

## **Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-2: The New Atheists' Redefinition of "Atheism."**

In this DDR, I would like to note the philosophical naiveté of the New Atheists and how they have actually changed the meaning of "atheism." The New Atheists I have in mind are the self-styled Four Horsemen, namely Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett.

Unlike the previous generations of atheists who were philosophically mature, the New Atheists consistently show a manifest ignorance and breathtaking shallowness of philosophical analysis. As Edward Feser so aptly puts it:

They [Harris, Dennett, Dawkins, Hitchens] do not evince the slightest awareness of the historical centrality of ideas deriving from classical philosophy—the tradition of thought deriving from Plato and Aristotle and whose greatest representatives within Christianity are Augustine and Thomas Aquinas—to the content and self-understanding of the mainstream Western religious tradition. This is perhaps not surprising in the case of either Dawkins—a writer of pop science books who evidently wouldn't know metaphysics from Metamucil—or *Vanity Fair* boy Hitchens, who probably thinks that metaphysics is the sort of thing people like Shirley MacLaine start babbling about when they've lost their box office cachet. But such ignorance is simply disgraceful in the case of Dennett and Harris, who are trained philosophers. One would never guess from reading any of the "New Atheists" (not to mention the words of countless other secularist intellectuals) that the vast majority of the greatest philosophers and scientists in the history of Western civilization—not only the thinkers just mentioned but also many modern thinkers outside the classical tradition, including Descartes, Leibniz, Berkeley, Boyle, Newton, and on and on—have firmly believed in the existence of God, and on the basis of entirely rational arguments. And, needless to say, they offer their readers no account of the grave philosophical challenges to which the naturalism they are committed to . . . (*The Last Superstition*, 4).

Of course, if Christians in particular and society in general do not understand metaphysics, they will not be able to see the bankruptcy of the arguments from the New Atheists or appreciate such things as the reality and dynamics of the nature of things as per form and matter. This is most unfortunate as it tends to limit the believer's appreciation of the wonders of nature as the handiwork of God. But more on this later.

What I would like to bring to the reader's attention at this point is how many modern atheists have *illicitly* changed the very definition of atheism—a change which would have

merited red marks from an elementary English teacher. For thousands of years, atheists have described themselves as those who maintain a *positive* belief that there is no God, i.e. I BELIEVE THERE IS NO GOD (a-theism = not God). Now, they are simply saying that they do not believe in God. Note the change in the negation. The negation went from “I believe/affirm not God” to “I do not believe in God.” Technically, this is not even an existence claim; rather, it is belief claim. Rather than denying the existence claim that God exists, they are trying to get away with saying that atheism is just refraining from affirming the existence of God. The negation (“a”) is placed before believing instead of God. This is different than denying the existence of God. According to these atheists, an atheist is just one who lacks believing in God rather than believing that there is no God. Again, note the switch of the negation. Instead of it denying the existence of God, it is denying belief in the existence of God. This switch has major implications. If atheism is simply lack of believing in God then babies, puppy dogs, and rocks are atheists. Again, by putting the negative before belief instead of before God, they are not even say anything about the actual existence of God; rather, only about someone’s belief. How is that evidence? Again, there is vast difference between affirming there is NO God and I do NOT believe in God. Atheism has never been defined as simply lack of belief in God and is not so defined in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Lack of belief is more characteristic of agnosticism. It is not hard to see why they are changing the definition of atheism: it tends to make the default position atheism and provides an advantage in debates. At least the older atheists had enough philosophical guts to say straight-out that there is no God and then proceed to provide arguments against the existence of God. The New Atheists do not even understand the debate, and you can be sure that they are betting on the philosophical ignorance of the populace to advance their irrational and immoral worldviews. As far as Christians, all they have to do to muster up more courage to further dupe them is spend Sunday morning channel-surfing televangelists or visit a church that is soaked in a pop psychology that is sprinkled with a few verses tethered to God-loves-me-and-wants-me-to-have-more-stuff sermons. God help us and our children!

Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Existing in, with, by, and for Esse

*Pastor Don*