

Dissecting
the Unholy Trinity of
Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens

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THE CASE AGAINST SCIENCE

Our technical advances in the art of war have finally rendered our religious differences—and hence our religious beliefs—antithetical to our survival. We can no longer ignore the fact that billions of our neighbors believe in the metaphysics of martyrdom, or in the literal truth of the book of Revelation, or any of the other fantastical notions that have lurked in the minds of the faithful for millennia—because our neighbors are now armed with chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. There is no doubt that these developments mark the terminal phase of our credulity. Words like “God” and “Allah” must go the way of “Apollo” and “Baal,” or they will unmake our world.

—SAM HARRIS, *The End of Faith*

AS RICHARD DAWKINS DEMONSTRATES in his ode to science, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, the New Atheists harbor nearly as great a love for science as they do a hatred for religion. Like the science fetishists who regard science as a basis for dictating human behavior, atheists like to posit that Man has evolved to a point where he is ready to move beyond religion. This has been their constant theme for more

than 100 years, but as Daniel C. Dennett points out, the evidence is mounting that this simply isn't going to happen. A more interesting and arguably more relevant question that none of the New Atheists dare to ask is whether science, having produced some genuinely positive results as well as some truly nightmarish evils over the course of the last century, has outlived its usefulness to Mankind. Man has survived millennia of religious faith, but if the prophets of over-population and global warming are correct, he may not survive a mere four centuries of science.

In spite of his scientific pretensions, Sam Harris is a mere science fetishist.¹ His book, *The End of Faith*, is a profoundly non-scientific expression of hope wrapped up in an emotional plea. This is why many militant atheists find it so stirring and why more rational non-believers find it unconvincing. It is not, as some optimistic infidels would have it, a prediction, much less a coherent case leading to a logical conclusion—it's just another expression of faith in Enlightenment utopianism. And as Harris's brave words about an absence of doubt indicate, it is an expression of surprisingly blind faith, lacking both common sense and evidence.

The five major religions of the world, in order of their appearance on the scene, are Hinduism, traditional Chinese folk religion, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. These five religions have approximately 4.85 billion adherents, representing an estimated 71.3 percent of the world's population in 2007, and they have been around for a collective 11,600 years. During the vast majority of those 116 centuries, the world has not been in any danger of extinction from weapons of any kind, nor has the human race been in serious danger of dying out from pollution, global warming, overpopulation, or anything else. Despite 116 centuries filled with hundreds, if not thousands, of diverse religions, all competing for mindshare, resources, and dominance, the species has not merely survived, it has thrived.

There is no aspect of Hindu teaching that has produced a means of potentially extinguishing Mankind. The occasional eleventh-century

¹ Harris's training is in philosophy, although in a 2006 debate with Dennis Prager he announced that he is "firmly grounded in the life sciences" and his continuing education requires him to "actually understand recent developments in biology."

rampages by the *Sohei* of Mount Hiei² notwithstanding, Buddhism provides no method of destroying the planet, while Christians have been waiting patiently for the world to end for nearly 2,000 years now without doing much to immanentize the eschaton except for occasionally footing the bill for Jews making aliyah.³ Islam, for all the danger it supposedly presents, has not produced a significant military technology since Damascene steel was developed in the twelfth century and even that is of nebulous connection to the religion itself.

Modern science has only been around for the last 350 years, if we date the scientific method back to the man known as the Father of Science, Galileo Galilei. One could push that date back considerably, if one wished, to Aristotle and Archimedes, or forward to Newton and the Age of Enlightenment, but regardless, the dire threat to Mankind described by Harris only dates back to the middle of the twentieth century. In the last sixty years, science has produced a veritable witches' brew of potential dangers to the human race, ranging from atom-shattering explosive devices to lethal genetic modifications, designer diseases, large quantities of radioactive waste and even, supposedly, the accidental production of mini black holes and strangelets through particle collider experiments.⁴

So, in only 3 percent of the time that religion has been on the scene, science has managed to produce multiple threats to continued human existence. Moreover, the quantity and lethal quality of those threats appear to be accelerating, as the bulk of them have appeared in the most recent sixth of the scientific era. It is not the purpose of this chapter to examine whether religion exacerbates or alleviates these scientific threats—that appraisal must wait for a later chapter. Harris's extinction equation, which states that $S+F=\text{☠}$, is not inherently wrong. But his conclusion is, because it is Science, not Faith, that is the factor in the equation that presents a deadly danger to Mankind.

This is true of both the military and non-military threats to humanity.

² The warrior monks of Heian Japan. The emperor Shirakawa said of them: "There are three things that even I cannot control: the waters of the Kamo river, the roll of the dice, and the monks of the mountain."

³ Migration to Israel.

⁴ I personally find it difficult to believe that the good Swiss scientists at CERN are running any serious risks of blowing up the planet. I spoke with the people in the TH-PH department and they assured me that they would do their very best to keep any inadvertent black holes from getting out of hand.

While the jury is still out on the precise nature of the threat caused by global warming,⁵ there can be no doubt that the scientific method is at least in part responsible for it, along with the threats supposedly posed by overpopulation, pollution, and genetic engineering. Religion simply cannot be held accountable for any of those things, not even overpopulation.⁶ What could be more absurd than to claim that the Bahá'í are in some way responsible for any damage to humanity caused by CERN's Large Hadron Collider? Not even the most militant New Atheist would dare to set himself up for public ridicule that way. And yet, making religious faith the significant variable in the Extinction Equation is no less ludicrous.

However, the guilt of scientody does not mean that the profession of science can be held entirely blameless. The fact that it was the method that made the development of these threats possible does not indicate that their development via the method was inevitable. It was scientists who freely made the choice to develop these theories and, in many cases, the weapons, sometimes in innocence, like Alfred Nobel⁷ being stunned to learn that his blasting cap and smokeless explosives would cause him to be remembered as "the merchant of death," and sometimes in full cognizance of their moral culpability, as in the case of Albert Einstein's⁸ 1939 letter to President Roosevelt written in the hopes of encouraging F.D.R. to build an atomic bomb.

It is not the combination of religion and science, then, but rather the combination of scientists and the scientific method that has created this panoply of mortal dangers to Mankind.

⁵ I note that I am a global warming skeptic myself. Greenland is still colder now than it was when Norse settlers were raising crops there in the eleventh century. So I don't see why a return to those temperatures should present a problem. Of course, when you grew up waiting for the school bus in forty below zero wind chills, global warming just doesn't sound all that ominous.

⁶ Yes, religious people breed faster than the non-religious. But they breed slower now than they were when overpopulation was not a problem; to the extent overpopulation is a genuine threat to Mankind, it is a threat entirely created by the use of the scientific method in extending average lifespans and lowering death rates.

⁷ "My dynamite will sooner lead to peace than a thousand world conventions. As soon as men will find that in one instant whole armies can be destroyed, they surely will abide by golden peace." One finds that great scientists seldom turn out to be particularly accurate prophets.

⁸ "I made one mistake in my life when I signed that letter to President Roosevelt advocating that the atomic bomb should be built." Albert Einstein, letter to Linus Pauling. Unfortunately for Einstein's conscience, the opening of the Eastern Front and the failure of Operation Barbarossa ultimately rendered the theoretical threat of a Nazi bomb nonexistent two months and eight days before the first test of an atomic bomb on July 16, 1945.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE SCIENTIFIC

Questioning science in this manner invariably leads to one of five responses,⁹ often rather heated.

1) The first response is an *ad hominem* one insisting the individual is only questioning the inherent munificence of science because he is stupid, anti-science, or incapable of understanding science. Like most *ad hominem* responses, this one is invalid because it doesn't even begin to dispute the issues raised. Neither the level of my intelligence nor my personal opinion about science is a factor in the question of whether some aspect of science is responsible for posing a threat to humanity. One need not understand a human being or the operation of the human body to comprehend that a particular individual is guilty of committing murder after witnessing the act.

2) The second response is to wonder how it is possible to live in the modern world, make use of modern technology, and still harbor any doubts that the benefits of science are worth whatever their costs might happen to be. After all, we have electricity, computers, television, X-rays, automobiles, antibiotics, vaccines, and many other valuable things thanks to science. Science has increased our lifespan, it has significantly increased the average individual's chance of surviving childbirth and childhood, and it has made those longer lives considerably more comfortable.

I do not dispute any of this. But I do note that this is a fundamentally illogical response, since if humanity is in danger of being wiped out by the weapons that science has also produced, then there will not be anyone to continue enjoying those scientific benefits. It does not matter how many wonderful contributions to humanity have been produced thanks to science, because wiping them all out is the equivalent of multiplying their sum by zero. One could certainly argue that the threat to humanity from science is not really all that dire, but then it would be necessary to admit that religious faith poses no threat to humanity, either, thus demonstrating Harris's thesis to be entirely bankrupt.

⁹ These responses are not strawmen. All of them are specific responses I have either received via e-mail or read on Web sites responding to my columns and blog posts. In each of the five responses related, I am summarizing a series of similar responses.

3) The third is to argue that science cannot be held responsible for the evils it enables because to do so is to confuse facilitation with prescription. It is claimed that although science made the atomic bomb possible and scientists designed, tested, and built the bombs, it does not follow that science is responsible for the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A variant on this is to argue that because the evils are not performed specifically “in the name of science” or in the interest of a scientific agenda, they cannot be blamed on science.

There are three errors inherent in this third response. The first is that causal factors do not depend upon motive. No reasonable individual would accept the argument that cigarettes don’t cause lung cancer because no one smokes “in the name of Marlboro” or in the interest of a cigarette agenda. The distinction between motive and method may be significant in a court of law, but is largely irrelevant when considering if a particular problem exists and how it can be best resolved. The second error is that the presence of the danger is solely due to the existence of these dangerous weapons and technologies; while blame for any decision to actually use them should rightly fall upon the various politicians and government leaders who make those decisions based on a variety of reasons, blame for their existence can only lie with their creators.

The third error is that numerous evils have historically been committed, justified, and utilized by scientists “in the name of science,” as demonstrated by the infamous Tuskegee syphilis experiments, the attempts of hypothermia researchers at the University of Minnesota and Victory University to use Nazi data obtained at Dachau, and the *Atlas of Topographical and Applied Human Anatomy*, which was produced with the bodies of 1,377 executed criminals sent to Professor Eduard Pernkopf at the University of Vienna by the Gestapo.¹⁰ Although the defenders of science inevitably claim that unpleasant-ries such as Nazi science, racist science, and the 64,000 forced ster-

¹⁰ While some scientists have argued that it would not have made sense for Pernkopf to use the emaciated bodies of Jewish concentration camp victims for his anatomical drawings, a 1998 report by the University of Vienna commission charged with investigating the affair admitted that at least eight of the victims were of Jewish origin. More to the point, because the crimes of the Gestapo were not limited to murdering Jews, it is likely that none of the 1,377 cadavers were obtained by legitimate means. This should have been obvious, since some of the victims were children.

ilizations done at the behest of American eugenicists should not be blamed on science because it is today considered “bad science,” it is worth noting that religious individuals who commit acts in complete contradiction of their religious tenets are never absolved of responsibility for their crimes on the basis of their “bad theology.” The fact that Richard Dawkins and other atheists have publicly called to reconsider the legitimacy of eugenics also serves to demonstrate that the historical evils of eugenics are properly blamed on science and scientists.

4) The fourth response is to claim that it is unfair to blame science for the actions of some scientists. Of course, it must then be equally unfair to blame religion for the action of some religious individuals. And it is spectacularly unfair to blame the adherents of one religion for the actions of a completely different religion, especially when those adherents are being actively persecuted by the members of that other religion. It is wildly irrational to argue that a religious moderate is somehow responsible for the actions of religious extremists he does not know and has never met, but that one scientist cannot be blamed for the actions of another scientist, not even one who belongs to the same professional organization or university and with whom he presumably has some influence. Also, one must always be careful to distinguish between the three aspects of science. Whether one is holding a particular scientist or the scientific method itself accountable for a particular scientific misdeed, this does not necessarily impute any blame to other scientists.

5) The fifth and final response is to declare that knowledge, regardless of its risks, is always better than ignorance. As Dr. P. Z. Myers puts it: “That’s a deeply cynical view that Day has—that ignorance is better than knowledge, because awareness hurts and technological progress brings great risks. I guess I must be more optimistic than a weird Christian nihilist, because I think it’s better to aspire to a better world than to give up and slide back into some benighted religious illusion.”

But I am not arguing that ignorance is better than knowledge, I am merely pointing out that the evidence suggests that in some circumstances, ignorance may be preferable to knowledge, especially

partial knowledge imperfectly understood and enthusiastically embraced too soon. I'm not eager to return humanity to a Stone Age state—an ironic accusation given Albert Einstein's assertion that the Fourth World War would be fought with stones and clubs, thanks in part to his scientific legacy—I am actually a classic early adopter.¹¹ But just as it is now considered bad science, if not an atrocity, to have sterilized thousands of American citizens against their will, it is not hard to imagine that there is likely a non-zero amount of scientific activity today that will be considered equally mistaken, perhaps even equally atrocious, in the future.

Only a complete fool would argue that all risks are inherently worth taking, or that all knowledge is inherently worth pursuing. Is the mapping of the human genome worth risking the possibility that some individuals will be denied insurance for diseases they are genetically bound to develop? I think so. Is it worth risking the development of genetic weapons coded to kill all individuals possessing a certain genetic marker? I'm not so sure about that, and there is certainly a case to be made that it isn't, especially by those who happen to belong to a group likely to be targeted by such an insidious invention. The argument that all risks are worth taking and all knowledge is worth pursuing is not only foolish, it is an argument that is based on neither evidence nor reason, only blind secular faith. Technological progress offers no guarantees of a better world, no matter how strong one's optimistic aspirations or beliefs in Man's inevitable progress toward a self-made paradise on Earth might be.

As for the better world of today, there are three obvious flaws in the assumptions that credit all of it to science. The first is the impact of science on human life expectancy.¹² Life in the pre-scientific era was not always as short as we commonly imagine it to have been. While life expectancy has risen dramatically in the last century, from forty-seven to seventy-seven in the United States, for the first two-thirds of the scientific era, life expectancy was comparable to that of ancient

¹¹ One of my friends commented a few years ago that my idea of a threesome was to take a Dana and a Treo to bed. Hot stuff!

¹² There is a quality of life argument that could be made as well, but as it could legitimately be made either way, I shall avoid discussing it. I'll simply note that I personally prefer to avoid the Big Room with the green carpet and the bright light as much as possible.

Rome for those who were not slaves.¹³ Anyone familiar with Roman history is well aware that the average life expectancy of twenty-eight years that is commonly cited is misleading; the comparison of life expectancies between one society that practices population control through infanticide, which is factored into the mortality rates, and one that practices it through abortion, which is not, is not a reasonable one.¹⁴ And since both infanticide and slavery were ended by predominantly Christian imperatives, it is improper to inherently credit all evidence of longer human lifespans to science.

The second flaw is that advocates for science in all its aspects habitually make use of a different measure depending on whether they wish to credit science for a technological innovation or to deflect blame from it. Consider the previous reference to vaccinations, for example. While vaccines, like massive ordnance air blast bombs, were discovered and developed by scientists making use of the scientific method, scientists no more provide shots to children than they drop bombs on unsuspecting civilian populations.¹⁵ Politicians make the decisions regarding the way vaccines are to be funded and used while doctors and nurses administer them, just as politicians decide if bombs are to be utilized and air force pilots deliver them to their targets. One can either argue that science is responsible in both cases based on the involvement of scientage and scientody or that science is not responsible in either case based on the absence of scientistry, but what one cannot logically do is to conclude that science is responsible in the one case and not the other.

The third flaw is that capitalism and individual freedom arguably

¹³ The life tables of Domitius Ulpianus used to capitalize annuities for imperial pensions indicate an average expected Roman lifespan of around fifty-five years. Other sources indicate average lifespans of 58.6 years for the rural clergy compared to only 17.5 years for urban slaves. Living within the confines of Rome itself reduced life expectancy for both professionals and slaves by 12 and 32 percent respectively. W. M. S. Russell, and Claire Russell, "The History of the Human Life Span," *The Journal of Postgraduate General Practice* (1976): 571–588.

¹⁴ If the 1.287 million abortions performed in the United States in 2003 were considered Roman-style infanticides for the sake of a more accurate comparison and factored in with the 4,089,950 live births that year, the average American life expectancy at birth would be reduced by nearly two decades, from seventy-eight to fifty-nine. Science appears to be giving us about a decade in addition to allowing humanity to live in huge urban communities without dying like flies.

¹⁵ The notable exception being the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Navy Captain William Parsons was a Manhattan Project scientist and acted as the *Enola Gay's* bomb commander and weaponeer. Science can be held responsible for the dropping of the atomic bomb in literally every way.

play a greater role in technological advancement than all three aspects of science combined. Despite devoting double the percentage of its national expenditures to science than did the United States or any other country in the West,¹⁶ the technologically retarded state of the scientifically enamored¹⁷ former Soviet Union demonstrates that the link between science and technological progress is far more tenuous than is usually considered to be the case.

Because there is no hard line between pure science and applied science aside from the professional distinction between the research scientist and the applications development engineer, it can be difficult to ascertain precisely what responsibility should be assigned to science and the scientist for any given technological innovation. This is especially true when one takes into account the major role that economics and entrepreneurialism also play in technological development; the most prolific and successful inventors are seldom scientists and often are not even engineers. Regardless, it is important to keep in mind that whatever amount of responsibility deserves to be assigned to science, it applies to innovations that are harmful to humanity as well as those that are beneficial.

Two famous scientific Richards are in accord on this subject:

It is that scientific knowledge enables us to do all kinds of things and to make all kinds of things. Of course if we make good things, it is not only to the credit of science; it is also to the credit of the moral choice which led us to good work. Scientific knowledge is an enabling power to do either good or bad—but it does not carry instructions on how to use it.

—RICHARD FEYNMAN

People certainly blame science for nuclear weapons and similar horrors. It's been said before but needs to be said again: if you want to do evil, science provides the most powerful weapons to do evil; but equally, if you

¹⁶ "Certainly the U.S.A. spends about three times as much in absolute figures (\$24 billion in 1967, of which \$15 billion were for government research and development), but because of the great difference in scientific costs in the two countries, it is thought possible that the Kremlin gets about three times as much research per ruble as does Washington. If this calculation is approximately correct, then the U.S.S.R. is now spending almost as much in real terms as the U.S.A., although Moscow's effort is mounted from a much smaller economic base." "Recent Developments in Soviet Science and Technology," *Current History*. November, 1968.

¹⁷ "Communist society can be built only on the summits of science and engineering." V. I. Lenin.

*want to do good, science puts into your hands the most powerful tools to do so. The trick is to want the right things, then science will provide you with the most effective methods of achieving them.*¹⁸

—RICHARD DAWKINS

THE PHONY WAR: SCIENCE VERSUS RELIGION

The Party cannot be neutral toward Religion because Religion is something opposite to Science.

—JOSEPH STALIN

When considering the suggested conflict between science and religion, the first and most important is: Which science? In the previous chapter, a distinction was made between three aspects of science: scientage, scientistry, and scientody. Of those three aspects, which one can be most reasonably said to pose the greatest threat to humanity? And the second question is, if one or more aspects of science do pose a genuine danger to Mankind, then what should we do about it?

These questions are not rhetorical, even though they may strike the reader as being more outlandish than the calls for an end to faith to which this book is a response. If one troubles to consider the situation through the broad lens of history, two facts immediately become apparent:

- There are a lot more religious people than scientists.
- Religion has never been stamped out anywhere despite a number of vigorous efforts that lasted for decades. Science and technological development, on the other hand, have been successfully brought to a halt on several occasions in the past.

Science is not inevitable. Japan was closed to outside contact from 1639 to 1853, and although the Edo Shogunate kept its eye on developments in *rangaku*, or “Dutch learning,” through the international trade permitted at a single port located near Nagasaki, Japanese

¹⁸ Dawkins, Richard. “Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder.” Richard Dimpleby Lecture, BBC1 Television, 12 Nov. 1996.

society did not suffer greatly from its relative backwardness. It certainly suffered far more from its subsequent post-Meiji attempts to catch up to the West, which ended in the second atomic bomb being dropped, ironically enough, on Nagasaki. China, too, successfully arrested its scientific advancement around 1450, transforming itself from the world leader into a distinctly backward nation over a period of 500 years.¹⁹ In short, the end of science is a much more practical goal for humanity than the end of faith.

I hope the reader will note that this book is not named *The End of Science* for a very good reason; I am not anti-science or even anti-scientist, nor am I arguing that the elimination of all science is a moral imperative for humanity. I am merely following the logic of Sam Harris's extinction equation to its proper logical conclusion, which is that if the world truly is in imminent danger, the only reasonable answer is for humanity to put an end to science.

But which science? While the body of knowledge certainly contains the danger, since atoms are not given to accidentally colliding and it is difficult to smash one without knowing exactly how to do it, the mere knowledge cannot be said to be the cause of the danger. Scientage in itself is static—it is its relationship with scientody and scientists that makes it dynamic. Knowledge does not give birth to itself. Athena may have appeared on the scene fully armored, but she still had to spring from the brow of Zeus.

The method of science, on the other hand, is directly tied to both the theoretical basis for the threats to Mankind as well as the specific applications of the various scientific theories required to develop them into lethal weapons. Hypothesis, experiment, and observation all play integral parts in both the research and engineering aspects of the weapons development process. Without scientody, these threats to the human race simply would not exist; there is a direct causal relationship between the scientific method and the existence of those things that are, in Harris's words, "antithetical to our survival."

But not all the New Atheists are convinced of an immediate danger to Mankind and they don't even present an entirely united front

¹⁹ It's worth noting that Jared Diamond places the blame for China's backwardness on its political unity, which suggests some very negative implications for the fate of science in a globally governed world.

regarding the inherent opposition of religion and science. It is interesting to note that it is the least scientific individual who is the most certain that the two are bound to eternal conflict. Christopher Hitchens asserts that “all attempts to reconcile faith with science and reason are consigned to failure and ridicule.”²⁰ Sam Harris has created the aforementioned extinction equation, of course, and adds that “the maintenance of religious dogma *always* comes at the expense of science.”²¹ Richard Dawkins is more temperate, but nevertheless admits that he is hostile to religion because “it actively debauches the scientific enterprise . . . subverts science and saps the intellect.”²² It is only the philosopher, Daniel Dennett, who argues that the two can conceivably coexist, which is the basis for his call to make “a concerned effort to achieve a mutual agreement under which religion—all religion—becomes a proper object of scientific study.”

What is curious, however, is that once again the primary atheist argument presented is an unscientific and epistemological one that fails to provide any relevant evidence in support of the assertion. I found this curious, as surely this bitter centuries-old conflict must have left some recent signs of the vicious hostilities between the two warring camps. And yet, when I contemplated the matter, it occurred to me that the three most often cited crimes of religion against science are the Catholic Church’s persecution of Galileo, the occasional school board battle over teaching evolution in the public schools, and the Christian opposition to the federal funding of research using stem cells taken from human embryos. As one might expect, all three of these issues are brought up in one of the New Atheist books.

And yet, these are not serious issues. Taken in their entirety, they barely amount to mild smack-talk between unarmed border guards from two neighboring countries caught up in a dispute over agricultural subsidies. To argue that these three things are in any way indicative of an implacable and incorrigible hostility is obviously absurd. Galileo was not attacked because he defended the Copernican theory that had been published eighty years before, but because he was foolish enough to both disobey and publicly caricature his former supporter,

²⁰ Hitchens, Christopher. *god is not Great*. New York: Twelve Books, 2007. 64–65.

²¹ Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 63.

²² Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 284.

Pope Urban VIII, in a book that had been granted both papal permission and Inquisitorial authorization. Evolutionary theory is not only taught in the public schools, its teaching is largely unquestioned and unchallenged, a few high-profile cases of stickers on textbooks notwithstanding.

As for the stem cell controversy, it is looking increasingly likely as if there simply isn't one. Opposition to federal funding is not inherently religious, moreover, federal funding is not science and should never be confused with it. Unless scientists are being jailed and put on trial by church authorities for pursuing this morally suspect research, it is a huge exaggeration to claim that the controversy is an example of religion inhibiting science in any way. However desirable it may be, science has no inherent right to the public purse.

More importantly, after a decade of stem cell research, no scientist has successfully created a stem cell line using cloned human embryos.²³ But a Japanese researcher at Kyoto University, Shinya Yamanaka, has recently declared that neither human eggs nor human embryos are necessary, since his team has learned how to modify skin cells so that they can be transformed into any type of cell, thus creating a functional technique that provides an easier means of obtaining genetic matches and has the benefit of not engendering either ethical or religious opposition.²⁴

If this Japanese technique proves successful in humans, one can't help but wonder if the next edition of *Letter to a Christian Nation* will omit the five-page screed—one-eighteenth of the entire book—hysterically condemning American Christians for their “obscene” opposition to the unnecessary destruction of unborn human children. Harris certainly might wish to revisit his declaration that resistance to embryonic stem cell research is uninformed; it looks as if science would have been poorly served if the Kyoto researchers had accepted the “fact” about the necessity of destroying three-day-old human embryos.²⁵

This hoisting of Harris on his own scientific petard tends to highlight

²³ “Will a Disruptive Technology Mothball Therapeutic Cloning?” *TCS Daily*. 19 June 2007.

²⁴ “Simple Switch Turns Cells Embryonic.” *Nature*. 6 June 2007.

²⁵ Actually, this isn't necessary, either. “*Biologists have developed a technique for establishing colonies of human embryonic stem cells from an early human embryo without destroying it.*” *The New York Times*. 24 Aug. 2006.

the problem of placing too much trust in science, given the constantly changing nature of the body of knowledge.²⁶ But stem cells are only a single issue, and since it seemed possible that I might have missed a skirmish or two in this ongoing intellectual struggle, I posed the question of what tangible sins Christianity had committed against science to the readers of my blog,²⁷ and, arguably more usefully, to the readers of the hitherto mentioned science blog Pharyngula. This was the most comprehensive list,²⁸ which covered pretty much everything brought up by anyone else:

1. Galileo's trial. (1633 A.D.)
2. The demonization of mathematics during the Dark Ages. (476 to 1000 A.D.)
3. The persecution of alchemists during the Middle Ages. (476 to 1485 A.D.)
4. The execution of Michael Servetus. (1553 A.D.)
5. Opposition to the theory of evolution.
6. The destruction of libraries and the burning of books during the fourth and fifth centuries.
7. The ban on the works of René Descartes. (1663 A.D.)
8. The imprisonment of Roger Bacon. (1277 A.D.)
9. The condemnation of Francis Bacon.²⁹ (1621 A.D.)
10. The destruction of Islamic manuscripts by Cardinal Ximenes. (1499 A.D.)
11. The execution of Giordano Bruno. (1600 A.D.)
12. The execution of Lucilio Vanini. (1619 A.D.)
13. The murder of Hypatia. (415 A.D.)
14. The recantation of the Comte de Buffon. (1753 A.D.)³⁰

²⁶ One could reasonably draw the conclusion that scientists lounging in laboratories testing hypotheses is no basis for a system of ethics.

²⁷ The ilk of Vox Populi aren't without their strengths, but they do tend to be rather more useful when it comes to questions like "9mm or .45?" and "What's the best way to get rid of a dead body?" Feel free to stop by, but whatever you do, don't ask about anything to do with the Civil War, or as some prefer to call it, Round One. <http://voxday.blogspot.com>.

²⁸ This list was compiled by a Pharyngula reader named Daedelus.

²⁹ This is an interesting inclusion, as the indebted Bacon was briefly jailed after being charged with twenty-three counts of bribery.

³⁰ Georges-Louis Leclerc published the first volume of his thirty-six-volume *Natural History* in 1749, and the Catholic Church forced him to add a ten-paragraph recantation in 1753. This did not prevent him from publishing the additional volumes, including "The Epochs of Nature" in which

15. St. Paul's rants against the "wisdom of the wise" in Corinthians. (First century A.D.)
16. The Byzantine emperor Justinian's closing of Plato's Academy in Athens.³¹ (529 A.D.)
17. The ecclesiastical monopoly upon lay education.
18. Martin Luther's attacks upon reason. (1517 A.D.)
19. Rejection of modern medicine by the Jehovah's Witnesses and other sects.
20. The excommunication of Johannes Kepler by the Catholic Church. (1612 A.D.)

Now, one can't help but note that the most recent of these terrible sins against science took place more than 250 years ago, in 1753, except for the three that still apply today. This is not evidence of an ongoing war, it is merely a collection of historical grudges, most of them remarkably petty. By this standard, Christians would be justified in continuing to hold the Jews liable for the historical crime of murdering their Lord and Savior.³² Furthermore, five of these seven individual victims of Christian persecution were themselves Christians. No wonder the Unholy Trinity found it difficult to come up with anything more specific than the spurious example of stem cell research.

The idea that religion is the enemy of science is a remarkably silly one when examined in scientific terms. Consider that Christian nation and the hostility to science that it supposedly harbors due to its extraordinary religiosity. And yet the United States of America accounts for more than one-third of the global scientific output despite representing only 4.5 percent of the global population. The scientific overperformance of religious America is a factor of 7.89, representing

he estimated the age of the Earth to be 75,000 in 1778. He survived his conflict with the Church; his son, on the other hand, was guillotined by the French Revolutionaries.

³¹ This is false, as the Academy was apparently closed by the philosophers themselves, and only for one year. Despite the emperor's effort to reduce the influence of Hellenism, the Academy continued to operate for several decades afterward.

³² Hey, it's not only in the New Testament. The great Jewish scribe Maimonides was pretty pleased to claim responsibility for killing Jesus Christ. *"Jesus of Nazareth interpreted the Torah and its precepts in such a fashion as to lead to their total annulment. The sages, of blessed memory, having become aware of his plans before his reputation spread among our people, meted out fitting punishment to him."* I still don't see how it makes much sense to hold it against them, though; my philosophy is that if a guy comes back from the dead, no harm no foul applies.

28.7 percent more scientific output per capita than the most atheistic nation in Europe, France.³³

Ironically, it is easy to provide an example of scientistry sinning against both the scientific method and the body of knowledge much more recent than most of religion's supposed crimes. For example, Ernest Duchesne was a French military doctor who discovered the medical benefits of mold and submitted his doctoral thesis showing the result of his experiments with the therapeutic qualities of bacteria-killing molds to the Institut Pasteur, which ignored it because he was only twenty-three and had no standing in the scientific community. It would take another thirty-two years before Alexander Fleming discovered the antibiotic qualities of penicillin. As historian Daniel Boorstin notes in *Cleopatra's Nose*, the chief lesson of the history of science is that it is not ignorance that menaces scientific advancement, but rather the illusion of knowledge.

While the scientific method may lead invariably to a more accurate understanding of the material world, the same is not true of the scientists who pursue it. The profession of science is growing increasingly authoritarian and political, as can be seen by the treatment of those who fail to fall in line with the scientific consensus on subjects where the evidence is far from settled, such as global warming. This poses a real danger to the credibility of all three aspects of science, which is particularly ill-timed in light of the very real danger that science presently poses to humanity. After all, it would be far easier to eliminate a few hundred thousand scientists, even a few million scientists, than 4.85 billion religious adherents.

Religion does not threaten science so much as science threatens itself. By combining increasingly authoritarian arrogance with an encroachment upon intellectual spheres they are manifestly unprepared to invade, scientists and their thoughtless science fetishist followers risk starting a genuine war they cannot possibly hope to win.

³³ Braun, Tibor, Wolfgang Glänzel, and András Schubert. "A Global Snapshot of Scientific Trends," *The UNESCO Courier*, May 1999.

IV

THE RELIGION OF REASON

*Reason has always existed, but not always in a reasonable form.*¹

—KARL MARX

ATHEISTS OFTEN EXPRESS ANGER and bewilderment at the low esteem in which they are collectively held by the rest of the world. This is a matter of particular frustration for the New Atheists, as they lament the Gallup poll² in which it was determined that Americans would rather vote for a toothless, illiterate, homosexual Afro-Hispanic crack whore with a peg leg than a well-qualified atheist with executive hair. That's a slight exaggeration, perhaps, but it is interesting to note that three years after the publication of the first

¹ Karl Marx and Arnold Ruge, Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher. September 1843.

² In the most recent poll on the subject, a *Newsweek* poll from March 31, 2007, only 29 percent of the respondents said they were willing to vote for an atheist. Amazingly, it appears that telling people how evil and stupid they are may not be the best way of convincing them to see things your way.

New Atheist screed, the expressed willingness of Americans to vote for an atheist has declined considerably.³

And yet, a strong majority of those same respondents, 68 percent, believe it is possible for someone to be a moral person and an atheist. At first glance, this might appear to be an irrational dichotomy, but upon reflection it makes sense. Politicians are not ordinary people, they are extraordinarily ambitious individuals who possess an active desire to seek power over the lives of others. Think about how obnoxious the kids who ran for student council president at your school were—that's the larval form of the national politician. Most Americans wisely distrust politicians on principle; after all, the country was founded upon the basic principle of limiting the power of those who have been successful in obtaining office.

Regardless of what one thinks of a politician's religion, the mere fact that he has one offers the voter essential information about where his moral and ethical lines are theoretically drawn. This doesn't mean that he is actually bound by them in any way, but at least the voter has some idea of where his limits should be. The voter has only to call upon his personal knowledge of the religion's tenets, to read the religion's holy book, or to ask an acquaintance who happens to share the politician's faith to obtain a basic understanding of what the religious politician's ideas of right and wrong are and what policies he is likely to pursue.

In the case of the atheist politician, however, the voter not only has no information, he has no easy means of obtaining that information. As I pointed out in the first chapter, it is atheists who are quick to assure us that there are absolutely no similarities between atheists, that the mere absence of god-belief in an individual is not information from which any reasonable inferences can be drawn. This is an erroneous assertion, as there is no shortage of evidence to the contrary, but there is a grain of truth to it that applies in this situation.

Anyone can behave according to any moral system without needing to subscribe to the beliefs from which that system is derived.

³ "In a recent *Newsweek* poll, Americans said they believed in God by a margin of 92 to 6—only 2 percent answered 'don't know'—and only 37 percent said they'd be willing to vote for an atheist for president. (That's down from 49 percent in a 1999 Gallup poll—which also found that more Americans would vote for a homosexual than an atheist.)" *Newsweek*, 11 Sep. 2006. The 2007 Gallup poll also showed a decline, although only to 45 percent.

One doesn't have to be an Orthodox Jew to keep kosher, just as one doesn't need to be a Christian to believe that committing adultery is wrong. Most atheists abide by the morality of the culture that they inhabit, not because they have taken the effort to reason from first principles and miraculously reached conclusions that bear a remarkable similarity to the moral system of those around them, but because lacking any moral system of their own, they parasitically latch on to the system of their societal host.

That's a negative way of describing what is essentially a good thing, and it's why atheists in Christian cultures behave according to an individual morality that has more in common with the surrounding Christians than with Hindu atheists or Islamic atheists with whom they theoretically have more in common. In practice, this tends to work out as the dominant local moral system minus the proscribed behavior in which the individual really wants to engage, which is usually something involving sex or money. But this positive moral parasitism can never be confused with the possession of an independent system of morality,⁴ so the problem is that a voter has no idea which specific aspects of the dominant moral system have been rejected by the atheist politician.

While the atheist next door is likely to limit his rejection to the specific aspects that proscribe premarital fornication or gluttony and indulge himself in the sort of everyday moral failure to which even the most devout Christians are susceptible, history demonstrates that the ambitious atheist who seeks political power is significantly more likely to reject the moral proscription on things such as slaughtering large numbers of people who stand in the way of establishing a godless utopia.⁵ The peg-legged crack whore, on the other hand, only wants to shift agricultural subsidies from cereal crops to coca plants and poppies and install disco balls in the White House.⁶

This is why the philosopher John Locke reached the conclusion

⁴ While Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris all recognize this, Hitchens doesn't understand the concept at all. His constant stumbling over this issue in his debate with Douglas Wilson was amusing at first, but by the end it was getting painful.

⁵ What's strikingly weird about many of these individuals is what moral proscriptions they retain, as if at random.

⁶ With the slogan "Party to the People," of course. Now, where is this crack whore and when can I vote for him?

that atheists could be tolerated in civil society, so long as they were not permitted to hold positions of political authority. Locke, who died in 1704, never lived to see just how astute his observation was; tens of millions of lives in dozens of nations would have been saved had his wisdom been heeded.⁷

Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all; besides also, those that by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion, can have no pretence of religion whereupon to challenge the privilege of a toleration. As for other practical opinions, though not absolutely free from all error, yet if they do not tend to establish domination over others, or civil impunity to the church in which they are taught, there can be no reason why they should not be tolerated.

—JOHN LOCKE, “Letter Concerning Toleration,” 1689

So, while atheists indubitably possess morals, it is the inability to know which specific morals they personally subscribe to and which they reject that renders them rightly suspect. The problem is rooted in the fact that no atheist possesses a universally applicable morality, since one cannot be derived from either his atheism or from science. However, this does not mean that the New Atheists do not subscribe to a specific moral system that makes the same sort of universal claims as the moralities derived from religion, for they do, and it is not a new morality, but one that has been around for centuries.

LEIBNIZIANS AND NEWTONIANS

You are saying it should be the goal of all Natural Philosophers to restore peace and harmony to the world of men. This I cannot dispute.

—NEAL STEPHENSON, *Quicksilver*

It was this quote from *Quicksilver*, the first novel in Neal Stephenson’s excellent Baroque Cycle, that caused me to contemplate the way in which the clash between the New Atheists and evangelical Christians can be usefully viewed as a continuation of the fundamental

⁷ See chapter XIII, *The Red Hand of Atheism*.

dichotomy between the worldviews of Gottfried Leibniz and Sir Isaac Newton as described by Stephenson.⁸ The most important difference between the two geniuses was not the theoretical basis of one's calculus and the geometric basis of the other's, but rather Leibniz's belief in the secular improbability of Man and Newton's skepticism regarding the same.

It's interesting to note that this basic difference may have even informed their different approaches to developing the calculus, as Newton's approach, like the Christian's view of Man, is a combination of religious faith and empirical observation, whereas both the Leibnizian and New Atheist⁹ approaches are primarily based on reason. The fictional Leibniz saw Natural Philosophy as having a practical moral application. All the disgusting dog-torturing and corpse-carving in which the Natural Philosophers engaged was seen as being ultimately justified in order to bring about world peace through human means. The fictional Newton, on the other hand, saw Natural Philosophy primarily as a means of discovering the mechanics of God's Creation, hence his eventual loss of interest in it and subsequent turn to alchemy as a means of seeking an essence that transcends the material.

The New Atheists are Leibnizians, not literally, because Stephenson's Leibniz character sees no conflict between his Natural Philosophy and his belief in God,¹⁰ but in an analogical sense. Based solely on their theoretical reasoning, the New Atheists declare that it should be the goal of all scientists, indeed, all rational thinkers, to bring peace and harmony to the world of men. They don't declare this in a succinct or straightforward manner, they don't even lay out their case in a coherent manner, but this is the only conclusion that can rationally be derived from their cumulative premises, logic, and stated goals. It is unclear why none of them are able to come out and state this clearly, but there are a number of possible explanations.

⁸ I leave it to the reader to decide how historically accurate Stephenson's fictional portrayal of these worldviews are.

⁹ Or New Natural Philosophy, as would arguably be a more accurate description of the movement.

¹⁰ Technically, Daniel Waterhouse represents the atheists, but the analogy stands either way. And, of course, Leibniz's calculus was ultimately upheld by the evidence and, as shall be seen throughout this book, the same is seldom true of the New Atheist theories.

The first is a question of intellectual competence. They simply may not understand the correct way to articulate their argument. This is entirely possible with Harris and Hitchens, who are impressively incoherent thinkers at the best of times, but it isn't credible in the case of Dawkins or Dennett. Dawkins, at least, clearly understands the difference between his enthusiasm for science and his advocacy of an alternative secular morality,¹¹ even if he does not provide a concise description of precisely what that morality is or the basis of its claim on anyone's behavior.

The second possibility is that they genuinely believe science leads ineluctably toward certain moral conclusions. Although the careless reader could be convinced of this by a judicious selection of quotes, both Dawkins and Dennett specifically deny this to be possible and even Harris only dares to base his moral appeals on reason, not science. Hitchens, meanwhile, is almost completely indifferent to getting either the science or the theology straight. (He's just a journalist after all—he's not expected to make sense.)

The third and most likely explanation is that the New Atheists are pulling a deceptive bait-and-switch for marketing purposes. All four authors state outright that their books are works of atheistic evangelism, meant to either convince the Low Church atheist to publicly identify with the High Church or to convert a theistic reader by destroying his faith. Three of the four books are marketed as quasi-scientific works and are filled with a panoply of references to science and concepts that sound vaguely scientific, although Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell* is the only one that actually utilizes a recognizably scientific approach or makes any use of the scientific method; unsurprisingly, Dennett is also the only New Atheist who presents the reader with a reasonable hypothesis worthy of consideration instead of a philosophical conclusion meant to be accepted at face value.

The division between science¹² and the moral and philosophical purposes toward which scientists ultimately direct the scientific method was always inevitable. Richard Feynman understood this, pointing out that scientific knowledge provides the ability to do good

¹¹ See chapter VIII.

¹² In the sense of scientage and scientody.

or evil, and that using it to do good is not only to the credit of science, but to the credit of the moral choice that led to the good work as well. And like Daniel Dennett, Feynman regretted that Man's accomplishments had fallen far short of what had been believed possible at the beginning of the Age of Reason.

Why can't we conquer ourselves? Because we find that even great forces and abilities do not seem to carry with them clear instructions on how to use them. As an example, the great accumulation of understanding as to how the physical world behaves only convinces one that this behavior seems to have a kind of meaninglessness. The sciences do not directly teach good or bad.

—RICHARD FEYNMAN

But Feynman's response to this division was a commendably scientific one that is profoundly different from the moral philosophy advocated by Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens. Feynman believed that it was the responsibility of scientists to proclaim the value of intellectual freedom, to support open discussion and criticism, and to welcome doubt, not suppress it. He declared that demanding this freedom for all future generations was a fundamental scientific duty.¹³ He was far more dedicated to protecting science as an effective means than he was to using it to advocate any specific ends.

The New Atheists harbor no similar dedication to open discussion, let alone criticism. To them, science is but a means to a specific end, something to be prostituted in order to sell the secularist Enlightenment morality that they see in competition with the Christian faith. Having already sold out science, they reject any sense of scientific responsibility and thus will tolerate no skepticism, let alone outright opposition. Dawkins is the worst offender—his prickly reaction to criticism is not to address it, not to discuss it, but to disdainfully dismiss it, unread. When Douglas Wilson¹⁴ published his response to *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Dawkins lost no time in labeling him “Sam's Flea.” According to Dawkins, arguably the most visible

¹³ Feynman, Richard. *What Do You Care What Other People Think? Further Adventures of a Curious Character*. New York: 1985.

¹⁴ The same Douglas Wilson who handed Christopher Hitchens his head in their 2007 debate. I haven't read the book, in fact, I haven't read any of the books criticizing Dawkins, either.

representative of science today, any published criticism of him and his fellow militants can only be driven by the desire for book sales.¹⁵

Feynman wept.

The key to understanding the New Atheism is that it is not based on science. The New Atheists have no commitment to scientage or scientody when either aspect of science happens to stand in the way of the secular morality they are selling with a scientific sheen. While their attacks are theoretically directed against all religions, they betray their focus for the main object of their hatred in both their language and the examples they choose. For all that he was supposedly inspired to write *The End of Faith* by the jihadist 9/11 attacks, Sam Harris will never write *Letter to an Islamic Nation* and Christopher Hitchens expends more of his bilious vitriol on one dead Catholic nun than he does attacking the entire Hindu pantheon worshipped by one billion individuals around the world.

So what, specifically, is this morality? Because it is never described in its entirety, it is necessary for us to piece it together from the hints sprinkled throughout the atheist canon. We know that Christianity stands in its way, courtesy of Bertrand Russell, who declares that the Christian religion is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world. And we know that it is in opposition to even the most moderate forms of religious faith, thanks to Sam Harris.

*My biggest criticism of religious moderation . . . is that it represents precisely the sort of thinking that will prevent a fully reasonable and non-denominational spirituality from ever emerging in our world.*¹⁶

However, Harris never gets around to describing his proposed morality due to a tendency to meander into oxymoronic dicussions of his New Age, neo-Buddhist rational spirituality. For a system of morals and ethics, Harris offers nothing more concrete than half-baked utilitarianism in declaring that morality is merely a recipe for maximizing

¹⁵ "Fleas" and "parasites" are Dawkins's favored means of referring to his critics. On March 4, 2007, at <http://www.richarddawkins.net>, Dawkins posted an entry entitled "Was there ever a dog that praised his fleas?" in reference to the "three new parasitic books released in response to *The God Delusion*." If the supercilious old fart ever wants to see who the bigger dog is, I'll be delighted to throw down with him. Oxford Union or the Octagon, it's all the same to me.

¹⁶ Harris, Sam and Andrew Sullivan. "Is Religion 'Built Upon Lies?'" Beliefnet, 2 Feb. 2007.

happiness and minimizing suffering.¹⁷ Hitchens is a bit more helpful, as *god is not Great* builds up to a final chapter that informs us that there is a definite need for a New Enlightenment, and in the process asserts that the following things are positively immoral: presenting a false picture of the world to the innocent and credulous,¹⁸ the doctrine of blood sacrifice, the doctrine of atonement, the doctrine of eternal reward or punishment, and the imposition of impossible tasks. Other moral evils that go beyond this list of doctrinal thought crimes include frightening children, exploitation, suicide bombings, opposition to birth control, circumcision (male and female), banning and censoring books, and silencing dissenters.

Regarding the basic moral structure of this new and shinier Enlightenment, Hitchens is, like Marx describing the long-awaited Worker's Paradise, more than a little vague. After 282 pages of furious anti-religious foreplay, the climax is disappointing indeed, amounting to only a single paragraph of seven sentences.¹⁹ But we are informed that the New Enlightenment will be based on the idea that the proper study of Mankind is man and woman. Literature and poetry will replace sacred texts, and most importantly, the sexual life will be divorced from fear, disease, and tyranny, all on the sole condition "that we banish all religions from the discourse" by knowing "the enemy" and fighting it. Sadly, it appears there are no seventy-two virgins in store.

Despite his grand eloquence and enlightened posturing, Hitchens is almost indistinguishable from a conventional Low Church atheist, who is content to dwell as a moral parasite on traditional Christian morality except when he wants to get laid without feeling guilty or catching a venereal disease.

Both Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, on the other hand, are not looking for a New Enlightenment as they are still pledged to the old one. While it's absolutely true that atheism is not a religion, most High Church atheists subscribe to a specific denomination of the Enlightenment faith known as humanism.²⁰ In *The God Delusion* Dawkins

¹⁷ Although he is to be commended for saying in a sentence what takes Michel Onfray seven volumes.

¹⁸ The reader may wish to remember this charge in light of some of the subsequent chapters.

¹⁹ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 283.

²⁰ "Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and

describes his belief in humanism, “the ethical system that often goes with atheism,” and testified to his faith that “the broad direction of history is toward enlightenment”²¹ in an interview with Salon. Although he’s much more famous for his atheism, his humanism is no secret—the American Humanist Association named him the 1996 Humanist of the Year, while in 2004, it was Daniel Dennett’s turn to be so honored.²² Richard Dawkins is also a public signer of the third Humanist Manifesto, which summarizes the principle articles of the humanist faith thusly:

1. Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.
2. Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change.
3. Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience.
4. Life’s fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
5. Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
6. Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

Specifically what those humane ideals and ethical values might be is not explained, although we are informed that Dawkins and company “aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals.” This is all very scientific, of course, because we are assured that the humanist conviction—which is of course not to be confused with “faith”—is informed. But it is evidence that even the world’s most militant atheists find that belief in a universally applicable morality is something to preserve, so that when they find the theistic foundations of Christian morality incredible, they don’t give up, they seek a substitute instead. In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins suggests substituting the following for four

responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.” <http://www.humanism.org.uk>.

²¹ Gordy Slack, “The Atheist.” Salon. 30 April, 2005.

²² I’ll be astounded if Sam Harris or Christopher Hitchens doesn’t pick one up in 2008, 2009 at the latest.

of the Ten Commandments, although he doesn't indicate which he'd leave out, his hatred for God combined with his marital history suggests that he has numbers One, Three, Four, and Seven in mind.

- Enjoy your own sex life.
- Do not discriminate or oppress on the basis of sex, race, or species.²³
- Do not indoctrinate your children.²⁴
- Value the future.²⁵

The British Humanist Association, which Dawkins serves as an honorary vice president, provides some additional detail on humanist tenets in its ten-question quiz²⁶ meant to help one determine whether one happens to be a humanist or not. According to the BHA, the following answers indicate that one is either a humanist already or is very close to humanist thinking:

1. There is no evidence that any god exists, so I'll assume that there isn't one.
2. When I die, I will live on in people's memories or because of the work I have done or through my children.
3. The scientific explanations for how the universe began are the best ones available—no gods were involved.
4. The theory that life on Earth evolved gradually over billions of years is true—here is plenty of evidence from fossils showing that this is how it happened.
5. When I look at a beautiful view I think that we ought to do everything possible to protect this for future generations.
6. I can tell right from wrong by thinking hard about the probable consequences of actions and their effects on other people.
7. It's best to be honest because I'm happier and feel better about myself if I'm honest.
8. Other people matter and should be treated with respect because

²³ Discrimination based on looks is okay. That's just evolution in action.

²⁴ Except for teaching evolution to school children. That's a moral imperative.

²⁵ Even though this life is all you've got and you won't be there to see it.

²⁶ <http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentviewarticle.asp?article=1208> on 25 June 2007.

we will all be happier if we treat each other well.

9. Animals should be treated with respect because they can suffer, too.
10. The most important thing in life is to increase the general happiness and welfare of humanity.

As it turns out, Harris's morality of happiness is ultimately humanist in origin. From these examples, the educated reader should be able to see that the religion of reason is little more than a memetic chimera crossing the Summer of Love with Darwinism and scientific socialism: be happy, be nice, be Green, to each according to his needs, individuals exist for the purpose of serving the common good, human progress toward an earthly paradise is inevitable, all shined up with a thin veneer of science. It's no wonder Christopher Hitchens is seeking a New Enlightenment, he only recently disavowed his secular faith in the old one.²⁷

RESURRECTING THE RED HAND OF REASON

The Marxist worldview has a relationship to the Enlightenment. I think that's impossible to doubt.

—CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

The original Enlightenment led directly to the French Revolution, and only 349 days after the *citoyens sans-culottes* established the French Republic, the bloody Reign of Terror began. On 20 Brumaire An II,²⁸ the cathedral of Notre Dame was renamed the Temple of Reason and a dancer named Mademoiselle Maillard was enthroned upon the altar as Reason's goddess. Like a lethal virus transmitted from corpse to living carrier, Enlightenment ideals survived the collapse of the First Republic and were preserved by utopian socialists such

²⁷ "I no longer would have positively replied, 'I am a socialist'. . . . There is no longer a general socialist critique of capitalism—certainly not the sort of critique that proposes an alternative or a replacement. There just is not and one has to face the fact, and it seems to me further that it's very unlikely, though not impossible, that it will again be the case in the future. Though I don't think that the contradictions, as we used to say, of the system, are by any means all resolved." "Free Radical:" Reason. Nov. 2001.

²⁸ Otherwise known as Anno Domini November 10, 1793.

as de Rouvroy, Fourier, and Cabet. De Rouvroy, who died in 1825, anticipated the Actually Not So New Atheists by nearly two centuries in arguing that a new religion purged of divisive Christian dogma, with scientists serving as priests, was required for the good of society. Twenty-three years after de Rouvroy's death, Marx and Engels put a scientific spin on their socialism, which inspired the Russian Revolution of 1917 and all the humane joys inherent in seventy-four years of Communist rule.

Although the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 briefly left the enlightened humanists of the world without a state to call their own, that was soon remedied by the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, which established the European Union²⁹ as a political entity dedicated to Enlightenment ideals³⁰ and from which all reference to Europe's historic Christian heritage has been carefully excised.³¹ While the European Convention on Human Rights has not yet been ratified by the European Union because the EU is not yet a recognized state, the Convention serves as a good measure of Enlightenment morality in action since it has been ratified by all the EU's member states and is considered to be the basis for the EU's own Charter of Fundamental Rights.³²

The Convention is a cornucopia of Enlightenment rights, including the right to life, the prohibition of slavery, the right to liberty and security, the right to freedom of expression, and so forth. Unfortunately, these rights come with strict caveats that leave holes in these theoretical protections large enough to drive a truck through . . . or an overcrowded train rattling along the tracks pointing toward a gulag. Nor do they come as unalienable rights endowed by a creator, they

²⁹ "If you go through all the structures and features of this emerging European monster you will notice that it more and more resembles the Soviet Union. Of course, it is a milder version of the Soviet Union." Vladimir Bukovsky. "Former Soviet Dissident Warns For EU Dictatorship." *Brussels Journal*. 27 Feb. 2006.

³⁰ According to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the former French president who presided over the Convention on the Future of the European Union at which the EU Constitution was created, "*the philosophy of the Age of the Enlightenment and the contributions of rational and scientific thought define the European identity.*" "Is Turkey 'Enlightened' Enough to Join the EU?" *The Globalist*. 10 Dec. 2004.

³¹ Cullinan, John. "Godless in Brussels." *National Review Online*, 16 June 2003.

³² The Charter of Fundamental Rights is an expansion of the rights delineated in the Convention and includes such additions as right to good administration, workers social rights, personal data protection, and bio-ethics. At the time of writing, the Charter had not yet been formally incorporated into European Union treaty law.

are merely notional rights granted by the forty-seven signatory governments that belong to the Council of Europe, subject to the political and legal processes of those governments. Some of the limitations are even articulated in the explication of the rights themselves, while Article 17 ominously prohibits what it terms “the abuse of rights” granted in the Convention.³³

“Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society. . . .” (Article 9) *“The exercise of these freedoms [of expression], since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society. . . .”* (Article 10) *Similar caveats restrict the rights granted in articles 5, 6, 8 and 11.*

The multiple references to the need for a democratic society to limit human rights is particularly ironic, as for all its democratic pretensions, European integration has been pushed inexorably forward without the democratic consent of many of Europe’s peoples. Every significant step in the integration process has been the result of negotiations between the bureaucratic and political elites, and when the people have been given the opportunity to express their opinion democratically and rejected the results of these negotiations, they have either been forced to vote until they get it right, as was the case in Denmark and Ireland,³⁴ or simply ignored and overrun with semantic games.³⁵

³³ A Canadian journalist named David Warren warns: *“The most frightening proposal is the one least appreciated: to create a European ‘charter of fundamental rights’ that will accomplish the precise opposite of what it claims. It will swing the iron claw of ‘progressive thought’ through the soft flesh of human variety, enterprise, and freedom, on an unprecedented scale. . . . It is time people realized that ‘human rights codes’ are a weapon employed by the state to suppress disapproved behavior by the individual. They cannot be wielded by the individual against the state, as independent civil and criminal courts could be.”* Warren, David. “Constituting EU,” 23 June 2007.

³⁴ The Irish people voted against the Treaty of Nice in June 2001. After a year of intense government lobbying, they ratified it in October 2002. This followed the Danish example, in which the Danish people voted down the Treaty of Maastricht in June 1992 and then approved it in a May 1993 referendum. Of course, neither the Irish nor the Danish people have been given an opportunity to change their minds again. The Swiss people have rejected the EU twice already, but few doubt that they will have to do so a third time.

³⁵ German Chancellor Andrea Merkel was as shamelessly deceptive as any previous German Reichskanzler in repackaging the rejected European Constitution as a “treaty,” thereby attempting to bypass any need to respect the will of the French, Dutch, and British people who oppose it. If the

The president of the European Union, Jean-Claude Juncker, answered with commendable, if anti-democratic, honesty when asked about the French vote on the EU constitution: “If it’s a Yes, we will say ‘on we go’, and if it’s a No we will say ‘we continue.’”³⁶ And after the signing of the “treaty” to allow the governments of the nations who voted the constitution down to proceed with its adoption without the consent of the people, the president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, declared, “We are unique in the history of Mankind. . . . Now what we have is the first non-imperial empire. We have twenty-seven countries that fully decided to work together and to pool their sovereignty.”³⁷

Perhaps because he is a recent apostate from Marxism, Christopher Hitchens alone among the New Atheists appears to see the creeping authoritarianism inherent in the religion of reason. When asked why so many individuals with theoretically anti-authoritarian beliefs somehow end up supporting authoritarian government actions, he explained that this was because of the way in which temporary expedients considered necessary for the achievement of a primary goal are easily transformed into dogma³⁸ that cannot be questioned lest the attainment of the goal be jeopardized. This is the very rational reason that the historical religion of reason so quickly produced massive violence and why its revival is very likely to lead to the same result. If the desired end cannot be reached without resorting to an ugly means, then either the end must be abandoned or the ugly means must be adopted. Therefore, while a decision to engage in mass slaughter can be an irrational one, it clearly cannot be considered inherently irrational. The process can be entirely based on reason, from utopian start to bloody finish. The problem is not in the logic or its absence, but rather in the basic premises that the logic serves.

This is why the humanist vagaries regarding their moral premises are so troubling, and it also explains why atheists in positions of power

history of the former European Coal and Steel Community is any guide, this anti-democratic power grab will be successful.

³⁶ “Keep up the pressure for a No vote, Left warned.” *The Telegraph*. 26 May, 2005.

³⁷ “Call For Vote on Europe Empire,” *The Times*, 11 July 2007.

³⁸ “If you make your priority—let’s call it the 1930s—the end of massive unemployment, which was then defined as one of the leading problems, there seemed no way to do it except by a program of public works. . . . And then temporary expedients become dogma very quickly—especially if they seem to work.” “Free Radical.” *Reason*.

have been inordinately disposed to commit mass murder in service to their ideals. History shows that it is easy enough for Christians to violate their fairly explicit moral strictures, and it is even easier for humanists to ignore their own nebulous moralities in self-righteous, rational pursuit of their ultimately irrational goals. As evidence of this, I note that while the European Union has not even formally adopted the European Convention on Human Rights yet, some of its member-states are already exploiting the aforementioned caveats to violate the right to respect for private and family life, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the freedom of expression.³⁹

After Belgian police beat up two leading Flemish politicians protesting pro-immigration policies in Brussels on September 11, 2007, the secretary general of the Council of Europe was inspired to announce: “The freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are indeed preconditions for democracy, but they should not be regarded as a license to offend.” Free speech is permitted by the enlightened eurofascists, as long as one doesn’t actually say anything they deem unacceptable.

*Das Europa über alles
Über alles im Erdteil.
Einigkeit und Gewaltherrschaft
Für die neue Erleuchtung...*

So, what is the ultimate goal of the religion of reason? And is it a rational one? Sam Harris’s description of the result of this inevitable humanist progress is precisely the same as the end prophesied by the humanist and New Atheist icon⁴⁰ Bertrand Russell eighty-four years ago.⁴¹ It is not the end of faith that is the ultimate goal, this is merely a

³⁹ Unsurprisingly, it is Germany that is the worst offender, jailing parents and seizing children under a 1938 Nazi anti-home schooling law that is still in effect, and imprisoning people for expressing their doubts about the official version of the Holocaust. It’s a pity they didn’t keep the snappy uniforms and give up the totalitarianism instead.

⁴⁰ Dawkins quotes or refers to Russell even more often than he does to his fellow New Atheists. Harris has eight references to him in his index, Hitchens five.

⁴¹ “I believe that, owing to men’s folly, a world-government will only be established by force, and therefore be at first cruel and despotic. But I believe that it is necessary for the preservation of a scientific civilization, and that, if once realized, it will gradually give rise to the other conditions of a tolerable existence.” Bertrand Russell. “Icarus, or, the Future of Science,” 1924. Russell also called for the United States to use its nuclear monopoly to institute an international authority ruling the world

necessary prerequisite to the economic, cultural, and moral integration required for establishing the world government that the devotees of Reason hope will bring a permanent end to war.

But world government and a subsequent end to war is not a rational goal given the way it flies in the face of everything we know about human history and human nature, to say nothing of the grim results of past monopolies on legal violence. While Harris attempts to argue that the humanist dream is feasible based on the historical example of slavery, his argument requires ignoring the inability of modern society to bring an end to the sex slavery and human-trafficking that persist today in even the most civilized Western nations. The terrible tragedy of the New Atheists is that they are laboring to lay the foundation for yet another reprisal of the very horrors they think to permanently prevent in the name of Reason. Voltaire may have been correct to write that “those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities,” but a more meaningfully rational statement would be to say: If you commit atrocities, then you believe absurdities.

And the undeniable fact is that the absurdity most often believed by those who have committed Man’s greatest atrocities is that there is no God.