

Godless Minds: Exploring The Rise and Influence of New Atheist Thinkers

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Abstract

This study provides a concise history of New Atheism, highlighting its departure from traditional atheistic perspectives. The study identifies five defining features of New Atheism after exploring into the subtle differences. These include its recent emergence and widespread media coverage, the adoption of an outspokenly critical stance towards religion, the promotion of scientism and rationalism as intellectual pillars, and the advocacy for secularism in societal frameworks. Furthermore, the study unfolds with an in-depth examination of the movement's key figures, commonly known as "The Four Horsemen" - Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins. This study aims to improve the clarity of the ideological roots of New Atheism and its impact on contemporary debates about faith, reason, and secularism by examining their individual contributions.

Keywords: New Atheism; Four Horsemen; classic atheism; features of New Atheism

Abstrak

Makalah ini menyediakan sejarah ringkas Ateisme Baru, dan menonjolkan perbezaannya daripada perspektif ateistik tradisional. Kajian ini mengenal

pasti lima ciri yang menentukan Ateisme Baru selepas meneroka perbezaan yang halus. Ini termasuk kemunculannya yang terbaharu dan liputan media yang meluas, penggunaan pendirian kritis yang lantang terhadap agama, promosi pemikiran saintifik dan rasionalisme sebagai tonggak intelektual, dan sokongan untuk sekularisme dalam rangka kemasyarakatan. Selain itu, kajian ini turut membuka lembaran yang mendalam tentang tokoh utama pergerakan itu, yang biasanya dikenali sebagai “Empat Penunggang Kuda” - Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, dan Richard Dawkins. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kejelasan akar ideologi Ateisme Baru dan kesannya terhadap perdebatan kontemporari tentang teologi, akal, dan sekularisme dengan mengkaji sumbangan mereka.

Kata Kunci: Ateisme Baharu; Empat Penunggang Kuda; ateisme klasik, ciri Ateisme Baharu

Introduction

This research examines thoroughly into the intricate areas of New Atheism and its foundational principles. Against the backdrop of atheistic ideologies, the rise of New Atheism represents a profound paradigm shift, deviating from traditional perspectives. To understand its significance, the chapter begins with a brief historical overview, meticulously tracing the emergence and rise of New Atheism as a significant intellectual movement.

The concept of atheism has evolved over time in the realm of philosophical discourse, giving rise to a distinct movement known as New Atheism. This article will go deeper into the complexities of defining atheism and New Atheism, including shedding light on the key differences between Classical Atheism and the more contemporary New Atheism. Notably, the study will investigate newness and comprehensive media coverage, the adoption of aggressive religious criticism, the promotion of scientism and rationalism, and the advocacy for secularism. This study will centre on the influential figures of New Atheism known as "The Four Horsemen" - Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. These factors - taken together - will contribute to a thorough understanding of the evolution and characteristics of New Atheism in comparison to its classical counterpart.

Defining New Atheism

Atheism has never been considered as a modern phenomenon. It is a popular culture primarily due to its failure to develop a critical mass of adherents.¹ Given its recent nucleation and promulgation in the Western world, some have argued that the rise of atheism is strongly linked to its complicated history with Christianity. Several contributory causes have been identified in connection with the rise of atheism. The first cause was a shift in worldview from a teleological perspective to a mechanical one—a change that marked the unravelling of the Aristotelian metaphysic so tightly intertwined with Christian theology. This resulted in the replacement of finality with materiality (to borrow the Aristotelian terminology). The second cause was the diminished status of revelation, which likely occurred due to internal strife amongst Christian factions causing a loss of authority and legitimacy for competing papal systems.

The precise definition of atheism is a contentious issue as academics have not reached a consensus on its definition.² There is no single definition of atheism.³ While there have been avowed atheists since the beginning of recorded history (and unbelievers before that), historians frequently emphasise that mainstream atheism is a far more recent phenomenon.⁴ Atheism linguistically

¹ Jonathon Ree, “Atheism and History”, in *Religion and Atheism: Beyond the Divide*, ed. Anthony Carrol and Richard Norman (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 63–70; Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 1-43; David Sedley, “From the Pre-Socratics to the Hellenistic Age”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 139-151; Mark Edwards, “The First Millenium”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 152-163; Dorothea Weltecke, “The Medieval Period”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 164-178; Denis J.J. Robichaud, “Renaissance and Reformation”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 179-194; Alan Charles Kors, “The Age of Enlightenment”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 195–211; David Nash, “The (Long) Nineteenth Century”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 212-228; Callum G. Brown, “The Twentieth Century”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 228-244.

² For an elaboration of the debate, see Bullivant, Stephen. *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11-21.

³ Quillen, E. “Discourse analysis and the definition of atheism” in *Science, Religion & Culture* 2, no.3 (2015): 25–35.

⁴ Brown, CG. “The twentieth century” in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Bullivant, S and Ruse, M (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 229-244.

means ‘not a theist’ or in other words, not a believer in the existence of a God or gods. The prefix *a* means none or not, and theism, coming from the word *theos*, denotes a “belief in the existence of an intervening a God or gods”. Both come from Greek but relying on the literal meaning is not enough to explain the implications of the term. Thus, what does disbelief in a God or gods imply? Does it indicate that the one who describes himself as an atheist has positive arguments in favour of atheism? Does it mean that they are currently not convinced by any theistic arguments? Or does it mean that they just do not believe in any gods?

“Atheism” in most dictionaries defined as belief that there is no God. Yet this is not what the term means if one considers it from the point of view of its Greek etymology. In Greek “*a* (*α*)” means “without” or “not,” and “*theos* (*θεός*)” means “god.”⁵ From this standpoint, an atheist is someone without a belief in God; he or she need not be someone who believes that God does not exist.⁶ Still, there are some popular dictionaries stated the meaning of “atheism” according to which an atheist is not simply one who holds no belief in the existence of a God or gods but is one who believes that there is no God or gods. While some argues that atheism is not an affirmative belief that there is no god nor does it answer any other question about what a person believes. It is simply a rejection of the assertion that there are gods.⁷

Eller had come to a unique conclusion that “At its core, atheism ... designates a position (not a “belief”) that includes or asserts no god(s)”⁸ It is known that a difference between position and belief is that position is a stand, opinion, or stance while belief is mental acceptance of a claim as likely true. Martin emphasized with a

⁵ Gordon Stein, “The Meaning of Atheism and Agnosticism,” in *An Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism*, ed. Gordon Stein (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus, 1980), 3.

⁶ This negative sense of “atheism” should be distinguished from the sense of “atheism” introduced by Paul Edwards. According to Edwards, an atheist is a person who rejects a belief in God. This rejection may be because the person believes that the statement “God exists” is false, but it may be for other reasons. The negative sense of “atheism” used here is broader than Edwards’s definition since on the present definition someone can be an atheist if he or she has no belief in God, although the lack of belief is not the result of rejection. See Paul Edwards, “Atheism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1967), vol. 1, 175.

⁷ American Atheist, “What is Atheism”, accessed on December 27 2023, <https://www.atheists.org/activism/resources/about-atheism/>

⁸ Eller, J. D. “What is atheism?”, in *Atheism and Secularity*, ed. P. Zuckerman, volume 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 1.

definition that likely taken from Greek word, *atheos*. According to him, “[A]n atheist is someone without a belief in God; he or she need not be someone who believes that God does not exist.”⁹ While McGrath believes it is a principled and informed decision to reject belief in God.¹⁰ In contrast, Sam Harris has challenged the need for the term "atheism" itself. He wrote,

In fact, "atheism" is a term that should not even exist. No one ever needs to identify himself as a "non-astrologer" or a "non-chemist". We do not have words for people who doubt that Elvis is still alive or that aliens have traversed the galaxy only to molest ranchers and their cattle. Atheism is nothing more than the noises reasonable people make in the presence of unjustified religious beliefs.¹¹

These variety of definitions concluded what has been emphasized by Stephen Bullivant. Some of the ambiguity involved in defining atheism arises from difficulty in reaching a consensus for the definitions of words like deity and God. The variety of different conceptions of God, deities and even spiritual, supernatural, or transcendental concepts, such as those of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Taoism leads to dissimilar ideas regarding atheism's applicability.

Atheism in Arabic word is *al-ilhad*, from *alhada* – *yulhidu* – *ilhadan*. It means be inclined (*mal*), turning aside from (*'udul*), engage in conflict with (*mara*), and wrangle with (*jadil*).¹² According to Ibn Fāris, the word is taken from past tense (*fi'l al-madi*) *lahada* or *alhada*. The alphabet *lam*, *ha'* and *dal* (L-H-D) refer to digress from the straight path (*mayl 'an istiqamah*). It is said: The man has digressed from the straight path (*alhada al-rajul*) if he deviates from the path of truth and faith.¹³ *Al-lahd* is a trench (*al-shaqq*) on the side of a grave at the ground; because it inclines

⁹ Martin, M. "General Introduction", in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed., M. Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-7.

¹⁰ McGrath, A. *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (London: Rider, 2004), 175.

¹¹ Harris, Sam, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 17.

¹² Al-Firuzabadi, Muhammad bin Ya'qub, "Ilhad" in *Al-Qamus al-Muhit* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2005), 317.

¹³ Ibn Faris, *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lughah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979), 5/236.

from the middle to the side.¹⁴ Thus, a wrongdoer (*ẓalim*) is called *mulhid* as said by Ḥumayd al-Arqaṭ in his poem:

قَدِّينِ مِنْ نَصْرِ الْحُبَيْبِيِّنَ قَدِّي ... لَيْسَ الْإِمَامُ بِالشَّحِيحِ الْمَلْجِدِ

Lead me away from Khubaybin's victory... A leader is not a miserly atheist.¹⁵

While *ilhad* technically means inclination and renunciation from the straight path, religion, or truth as Ibn Taymiyyah said, “*Ilhad* implies a deviation from something to something in void.”¹⁶ *Ilhad* in Islamic worldview is in the broadest sense of an absence or lack of belief in the six fundamental beliefs (*al-arkan al-sittah*). Besides, those who believed in the eternity of the cosmos, no resurrection of the dead, materialists, and naturalists, technically also may be considered as *mulhid*.

According to Quranic usage of the term, *ilhad* means to be inclined to something negative or blasphemy, to deviate from something good, or to tend to something negative or blasphemy and such basic meaning occurs in various Quranic contexts, as shown above. *Ilhad* in the Quranic terminology does not solely indicate atheism in the sense of denying Allāh, as the common meaning of the term in contemporary Arabic denotes; rather, the researchers find that in the Quranic contexts, it covers, along with its derivatives and forms.¹⁷ The researchers believe that ‘Abd al-Rahman Ḥabannakah’s definition of atheism in Islām is one of the most accurate and in line with modern understandings of atheism. He defines atheism as “... the denial of the existence of Allah and the belief that this universe was created without a Creator, that matter is eternal, and that the change of the universe is caused by chance or by the nature of matter and its laws. It is known as the

¹⁴ Ibn Manzur. *Lisan al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 2005), 3:388-389; Al-Zubaydi, Muhammad bin Muhammad, “Lahada” in *Taj al-‘Arus min Jawahir al-Qamus* (Dar al-Hidayah, n.d.), 9:136.

¹⁵ This line is from the classical Arabic poetry (arjuzah) of Abu Nakhilah Humayd bin Malik Al-Arqaṭ, one of the poets of the Umayyad era, praising Al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf Al-Thaqafi and criticizing Abdullah bin Al-Zubayr. See Ibn ‘Aqil, *Sharh Ibn ‘Aqil ‘ala Alfīyyah ibn Malik* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1980), 1:115.

¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu‘ al-Fatawa* (Madinah: Majma‘ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 12:124.

¹⁷ Refer to surah al-A‘raf: 180; surah Fussilat: 40; surah al-Nahl: 103; surah al-Hajj: 25; surah al-Kahf: 27; and surah al-Jinn: 22.

phenomenon of life and what it entails from human thought and feelings as a result of the effect of matter evolution.”¹⁸ Despite various definitions of atheism, he concludes: “...What is meant by atheism in this context is the denial of the existence of a Lord who created this universe.”¹⁹

The pejorative term ‘New Atheism’ emerged between late summer and autumn (August) of 2006 when the three individual authors Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris (Hitchens came later) were grouped together.²⁰ An American journalist Gary Wolf wrote the article *The Church of the Non-Believers* to describe the positions promoted by some atheists of the 21st century.²¹ His article has succeeded in setting the negative tone of the discussion surrounding what is now popularly called ‘New Atheism’.²²

¹⁸ Al-Maydani, ‘Abd al-Rahman Habannakah, *Kawashif Zuyuf fi al-Madhahib al-Fikriyyah al-Mu’asirah* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1991), 409.

¹⁹ Al-Maydani, *Kawashif Zuyuf fi al-Madhahib al-Fikriyyah al-Mu’asirah*, 433.

²⁰ Zenk, Thomas. “New Atheism”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 251. *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, a Sam Harris publication from 2004, is widely cited as the movement’s starting point. *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* by Daniel Dennett, and *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* by the late Christopher Hitchens all appeared shortly after Harris’ book. These prominent intellectuals, who are frequently called as the “Four Horsemen of Atheism,” started a public conversation about the plausibility and potential risks of faiths, which led to the publication of well over twenty responses. For just a few examples of these works, see Alister McGrath, *Why God Won’t Go Away: Is the New Atheism Running on Empty?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010); Amarnath Amarasingam, ed., *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (Boston: Brill, 2010); Victor J. Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (New York: Prometheus, 2009); Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great about Christianity?* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2007); Becky Garrison, *The New Atheist Crusaders and Their Unholy Grail: The Misguided Quest to Destroy Your Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007); and John C. Lennox, *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target* (Chicago: Lion Hudson, 2011).

²¹ Gary Wolf, “The Church of the Non-Believers”, *Wired*, retrieved on 10 October 2020, <https://www.wired.com/2006/11/atheism/>.

²² This was possibly done for the first time in a review of *The God Delusion* in the American trade magazine *Publishers Weekly*, dating from 21 August. Refer to *Publishers Weekly*, 2006. ‘The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins’, retrieved on July 25 2021, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-618-68000-9>. Another such article, ‘The New Naysayers’, appeared in the 11 September issue of the American magazine *Newsweek*; here, for the first time, the adjective ‘new’ appeared. Refer to Adler, J. 2006. ‘The New Naysayers’, *Newsweek*, retrieved on July 25 2021, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/45574>. On 23 October, the influential German weekly *Der Spiegel*—to quote an example from a non-English language context—printed an article, which was published in *Spiegel Online International* under the English title ‘The New Atheists: Researchers Crusade against American Fundamentalists’ on 26 October. Refer to Blech, J. 2006. ‘The New Atheists. Researchers Crusade against American Fundamentalists’, *Spiegel Online International*,

The aforementioned publications represent the start of a heated public debate about the so-called “New Atheism”. Once this name had been entrenched in public discourse, it was replicated time and time again, not only in the United States, but also in several other nations. This discussion, which began in 2006 and peaked between 2007 and 2009, appears to have calm down since then. Hundreds of articles have used the term in various ways. Not just in the Anglosphere, but also in translation: French (*Nouvel Athéisme*), Italian (*Nuovo Ateismo*), Spanish (*Nuevo Ateismo*), Swedish (*Nya Ateism*), Polish (*Nowy Ateizm*), Finnish (*Uusateismi*), German (*Neuer Atheismus*), or Arab world (*al-ilhad al-jadid*).²³

The emergence of New Atheism brought about a global cultural shift that has drawn religion back into the centre of public discourse. The proponents of this contemporary movement have launched an ideological onslaught against all religions alike, denouncing them as nonsensical and deeply harmful. They have published and sold millions of copies of their books and have increasingly been given public platforms for their speeches and debates; they have accrued a vast amount of social and political capital, and, all the while, New Atheism has gained popularity as a worldview, coming to compete aggressively with theisms all around the world.

The self-proclaimed "Four Horsemen" heralding the end of Western religion, Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, and Dennett, were joined in 2007 by Victor Stenger, whose book *God: The Failed Hypothesis* received significantly less popular acclaim but was described by Hitchens as "a huge addition to the arsenal of argument" for the New Atheism. However, Stenger's most significant contribution came two years later in the form of his systematic analysis of the movement, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*. Stenger aimed to "examine and build upon the principles of New Atheism" in that book, as well as reply to the first round of opposition material written by theologians Alister McGrath, Keith Ward, Thomas Crean, Scott Hahn, and John Haught, as well as scientists Francis Collins and Jerry Coyne.²⁴ In

retrieved on July 25 2021,
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,444787,00.html>.

²³ Zenk, Thomas, “New Atheism”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, 251.

²⁴ Zenk, “New Atheism”, 116.

public lectures and writings, such as *The Fallacy of Fine Tuning* and *God and the Folly of Faith*, Stenger continued to shoot back.²⁵ As the increasing tide of the New Atheist writers' appeal lifted more anti-religious and secular humanist boats, a small cottage industry of publications sprouted up alongside Stenger and the rest of the self-identified "New Atheists." At the very least, the New Atheism has sparked a debate about how religion is treated in the twenty-first century, as well as providing a platform for secular humanists to communicate a positive vision of a religion-free society.

Differences Between Classical Atheism and New Atheism

The noteworthy challenge posed by such a comparative examination lies in the definitions and possible non-existence of any intrinsic, coherent, and definable qualities of the two phenomena. From the evidence provided in this essay, it appears that New Atheism, along with its counterpart classical atheism, exists only in general discourse. Subsequently, these two categories contain limited analytical value. The primary conceptual weakness with New Atheism as an analytical category, lies in the pre-existence of the characteristics commonly ascribed to it; qualities which can all be found in the works of both atheists and deists prior to the 21st century. Thus, there are only a little about the newness of New Atheism.

Five Common Features of New Atheism

New Atheism according to Wolf is an aggressive, evangelizing atheist movement that conflates moderate forms of religion with fundamentalist forms, and is, in essence, a quasi-religious movement.²⁶ Some critics of the movement such as al-'Ujayri, Waal and Lyons characterize it as "militant atheism".²⁷ There are five common features discursively ascribed to New Atheism:

²⁵ Zenk, "New Atheism", 170.

²⁶ Gary Wolf, "The Church of the Non-Believers", *Wired*, retrieved on October 10 2020, <https://www.wired.com/2006/11/atheism/>.

²⁷ Al-'Ujayri, 'Abd Allah bin Salih. *Milishiya al-Ilhad*, (London: Takween Center, 2014); Frans De Waal, "Has militant atheism become a religion?", *Salon*, retrieved on October 11 2020, https://www.salon.com/2013/03/25/militant_atheism_has_become_a_religion/; Eric Lyons, Kyle Butt, "Militant Atheism" *Apologetics Press*, retrieved on October 11 2020, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=12&article=2051>. Refer to McAnulla, Stuart. 2012. "Radical Atheism and Religious Power: New Atheist Politics" *Approaching Religion*, 2(1). 87-99 to learn more about radical atheism and politics.

Newness and Comprehensive Media Coverage

The main discourse surrounding New Atheism retrospectively dates its initial rise with the publication of Sam Harris' *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason* on 2004. This discourse also asserts that the inspiration for the emergence of New Atheism can be located in the events of 11th of September 2001, due to Harris' stated intention for writing the book.

Stenger in *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Reason and Science* gives a reason for the newness of the movement. He argues that its central proponents write mainly from a scientific perspective. Dawkins is a biologist and Stenger, himself, a physicist and astronomer. Harris is a neuroscientist and Dennett is a philosopher of science who has written almost exclusively on scientific topics. While Hitchens was not a scientist but a journalist, his approach to religion, according to Stenger is empirical. However, critics of New Atheism maintain that it offers nothing more than a rebranding of age-old philosophical and religious alike arguments combined with an intolerant, dogmatic and aggressively anti-religious rhetoric.²⁸ The researcher believes that the newness of the New Atheism has very little to do with the philosophy, belligerent nature, popularity, or even its scientific approach to religion. What seems to distinguish it from classical forms of atheism is only the subtle ways it critiques and attacks Islām through its scattergun approach of critique of religions. Zenk remarks:

“Why are these (very) different authors and books subsumed under the one, unity-implying label New Atheism? In my answer to this question, I want to point to an external factor instead of seeking an intrinsic quality of New Atheism: the comprehensive media coverage. The phenomenon referred to as ‘New Atheism’ is the result of a discursive process in which several authors eventually were labelled New Atheists.”²⁹

²⁸ Refer to Haught, F. John, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008); Beattie, Tina, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2008).

²⁹ Zenk, Thomas. New Atheism in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, 250.

New Atheism is believed to be a famous movement,³⁰ the foundation for which is said to lie in the bestselling works of four authors; Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett.³¹ Each person employs different approaches to religious criticism, so different that they cannot be taken to encompass a single, definable movement or category of atheism.

However, New Atheism clearly is not something new. The only new thing about them is their tone, their emphasis and extensive media coverage. The New Atheists are much louder and ear-splitting than the classical atheists. While there are many similarities that clearly position New Atheism within the history of scientism, we find that the form of scientism the New Atheists employ owes at least as much to the current state of religious field as to their scientific predecessors.³²

Pigliucci argues that there are intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the newness of the New Atheism that distinguished it from classical atheism. The extrinsic character is the popularity of the movement itself. All books written by the New Atheists mentioned above have been worldwide best sellers, in the case of Dawkins's *God Delusion*, for instance, remaining for enormous 51 weeks on the New York Times best-seller list.

While the intrinsic qualities of New Atheism are its grounding in science, reason, rationalism, as well as its unapologetic stance against the excessive of problems associated with living in a predominantly religious world. Classical atheism, on the other hand, is seen as a philosophical brand of atheism that perhaps knows its place, a place prescribed for it in the pre-secular world.³³

The researcher also believed that when the free speech afforded by secularism is considered, as well as wide media coverage, the 'evangelism' ascribed to New Atheism appears to be little more than the result of living in a digital age in which all opinions have become amplified. Ironically, although secularization

³⁰ Massimo Pigliucci, "New Atheism and the Scientific Turn in the Atheist Movement" in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XXXVII, 2013, 144.

³¹ Zenk, Thomas, "New Atheism", in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, 245.

³² Kaden, Tom; Schmidt-Lux, Thomas, "Scientism And Atheism Then and Now: The Role of Science In The Monist And New Atheist Writings", *Culture and Religion* 17 no. 1, (2016), 73-91.

³³ Pigliucci, Massimo, "New Atheism and the Scientific Turn in the Atheism Movement", 144.

is a general tendency or principle of development in modern societies (as understood by most people) this does not imply that religion is driven out altogether from society. In fact, as one of the most secular countries in the world, the United States is also among the world's most religious.

Aggressive Criticism towards Religion³⁴

One of the characteristics of New Atheism is said to be its harsh and impenitent criticism towards all religions. Antitheism or anti-religion is defined as depicting the 'New Atheism' as disrespectful or hostile toward religion. Making the 'New Atheists' aggressive helps them to be portrayed as a threat. Wolf introduced the 'New Atheists' in his opening remarks by comparing them with 'lazy agnostics,' 'noncommittal nonbelievers,' or 'vague deists.'³⁵

Sam Harris goes further by claiming that in the name of *jihād*, "suicide bombings have been rationalized by much of the Muslim world"³⁶ and that, in Islām, it is "rational for Muslim women to encourage the suicides of their children, as long as they are fighting for God".³⁷ Based on that "premises", Harris believes that majority of Muslims celebrated the death of terrorist 11 September attack as martyrdom.³⁸

The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins was an explicit outburst declaring the superiority of the atheistic worldview and simultaneously launching a withering and provocative attack on all religions alike. He also criticizes the concept of moderation in religion by saying:

“As long as we accept the principle that religious faith must be respected simply because it is religious faith, it is hard to

³⁴ The 'new' in the new atheists' writings, according to William W. Emilsen, is not their aggressiveness, nor their extraordinary popularity, nor even their scientific approach to religion; rather, it is their attack not only on militant Islamism, but also on Islam itself, under the guise of its general critique of religion. The new atheist movement has increased hostility towards Islam and may have heated relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Refer to Emilsen, W. W. "The New Atheism and Islam", *The Expository Times* 123, no. 1 (2012), 521–528.

³⁵ Gary Wolf, "The Church of the Non-Believers", *Wired*, retrieved on October 10 2020, <https://www.wired.com/2006/11/atheism/>.

³⁶ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 123.

³⁷ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 136.

³⁸ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 127.

withhold respect from the faith of Osama bin Laden and the suicide bombers [of the London attack]. The alternative, one so transparent that it should need no urging, is to abandon the principle of automatic respect for religious faith. This is one reason why I do everything in my power to warn against faith itself, not just against so-called ‘extremist’ faith. The teachings of ‘moderate’ religion, though not extremist in themselves, are an open invitation to extremism.”³⁹

Harris makes Islamophobia a central part of his message. Hitchens comes second by recognizing that the bad aspects of Islām are also found in Christianity and Judaism. In fact, there are no good religious traditions according to him. Dawkins portrays Islām as an illustration of the strange and bizarre behaviour of religious people. It is interesting to note how both Harris and Hitchens supported the American war to Iraq, primarily as a result of their deep prejudice against Islam.⁴⁰

Promoting scientism and rationalism

Science is the most resourceful tool New Atheists have against religion.⁴¹ Scientism can be defined as the promotion of science as the best or only objective means by which society should determine normative and epistemological values. It is a belief that all intellectual disciplines must be subject to the natural sciences to able to achieve the license to properly interpret truth and reality.⁴²

By analysing most of the New Atheists’ writings on scientism, the researcher came to know that that there is a slightly standard understanding on scientism; a totalizing attitude that regards science as the ultimate standard and arbiter of all interesting questions; or alternatively that seeks to expand the very definition and scope of

³⁹ Dawkins, Richard, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006), 345-346.

⁴⁰ Ian S. Markham, *Against Atheism: Why Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris are Fundamentally Wrong* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 105–106.

⁴¹ “The problem with the science in the books and lectures of the New Atheists is that it is not pure science; The objective pursuit of knowledge about the universe. Rather, it is ‘science with a purpose’: the purpose of disproving the existence of God.” See: Amir D. Aczel, *Why Science Does not Disprove God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 18. See other refutation by al-Ujayri, Abd Allah Salih. *Milishiya al-Ilhad*, 83-97.

⁴² Shoaib Ahmed Malik, *Atheism, and Islam: A Contemporary Discourse* (Abu Dhabi: Kalam Research Media, 2018), 23.

science to encompass all aspects of human knowledge and understanding.⁴³

Stenmark provides some useful distinctions on the various forms of scientism. For purposes of this study, there are three forms of scientism; epistemic scientism, ontological scientism, and existential scientism.⁴⁴ Epistemic scientism refers to the position that the only reliable and valid method by which we can make claims about reality is through the scientific method; all else needs to be marginalised or excluded. Ontological scientism refers to the idea that reality consists only of those things that are knowable through the scientific method. In its extreme form, it invokes a naturalistic philosophy, which is the belief that all of reality can be reduced to and can only be explained by physical elements, including free will, thoughts, and morality. Thus, science does not merely answer the questions that religion seems to have answers for, it also replaces religion as whole; this is existential scientism. It is this specific and radical position within scientism that is predominant among New Atheists.

The New Atheists use scientism in one form or another as their yardstick for what constitutes a rational belief. Strong scientism holds that empirical science is the only source of knowledge about the world, while weak scientism holds that it is the best source of rational belief about how things are. About this, Harris and Dawkins are very clear. According to Harris, a genuinely rational approach to moral and philosophical issues is equivalent to a scientific approach to these issues.⁴⁵ According to Dawkins, it is a valid scientific question to ask whether a super-creative intelligence exists.⁴⁶ According to the New Atheists, a belief can only be epistemically justified if it is supported by sufficient evidence. Because scientism and evidentialism go hand in hand, a belief can only be justified if it is supported by sufficient scientific evidence.

The conclusion reached by the New Atheists that there is insufficient scientific evidence for God's existence (and even sufficient scientific evidence for God's non-existence) leads them

⁴³ Pigliucci, Massimo, "New Atheism and the Scientific Turn in the Atheism Movement", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 31, (2013), 144.

⁴⁴ Mikael Stenmark, *Scientism: Science, Ethics and Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 1-17.

⁴⁵ Harris, *The End of Faith*, 42.

⁴⁶ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 58-59.

to conclude that belief in God is unjustified. According to Dawkins, the “God Hypothesis”, which asserts that the universe was purposefully created by a superhuman, supernatural intelligence, is “founded on local traditions of private revelation rather than evidence”.⁴⁷ Given these New Atheist epistemological presumptions (and their implications for religious epistemology), it is not surprising that some of their arguments have been criticised for lacking sufficient scientific evidence to support scientism and sufficient evidence to support evidentialism.

Promoting Secularism

The involvement of the New Atheists in process of secularization is inarguable. “The disenchantment of the world” as Max Weber said or secularization is a part of modernization which systematically challenges religious institutions, beliefs, and practices, substituting for them those of reason and science. Ibn Warraq is the founder of the Institute for the Secularisation of Islamic Society (ISIS).⁴⁸ Ali Rizvi takes the project of secularization to its furthest extreme in his book, *The Atheist Muslim: A Journey from Religion to Reason*. He writes:

“As a rationalist, I would ideally want to see a truly enlightened world, liberated from religion and superstition entirely; this is where I diverge from my pro-reform friends and family, most of whom are believers.”⁴⁹

Secularization and atheism are both concerned with the use and impact of supernatural constructs (or ideas, beliefs, perceived realities, or phenomena) in human affairs in their broadest senses. The assertion or observation that social phenomena organised around supernatural ideas - or the ideas themselves - have been, or are, in decline is known as secularization. It goes hand in hand with religionization, or the application of supernatural ideas to authorise,

⁴⁷ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 32.

⁴⁸ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 13.

⁴⁹ Ali A. Rizvi, *The Atheist Muslim: A Journey from Religion to Reason* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2016), 202

motivate, or control human activity (at the individual, institutional, or societal levels)⁵⁰

The late Christopher Hitchens makes the case that many of the conflicts that have shaped the world of the 20th and 21st centuries have their roots in religion in this speech from Intelligence Squared's debate on the topic, "We'd be better off without religion." He uses the current conflicts in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Northern Ireland as examples, pointing out that in each of these regions, interfaith conflicts have either started or exacerbated the conflicts and slowed the advancement of politics and society.⁵¹

The Temporality of Universe

According to al-'Ujayrī, most atheists today acknowledge the temporality of the universe and that everything in it is temporal, which was not common in pre-modern atheism. They used to believe the universe was pre-eternal; in fact, they had this down as an accepted fact, and stated that the burden of proof for its temporality was on those who claimed it was temporal. Bertrand Russell, the famous British mathematician and philosopher, claimed that "the universe is just there, and that is all" - it did not need an explanation, he said; it was pre-eternal, with nothing that caused it to begin.⁵²

Few ancient Greeks had views on the nature of the universe.⁵³ The pre-Socratic philosophers Leucippus and Democritus proposed an atomic theory, which proposed that everything in the universe is made up of indivisible particles called atoms. They believed that the universe was infinite and contained an infinite number of atoms. This concept is frequently associated with the "void" or empty space between atoms.⁵⁴ The Stoics, a Hellenistic philosophical

⁵⁰ Frank L. Pasquale and Barry A. Kosmin, "Atheism and the Secularization Thesis" in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 377.

⁵¹ Christopher Hitchens, "We'd be better off without religion: Christopher Hitchens" Youtube, accessed on September 24 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpKmj75kZo>.

⁵² Al-'Ujayri, 'Abdullah Salih, *Shumu 'al-Nahr*, (London: Takween Center, 2018), 113.

⁵³ Furley, David J. "The Greek Theory of the Infinite Universe." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42, no. 4 (1981), 571–85.

⁵⁴ The whole idea of Leucippus and Democritus can be referred to Guthrie, W.K.C., *A History of Greek Philosophy vol. 1: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Mihai, Adrian, 'Atomism and the Cambridge Platonists,' in Ugo Zilioli (ed.), *Atomism in Philosophy: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 206-71; Sedley, David, 'Atomism's

school, held a more nuanced viewpoint. Some Stoic philosophers, such as Chrysippus, believed that the cosmos was infinite in its entirety, but they also recognised a cyclical pattern of cosmic conflagrations (world-ending events) and renewals.⁵⁵

The term “temporality of the universe” of temporal finitism describes the notion that, according to contemporary cosmology, the universe has a limited lifespan, having both a beginning (the Big Bang) and an eventual end (a number of theories, such as the heat death of the universe). Scholars, or more specifically philosophers, have examined the idea of the temporality of the universe from a variety of perspectives, frequently touching on metaphysics, cosmology, and epistemology. The belief in a finite or infinite universe is primarily a matter of scientific inquiry and cosmological research. This question is being investigated by scientists, including cosmologists and physicists, through observations, experiments, and theoretical models. Their findings are supported by empirical evidence and mathematical models.⁵⁶

In conclusion, the emergence of New Atheism resulted in significant shifts in the discourse surrounding religion, science, and secularism. The five common features of the movement, namely its newness and extensive media coverage, aggressive criticism of religion, promotion of scientism and rationalism, advocacy for secularism, and recognition of the universe's temporality, have collectively shaped public perception of atheism and its interaction with the broader society.

To begin with, the movement's newness, combined with extensive media coverage, allowed New Atheism to reach a larger audience and garner increased attention. This exposure facilitated open discussions about religious beliefs and encouraged people to reconsider their own perspectives on spirituality and atheism.

Second, the movement's emphasis on aggressive criticism of religion sparked heated debates, which frequently resulted in a more confrontational dialogue between atheists and religious believers.

Eleatic Roots,' in Patricia Curd and Daniel W. Graham (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 305-332.

⁵⁵ Drozdek, Adam. “Infinity in Chrysippus.” *Hermes* 130, no. 4 (2002), 404–15.

⁵⁶ However, the scope of debate on this topic is currently very limited. The dominant view in modern science is that the world is temporal, and that the universe in which we live has a fixed age. As a result, the debate over the universe's “pre-eternality versus temporality” is no longer an issue in nowadays' science.

While this approach alienated some, it also contributed to a more thorough examination of religious doctrines and their role in modern society.

Third, the promotion of scientism and rationalism by New Atheism highlighted the importance of evidence-based reasoning and empirical inquiry, encouraging people to prioritise scientific understanding over supernatural explanations.

Fourth, New Atheism's advocacy for secularism sought to maintain the separation of religious institutions and the state. This stance sought to protect individual liberties while also ensuring that no single religious belief system dominated public policies and governance.

Finally, acknowledging the universe's temporality highlighted the naturalistic viewpoint of New Atheism, which sees the universe as finite and devoid of supernatural intervention. In contrast to religious cosmologies, this viewpoint provided an alternative explanation for the origins and functioning of the universe.

While New Atheism has had an impact on contemporary discussions about atheism, it is important to recognize that the movement represents a wide range of viewpoints. Some critics argue that the movement oversimplifies complex philosophical and theological discussions, and not all atheists agree with its aggressive approach. As a result, the impact and legacy of New Atheism are still being studied by academics.

Key Figures of New Atheism: The Four Horsemen

It is important to justify the study by recognizing the profound impact of the Four Horsemen's collective work and their role in shaping the dialogue on atheism in the 21st century. The record of their meeting captures the shared convictions and diverse perspectives of these prominent New Atheists as they confront the challenges posed by religious beliefs and assert the primacy of reason and secular values in the face of tradition. The researchers gain insight into the motivations, arguments, and strategies used by these influential figures in their collective pursuit of a more rational and secular world by examining this discussion.

The use of this biblical allusion, which draws parallels to the Book of Revelation's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, adds a layer of symbolism and significance to the conversation. The Four

Horsemen are harbingers of cataclysmic events in the biblical context, each riding a different-colored horse representing conquest, war, famine, and death. Likewise, the "Four Horsemen of New Atheism" represent a concerted intellectual and ideological challenge to doctrines of religion, promoting reason, science, and secularism as alternatives to traditional faith-based beliefs.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are described in the last book of the New Testament of the Bible, the Book of Revelation by John of Patmos, at 6:1–8⁵⁷, according to the main exegetical stream since the Reformation. The chapter tells of a book or scroll in God's right hand that is sealed with seven seals. The Lamb of God opens the first four of the seven seals, which summons four beings that ride out on white, red, black, and pale horses. Before the Reformation it was generally thought that there was only one Horseman, riding successively these four horses.

On 30 September 2007, four prominent atheists met at Hitchens' residence in Washington, D.C., for a private two-hour unmoderated discussion. The event was videotaped and titled "The Four Horsemen".⁵⁸ They are:

Sam Harris

He is an American philosopher and neuroscientist, who launched an aggressive assault on all religions in his book, *The End of Faith*:

⁵⁷ *Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the [a]seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come [b]and see." Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So, I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales[c] in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A [d]quart of wheat for a [e]denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine." When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And [f]power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.*

⁵⁸ Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, "The Four Horsemen HD: Hour 1 of 2 - Discussions with Richard Dawkins, Ep 1" Youtube, December 7 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DKhc1pcDFM>. For more information about the New Atheism's Four Horsemen, refer to Finley, Wayne, "The Four Horsemen of New Atheism: A Select Bibliography." *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 18 (2019), 115 - 125.

Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason (2004)⁵⁹. According to the researcher's viewpoint, Harris is the most hostile towards Islām to the extent that he dedicates an entire chapter to the "Problem with Islam" - the lengthiest chapter in the book.⁶⁰ He argues that his work is a response to the September 11 attacks by Muslim terrorists and the subsequent public debate on the dangers of religion.⁶¹ As a result, the purportedly violent nature of Islam is a major subject in the book, and Harris quotes extensively from the Qur'an and prophetic traditions to support the argument that Islām is an aggressive, if not the most hostile, religion.⁶²

In this book, he mentions several violent conflicts and battles from the past and today, all of which he believes are the result of religion.⁶³ The entire book reads as a criticism of religion rather than an argument for the non-existence of God, yet, it is clear from the way that Harris frames his arguments that, for him, the repudiation of religion equates to the negation of God. He writes, "most religions have merely canonized a few products of ancient ignorance and derangement and passed them down to us as though they were primordial truths"⁶⁴ This would presumably include the primordial truth of the existence of God. Harris then asserts that Islam sees the world as being divided into the two broad categories of the "House of War" and the "House of Islam", which marks it as an intrinsically hateful religion that despises all non-believers, whoever they may be:

"On almost every page, the Koran instructs observant Muslims to despise non-believers. On almost every page, it prepares the ground for religious conflict. Anyone who cannot see a link between Muslim faith and Muslim violence should probably consult a neurologist"⁶⁵

⁵⁹ He has written a second book, *The Letter to a Christian Nation*, in response to some of the emotions sparked by *The End of Faith* (2006). Because this follow-up is a continuation and clarification of parts of his earlier work, the researcher will not describe it here.

⁶⁰ It must be kept in mind, however, that Harris criticizes Islam from a largely scriptural and praxeological perspective or, at least, how he sees Islam in practice.

⁶¹ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, 33.

⁶² Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 111-123.

⁶³ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 26-27.

⁶⁴ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 72.

⁶⁵ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 123.

According to Harris, the harmfulness of religion is not accidental, but must be attributed to the fact that religion is founded on faith. The idea of faith as illogical, ridiculous, non-empirical, unjustifiable, absolutist, intolerant, and dogmatic is central to this structural critique of religion.⁶⁶ These characteristics foster religious conflict and make it nearly difficult to reconcile religious dispute through negotiation.⁶⁷ As a result, Harris regards faith as very problematic, and hence its critique, if not its abolition, is required.

Daniel Dennett

This American philosopher and cognitive scientist had declared himself as an atheist by stating that “I am a godless philosopher.”⁶⁸ In other places, he expressly rejects some parts of religion: “I for one am not in awe of your faith. I am appalled by your arrogance, by your unreasonable certainty that you have all the answers.”⁶⁹ Another line that has been taken as religious criticism is contained in the opening chapter of the book, when Dennett presents the meme theory.⁷⁰ He draws the following analogy: just as a parasite infects an animal's brain, manipulates its behaviour, and eventually kills it, ideas may take control of human minds.⁷¹

As an example, Dennett uses examples from many religious traditions as well as the secular world (such as Democracy, Justice, and Truth) to avoid a one-sided reading of meme theory as anti-religious. He wrote *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* to primarily devoted to his arguments for a physical account of religion. Dennett does not focus specifically on Islām in his critique. Still, he implicitly and, on the rare occasion, explicitly criticizes Islām under the broader category of religion, which, for Dennett, remains a problematic phenomenon, since it represents a

⁶⁶ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 48, 64-68. These claims can be found at various places throughout this book.

⁶⁷ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 27, 48, 212, 225.

⁶⁸ Dennett, Daniel C. *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2006), 21.

⁶⁹ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 51.

⁷⁰ Dennett, Daniel C., *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), 335-368.

⁷¹ Dennett, Daniel C. *Breaking the Spell*, 4.

position of ignorance.⁷² The cognitive science of religion, according to Dennett (as mentioned in Jonathan Lanman's *Atheism and Cognitive Science*), is the theoretical approach most adapted to explaining religion.⁷³

In addition to this theoretical viewpoint, Dennett takes a practical approach to religion, which may be best described as the “policy-making of religion”. He favours rigorous adherence to the separation of religion and state in line with the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which he believes was breached under George W. Bush's administration.⁷⁴ He advocates for a compulsory comparative religious studies curriculum in schools that is based on current research rather than a single religion.⁷⁵ Finally, he recommends the formation of an organisation he refers to as a “Buyer's Guide to Religions”; The various religions will be investigated and appraised in terms of their benefit or detriment to human coexistence on Earth.⁷⁶

Christopher Hitchens

He was known for his strong command of rhetoric and his quick wit in public debates. However, Hitchens did not fit neatly into a thematic continuity because he was only a political commentator and a journalist. In his book *God Is Not Great: Religion Poisons Everything*, Hitchens, who worked as a foreign correspondent in many areas of the world, frequently uses first-hand stories and anecdotes. While his critique of religion is not systematic, it is comprehensive: it covers not just Abrahamic theistic faiths and deism - as in Dawkins' case - but also Mormonism, Hinduism, and, unlike Harris, Buddhism from a socio-political perspective as well as philosophical, theological, and scientific claims in it.⁷⁷ According to Hitchens' socio-political assessment of Islām, it is nothing more than the practical outcome of the erroneous Qur'ān, which can only

⁷² Refer to Dennett, Daniel C., *The Intentional Stance* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996); *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little Brown and Co, 1991); and *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1995).

⁷³ Zenk, “New Atheism”, 248.

⁷⁴ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 308, 334, 340.

⁷⁵ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 327-328.

⁷⁶ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 39, 249-277.

⁷⁷ Hitchens, Christopher, *God Is Not Great: Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette Twelve, 2007), 195-204.

lead to illogical and frenzied behaviour. As an example, Hitchens mockingly notes Muslims' dislike of pigs:

Today, ancient stupidity is upon us again. Muslim zealots in Europe are demanding that the Three Little Pigs, and Miss Piggy, Winnie-the-Pooh's Piglet, and other traditional pets and characters be removed from the innocent gaze of their children...an old statue of a wild boar, in an arboretum in Middle England, has already been threatened with mindless Islamic vandalism."⁷⁸

He describes how Bin Laden followers attempted to utilise devils (*jinn*) for military purposes, how a woman is permitted to be gang-raped to atone for her own brother's crime under Pakistani law, the problem of female genital mutilation (FGM) of young girls in African communities, and other issues. By emphasizing Islām-Judaism tensions tribe and dynasty and racial provenance in its holy books, religion - according to Hitchens - "must accept the responsibility for transmitting one of mankind's most primitive illusions down through the generations."⁷⁹ While religious ideas are erroneous, according to Hitchens,⁸⁰ the major motive for his critique of religion is its danger; specifically, the book's subtitle "Religion Poisons Everything". It is repeated numerous times throughout the book. Hitchens sees his book as a culmination of the Age of Enlightenment's critique of religion and advocates for a "New Enlightenment".⁸¹ Furthermore, he, like Dennett, calls for the reinstatement of a strong separation of religion and state. Hitchens, like Dawkins, stresses the positive aspects of an atheistic worldview:

We are not immune to the lure of wonder and mystery and awe: we have music and art and literature and find that the serious ethical dilemmas are better handled by Shakespeare and Tolstoy and Schiller and Dostoyevsky and George Eliot than in the mythical morality tales of the holy books.

⁷⁸ Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 41.

⁷⁹ Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 251.

⁸⁰ Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 63-71.

⁸¹ Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 277-283.

Literature, not scripture, sustains the mind and [...] also the soul. [...] We are reconciled to living only once, except through our children, for whom we are perfectly happy to notice that we must make way, and room. [...] We believe with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion.⁸²

Apart from his ineptitude in philosophical, theological, and scientific, he was undeniably a good writer. This is probably the main cause why his writings are widely spread despite of weak arguments.

Richard Dawkins

Richard Dawkins, the last of the Four Horsemen, is unquestionably the face of New Atheism. A British ethologist, evolutionary biologist, and author, Dawkins is known as an outspoken atheist. He was already well-known among the public because of his numerous best-selling books and television appearances. He has propagated the Darwinian idea of evolution for decades. He publicly articulated an atheistic viewpoint in *The Selfish Gene* in 1976, the book that made him famous.⁸³ While atheism was secondary at best in this context, Dawkins addressed religious issues more clearly in his books *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986) and *Climbing Mount Improbable* (1996). He alludes to the conflict between Darwinism and creationism by discussing Darwin's theory of evolution. Finally, he contends that evolutionary theory outperforms religious creationism and, in particular, "intelligent design" in terms of explanatory usefulness.

He has repeatedly stated in his works that Darwinism undermines religiously formed anthropology and cosmology. *The God Delusion* marked a global cultural shift, completely altering the perception of religion in the public sphere, for which achievement Dawkins was granted an emblematic status and labelled one of the most and controversial iconoclasts of the 21st century. His religious criticism extends to all faiths in which the notion of a personal God is a key component. He denies the widely accepted proofs for God's existence⁸⁴ and then uses Darwinism as the main argument against

⁸² Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 5-6.

⁸³ Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1, 193.

⁸⁴ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 76-109.

theism and deism, or what he calls the “God hypothesis”⁸⁵; an expression that follows in the footsteps of Pierre-Simon Laplace (*Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là*) and Carl Sagan's coining of the term in his book *The Demon Haunted World*⁸⁶. According to him, religion might engage a position of holiness and godliness amongst a community, but that does not and should not insulate it from critical analysis.⁸⁷

While Dawkins' critique is founded on a scientific and naturalistic viewpoint, he also employs traditional philosophical arguments from epistemology and science theory. He uses, for example, Bertrand Russell's classic thought experiment of the celestial teapot⁸⁸. Dawkins comments on the consequences of religion in addition to a critical evaluation of the legitimacy of religious beliefs. He, like Harris, believes that the world's religions are harmful⁸⁹. This is especially clear when he refers to religious upbringing as “child abuse”.⁹⁰ Dawkins' argument against theism is also an argument in favour of positive atheism. This is a major ‘consciousness-raising’ theme of the book, according to Dawkins: “You can be an atheist who is happy, balanced, moral, and intellectually fulfilled”.⁹¹

After the death of Hitchens, they gathered for the second time in 2012 Melbourne Global Atheist Convention and replaced Hitchens with Ayaan Hirsi Ali; later called the fourth horsewoman.⁹² In addition to these four horsemen, the outlook of New Atheism now features a growing group of ex-Muslim atheists. They are ex-Muslims who, after leaving Islām, have begun to promulgate material that attempts to change the Islamic worldview through various means. As we shall see, their arguments often resemble or are modelled on those put forward by the New Atheists.

⁸⁵ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 113-159.

⁸⁶ Dawkins, *Climbing Mount Improbable* (New York: Norton, 1996), 34.

⁸⁷ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 49-50.

⁸⁸ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 51-55. Later known as Russel's teapot.

⁸⁹ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 281-308.

⁹⁰ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 315-340.

⁹¹ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 1.

⁹² Al-Ujayri, *Milishiya al-Ilhad*, 89.

Some of them are Ayaan Hirsi Ali⁹³, Ali Rizvi⁹⁴, Armin Navabi⁹⁵ and the unknown pseudonym Ibn Warraq⁹⁶

Even if there is universal natural knowledge of God, there are unquestionably people who deny God's existence and offer arguments in support of their position. Some have attempted to expose contradictions within the concept of God (for example, between omniscience and divine freedom), comparing God to a "square circle" whose existence is logically impossible. Most such arguments only rule out specific conceptions of God, which are frequently at odds with the biblical view of God in any case.

Conclusion

The study of New Atheism has shed light on its distinguishing features, differences from classical atheism, and the pivotal role played by key figures such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett - the Four Horsemen. This intellectual movement has significantly shaped contemporary discussions on faith and reason, as evidenced by its novelty, extensive media coverage, aggressive critique of religion, promotion of scientism and rationalism, and advocacy for secularism.

The assertive criticism of religion employed by New Atheists contrasts with classical atheism's more passive stance. These thinkers have actively challenged religious dogma through various media platforms, arguing for the primacy of scientific inquiry and rational thought while also advocating for the separation of religious institutions from matters of state. The emphasis on scientism and rationalism reflects the commitment of New Atheism to evidence-

⁹³ Refer to her writings Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation for Women and Islam* (New York: Free Press, 2006); Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel: My Life* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: From Islam to America* (New York: Free Press, 2011); Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015).

⁹⁴ Ali A. Rizvi, *The Atheist Muslim: A Journey from Religion to Reason* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2016)

⁹⁵ Armin Navabi, *Why There is No God: Simple Responses to 20 Common Arguments for the Existence of God* (USA: Atheist Republic, 2016)

⁹⁶ Ibn Warraq, *Why I am Not a Muslim* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995); Ibn Warraq, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000); Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and Commentary* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002); Ibn Warraq, *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003).

based reasoning and reliance on scientific methodologies to understand and explain the world. This commitment is framed as a response to religious doctrines perceived negative influences on human progress and intellectual freedom. The promotion of secularism, in which New Atheists argue for the exclusion of religious influence from public policy and governance is central to the movement. They argue that secular societies create the necessary conditions for individual liberty, tolerance, and social harmony.

In conclusion, the rise and influence of New Atheism represent a paradigm shift in the discourse on religion and belief systems. Through their writings, debates, and public appearances, the Four Horsemen have propelled atheism to the forefront of public consciousness. Despite criticisms of the movement's confrontational approach, its long-term influence on public discourse and the intellectual landscape is undeniable. As New Atheism evolves, its impact and contributions to the ongoing dialogue between faith and reason will be of continuing interest.

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