
I read Sam Harris's The End of Faith in 2005 and agreed with much of his polemic against religion while being far less sanguine than he about change being possible. This book had an obvious genesis in the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but when the other books appeared their motivation could not clearly be traced to those events. The books of Dennett, Hitchens, and Dawkins all make brief reference to 9/11, but all involved earlier research and in some cases parts or related works had been published that predated the events of 9/11. Hitchens insists in the acknowledgments in his book that he has been writing it all his life. There was more in the air than the dust of the World Trade Center that led to these books at this time. I decided to read them to determine what they have in common and what the unique approach of each was, as well as to explore the question: why these books and why now? The answer to the last question turned out to be a startling combination of forces beginning with the attack on the homeland but also including widespread attacks on public education and attempts to usurp political power by the forces of anti-reason.

Of course there have been books attacking organized religion and religious belief before. As several of these authors point out, the psalmist's "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" should make it clear that there have always been unbelievers. But many organized religions do a good job of systematically suppressing their dissidents, and links between religion and governments made dissent very difficult—and in many cases dangerous—over many centuries, so that assaults on religion did not get much traction until the Enlightenment. One of the first books to openly critique organized religion was Thomas Paine's 1794 The Age of Reason, a defense of deism and "natural" religion. Voltaire fired a number of satiric salvos at the proponents of various religious theories. The 19th century's most profound attack on biblical inerrancy and its chronology, as well as on the argument from design, came in Darwin's The Origin of Species in 1859, though Darwin initially did not see these consequences, and he argued in his conclusion that there was no reason to see his work as inimical to religion. All of the New Atheist authors have much to say about Darwin.

Bertrand Russell's 1927 "Why I Am Not a Christian" systematically...
The term “New Atheism” didn’t really catch on until about 2006 when Richard Dawkins published The God Delusion; Early Internet Argument Culture was just a prelude to the main event. Post-2006 atheists were brasher and more political. They were less interested in arguing with religious people about the minutiae of carbon-dating; they were more interested in posting about how stupid carbon-dating denials were, on their own social media feeds, read entirely by other atheists. I think of this as the second part of the mystery around New Atheism’s decline: why did a successful social movement so quietly and complacently agree to turn into a totally different social movement? III. My solution to both these questions is: New Atheism was a failed hamartiology. New Atheism is a contemporary intellectual movement uniting outspoken atheists. The New Atheists' philosophies and arguments are generally consistent with those of their predecessors; what’s “New” is a difference in style and profitability. Most of the prominent New Atheists have had at least one book become a bestseller, which was almost unheard of for atheistic literature in the past. New Atheists consider belief in God erroneous as well as detrimental to society, and espouse their views frequently. 

Author Steve Ebling admits to being an Atheist, wh Warning: If you are one who takes the Bible as being absolute Gospel (pardon the pun), this book will most likely offend you. However, if you are willing to embrace the various quirks and foibles of the Book of Genesis--and you're not afraid of a little satire and profanity--you'll probably laugh.