



WEAKNESSES OF THE NEW ATHEISM

By David Aikman, Ph.D.

In just two days some old codgers in Russia, China, Vietnam and maybe Cuba, will celebrate an anniversary that once resonated politically around the world. February 21, 2008 will be the one hundred sixtieth anniversary of the Communist Manifesto, a document that for more than a century thrilled the hearts of revolutionaries and made the chanceries of Europe tremble. “A spectre is haunting Europe,” that famous document written by Karl Marx and published in 1848, began. “It is the spectre of Communism.”

As we now know, of course, it is not the spectre of Communism that is haunting Europe, but the spectre of radical Islam. That, of course, is another story. Rather, a new generation of revolutionaries has arisen in the Anglo-Saxon world that hopes to become the new spectre haunting Americans and Britons. These are not political revolutionaries – at least most of them are not – so much as revolutionaries of philosophy. What they want to overthrow are not the crowned heads and bourgeois parliaments of our time but he

institutions and traditions of society associated with religious faith. If they could, they would like to demolish all religious faith, but they have a modest initial goal: they want only to overthrow Christianity and Judaism.

These revolutionaries have sometimes been called “The New Atheists,” or “the Atheist Fundamentalists.” To give the revolutionary phenomenon a collective name, I would like to refer to it simply as “the New Atheism.” It is associated with particular people and particular ideas, and I shall certainly be discussing those in this paper. What I am going to suggest, however, is first, that the “New Atheism” is not at all new, and second, that it has serious weaknesses as a revolutionary doctrine. Personally, I believe some of those weaknesses are ultimately fatal for the atheism project, depriving it both of intellectual credibility and any moral integrity. As serious Christians, however, I believe that we should be well-equipped both to defend our faith against criticism, however spurious, and to propound it boldly to others. We must therefore take the challenge of the New Atheism seriously. We need to know what the New Atheists are saying and why, in many instances, they simply don’t make sense. It will be the purpose of this paper to do just that.

In a sense, the New Atheists are not new at all.

Atheism in the sense of not believing in the Deity, or in any deity at all, probably goes back to the beginning of monotheism itself. In classical Greece, Diagoras of Melos, who flourished in the fifth century BC, is sometimes referred to as “the first atheist,” because he publicly mocked the prevailing polytheism of his day. Socrates, about whose execution we read in the *Phaedo* of Plato, was killed because

he was an *atheos*, that is, he disbelieved in the state religion of the day. Many of the early Christians were martyred because they were considered “atheist,” that is, they rejected the state religion of Caesar-worship.

The term atheism to which we refer certainly expressed itself at different times and through different thinkers in the Christian era. It did not really become the settled philosophical perspective of a significant group of intellectuals in the West, of course, until the French Revolution of 1789. After that year and in the nineteenth century, atheism took root in Europe through the writings of Feuerbach, Marx, Bakunin, Nietzsche, and others, with twentieth century exponents including philosophers like Bertrand Russell, psychologists like Sigmund Freud, and writers and intellectuals like France’s Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. In a sense, atheism in Europe became the default intellectual tradition, absorbed into the lining of the culture rather than actively adopted.

But in the United States atheism had a much harder time. Christianity had been at the core of the American political revolution of the 1770’s. Even more importantly, it had been at the heart of American society throughout most of the colonies for a century and a half before then. Americans, in a sense, have been instinctual Christians since the beginning, not necessarily subscribing to all the specific doctrines of Christianity, but certainly showing a willingness to accept Christianity as the nation’s “natural” faith. Even in the year 2008 the percentage of Americans who consider themselves Christian is about 83%, according to a recent ABC News investigation. Of that group, 37% call themselves born again; in numerical terms,

that's about 81 million Americans.¹ Those who say they believe in God or a higher power seldom falls below 90% from year to year, and church-going, on any Sunday of the year, may be practiced by as many as 40% of the population. What the New Atheism seems to be targeting, above all, is Christian belief in the United States.

How do we know this? Because all of the four best-selling atheist books published during 2006 and 2007 were written with an American audience very much in mind. The first to hit the bookstores was *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, by Daniel Dennett, a philosophy professor at Tufts University. Then, in September 2006, appeared *The God Delusion*, by Oxford University evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, and one day later—conspiracy theorists, pay attention—*Letter to a Christian Nation*, by Sam Harris, at the time a doctoral candidate in neuroscience. Finally, on May 1, 2007, there appeared *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, by British-born journalistic pugilist Christopher Hitchens.²

All four books dominated the best-seller lists, with the Hitchens book rocketing into number one on the New York Times best-seller list within one month. The total sales of all four books by the late fall of 2007 were close to a million; it is probably well in excess of a million by now. In *The Delusion of Disbelief*,³ a book to be published within a few weeks, I have referred to all four writers as The Four Horsemen, a reference, of course, to Revelation's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Richard Dawkins, the most senior of the group and by far the most militant atheist among them, has referred to them more cheerily as "The Four Musketeers." Of course, cynics might say

that Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens sounds more like a Mississippi law firm than the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Yet there is nothing either cheery or especially prosaic about the message they bring forth in their writings. In at least three of the writers, Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens, there is a great deal of anger. All four writers insist with a sort of annoyed weariness, like Enlightenment *philosophes* wondering why they didn't get tenure, that they have strictly followed reason and evidence in their assault upon faith. In fact, there is a tone to Dawkins and Hitchens that leaves one scratching one's head in amazement, one of sizzling vitriol. Not to shock you, but early on in his book Dawkins almost quivers with rage when talking about the Almighty. "The God of the Old Testament," he thunders in his second chapter, "is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction." He is "jealous and proud of it, a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak." I won't offend your esthetic or theological souls by reading out an extensive quote, but according to Dawkins, God is, among other things, "vindictive, bloodthirsty...misogynistic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential," and, of course, "homophobic."

Now there's a certain obvious contradiction here. If God doesn't exist at all, or is merely a character in fiction, how on earth can he embody all these frightening attributes? Why is Dawkins getting so worked up about someone who doesn't actually exist, or at very best exists only in fiction? Perhaps aware of the contradiction, Dawkins pauses in mid-invective and allows that "it is unfair to attack such an easy target." He goes on, "I am not attacking the particular qualities of Yahweh, or Jesus, or Allah, or any other specific god such

as Baal, Zeus, or Wotan,” (end quote) though of course he has just finished eviscerating Yahweh. Then what is he doing? To quote Dawkins again, “I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been or will be invented.”⁴

The overwhelming impression one gets from reading the Four Horsemen is that they are asserting the non-existence of someone they sort of know—or at least, think they know *about*—but whom they dislike venomously (Dawkins), clandestinely admire (Dennett), or simply would not care to become acquainted with if he did exist (Hitchens and Harris). I will leave it to psychologists of both the present and the future to untangle the thickets of possible neurosis through which at least two of these Four Horsemen seem to have dragged themselves. That is not the focus of this paper.

What I want to attempt, as succinctly as possible, is to take the arguments of the New Atheism at face value and hold them up to some reasonably rigorous scrutiny. Sam Harris in particular, with sometimes boring repetitiveness, harps on the need for reason and for evidence in discussing religion. This is unusual for an interesting reason. Alone of all the Four Horsemen, Harris has spent many years investigating and practicing meditation in what is commonly called the Asian tradition. He has spent time in meditation and retreat centers in both North America and India, and appears to be strongly drawn, from a philosophical perspective, to the sages of ancient India and Tibet. This has evoked no small amount of squawking from fellow-atheists entirely uncomfortable with one of their number who strays off the reservation and begins hobnobbing with, well,

religionists. In fact, it also evoked a scathing comment from a critic of Harris's first excursion into the realm of religious skeptic, a book called *The End of Faith*. "The dirty little secret of that book," wrote James Wood, "is that Harris turns out to be a Buddhist."⁵ In fairness to Sam Harris, there are well-known expositors of Buddhism who insist that it is indeed an atheistic faith, if that is not an oxymoron.

The New Atheism covers a lot of very old ground. The thrust of the arguments of the Four Horsemen is the following:

- 1) Religion is bad because it makes people do bad things;
- 2) Religion cannot be true because science has explanations, or sooner or later will have explanations, of all the issues upon which religions claim authority;
- 3) Complaints about the wickedness of atheistic leaders or regimes in the twentieth century are invalid; there is no evidence that atheism *influences* people to do bad things (Dawkins), or else the apparent wickedness of the atheists is all the fault of the religious people whom the atheists replaced when they took over (Hitchens);

In a paper of this length, it will not be possible to examine in detail all the arguments of the New Atheism. I would, however, like to focus on a few.

As might be expected, at least three of the Four Horsemen, Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens, try to lay the foundation for the alleged superiority of atheism on the first argument of the New Atheism: the actual history of wicked acts perpetrated by the adherents of the great religions. In fact, the subtitle of the Hitchens book, *How Religion Poisons Everything*, makes it very clear that he

does not believe a single good thing has ever emerged from people with religious faith. Of course, he contradicts himself in the text, here and there acknowledging that evangelical Christians have been quite useful in promoting human rights, for example, in North Korea. But Hitchens appears to take his own subtitle quite seriously. The author of a vicious and grossly unfair attack on the late Mother Teresa, titled with vulgar flippancy, *The Missionary Position*,⁶ Hitchens goes to absurd lengths to try to show that people of great faith who are widely admired for their achievements were not really people of faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), for example, who was hanged in the last few weeks of the war for heroically resisting Adolph Hitler is described by Hitchens as having exhibited “a nebulous humanism.”

Let’s look at that assertion a little more closely. Here is what the camp doctor at Flossenberg prison, who witnessed the execution of Bonhoeffer by hanging, said of after watching the courageous German Lutheran hours before his death, “I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. . . . In the almost fifty years I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.”⁷ Hitchens’ blind refusal to acknowledge that people of religious faith might, just occasionally, be motivated by their faith to perform charitable, even sacrificial acts gets him into real trouble with an American here, Martin Luther King, Jr. Hitchens seems to think that if Christians perform meritorious acts to implement social reform, it is because the advocates of what he calls “Christian reformism” had the ability to contrast the Old Testament from the New. Because King failed to preach hell and damnation, he is relegated by Hitchens to

the ranks of the infidels. Hitchens asserts of King, “In no real as opposed to nominal sense, then, was he a Christian.”

This would certainly be news to every single African-American who knew King or worked with him, or for that matter to the Nobel Committee that awarded him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and made the observation, “Martin Luther King’s belief is rooted first and foremost in the teachings of Christ.”⁸ None other than Al Sharpton took Hitchens briskly to task in a May 2007 debate about Hitchens’ book at the New York Public Library. “In terms of the civil rights movement,” Sharpton said in rebuke of Hitchens, “it was absolutely fueled by a belief in God and a belief in right and wrong. Had there not been this belief that there was a right and a wrong, the civil rights movement...would not have existed...There is no question that he [King] himself saw that the basis of the movement was God-based.”⁹

Atheists have traditionally made great hay from the misdoings of people in history who claimed to act in the name of some great religion or other. Of course, the commonest examples of misdoings by Christians cited today are usually the Crusades in the Middle Ages, the Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the silencing by the Roman Catholic Church of eminent scientists like Galileo. It is interesting that the Four Horsemen barely refer to these wrong-doings by so-called Christians and tend to focus on contemporary misdoings by people professing the Christian faith. Hitchens zeroes in on the murderous mayhem that descended on Yugoslavia after the collapse of Communism there, the killing of Croats by Serbs and vice versa, supposedly in the name of their faith, the carnage in Beirut as Christians and Muslims fought against each

other during that country's civil war in the 1970's and 1980's, and even the hideous genocide of 1994 in Rwanda, supposedly a country with a large Christian majority. The points he makes, as far as they go, are cogent. People who have called themselves Christian have committed atrocities in our own century, and it is not very profitable for us to make the argument that they weren't really Christians because, for the most part, they didn't believe that you have to be born again to be saved. It would probably be difficult to prove, but it is probable that among the southern whites who resisted integration in the 1950's and 1960's there were almost certainly born-again Christians.

No, the real weakness of the Hitchens case is that it is a generalization so all-encompassing—"religion poisons everything"—that it fails to pass the first test of all generalizations, namely common-sense. No sensible person above the age of ten who had met both religious and non-religious people in his or her lifetime would say that all religious people were bad or misguided. Hitchens himself cites some heroes of the twentieth century who, as we saw in the case of Bonhoeffer and King, were palpably inspired to do good by their religious faith, though he is foolish enough to challenge their faith credentials. No, a better subtitle for Hitchens' book would be, *How Atheism Poisons Everything*. We will come to that in due course. First, however, we need to deal with the second principle assertion of the New Atheism, namely that science has disproved religion.

The main weakness of the New Atheism in regard to science is the assertion that science, as we know it, contains the answer to virtually everything. All of the Four Horsemen seem to think that that

science has so completely explained the known universe that there is no room to view life's realities outside of the rigidly defined parameters of the scientific method. This viewpoint has been labeled by critics of the New Atheism—and by those not necessarily sympathetic to the Christian or any other faith—as “scientism.” The Four Horsemen seem to have constructed an arid universe wherein dwells no God, no transcendence, no mystery other than what can be conjured from contemplating physical nature itself. Harris, to be sure, whose path to atheism passed through experimentation with the drug Ecstasy and then Eastern meditation, has a lot to say about contemplation of human consciousness, but that is somewhat eccentric and not germane to his overall views of science, which are aligned with those of the other Four Horsemen.

Dawkins, of course, is a Darwinian acolyte. Indeed, after he was selected for his current position as Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University, Charles Simonyi, who made his fortune as a Microsoft princeling, described him as “Darwin’s Rottweiler.” Dawkins came to fame in 1976 with his book *The Selfish Gene*, now translated into several languages and used on college campuses throughout the US. In this work, Dawkins introduced the term “meme,” a unit of cultural information that is, he claimed, transmitted in a manner analogous to genes. It needs to be said that the “meme” is an entirely speculative entity. No scientist has ever found a way to observe or measure it, much less reproduce its likeness in a laboratory setting. It is an alluring theory of cultural change, but its existence has never been proved.

The big problem that Dawkins faces with religion is how it fits into this meme theory. According to Darwinian evolutionary orthodoxy, animal behavior is always determined by the need for group survival, and survival requires the greatest economy in the use of resources. The problem with religion, says Dawkins, is that it is “so wasteful, so extravagant; and Darwinian selection habitually rejects and eliminates waste.”¹⁰ How to square the circle? How to fit religion into the Darwinian framework?

Dawkins answers his own question with a burst of fertile imagination. Of course: the religion meme exists to ensure the survival of religion itself. Thus, according to Dawkins, religious ideas, because they are memes and thus the analogues in culture of what genes are in biology, have adopted a “circle-the-wagons” strategy to protect themselves from attack by the memes of atheism and criticism. The hosts for genes are any living biological entity. The hosts for memes—or “phenotype” to use the technical scientific term—can only be people, because it is only through human beings that culture is transmitted from one generation to another.

Meme theory may go the way of the phlogiston theory, an entirely defunct scientific hypothesis in the second half of the seventeenth century that attempted to explain the oxidation process. Though passionately embraced by one of the Four Horsemen, namely Daniel Dennett, the meme’s entirely speculative nature may not long survive science’s relentless demand for experimental evidence. Actually, Dawkins would have done himself more service if he had embraced the obvious: religion is actually good for you. It is a well-established fact that religious faith can significantly reduce stress

in individuals. There is an abundance of evidence that people who are regular church-goers or who otherwise engage regularly in religious activities live longer than those who do not.¹¹

Dawkins admits that the scientific community has doubts about the meme idea. He admits: “Another objection [to memes] is that we don’t know what memes are made of, or where they reside. . . . Whereas genes are to be found in precise locations on chromosomes, memes presumably exist in brains and we have even less chance of seeing one than of seeing a gene.”¹² Oxford theologian Alister McGrath, who acquired a Ph.D. in molecular physics before studying theology, has dryly observed, “Dawkins talking about memes is like believers talking about God – an invisible, unverifiable postulate, which helps explain some things about experience, but ultimately lies beyond empirical investigation.”¹³

Daniel Dennett in his book thinks that religion is a virus that lodges itself in people’s brains and causes them to behave in ways that don’t make sense to outsiders. “Religion,” Dennett portentously informs us, “is too important for us to remain ignorant about.”¹⁴ He spends much of the remainder of his book trying to demonstrate that there has been a taboo against the scientific study of religions. The one point he makes emphatically, however, is one that is seized upon by Dawkins as a revelatory insight, namely that religion is quite often “belief in belief.” Dennett declaims, “It is entirely possible to be an atheist and believe in belief in God,” as though this were some breathtaking insight.¹⁵ John Gray, Professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics, in a review of the Dennett book in the *New Statesmen* delightfully titled “Atheists Are Irrational Too,”

commented, “In fixating on the belief-content of religion, Dennett emulates Christianity at its most rationalist and dogmatic.” He added, “There is more skepticism in a single line of the *Pensees* [by French Christian apologist and mathematician Blaise Pascal] than in the whole of Dennett’s leaden tome.”¹⁶ In another British weekly, *The Sunday Times*, John Cornwell was even more scathing. “The most striking gap in *Breaking the Spell*,” he wrote, “is its lack of humanistic commentary from anthropology, aesthetics, and confessional literature. . . . *Breaking the Spell* is an insidious book; not because it breaks taboos by asking uncomfortable questions of religion, not because its author is an ardent atheist, but because it is written by a brilliant philosopher who betrays his academic standards by proceeding from emotive, ill-informed prejudice.”¹⁷

Another reviewer who has on many occasions shown sharp antipathy to Christianity took issue with Dennett over what he alleged was Dennett’s “scientism,” a refusal to concede any limitation at all to the sciences. Writing in *The New York Times*, Leon Wieseltier hammered mercilessly at Dennett’s approach to reality. “Scientism,” wrote Wieseltier, “the view that that science can explain all human conditions and expressions, mental as well as physical, is a superstition, one of the dominant superstitions of our day; and it is not an insult to science to say so.”¹⁸

Richard Dawkins, in fact, engaged in a long and blistering dispute with fellow evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard, who proposed in his book *Rocks of Ages* that Darwinian evolution left entirely open the question of whether God existed. “Either half my colleagues are enormously stupid,” Gould wrote, “or else the science

of Darwinism is fully compatible with conventional religious beliefs—and equally compatible with atheism.”¹⁹ This ironic attitude to religious believers who are scientists provokes Dawkins in *The God Delusion* into a frenzy of annoyance. He titles one of his chapter subsections, “The Neville Chamberlain School of Evolutionists” as though conceding the rationality of religion were akin to allowing Hitler to march unopposed into the Sudetenland. He fumes especially about Gould. “I simply do not believe,” he says, “that Gould could possibly have meant much of what he wrote in *Rocks of Ages*.”²⁰

Gould posited an approach for the relationship of science and faith that he called “Non-overlapping magisterial,” or NOMA. The phrase is borrowed from the Roman Catholic term “magisterium,” meaning the authority to teach religious doctrine. In essence, Gould believed that the magisterium of science dealt with only the empirical realm, whereas religion dealt with “questions of ultimate meaning.” Now it is interesting that some Christians who would agree with Gould’s view that one can believe in a Creator-God and still accept many of the formulations of evolution, nevertheless disagree with him on NOMA. Both Francis Collins, an author of a best-selling book, *The Language of God*, and Alister McGrath do not accept that science and faith are two separate realms. McGrath is by far the most effective critic of Dawkins²¹ and he makes a strong case that the notion that science and religion have always been at war is completely false and emerged as a dogma only in the late nineteenth century.

Interestingly, none of the Four Horsemen makes an attempt to enlist Darwin on the side of skepticism towards religion. They can't, of course. Darwin's views of Christianity evolved, as one might say, over the course of his life, but he was never an atheist. Indeed, at the beginning of his career he was training to be a clergyman of the Church of England. Darwin was disappointed with Christianity, but not at all because he believed that the theory of evolution had eroded its veracity. Like many Victorian free-thinkers and agnostics, his disappointment was a moral one; he didn't think it satisfactorily accounted for human suffering and injustice. Darwin was beset by personal tragedy when his daughter Annie died at the age of ten, and by physical sufferings himself as the victim of still unidentified chronic illnesses. But in his autobiography he expressed belief in God as the First Cause and described himself as a theist.²² His theistic view weakened over time, but was occasionally boosted by doubts over whether the minds of Homo Sapiens, who stand at the pinnacle of what he believed to be the human evolutionary process, could have emerged unaided by Divine guidance from the lower animals.²³

The Four Horsemen were wise not to attempt to recruit Charles Darwin, even posthumously, into their club. But none of them showed the same prudence with regard to Albert Einstein, whom both Dawkins and Hitchens embrace as though the sheen of Einstein's brilliance would somehow also envelop them. Dawkins quotes Einstein saying that God had no choice in creating the universe, and then labels such comments "pantheistic, not deistic, and certainly not theistic."²⁴

Hitchens wraps himself up in Einstein too, alleging that Einstein “preserved what he could of ethical Judaism and rejected the barbaric mythology of the Pentateuch.”²⁵ Hitchens doesn’t explain what he means by “ethical Judaism,” but since he is Jewish, an atheist, and yet considers himself a person of high moral principle, perhaps the term “ethical Judaism” means “all Jews who agree with Christopher Hitchens.” As for Harris, contemplation of Einstein’s religious views seems to move him into a vaporous lyricism. “Einstein seemed to consider faith nothing more than a eunuch left to guard the harem while the intellect was away solving the problems of the world. By pretending that it could proceed without any epistemic aspirations whatsoever, Einstein robbed religion of the *truth* of its doctrine. (emphasis in the original)”²⁶ Huh? What is it about Einstein that makes some atheists sound as if they have just come off an “acid” trip? Come to think of it, Harris started his search for—well, whatever it was a search for—after tripping out on “ecstasy,” so perhaps that explains his Einsteinisms.

Einstein, indeed, should be allowed to speak for himself wherever possible. Walter Isaacson, former managing editor of *Time Magazine* and author of several excellent historical studies, quotes Einstein as saying:

I’m not an atheist. I don't think I can call myself a pantheist. The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written

those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God. We see the universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws but only dimly understand these laws.²⁷

At a dinner party in Berlin (before Einstein emigrated from Germany to the United States), a guest who asserted that religion was mere superstition was silenced by his host, who noted that even Einstein was religious. “‘It isn't possible!’ the skeptical guest said, turning to Einstein to ask if he was, in fact, religious,” Isaacson’s account reports. “‘Yes, you can call it that,’ Einstein replied calmly. ‘Try and penetrate with our limited means the secrets of nature and you will find that, behind all the discernible laws and connections, there remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion. To that extent I am, in fact, religious.’” If Einstein was angered by being described incorrectly as a follower of any organized religion, he was equally irritated at the atheists who claimed him as one of their own. “There are people who say there is no God,” Isaacson reports Einstein telling a friend. “But what makes me really angry is that they quote me for support of such views.” Isaacson further says that, unlike Sigmund Freud or Bertrand Russell or George Bernard Shaw, Einstein never felt the urge to denigrate those

who believed in God; instead, it was the atheists he tended to criticize. “What separates me from most so-called atheists is a feeling of utter humility toward the unattainable secrets of the harmony of the cosmos,” he explained.

In fact Einstein admitted that, though he was Jewish, he had studied the Old and New Testaments as a child and was “enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.” To another skeptical interlocutor who expressed amazement that Einstein believed Jesus even existed and who asked if that could be true [i.e. that Einstein believed this], Einstein replied, “Unquestionably! No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.”²⁸

Well, of course we would take issue with the word “myth” in relation to the New Testament. The Four Horsemen, however, perpetuate a real “myth,” namely that there are almost no prominent scientists who are professing Christians. A study in 1916, a year after Einstein had published his general theory of relativity polled top scientists on whether they believed in God, defined as a personal God who communicates his thoughts to humanity. The results of the poll have been widely disseminated; about 40% of the responding scientists said they did, while another 40% did not. When a poll in 1996 asked the identical question, the proportion of atheists had risen slightly—to 45%—but the percentage of believers in God still matched: 45%. Dawkins grudgingly admits that he knows three prominent scientists in Great Britain who are Christian believers—Peacocke, Stannard, and Polkinghorne—and he names one

Collins, like Gingerich, has no problem with the theory of evolution, which he believes has been “theistic.” In his view, the laws of nature that guided evolution were put into place by God. Collins says that the “central question” of his book is: “In this modern era of cosmology, evolution, and the human genome, is there still the possibility of a richly satisfying harmony between the scientific and spiritual worldviews? I answer with a resounding yes! (emphasis in the original)”³¹

Unlike Dawkins, Gingerich sees no war between science and religion. Not only is there no incompatibility between rigorous science and theistic belief, in his view, but Gingerich also says that a scientist’s religious faith or lack thereof does not affect the quality of his scientific work. “One can *believe* that some of the evolutionary pathways are so intricate and so complex as to be hopelessly improbable by the rules of random chance (emphasis in the original),” Gingerich writes, “but if you do not believe in divine action, then you will simply have to say that random chance was extremely lucky, because the outcome is there to see. Either way, the scientist with theistic metaphysics will approach laboratory problems in much the same way as will his atheistic colleague across the hall.”³²

On the one hand, the approach taken by Gingerich and Collins has the great merit of preventing atheist evolutionists from disguising their metaphysical presuppositions as scientific conclusions. In this Collins and Gingerich have much in common with scientists in the “Intelligent Design” movement who also insist on the even-handed treatment of empirical methods.

On the other hand, Collins and Gingerich seem surprisingly sanguine about evolutionary conclusions. *Unlike* those in the Intelligent Design movement they apparently minimize the empirical difficulties of demonstrating the “evolutionary pathways” which often seem to be the wishes of evolutionists rather than facts of evolution. As the ID scientists point out, it is exceedingly difficult actually to document the gradual transformation of one basic kind of creature into another, and it is impossible to document abiogenesis, i.e., the alleged original transformation of non-living matter into living matter.

Moreover, it is not easy to square the approach taken by Collins and Gingerich with the text of Scripture, which tell us that God consciously and specifically created every major kind of organism and then made the individual man Adam and the individual woman Eve, from whom all other humans came.

Nevertheless, their approach resists the fundamental error of modern evolutionism: its reduction of all causality to natural material causes alone.

Now I’m fully aware that the view of the origins of human life taught in Biology courses at Patrick Henry College identifies each day of creation in Genesis 1 as a 24-hour period, and that this view in turn usually entails a relatively young earth. I am certainly not qualified as a scientist or a Hebrew scholar or a historian to make an intelligent comment on that.

I humbly suggest that there is room for a great diversity of viewpoint on origins among believing Christians. As Dr. Walker said to me recently, and I quote:

“Obviously, churches have a right and a duty to maintain their own convictions and their positions on the details of God’s creation. I hope they do so. Patrick Henry College does so. But this need not—and should not—prevent Bible-believing Christians, whose convictions may vary on the details, from making common cause in the public square on behalf of the truth – the truth not only of God’s acts as creator but also the truths discovered by reason and empirical study which point persuasively to design. I disagree with theorists like Francis Collins on some important issues. Yet the biggest threat comes not from Christians’ differing interpretations of Genesis 1, but from the atheists’ and secularists’ claim that the complex reality of life emerged accidentally from purely material causes without design.³³

I would certainly concur with that view. The threat of the New Atheism to science is the insistence that good science is incompatible with the profession of religious belief. The threat of the New Atheism to the Christian faith is the attempt to outlaw the application to scientific discovery of the great insights into the meaning of life itself. Those insights, in almost every case, have been brought forth by adherents of the great religions, and especially by adherents of Judaism and Christianity.

Before leaving the subject of science in relation to the views of the New Atheism, attention needs to be paid to a book by a major

defector from atheism in the past half decade. Antony Flew, who taught as an atheist philosopher at Oxford in the 1940's and 1950's and debated C.S. Lewis in the Socratic Club there, was for half a century one of the world's most renowned atheistic philosophers. In 2004 he publicly announced his conversion, not yet to Christianity, but to a theistic view of creation. Last year his important book describing the process of his conversion out of atheism was published.³⁴

Flew's change of view was initially a philosophical one. He was repelled by the materialistic determinism which was the only consistent implication of an atheistic rejection of free moral will. But Flew also came to the conclusion that the so-called "Monkey Theorem" of Shakespeare's sonnets was absurdly flawed after reading a description of it by another scholar, Dr. Gerry Schroeder. The "Monkey Theorem," in its popular form, holds that if you have an infinite number of monkeys banging away at an infinite number of keyboards, eventually you will get from one of them Shakespeare's Sonnet Eighteen, the first four lines of which read:

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May

And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Well, in the 1990's the British National Council of the Arts, in an inventive use of taxpayers' money, placed six monkeys in a cage with a computer. After banging away at the keyboard for a whole month—and using the computer as a bathroom at the same time—the monkeys had typed 50 pages but failed to produce a single word in the English language, not even the letter “a” by itself. Schroeder applied probability theory to the “Monkey Theorem” and calculated that the chance of getting Sonnet Eighteen by chance was 26 multiplied by itself 488 times (488 is the number of letters in the sonnet) or, in base 10, 10 to the 690th. If that number is written out, it is 1 with 690 zeroes following it. But, as Schroeder showed, the number of particles in the entire universe—protons, electrons and neutrons—is only ten to the 80th. Thus, even if every particle in the universe were a computer chip that had been spinning out random letters a million times a second since the beginning of time, there would still be no Shakespeare's Sonnet Eighteen by chance. As Flew concluded, “if the theorem [the Monkey Theorem] won't work for a single sonnet, then of course it's simply absurd to suggest that the more elaborate feat of the origin of life could have been achieved by chance.”³⁵ Flew came around to the view that modern science itself “spotlights three dimensions of nature that point to God. The first is the fact that nature obeys laws. The second is the dimension of life, of intelligently organized and purpose-driven beings, which arose from matter. The third is the very existence of nature.”³⁶

Flew admits to being impressed by Einstein's observation that “the laws of nature” manifested “the existence of a spirit manifestly

superior to the mind of men,” but he says his departure from atheism was not occasioned by any new argument or phenomenon. “When I finally came to recognize the existence of a God,” he wrote, “it was not a paradigm shift, because my paradigm remains, as Plato in his *Republic* scripted his Socrates to insist: ‘We must follow the argument wherever it leads.’”³⁷ His discovery of the divine, he says in his book, was actually “a pilgrimage of reason and not of faith.”³⁸ It is surely the contention of all intelligent Christians that there is never an incompatibility between the two. After all, we believe that the God who created faith also created reason.

If there is one topic that puts the New Atheists on the defensive, it is the subject of the wickedness committed by atheistic regimes, especially in the twentieth century. Displaying the annoyance of a third-grade teacher who has been asked yet again how to spell *recess*, Dawkins complains, “The question [what about Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao Zedong?] comes up after just about every public lecture I ever give on the subject of religion, and in most of my radio interviews as well.”³⁹ And so it should. Atheists who spend much of their time revisiting the crimes of religion ought to be quizzed again and again about what happens when governments adopt atheism as their official worldview. It is one of the most erroneous statements in popular culture in America, one of the most inaccurate but frequently repeated “urban legends,” that more people have been killed in wars of religion than any other kind of war.

Wrong. If the entire list of victims of every religious war ever fought, from the Crusades, through the wars of religion in Europe after the Protestant Reformation, to the brutal attacks upon each

other of Muslims and Hindus in the sub-continent of India is added up, that number is completely dwarfed by those murdered by Communist regimes in the twentieth century. According to some estimates, the number of people murdered under Communism, whether in wars started by Communist regimes, or as a result of internal repression against domestic adversaries, or in policies deliberately intended to produce starvation (Stalin's holocaust in the Ukraine through starvation in 1933 murdered between seven and eleven million men, women, and children) approaches a total of 100 million.

Then there is Hitler, who by general agreement deliberately murdered about twelve million people but started a war that took the lives of some 50 million. Hitler wasn't technically an atheist—we'll come to this in a moment—but there is no question that he acted as if there were no Divine personality or moral code above him to which he was going to be held accountable. In short, he certainly acted like someone in total rebellion against God.

In a paper of this length there is not time or space sufficient to deal thoroughly with the weaknesses of the New Atheism in regard to Communist—or to be more specific—Marxist-Leninist crimes, crimes quite specifically made possible by the Marxist revolt against God. But I will start with at least the broadest outlines.

Marx's atheism is usually illustrated by that inevitable quote, his comment about religion being "the opium of the people." (For reasons that remain quite obscure, this is almost invariably misquoted by journalists and columnists as the "opiate" of the people.) It is assumed that Marx's atheism was the mere byproduct of a materialistic view of the world and an admiration for the evolutionary

ideas of Charles Darwin. But it was much more than that. Marx's atheism grew directly out of the rejection of God by the followers of the seminal German philosopher Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) who were known as the Young Hegelians. The most important of these was theologian Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). That German theologian wrote an extremely influential book called *The Essence of Christianity*, which was first translated into English by the brilliant English nineteenth century novelist George Eliot. Feuerbach thought that the turning-point of the whole of history was the acknowledgment by German thinkers that "consciousness of God" was nothing other than "the consciousness of the species," by which he meant humanity's awareness of itself.⁴⁰ Christopher Hitchens gives the impression that he is dazzlingly original by making the claim that religion is "man-made," but of course Feuerbach got there first 166 years earlier.

Another young German thinker of that era who was, like Marx, also Jewish, Moses Hess (1812-1879) wrote to a friend in 1841 that Marx would "give the *coup de grace* to medieval religion and politics."⁴¹ Marx was indeed planning that year to bring out *Archiv der Atheismus* (Atheist Archive) and had, also in 1841, completed his doctoral dissertation, *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*. These bellicose words appear in the dissertation's preface: "Philosophy makes no secret of it. The proclamation of Prometheus: 'In a word, I detest all gods,' is its own confession, its own aphorism against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity. It will have none other beside."⁴² (In his Preface, Marx uses

the original Greek in quoting Prometheus, the character in Greek mythology who stole fire from the gods and brought it to humans, but I provided the English translation directly from the Greek text and the German.)

The point of this little philosophical diversion is important: long before Marx started thinking about capital, proletarians, and world revolution, he was engaged in what many observers of his thought have described as “an assault upon heaven.” In other words, it is completely mistaken to think that Marx was moping in his Berlin student lodgings one day and decided that those poor proletarians were getting a bad rap from the capitalists so something ought to be done about it. “*Eureka!*” he said, spilling his stein of beer, “Let’s organize a revolution.” Marx’s early philosophical obsession was to render humanity’s consciousness of itself the primary motive of human behavior. It was in 1843 that Marx’s “opium of the people” phrase was made, in a work of seminal importance for understanding the entire atheistic thrust of Marxism. In his work *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law: Introduction*, Marx wrote,

For Germany, *the criticism of religion* has been essentially completed, and the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism . . . The foundation of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man . . . The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the struggle *against that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion. . . . Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.⁴³

It is not surprising that of the Four Horsemen, Hitchens, who was a Marxist and then a Trotskyist for a while, makes a great deal of the Marxian formulation “man makes religion,” which of course grew out of the thinking of Feuerbach. What Hitchens fails to notice, however, is that the Marxian tradition, which produced Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot, acquired from the earliest days of Marx’s philosophical writings an animus towards religious faith, and towards Christianity in particular, that is a major reason for the wickedness produced by atheistic regimes when in power.

The easiest way to illustrate this is through the writings and actions of Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), who, of course, organized the Bolshevik coup d’etat in St. Petersburg in November 1917 and inaugurated the world’s first specifically atheistic regime. It’s fascinating to observe the evolution of Lenin’s thought towards religion because it is quite clear that, as Marx did, he had a profound personal animus towards faith in God that is not satisfactorily explained by his having merely a materialistic view of the universe. In a letter to the writer Maxim Gorky in 1913, Lenin wrote, “Every religious idea, every little god, even flirting with a little god, is unutterable vileness . . . vileness of the most dangerous kind, a plague of the most abominable kind.”⁴⁴ Within four years of coming to power, Lenin had ordered the arrest and execution of thousands of priests and Christian lay-people, had abolished church marriages, closed down thousands of churches and monasteries, and in 1921 asked the politburo to prohibit the sale of “pornography and books with religious content.”⁴⁵ Lenin initiated the first show trials and executions of religious figures and the first atheistic propagandist

clubs. Lenin was also responsible for the establishment of the nationwide complex of slave labor camps that were made infamous by the Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his book *The Gulag Archipelago*. (*Gulag* is an acronym, as all of my students of Russian history know, from the phrase *glavnoe upravleniie lagerei* ["Main Administration of the Camps"]). The Soviet government newspaper *Izvestiia* made it clear in a 1923 editorial that the aim of the Soviet leadership's anti-religious policy was not to purify or reform religion, but to destroy it.⁴⁶

Lenin died in 1924, and for a while it was unclear who his successor would be. But by 1927, Stalin had emerged as the new dictator of the Soviet Union. His period in power was to prove one of the most frightening political eras in the twentieth century, in a way even more terrifying than that of Adolf Hitler who was himself going to come to power in Germany in 1933.

Now Richard Dawkins, in *The God Delusion*, makes two rather foolish assertions about atheistic regimes. One is his statement that "there is not the smallest evidence" that atheism "systematically influences people to do bad things." The second is the claim on page 249 of his book that no "atheist in the world would bulldoze Mecca—or Chartres, York Minster or Notre Dame...etc.,etc."⁴⁷ Dawkins's high indignation comes after his reference to the scandalous dynamiting of the enormous Buddhist statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, by the Taliban regime in 2001. But Dawkins is certifiably wrong on the issue of destruction of religious property. In December 1931, atheist Joseph Stalin ordered the dynamiting of Moscow's largest Russian Orthodox church, the magnificent

Cathedral of Christ the Savior. The building was totally razed to the ground as thousands of stupefied Russian Christians watched in horror.

One consequence of the anti-religious policies of Lenin and Stalin was the emergence of a cult of Lenin and Stalin in Soviet culture that came close to replicating Christianity. The lyrics of one popular song were “Lenin lives in my heart,” an unconsciously blasphemous transmogrification of “Christ lives in my heart.” Freudian interpreters of his might say that this was merely the Soviet expression of a universal need for a father figure in Soviet society. But the larger point in response to the claims of the New Atheism is that, if you try to displace God and Christ as the center of any culture, you invariably establish in their place a human monster with hideous attributes.

This was particularly true in China, where the Communist leader Mao Zedong created a personality cult with himself at its center. If that is possible, it was even more idolatrous than Stalin had managed to construct in the Soviet Union. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) the idolatry of Mao reduced millions of Chinese young people to blubbery Asian versions of Western rock-and-roll groupies. During the most extreme phase of Red Guard adulation of Mao in 1966 and 1967, young people would “report” to Mao by reciting to him—as if he were in the room with them—at the beginning of each day what they were planning to do to further his revolution, and at the end of the day what they had actually done. It was, in effect, a sort of spiritual communication with Mao that emulated Christian prayer. The Chinese press, meanwhile, began to

report “miracles” wrought by the application of Mao Zedong Thought to the most banal of human problems. The removal of a giant tumor from a woman in a medical operation was said to have been made possible only by the application of Mao’s almost supernatural way of thinking to the medical issue. Focusing on Mao’s thought was claimed to have produced giant-sized watermelons, and so forth.

In two other Marxist-Leninist regimes, the quasi-religious cult of personality that has characterized the regimes—Khmer Rouge Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, and North Korea from the 1950’s until the present day—has produced equally ugly and distorted parodies of worship of our Creator and Savior. Pol Pot, a middle class Khmer intellectual who had imbibed his Marxism in Paris at the feet of feet of French intellectuals who were not only fawning admirers of Stalin but defenders of the use of terror in the name of “humanism,” actually wanted to surpass his teachers. He wanted to be higher in the pantheon of revolutionary heroes than even Marx, Lenin, or Mao. “The Khmer revolution has no predecessors,” he said boastfully. “We are trying to bring about what has never been accomplished at any time in history.”⁴⁸ He was successful; Pol Pot was responsible for the murder of a greater proportion of his own people than any previous tyrant in the world, approximately 1.2 to two million deaths from a total population of 7.3 million. When late in 1975 (after the Khmer Rouge had come to power and the killings had begun) at an international conference I questioned Pol Pot’s close associate, Khieu Samphan, who eventually became the President of Democratic Kampuchea, why the Khmer Rouge had murdered the entire officer

corps of the Lon Nol army, scores of thousands of men, he replied, “Why are you so concerned about war criminals?”

Not much needs to be said about North Korea’s Kim Il-sung. Hitchens, to his credit, expressed loathing of him in *God Is Not Great*, though in a case of confused zoological name-calling, he described Kim in his book as a “mammal,” whereas after the late Rev. Jerry Falwell passed away, in the Hitchens taxonomy on TV Falwell had descended the evolutionary chain to a “toad.” The current leader of North Korea is Kim’s son, Kim Chong-il, who graduated on his father’s decease from “the Dear Leader” to “the Great Leader,” as befits a son stepping into his father’s shoes. There are statues all over North Korea of the original Great Leader, and foreigners visiting the North Korean capital are supposed to present a bouquet of flowers to him, as though visiting the grave of a beloved deceased grandmother. To his, literally, everlasting credit, the evangelist Billy Graham, on his first and second visits to North Korea in 1992 and 1994 respectively, pointedly refrained from the flower ceremony. I can attest, however, to the point at which adulation of Kim Il-sung reached religious idolatry. I visited North Korea in 1983 and attended an opera complete with projected words in English. “Kim is our savior,” the singers sang.

As of today, there are hundreds of thousands of North Koreans being worked to death in slave labor camps, a North Korean version of the *Gulag* that makes Stalin’s original version seem by comparison, to be a day of frolicking in Lake Bob. Some of them are North Korean Christians, arrested for holding a clandestine worship service, or prayer meeting. Others are escapees from the North Korean

paradise who have been arrested in China and returned, for safe-keeping, to the North Korean authorities. In a rare moment of weakness, Hitchens acknowledges that evangelical Christians are doing more to draw world attention to the nightmare that is North Korea than any other group. He doesn't attempt to account for this apparent lapse from spreading global poison that religious believers are supposed to be doing most of the time. How Dawkins, presuming he has made an even cursory appraisal of what happens when totalitarian governments suppress all transcendental religious belief and replace it with human idolatry, can claim that atheism never "influences" the actions of totalitarian leaders can be explained, perhaps, by the fact that Balliol men just don't get it. Hitchens, of course, also went to Balliol College, Oxford.

Finally, there is Hitler.

It must be admitted, the Four Horsemen certainly haven't gotten their act together on this historical phenomenon. Sam Harris, like many secular or atheistic Jews, wishes to portray Hitler as unequivocally Christian and his genocide against the Jewish people as merely continuing—a *little more thoroughly perhaps*—a legacy of German anti-Semitism that goes back to Martin Luther, founder of Protestantism in 1543, and beyond. Hitchens rejects that theory, offering what I think is a much more accurate assessment of Nazism than Harris has offered. He describes Hitler's ideology as "a quasi-pagan phenomenon which in the long run sought to replace Christianity with pseudo-Nordic blood rites and sinister race myths, based upon the fantasy of Aryan superiority." Hitchens, somewhat contradictorily (because his entire book tries to make the case that

nothing is ever good in any religion), credits the German church with having publicly denounced one of Hitler's evil crimes—"an exterminationist attitude to the unwell, the unfit, and the insane"—even before Hitler began systematically to deal with the Jews.⁴⁹ Dennett is so busy adulating Dawkins that he ignores Hitler altogether. In a surprising lurch into historical learnedness, Dawkins admits that, though Hitler was probably not an atheist at all, his rejection of Christianity was as total as his rejection of Judaism. Dawkins, with commendable honesty, refers to a key source of evidence for what Hitler really thought, a book called *Hitler's Table Talk*, in which Hitler made it plain that he had nothing but total contempt for Christianity since Christianity, he thought, would mean the cultivation of human weakness and failure.⁵⁰

Finally, of course, it is impossible to discuss Hitler without reference to the German philosopher who influenced him uniquely, namely Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Hitler kept a bust of Nietzsche in his office, and he even gave a copy of one of Nietzsche's works to the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini (who reportedly did not read it). Nietzsche's philosophy has been interpreted since his death in several ways. He referred to himself as the Anti-Christ but is probably most famous for the passage from his book *The Joyful Wisdom* (the title was originally translated as *The Gay Science*, but it needs to be stressed that at the time of the work's writing, in the 1880s, the word "gay" had no connotation in general usage of "homosexual"). In the book, Nietzsche first tells the parable of a madman who runs into a town marketplace and declares, "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" Nietzsche then

explains the meaning of this odd tale, “The most important of more recent events—that ‘God is dead,’ that the belief in the Christian God has become unworthy of belief—already begins to cast its first shadows over Europe.”⁵¹ In fact, Nietzsche went on to predict that the twentieth century would be the bloodiest ever, precisely because of the waning of cultural and moral restraints resulting from Christianity’s diminishing influence.

Sam Harris, in what has to be the most ineffectual response to the “wicked atheist” arguments against which Dawkins is forever railing, explains that, in the case of Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot, the great atheist dictators of the last century have never been “especially rational.”⁵² But that is both true and so obvious it needs commenting on. Atheistic totalitarian leaders become irrational because they have replaced God with humanity, or more specifically, they have put themselves in the place of God. When a person believes, as Hitchens and Feuerbach do, that “man makes religion,” it is the simplest thing to unmake it and, having done so, to erect in its place a Frankenstein-like structure of idolatry that unleashes upon the human race all the wickedness and cruelty of which humanity has shown itself capable. Hitchens is at least honest enough to admit that “secular totalitarianism has provided us with the *summa* of human evil.” What he is not logical enough to admit is that this *summa* is the inevitable consequence of discarding those moral restraints that come down to us through the great religious traditions. Ever since Judaism and Christianity made their appearance in human history, they have taught that individuals and societies are accountable to the Creator. Even Islam, though without developing the emphasis on

individual conscience, does this. But the New Atheism wants to discard this and make us accountable to...to whom? To the moral law firm of Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens?

There are, of course, many further points to be made about the weaknesses of the New Atheism, but we are out of space and time (so to speak). A whole chapter could be written (and was written in my forthcoming book, *The Delusion of Disbelief: How the New Atheism is a Threat to Your Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness*), on the converse side of the political tyranny that atheism always seems to drag in its wake. In fact, I happen to think that the greatest danger of all of the New Atheism is the one it would make, if adopted at the state level in any hitherto free society, to individual liberty. This is a view, hardly original to me, I am the first to admit, held by many observers of the origins of the American republic. It holds that, basically, the only systems of government that have spontaneously created, then preserved, conditions both for religious freedom and then political freedom are those that have emerged from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Christianity set it all in motion with the post-Reformation emphasis on freedom of conscience. But I am happy to say that the only true democracy in the entire Middle East is Israel, also a Jewish state.

In this paper I have drawn attention to what I think are the obvious weaknesses of the New Atheism. I have not, of course, attempted to defend theism or Christianity in a philosophical or moral sense. I think they do that quite well on their own, thank you very much, without any help from me. But in closing, I'd like to quote a self-confessed "unrepentant atheist," a former member of the British

Parliament, a long-time socialist, Roy Hattersley. In a column in, of all places, Britain's *The Guardian* newspaper in 2005, Hattersley admitted what to many people is rather obvious. "We atheists have to accept that most believers are better human beings," the subhed to the column said. Hattersley's column was written after visiting the flood-ravaged city of New Orleans in 2005. "Almost all" the aid groups that stayed on in the devastated city after the first wave of relief workers had left, he said, had "a religious origin and character." He said that notable by their absence were "teams from rationalist societies, free thinkers' clubs, and atheists' associations – the sort of people who not only scoff at religions' intellectual absurdity but also regard it as a positive force of evil." Hattersley said he had observed the Salvation Army and other Christian groups at work in New Orleans as well as in his own English constituency. "The only possible conclusion," he wrote, "is that faith comes with a packet of moral imperatives that, while they do not condition the attitude of all believers, influence enough of them to make them morally superior to atheists like me. The truth may make us free. But it has not made us as admirable as the average captain in the Salvation Army."⁵³

Spoken like a true atheist. Now, are the others listening?

¹ Source: http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/beliefnet_poll_010718.html

² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Random House, 2006), Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve Publications, 2006)

³ David Aikman, *The Delusion of Disbelief: How the New Atheism is a Threat to your Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2008)

⁴ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 38

⁵ James Wood, "The Celestial Teapot," *The New Republic*, December 18, 2006, p. 27. Available online at <http://www.tnr.com/doc.mhtml?i=20061218&s=wood121806> (Cited July 2007).

⁶ Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (London: Verso Books, 1997)

⁷ "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," Online Exhibitions of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Available online at <http://www.ushman.org/museum/exhibit/onli#21r> (cited September 2007)

⁸ The 1964 Nobel Peace Prize presentation speech by Gunnar Jahn, chairman of the Nobel Committee, is available online at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates1964/press.html (cited July 2007)

⁹ Sewell Chan, "Hitchens, Sharpton, and Faith," The Empire Room blog, The New York Times, 7 May 2007. Available online at <http://empirezone.blogs>

¹⁰ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 239-247

¹¹ See for example the following studies:

David G. Myers, "On Assessing Prayer, Faith, and Health, Reformed Review, 2000, 53 (2), 119-126. Available online at <http://www.davidmyers.org/Brix?pageID=54> (cited September 2007); and Kathleen M. Clark, Howard S. Friedman and Leslie R. Martin, "A Longitudinal Study of Religiosity and Mortality Risk, Journal of Health Psychology, Vol. 4, No. 3, 381-391 (1999), the abstract of which is available online at <http://hpq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/4/3/381> (cited September 2007). The abstract reads:

The relation of adult religiosity to longevity was studied in 993 participants from Terman's 70-year Life-Cycle Study. Key social and behavioral variables of physical health, psychological well-being, socio-economic status, social support, and health behaviors were also considered. Results indicate that women who viewed themselves as more religious in adulthood (approximately age 40) had a lower risk for premature mortality than those who were less religiously inclined. These women had healthier behaviors, more positive feelings about their futures, and reported being somewhat happier than their less religiously inclined peers. In this bright, middle-class, 20th century sample, religiosity among women seems to be part of a generally healthy lifestyle, but not necessarily a direct cause of it.

¹² Richard Dawkins, *A Devil's Chaplain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), p. 124

¹³ Alistair McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 128

¹⁴ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, p. 14

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 221

¹⁶ John Gray, "Atheists are Irrational Too," *New Statesman*, March 20, 2006. Available online at <http://www.newstatesman.com/200603200044> (Cited July 2007).

¹⁷ John Cornwell, "Religion as a Natural Phenomenon," *The Sunday Times*, February 19, 2006 Available online at www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/science/article730931.ece (Cited July 2007).

¹⁸ Leon Wieseltier, "The God Genome" *The New York Times*, February 19 2006 Available online at www.nytimes.com/2006/02/19/books/review/19wieseltier.html?ex=1298005200&en=9ecb4016f9ff8682&ei=5090 (cited September 2007)

¹⁹ Stephen Jay Gould, "Impeaching a Self-Appointed Judge," *Scientific American*, Vol. 267, No. 1 (1992), pp 118-121. Available online at http://www.stephenjaygould.org/reviews/gould_darwin-on-trial.html (cited September 2007). Cited in Alister McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), p. 13

²⁰ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 57

²¹ See especially, Alister McGrath, *Dawkins' God*, (publication details previously cited) and Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007)

²² Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809-1882* (London: Collins, 1958), pp. 92-93. Available online at <http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?itemID=F1497&viewtype=text&pageseq=94> (cited September 2007)

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 93

²⁴ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 18

²⁵ Hitchens, *God is Not Great*, p. 272

²⁶ Harris, *The End of Faith*, p. 272

²⁷ Walter Isaacson, "Einstein and Faith," *Time Magazine*, April 5, 2007. Available online at www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1607298,00.html (Cited July 2007).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 99

³⁰ Owen Gingerich, *God's Universe*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006) and Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: The Free Press, 2006)

³¹ Collins, *The Language of God*, p. 5-6

³² Gingerich, *God's Universe*, pp. 101-102

³³

³⁴ Antony Flew, *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2007)

³⁵ Antony Flew, *There Is a God*, p. 78

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93

³⁹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 272

⁴⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by George Eliot (New York: Harper and Row, 1957). Also available online at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/ec15.htm> (cited August 2007).

⁴¹ Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels, *Historische-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 11 vols. Vol I (Frankfurt-am-Main: Marx-Engels Institut, 1937-1935), 1-2, p. 261

⁴² Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), I, p. 30. Also available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1841/dr-theses/foreword.htm> (cited August 2007).

⁴³ Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1975) pp. 243-244. Also available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm> (cited August 2007).

⁴⁴ Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, 5th. Ed. 55 vols. (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1965-1973, XLVII), pp. 226-227

⁴⁵ V.I. Lenin, "Draft Decision of the Politbureau of the C.C.R.C.P. (B) on the Free Sale of Books from Moscow Warehouse Stocks," in Lenin's *Collected Works*, 1st. English ed., vol 42 (Moscow:

Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 342-343. Available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/sep/13a.htm> (cited October 2007)

⁴⁶ Cited in A.A. Valentinov, *The Assault of Heaven* (London: Boswell Printing and Publishing Co., 1925), p. 7

⁴⁸ Stephane Courtois and others, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 616

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 237

⁵⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Table Talk*, cited in Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1962), pp. 672-673

⁵¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, Sections 125 & 343, in *A Casebook on Existentialism*, William V. Spamos (New York: Crowell, 1966), cited in Guinness, *The Journey*, pp. 137-138

⁵² Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, p. 40

⁵³ Roy Hattersley, "Faith does breed charity; We atheists have to accept that most believers are better human beings," *The Guardian*, 12 September 2005. Available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1567604,00.html> (cited October 2007)