in terms of conceptual demonstration) an approach to developing common cause between religious people and the neo-atheists, I will do so specifically and most pointedly in terms of the third dimension of an essay as experimentation.

[4]See the threefold structure of an older study by Paul Ricoeur, in which he begins by considering predominantly *political discourse*, then examining a more explicitly *poetic discourse*, and concluding with reflection on largely *philosophical discourse*: Paul Ricoeur, "Violence and Language," in *Political and Social Essays* by Paul Ricoeur, ed. David Stewart and Joseph Bien (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1974), 88-101. In a larger study of the phenomenon of the New Atheism, I would include three similar stages, but would alter the order: beginning with description of the political pursuit, mediated by examination of philosophical performance, followed by experimentation with a poetic possibility. Nevertheless,

I have limited the scope of my essay to the third moment in such a larger analytical structure. Even this reduction in scope for this essay, however, quite appropriately supports the goal of my own essay, since Ricoeur explores the problem of violence as it emerges in political, philosophical, and poetic discourse, even when "[s]peech, discussion, and rationality also draw their unity of meaning from the fact that they are an attempt to reduce violence" (Ricoeur, "Violence and Language," 89).

In my use of the term "world," I also refer to two ways in which Paul Ricoeur employs the concept of "world" in relation to written texts. In the first usage, with the concept of "world," Ricoeur identifies "the referential dimension" of a text, that "thing" or "issue" of the text, the "about something" of discourse, "the world of the text" that "is not in the text," but exists as an *actual* "extra-linguistic reality" outside the text that the readers and the author share. In the second usage of this concept, according to Ricoeur, by offering a poetic suggestion or proposal as the "world of the text," one temporarily abolishes a "first order reference" to the "ordinary reality" of the situation that currently exists, in order to liberate "a second order of reference which reaches the world not only at the level of manipulable objects, but at the level …" of "… being-in-the-world." Thus, in this essay, following Ricoeur, I refer to two dimensions in the concept of world. (1) With respect to the first meaning, at various points in this essay, when I refer to "the world," I refer to the *actual* world that presently exists for neo-atheists and religious people as the extra-textual reference of the text. (2) With respect to the second meaning of the concept, I also refer to a potential world, "a proposed world, a world that I might inhabit and wherein I might project my ownmost possibilities," "the world properly belonging to this unique text," "new possibilities of being-in-the-world" that this text "open[s] up within everyday reality" (Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer [Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995], 220, 221; idem, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," *Philosophy Today* 17 [Summer 1973]: 140-41). In this sense, when I refer to my "poetic" suggestion, I make room "for the imagination" to permit "a field of previously unconsidered possibilities [to] appear," in order "to explore the new and the possible in the order of the ethical space." Thus, as Ricoeur indicates, realistically I realize that, in this meeting between the neo-atheists and religious people, this aim will remain "a 'wounded' undertaking," occurring in the tension *between* a "poetic[s]," a "utopia," "a morality of conviction," or "a morality of the absolutely desirable," on the one hand, *and* a "politics," a "program," "a morality of responsibility," or a "morality of the relatively possible and also of the limited use of violence," on the other hand (Paul Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy Today* 22 [Fall 1978]: 192).

[5]Although Stenger summarizes the "philosophy" of the neo-atheists, he simply reduces the perspective to the one-line descriptions of the major claims of books by Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and himself (Stenger, *New Atheism*, 238). Stenger also later summarizes "[t]he message of New Atheism."

> Faith is absurd and dangerous and we look forward to the day, no matter how distant, when the human race finally abandons it. Reason is a noble substitute, proven by its success. Religion is an intellectual and moral sickness that

> cannot endure forever if we believe at all in human progress. Science sees no limit in the human capacity to comprehend the universe and ourselves. God does not exist. Life without God means we are the governors of our own destinies (Stenger, *New Atheism*, 244).

[6]Certainly, in some respects, the New Atheism exhibits differences from earlier forms of atheism, at least in terms of emphasis, motivation, organization, and energy. Although I will not address at length the extent of the novelty in the New Atheism, I note here that a large majority of the arguments and even language in the New Atheism closely resemble the claims and arguments of Bertrand Russell from more than half a century ago: see, e.g., Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not A Christian: And Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), v-vii, 6-7, 10-11, 14-19, 20-22, 24, 26, 30-35, 50-56, 79-87, 206. Moreover, for the most part, religious people do not realize the extent to which atheism historically, including the most well-known contemporary variety, has arisen from the problems within theism specifically and within religion more generally (see Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* [New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987], 363).

[7]Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 39, 72, 337-38. Stenger notes that the events of 11 September 2001 motivated the inauguration of the New Atheism: see Stenger, *New Atheism*, 11, 108, 128, 129, 241.

[8]Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 300-301.

[9]Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 24, 334-39. According to Stenger, "[t]he new atheists are not trying to take away the comfort of faith. [They] are trying to show that life is much more comfortable without it." Continuing this line of thought, he states more boldly, yet naively, that, "[n]ot only will a more secular world improve our security by making wars more unlikely, it will allow science and reason to once more help guide government policies …" (Stenger, *New Atheism*, 17).

[10]Stenger, *New Atheism*, 239.

[11]Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 334-39. On the meaning of the terms "*polis*" and "political," see *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 656, 657.

[12]Although this major political aim of the New Atheism holds promise as a point of contact for creative conversation and common cause between the neo-atheists and religious people, in the larger network of claims that characterizes the New Atheism, the neo-atheists have restricted access to that point of contact with axiological, epistemological, rhetorical, and moral obstacles of various kinds. Although I cannot examine these obstacles here, they also constitute a series of interlocking performative self-contradictions within the larger perspective of the New Atheism itself. The description of "performative self-contradiction" that John D. Caputo offers in his debate with James L. Marsh closely resembles the meaning that my use of this concept reflects with respect to the claims of the New Atheism: "A performative contradiction consists in acting upon the basis of what one has *denied*, deploying something of which one has *forbidden* the use, depending on something which one has already *destroyed*, *sawing* off the limb upon which one has perched oneself" (John D. Caputo, "On Being Inside/Outside Truth," in *Modernity and Its Discontents*, ed. James L. Marsh, John D. Caputo,

and Merold Westphal [New York, New York: Fordham University Press, 1992], 56).

[13]Caputo, "On Being Inside/Outside Truth," 56, 57.

[14]Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 300-301.

[15]F. Bueche, *Principles of Physics*, 2d ed. (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), 83, 95. When Stenger explains scientific naturalism to help readers "grasp the interplay between physics and theology," he briefly discusses "[t]he three most important laws of physics": "*conservation of linear momentum*, *conservation of angular momentum*, and *conservation of energy*" (Stenger, *New Atheism*, 164).

[16]As Dawkins commented about his own theory of memes, "[t]he final test of a hypothesis should be experimental" (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 30th anniversary ed. [Oxford, England, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2006; 1st ed. published 1976], 324).

[17]Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 220. In light of Dawkins' entirely negative interpretation of the meme, "faith," I retain some doubt about whether or not my proposal to shift the type of game in which religion and the New Atheism both participate will receive a positive reception—at least from Dawkins himself.

> The meme for blind faith secures its own perpetuation by the simple unconscious expedient of discouraging rational inquiry.
> [Faith] … is a state of mind that leads people to believe something—it doesn't matter what—in the total absence of supporting evidence. … [Faith] is capable of driving people to such dangerous folly that faith seems to me to qualify as a kind of mental illness. It leads people to believe in whatever it is so strongly that in extreme cases they are prepared to kill and to die for it without the need for further justification. … Faith is powerful enough to immunize people against all appeals to pity, to forgiveness, to decent human feelings. It even immunizes them against fear, if they honestly believe that a martyr's death will send them straight to heaven. What a weapon! Religious faith deserves a chapter to itself in the annals of war technology, on an even footing with the longbow, the warhorse, the tank, and the hydrogen bomb (Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 198, 330-31)

[18]Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 17, 192, 194, 196, 197, 322.

[19]Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 200, 322, 323, 330. Also see Juan D. Delius, "The Nature of Culture," in *The Tinbergen Legacy*, ed. M. S. Dawkins, T. R. Halliday, and Richard Dawkins (London, England, United Kingdom: Chapman and Hall, 1991); and H. Keith Henson, "Memes, L_5 and the Religion of the Space Colonies," *L_5 News* (September 1985): 5–8.

[20]Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 200-201, 331-32.

[21]Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 212-13, 215, 220, 225, 228-29, 233, 282-83, 331-32.

[22]Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 67, 69-73, 200, 233.

[23]*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 178.

[24]Stenger, *New Atheism*, 70; Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 56.

[25]E.g, Dawkins, *God Hypothesis*, 63-67.

[26]I borrow from Paul Ricoeur these insights about several conditions that re-actualizing this biblical tradition of lamentation require: Paul Ricoeur, "Lamentation as Prayer," in *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, by André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 230-32.

[27]*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 667, 668; Joseph T. Shipley, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York, New York: Dorset Press, 1945), 280; *idem*, *The Origins of English Words: A Discursive Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 311-12.

[28]*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 654; cf. Ricoeur, "Violence and Language," 94-95.

[29]William James, *Pragmatism*, *The Works of William James*, vol. 1, series ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975), 106, 110.

[30]James, *Pragmatism*, 97, 110.

[31]See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1966), 150-51. According to Hitchens himself, "[t]o 'choose' dogma and faith over doubt and experiment is to throw out the ripening vintage and to reach greedily for the Kool-Aid" (Hitchens, *god Is Not Great*, 278).

The New Atheism

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The news is that atheism sells. The commercial success of several books by the so-called new atheists is notable. In the United States, perhaps the most religious nation in the industrialized world, the reception of works by Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens is fairly remarkable.[1] However, their work has also stimulated criticism of the new atheism as being theologically naïve and uninformed, as displaying a remarkable degree of ignorance of contemporary theology and theologians. This, I take it, is the claim made by John Haught in a series of books on theology and science.[2] Whether the news that atheism sells is good news or bad depends, of course, on one's point of view. I consider it, with some reservations, to be good news, and I hope to explain why in this paper.

I should like to begin by providing, however sketchily, my own reasons for defending atheism, doing so in the spirit of the new atheism, and subsequently respond to a variety of criticisms leveled against the new atheism by Professor John Haught. My arguments in defense of atheism are not new. I owe much to philosophers like David Hume, for example. Moreover, despite the name `new atheism,' there is little in Dawkins or Hitchens or Harris that is especially novel, as Haught points out. They may draw rather more heavily on biology and evolutionary psychology than their predecessors, and they may be more caustic in their styles, although Bertrand Russell did not pull any punches either. However, the main lines of their arguments can be found in earlier writers.[3]

Why Atheism

There is much that could be said about specific theistic religions, much that could be said about the credentials of the Bible or the Koran as the Word of God. However, I will focus on

what unites these theistic religions, the belief in a personal God, who exhibits providential control over the world, who created the world, who is supremely good and who is a fit object of worship. This is the God whose existence I wish to deny. This is the central concept of God in the Western tradition. There may be other concepts of God, but I'd rather not be compelled to take aim at a moving target. I can tackle only one God at a time. That's enough, I take it.

In the history of philosophical and theological thinking, there have been many attempts to provide evidence or proof of God's existence, but the argument that seems to have been the most popular and most influential (though not necessarily among philosophers) is the so called argument from design. For reasons that should become clear later, I would prefer to call it the argument from order to design. It is an argument with a long history. Clear versions of it can be found in Aquinas. (It is the fifth of his five famous proofs we get introduced to in introductory philosophy courses.) Its heyday was in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the notion that the world is essentially like a machine, governed by mechanical laws, was so very popular. The classic formula can be found in William Paley's famous comparison of the world of nature to a watch. If we were to come upon a watch, we would immediately conclude that it must have been designed. No operation of either chance or other natural forces could have brought about this curious, perfect adaptation of means to end. For Paley, the world of nature (his favorite example is the eye) exhibits this same curious adaptation of parts to whole so as to bring about some end. If the watch was caused by design, then by all the rules of analogy, the world of nature must have been brought about by design as well. Similar effects must, after all, have similar causes. It follows, at least with a high degree of probability, that nature too is brought about by the design of an intelligent mind, one like a human mind but "proportioned to the grandeur of the work."

That the five ways of Thomas Aquinas both seem and are more metaphysical should not obscure the fact that they also depend on the science of their day. Thus, while Aquinas' proof from motion (the "more manifest" way) is not exactly a scientific hypothesis, it is a conclusion drawn from a theory of motion that, while widely accepted in the Middle Ages, is scientifically dated

and no longer taken as a viable option in science since, at least, Newton. The assumption that for a body to be set in motion and to be sustained in motion a force is required is essential to drawing the conclusion that there is a First Mover. This "way" amounts to a conclusion drawn from a theory in physics and depends on the accuracy of that theory. Aquinas's fifth way ("from the governess of the world") has as a crucial assumption that, to account for things in nature that lack knowledge acting for the most part in the same way to attain the best possible result, something other than chance is required. The only other option available to Aquinas was that such things were guided by someone or something which has knowledge and intelligence, "and this we call God."[4]

This argument from order to design has a number of advantages over other, more metaphysical arguments. In the first place, it is a relatively simple argument and thus is open to appreciation by nearly anyone, not only the theological elite. Moreover, if it works, it does provide reason for believing in the existence of something like the God of traditional theism. Presumably, God's wisdom must be vastly superior to man's to account for the amazing intricacy of his work. Secondly, as is true of the works of human design, we can learn something of the mind of the creator by studying his creation, something that has often been an important motivation for doing science. And thirdly, as any of us cares about the fruits of our labor, it would seem likely that God would exhibit providential care for his creation as well. So from a religious point of view, the argument has a good deal to be said on its behalf. However, the argument is seriously flawed, as David Hume showed with great skill in his

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.

Time does not permit a full discussion of Hume's critique, but a few of the main points can be noted. In the first place, the analogy is not an especially strong one. What the world of nature and the world of machines have in common is that they both exhibit order. The argument would lead us to believe that it is only order by itself that leads us to the conclusion that the watch is designed, but that is not so. We conclude that the watch is designed because we have had prior experience of things like watches which we know to have been caused by design. It is

that past experience of similar cases which justifies the inference to a watchmaker. As Hume would have it, all causal inference is tacitly based on appeal to the general features of our experience.

However, universes are simply not as plentiful as watches. Think of it this way. Suppose the old proverbial ignorant savage came upon our watch. What would he conclude? Not having experience of anything like a watch, he might not know what to conclude. He might conclude that it was alive if it were still running, for example. Perhaps he would attribute the watch to a God. You have, I hope, seen the film *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. But what *should* he have concluded, if he were rational, but uninformed about things like watches? Well, nothing. Having no past experience upon which to draw, he should conclude that he has no idea what the cause of the watch is, or even if it has a cause. Well, we are to the universe as our savage is to the watch. We should remain silent.

Secondly, think about what it is about machines that causes us to conclude that they are designed. Better yet, think about how an anthropologist sets about deciding whether a particular object is or is not manufactured. Artifacts, unlike what occurs naturally, show the marks of being tooled. When I tour our engineering labs, I have no idea what all those contraptions are or what they are for. But I conclude that they are designed, not because they exhibit order, but because they show the marks of having been tooled. Again, mere order, in the absence of other information drawn from past experience, tells me nothing about the cause of order or if that order even has a cause.

So, the argument from order to design, construed as an analogical argument, is not a very strong argument. The analogy upon which the argument is based, comparing the natural order to a machine, is simply a weak analogy. Hume makes another point which, in certain respects, is even more devastating as it gets at the heart of his charge that the argument is anthropomorphic. If one assumes that the analogy upon which the argument is based is a strong one, what conclusions does the theist want to draw, besides the one that the universe is designed? There are several other conclusions that are fundamental to traditional theism.

1. The universe is designed by one being.

2. The universe is designed by the being that created it.
3. The universe was created from nothing.
4. The designer of the universe is a purely spiritual being and is not a material or physical being.
5. The designer is all good, all-powerful and all wise.

But if the analogy is strong, that is, if the universe is enough like human artifacts to justify the inference from order to design, these other, equally central conclusions do not follow. For example, with respect to machines and human design, the more complex the machine, the more likely it was designed by a number of persons; the more likely that there would be a division of function, perhaps it was made by a person other than its designer. Furthermore, we have no experience of design which brings something into being from nothing, but rather things are created from pre-existing material whose existence is independent of the activity of design, as I might design a house and make it from wood. Moreover, this independent material must already exhibit an order independent of my design if I am to make anything at all from it. In other words *designing* requires material that is already orderly and behaves in predictable ways, independent of design. Furthermore, all design which culminates in creation in the human realm necessarily involves some use of the body to manipulate building materials. Even literary creations must at least be spoken or written, both of which involve the body. And finally, no conclusion regarding the infinity of the deity can be drawn from any such argument. Even if there were only one such designer and creator, all we would be entitled to conclude would be that this being must be sufficiently good, powerful and wise to have created the world as we experience it.

So if the analogy between artifacts and nature were a strong analogy and we stick to the principle that similar effects have similar causes, then what we ought to conclude from the argument is that there are many gods with different functions who have bodies and created this world by rearranging pre-existing materials. As Hume so nicely put it, “Behold the cosmogony of ancient times brought back before us.” So, contrary to its defenders’ intent, what this argument actually supports is some ancient form of polytheism, hardly a welcome outcome for theists!

The usual response to this is that Hume is overlooking the fact that divine design is totally unlike human design. Well, perhaps so, but then the defender of the argument is between a rock and a hard place, as Hoosiers would say. The analogy is either a strong one, in which case polytheistic conclusions follow, not theistic ones, or the analogy is remote, in which case no conclusions can be drawn at all. You can't have it both ways.[5]

Perhaps the most distressing consequence of Hume's critique is that the moral attributes of the deity are equally difficult to fathom with the resources of the design argument. One could talk about the problem of evil for a good long time. How do you square the goodness and omnipotence of God with the evil and suffering in the world? Either God is not all good (since he obviously allows evil he could easily have prevented) or he is not all powerful (since he is unable to eliminate evil). Theists have a whole battery of responses to this problem. Free will is probably the favorite. Evil is the result of human choice. If God were to prevent evils that result from human choices, then we would only be automatons. Moreover, unless there are evils in the world (dangers to be faced, suffering to overcome, etc) there could be no virtue (no courage, no patience). Therefore, for all we know, this is on the whole a better world for the evil that is in it. A world without evil would be a world without free beings capable of developing and exercising virtue.

This rebuttal has its flaws and its complications, few of which we can get into here. However, the main difficulty with the design argument can be appreciated, even if we accept these theistic efforts at theodicy. All they show is that the existence of evil can be shown to be logically consistent with the existence of the God of traditional theism. They do not in any way explain or justify the *inference* to the existence of God from what we can know about the world. The point can be made this way, in the spirit of the design argument itself. On the basis of our knowledge and experience of the world, supposing the world has a cause and that this cause bears some remote analogy to intelligent design, is the ascription of the traditional moral attributes to the deity the most plausible hypothesis? I don't see how this could be supported. Indeed, John Henry Newman did not make use of the design argument in his defense of the rationality of religious belief for just this reason.

> I have not insisted on the argument from *design*, because I am writing for the 19th century, by which, as represented by its philosophers, design is not admitted as proved and, to tell the truth, for 40 years I have been unable to see the logical force of the argument myself. I believe in design, because I believe in God, not in God because I see design.[6]

The design argument, he said, at best teaches us of God's power and wisdom, but nothing of his justice or mercy, which things are of the essence of religion. Newman, as it turns out, read his Hume and was aware of the limits of the design argument in particular and of natural (or physical) theology (the effort to provide evidence from nature about God).[7]

The argument from design can be looked at as an analogical argument, as I have so far done. However, it can also be looked upon as an explanatory argument, what philosophers call an inference to the best explanation. Understood as an explanatory argument, the design argument goes something like this. It is a fact about nature (think here especially of biological systems) that it exhibits order and pattern. What is the best explanation of this order? When the options are, as they were until Darwin, chance or design, clearly, design was the better explanation, the better explanatory hypothesis as it were. The pivotal role of Darwin in this debate is that he proposed a third alternative, descent with modification from common ancestors by natural selection. Darwin's hypothesis is by far the best explanation, compared to design and chance. It is better than design because, as Stephan Jay Gould has pointed out in an essay entitled "Senseless Signs of History,"[8] organisms show evidence of their historical descent from earlier forms of life. The best evidence for evolution's superiority over design is not the perfection of the adaptation of an organism to its environment, but the imperfection of that fit. If God had designed a beautiful machine to reflect his wisdom and power, he would not have used a collection of parts generally used for other purposes. Optimal design is what one would expect, if the world were designed by an infinite God. But we don't find optimal design. We find, instead, structures that are jury-rigged from components made available by historical circumstances. This is where bad knees and lower back pain come from, for instance. It is also

where one of Gould's favorite examples, the panda's thumb, comes from. From descent with modification from common ancestors, that is what we should expect. That is not what we should expect from divine design. Therefore, the naturalistic explanation of the order of nature is a better explanation of the evidence than the hypothesis of intelligent design.

But does all this establish atheism? Isn't it still possible that there is some God "directing or guiding" evolution, even though the process itself proceeds by purely naturalistic principles? Well, that's possible. But it's also possible that my car is really directed or guided by little gremlins, even though they operate through the laws of mechanics. But such bare and fanciful possibility is not a sufficient reason for belief. We are justified in denying the existence of my mechanical gremlins because they play no explanatory role in understanding how my car works. By the same argument, God's existence plays no explanatory role in understanding how our world works. We live by such explanatory, probabilistic arguments. As Laplace might say, there is no explanatory role for the God hypothesis to play here.

Perhaps the most common question which traditional theists ask us atheists has to do with morality. Without God, what do we base our moral decisions on? If there is a moral law, must there not be a law giver? Shades of this argument can be found in hosts of Christian writers, most notably C. S. Lewis.[9] It is, however, a weak and confused argument whose flaws were exposed centuries ago by Plato.

In Plato's dialogue *The Euthyphro,* Socrates is depicted as on his way to his trial at which he will, among other things, be charged with impiety. Outside the court he meets Euthyphro, a self-styled expert on matters religious. In his customary way, Socrates inflates Euthyphro's ego by expressing his good fortune. He does not know what piety is and was therefore expecting to have a difficult time defending himself. Now that he has met the great expert on piety, whom he trusts will instruct him about the nature of piety, he feels invigorated. In the course of the dialogue, several different definitions of piety are proposed and Socrates proceeds to show flaws in all of them. I will focus on only one definition.

Euthyphro defines piety as what is pleasing to or dear to or loved by the gods. For our purposes I will revise the interchange

a bit. Suppose we say that that which is moral is what God commands. (Correlatively, that which is morally wrong is what God prohibits.) Socrates poses a question at this point. Are things commanded by God because they are moral, or are they moral because they are commanded by God? If it is the former (which, by the way, is what Euthyphro agrees to), then we are in effect conceding that morality is not determined by divine command. God commands certain things because he knows that they are moral; morality is thus independent of God's will. Morality does not, therefore, depend on belief in or beliefs about God. On the other hand, if you say that things are moral simply because they are commanded by God, then two things follow. First of all, God's commands are completely arbitrary, his having no reason for issuing the commands he issues. (If he had a reason, say that following his commands leads to the general well-being of humans, then that reason could serve as a moral standard independent of God's endorsing it with his will.) Secondly, God's commands cannot themselves be good and we have no reason for praising him for his goodness. It would make no sense to ascribe moral attributes to God. Either horn of the dilemma creates problems for the traditional theist. Morality, therefore, cannot be said coherently to be based on belief in God or beliefs about what God commands.

The same point can be made by considering how one might use a text, like the Bible, for moral instruction. One need not be one of the new atheists to realize that using the Bible for moral instruction requires interpretation. But it is more serious than that. Consider the story of Lot and the angels (Genesis 19: 5-8). Two male angels are sent to Sodom to warn Lot of the pending destruction of Sodom. The men of Sodom demand that Lot turn the two over to them so that they may have their way with them. Lot refuses, presumably invoking the idea that one should protect the stranger in our midst. However, no sooner does he do this then he offers his daughters in the place of the angels! Which lesson do we draw, that strangers (guests) should be protected or that women should be treated as property? To complicate the picture, is it protecting the strangers from homosexual sodomy or perhaps only *forced* homosexual sodomy that is at issue? (Apparently rape of his daughters is less objectionable.) As in so many of the moral lessons drawn

from Scripture, one must bring moral principles to the text to interpret it "correctly," suggesting that the principles must be independent of the text. If one chooses to invoke some texts while ignoring others (a time honored strategy of generations of preachers and theologians), gerrymandering texts as politicians gerrymander political districts, whatever principle one invokes to warrant one preferred interpretation or one preferred text must be the source of one's moral insight, not the text itself.

Where might such moral principles come from? The atheist who is also a Darwinian naturalist is not without her own resources in trying to give an account of morality. Our moral behavior, no less than any other aspect of our behavior, can be explained on the basis of natural selection. We are, after all, social mammals. We are the descendents of social mammals. To be sure, a program of evolutionary ethics leaves no place for a transcendent source for morality, but it is not at all clear what such a source would add to a naturalistic account. Power? Enforcement? One might argue that a transcendent source could explain why, as social animals, we have the moral sentiments and dispositions to altruism that make morality possible. But that is already done by the principles of descent with modification from common ancestors by natural selection.[10] A transcendent source, whatever that might mean, adds no more by way of explanatory power to an account of morality than the proverbial designer "behind or beneath" the naturalistic forces of evolution adds to evolution or than my little gremlins adds to the mechanical account of the operation of my car. It might be that some transcendent source for morality is possible, but its probability as an explanatory hypothesis is without merit.

In short, I see no good reason to think that God exists. While there are many more arguments for God's existence, I do not think that any of them establishes even the probability of God's existence. But am I not guilty of fallaciously arguing that since there is no proof of God's existence, then that constitutes proof of or evidence of God's non-existence? Well, in a manner of speaking, yes. But such arguments are not always fallacious. When the existence of God is defended as an explanation of the order of nature or the existence of morality or the cultural pervasiveness of belief in supernatural beings, for that matter, we have good reason to reject the theistic explanations when we

have other, more plausible and better supported explanations which dispense with supernatural beings. While primitive peoples may be excused their belief that evil spirits cause illness, we have no such excuse.

Moreover, to claim that religious belief is not in need of justification by evidence, but that such belief is justified by faith, is to fall prey to the idea that it is rationally desirable to believe without evidence, even sometimes deserving of respect. It is precisely this ploy that is so devastatingly attacked by Sam Harris in both *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation.* To legitimize faith in this sense is to warrant all kinds of myth and superstition. Faith, in the sense of belief on evidence insufficient to persuade any rational person is not, according to Harris, to be respected and the more important the issue, the more pressing our duty to withhold belief from any proposition for which evidence is insufficient. In the memorable words of 19th century philosopher and mathematician William K. Clifford, "To sum up: it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."[11] It is because it makes us credulous that faith is to be eschewed.

Haught's Critique of the New Atheism

Haught on Faith

In a series of books, most notably *God and the New Atheism*, theologian John Haught has offered a spirited rebuttal to the kind of naturalistic, Darwinian defense of atheism offered by the new atheists and in the spirit of which I have followed. In the end, however, his efforts, in my view, ultimately fail. Moreover, they fail precisely because they underestimate the intellectual bankruptcy of a faith inspired theology.

As Haught points out, the new atheists, especially Harris, tend to view faith as believing without evidence, or at least without evidence sufficient to persuade a rational person. For the new atheists the requirement of evidence is not only epistemological, but moral as well. [12]

However, Haught claims that this way of construing faith is not how theologians use the term. The new atheists view faith in a "narrow intellectual and propositional sense."[13] To be sure, when we use the term `faith' we rarely use it merely in an

intellectual and propositional sense. I do not, for example, have faith that Frankfurt is the capital of Kentucky. When I speak of having faith in a person or even an institution, I mean much more than merely believing that certain propositions about them are true and are grounded in evidence, but I do mean *at least* that. If my faith in a friend is grounded on beliefs about my friend for which there is or I have no reasons and can give no reasons, faith is no virtue. Moreover, it would be even more absurd to say that faith could warrant my belief that my friend exists in the first place! Faith or belief in presupposes faith or belief that certain propositions are true and supported by evidence. Without that "intellectual and propositional sense," faith ceases to be a virtue and seems indistinguishable from the vice of credulity.

If faith is not to be construed in an allegedly narrow and propositional sense, what exactly does Professor Haught think it is? Unfortunately, his various accounts of faith are too vague or even opaque to provide much help. Thus, in contrasting what the new atheists mean by faith with what he takes modern theologians to mean by faith, he says that "Theologians today understand faith as the commitment of one's whole being to God."[14] Further on he characterizes the difference between the new atheists' conception of faith and the faith of theology in the following way:

> The main difference is that the new atheists think of faith as an *intellectually* erroneous attempt at something like scientific understanding, whereas theology thinks of faith as a state of self-surrender in which one's whole being, and not just the intellect, is experienced as being carried away into a dimension of reality that is much deeper and more real than anything that could be grasped by science and reason.[15]

Sounds impressive, but in the absence of reason to believe that some deeper dimension to reality actually exists and can legitimately be characterized in some personal way and be something or someone to whom surrender or worship might be appropriate, all this is just smoke. Such self-surrender (such *faith in)* is appropriate only if our faith that certain propositions are true and warranted can be made out. Otherwise such faith may turn out to be, well, a delusion.

Perhaps Haught thinks such faith, such self-surrender, is self-authenticating, that only the act of self-surrender can reveal this deeper dimension to us. The question begging nature of this kind of argument seems to me apparent. Yet there are places in both *God and the New Atheism* and *Deeper than Darwin* where he seems to argue in just this question begging way. Consider the following passage from *Deeper than Darwin*, for example.

> My thesis, however, is that cosmic purpose lies deeper than either Darwin or design. Cosmic purpose is more appropriately thought of in terms of nature's *promise* than of the "design" that appears on the surface of this great text. The idea of "design", in any case, is too brittle to represent the richness, subtlety and depth of the life-process and its raw openness to the future. Life is more than "order." Life requires also the continual admittance of disruptive "novelty," and so the idea of "promise" serves more suitably than "design" to indicate life's and the universe's inherent meaning. . . .
>
> If we placed ourselves imaginatively in the remote cosmic past – say seven hundred thousand years after the Big Bang – how many of us, after looking out at the massive sea of radiation and emergent atoms all around, could have predicted such eventual outcomes of cosmic process as life, mind, culture, art and science? But these precipitates have indeed occurred, and so the *promise* of their appearance was latent in the inauspicious monotony of the primordial cosmic stuff.[16]

So, one might come to see that the evolution of human consciousness is a possibility. (He knows evolutionary theory too well to imagine any stronger prediction.) But suddenly that possibility is expressed by saying that the *promise* of consciousness is present in the cosmos, as though someone or something has made a *promise* to which we might attach faith, hope and commitment. The evolution of the cosmos might thus have a direction, deeper than can be revealed by natural selection.

Haught is led to this strange way of arguing, I believe, at least in part, by the ideas of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, for whom he has the utmost respect. In his *Phenomenon of Man*, for example, Teilhard formulates what he calls the law of complexity-consciousness. According to this "law," there is simultaneously a within and a without of things and as the without becomes increasingly complex, consciousness begins to emerge. While it is never clear exactly what scientific status Telihard gives to this "law," he clearly believes that evolution has a direction. His vision of evolution is Lamarckian and he may be excused in thinking this to be the case, as the modern synthesis of genetics and Darwinian natural selection had not yet been fully formulated when Teilhard first began to formulate his ideas.[17] Haught has no such excuse.

This vision of evolution as having direction is not the result of "going deeper than Darwin." It is not a matter of going to a "deeper level of explanation" as Haught seems to want to say. It is just incorrect science. That evolution does not have a direction is not a scientistic theory, as Haught contends, but is a matter of science. In any case, this whole line of argument seems just to load the dice. It is as though, because a young musician or athlete or student shows promise, that someone or something has made a promise to which we might attach faith and hope. No, it is just that, given what we know about them, these folks might well become great musicians, athletes or students. The term `promise' here means only `possibility.' It may provide grounds for hope, but not for belief.

God not a Hypothesis

Much of what I have said earlier regarding arguments for God's existence, in the spirit of the new atheists, would be dismissed by Haught on the grounds that the being of God is not a hypothesis in the way that evolution or the design hypothesis is taken to be by Intelligent Design Theorists. This point of view is puzzling for a number of reasons.

In the first place, most of the classical arguments for the existence of God appear to claim that God's existence is a hypothesis (as in the classical design argument) or treat God's existence as required by or following from some physical theory (as Aristotelian physics was presupposed by Aquinas' motion proof) or as required by some cosmological principle of

explanation as in many of the other classical formulations of the cosmological argument. So, it is simply false that God's existence has not been treated "as a hypothesis." It most certainly has.

Nor does he provide any evidence for the view that God is not treated "as a hypothesis by most believers," as he claims.[18] It may be that believers do not treat the God hypothesis tentatively as anyone ought to treat a factual claim, but that tells us something about the believer and nothing about the explanatory role God's existence plays in the believer's world view. When pressed, the believer will say God's existence *explains* things, how the world is ordered, why things turn out the way they do or what makes morality possible. The believer might just be so certain of God's role in these regards that the "God hypothesis" is no longer, for them, subject to review. That attitude on the part of the believer does not turn a hypothesis or conclusion drawn from science into something "deeper," something more metaphysical that is not in need of the same sort of canons of evidence as more mundane claims.

Of course, Haught would insist that at least God is no longer treated as a hypothesis *by modern theologians*. He mentions Karl Barth and Paul Tillich in particular. I'll give him that. But why is this so?

> Because thinking of God as a hypothesis reduces the infinite divine mystery to a finite scientific cause, and to worship anything finite is idolatrous. The notion of a God hypothesis shrinks God down to the size of a link in a causal chain, and this diminishment amounts to a much more radical atheism than our three purveyors of godlessness could ever have concocted by themselves.[19]

This is a *very* puzzling, not to say obscure, paragraph. In the first place, it reduces most theists, whether ordinary believer or theologian, to some form of radical atheism. Was Aquinas an atheist? He certainly thought of God as more than an infinite mystery. While, for Aquinas, much that people believe and say about God is understood analogically, to say that God loves us or judges us is to say something much more specific about God than that God is an infinite mystery. What is, after all, an infinite

mystery? If we characterize God so vaguely, so amorphously, how do we decide such questions as whether there is one god or two or three? Could there be one god for good and one for evil? Does God act in history? How do we understand the fundamental disagreements among religions over their characterization of the supernatural? Are we simply reduced to a view according to which we all believe in existence as an infinite mystery and can say no more?

Later, in his effort to provide a "theological" grounding for our cognitive faculties, he says that ". . . each of us, simply by existing, is already encompassed by infinite Being, Meaning, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty."[20] But how does he know this, much less what does this mean? If we cannot give evidence for such claims, if faith is (I want to say `merely') a state of the self-surrender of one's whole being, how do we decide between competing religious claims? Insulating belief claims, whether religious, philosophical, or scientific from the discipline of reasons and arguments is precisely what makes faith so dangerous. What if my faith tells me that gays should be stoned or non-believers expelled from the community? I'm pleased that "modern believers and theologians" (well, many of them) believe no such things but how can such views be disposed of on faith reasons when faith has no reasons? This is why Harris, Hitchens, Dawkins and their fellow travelers think, not without cause, that faith is dangerous and that faith should not be respected. (This, by the way, does not mean that *the faithful* should not be respected. As one says, condemn the sin, not the sinner!)

There is entirely too much Tillich in Haught's account. Faith, for Tillich, is the state of being ultimately concerned. (Somehow, *everyone* has an ultimate concern, even, I guess, the atheists, although why one must have *an* ultimate concern is never made clear.) However, to be ultimately concerned about what is not truly ultimate is a form of idolatry, reducing the truly ultimate to the level of *a being* rather than the *ground of being*. So everyone has an ultimate concern, but we risk idolatry if we characterize the ultimate in any more precise way. This smacks of conversion by definition, no argument necessary. How convenient![21]

The Faith of Atheists

One of the most persistent objections to atheism, especially atheism defended in the spirit of naturalism, is that naturalism depends as much on faith as does religion. Since the methods of naturalism (argument, reason and evidence) are not self-authenticating, even the naturalist has to concede that her confidence in reason and evidence is itself based on a faith commitment. Professor Haught, as one might expect, is not reluctant to make this charge.

> Harris, Dawkins, and Hitchens consider all forms of faith to be irrational, and abusing reason by harboring faith in one's mind is shockingly unethical as well. It is morally wrong to believe anything without sufficient evidence. In this respect the new atheists adopt what an older generation of atheists called the "ethic of knowledge". . . In other words it is morally wrong to accept any claim that cannot be verified by "objective" scientific knowing. But, then, what about that precept itself. . . . Faith, it seems, makes an opening wide enough for atheism too.[22]

There is something to this objection, but much less than is usually claimed. To be sure, no first principle can, without circularity, justify itself. This, of course, holds for any first principle, including theological ones. However, Professor Haught thinks that one can ground one's confidence in our cognitive capacities theologically.

> How, then, can we justify our cognitional confidence? Not by looking back scientifically at what our minds evolved from, informative as that may be, but only by looking forward toward the infinite meaning and truth looming elusively on the horizon. Simply by reaching toward the fullness of being, truth, goodness, and beauty, we are already in its grasp.[23]

Exactly how this provides a "grounding" for our cognitive faculties and methods is not at all clear. To be sure, we use and trust our cognitive capacities, even while we recognize their limitations. However, our trust is not undermined by their evolutionary origins. On the contrary, if they weren't at least

reasonably reliable, we likely would not be here! Our cognitive capacities, no less than the perceptual capacities of other animals, enable us to adapt to our world. If they weren't reliable, would we have survived as a species? Haught's theological grounding is far less convincing. "Simply by reaching toward the fullness of being, truth, and beauty, we are already in its grasp. This is the true ground of our cognitional confidence, and faith and trust allow us to be drawn toward the horizon in the first place."[24]

This "grounding" seems blatantly question begging, if it makes sense at all. Our trust in our cognitive capacities is warranted in the very act of trusting them. They are trustworthy because we trust them. What could be more question begging? This defense, like so much in Haught's theological critique of the new atheism (and I hesitate to add, in much of "modern theology") turns theology into no more than a desperate attempt to make poetry scientific.

Are we left, then, with the naturalist and the "supernaturalist" merely making counter assertions? Not quite. Besides evolutionary accounts of the general reliability or our faculties, there is more that can be said for the ethics of belief of the new atheists, something made clear more than a century ago by the American philosopher, Charles Peirce, in his famous paper, "The Fixation of Belief."[25]

In that essay Peirce is concerned with the practical question of what the most effective way is of fixing belief, of settling disagreements. Peirce contrasts the method of science (really reason, empirical evidence and argument) to three other "methods": the method of tenacity (simply holding fast to one's beliefs), the method of authority (appoint an authoritative institution to resolve disagreements), and the method of intuition (the appeal to self-evidence, to self-authenticating beliefs). The method of science is preferable to each of these because it is self-corrective. Tenacity and intuition simply cannot resolve conflicting claims (conflicting faiths, if you will); the method of intuition furthermore cannot overcome the fact that what seems self-evident to one person is not to another; and the method of authority can neither resolve conflicting pronouncements of the authority itself nor resolve conflicts between authorities. Only the method of science is determined by something beyond itself and

is self-corrective. The method of science may not always get things right, but if it does not, continued application of the method will eventually correct its own shortcomings. Faith, whether based on tenacity, an authoritative institution or some allegedly self-authenticating faith experience can provide no such justification. As Freud put it, "No, science is no illusion. But it would be an illusion to suppose that we could get anywhere else what it cannot give us."[26]

Conclusion

I have not discussed some of the other criticisms of theism that the new atheists have leveled. In particular, I have not discussed the charge that its moral and social influences have been, for the most part, pernicious. That is certainly a substantial part of the new atheists critique, especially that of Hitchens. I have some sympathy with those charges, but they touch upon the truth claims of religion less directly. Suffice it to say that the moral influences of religion have been a mixed bag. While the influence of religion has occasionally been positive, as in some abolitionist and civil rights circles, it has often been a hindrance to those same movements, as religious groups have lined up in defense of both slavery and discrimination. To be sure, religion is not the cause of every evil in the world, nor is it the only form of dogmatism. However, while not all disputes have their origin in religious differences, it is fair to say that there is no social or political conflict, whatever its origin, which religion can't make worse. The conflict in the Middle East is about land and water rights, but when religion is added to the mix, it doesn't help. Such conflicts are made worse by the respect shown toward the very idea of a faith not rooted in science, whether that faith comes from traditional theism or from what Haught refers to as "modern theology." For this reason if none other, the end of faith may well be something to look forward to.

Notes

[1] See Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2004) and *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006)*;* Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Warner

12, 2007) and Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 2006).

[2] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism* (Louisville and London, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospects for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 2003), and *Is Nature Enough?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[3] In addition to classic sources, such as Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* see also Walter Kaufman, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* and *The Faith of a Heretic.*

[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Part One, Question 2, Article 1* in *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas,* Volume I, ed. Anton Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), 18-19. For a more detailed version of the same argument see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ed. and translated by Anton Pegis (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1955), 85-94.

[5] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1947).

[6] John Henry Newman, Letter to W. R. Brownlow in *Philosophical Readings in Cardinal Newman,* ed. James Collins (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1961), 189.

[7] Newman, *Philosophical Readings in Cardinal Newman, 189.*

[8] Stephen Jay Gould, "The Pandas Thumb" and "Senseless Laws of History" in *Panda's Thumb* New York: W. W. Norton, Co. 1982), 19-26, 27-34.

[9] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1960), 17-39.

[10] See Matt Ridley, *The Origin of Virtue* (New York: Penguin Group, 1996) and Marc Hauser, *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong* (New York: Ecco, 2006).

[11] William K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" from *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 206.*

[12] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism*, 4ff.

[13]John Haught, *God and the New Atheism,* 5.

[14] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism,* 5.

[15] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism,* 12-13.

[16] John Haught, *Deeper than Darwin,* p. 25.

[17] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York, Harper, 1955)

[18] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism,* 42.

[19] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism,* 43.

[20] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism,* 50.

[21] See Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York, Harper, 1958)

[22] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism*, 5.

[23] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism,* 51.

[24] John Haught, *God and the New Atheism, 51.*

[25] Charles S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" from *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce,* Vol. V, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 223-247.

[26] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday Anchor, 1953), 102.

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