

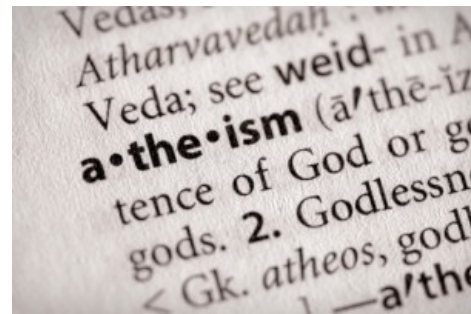
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The New Atheism and the Dogma of Darwinism

We can draw a straight line from the emergence of evolutionary theory to the resurgence of atheism in our times. Never underestimate the power of a bad idea.

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The New Atheism is now an established feature of the intellectual landscape of our age. Thinkers such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris are among the figures who most regularly appear on the front tables of America's bookstores and the front pages of our newspapers. And, along with their vigorous defense of atheism, we most often find an equally vigorous defense of evolutionary theory. This is no accident.



Atheism has appeared in some form in Western cultures since the midpoint of the last millennium. The word "atheist" did not even exist within the English language until the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The earliest atheists were most often philosophical and theological skeptics who denied the existence of any personal God. Nevertheless, the God they almost always rejected is the God of the Bible – in other words, a specific rejection of Christianity.

The early atheists were usually notorious, as were well-known heretics. Their denials of God and the Christian faith were well-documented and understood. But the early atheists had a huge problem -- how could they explain the existence of the Cosmos? Without a clear answer to that question, their arguments for atheism failed to gain much traction.

As even the ancient Greeks understood, one of the most fundamental philosophical questions is this: *Why is there something, rather than nothing?* Every worldview is accountable to that question. In other words, every philosophy of life must offer some account of how we and the world around us came to be. The creation myths of ancient cultures and the philosophical speculations of the Greeks serve as evidence of the hunger in the human intellect that takes form as what we now call the question of origins.

For some time, atheists were hard-pressed to offer any coherent answer to that question. Once they ruled God out of the picture, they had virtually no account of creation to offer.

Of course, all that changed with Charles Darwin.

Darwin's theory of natural selection and the larger dogma of evolution emerged in the nineteenth century as the first coherent alternative to the Bible's doctrine of Creation. This revolution in human thinking is well-summarized by Richard Dawkins, who conceded that an atheist prior to Darwin would have to offer an explanation of the Cosmos and the existence of life that would look something like this: "I have no explanation for complex biological design. All I know is that God isn't a good explanation, so we must wait and hope that somebody comes up with a better one."

Dawkins, who is perhaps the world's best-known evolutionary scientist, argues that the explanation offered by a frustrated atheist before Darwin "would have left one feeling pretty unsatisfied."

But then came Darwin. In a single sentence, Dawkins gets to the heart of the matter: "Darwin made it possible to be

an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”

His point is clear and compelling. Prior to the development of the theory of evolution, there was no way for an atheist to settle on any clear argument for why the cosmos exists or why life forms appeared. Darwin changed all that. The development of Darwinian evolution offered atheism an invaluable intellectual tool – an account of beginnings.

The New Atheists have emerged as potent public voices. They write best-selling books, appear on major college and university campuses, and extend their voices through institutional and cultural influence. The movement is new in the sense that it differs from the older atheism in several respects, and one of these is the use of science in general, and evolutionary theory in particular, as intellectual leverage against belief in God.

Dawkins, for example, not only believes that Darwinism made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist, but he also argues that religious belief is actually dangerous and devoid of credibility. So, he argues not only that Darwinism made it possible for an atheist to be intellectually fulfilled, he also argues that the theory of evolution undermines belief in God.

In other words, Dawkins asserts that Darwinism makes it impossible to be an intellectually fulfilled Christian.

Daniel Dennett, another of the “Four Horsemen” of the New Atheism, has argued that Darwin’s theory of evolution is a “universal acid” that will burn away all claims of the existence of God. His confidence in Darwinism is total. He looks back longingly at his own childhood belief in a divinely-created world and argues that, eventually, his experience of moving from belief in creation to confidence in evolution will be shared by a humanity that grows into intellectual adulthood.

Dennett is honest enough to recognize that if evolutionary theory is true, it must eventually offer an account of *everything* related to the question of life. Thus, evolution will have to explain every aspect of life, from how a species appeared to why a mother loves her child. Interestingly, he offers an argument for why humans have believed in the existence of God.

As we might expect, the theory of evolution is used to explain that there must have been a time when belief in God was necessary in order for humans to have adequate confidence to reproduce. Clearly, Dennett believes that we should now have adequate confidence to reproduce without belief in God.

Sam Harris, also a scientist by training, is another ardent defender of evolutionary theory. Pushing the argument even further than Dawkins and Dennett, Harris has argued that belief in God is such a danger to human civilization that religious liberty should be denied in order that science might reign supreme as the intellectual foundation of human society.

The last of the “Four Horsemen,” author Christopher Hitchens uses his considerable wit to ridicule belief in God, which he, like Dawkins and Harris, considers downright dangerous to humanity. Though Hitchens is not a scientist, his atheism leaves no room for any theory other than evolution.

The Dogma of Darwinism is among the first principles of the worldview offered by the New Atheists. Darwin replaces the Bible as the great explainer of the existence of life in all of its forms. The New Atheists are not merely dependent upon science for their worldview; their worldview amounts to *scientism* – the belief that modern naturalistic science is the great unifying answer to the most basic questions of human life.

As Richard Dawkins has recently argued, they believe that disbelief in evolution should be considered as intellectually disrespectful and reprehensible as denial of the Holocaust. Thus, their strategy is to use the theory of evolution as a central weapon in today’s context of intellectual combat.

The New Atheists would have no coherent worldview without the Dogma of Darwinism. With it, they intend to malign belief in God and to marginalize Christians and Christian arguments. Thus, we can draw a straight line from the emergence of evolutionary theory to the resurgence of atheism in our times. Never underestimate the power of a bad idea.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

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