Introduction: What is the New Atheism?
As I mentioned in my first talk Tuesday evening, the secular worldview has taken on a particularly harsh turn in the 21st century. This is the New Atheism. From the books and public presentations of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett, to other public figures and even a slew of scientists, atheism has now gotten ugly.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell argues in his essay, *An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish*, that you can tell a great deal about the shallowness of a claim or argument by the shrillness in which it is presented.¹ We know this from our own experience. Insults are pandemic in the books of the New Atheists. Here are a few samples: Harris writes: “Surely there must come a time when we will acknowledge the obvious: theology is now little more than a branch of human ignorance. Indeed, it is ignorance on wings;”² Hitchens proclaims: “Religious people just won’t leave me alone. But this, religion is incapable of doing;”³ and Dawkins asserts: “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction; jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”⁴ This is simply not mature discourse.

Sloppy Thinking
Terry Eagleton observes that “Most critics buy their rejection of religion on the cheap,”⁵ and I believe this is the modern case of atheism. We are told on the one hand that they are the cultural elite, the smartest, most creative, and most successful in society and on the other hand that they are persecuted victims of theists. Hitchens claims that religious believers are constantly harassing him and imagines that theists want his and everybody else’s destruction.⁶ Harris is convinced that “people of faith want to curtail the private freedom of others.”⁷ And Dawkins decries systematic cultural persecution. We might ask ourselves, is this really true to our experience? Are atheists getting fired by intolerant theists? Are theists waiting to attack them for refusing to believe in God? How many murders do you recall where the victim was an atheist and killed out of some dread religious pogrom in your neighborhood or city?

In “A Declaration in Defense of Science and Secularism,” a large number of scientists and philosophers called on our elected officials “not to permit legislation or executive action to be influenced by religious beliefs.” Of course, if the religious belief is an apocalyptic one, then this certainly ought not to influence foreign policy. But the complete removal of religious values from any legislative consideration is part of the sloppy logic of the New Atheists. What they are saying is that postmodern moral relativists can have a public say, nihilists can
come to the table, atheistic materialists who do not believe in objective morality may influence law, and anybody else with their values can too; just not religious believers.

Another example of sloppy argumentation is the assertion by New Atheists that religious believers are less moral than the nonreligious. This would be really disturbing if it were true, and philosopher Daniel Dennett assures us that theists are now scrambling to explain this. It’s just a fact, we are told, that atheists are less violent or greedy than faithful people. Harris announces that, “One of the most pernicious effects of religion is that it tends to divorce morality from the reality of human and animal suffering.”

It is simply a fact that religious people are significantly more likely to donate to charitable causes, both religious and secular. According to George Gallup: “A mountain of survey data from Gallup and other survey organizations show that when educational background and other variables are held constant, persons who are ‘highly spiritually committed’ are far less likely to engage in antisocial behavior than those less committed. They have lower rates of crime, excessive alcohol use, and drug addiction than other groups.” Gallup’s article is titled “Dogma Bites Man: On the New and Biased Research Linking Faith and Social Ills.” The dogma he refers to is of course the dogmatics we’ve seen from the New Atheists.

Most stunning is that their intellectual engagement challenging religion shows few to no actual representatives from the field. Dawkins, for example, utilizes John Hartang’s critique of the Bible. In fact, he gives Hartang six pages of consideration. Here is a typical quote:

> The Bible is a blueprint of in-group morality, complete with instructions for genocide, enslavement of out-groups, and world domination. But the Bible is not evil by virtue of its objectives or even its glorification of murder, cruelty, and rape. Many ancient works do that…. But no one is selling the Iliad as a foundation for morality. There lies the problem. The Bible is sold, and bought, as a guide to how people should live their lives.

And who is John Hartang? A noted biblical scholar? A historian of the classical period? John Hartang is an anesthesiologist.

**Weird Argumentation**

**Just Plain Weird**

Beyond these sloppy arguments things can get more surreal. From the New Atheists we learn a whole spate of things they clearly manufactured:

- A significant percentage of Americans would rejoice with a nuclear bomb hitting New York, for this would be the beginning of the *rapture*.
- The Dalai Lama is a religious persecutor.
• Religion is the reason that diseases come from sex.\textsuperscript{16}
• Christianity is responsible for the drug trade.\textsuperscript{17}
• Religions broadly teach that venereal disease will result from kissing.\textsuperscript{18}

The Straw Man
One regular way to advance the straw man in religion is to define religion or faith in a way that implies its own absurdity. For example, “faith” is regularly defined by the atheists as “belief without evidence.”\textsuperscript{19} I know no one who thinks this.

A second form of straw man that is typical in this debate is to imagine that your theistic opponent is a fundamentalist. Here we find that the vast majority of believers apparently are more like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Osama Bin Laden, and the Ayatollah Khomeini. Dawkins claims that while many of his religious examples seem extreme, they are actually mainstream.

When these aggressive skeptics zero in on foolish expressions of religion most of us religious believers wholeheartedly agree with them. So what? The human condition makes it certain there will be dysfunction in relationships, politics, social movements, institutions, sports, you name it. What the New Atheists want you to believe is these odd religious examples are typical. You know they are not. Why the bad form? Why bring such shoddy sets of arguments? I believe it is because what we are dealing with is a fundamentalist atheist movement.

Ockham’s Razor and Other Issues
As we saw earlier, the New Atheists believe that positing the existence of only a material world is the best explanation, the simplest one, and the one that can be attested to by the strongest argument. In a word, God is metaphysically extravagant, an unnecessary and unprovable add-on. They will point to an adapted version of \textit{Ockham’s Razor}. Originally, Ockham’s Razor posited that when two explanations equally explain the evidence, one ought to choose the version with the fewest entities or causes. A co-opted version maintains that a set of phenomena is best explained by the simplest, most coherent, and most comprehensive alternative.\textsuperscript{20} Let’s assume this reframed version. But Ockham’s Razor also demands that your answer be sufficiently comprehensive and account for the data well. One of the many problems with the New Atheism is that its explanation is not adequate, comprehensive, or often even coherent. In fact, to accept atheism’s story, you’re going to have to wince a number of times, accepting conclusions that are counter-intuitive and assault human dignity.

One issue to address with this version of Ockham’s Razor is that there are typically a number of explanatory causes for something. To isolate one cause that is indeed a real cause is not necessarily to understand an issue or explain it satisfactorily. One might say that the \textit{cause} of this paper I am presenting is paper and ink. There is nothing more in front of me, and thus paper and ink exhausts the issue, because it accounts for everything.
But there are obviously additional causes—ones that do not reject the *paper and ink* cause—that are not at all explanatory extravagances. These would include the arising culture of religious skepticism, my sensed moral duty to respond, this gathering of teachers, and so on. Ockham’s Razor doesn’t say: Stop at the most reductive, most limited reference and imagine that you’ve adequately explained something. So, for example, we find throughout atheists’ texts that “religion is man-made.” Of course it is. Who would deny that human activity and the human imagination are central in the making and the ongoing operations of any religion? But does this *adequately* explain religion? For us, the *man-made* claim feels much like the *paper-and-ink* response. I’ll grant it, but its explanatory power is utterly wanting.

Consider: “We have come to the crucial stage in the history of biology, where religion itself is subject to the explanations of the natural sciences…. [T]he final decisive edge enjoyed by scientific naturalism will come from its capacity to explain traditional religion, its chief competitor, as a wholly material phenomenon.”

The truth is that every thinker from any discipline that I’ve ever read believes that scientific findings are indeed *part* of the explanatory story. It is just that science isn’t the *only* explanation or *sufficient* explanation to cover everything. We will see today and tomorrow, that materialism cannot, in fact, explain a great deal of things. The New Atheists want you to believe that if you accept evolution as a biological mechanism, then you must also believe in philosophical materialism.

**Evolutionary Psychology and Filling in the Gaps**

Dawkins and Dennett rely on each other heavily in trying to explain how the human condition could be the way it is, given blind, materialistic, natural selection. They are also enthusiastic supporters of such disciplines as evolutionary psychology, evolutionary biology, and sociobiology. What all of these disciplines have in common is their various attempts to explain *everything* in terms of evolution, particularly how a determinist world and natural selection produce the humanity we see today. We are, in short, products of blind animality. This is a bold project indeed, with bolder claims. Take, for example, Harvard social evolutionist R.L. Trivers: “Sooner or later, political science, law, economics, psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology will all be branches of sociobiology.”

Evolution as the sole explanation of the human condition is particularly problematic when you look at religion, since evolutionary theory insists the only core interest an organism has is survival and procreation, nothing more, nothing less.

One might pose a number of problems to the belief that evolution is the sole explanation for all things human. Why then religion, when it wastes resources? What about altruism, which undermines reproduction and survival?
those who give over their lives for a greater good? Easy, they maintain. We have a gullibility gene that helps pre-historical children survive; altruism elevates our status in the tribe and ironically advances our reproductive possibilities; warriors and martyrs advance the genes of the tribe, which they share, and you’re promised heaven. But, we counter, where is this *gullibility gene*? What about real compassion and selfless giving? Don’t nearby enemy tribes really share our gene pool? Doesn’t that leave large-scale wars (beyond your gene pool) incomprehensible? Doesn’t that fail to explain actual martyrdom? Which pre-historical religion offered heaven for a warrior’s death?

Couldn’t we add numerous other wonderments to the list? Religions commend leaving the clan and spreading the faith outside of the clan. But this would involve losing a vigorous part of the gene pool for the good of genetic competitors. Many religions commend celibacy, monasticism, and the like, which directly undermine evolution’s interests. Loving your enemy (one of the highest commands in any religion) is evolutionarily absurd. Here’s the big one: every religion I know of, along with the consensus of humanity, asserts that care for the weak, the vulnerable, the needy, and the poor, represents one of the highest virtues. The ideology of the New Atheists can only find this to be an evolutionary nightmare, contrary to our nature and evolutionarily *immoral* to the health of our species. The weak are those whose genes should not survive and for whom care represent the squandering of our resources at the expense of our genes, indeed the future of humanity. My point is simply this: *The New Atheists would have us believe that blind, natural selection in evolution has created a situation where our deepest, most profound, most meaningful intuitions about being human are not only themselves false, they also undermine our true (evolutionary) nature.* And what do they offer as empirically based, scientific evidence for these conjectures? It turns out none.

**Memes, Promissory Evidence, and Overshooting Science**

**Memes**

In *The Selfish Gene* Dawkins develops an evolutionary hypothesis, which he termed *meme*. Just as there are genetic replicators, he claims, there are also cultural replicators that act in the same way, only in terms of ideas. Susan Blackmore, author of *The Meme Machine*, describes them: “Memes are stories, songs, habits, skills, inventions, and ways of doing things that we copy from person to person by imitation. Human nature can be explained by evolutionary theory, but only when we consider memes as well as genes.” A good half of Dennett’s book, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, is predicated not only on Dawkins’s meme theory, but on lengthy, unsubstantiated meme conjectures. In an attempt to explain religious ideas, the meme theory holds that a religious conviction (meme) or set of interrelated convictions (memeplexes) replicate like genes through a culture. Among the memes that religions replicate vigorously include “you will survive your own death;” “heretics, blasphemers and apostates should be killed;” and “faith (belief without evidence) is a virtue. The
more your beliefs defy the evidence the more virtuous you are.”24 I think it is obvious that human ideas are shared and adopted. If that’s the New Atheists’ only point, then who wouldn’t agree? The problem is that they pose this theory as a scientific analogue to genetics and evolution, and in a way to undermine religion. Interestingly, they provide no evidence.

Even sympathetic scholars are starting to question memes. Biological anthropologist Robert Aunger, author of *The Electric Meme*, questions meme theory as a worthy academic inquiry. He shows, for example, that memes have no correlation with brain states, no high-fidelity replication, no independent confirmation of existence, and no way to trace their supposed origins, particularly given that many people with the same ideas had no contact with each other.

**Promissory Evidence**
The New Atheists all drive home that evidence is essential to any credible claim. That’s the damnable point of religious faith, they insist: It’s “belief without evidence.” What we’ve really seen is that evidence for their own claims is rather light to nil. Philosopher of science Karl Popper has called their strategy *promissory evidence*: “I’m going to tell you a story and, while I don’t have any actual evidence, I promise it’s coming sometime in the future. Trust me, the check is in the mail.”25 See how atheist Matthew Alper describes the evolution of religion:

Rather than allowing these fears to overwhelm and destroy us, perhaps nature selected those whose cognitive sensibilities compelled them to process their concept of death in an entirely new fashion. Perhaps after hundreds of generations of natural selection, a group of humans emerged who perceived infinity and eternity as an inextricable part of self-consciousness and self-identity. Perhaps a series of neurological connections emerged in our species that compelled us into perceiving ourselves as ‘spiritual’ beings.”26

What scientific hypothesis has three *perhaps* clauses as its sole explanation? There is no evidence, there is no testability to the hypothesis, and there is no way to verify or disprove the claims. Evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne recognizes the problem with evolutionary psychology: “Evolutionary psychology suffers from the scientific equivalent of megalomania.”27

**Overshooting Science**
While the New Atheists would like to convince us that scientific methodology is the cure-all for whatever ails us intellectually, many scientists recognize their own methodological limitations and the hubris of those suffering from scientism’s myopia. Evolution simply has a very difficult time explaining the process of and the reason for such things as how life came about or, all the more difficult, how and why consciousness came about. Francis Collins, head of the genome project, finds the notion that evolution could be the sole interpreter of our existence utterly
reductive and incredible. And he finds the arguments devised to support it painfully tortured.

How could a self-replicating information-carrying molecule assemble spontaneously from these compounds? DNA, with its phosphate-sugar backbone and intricately arranged organic bases, stacked neatly on top of one another and paired together at each rung of the twisted double helix, seems an utterly improbable molecule to have ‘just happened’—especially since DNA seems to possess no intrinsic means of copying itself?28

How is it that atoms of hydrogen, carbon, and oxygen can produce perceptions? What is the evolutionary advantage to consciousness? What adaptive benefits does it confer? How did unconscious life transform itself into conscious life? Even other atheists see the problem. In “The Fear of Religion” atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel calls it a “reductionist project” that is doomed to fail.29 Noted atheist Stephen Jay Gould characterizes the New Atheists as “Darwinian Fundamentalists.”30 They use Darwin to try to account for anthropology, psychology, sociology, politics, culture, ethics, religion, and, even most improbably, cosmology. Further, they feel free to advance it all with no evidence.

The God Hypothesis
One of the oldest rhetorical strategies in a debate is to make the other side abandon its worldview, concede your worldview, and then argue within it. Consciously or not, the New Atheists have tried to bait theistic philosophers into arguing for God on scientific terms. The God Hypothesis is great example of bait-and-switch. The strategy is to argue the philosophical question about the existence of God as though it were a scientific hypothesis. In science, a hypothesis is either an explanation for something or a conceptual framework that would bring some intelligibility to whatever one is studying. This hypothesis then is tested with replicable observations or experiments. When the New Atheists introduce the God hypothesis, they treat God like they would some thing in the universe, an object, albeit a big supernatural one, that one can experiment on. The New Atheists say that the universe looks just like it would if God did not exist. In God: The Failed Hypothesis, Victor Stenger argues that science has disproven God by showing us that the universe looks the way it does if there were no God.31 “There is no rhyme, reason, or justice out there, but only blind, physical forces, genetic replication, and pitiless indifference.”32

Here is the problem in a nutshell: Science, that discipline meant to study cold, material things, will necessarily be looking at the universe through the lens of its cold, material realities. If God existed, scientific research would still see materiality as materiality working like materiality. That materiality acts like materiality does not prove nor disprove God. It’s the wrong kind of discourse to address this question.

God is not a member of the created world. To try to delegitimize God as if he were an object in the world is an intellectual disaster. Why do they keep doing it?
Scientific Materialism: Consciousness, Free Will, and Morality
Scientific materialism is a philosophical position, an unproven first principle that claims, without evidence, that the only existent reality is physical matter and that knowledge of anything can only be secured through the scientific method. This even includes God, which is a particularly bad, and indeed bizarre, category mistake. An additional problem is the virtually absolute reliance on evolution to explain everything.

The New Atheists want to put the burden of proof on believers regarding how to explain reality as we know it, particularly evil, if there is a good God. I believe this is an authentic challenge theism must address. But atheists have their own story and they are going to have to step up to the plate as well. If theists have to give a decent account of suffering and explain the differences in religions, atheists will have to give a decent account of their first principles. They have to make their version compelling. And one of the most challenging areas for them to defend is how to understand such things as consciousness and free will in a materialistic, deterministic, impersonal world.

The Material Brain and Consciousness
Physicist Carl Sagan believes he describes the cold hard facts about us: brains, he tells us, are computers and computers are kinds of unsophisticated brains. “Machines are just passing over an important threshold: the threshold at which, to some extent at least, they give an unbiased human being the impression of intelligence. Because of a kind of human chauvinism or anthropocentrism, many humans are reluctant to admit this possibility.” Could this be true? Are we merely animated computers? Cognitive scientist and evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker thinks so indeed. He writes, “The computational theory of mind has quietly entrenched itself into neuroscience.” But what about my self? Do I have some kind of presence or being beyond this computer, something I can call my mind that is not simply the impersonal brain computer? No, say these materialists. “Man no longer has need for Spirit,” declares French neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux, “it is enough for him to be Neuronal Man.” Francis Crick writes in his book, The Astonishing Hypothesis, “You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of the vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules…. You’re nothing but a pack of neurons.”

But if I do not have a self or a mind or any real consciousness, how could it be said that I have free will? How could I choose, if everything is being run by program? After all, computers have no free will. It should also not surprise us that in looking for a consciousness, they are looking for a physical thing, and this is our first clue that there may be a problem with such a conclusion.

Enter Daniel Dennett. In Consciousness Explained and Freedom Evolves Dennett tries to negotiate the problems of consciousness and free will in the
context of a materialistic world, one where there is no self. Some philosophers dismiss the idea of a computational, mechanical self. They suggest that if that were really our status, we would be something akin to zombies, i.e., organisms that eat, sleep, assess data, react to their environment, and so on, but have no consciousness. Dennett recognizes the problem and responds with his theory of consciousness. This is how it goes in a laboratory: an experimenter tries over a series of many interviews to get inside the volunteer’s imaginative world. With practice, one can picture the interpretive lenses of the volunteer and see how he produces the self-narratives he does. In making that discovery, one has explained the volunteer’s consciousness and shared that consciousness. So consciousness is the interpretive narrative our chemical brains create as we extrapolate neuro-information. What appears to be some self creating a narrative turns out to be nothing but neural layering. That’s it? Consciousness is reduced to that?

The Material Brain and Freedom

Now we come to the tricky problem of human freedom. Can you be free as a materialist, since materialism demands that one embrace a deterministic world? Bertrand Russell faced it square on: “The first dogma which I came to disbelieve was that of free will. It seemed to me that all notions of matter were determined by the laws of dynamics and could not therefore be influenced by human wills.”

Dennett tries to soften this blow with a version of choosing. The quick, but I think fair, version of Dennett’s freedom is that we are neurologically able (as are all animals) to recognize a relevant concern in our present condition. We also have the intellectual wherewithal to anticipate a future if we act in one way or act in another. Responding in a way that is not inevitable is a kind of expression akin to freedom.

Is Dennett’s position convincing? Dennett realizes it’s not actual freedom, but sort of like it. He describes it like margarine to butter. It’s not really butter, but sort of like it. While Daniel Dennett is taken seriously by some of his academic peers on this very material, he is also highly criticized by many of them. Some have argued that Dennett really simply does not understand determinism. Others show that he has at best argued for a kind of pseudo-freedom. Broadly, philosophers have pointed out that in Dennett’s work we find a great deal of evolutionary science, but not a lot of philosophy, which is a liability for a philosopher writing about philosophy. Even sympathetic interpreters charge that Dennett ignores whole swaths of relevant philosophical discourse as if it didn’t exist or matter. Dennett himself admits in Freedom Evolves that he simply chooses to ignore many relevant philosophical issues. But he frames this as if an achievement:

I have ignored the ideas of more than a few highly regarded philosophers, sidestepping several vigorously debated controversies in my own discipline without so much as a mention…. I have convinced myself—not proved—that my informal tales and observations challenge some of their
enabling assumptions rendering their contests optional, however diverting to those embroiled in them.\textsuperscript{45}

Dennett is not alone in his reductive world, since that is the typical situation among hard-core materialists. As philosopher Timothy O’Conner observes, “Naturalists [materialists] are an educated bunch…but their intellectual diet is narrow.”\textsuperscript{46}

Others have recognized the problem as well. Regarding mind or consciousness, philosopher B. Alan Wallace reminds us that scientists don’t even know what consciousness is or how to measure it.\textsuperscript{47} Physicist Nick Herbert agrees: “Science’s biggest mystery is the nature of consciousness. It is not that we possess bad or imperfect theories of human awareness; we simply have no such theories at all.”\textsuperscript{48} Other experts in the field admit how baffling the situation is.\textsuperscript{49}

Could it be that the scientific trouble with consciousness is that it is essentially not a material thing? As Wallace notes, “Materialist accounts appear fundamentally determined to preserve materialism rather than account for the data…a symptom of the metaphysical miasma induced by overexposure to scientific materialism.”\textsuperscript{50}

New Atheists’ Moral Claims
It should be perfectly obvious to all that someone can be an avowed atheist, indeed even a committed scientific materialist, and be highly moral, generous, virtuous, and so on. Therefore, it is maintained by the New Atheism that being moral has nothing to do with religion per se, and one can derive a very fine moral framework atheistically. In fact, given that religion is such a source of moral harm according to the New Atheists, one is much better off morally by being an atheist. And what is the moral good? Clearly it is happiness, Harris says.\textsuperscript{51} Most recently Harris has published \textit{The Moral Landscape}, a book describing how true morality is scientifically based.\textsuperscript{52}

Some New Atheists point to Immanuel Kant, whose moral principles did not appeal to revelation. The two core Kantian principles that Dawkins highlights are two formations of Kant’s \textit{categorical imperative}. The first is that we are morally compelled to treat oneself and others always and in every circumstance as an end to oneself and never merely as a means to an end. The second is Kant’s imperative to truth telling. Again, one may never, under any circumstances, speak anything but what is identical to the facts of the matter.\textsuperscript{53} The New Atheists tells us these Kantian imperatives are built into us by evolution itself.\textsuperscript{54}

What they miss is that Kant was also convinced morality only made sense in a theistic world. For Kant, these categorical imperatives were required of us exactly because they were written into the fabric of the universe by God.\textsuperscript{55} Kant asks: how is the categorical imperative possible? His answer is twofold. First, it is because we are free. And, since we cannot \textit{prove} that we are free, we can only
know it if we accept three postulates: freedom itself, the immortality of the soul, and the presence of God.\textsuperscript{56}

What New Atheists miss is that the implications of the \textit{selfish gene} is that the universe is supposed to be dog-eat-dog. Didn’t we already hear that Dawkins thinks compassion is a genetic misfiring?\textsuperscript{57} How does one devise a moral vision from this? Other scientific materialists recognize the problem. Philosopher Will Provine writes, “Modern science directly implies that there are no moral or ethical laws, no absolute guiding principles for human society.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{What’s really \textbf{Going On}}
Sam Harris bases his moral theory in terms of happiness. But what grounds one’s understanding of happiness? Donald Trump apparently thinks it has everything to do with accumulating possessions and prestige. Is that happiness? How would you know?

Consider this: The United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins, “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world…” We might ask, why take everyone into account? Why assume that this would be part of the natural order? “Inherent dignity” cannot be an acceptable proposition from a materialist’s point of view. It would be an implicit recognition that it references a creator or transcendent source of goodness, value, and truth. Philosopher Jeremy Waldron observed that contemporary literature is virtually silent about the question of how egalitarianism can be defended philosophically without a transcendent appeal.\textsuperscript{59} The question itself is essentially ignored.

Elizabeth Anscombe, a major figure in 20\textsuperscript{th} century philosophy, noted that as philosophers detached themselves from religious frameworks they gradually detached themselves from the belief in inalienable rights.\textsuperscript{60} They had to.

\textit{Darwinian Fundamentalists Don’t Live their Faith (Thank God!)}
Creating a moral foundation for a Darwinian fundamentalist is a harrowing project, or perhaps just an absurd one. As Dawkins points out that there are no moral foundations in a blind, materialist world. If the universe is purposeless, pitiless, indifferent, and without good and evil, as Darwinian materialists think, then exactly nothing grounds their morality. Many are on record saying this. The reason that the New Atheists can be moral is that they are drawing on a religious patrimony that they don’t recognize, because it is sewn into foundations of Western culture. These include civil rights, human dignity, human equality, a particular disposition toward those most in need. When I see the New Atheists appeal to a sound moral principle, I think to myself: where do they think they get this from? Not from evolution. The New Atheists are using a set of assumptions that are theistically driven, Judeo-Christian originated, and Christian facilitated through the last two thousand years of European history.
Say we were to take them at their word, that there really isn’t any morality in the universe, and that all we have is Darwinism’s sole interest in the preservation and replication of genes, then the following would represent the most appropriate Darwinian life principles:

- You should always and in every way treat others like means to an end and not as ends in themselves.
- Lying is appropriate if it advances your survival or procreative advantage. (Darwinian dogmatists should congratulate fertility doctors Ben Ramaley and Cecil B. Jacobson for impregnating their clients with their own sperm.)
- Any real altruism is wrong. (Mark Buchanan explains in *New Scientist* that the only reason altruistic people have not been wiped out is that Darwinism is not done yet.)
- The exemplar is one who can secure the most progeny for the future.
- It would be appropriate for the human species to marginalize or perhaps even kill every member of the human race with an I.Q. under 100. This would advance our gene pool’s quality better than anything we have ever done as a species. (Consider lions: a new alpha male kills off all its competitor’s cubs and quickly impregnates all the lionesses.)
- It is most appropriate that the stronger (person, race, society) oppress or at least take away the procreative possibilities of the weaker.

It may appear as though I’ve sunk into the rhetorical muck with the New Atheists, but these claims simply follow. Darwinian materialists cannot, by their own resources, advance a moral theory that is grounded on anything beyond the dynamics of Darwinism, which they themselves have reminded us has no purpose except survival and replication.

**A Non-Religious Worldview**

The New Atheists have simply not come to terms with what it would be like to drop that worldview. Do they really want Nietzsche’s *will to power* as the core touchstone? Do they really want to identify and embrace Nietzsche’s abhorrence with compassion for those most in need? Do they really want to deny the intrinsic value of the person and demand that such value is ascribed only insofar as that person has earned it by power?

The New Atheists would have religion simply disappear, after which we should be able to go on enjoying the same lifestyle as before, just now with less religious bother. This is exactly the kind of atheism that nauseated Nietzsche. If you’re going to be an atheist, go all the way, but think about the ramifications to the bitter end. The New Atheists think that we can just drop God like Santa Claus without having to witness the complete collapse of Western culture, including our sense of what is rational and moral.

1 Harris, The End of Faith, 173.

2 Hitchens, God is not Great, 13.


5 Hitchens, God is not Great, 13.

6 Harris, The End of Faith, 160.

7 Dennett, Breaking the Spell, 280.

8 Hitchens, God is not Great, 5.

9 Harris, Letter to a Christian Nation, 25.


12 Dawkins, The God Delusion, 288-293

13 Hitchens, God is not Great, 232, and approvingly quoted at length in Dawkins, The God Delusion, 342.

14 Hitchens, God is not Great, 200.

15 Hitchens, God is not Great, 283.

16 Harris, The End of Faith, 161-4.

17 Hitchens, God is not Great, 56.

18 Harris, The End of Faith, 58, 73, 85; Dawkins, The God Delusion, 232, and Hitchens, God is not Great, 71 and 150.

19 Baggini, Atheism, 25-29.


27 Francis Collins, The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief in God (New York: Free Press, 2006), 90. Collins goes on to describe the hypotheses that RNA might be the master replicator, and how these experiments have themselves failed.


32 “The presence or absence of a creative super-intelligence is unequivocally a scientific question…. The methods we should use to settle the matter….would be purely and entirely scientific methods.” Dawkins, The God Delusion, 82-3.


35 Steve Pinker, How the Mind Works, 83.
39 While I will be citing Dennett directly, I am also well indebted to John Symons, whose sympathetic interpretation to Dennett’s work has guided me. See John Symons, *On Dennett* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002).
42 Peter Van Inwagen’s *consequent argument* against determinism is considered daunting by most. Part of that argument is simply that if determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past, which I could not affect. If I am not capable of affecting these conditions then the consequences of those things (including my present acts) are not up to me. This is just a part of the argument. Dennett tries to take on Van Inwagen in his article “Who’s Afraid of Determinism?: Rethinking Causes and Possibilities.” See *Oxford Handbook on Free will*, R. Kane, ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 257-77. But it has been pointed out that he completely misreads (and then demolishes only the straw man) Inwagen’s argument. See John Martin Fischer, “Dennett on the Basic Argument,” in *Metaphysiology* Vol. 36, no. 4 (July 2005): 427-435.
46 O’Conner, “Pastoral Counsel for the Anxious Naturalist,” 438.
49 See, for example, Steven Weinberg’s *Dreams of a Final Theory: The Scientist’s Search for the Ultimate Laws of Nature* and Steven Palmer’s *Vision Science: Photons to Phenomenology*.
50 Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity*, 81.
51 Harris, *The End of Faith*, 191.
See Haught, “Amateur Atheists.”