Is Religion Dangerous or Just Plain Stupid?
On Atheism Dressed-up as Science

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The “New Atheism”

- “Nones” [no religion] and Scientism
- Minority yet powerful voice
- Some common perspectives, while all being different.
Common Themes

- Dangerous!
- Irrational and Unscientific!
- The sciences are atheistic.
- Atheism makes for happiness.
- No Religion? Thank God! ("The Virus of Faith")
I think that religion is the most dangerous and divisive ideology that we have ever produced.

It is also the only ideology that is systematically protected from criticism, both from within and without.

Sam Harris
Types of Christian Responses

- Ignore it and hope they go away!
- Re-trench in old positions
- Go on the attack!
- The Dangers of Fideism
Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon

- Daniel Dennett
- Treat religion scientifically, biologically
- Toleration not always right
- Be critical of faiths openly & on moral grounds
Some Responses to Dennett

- Ignores 100 years of social-scientific work on religion! Unscientific!
- \( \text{religion} = \text{supernatural agent(s)} \)
- Faith = scientific truth OR irrational
He is right about many things....

- Religion is natural = normal, typical.
- We should study scientifically in the social sciences. Biology is very speculative.
- It has important social functions
- We SHOULD be critical of religious beliefs on rational, moral grounds.
The God Delusion: Richard Dawkins

- Outright attack on all religions as dangerous & irrational
- Faith is belief without evidence
- Faith = “virus”
- Critical of the Bible
Responses to Dawkins

- religion = monotheism?
- Faith = science or irrational again.
- His review of arguments for God: dated, too simplistic
- Example: is God complex because God is omniscient?
- Bible, prooftexting & literalisitc
The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason

- Sam Harris
- Pits faith against reason
- Sees religion as always harmful
- Even treats communism as a “state religion.”
Response to Harris

- Faith seeks understanding & reason
- Religion is open to rational criticism – that’s what theology’s all about!
- Religious people founded universities, hospitals, peace movements.
- No theism, no modern science!
More on Harris

- Like the others, one-sided and confused attack on religion
- Ignores the full reality of the evils of science, and of atheistic governments & movements. Tries to explain them away as “religion”!
What They Get Right

- The Christian religion has been a cause of much evil and suffering.
- Faithful believers have been too anti-intellectual, too American-populist.
Learning from Scientism

- Sciences really are important.
- Our mission to a scientific & technological age
- Define carefully what we mean by “faith” – radical trust in God.
- But what about evidence and reason?
Our Response

- Engage their Views Openly
- Love first, then discussion. Love seeking conversation?
- Relationships really matter!
- So do arguments & reasons!
Faith & Reason to Read the Bible

- Accept biblical criticism ("scientific")
- Preach & teach the centrality of Jesus
- Avoid literalism: many types of truth!
- Avoid atomism: only the whole Bible is authoritative: many "texts of terror" in it.
New Arguments for God

- Robert Spitzer
- Richard Swinburne
Mutuality: Neuroscience & the Soul

- Mutuality of Science & Theology
- Emergent Soul