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The Rise of New Atheism and Its Relationship to Islam

Dr. Jamaal Zarabozo

is a prolific writer, researcher and speaker, who has lectured around the world on many traditional and contemporary issues and gained distinction in the field of dawah. Widely respected in Islamic scholarly circles, he has authored numerous books including a multi-volume explanation of the 40 Hadith of Imam Nawawi and "How to Approach and Understand the Quran." Dr. Jamaal has also translated, edited and compiled many other books of Islamic knowledge. His diverse works appeal to the serious student of knowledge as well as Muslims seeking a better understanding of their deen.

"الأراء في هذا البحث تعبر عن رأي الباحث وليس بالضرورة عن رأي أمجا"
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Grantor of Mercy

Introduction

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated,

مَا مِنْ مَوْلُودٍ إِلَّا يُولَدُ عَلَى الفِطْرَةِ فَأَبَوَاهُ يُهَوِّدَانِهِ وَيُنَصِّرَانِهِ كَمَا تُنْتِجُونَ البَهِيمَةَ هَلْ تَجِدُونَ فِيهَا مِنْ جَدْعَاءَ حَتَّى تَكُونُوا أَنْتُمْ تَجْدَعُونَهَا

"No child is born but on the natural inclination [of true faith]. However, its parents turn it into a Jew or a Christian. It is as you help the animals give birth. Do you find among their offspring a mutilated one (from your branding) before you brand them yourself?" (Recorded by al-Bukhari.) In this hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) highlighted both the "naturalness" of *tauheed* ("monotheism") as well as the possibility and explanation of different deviations, involving different levels of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah). Given the obvious presence of the *mushrikeen* (polytheists) in the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the examples that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave cannot be considered exhaustive. Hence, atheism logically could also be one of those faiths that humans may end up adopting.

The hadith highlights the important influence of environment on an individual. In today's world, the dominant paradigm concerning both knowledge and law is a secular, areligious paradigm. Many of the postulates of this paradigm actually challenge long-held religious beliefs. If reasonable responses cannot be found to those challenges, doubts are bound to occur. On top of that, when one's faith becomes less and less relevant to one's daily living, faith crises can result. This happens when one is forced to make more and more compromises in one's practice, accepting forbidden acts as simply being unavoidable or simply as the manner in which things are done today. Perhaps the icing on the cake is when the religious leaders themselves teach that what is in the religious texts are not to be taken at face value and that the community must continually seek new ways to understand those texts, as their meanings are no longer considered valid or meaningful.

In the midst of the above realities there appeared a group of atheists who targeted Islam in particular. This group, known as the "new atheists," gained some fame and popularity, exposing them to countless Muslim youth and Muslims as a whole. All the worldly factors were in place to allow this group to make some headway and, at the very least, cause Muslims and others to doubt their faith, if not completely abandon it.

Under such pressures and challenges, some individuals may resort to cognitive dissonance wherein they may try to ignore information that challenges their faith. Cognitive dissonance

responses can probably be successful only for so long. At some point in time, there may be a true breakdown. It is definitely the obligation of Muslim scholars and institutions to respond to the challenges the real world presents. They must focus on the ideas and practices that are truly influencing and effecting the faith health of Muslims throughout the world.

This paper seeks to explore this one particular phenomenon of new atheism that has come on like a storm and has, unfortunately, influenced a number of Muslims.

1. Atheism

Baggini, himself an atheist, states about atheism, "Atheism is in fact extremely simple to define: it is the belief that there is no God or gods."[1] He then emphasizes that this belief does not imply that there is no such thing as morality, human goodness, or meaning to life, as some people think concerning atheists. There is simply put a way of discussing all of those things without reference to a god.[2] He goes on to say that atheism is also clearly different from agnosticism. Agnostics claim that one cannot say whether or not there is such a thing is "god," and reserve judgment on the question.[3] The atheists clearly say that there is no god.

The "a" in front of the word denotes the negation or absence of something, in this case "theism." Hence, Le Poidevin adds a little to the discussion when he states, "An *atheist* is one who denies the existence of a personal, transcendent creator of the universe, rather than one who simply lives life without reference to such a being. A *theist* is one who asserts the existence of such a creator. Any discussion of atheism, then, is necessarily a discussion of theism."[4]

In other words, proclaiming one's atheism is stating one's position toward God. It seems that some atheists do not like being identified with a term that juxtaposes them with the concept that they do not believe in. Hence, famed atheists Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris object to the term atheist. Dawkins, for example, said he should not be called, for example, an "aunicornist" because he does not believe in unicorns[5] and Harris argued that one does not call people who do not believe in astrology "non-astrologers."[6] Their argument, though, does not make much sense. If the essence of their proclamations and beliefs were regarding unicorns or astrology, they perhaps would be called by those terms. However, the gist of their rhetoric is the denial of God, a central being for many among humankind; hence, atheism, or the stronger term that some of them prefer "anti-theists," is an appropriate term to use for them.

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1 Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 3.

2 Ibid., p. 3.

3 Ibid., p. 4.

4 Robin Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (London, England: Routledge, 2004), p. xvii.

5 *"Rise of the New Atheists," The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEClFXjx_fQ . Last accessed November 20, 2019. That article is a review of Whitmarsh's book.

6 Sam Harris, https://samharris.org/the-problem-with-atheism/ . Last accessed November 20, 2019.

1.1 The History of Atheism

To this author's knowledge, neither the Quran nor the Sunnah give any hint as to the first atheist. From an Islamic perspective, as noted above, atheism definitely goes against the innate nature with which humans are created. However, the same can be said for polytheism or *shirk*. Even though, it can be proven that humans fell into the egregious error of *shirk* early in their history. Hence, one should not be surprised if atheism also has a long history. From a Quranic perspective, though, there is no hint of atheism being adopted by any community on a widespread scale. The Quran speaks about many previous communities but their common error was that of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah) and not of denying Allah's existence.

Some believe that atheism is "a modern invention from the western Enlightenment."[7] That view is challenged by Tim Whitmarsh in *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World.*[8] However, that author seems to be a strong supporter of the new atheist movement and certainly has some biases. One of his stated goals, as he told *The Guardian,* was to counter the idea that belief in God is somehow hardwired into humans' minds.[9] At least one reviewer, the Greek historian Jan Bremmer, has demonstrated that Whitmarsh's stance may have blurred his research. For example, Whitmarsh makes the claim that atheism is as old as monotheism but he fails to prove that.[10] (From an Islamic perspective, that claim is definitely untrue.) One example that Whitmarsh discusses in detail is the famous case of Diagoras of Melos, a fifth century BCE poet. However, Winiarcyzk has cast a great deal of doubt as to whether he was truly an atheist. Furthermore, Winiarcyzk states, "In my opinion, atheism perceived as 'the negation of the existence of any kind of deity or supernatural forces' did not emerge in Greece until around the year 400 BC."[11] That would still date atheism back quite some time. However, that type of "atheism" may simply mean a rejection of the Greek conception of god, gods and mythology and not necessarily the rejection of a God as understood, for example, by Muslims.

Perhaps more important than the origins of atheism is the realization that there were many bouts of history when atheism became very popular and influential in certain regions—much like

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7 The reference to this belief was made by Alison Flood, "Atheism has ancient roots and is not 'modern invention', claims new text," *The Guardian,* https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/feb/17/atheism-has-ancient-roots-claims-new-study . Last accessed November 20, 2019. Hyman has a unique understanding as atheism and, as such, sees it as a product of modernity. He also argues, then, that as modernity fades away, so will atheism. See Gavin Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism* (London, England: I.B. Tauris, 2010), *passim*.

8 Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015).

9 Flood, op cit.

10 Jan N. Bremmer, "*Book Review," Classical Philology* (Vol. 113, Issue 3, 2018), p. 374.

11 See Marek Winiarczyk, *Diagoras Of Melos: A Contribution to The History of Ancient Atheism* (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2016), p. 130.

fads. For example, there is no question that atheism had an impact on the French revolution, even though it was eventually soundly "defeated."[12] In Boston, from 1825-1850, there was a robust atheist movement that openly challenged Christian dominance at the time (causing Rogers to considerate it similar to the contemporary New Atheism movement[13]). In addition, there was an attempt at a forced atheism under the Soviet regime, which, judging by more recent years and its revival of religion, was probably not very effective.

1.2 Atheism Within Muslim Communities

Tracing the history of atheism within the Muslim milieu is difficult, given that atheism is simply one possible manifestation of *kufr* (disbelief). Atheism is often translated into Arabic is *ilhaad*, but even that word is more general than atheism itself, as it implies deviation from the straight path. *Zindeeq* is another word that could be inclusive of atheism but is also not restricted to atheism, as a Christian or Jew parading as a Muslim in order to damage Islam could be called a *zindeeq*. According to Abdullah, the word *zindeeq* did not come into vogue until after the Umayyad times. It was in the Abbasid era that, as al-Tabari noted, foreign, deviant views were floated in the Muslim world.[14] One of the earliest known works refuting those who doubted the existence of the creator used a form of both words, *ilhaad* and *zindeeq*, in its title. This was the work *al-Daleel al-Kabeer fi al-Radd ala al-Zinaadaqah wa al-Mulhideen* by al-Qaasim ibn Ibraaheem al-Rasi (d. 246).[15] However, it should be noted that al-Rasi actually never names any specific atheists in his work.[16]

However, specifically speaking, *dahri* may be the closest translation for the term atheism in Arabic. Allah says,

وَقَالُواْ مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا ٱلدُّنۡيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحۡيَا وَمَا يُهۡلِكُنَآ إِلَّا ٱلدَّهۡرُۚ وَمَا لَهُم بِذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ عِلۡمٍۖ إِنۡ هُمۡ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ

12 For an interesting discussion of the appearance, influence and response to atheism during and after the French Revolution, see Shane H. Hockin, "Les Hommes sans Dieu: Atheism, Religion, and Politics during the French Revolution," (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 2014), *passim.*

13 James Rogers, "Preaching Unbelief: Freethought in Boston, 1825-1850," (Master's Thesis, University of New Hampshire, 2013), p. 66.

14 Imam Hanafi Abdullah, introduction to al-Qaasim ibn Ibraaheem al-Rasi, *al-Daleel al-Kabeer fi al-Radd ala al-Zinaadaqah wa al-Mulhideen* (Cairo, Egypt: Daar al-Afaaq al-Arabiyyah, 2000), p. 6.

15 al-Qaasim ibn Ibraaheem al-Rasi, *al-Daleel al-Kabeer fi al-Radd ala al-Zinaadaqah wa al-Mulhideen* (Cairo, Egypt: Daar al-Afaaq al-Arabiyyah, 2000).

16 Stroumsa writes, "And yet we can search these texts in vain for a specific contemporaneous individual accused of denying the existence of God … The atheists themselves always remain faceless and nameless. When a name does appear, it is always that of a person accused of some specific heretical doctrine which, the theologians say, is *as bad* as atheism or *may lead* to atheism – never of somebody the core of whose heresy is actually identified as atheism… Whenever atheistic opinions are discussed in dialogues, they are always expressed by the proponents of orthodox beliefs, who attribute them to their (heretical) interlocutors, while the latter hasten to deny the accusation." Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rawandi, Abu Bakr al-Razi and their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 1999), p. 123.

> And they say, "There is not but our worldly life; we die and live, and nothing destroys us except time (*al-dahr*)." And they have of that no knowledge; they are only assuming [Al-Jaathiya 24].

According to Loi,

From the ninth century CE, the dahrīyūn started [to] organise around an organic group of empiricists and physicists who excluded revelation from knowledge and who instead emphasised the use of the senses and reasoning. The dahrīyūn believed that the world was the product of eternal elements (four qualities, ṭabā'i', to which sometimes were associated spirit, rūḥ). These elements were eternal – the action of a creator was excluded, or partially recognized in the idea that He had to combine these elements with matter. The dahrīyūn thus excluded the existence of God, prophets and the afterlife. Similarly, al-Rāzī[17] believed in the existence of five eternal principles, although in his opinion, the inclusion of God among these was sufficient evidence to exclude him from the materialists. However, in spite of his attempt to reject this accusation, an analysis of the creation myth he formulated demonstrates the insignificance of the role he gave to God, and this justifies his inclusion among the atheists.[18]

However, earlier, she also stated about Ibn al-Rāwandī, al-Rāzī and al-Ma'arrī, who are the focus of her research,

In order to identify whether atheism is present in medieval Islam, this study focuses on the thought of Ibn al-Rāwandī, al-Rāzī and al-Ma'arrī, three major representatives of the Muslim medieval intellectual milieu. *They never rejected God explicitly*, but they clearly doubted the possibility that Allāh existed, attributing traditional monotheistic views about Him to an invention of the prophets. What is more, their atheism appears evident in the view they had of the world. They believed in an essentially secular world, where the individual should seek a personal and collective realisation; human existence is not finalised to the realisation of divine plans, rather to the individual contribution to the creation of a better existence in the present moment; reason and critical thinking should never be subordinated to religious considerations; and, finally, morality is independent from religious considerations… The research shows that during the period of the formation of the Islamic dogma, views that excluded God from the ways human existence was regulated were well known and debated among Muslim thinkers, anticipating of many centuries the European Enlightenment.[19]

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17 This is the famed physician Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi (250-c. 310).

18 Elisabetta Loi, "Atheism in Medieval Islam: The cases of Ibn al-Rāwandī, al-Rāzī and al-Ma'arrī," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 2015), p. 19.

19 Loi, p. 3. Emphasis added.

Even concerning the three individuals, it seems that they were more secularists and possibly deists than outright atheists. Hence, Stroumsa, who studied ibn Rawandi and Abu Bakr al-Razi, entitled her book, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam* and not "atheists of medieval Islam."

Regardless of the history of atheism within Muslim lands, contemporary society as a whole has seen an uptick in the numbers of people who are openly willing to be recognized as atheist. Of course, it is difficult to know if there is an actual increase in atheism or simply an increase in the number of people who are willing to identify themselves as atheists. There definitely could still be a lot of "closet atheists." According to Resnick, atheists make up about 10% of the American population and this number has been increasing over the decades.[20] At the same time, Pew noted that 8% of those who called themselves atheists "believe in God or a universal spirit."[21]

The news is probably more startling concerning the Arab and Muslim world. Writing in 2015, Benchemsi noted

When I recently searched Facebook in both Arabic and English, combining the word "atheist" with names of different Arab countries, I turned up over 250 pages or groups, with memberships ranging from a few individuals to more than 11,000.[22] And these numbers only pertain to Arab atheists (or Arabs concerned with the topic of atheism) who are committed enough to leave a trace online. "My guess is, every Egyptian family contains an atheist, or at least someone with critical ideas about Islam," an atheist compatriot, Momen, told Egyptian historian Hamed Abdel-Samad recently. "They're just too scared to say anything to anyone."[23]

Benchemsi also noted that a 2012 poll found that 5% of Saudis self-identity as "convinced atheists."[24]

Additionally, The Pew Research Center found that 23% of Americans who were raised Muslim no longer identify with Islam. Among this group, when asked why they no longer identify as Muslim, 8% of them stated that they do not believe in God.[25] This means that approximately 2 (actually

20 See Brian Resnick, "How many American Atheists are there Really?" https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/4/13/15258496/american-atheists-how-many.

21 Pew Research Center, "10 facts about atheists," https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/10-facts-about-atheists/

22 Perhaps everyone has learned from the 2016 Presidential Elections in the United States that many of those sites could be phony, with some ulterior purpose.

23 Ahmed Benchemsi, "Invisible Atheists: The spread of disbelief in the Arab world," https://newrepublic.com/article/121559/rise-arab-atheists

24 Ibid.

25 Besheer Mohamed and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac, "The Share of Americans who Leave Islam is Offset by those who Become Muslim," https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/26/the-share-of-americans-who-leave-islam-is-offset-by-those-who-become-muslim/

1.84) out of every 100 individuals of the "American Muslim community" who were brought up as Muslim later end up atheist.

1.3 The Driving Forces behind the Growth in Atheism

As is known, true guidance placed in the heart of an individual can only come from Allah. Even the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself was told by Allah,

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُهْتَدِينَ

«Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided» [Al-Qasas: 56]

Given that Quranic reality, however, sometimes a "worldly cause" can also be highlighted. In contemporary times, for example, one can imagine a number of reasons why people are turning away from organized religion and faith. Ayaan Hirsi Ali attributed her atheism to the savagery of 9-11 and the number of innocent civilians killed in the name of God.[26] ISIS stepped up the violence and probably led many to question their faith as a result. Benchemis also mentions that the events and afterward of the Arab Spring turned people away from religiosity.[27] Others have complained about being wronged (experiencing *dhulm*) as a result of Islam's teachings.[28]

Whitaker, who wrote *Arabs without God*, found many having unanswered questions about their faith that eventually led Muslims to abandon Islam. He noted,

Last year, researching my book *Arabs Without God*,[29] I tried to find out why some Arabs turn to atheism. No one I spoke to mentioned terrorism as a major factor. Those who abandoned Islam did so because they rejected basic tenets of the faith, mainly as taught to them in schools and by government-approved clerics. In interviews, they mostly described a gradual progression away from

26 It is illogical but not uncommon to hear of people leaving religion or belief in God as a result of the amount of innocent civilian deaths caused on 9-11 and other terrorist attacks done in the name of religion. Presumably they ask themselves, "How can they follow a faith or believe in a God that sanctions such killings?" The first question should be, "Does Islam sanction such killings?" Furthermore, though, the reality is that those numbers killed on 9-11 and other attacks pale in comparison to the numbers who die in the name of human rights and democracy. It has been reported, for example, that the number of innocent children who died as a result of the sanctions placed on the Iraqi regime were close to half a million not to mention those killed in Nagasaki and Hiroshima (not sights of military interest) in order to protect the "fee world." Yet this author has never heard of or seen websites dedicated to those who leave the human rights, freedom, or democracy ideology due to the number of innocent civilian deaths it has directly contributed to. By definition, human rights tell individuals that they have a right to explicit rights, which would imply an individual's right to fight for that right and be defended if not receiving that right. In modern times, just from the examples just given, there is no question that the fight on behalf of the ideologies of democracy and human rights has led to more innocent civilian deaths than any other ideology or religion.

27 Benchemesi, op cit.

28 Ibid.

29 This work has been translated into Arabic, *Arab bilaa Rabb: al-Ilhaad wa Hurriyah al-Mutaqad fi al-Sharq al-Ausat*, and is available at https://al-bab.com/sites/default/files/awg.pdf. It has even been translated into Italian: *Arabi senza Dio: Ateismo e libertà di culto in Medio Oriente.*

religion, sometimes spread over years; there was no sudden "road to Damascus" moment of conversion to atheism. Typically, it began with a niggling question about some aspect of religious teaching that struck them as illogical, and often they had hoped to resolve these discrepancies to have a better understanding of their faith.[30]

He cites anecdotal evidence of Muslims asking questions like, "Why are non-Muslims, even when they are so nice, punished in Hell?" and similar other questions that imply injustice on Allah's part.

A cursory survey of the literature and websites concerning ex-Muslims demonstrates that in many cases there are clear "causes" that individuals highlight as being the reasons for why they left Islam. The causes are numerous but many, perhaps the majority, fall into specific categories. Of course, unbelief or atheism could simply be an excuse to "be free" and follow one's passions in this world. However, if these narratives in the literature are sincere then, sadly, many times the flight from Islam is more based on a lack of knowledge or understanding of Islam than anything else. Here is a list that this author has noted of the major categories leading Muslims to abandon Islam, with short comments on them:

True dhulm ("wrong, oppression") that takes place within the Muslim communities: The dhulm here is true in the sense that the practices violate Islamic teachings yet the Muslim community, including many of its leaders, have acquiesced to them. As is typical with dhulm, these practices usually hurt the weakest in the community (women, the poor, and so on). This category would include actions like honor killings, female genital mutilation, women being prevented from their dowers or inheritance, exploitation of servants, and the like. The remedy for these acts of dhulm requires a strong will on the part of the Muslim leaders to change what has been accepted and even looked upon as "Islamic" in many Muslim societies.

"Perceived" dhulm ("wrong, oppression") in Islam: This is called "perceived" because it is not truly dhulm, although individuals—perhaps those with an extreme focus on "individual human rights" as opposed to the needs of society and community as a whole—consider them to be dhulm. These would include issues like the specific cases of different shares of inheritance for males and females, women not being allowed to non-Muslim men while Muslim men may marry some non-Muslim women, and so on. There is, obviously, a purpose and legal reason behand all of these laws in Islam but some people may not be interested in hearing the clear reasoning behind them or, sometimes,

30 Brian Whitaker, "The Rise of Arab Atheism," https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/4898/the-rise-of-arab-atheism.

they may never be exposed to such reasoning. All the objections raised against Islam related to human rights, freedom, and feminism paradigms may be subsumed under this category.

The supposed violence and radicalism of Islam, indicating problematic aspects with the teachings of Islam: Unfortunately, the behavior of many Muslims today demonstrates that extremism (al-ghulu) and misapplication of the concept of jihad is common. This requires Muslim scholars and leaders to analyze the issues in detail and spread the correct understanding of Islam to the best of their ability.

Not understanding the wisdom of God: This is a common complaint or confusion. The argument runs, for example, "If God is merciful, why do small, innocent children suffer? Why should nice non-Muslims be punished with Hell?" This falls under the purview of the theological concept of theodicy. Through a study of Islamic theodicy, one can then understand how Allah's wisdom, knowledge, justice, and mercy permeates all of His actions and decrees. As is clear from numerous stories of ex-Muslims, this aspect of the faith is somewhat surprisingly not well-known or perhaps not widely taught.

Crisis of faith: What is meant here by "crisis of faith" is where the teachings of the faith become almost irrelevant to actual day-to-day living, making one question the value of the faith itself or the value of their particular religiosity. Although this may not necessarily lead to atheism, it could be an initial starting point. Sometimes the beliefs of a faith are not those that are actually acted upon in real-life situations.[31] Furthermore, in today's world, more and more "compromises" are being accepted in the religion and even promoted by some religious scholars. The solution for this dilemma could require an in-depth and nuanced understanding of both the faith and "reality." This area probably deserves more attention than it has received.

Claims in academia doubting the authenticity of Islam: Every so often Orientalists and others make grandiose claims casting doubt on the veracity of the religion of Islam or the purity of its revelation. Many of these works are read in the current university environment, which lends itself to reading all sorts of thought, regardless sometimes of how far-fetched it may be. The history of such critiques of Islam goes back a long way. Unfortunately, for Muslims, sometimes there is quite a lag between when claims are made about Islam and when solid academic replies are produced. For

31 In the words of Varisco, "By insisting on a dogma that is not rational within a scientific worldview, the danger exists that the sincere Muslim or Christian will throw out the moral baby with the exegetical bathwater. If Muslim students blame 'Islam' as out of step with modernity, then dogmatic denials of scientific findings will only encourage educated people to leave their faith for a secular view of life." Daniel Varisco, "Darwin and Dunya: Muslim Responses to Darwinian Evolution," (Journal of International and Global Studies Volume 9, Number 2), p. 29.

example, thirty-six years passed between the Orientalist Schacht's work on Islamic law and Azami's strong refutation of Schacht.

"Science" and the new atheism: Some claims of science could make someone question their faith and lead to atheism. This is perhaps where the influence of the "new atheist" movement, the focus of this paper, would be most evident.

The "new atheism" movement, which shall be discussed in greater detail shortly, emphasizes scientific arguments to deny the existence of God or the important of religion. Whitaker did not find their views necessarily resonating with Arab atheists. He stated,

One striking difference between Arab non-believers and those in the West is that scientific arguments about evolution and the origins of the universe, a major part of Western atheist discourse, play only a minor role in Arabs' drift away from religion – at least in the earlier stages. Generally, their initial questioning is not so much about the possibility (or otherwise) of God's existence as about whether God could exist in the form described by organized religions.[32]

However, Khalil, writing from a North American's perspective, stated,

Having taught in the humanities at two public research universities in the American Midwest, I have found that many of my own colleagues and students have been more profoundly impacted by the writings of New Atheists than, say, polemical works by far-right religiously affiliated critics of Islam (whose impact is more obvious in other contexts).[33]

Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of atheists and atheist organizations in North America. This growth has been spurned on and supported by the "new atheist" movement.

32 Whitaker, op cit., "The Rise."

33 Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Jihad, Radicalism, and the New Atheism* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 3.

2. The New Atheism Movement

Gary Wolff's 2006 article in *Wired*, "The Church of the Non-Believers," is credited with coming up with the term "new atheism."[34] New Atheism is a post-9-11 phenomenon. Sam Harris said that he started writing his book *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* the day after 9-11, although the book was not published until 2004. The main early leading figures of the movement are known as the "four horsemen of the non-apocalypse": Neuroscientist Sam Harris, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins[35], journalist Christopher Hitchens and philosopher Daniel Dennett.[36] Other well-known personalities later joined their ranks, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the physicist Lawrence Krauss, TV talk show host Bill Maher and others.

2.1 What is new about New Atheism?

Atheism has been around for a long time. This begs the question: What is the "new" in the "new atheism" movement? There seems to be a fairly wide consensus that none of their rational or logical arguments are earth-shattering. They simply reproduce many of the arguments of earlier atheists.

However, various researches have highlighted a number of ways in which they differ from earlier atheists. These include:

2.1.1 Their Popularity in Pop Culture

The new atheism was never restricted to the ivory towers of academia.[37] Instead, the works the new atheism authors produced were best sellers, starting with Sam Harris' *The End of Faith*. Dawkins' *The God Delusion* was on the New York Times bestseller list for almost a year. *The Times* ran an article that facetiously stated,

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34 Gary Wolff, "The Church of the Non-Believers," *Wired.* https://www.wired.com/2006/11/atheism/?pg=1&topic=atheism&topic_set=

35 Richard Dawkins most relevant work is entitled, *The God Delusion*. Not surprisingly, Dawkins' book has been translated into Arabic with the title, وهم الإله. On the bottom of the cover is written: الكتاب الممنوع في جميع الدول العربية ("The banned book in all Arab countries").

36 They have also been referred to as the "high priests" of new atheism. In a recent book lauding them, Stephen Fry also refers to them as, "The Four Musketeers of the Mind." Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, *The Four Horsemen: The Conversation that Sparked an Atheist Revolution* (New York: The Center for Inquiry, 2019). Incidentally, this book is the transcript of the conversation that took place the first and only time that the four of them met together.

37 After 2001, the year of 9-11, the number of articles published about atheism in academia "increased steadily per year." Melanie E. Brewster, et al., "Arrantly Absent: Atheism in Psychological Science from 2001 to 2012," *The Counseling Psychologist,* https://www.apa.org/education/ce/arrantly-absent.pdf

Once upon a time an American writer called Sam Harris wrote a book called *The End of Faith*, about how silly it was to believe in God. The book sold many copies, so some other people — Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, AC Grayling — wrote the same book. This made them all quite a bit richer and turned them into a movement called either Militant Atheism or the New Atheism.[38]

The leading new atheists are even sometimes referred to as "celebrity atheists." Dawkins' book actually came out after his television documentary, "The Root of All Evil?" The leading new atheists have appeared on numerous television programs, perhaps most notably that of fellow atheist Bill Maher. They have also taken part in debates, including debates with Muslims. They definitely have had thousands of fans. The "2012 Reason Rally" in Washington, D.C., led by Dawkins, drew more than 20,000 people.[39] Most likely, the Internet, with the anonymity that the Internet often provides, has also contributed to the increased interest and discussion of atheism.

One could argue that the new atheism has made it much more acceptable or perhaps even cool to come out as an atheist. This is not just true for the United States and England, where the new atheist leading personalities come from. For example, Taira argues that even in Finland, where atheism has been connected to communism and therefore anti-Finnishness, the new atheism movement has made atheism more visible in Finland and more acceptable as an alternate identity.[40]

2.1.2 Their Fundamentalism and Extremism[41]

In his early article about them, Wolff noticed their fundamentalist qualities. He stated, "People see a contradiction in its tone of certainty. Contemptuous of the faith of others, its proponents never doubt their own belief. They are fundamentalists…Even those who might side with the New Atheists are repelled by their strident tone."[42] He also stated, "The irony of the New Atheism – this prophetic attack on prophecy, this extremism in opposition to extremism – is too much for me."[43]

Chris Hedges also notes this quality about them, arguing that they have appropriated many qualities from Christian fundamentalism. He states that they see things as binary, one is either with

38 https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/humans-never-learn-the-philosopher-john-gray-on-new-atheism-the-god-debate-and-why-history-repeats-itself-h9v6xvfmc

39 Benjamin Fearnow, and Mickey Woods. "Richard Dawkins Preaches to Nonbelievers at Reason Rally," *The Atlantic* (25 March 2012) http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/03/richard-dawkins-preaches-to-nonbelievers-at-reason-rally/255012/.

40 Teemu Taira, "Move Visible but Limited in Its Popularity: Atheism (and Atheists) in Finland," *Approaching Religion* (Vol. 2, No. 1, June 2012), p. 21.

41 It should be noted that this author believes that both terms fundamentalist and extremist are value-laden and one should be cautious in applying these terms to others. Here the terms are used only because they are terms that have been used to describe the new atheists.

42 Wolff, op cit.

43 Wolff, op cit.

them or against them, while at the same time willing to use military force against their opponents. Hedges notes that for them evil is not something that everyone needs to struggle with but it is only in those who oppose them, the people of religion.[44] Hedges developed this further when he, without mincing his words, wrote,

Fundamentalism is a mind-set… [B]ecause it dismisses all alternative viewpoints as inferior and unworthy of consideration it is anti-thought… It creates a binary world of absolutes, of good and evil… It is used to justify imperial hubris, war, intolerance and repression as a regrettable necessity in the march of human progress…

All fundamentalists reject intellectual investigations. They know the truth. They live wrapped in the comforting and self-deluding belief that they have nothing left to learn. Hitchens, for example, assures us that "religion spoke its last intelligible or noble or inspiring words a long time ago." There is no need to read theology. Harris insists he understands the Muslim world because he has read opinion polls and passages in the Koran.[45]

Noam Chomsky refers to them as "fanatics" who believe in "the State religion." He says that they may not go worship once a week but what they believe in is much more dangerous.[46]

2.1.3 Their Evangelicalism

Wolff highlighted their evangelical character. About Dawkins, Wolff wrote, "But the atheist movement, by his lights, has no choice but to aggressively spread the good news. Evangelism is a moral imperative. Dawkins does not merely disagree with religious myths. He disagrees with tolerating them, with cooperating in their colonization of the brains of innocent tykes."[47] About other atheists he knows, Wolff states, "I have become a connoisseur of atheist groups – there are scores of them, mostly local, linked into a few larger networks. There are some tensions, as is normal in the claustrophobia of powerless subcultures, but relations among the different branches of the movement are mostly friendly. Typical atheists are hardly the rabble-rousing evangelists that Dawkins or Harris might like."[48]

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44 Hedges stated that he appreciates the contributions that atheists have made to society over the centuries. Hence, he was looking forward to meeting and speaking with the likes of Harris and Hitchens. Needless to say, he was disappointed. Chris Hedges, "Chris Hedges on New Atheism, the God Debate, Science and Religion, and Self-Delusion," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4n8QRiXeRQg

45 Chris Hedges, *I Don't Believe in Atheists* (New York: Free Press, 2008), pp. 69-71.

46 Noam Chomsky, "Chomsky on Hitchens, Harris and Skinner," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt9QCAUPPeY.

47 Wolff, op cit.

48 Ibid.

2.1.4 Their Lack of Intellectual Humility

Revisionist Darwinian evolutionary psychologist Robert Wright has accused the New Atheists of lacking intellectual humility.[49] Instead of an increase in knowledge making them appreciate how much more is still unknown, the New Atheists, Wright claims, are willing to leap forward and declare that there is no God, which is something beyond what they have proven.[50] Reading the likes of some of them, this author thinks it is a fair judgment to say that they take their interpretation of events to be equivalent to scientific fact. However, on the central question of whether or not God exists, some of them, such as Dickens, Krauss and Jerry Coyne are somewhat more cautious and simply argue that it is "highly probable" that God does not exist.[51] (This, it seems, would make them more agnostic than atheist.)

Chris Hedges simply calls them ignorant. Grouping the new atheists with Christian fundamentalists, he stated, "They are culturally, historically and linguistically illiterate. They know nothing about the Middle East and nothing about religion. And they believe that there is no reason to investigate other ways of being, other ways of believing and other ways of thinking."[52] Although Hedges' critique of them is extremely strong, when it comes to religion as a whole and Islam in particular, the new atheists as a whole do not seem to have much in-depth knowledge, even if one of them (Harris) claimed to be well-informed on the topic of Islam.[53]

The accusations of lack of intellectual humility could explain how Torres has described what the new atheist movement has become, "Words that now come to mind when I think of new atheism are 'un-nuanced,' 'heavy-handed,' 'unjustifiably confident' and 'resistant to evidence' — not to mention, on the whole, 'misogynist' and 'racist.'"[54]

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49 This lack of intellectual humility is of great concern to Wright. In fact, he has been quoted to have said, "[T]he biggest threat to America and to the world may be a simple lack of intellectual humility." https://www.facebook.com/ScottBarryKaufman/posts/the-biggest-threat-to-america-and-to-the-world-may-be-a-simple-lack-of-intellect/1961796693831417/

50 Robert Wright, "The New Atheists vs. The New Agnostics," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trmv1M_7VAU

51 In fact, Chapter 4 of Dawkins' *The God Delusion* is entitled, "Why there almost certainly is no God." For a short response to Wright, see https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2016/05/26/robert-wrights-rant-against-new-atheism/. Dawkins has directly responded to this type of criticism concerning science and atheism as a whole and tried to shift the description of hubris to religion itself. See his recent chapter, "The Hubris of Religion, the Humility of Science, and the Intellectual and Moral Courage of Atheism," in Hitchens, at al., *The Four Horsemen*.

52 Chris Hedges, "Chris Hedges on New Atheism," op cit.

53 Sam Harris made that claim while on *The Bill Maher Show*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vln9D81eO60.

54 Phil Torres, "From the Enlightenment to the Dark Ages: How 'new atheism' slid into the alt-right," https://www.salon.com/2017/07/29/from-the-enlightenment-to-the-dark-ages-how-new-atheism-slid-into-the-alt-right/ This lack of intellectual humility could explain why, according to Torres, "I'm sorry," is not part of the new atheists' vocabulary.

A lack of intellectual humility can easily lead to intellectual dishonesty if one is too arrogant to admits one's errors. Both Torres and Seymour have presented evidence of such dishonesty among selected new atheists.[55]

2.1.5 Their Blatant Vitriol Against Religion

The new atheists' blatant vitriol against religion is a characteristic of them that perhaps no one can deny. It is for this reason that they are sometimes called anti-theists. These individuals have made it a point to attack religion itself, blaming religion for much of the ills of humanity. Stenger, one of the voices of new atheism, wrote,

The new atheists are committed to helping accelerate the trend away from religion that is already occurring in certain parts of the world. We ask other atheists and agnostics to join us in taking a harder line against the follies and atrocities of religion produced by its irrational thinking. Not only will a more secular world improve our security by making wars more unlikely, it will allow science and reason to once more help guide government policies.[56]

Amarasingam noted,

There have of course always been atheists. What distinguishes the attack dogs of the new atheism from their more philosophically inclined predecessors is that they believe religion to be not only untrue, but also pernicious, an evil or poison that needs to be eliminated from the bloodstream of society. The new atheism's predominant tone is one of intellectual righteousness— new atheists like to call themselves 'The Brights'—and it is something of a moral crusade.[57]

Peterson states, "The new atheists almost uniformly claim that it is modern atheists who hold the moral high ground, and that it is the practitioners of the world's religions that are immoral, both in historical practice and in fundamental commitment."[58]

It will be appropriate here to quote some of their provoking statements concerning religion.

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55 Torres, Ibid; Richard Seymour, "The Genocidal Imagination of Christopher Hitchens," in Simon Cottee and Thomas Cushman, *Christopher Hitchens and His Critics: Terror, Iraq, and the Left* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), *passim.* For example, Dennis Perrin, a friend of the now deceased Hitchens, describes Hitchens' story related to being in a Jeep with Kurds as a "complete lie." Seymour, p. 316.

56 Victor J. Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2009), 17.

57 Amarnath Amarasingam, "Foreword," in Amarnath Amarasingam, ed., *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2010), p. p. xi.

58 Gregory Peterson, "Ethics, Out-Group Altruism and the New Atheism," in Amarnath Amarasingam, ed., *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2010), p. 159.

In an interview with *The Sun* in 2006, Sam Harris said "If I could wave a magic wand and get rid of either rape or religion, I would not hesitate to get rid of religion. I think more people are dying as a result of our religious myths than as a result of any other ideology."[59]

Perhaps the title of Christopher Hitchens is sufficient to demonstrate his stance toward religion: *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. Among the many provocative statements in the book, he wrote, "One must state it plainly. Religion comes from the period of human pre-history where nobody—not even the mighty Democritus who concluded that all matter was made from atoms—had the smallest idea what was going on. It comes from the bawling and fearful infancy of our species, and is a babyish attempt to meet our inescapable demand for knowledge (as well as for comfort, reassurance, and other infantile needs)."[60] He also wrote, "Violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children: organized religion ought to have a great deal on its conscience."[61]

On more than one occasion, Dawkins has said that he is out to "destroy religion." Dawkins wrote in *The God Delusion*,

I am not attacking the particular qualities of Yahweh, or Jesus, or Allah, or any other specific god such as Baal, Zeus or Wotan. Instead I shall define the God Hypothesis more defensibly: *there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us.* This book will advocate an alternative view: *any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution.* Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God, in the sense defined, is a delusion; and, as later chapters will show, a pernicious delusion.[62]

2.1.6 Their Vitriol Against Islam in Particular

The new atheists vitriol against Islam in particular does not seem to be something that they try to hide. Thus, a number of authors have highlighted this characteristic as being the true "new"

59 Bethany Saltman, "The Temple of Reason: Sam Harris on How Religion Puts the World at Risk," https://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/369/the-temple-of-reason

60 Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2007), p. 64.

61 Ibid., p. 56.

62 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London, England: Bantam Press, 2006), p. 31.

in new atheism. Nathan Lean demonstrated how they, especially Dawkins, has Islamophobic leanings.[63] Emilsen proclaims,

This article argues that the 'new' in the new atheists' writings is not their aggressiveness, nor their extraordinary popularity, nor even their scientific approach to religion, rather it is their attack not only on militant Islamism but also on Islam itself under the cloak of its general critique of religion. The new atheist movement has contributed to a hardening of hostility towards Islam and may well have inflamed relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.[64]

Emilsen's words are echoed by Markham who wrote,

Harris is the worst; he makes Islamophobia a central part of his message. Hitchens comes second; to his credit (perhaps), he recognizes that the bad aspects of Islam are also found in Christianity and Judaism (in fact for Hitchens, there are no good religious traditions). And, for Dawkins, Islam is an illustration of the strange and bizarre behaviour of religious people. It is interesting to note how both Harris and Hitchens supported the American war to Iraq, primarily as a result of their deep prejudice against Islam.[65]

Some of the new atheists statements about Islam include the following:

Sam Harris wrote, "It is time we recognized—and oblige the Muslim world to recognize—that 'Muslim extremism' is not extreme among Muslims. Mainstream Islam itself represents an extremist rejection of intellectual honesty, gender equality, secular politics and genuine pluralism. The truth about Islam is as politically incorrect as it is terrifying: Islam is all fringe and no center."[66] He also wrote, "The idea that Islam is a 'peaceful religion hijacked by extremists' is a dangerous fantasy."[67] Harris also proclaimed that Islam is the "mother lode of bad ideas."[68] This is just a small glimpse of the many things Harris has to say about Islam. The fourth chapter of Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* is entitled, "The Problem with Islam."[69]

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63 Nathan Lean, "Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens New Atheists flirt with Islamophobia," https://www.salon.com/2013/03/30/dawkins_harris_hitchens_new_atheists_flirt_with_islamophobia/

64 William W. Emilsen, "The New Atheism and Islam," *The Exploratory Times* (123(11) 2012), p. 521.

65 Ian S. Markham, *Against Atheism: Why Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris are Fundamentally Wrong* (West Sussex, United Kindgom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 105-106.

66 Sam Harris, "The Reality of Islam," https://samharris.org/the-reality-of-islam/

67 Ibid.

68 Harris originally made that statement on the Bill Maher Show, *The Bill Maher Show*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vln9D81eO60. Harris later went on CNN to defend this comment. See CNN, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_ubamwlPI8.

69 Glenn Greenwald has reviewed Harris' stance toward Islam. Glenn Greenwald, "Sam Harris, the New Atheists, and anti-Muslim animus," *The Guardian,* theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/03/sam-harris-muslim-animus.

Although a scientist and academic, Dawkins admission to never having read the Quran has not kept him from making numerous statements about Islam. Richard Dawkins claimed, "Islam is one of the great evils in the World."[70] Hitchens most important work is entitled, *God is not Great*, which seems to be clearly confrontational with the Islamic statement, *Allaahu akbar* ("God is greatest"). Not to be outdone, Bill Maher stated, "Islam is the only religion that acts like the mafia."[71]

Edis has explained further why there is such a stance among them towards Islam, writing,

September 11 colors today's atheistic responses to Islam, often resulting in a special antipathy toward Islam that goes beyond intellectual rejection. Of course, atheists do not accept gods, prophets, or revelations. They object to social orders centered on religious faith. But the negative perception of Islam among the New Atheists and online atheist groups goes beyond their distaste for those conservative forms of Christianity that most affect the lives of most English-speaking atheists.

There are two main ways in which Islam functions in popular atheist discourse today. First, it is taken to be an extreme case of monotheism. Unlike Christianity, which has at least developed some liberal, watered-down forms, the New Atheists see Islam as an unreformed, secularization-resistant, scientifically backward, particularly rigorous form of traditional faith. Atheists usually think of themselves as defenders of the European Enlightenment and its ideals of social progress. Due to cases of Muslim repression of religious dissent, consistent Muslim support for patriarchal gender roles, and a common Muslim desire for societies guided by religious orthodoxy, Islam is a particularly intense representative of everything about monotheistic religion that atheists dislike.

New Atheist antipathy to Islam does not stop with political opposition to conservative Islam. It occasionally shades into a second function of Islam that depends on unreflective associations of Muslims with terrorism and similar Islamophobic themes. In such cases, Islam is not just imagined as an intellectual and political rival; it is made into an enemy. Finding an enemy can be invigorating for an emerging movement centered on an atheist identity, but it also stands in tension with most atheists' expressed commitment to empirical accuracy.[72]

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70 See https://freethoughtnation.com/richard-dawkins-islam-is-one-of-the-great-evils-of-the-world/. For a discussion of numerous extreme statements made by Dawkins about Islam, see Jai Singh, "Richard Dawkins' anti-Islam/anti-Muslim propaganda exposed: The Facts," http://www.loonwatch.com/files/2013/04/richard-dawkins-anti-islamanti-muslim-propaganda-exposed-the-facts/

71 *The Bill Maher Show*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vln9D81eO60

72 Taner Edis, "Finding an Enemy: Islam and the New Atheism," in Ruqayya Yasemine Khan, *Muhammad in the Digital Age* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015), pp. 174-175.

2.1.7 Their Political Views and Endorsement of Violence

The political views and clear endorsement of violence is another feature that seems to set the new atheists apart from traditional atheists. Perhaps, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens stand out the most in this realm.

For some, their violent stances seem somewhat ironic. Megoran wrote,

Celebrity atheists such as Richard Dawkins appear to claim the moral high ground when it comes to violence. Dawkins, along with Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens, insist that because religion is intrinsically violent, then atheism is inherently more pacific. After all, if all the evils in the world can be blamed on religion, then arguably eliminating religion is not only desirable but a moral obligation for atheists who believe in peace.

Yet our research shows that in the War on Terror, these atheists have been surprisingly willing to align themselves with policies which are at least as violent – and in some cases more so – than many of those perpetrated in the name of religion.[73]

After the infamous siege of Fallujah, wherein white phosphorous was used against its residents and some 6,000, mostly civilians, died, Christopher Hitchens commented, "the death toll is not nearly high enough . . . too many [jihadists] have escaped."[74] Concerning cluster bombs, Hitchens wrote,

If you're actually certain that you're hitting only a concentration of enemy troops . . . then it's pretty good because those steel pellets will go straight through somebody and out the other side and through somebody else. And if they're bearing a Koran over their heart, it'll go straight through that, too. So they won't be able to say, "Ah, I was bearing a Koran over my heart and guess what, the missile stopped halfway through." No way, 'cause it'll go straight through that as well. They'll be dead, in other words.[75]

Harris fearmongering concerning Islam is such that he even called for a first-strike nuclear attack in the following passage,

What will we do if an Islamist regime, which grows dewy-eyed at the mere mention of paradise, ever acquires long-range nuclear weaponry? If history is any guide, we will not be sure about where

73 Nick Megoran, "Why the Arguments of the 'New Atheist' are Often Just as Violent as Religion," http://theconversation.com/why-the-arguments-of-the-new-atheists-are-often-just-as-violent-as-religion-95185

74 Quoted in Seymour, p. 313.

75 Ibid., p. 313.

the offending warheads are or what their state of readiness is, and so we will be unable to rely on targeted, conventional weapons to destroy them. In such a situation, the only thing likely to ensure our survival may be a nuclear first strike of our own. Needless to say, this would be an unthinkable crime—as it would kill tens of millions of innocent civilians in a single day—but it may be the only course of action available to us, given what Islamists believe.[76]

Given Harris' views on racial profiling ("We should profile Muslims, or anyone who looks like he or she could conceivably be Muslim, and we should be honest about it"[77]), it is fair to question whether he would actually wait for the Islamist regime to actually acquire such nuclear weaponry. Of course, in Sam Harris' world, one need not worry about Muslims getting close to having nuclear weapons for if he were in charge, it would be ethical to kill Muslims due to their Islamic beliefs. In Harris' words,

The link between belief and behavior raises the stakes considerably. Some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them. This may seem an extraordinary claim, but it merely enunciates an ordinary fact about the world in which we live. Certain beliefs place their adherents beyond the reach of every peaceful means of persuasion, while inspiring them to commit acts of extraordinary violence against others. There is, in fact, no talking to some people. If they cannot be captured, and they often cannot, otherwise tolerant people may be justified in killing them in self-defense. This is what the United States attempted in Afghanistan, and it is what we and other Western powers are bound to attempt, at an even greater cost to ourselves and to innocents abroad, elsewhere in the Muslim world. We will continue to spill blood in what is, at bottom, a war of ideas.[78]

Although many atheists are known to be "secular humanists," and therefore on the Left of the political scale, many of the New Atheists have actually drifted to the far-right, according to Torres.[79] Torres, who described himself as having been one of the new atheists' greatest allies, begins by writing a second subtitle, "A movement supposedly committed to science and reason has decayed into racism, misogyny and intolerance. I'm done." Torres notes "tweets from major leaders that (oops!) linked to white supremacist websites."

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76 Sam Harris, The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), p. 129.

77 Sam Harris, "In Defense of Profiling," https://samharris.org/in-defense-of-profiling/

78 Harris, *The End of Faith*, pp. 52-53. Emphasis added.

79 Torres, op cit.

2.1.7 Summary

Ironically, other than their popularity, there seems to be nothing appealing about the new atheist movement. Nonetheless, they have still influenced people. Their popularity requires that they be "taken seriously."

2.2 Is The New Atheism Movement Already Dead?

Although the atheist movement is a post 9-11 phenomenon, there is already a good deal of discussion concerning whether or not it is already dead.[80] In this author's view, a combination of their vicious vitriol, generalizations and lack of logic in their arguments, politics, racism[81], misogyny, and scandals[82] has definitely caused the sensation surrounding this movement to die down quite a bit. An example of the backlash that it has received even from fellow atheists can be found in Adam Lee who wrote,

Is the New Atheist movement dead?

If it's not, a lot of people seem prepared to write its obituary. Two new articles are suggesting that its time is past. And in the name of honesty, I should say that I have an article coming out soon that throws another shovelful of dirt on the casket.

I'm in agreement with PZ that I used to proudly call myself a New Atheist. I don't do that very much anymore, not because *my* beliefs have changed so much, but because that label doesn't mean what it used to. It's collected a set of unsavory allegiances that I don't wish to claim for myself.

How did we come to this? Let's take a look back…[83]

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80 The response of Jerry Coyne and Steve Pinker tries to write off the weakening of the new atheism movement by saying, among other things, that there never was any such thing as new atheism and that the famous "leaders" were only such because they wrote popular books. (https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2019/02/15/is-new-atheism-really-dead-three-new-atheists-respond/) That argument is hardly convincing seeing that they accepted and continue to accept to call themselves the "four horsemen of the anti-apocalypse." The rise and fall of new atheism is dealt with in detail and analysis in Amarnath Amarasingam and Melanie Elyse Brewster, "The Rise and Fall of the New Atheism: Identity Politics and Tensions within U.S. Nonbelievers," available at https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004319301/B9789004319301-s008.xml

81 Besides his call for racial profiling, Harris has more than once posited or given voice to the idea that some races are simply cognitively inferior. See Hitchens, et al., *The Four Horsemen: The Conversation that Sparked an Atheist Revolution*, p. 75. Also see Ezra Klein, "Sam Harris, Charles Murray, and the allure of race science," https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/27/15695060/sam-harris-charles-murray-race-iq-forbidden-knowledge-podcast-bell-curve

82 Even fellow atheist Jerry Coyne has completely disassociated himself from Lawrence Krauss due to the sexual misconduct charges leveled at Krauss. https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2018/03/10/the-lawrence-krauss-affair/

83 Adam Lee, "The New Atheism is Dead, Long Live Atheism," https://www.patheos.com/blogs/daylightatheism/2019/02/the-new-atheism-is-dead-long-live-atheism/

As the title of Lee's article states, "The New Atheism is Dead, Long Live Atheism," Atheism predated the movement and is outlasting the movement. However, regardless of the popularity of the movement as a movement, the movement did bring to the forefront many questions that could be considered a challenge to religion. In particular, the movement openly attacked and questioned many aspects of the religion of Islam. Secondly, the movement did popularize many old "scientific arguments" against religion. Both of these issues raise concerns for Muslims, with Muslims on university campuses probably being the most exposed and vulnerable. This may explain the quote presented earlier from Khalil who, writing in 2018, stated,

Having taught in the humanities at two public research universities in the American Midwest, I have found that many of my own colleagues and students have been more profoundly impacted by the writings of New Atheists than, say, polemical works by far-right religiously affiliated critics of Islam (whose impact is more obvious in other contexts).[84]

While writing about ex-Muslims, Cottee also spoke about the influence of new atheists, such as Dawkins and Hitchens, who gave these ex-Muslims the substantiation they needed. Cottee wrote,

Reading the work of atheists and agnostics was thus a fundamentally validating experience for respondents. Their own intuitions were correct. They were sound. Their doubts had substance: the haram voice was right all along. And this recognition empowered them to move forward and to finally renounce Islam. It gave them the self-confidence to disavow: because it legitimized their doubts. And with that legitimation and newly found self-confidence, their sense of guilt and anxiety began to fade. They were surely right in doubting Islam, so there was no reason to feel guilty or anxious anymore: this is what they thought, although their feelings were not always in tune with this.[85]

3. Muslim Responses to the New Atheist Movement

Since Islam has been particularly targeted by the new atheist movement, a number of Muslims have stepped up to respond to it. Beyond debates that one may find on Youtube, there are some published, written responses to the movement as well. The most relevant written works will be what is covered in this brief review.

84 Khalil, p. 3.

85 Simon Cottee, *The Apostates: When Muslims Leave Islam* (London, United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Company, 2015), p. 79.

3.1 Bill Whitehouse

In 2008, Bill Whitehouse published *Sam Harris and the End of Faith: A Muslim's Critical Response*.[86] As the title demonstrates, other than in the first few pages where he touches upon Dawkins and Hitchens, this work concentrates on Sam Harris and his early work *The End of Faith*. In fact, he virtually does a page by page analysis of excerpts from the book. For the most part, this work is a good critique of the numerous logical flaws, scientific errors, overgeneralizations, and extreme political positions found in Harris' book.

One example of his critique should suffice for this review. Whitehouse quotes the following passage from *The End of Faith*,

We can no longer ignore the fact that billions of our neighbors believe in the metaphysics of martyrdom or in the literal truth of the book of Revelation, or any of the other fantastical notions that have lurked in the minds of the faithful for millennia - because our neighbors are now armed with chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. There is no doubt that these developments mark the terminal phase of our credulity. Words like "God" and "Allah" must go the way of "Apollo" and "Baal" or they will unmake our world.[87]

Whitehouse spends many pages discussing this passage. First, he questions the empirical basis of the "billions of our neighbors." He then points out that, "martyrdom has never been about killing others but, instead, martyrdom always has been about the willingness to sacrifice one's own life in the service of truth and justice for everyone, whether Muslim or non-Muslim."[88] Whitehouse then speaks about those countries that actually do possess nuclear weapons, most notably the United States. He notes how it was the United States who engineered a coup in Iran in 1953 and then later encouraged Saddam Hussein to invade Iran, providing him with biological and chemical weapons. Thus, if the Iranians fear the United States and are driven to develop to nuclear weapons, that would be understandable. After more discussions of a political nature, Whitehead sums up his response to Harris by writing,

Perhaps, contrary to what Sam Harris argues, it is not words such as "God" or "Allah" which need to go the way of "Apollo" and "Baal", but, rather, it is words such as "democracy" and "capitalism" that need to be rehabilitated, especially when these ideas are imposed on people in a corrupted form with little, or no, thought be given to the destruction which the deviant, irresponsible forms of these

86 Bill Whitehouse, *Sam Harris and the End of Faith: A Muslim's Critical Response* (Bangor, Maine: Interrogative Imperative Institute, 2008-2009).
87 Whitehouse, p. 14, quoting from Harris.
88 Ibid., p. 14.

ideas may bring to the peoples who supposedly are to be "liberated" through them. Understood and applied judiciously and with wisdom, democracy and capitalism have the potential to be great forces of constructive good, but when they are wielded about by those who are intoxicated with their own sense of acquisitiveness and power, these forces also have the capacity to lay waste to freedoms, rights, constitutions, communities, the Earth, and the human soul ... and we see the evidence of this everywhere in the world.[89]

Unfortunately, other than analyses like the above, there are definitely some glaring shortcomings to Whitehouse's book. Although he blames Harris for not supporting his arguments with annotated evidence, Whitehouse himself provides no references at all throughout the work. Hence, when Whitehouse writes, for example,

Presently, neuroscience does not know what consciousness is or how it arises. Currently, neuroscience does not know what logic and reason are or how they arise. At the present time, neuroscience does not know how language, understanding, insight, genius, or creativity is possible. I say such things not as someone who is completely ignorant about what is going on in neuroscience but as someone who has taught courses on psychology, including units on brain functioning and neurochemistry, as well as someone who has read about these matters for years.[90]

one has to simply blindly believe what he has claimed. It seems, if he has so much experience, that he could have backed those statements up with numerous references agreeing with him that such is the state of the science at the present time. Similarly, he made a very important claim in the following passage,

There have been a number of studies that have been conducted in conjunction with World War JI, Vietnam, and the Gulf War with respect to people's readiness to kill or harm other human beings. Not surprisingly, these studies found that the majority of people, on their own, really have no interest in harming other human beings.

They have to be moved to do this. They have to undergo a process of indoctrination and propaganda so that they will comply with the directive to kill other human beings…[91]

Yet, again, he does not back this up with a reference to any study whatsoever, not to speak of a "number of studies."

89 Whitehouse, p. 18.
90 Whitehouse, pp. 33-34.
91 Ibid., p. 68.

Whitehouse is also clearly a 9-11 conspiracy theorist. He spends a number of pages asking why Harris did not use his reasoning and brain to analyze the events of 9-11 and how, he claims, the official story does not make any rational sense.[92] Regardless of what one may believe about 9-11, there is no question that the 9-11 conspiracy theories are very controversial. It probably would have been best for Whitehouse to leave that discussion for some other occasion.

Without question, the greatest shortcoming of this book has to do with its presentation of Islam. If the goal of this book was to defend Islam against the onslaught of Harris, it fails in a very important way. In some ways, Whitehouse seems to agree with Harris concerning some "versions" of Islam but, importantly for Whitehouse, that is not the "Islam" that he believes in. He gives a glimpse of his Islamic background, writing, "My spiritual guide was a Sufi master or shaykh operating out of the Islamic spiritual tradition."[93] Although there is a clear influence of Sufism in many of his comments, it is his modern hermeneutics or approach to the Quran that is most troubling, removing the Quran from truly stating anything and opening the door for any type of interpretation of Islam. A couple of examples should suffice to illustrate this point:

In relation to the Quranic passage,

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ قَٰتِلُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ يَلُونَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡكُفَّارِ وَلۡيَجِدُواْ فِيكُمۡ غِلۡظَةٗۚ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ

«O you who have believed, fight those adjacent to you of the disbelievers and let them find in you harshness. And know that Allah is with the righteous» [At-Tauba: 123]

he writes,

Secondly, many Sufis have commented on the idea that waging war on the infidels near one is intended to refer to the need of each individual to wage war against the infidel – the ego or false self or oafs -- within, and the passage is not necessarily meant to be an injunction to wage war against other individuals. From this perspective, there is an infidel within each of us, and we should each busy ourselves with struggling against that infidel, and if we sincerely are engaged in such a struggle, one is unlikely to have much time or energy left over to wage war against anyone else or become obsessed with the issue of who it is that actually can be considered to be an infidel.

Mr. Harris makes the same mistake as so many would-be Muslim fundamentalists and literalists do. He assumes he knows who is being alluded to as an infidel or as an unbeliever when these terms appear in the Qur'an.

92 Ibid., pp. 61-65.

93 Ibid., p. 13.

I have faith that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) understood the nature and character of the Quranic references that Mr. Harris cites. I have no faith that either Mr. Harris or Muslim fundamentalists understand what is being said in the Qur'an in this respect.[94]

This is not the proper place to present a lengthy review of the commentaries on this verse of the Quran to critique this passage. One may, for example, question how he ignores the meaning of the word *qaatiloo*, which means physically fighting, and replaces its meaning with *iqtatal ma al-nafs* (struggling with oneself). After this Sufi reinterpretation of the verse, he later states that he has faith that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) understood the nature of this Quranic reference. If that is true, he should then see how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself applied this verse and the entirety of Soorah al-Taubah, which is well-known. This in itself will demonstrate that he is distorting the meaning this verse in order to, supposedly, present an Islam that is free from Harris' criticisms.

He has a similar lengthy passage concerning this verse (and small portions of the verses that follow it[95]),

لَّا يَسْتَوِي ٱلْقَٰعِدُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُوْلِي ٱلضَّرَرِ وَٱلْمُجَٰهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْۚ فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُجَٰهِدِينَ بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ عَلَى ٱلْقَٰعِدِينَ دَرَجَةٗۚ وَكُلّٗا وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰۚ وَفَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُجَٰهِدِينَ عَلَى ٱلْقَٰعِدِينَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

«Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled - and the mujahideen, [who strive and fight] in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives. Allah has preferred the mujahideen through their wealth and their lives over those who remain [behind], by degrees. And to both Allah has promised the best [reward]. But Allah has preferred the mujahideen over those who remain [behind] with a great reward Degrees [of high position] from Him and forgiveness and mercy» [An-Nisaa: 95]

After quoting Harris' reference to this passage, Whitehouse writes,

As some Sufis might say, we are all guilty of kufur [*sic*]. That is, in differing ways and to varying extents, we all give expression to unbelief.

A kafir, or unbeliever, is someone who hides the truth -either from others and/or from himself or herself. Since there are very, very few of us who are realized beings and, therefore, are in a position, possibly, to understand the full nature of the truth according to our inherent capacity to do so, then,

94 Ibid., pp. 73-74.

95 Harris "quotes" al-Nisaa 95-101 by presenting verse 95 and then one line from verse 100 and then the last few words from verse 101. In so doing Harris has tried to distort the meaning of the passage, completely ignoring the portion that speaks about those who are so oppressed that they are forced to emigrate from their homes. In addition, in verse 100, the portion was mistranslated as, instead of saying, "those who leave their homes emigrating to Allah and His Messenger," Harris' text reads, "He that leaves his dwelling to fight for Allah and His Apostle." This, of course, could be Dawood's original translation mistake and not Harris' mistake. Harris, *End of Faith*, p. 33.

in one way or another, we all are constantly hiding different facets of truth from ourselves and from others.

The Quranic passage that Mr. Harris cites here mentions the term "fight". Mr. Harris wishes to understand this term exclusively in terms of killing and waging armed conflict, and he, like many Muslim theologians, is insistent that all Muslims understand things as he does.

What does it mean to fight or struggle in the way or cause of Allah? In addition, what is that cause or way for which one is to fight or struggle?

The Quranic passage that Mr. Harris cites does not give specific answers to either of these questions. What it does say is that those who do make efforts in the way or cause of Allah are not the same as those who do not make such efforts.

On what basis does Mr. Harris justify his narrow understanding of what fight or struggle might mean in relation to the Quranic passage at issue? In point of fact, Mr. Harris can't justify his interpretation, but he does what many Muslim theologians do with respect to this same passage -Mr. Harris demands that everyone understand this passage in the way he has.

Can one suppose that the cause of Allah is only to kill or oppress or wage armed conflict? What evidence does Mr. Harris have to support such a position?

Does the cause of Allah have nothing to do with love, compassion, forgiveness, patience, repentance, honesty, charitableness, tolerance, mercy, nobility, courage, purification, wisdom, understanding, self-realization, remembrance, gratitude, dependence, piety, and so on? Can Mr. Harris prove how none of these qualities have anything to do with the cause of Allah? Can Mr. Harris demonstrate that such qualities are irrelevant to what it means to struggle in the way of or for the cause of Allah?

If I use my money and possessions to feed the hungry and care for the sick, I am fighting in the cause of Allah. If I am engaged in public service and I use my money, talents, time, and energy to advance the rights of human beings, I am fighting and struggling in the cause of Allah. If I die while engaged in any of these projects of mercy, then, I have died while fighting for the cause of Allah.

The one who is playing games with words is not the individual who is trying to point out the mistakes in Mr. Harris' proclamations about things Islamic. Rather, the player of word games here is Mr. Harris.[96]

96 Whitehouse, pp. 81-82. Emphasis added.

It seems needless to point out that it looks more like Whitehouse is playing with words here. It is definitely true that the term jihad is comprehensive all forms of striving for the sake of Allah. At the same time, no one can deny that it is also inclusive of the physical fighting against the disbelievers. However, in this passage wherein Allah juxtaposes those who make jihad with those who "sit" but are not disabled, it is farfetched to imagine that it is not speaking about the physical jihad against the disbelievers.[97] Furthermore, Whitehouse conveniently makes no reference to the context and time in which this was revealed and how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and those around him understand this verse.

In sum, Whitehouse's work is perhaps more damaging than it is beneficial. Whitehouse is essentially in agreement with Harris that there is some "fundamentalist" Islam out that seems to be truly rotten at its core. Thus, he works hard to reinterpret or cloud anything in Islam that is not to his unique liking. And Allah alone knows best.

3.2 Shoaib Ahmed Malik

Shoaib Ahmed Malik has written a short treatise entitled, *Atheism and Islam: A Contemporary Discourse*.[98] Early on, he highlights the need for writings such as his. After noting the rise of atheism in the Muslim world, he writes,

More surprisingly, the Muslim response to New Atheists has been peripheral if not non-existent, with a marked paucity of engagement by Muslims in the English-speaking world and on the academic level in particular. This has left the Muslim laity exposed to atheistic attacks on their faith and susceptible to serious ideological confusion. It is against this backdrop that I write, thus I will focus specifically on points raised by New Atheists against Islam.[99]

Malik does a nice job of presenting the history of modern atheism that has led to the contemporary phenomenon of new atheism. He highlights two important occurrences in the Christian world: "The first was a shift in worldview from a teleological perspective to a mechanical one… This resulted in the replacement of finality with materiality (to borrow the Aristotelian terminology). The second contributing factor was the diminished status of revelation…"[100] This led to a somewhat devastating development: "Thus, trust in authority was no longer a uniting principle in Christianity

97 Al-Tabari records that it was when the blind ibn Umm Maktoom asked permission to be relieved from fighting that the words, "other than the disabled" were recorded. This narration is also recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim. This verse shall be commented upon again in a later footnote.

98 Shoaib Ahmed Malik, *Atheism and Islam: A Contemporary Discourse* (Abu Dhabi, UAE: Kalam Research & Media, 2018).

99 Ibid., p. vi.

100 Ibid., p. 1.

and had to be replaced with some other universal principle cutting across all sects and denominations. It was in this context that René Descartes, the founding father of early modern philosophy, began his quest for certainty in reason alone, which he identified as the universal denominator."[101] This is the background that led to the atheism of Hegal, Feuerbach, Freud, and Marx.[102]

Malik then presents a concise but beneficial review of each of the "four horsemen." After his review of the "four horsemen," he turns his attention to a very important category: ex-Muslim atheists. Malik states that the arguments of the ex-Muslim atheists mirror those of the new atheists. He then discusses the following prominent ex-Muslim authors: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Ali Rizvi, Armin Navabi, and ibn Warraq.

Malik concludes that the complaints of the new atheists and ex-Muslim atheists concerning Islam may be summarized in the following four points, which he elaborates briefly: (a) Islam is an inherently barbaric and evil religion, (b) the Islamic scripture is outdated, and (c) there is no proof for the existence of God.[103]

At this point, Malik turns his attention to some "points of reflection" concerning the arguments of the new atheists. He starts with scientific contentions. Concerning evolution, for example, Malik writes,

The New Atheists seem to be completely driven by the Darwinian narrative… The Darwinian model (at least as it is portrayed by atheists) suggests that everything can be explained from a naturalistic perspective, such that even mental and emotional phenomena like free will, morality, and thoughts are taken to be the complex or epiphenomenal results of blind natural forces, whose nature we will discover eventually if we have not already done so. This is obviously completely antithetical to the Islamic worldview, since Islam requires belief in non-observable, supernatural entities such as God, the soul, and angels. This makes the Darwinian narrative of evolution a very serious concern for Muslims, but the problematic naturalism that comes attached to it seems to be more of a philosophical position than a scientific contention. To consider *a priori* that everything can be reduced to matter is not a scientific position, it is a metaphysical claim put forward with a scientific veneer. This issue can be directed into its proper philosophical context (a discussion that we will encounter later), but is there anything within evolution itself as a scientific explanation that conflicts with Islam?

101 Ibid., p. 2.
102 Ibid., p. 2.
103 Ibid., p. 14.

To answer this question, we first need to get a broad glimpse of what both sides are actually saying.[104]

He then goes on to summarize different Muslim views on evolution and how compatible or incompatible evolution is with Islam. This is an interesting section that highlights some of the difficulties concerning this topic. In Malik's view there are two obstacles that have kept Muslims from understanding this topic properly. The first obstacle is that many Muslims have taken a Christian fundamentalist attitude toward evolution. Malik identifies the second obstacle as a literalist approach to scripture.[105] He uses a hadith from both *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* to illustrate this problem. Afterwards he states, "The point that I am trying to make is that even though hadiths in Bukhari and Muslim are to be found authentic in their transmission, that does not necessary entail that the content is necessarily and automatically correct or that they can be taken at face value and interpreted in the absence of a solid hermeneutical foundation."[106] He concludes his discussion on evolution by writing, "I would like to caution against both the negligent dismissals of evolution on one extreme and the overzealous and wholesale adoption of evolution as whole, both scientifically and metaphysically, on the other."[107]

Malik then moves on to what he calls "philosophical contentions." It is in this section that Malik displays his clear *kalam* leanings, highlighting scholars such as al-Faraabi, ibn Rushd, al-Ashari and al-Ghazaali. He then quotes Nuh Keller to highlight how important *kalam* is.[108] From here Malik moves to the *kalam* arguments for the existence of God. He warns about too much of an reliance on "natural theology" or on Christian philosophers who have written much in response to the new atheists but their responses are problematic because they respond from a Christian perspective which will not always be the same as a Muslim response.[109] From here he goes into a discussion of scientism, emphasizing that many of the claims of the new scientists are not science at all or they may be called "pseudo-science."[110]

Next comes a section on quantum mechanics and occasionalism. In this section, Malik's reply relies heavily on Ashari-Kalam methodology. For example, he writes,

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104 Ibid., p. 15.

105 See Ibid., pp. 18-19.

106 Ibid., p. 19.

107 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

108 Ibid., p. 20. Among other things, the quote from Keller states a very Jahmite perspective, "Whoever knows that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God is by that very fact saved."

109 Ibid., p. 22.

110 Ibid., p. 24.

Note that in traditional *kalam*—specifically, the Ash'ari perspective—nature is composed of a fundamental unit. This unit is a combination of the *jawhar*, which is the abstract entity—the invisible scaffold that manifests into concretion only when it is combined by either a single or multiple properties, that is, an accident. Time is also discrete in the Ash'ari worldview, and since no property can occupy two instantaneous moments consecutively, the universe is in a continuous process of recreation (of existence and then non-existence and back again repetitively, but at a rate impossible to notice…[111]

His next major section is entitled "theological issues." Under the section, "hermeneutics and jurisprudence," Malik writes, "The theological concerns that atheists have are problems of major proportions... As noted by Abdullah Saeed, we are facing the problem of atomization wherein single verses are picked out of their collective thematic, linguistic, and historical background…More so than the Qur'an, the hadith literature poses a great challenge."[112] "Salafism or Wahhabism" is highlighted as a problem that contributes to the widespread literalism.[113] He argues that what is missing is "spirituality." Thus, in the end, there needs to be a "triangular balance between jurisprudence, Sufism, and *kalam*."[114]

In explaining why a number of people have left Islam, he discusses some of the sociological issues, reviewing Cottee's *The Apostates* and Whitaker's *Arabs Without God*. However, Malik, citing Cottee, concludes that eventually the arguments of the new atheists will anchor the rejection of Islam of these ex-Muslims.[115] Malik then goes on to discuss the Muslim engagement on the issue of atheism. Malik then speaks about ways forward, which are essentially "interdisciplinary platforms," and what he terms, "the Quranic perspective," arguing that there is a need for a better understanding of the Quran.

The major shortcoming of this work is similar to that of Whitehouse. In Malik's case, he expects a robust response to atheism among Muslims to be the result of a revival of Kalam theology, Sufism, and a non-literal hermeneutic interpretation of the Quran. Of course, kalam theology developed long after the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and seeks to delve into questions derived from philosophy rather than the Quran. Sufism, as well, is, for the most part, also a later develop. He does not offer any reason why Sufism rather than the Quranic

111 Ibid., p. 25.

112 Ibid., p. 27. The reader will probably recognizes that none of the concepts mentioned in this passage are truly rooted in the Quran or Sunnah. They have their roots elsewhere.

113 Ibid., p. 28.

114 Ibid., p. 28.

115 Ibid., p. 30.

spiritual or *tazkiyah* need be resorted to. "Literalism" is a rather vague term but one could understand his approach as meaning making *taweel* or fresh interpretations for any text that seems to contradict contemporary scientific views. In other words, a "fundamentalist" or "Salafi" view of Islam is definitely not going to be sufficient and is, in itself, part of the problem.

3.3 Mohammad Hassan Khalil

2018 also saw the publication of Mohammad Hassan Khalil's *Jihad, Radicalism, and the New Atheism*.[116] Khalil's focus is on the question of violence and jihad as understood by traditional Muslim scholars, today's radicals, and the new atheists, essentially responding to the question, "Is Islam fundamentally violent?" Khalil does a good job of presenting his own summary of what this work seeks to achieve. He wrote in the introduction,

As we shall see, although many of the concerns expressed by the New Atheists regarding terrorism are shared by many Muslims, the New Atheists featured in this book tend to portray the interpretations of Islam promoted by radicals such as bin Laden as literalistic and especially faithful to Islamic scripture. The central argument of this book is twofold: (1) among the most distinctive features of radicals such as bin Laden are not their alleged literal readings of the foundational texts of Islam – in some cases, they go to great lengths to circumvent such readings – but rather their aberrant, expansive conceptions of justifiable combat and retaliation and their particular, often crude assessments of geopolitical reality; and (2) on account of the New Atheists' overreliance on a limited array of sources and their apparent unfamiliarity with some of the prevailing currents of Islamic thought, they ultimately privilege anomalous interpretations of scripture. Yet not only do the New Atheists' conceptions of armed jihad conflict with those of the majority of Muslim scholars and laypeople, they even overstep what we find in the discourse of radicals.[117]

As can be concluded from the above passage, much of Khalil's book is beyond the scope of this paper to critique in detail. The focus of this review will be on "Part III: The New Atheism."

Many of the new atheists, in particular Sam Harris, make generalized or misleading statements about Islam, especially concerning jihad. Bin Laden, for example, is recognized by the bulk of the Muslims around the world as an extremist while Sam Harris proclaims him to be the

116 Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Jihad, Radicalism, and the New Atheism* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
117 Khalil, pp. 3-4.

Muslim par excellence. In refuting Harris though, one must be careful not to respond to one extreme with an opposite extreme, as often happens.

Chapter 6 of Khalil's work is entitled, "'We are at War with Islam': The Case of Sam Harris." The focus of Khalil's work is to present an understanding of Islamic concepts that belie the description of Islam as given by Harris and the other new atheists. Thus, one of the first issues that Khalil discusses in this chapter is that of salvation.

Harris seems to think that any Qur'anic reference to damned "unbelievers" or "infidels" necessarily applies to *all* non- Muslims. And there are, of course, Muslims who believe precisely this. This, however, is not the predominant view among Muslim theologians. Consider that the Arabic term for "unbeliever," *kafir* , denotes "one who conceals the truth" or "is ungrateful." A mere absence of belief need not be accompanied by concealment of the truth and ingratitude. Thus, for most theologians, although Muhammad's revelation supersedes other divine messages (such as the Torah of Moses and the Gospel of Jesus), God may save at least some "sincere" non-Muslims and, ultimately, only the Almighty knows who specifically among Muslims and non- Muslims will be saved and who will be damned. One of the most contentious questions among the theologians, then, is determining which general type or types of non- Muslims could be considered "sincere." On one end of the spectrum, we find theologians who only make room for non-Muslims who never truly encountered Islam, that is, the "unreached" (and some further argue that these would have to be "true" monotheists). On the other end, we find theologians who include "reached" non-Muslims (even nonmonotheists) who, in their heart of hearts, simply do not find Islam convincing or compelling. It is not entirely clear where most theologians fall on this spectrum. But consider this: it is difficult to think of a theologian more influential than al-Ghazali (d. 1111), and although he was not especially "liberal" – he assumed that to be considered "sincere," a non-Muslim would at least have to investigate Islam actively (without necessarily converting) after encountering it in its "true" form[118] – he nonetheless envisioned a paradise populated with most of humanity, Muslims and non-Muslims.

118 This statement does not seem to truly represent what al-Ghazaali said. Earlier he said that God may save some "sincere" non-Muslims. Here he claims to be presenting al-Ghazaali's understanding of that and somehow says that they do not have to convert to Islam to be considered among the "sincere." Al-Ghazaali clearly states that those who mix with Muslims and are exposed to the true Islam are "disbelievers forever [in Hell]" (الكفار المخلدون). See Muhammad al-Ghazaali, *Faisal al-Tafriqa bain al-Islaam wa al-Zandiqah* (Muhammad Baiju, ed., 1993), p. 84. The case that Khalil is describing above is a very specific case, as Khalil himself points out in his Ph.D. dissertation. It only applies to the case where the non-Muslim dies "before being able to confirm [the reality of Islam]." Mohammad Hassan Khalil, "Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of 'Others,'" (Ph. D. Dissertation: University of Michigan, 2007), p. 44. The dissertation, like its book form, is a study of an eclectic group of scholars (al-Ghazaali, ibn Taimiyyah, ibn Arabi and Muhammad Rasheed Ridha) and their discussion of who eventually will be "saved."

And even ibn Taymiyya, who is often cited in the works of al-Qaeda and ISIS, imagined a day in which *every single* inhabitant of hell would be admitted into heaven to spend the rest of eternity.[119]

Khalil wrote this passage in response to a lengthy passage in which Harris quotes a number of verses of the Quran that demonstrate how the Quran "vilifies" disbelievers.[120] The point that Khalil was trying to make is not clear. Regardless of how large or small of a group the "disbelievers" are, the Quranic texts Harris quotes discuss the status of "disbelievers" from a Shareeah perspective. In this world, as established in the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), people are to be taken according to their outward appearance or what they show themselves to be, a believer or disbeliever. Without revelation from Allah, no one can say definitely what will happen to any particular individual in the Hereafter, whether they "appear" as Muslims or non-Muslims in this worldly life.[121] In any case, Khalil seems to be trying to establish that there is a "voice" that would show that the Islam that Harris pictures is not necessarily that held by all Muslim scholars.

Khalil is, for good reason, particularly concerned about Harris' approach to the concept of jihad. This has led Khalil to emphasize specific understandings of jihad. (For a nonviolent reading of many passages of the Quran, he relies a good deal on the work *Striving in the Path of God* by Asma Afsaruddin.[122]) Perhaps every Muslim recognizes that jihad has many different levels to it, including

119 Khalil, pp. 100-101.

120 Actually, Khalil ties his discussion back to what Harris (p. 117) wrote, "He [God] prolongs their life and prosperity so that they may continue heaping sin upon sin and all the more richly deserve the torments that await them beyond the grave. In this light, the people who died on September 11 were nothing more than fuel for the eternal fires of God's justice." However, the point of all of the verses that Harris quoted is found in his next sentence, "To convey the relentlessness with which unbelievers are vilified in the text of the Koran, I provide a long compilation of quotations below, in order of their appearance in the text."

121 Incidentally, if one were to argue that a Muslim should not treat non-Muslims as disbelievers because only Allah knows their true fate in the Hereafter, then it follows that no Muslims should treat any other Muslim as a believer because only Allah knows their true fate in the Hereafter as well.

122 This is obviously not the proper place for a detailed study of Afsaruddin's work and the methodology she applied. A few words though may be needed. Her basic conclusion is that jihad is definitely only defensive, to protect "a religious community (not necessarily restricted to Muslims)." In no way, she argues, is it ever meant to be used in the propagation of Islam. She argues that those who have argued from the Quran for a different position essentially only did so to provide "a mandate—*a posteriori*—for the wars of conquest that ensued after the Prophet's death, whose worldly impetus and imperial providence were only to apparent to certain pietist groups, as we observed." Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 280. Here is an example of her academic work (related to a verse that was chosen because it was quoted earlier in this paper). Concerning *Soorah al-Nisaa*, verse 95, she wrote (p. 82), "This brief survey of the exegeses of Qurān 4:95 is revealing of the highly important fact that a number of exegetes, both early and later, specifically understood the nature of striving in this verse in a non-combative sense, so that the phrase *al-mujāhidūn fī sabīl allāh* is primarily understood to refer to those who emigrated to Medina and/or summoned unbelievers to Islam. From Abd al-Razzāq on, though, most exegetes tended to privilege the military sense of striving and yoked the verse to the battle of Badr." In her historical discussion of this verse, she starts with Muqaatil ibn Sulaimaan. She states (p. 80), "It is noteworthy that Muqātil makes no specific reference to fighting in this verse as a component of the striving of the believers with their wealth and their selves against their enemies; the focus is instead on emigration." This is a blatant and difficult error to ignore. In the edition of Muqaatil's *Tafseer* she uses, Sulaimaan inserted while quoting the verse the following words in italics, "Not

jihaad al-nafs ("striving against the lower desires of the soul"), but there is a big difference between recognizing the different levels of jihad and insisting that that is the default meaning of the texts. There are plenty of texts in the Quran and Sunnah that clearly refer to the physical or military jihad. Adding to the confusion as to what Khalil is truly trying to say, in a curious footnote, he writes, "Harris goes on to cite several hadiths (of varying levels of authenticity, according to traditional Sunni standards) that glorify jihad, noting that 'Islamists regularly invoke [such hadiths] as a justification for attacks upon infidels and apostates.'"[123] What could Khalil mean or seek to imply by this statement, "of varying levels of authenticity, according to traditional Sunni standards"? Harris quotes six hadith. The first is not a hadith at all but simply a statement that numerous scholars have made, including al-Bukhari as a chapter heading in his *Sahih*. The second one is recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim. The third one is recorded by Muslim. The fourth one is recorded by al-Bukhari. The fifth one is recorded by Muslim (except Harris got the last word wrong, it should have been hypocrisy instead of disbelief). The last one is recorded by both al-Bukhari and Muslim. Given that all of these hadith are from either al-Bukhari or Muslim, one struggles to figure out how Khalil could have made this statement or what was the purpose behind making such a statement.[124]

Interestingly, Khalil critiques Harris' usage of N. J. Dawood's translation of the Quran. Khalil states, "Throughout *The End of Faith*, Harris utilizes N.J. Dawood's 1956 translation of the Qur'an.

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equal are those believers remaining [at home] *from the battle (an al-ghazu)…*" Then Muqaatil specifically makes mention of Abdullah ibn Jahsh and ibn Umm Maktoom. Then he makes mention of those who stayed behind from the Battle of Tabook as being referred to in this verse. He does not even mention the emigration at all until discussing verse 97, which is specifically about emigration. [Muqaatil ibn Sulaimaan, *Tafseer Muqaatil ibn Sulaimaan* (Abdullah Mahmood Shihaata, ed: Beirut, 2002), vol. 1, pp. 400-401.] The next earliest Quranic commentary she quotes is Abdul-Razzaaq. About his commentary, she writes (p. 80), "Here we have an early explicit connection made between Qurān 4:95 and fighting, specifically at Badr." The next commentator she discusses is Hood ibn Muhakkam, who clearly ties this verse into the physical jihad. Next comes the Shiite al-Qummi whom, she says, does not define the nature of the jihad. She then mentions al-Tabari and al-Waahidi who both tie these verses into the jihad of fighting. Her coverage of al-Zamakhshari, al-Raazi and al-Qurtubi demonstrate that they all tied into military jihad, in particular two of them tying it into Badr. Thus, her claim that both early and later commentators understood "specifically the nature of striving in this verse in a non-combative sense" is completely unfounded, starting with Muqaatil himself. Actually, none of the commentators tied the verse into emigration and it was al-Raazi, a much later scholar, who spoke about the importance summoning unbelievers to Islam.

123 Khalil, p. 102, fn. 19. The six reports Harris quotes are: (1) Jihad is your duty under any ruler, be he godly or wicked (الْجِهَادُ مَاضٍ مَعَ الْبَرِّ وَالْفَاجِرِ); A single endeavor (of fighting) in Allah's Cause in the forenoon or in the afternoon is better than the world and whatever is in (لَغَدْوَةٌ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوْ رَوْحَةٌ، خَيْرٌ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا فِيهَا); A day and a night fighting on the frontier is better than a month of fasting and prayer (رِبَاطُ يَوْمٍ وَلَيْلَةٍ خَيْرٌ مِنْ صِيَامِ شَهْرٍ وَقِيَامِهِ); Nobody who dies and finds good from Allah (in the Hereafter) would wish to come back to this world even if he were given the whole world and whatever is in it, except the martyr who, on seeing the superiority of martyrdom, would like to come back to the world and get killed again (in Allah's Cause) (مَا مِنْ عَبْدٍ يَمُوتُ، لَهُ عِنْدَ اللهِ خَيْرٌ، يَسُرُّهُ أَنْ يَرْجِعَ إِلَى الدُّنْيَا، وَأَنَّ لَهُ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا فِيهَا، إِلَّا الشَّهِيدَ لِمَا يَرَى مِنْ فَضْلِ الشَّهَادَةِ، فَإِنَّهُ يَسُرُّهُ أَنْ يَرْجِعَ إِلَى الدُّنْيَا، فَيُقْتَلَ مَرَّةً أُخْرَى); He who dies without having taken part in a campaign dies in a kind of unbelief (مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَغْزُ، وَلَمْ يُحَدِّثْ بِهِ نَفْسَهُ، مَاتَ عَلَى شُعْبَةٍ مِنْ نِفَاقٍ); Paradise is in the shadow of swords (وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ الجَنَّةَ تَحْتَ ظِلَالِ السُّيُوفِ).

124 Khalil's statement had a critical connotation to it. No one wishes to be in the unenviable position of defending Sam Harris, but if that is what justice demands, it must be done. Along this same pattern, on p. 133 (in a footnote that continues from the previous page), Khalil also quotes Jonathan Brown who stated that the hadith of the martyrs and the seventy-two huris is "a problematic and unreliable Hadith of exhortation." This is in reference to another hadith that has been critiqued since 9-11. It is beyond the scope of this work but Brown's claim in *Misquoting Muhammad* that "leading Sunni Hadith scholars" consider that hadith not reliable seems to be an unfounded claim.

Needless to say, every translation has its shortcomings. But as Abdel Haleem notes, 'from the beginning [Dawoods]' translation was seen to take too many liberties with the text of the Qur'an and to contain many inaccuracies, as was immediately pointed out by reviewers.'"[125] At the same time, Khalil himself repeatedly uses the much more controversial *The Study Quran* as a reference for his interpretations of the text.

The above is not meant to downplay the fact that many times Khalil provides an excellent response to Harris' overgeneralizations, distortions, or lack of logic. Harris often speaks about how people like bin Laden follow the literal meaning of the Quran and that is why, he claims, they do what they do. In the following paragraph Khalil points out one of Harris' inconsistencies on this point,

As for the Islamic rules for conducting warfare justly, Harris refers to Bernard Lewis, who acknowledges that women, children, and the elderly can only be fought in self-defense. But, still in the same sentence, Harris notes that "a little casuistry on the notion of self-defense allows Muslim militants to elude this stricture as well." This muddles Harris's analysis, however, for one would not expect such "casuistry" to be practiced by true literalists.[126]

Another important example is the following, which speaks for itself:

He [Harris] also writes, "we must acknowledge that Muslims have not found anything of substance to say against the actions of the September 11 hijackers." This is an unfortunate myth. (It is ironic that Harris would proceed to ridicule certain Muslims for propagating myths of their own, including the absurd idea that the 9/ 11 hijackers "were really Jews.") The reality is that the targeting of innocents was a recurring theme in the September 2001 condemnations issued by scholars, clerics, and the leadership of, among many other institutions, the fifty-seven-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference, al-Azhar in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jamaat-e-Islami in both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Nahda Renaissance Movement in Tunisia, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam SeMalaysia), and even Hamas.[127]

Yet another important point that Khalil makes is that Harris insists that "moderate" Muslims are influenced by external factors and that is what contributes to their moderation. At the same time, Harris insists that the extremists are motivated simply by the texts of the Quran and nothing else. No external factors drive them to their extremist position. Khalil notes, "If Harris insists that

125 Khalil, p. 107.

126 Khalil, p. 109.

127 Khalil, p. 116. Later (p. 119), Khalil always refutes Thomas Friedman on this point.

'moderation' is fostered by factors external to scripture, however faithful 'moderates' might be, then he must concede that the same is true for violent radicalism, however faithful radicals might be."[128]

Khalil deals with Ayaan Hirsi Ali in Chapter 7 and with all of Dawkins, Hitchens and Dennett in Chapter 8. As with the above example concerning Harris, Khalil is mostly concerned with refuting the arguments that these people make about Islam in particular. Like in the case with Harris, he does a good job of highlighting either their ignorance of Islamic teachings or their inconsistencies in their views.

The biggest and most concerning drawback of this work is that one could walk away from this book with the impression that some of the new atheists' criticisms due apply to "fundamentalist" Islam but are avoided when one turns to a more modern interpretation of Islam. In responding to Harris and Ali, Khalil writes, "They seem to be generally unaware of the nuances of modern Islamic thought and therefore overlook other, potentially more effective avenues for action and reform."[129] This feeling is magnified by noticing his reliance on numerous authors who have a more "modern," less "fundamental" approach to the Quranic text, such as Sherman Jackson, Hossein Nasr (and *The Study Quran*), and others.

Overall, this book is definitely an important contribution in refuting the numerous inaccuracies of the new atheists concerning jihad, violence in Islam, radicalism, and the like.

3.4 Summary

Above was a brief summary of some of the most important printed material on the new atheists from a Muslim perspective. Numerous false claims and incoherent arguments made concerning Islam have been discussed in these works. There does seem to be room for more, as well as room for some improvement. The issues related to new atheists need to be discussed from a well-grounded "salafi" perspective, in other words, a perspective representing the message of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his Companions and not some later development in Islam. In particular, there are numerous questions related to issues of faith (*aqeedah*) that need to be responded to directly.

4. Suggested Approaches to "New Atheism"

128 Khalil, p. 128.

129 Khalil, pp. 167-168.

Much of the appeal of the new atheists is related to their claimed attachment to science. A suggested approach in dealing with new atheists from an Islamic perspective would have to start with some basic premises. These premises would include the following:

1. The Quran is not a book of "science," nor does the Sunnah concentrate on "science." When it comes to creation, there are a lot of points that the Quran and the Sunnah are actually silent about. It is not prudent to try to force a view on the Quran while the Quran does not truly lend itself to any particular view.
2. From an Islamic perspective, the Quran is Allah's speech and the Sunnah is Allah's inspiration. At the same time, the cosmos is Allah's creation, concerning which He has full and complete knowledge. Allah is truthful in His speech and inspiration. It is inconceivable that Allah will reveal something about His creation that is not true in reality.
3. There are texts of the Quran and Sunnah that are definitive in their implications (qatiee) and there are others that are conjectural (dhanni). Although science revolves around uncertainty and plausibility, there is much in science that one could call "definitive" and much which is conjectural or "unproven theory." Based on (2) above, there should never be any true contradiction between what is definitive in the revelation and what is definitive in science. However, there could be an apparent contradiction between what is definitive in one and conjectural in the other, or conjectural in both. In the former case, whichever is definitive, either revelation or science, would take precedence over the other.[130]
4. It is extremely important to differentiate revelatory text and scientific fact from their corresponding interpretations and explanations.
5. There are clear limitations on "science." As is well-known, the domain of science is limited to that which can be observed or tested and the ramifications those observations. Anything beyond that must, by agreement, beyond the scope of science, meaning science cannot comment on it.
6. Behind every scientific explanation, there is a philosophy or assumptions that work to determine that explanation. The philosophy or assumptions are usually left unstated, especially when a model or theory works well in explaining a physical reality.

Given the above, some of the claims and views of the new atheists will be discussed.

130 These are points that ibn Taimiyyah is well-known for making in his work *Dar al-Taarudh al-Aql wa al-Naql.* A more recent work discussing this topic in more detail is Jaabir Ameer, *Manhaj al-Salaf wa al-Mutakallimeen fi Muwaafaqah al-Aql li-l-Naql Wa Athaar al-Manhajain fi al-Aqeedah* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Adhwaa al-Salaf, 1998).

4.1 Models, Theories, Interpretations, and Facts

Before moving forward, it is important to discuss some points related to models, theories, interpretations and facts. Science works best when matters are observable, reproducible, and testable.[131] Models and theories are then developed for issues which are less directly discernable. In scientific lingo, "a theory is, essentially, a description of an operation or mechanism, which, if realized physically (materially) or mathematically, say in the form of a computational simulation, would reproduce the phenomenon one wished to understand."[132] This means that there is some substantiation for what scientists call a "scientific theory," even if among the general public they may refer to something as simply a theory and not a fact.

Virtually all theories are based on assumptions. Hawking stated, "Cosmology cannot predict anything about the universe unless it makes some assumption about the initial conditions. Without such an assumption, all one can say is that things are as they are now because they were as they were at an earlier stage."[133]

For example, in estimating the age of the oldest rocks on earth, uranium-lead dating is used. The half-life of Uranium-238 is most commonly used. The half-life for uranium-238 to decay and form lead-206 is over four billion years. As Schön, et al., perceptively noted, "The half-lives of ^{238}U and ^{235}U are extremely long, and obviously cannot be measured by following the decay rate with time in the laboratory."[134] As such, the exponential decay is estimated via equations—more than one has been postulated with varying rates of error. It is taken as a given—an assumption—that at no time over its four billion years does Uranium-238 have a sudden change in its behavior. Such an assumption, of course, cannot actually be proven. Even given that assumption, it is still not easy to determine the exact half-lives of these two isotopes. Schön, et al., stated, "As it is likely that the mass-spectrometric techniques will further improve, we urge that concerted efforts be made to re-measure the half-lives of ^{238}U and ^{235}U with improved accuracy… Finally, one may raise the question whether the two uranium isotopes will continue to provide the most accurate clocks for

131 In the current environment of scientific studies, the scientific world has been rocked by both fraud and in various fields, according to some, the phenomenon of irreproducible results (described as a replication crisis). Concerning fraud, see Nicolas Chevassus-au-Louis, *Fraud in the Lab: The High Stakes of Scientific Research,* Nicholas Elliot, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019). Numerous papers have been written concerning the replication crisis; one may see the references given in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Replication_crisis.

132 Bond, p. 28.

133 Stephen Hawking, "Quantum Cosmology," in Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose, *The Nature of Space and Time* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 75.

134 R. Schön, G. Winkler and W. Kutschera, "A Critical Review of Experimental Data for the Half-Lives of the Uranium Isotopes 238U and 235U," *Applied Radiation and Isotopes* (60:2004), p. 264.

geochronology."[135] The same kinds of questions can be raised for light traveling great distances, time, and through various phenomenon—is everything constant and how could that be known? In fact, recently in physics they are beginning to accept the idea that some of the "fundamental constants" can change. An article written in 2001 wrote,

Changing Constants Cause Controversy: The times, they are a-changin', and so are the fundamental constants of physics, an international group of physicists reports. After analyzing light from distant quasars, the team has concluded that the fine-structure constant, which is related to the speed of light, has shifted over time. The claim is extremely controversial, but scientists are taking it seriously—if skeptically.[136]

As the quote stated, there was a lot of skepticism in the field concerning this, with some blatantly stating that it was incorrect.[137] However, more recently in 2010 Hamish Johnston wrote,

Billions of years ago the strength of the electromagnetic interaction was different at opposite ends of universe. That's the surprising conclusion of a group of physicists in Australia, who have studied light from ancient quasars. The researchers found that the fine-structure constant, known as α, has changed in both space and time since the Big Bang.

The discovery – dubbed by one physicist not involved in the work as the "physics news of the year" – is further evidence that α may not be constant after all. If correct, the conclusion would violate a fundamental tenet of Einstein's general theory of relativity. The nature of the asymmetry in α – dubbed the "Australian dipole" – could also point scientists towards a single unified theory of physics and shed further light on the nature of the universe…

Despite being dubbed a constant, there are, however, good theoretical reasons why α might vary with space or time. A changing α could, for example, help solve the biggest mystery of physics – how to formulate a single unified theory that describes the four fundamental forces: gravity, electromagnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces.[138]

Summarizing a very recent view of this question (2017), Weiner writes that it is not really known if the constants change or not, as some studies have shown a slight change while others not.[139] Writing in 2017, Siegel also argues that there is evidence that the constants have not

135 Schön, et al., p. 271.

136 C. Seife, "COSMOLOGY: Changing Constants Cause Controversy." Science, 293(5534), 1410b–1411. 2001. doi:10.1126/science.293.5534.1410b

137 See, for example, the article written in 2005, http://math.ucr.edu/home/baez/physics/ParticleAndNuclear/constants.html

138 Hamish Johnston, "Changes spotted in fundamental constant," https://physicsworld.com/a/changes-spotted-in-fundamental-constant/

139 Sophie Weiner, "Are the Fundamental Constants of the Universe Changing?" *Popular Mechanics*, Sept. 30, 2017. https://www.popularmechanics.com/space/a28455/fundamental-constants-changing/

changed.[140] Yet a more recent article (October 2018) is entitled, "There's a glitch at the edge of the universe that could remake physics." The subtitle is, "One mysterious number determines how physics, chemistry and biology work. But controversial experimental hints suggest it's not one number at all."[141] In sum, "science" has recognized that it is an open question as to whether "constants" could change under different circumstances. As seen above, changing "constants" may actually be a good thing as it could possibly allow for an explanation of things that were previously unexplainable.

In a recent article, Siegel speaks about some of the ways that the universe changes even on a yearly basis—a very short amount of time. For example, he states that in 2020 a day will be exactly 14 nanoseconds longer than it was last year. Also, the moon will be further away from the Earth in 2020.[142] With all the changes that scientists can note going from year to year (and that they do their best to capture in models), one would expect that they would perhaps be more cautious when speaking about creation billions of years ago. True, the models may be very precise but one cannot truly account for all of the changes that occurred over time, including perhaps some that scientists are completely unaware of.

In any case, the important aspect with respect to theories and models is how well they "explain things." In other words, for many scientists, their ultimate value is in the model's ability to predict, even if the underlying assumptions are more idealizations rather than realistic.[143] As the world renown Hawking explained,

[A] theory is just a model of the universe, or a restricted part of it, and a set of rules that relate quantities in the model to observations that we make. It exists only in our minds, and does not have any other reality (whatever that might mean). A theory is a good theory if it satisfies two requirements: it must accurately describe a large class of observations on the basis of a model that contains only a few arbitrary elements, and it must make definite predictions about the results of future observations.[144]

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140 Ethan Siegel, "Distant Quasars show that Fundamental Constants Never Change," *Forbes,* https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2017/01/05/distant-quasars-show-that-fundamental-constants-never-change/#493a7cba47ee

141 Michael Brooks, "There's a glitch at the edge of the universe that could remake physics," https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg24031982-200-theres-a-glitch-at-the-edge-of-the-universe-that-could-remake-physics/

142 Ethan Siegel, "This is How the Universe Changes with Every New Year that Passes," *Forbes*, https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2020/01/01/this-is-how-the-universe-changes-with-every-new-year-that-passes/#57828e3416f1

143 In the realm of economics, this is best characterized by Milton Friedman's views on the assumptions. See Uskali Mäki, *The Methodology of Positive Economics: Reflections on the Milton Friedman Legacy* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 99-104.

144 Quoted from Adrian Bardon, *A Brief History of the Philosophy of Time* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 75.

Additionally, Hawking wrote, "I don't demand that a theory correspond to reality because I don't know what it is. Reality is not a quality you can test with litmus paper. All I'm concerned with is that the theory should predict the results of measurements. Quantum theory does this very successfully. It predicts that the result of an observation is either that the cat is alive or that it is dead."[145] Sometimes, the model even goes beyond the levels of current knowledge, and thus not truly accepted, only to be verified later. The classic example of that was Dirac, who came up with an equation that pointed to antiparticles, and who later admitted that "his equation was smarter than he was."[146]

However, models and theorizing can take one out of the realm of science into "philosophy." Scientists usually ignore or leave unstated the philosophy of the science—taking the philosophy's ramifications as givens. Dennett, one of the four horsemen of the new atheists, wrote years ago that the Darwinian revolution goes beyond science into philosophy. Dennett stated,

Darwin's new perspective turns several traditional assumptions upside down, undermining our standard ideas about what ought to count as satisfying answers to this ancient and inescapable question. Here science and philosophy get completely intertwined. Scientists sometimes deceive themselves into thinking that philosophical ideas are only, at best, decorations or parasitic commentaries on the hard, objective triumphs of science, and that they themselves are immune to the confusions that philosophers devote their lives to dissolving. But there is no such thing as philosophy-free science; there is only science whose philosophical baggage is taken on board without examination.

The Darwinian Revolution is both a scientific and a philosophical revolution, and neither revolution could have occurred without the other.[147]

Lawrence Krauss actually speaks about a time in the future, many, many years from now, in which, he claims, as the universe expands even further, astronomers will only be able to see one galaxy. Their view of the world will be like that of "science" one hundred years ago and they will be completely wrong.[148] Who is to say that something stupendous like that did not happen in the past

145 Stephen Hawking, "The Debate," in Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose, *The Nature of Space and Time* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 121.

146 Kenneth S. Schmitz, *Physical Chemistry: Concepts and Theory* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier, 2017), p. 27.

147 Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolutions and the Meanings of Life* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 21. Interestingly, Dennett, as the passage continues, was more concerned with philosophers clinging onto old thoughts and not embracing Darwinism. However, the point that he made goes both ways. Darwinian thought is often combined with philosophy or other ideas that take it beyond science.

148 Lawrence Krauss, "Lawrence Krauss: Atheism and the Spirit of Science," *The Agenda with Steve Paikin,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MawwCJ5g-2Y

and everything that astrophysicists are coming up with now is completely wrong? This, at the very least, cries out for some humility when it comes to analyzing issues that are well beyond what is observable and directly testable. (Of course, on the other hand, Krauss could be completely wrong on this claim he has made.)

It is actually this distance between fact and scientific theory that leads to paradigm shifts.[149] At one point in time, the steady state explanation for the beginning of the universe was considered stronger than the big bang theory. One can assume that at that time there were scientists (speaking to theologians, for example) arguing that what they were teaching was "science" and not "myth." Now that the steady state model has pretty much been abandoned in favor of the big bang theory,[150] one finds the same phenomenon today—scientists proclaiming that this is "science" and definitely not "myth."

The point of the above is not to downplay science or the importance of scientific theory or modeling—this paper was written using technology based a lot on scientific theory. Without a doubt, there are scientific facts (especially in the realm of what is observable). There are numerous theories or models that work quite well, that give a lot of confidence that they are truly reflective of reality. There are numerous other theories and models that cannot arguably produce "definitiveness" or "certainty" although they represent the limit of today's knowledge. Again, at times, there has to be some intellectual humility.

4.1.1 New Atheists Going Beyond "Science" and "Reason"

New atheists have a tendency to speak like they are coming from a position of science and reason, as opposed to what people of religion follow. Many of the new atheists called themselves "the brights," who believe in a "naturalistic worldview—free of supernatural and mystical elements."[151] Sam Harris (with Annaka Harris) even started a project entitled, "Project Reason," which was supposed to be "spreading science and secular values," because, again, they are the true reasoning people.[152] It has even been claimed that "reason" is the atheists' new god.[153]

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149 As humans, it is important to learn from one's mistakes. Such has been done in engineering design, as catalogued in Henry Petroski, *Design Paradigms: Case Histories of Error and Judgment in Engineering* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

150 See Chet Raymo, "Big Bang vs. Steady State: How the Big Bang Theory Won the 20th Century's Biggest Cosmological Debate," *Scientific American* (February 2005), pp. 98-99; Helge Kragh, *Cosmology and Controversy: The Historical Development of Two Theories of the Universe* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

151 See https://www.the-brights.net/vision/essays/futrell_geisert_who.html.

152 "Project Reason" has been quietly shut down.

153 https://bigthink.com/how-atheists-bow-down-to-the-god-of-reason

Any scientist should be very careful about mixing science with pseudoscience, presenting personal opinion as if it were science, and being self-contradicting (irrational, unreasonable). As such, it is actually inexcusable for the new atheists to demonstrate gross ignorance when it comes to speaking about Islam (as the earlier publications reviewed often highlighted). But their issues of this nature go well-beyond their discussion of religion.

Whitehouse's book on Sam Harris is filled with critiques of Harris' lack of logic through his work *End of Faith.* In his Ph.D. thesis no less, Harris was not lacking in logical fallacies as well. For Harris, of course, there must be a material, observable thing going on for something to be "real" in his view. He cannot admit, for example, that there may be something outside of the scope of the laboratory. As a result, he writes about consciousness, "With respect to our current scientific understanding of the mind, the major religions remain committed to a variety of doctrines that have been growing less plausible by the day. While the ultimate relationship between consciousness and matter has not been entirely settled (the subject of the Chapter 1 [of his thesis]), any naive conception of a soul can now be jettisoned on account of the mind's obvious dependency upon the brain. The idea that there might be an immortal soul capable of reasoning, feeling love, remembering life events, etc, all the while being metaphysically independent of the brain seems untenable given that damage to the relevant neural circuits obliterates these specific capacities in a living person."[154] This is yet another illogical conclusion that Sam Harris makes. If the soul is something beyond what science can perceive and therefore is beyond scientific recordings of the brain/mind, how can he make a conclusion about the state of the soul simply because the physical state of the brain may be impaired? He has to admit that based on the religious premises of the concept of the soul, he cannot answer such a question. The soul may be doing just fine even if the brain/mind is not. Not being able to answer such a question means that he cannot use this question to deny that a soul exists.

An example from Lawrence Krauss will be highlighted here as another example. Krauss was speaking about religion and essentially arguing that via religion, people impose their views upon reality. He then said, "You end up with nonsense. You end up saying that homosexuality is bad when in fact there is every bit of evidence that homosexuality is perfectly normal and natural in many species, not just in humans." His argument is that is if something is "normal and natural," it could not be bad.[155] Clearly that is not science. In addition, Krauss accepts that humans are "hardwired"

154 Sam Harris, "The Moral Landscape: How Science Could Determine Human Values" (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of California at Los Angeles, 2009), p. 49.

155 Lawrence Krauss, "Lawrence Krauss: Atheism and the Spirit of Science," *The Agenda with Steve Paikin,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MawwCJ5q-2Y. In general, from a Shareeah perspectives, humans should not be imitating animals. Anyone

to seek spiritual meaning of life and other aspects of religion. Then he immediately said that that does not make it "rational," meaning, of course, good or acceptable.[156] Once again, Krauss is making a judgment that is not "scientific" here but, in addition, he is contradicting the reasoning that he had earlier used: something that is normal and natural should be "good."

4.2 The Existence of God

Even though the new atheists are known as atheists and they claim to rely on science, they cannot disprove the existence of God. Any claim on their part that God does not exist is not science but "faith" on their part. This point is readily admitted by some of them, such as Dawkins and Krauss. Thus, one of the chapters in Dawkins' famous *The God Delusion* is entitled, "Why there almost certainly is no god." Krauss stated, "I cannot prove that God does not exist. That is impossible to do."[157]

The most that they try to argue is that God is "irrelevant." In other words, due to strides main in evolutionary biology and physics, it can be demonstrated, they claim, that all of this existence and evolution can occur on its own without the need of any external being such as God. Obviously, this is a far cry from claiming that God does not exist. Even if one accepts that premise, it does not preclude the possibility that it was God who set all of this in motion.

The most that scientists can say is that based on their observations—by which they have determined the "laws" of physics, biology, and son—actions and reactions seem to be happening on their own. There is no need for any puppeteer or magician to be running the show. There is though a question that is beyond the capacity of science via mere observation. Do these "forces of nature" actually have "power" and "ability" on their own or does that power and ability actually come from an external source, without which nothing would actually be able to occur. The expected answer from most scientists is probably obvious: all of these events are happening on their own without any invisible external force. That answer, though, would not be scientifically accurate. The more accurate answer would be that these events seem to occur on their own, within their own ability, and there

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who has ever owned a dog, for example, can probably think of many behaviors from their dog that they would not like to see in other humans, even if they are natural for a dog.

156 "Rise of the New Atheists?" *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* (April 30, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEClFXjx_fQ

157 Lawrence Krauss, "Lawrence Krauss: Atheism and the Spirit of Science," *The Agenda with Steve Paikin,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MawwCJ5q-2Y

is no need to assume any external force. Like being unable to prove the existence of God, scientists also cannot disprove that it is an external force that is needed for everything to actually act.

Muslims have a very clear belief on this point. A famous expression that Muslims often repeat is لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله, which literally could be translated as, "there is no power or strength except in Allah," or, "there is no motion or power except by Allah." Thus, nothing happens in this cosmos except by the will and creation of Allah, including the "natural laws" that Allah has created. This expression postulates something that the new atheists would consider redundant and unnecessary. However, this is not a case of a scientific "fact" contradicting an Islamic belief. This is a case of, like belief in God itself, believing in something concerning which science does not have an opinion.

4.2.1 A Quranic Argument and Krauss' Something from Nothing

There are numerous rational arguments in the Quran.[158] However, for the most part, those rational arguments deal more with why Allah alone should be worshipped rather than whether or not Allah exists. The logic behind that is clear: from an Islamic perspective, humans have a natural inclination (*fitrah*) to recognize that there is a Supreme Being who created this cosmos.[159] Thus, for most of humanity, lengthy arguments related to the existence of God are not necessary.

At the same time, though, that does not mean that there are no proofs in the Quran related to God's existence. One of their more powerful philosophical arguments for the existence of God has been captured in a very succinct, beautiful passage of the Quran:

أَمۡ خُلِقُواْ مِنۡ غَيۡرِ شَيۡءٍ أَمۡ هُمُ ٱلۡخَٰلِقُونَ أَمۡ خَلَقُواْ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَۚ بَل لَّا يُوقِنُونَ

«Or were they created by nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Rather, they are not certain» [At-Tur: 35-36]

The conclusion of this passage is very clear: There must be a creator.

Recently though "new atheist" Lawrence Krauss has made a lot of noise about countering that long-held belief about creation. He claims to have found a way that creation can come from

158 See, for example, Abdul-Kareem Ubaidaat, al-Adillah al-Aqliyyah fi al-Quran wa Makaanatuhaa fi Taqreer Masaail al-Aqeedah al-Islaamiyyah (Amman, Jordan: Daar al-Nafaais, 2000); Saood al-Areefi, Al-Adillah al-Aqliyyah al-Naqliyyah ala Usool al-Itiqaad (Makkah, Saudi Arabia: Daar Aalam al-Fawaaid, 1419 A.H.).

159 In recent literature, there have been a number of books speaking about how belief in God is "hardwired" into the brain. Of course, the secular scientist explanation of this "hardwiring" is going to be very different than the Islamic notion of *fitrah*. One of the first of those works was Dean Hamer's *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired into Our Genes* (New York, New York: First Anchor Books, 2005). A little after that work came Matthew Alper's *The "God" Part of the Brain: A Scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc. 2006). Hamer was of the opinion that the VMAT2 gene played in a vital role in one's level of spirituality. The point of Alper's book, essentially, is that to cope with the fear of death, the idea of a "god" evolved in humans' minds.

nothing.[160] Krauss wrote a book explaining his view: *A Universe from Nothing: Why There is Something Rather than Nothing*.[161] A one-line review of this book is very simple: Krauss does not deliver what he promises. Here is his definition of "nothing,"

By *nothing*, I do not mean *nothing*, but rather nothing-in this case, the nothingness we normally call empty space. That is to say, if I take a region of space and get rid of everything within it—dust, gas, people, and even the radiation passing through, namely absolutely *everything* within that region-if the remaining empty space *weighs* something, then that would correspond to the existence of a cosmological term such as Einstein invented.[162]

The strange thing is that every time Krauss describes "nothing," he is describing "something." For example, in his speeches, he emphasizes that it was found that empty space "weighs something," or, "has energy." That must mean that it is something and not nothing. Brooks points out how this book simply fails to delivers what it had promised. In his review of the work, he wrote,

Yet despite its clear strengths, *A Universe From Nothing* is not quite, as Richard Dawkins hopefully declares in the afterword, a "knockout blow" for the idea that a deity must have kicked the universe into being.

Krauss does want to deliver that blow: towards the end of the book, he promises that we really can have something from nothing – "even the laws of physics may not be necessary or required". Ultimately, though, he has to perform a little sleight of hand. Space and time can indeed come from nothing; nothing, as Krauss explains beautifully, being an extremely unstable state from which the production of "something" is pretty much inevitable. However, the laws of physics can't be conjured from nothing. In the end, the best answer is that they arise from our existence within a multiverse, where all the universes have their own laws – ours being just so for no particular reason.

Krauss contends that the multiverse makes the question of what determined our laws of nature "less significant". Truthfully, it just puts the question beyond science – for now, at least. That (together with the frustratingly opaque origins of a multiverse) means Krauss can't quite knock out those who think there must ultimately be a prime mover. Not that this matters too much: the juvenile asides that litter the first third of the book (for example, "I am tempted to retort here that theologians are

160 In his public appearances, he will add the caveat, "Maybe, just maybe," "it is possible," and the like.

161 Apparently, new atheist Christopher Hitchens was supposed to write the introduction to this work but he fell ill and died before being able to do so. Instead, new atheist Richard Dawkins wrote an afterword to the book.

162 Lawrence Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There is Something Rather than Nothing* (New York, New York: Free Press, 2012), pp. 48-49.

expert at nothing") mean that, by the time we get to the fascinating core of his argument, Krauss will be preaching only to the converted.[163]

Physicist George Ellis had the following to say about Krauss' work,

Certainly not. He is presenting untested speculative theories of how things came into existence out of a pre-existing complex of entities, including variational principles, quantum field theory, specific symmetry groups, a bubbling vacuum, all the components of the standard model of particle physics, and so on. He does not explain in what way these entities could have pre-existed the coming into being of the universe, why they should have existed at all, or why they should have had the form they did. And he gives no experimental or observational process whereby we could test these vivid speculations of the supposed universe-generation mechanism. How indeed can you test what existed before the universe existed? You can't.

Thus what he is presenting is not tested science. It's a philosophical speculation, which he apparently believes is so compelling he does not have to give any specification of evidence that would confirm it is true. Well, you can't get any evidence about what existed before space and time came into being. Above all he believes that these mathematically based speculations solve thousand year old philosophical conundrums, without seriously engaging those philosophical issues. The belief that all of reality can be fully comprehended in terms of physics and the equations of physics is a fantasy. As pointed out so well by Eddington in his Gifford lectures, they are partial and incomplete representations of physical, biological, psychological, and social reality.

And above all Krauss does not address why the laws of physics exist, why they have the form they have, or in what kind of manifestation they existed before the universe existed (which he must believe if he believes they brought the universe into existence). Who or what dreamt up symmetry principles, Lagrangians, specific symmetry groups, gauge theories, and so on? He does not begin to answer these questions. It's very ironic when he says philosophy is bunk and then himself engages in this kind of attempt at philosophy.[164]

Other reviewers came to essentially the same conclusion: the question that the book claims to answer (and which is also the title of many of Krauss lectures) has not been answered. The

163 Michael Brooks, "Trying to make the cosmos out of nothing," (*Newscientist*, January 11, 2012) https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21328472-000-trying-to-make-the-cosmos-out-of-nothing/

164 Quoted in John Horgan, "Is Lawrence Krauss a Physicist, or just a Bad Philosopher," *Scientific American* (Nov. 20, 2015), https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/is-lawrence-krauss-a-physicist-or-just-a-bad-philosopher/

following exchange between Krauss and Hogan may finally explain why the real answer was not found in the book:

Horgan: Larry, I'll always be grateful to you for helping bring me up to speed on modern cosmology 22 years ago when I was researching an article for Scientific American. And what's disappointing is that, apart from the discovery of the acceleration of the cosmic expansion, which was certainly a big surprise, nothing has really changed since then. You and/or your popularizing colleagues--Hawking, Greene, Kaku, Susskind--are still marketing various unsubstantiated versions of inflation, multiverse theories, string theory, vacuum energy, anthropic principle, etc. What's ironic is that, although you don't have any more evidence for these speculations, your marketing of them has become more aggressive... and yet you accuse ME of hype.

Krauss: John… first, I didn't make any definitive claims.. and I get offended when people claim I make such.. second I tried to indicate how much has changed in the last 22 years.. that is the purpose of the book.. things are dramatically different than they were then, and I went through a very careful analysis to describe these changes..... the analysis of fluctuations in the CMB, the discovery that the universe is flat.. these are REAL empirical discoveries that both impact upon and add credence to many of our ideas.

Horgan: Larry, so you're saying that you're not claiming to have answered the question posed by your book's title? You're just tossing some ideas around, and you don't expect anyone to take them too seriously? OK, that's a useful clarification. It also means that things have not progressed in the last 22 years, in spite of what you just asserted. I think you better tell Dawkins, before he embarrasses himself further.

Krauss did not respond.[165]

In sum, the succinct and clear rational argument presented by the Quran is not in threat of being debunked by Krauss' book, regardless of the title of his work.

4.3 Evolution

Evolution has been a tricky question for many Muslims.[166] In reality, though, it seems that there are many claims of evolution that the Quran and Sunnah are simply silent about. Hence, if

165 Ibid.

166 Muslim responses to evolution have been somewhat all over the place, illustrating, perhaps, both the difficulty and the importance of the topic. Howard concluded his study of evolution and its impact on Muslims by saying, "With regard to the question of Islam's compatibility with evolution, we have encountered positions as various as creative assimilation (Bergsonians), radical rejection (Traditionalists), naive compatibilism ('Abduh)

such matters are determined by observation, there should not be any objection to them from an Islamic perspective. For example, this author is unaware of any texts that would explicitly deny that the cosmos is billions of years old[167] or that species have gone through changes described by evolutionary theory.

4.3.1 The Appearance of the First Human

There is one area in particular in which the theory of evolution seems to definitely contradict what is stated in revelation: the appearance of the first human. The Quran and Sunnah are unequivocal that Adam was the first human and that he was distinct from the rest of creation. Numerous verses and hadith explain in detail the sources of Adam's creation.

The claims of evolution, of course, are very different. Humans are not essentially different from the rest of the species on earth. In fact, currently there is the theory of the last universal common ancestor, from whom all living creatures (including humans) on earth have descended. More specifically, the hominoids all descend from a common ancestor. Thus, humans, chimpanzees, gibbons, orangutans, and gorillas are essentially cousins to one another, according to evolution. In fact, evolution itself is truly about the origins of species, not the origins of life, and humans are simply one of those species.

Richard Dawkins found it morally appalling that Christians would teach young children about Hell and as a consequence he set out to write his own book for young children. The finished product was *The Magic of Reality: How We Know what's Really True*. Although targeted for young readers, it is one of the simplest and clearest expositions of the concepts of evolution with regard to the appearance of the first human. As Dawkins writes in his chapter, "Who was the first person?,"

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and critical reconciliation (Islamizers)." Damian A. Howard, *Being Human in Islam: The Impact of the Evolutionary Worldview* (London, England: Routledge, 2011), p. 157. Malek (pp. 16-17) also summarizes a number of Muslim views on this topic. Something like a concept of evolution actually existed among Muslims long before Darwin appeared. Thus, one actually finds John William Draper, who lived at the time of Darwin, speaking of a "Mohammedan theory of evolution." In addition, Draper noted, "Sometimes, not without surprise, we meet with ideas which we flatter ourselves have originated in our own times. Thus our modern doctrines of evolution and development were taught in their schools. In fact, they carried them much farther than we are disposed to do extending them even to inorganic or mineral things." [John William Draper, *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (New York, New York: D. Appleton and Company, n.d.), p. 118.] Muhammad Sultan Shah has provided a summary of that history in his, "Pre-Darwinian Muslim Scholars' Views on Evolution" (http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/uoc/PDF-FILES/%2811%29%20Dr.%20Sultan%20Shah_86_2.pdf). It should be noted that the majority of the scholars he discusses would fall outside of the scope of what is traditionally looked upon as "orthodox Islam," scholars, for example, such as al-Jahiz, al-Farabi, ibn Sina, the cult known as Ikhwan al-Safa, and others.

167 Some may object to that statement, as Allah has stated, "Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne. He covers the night with the day, [another night] chasing it rapidly; and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, subjected by His command. Unquestionably, His is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, Lord of the worlds" [Al-A'raaf: 54]. However, the term for day in Arabic (*yaum*) is a very flexible term and could imply a lengthy period of time, as found, for example, in the verse, "And indeed, a day with your Lord is like a thousand years of those which you count" [Al-Hajj: 47].

according to evolutionary theory, there is no such thing as the "first person" or first human.[168] This is because evolution is a very lengthy process by which one species transforms into another species. As Dawkins explains,

Once again, though, everything is gradual. You are *Homo sapiens* and your 50-000-greats-grandfather were *Homo erectus*. But there were never was a *Homo erectus* who suddenly gave birth to a *Homo sapiens* baby.

So, the question of who was the first person, and when they lived, doesn't have a precise answer. It's kind of fuzzy, like the answer to the question: When did you stop being a baby and become a toddler? At some point, probably less than a million years ago but more than a hundred thousand years ago, our ancestors were sufficiently different from us that a modern person wouldn't have been able to breed with them if they had met.

Whether we should call *Homo erectus* a person, a human, is a different question.[169]

Dawkins then goes on to explain how these conclusions have been arrived at. It is basically though the analysis of fossils and DNA.[170] With respect to fossils, a number of physical changes occurred between *Homo Erectus* and *Homo Sapiens*. This author is not aware of their being a complete set of fossils detailing these changes. An online pamphlet meant to dispel some of the myths regarding evolution stated, "In human evolution there are at least a dozen intermediate fossil stages since hominids branched off from the great apes six million years ago. Considering the exceptionally low probability that a dead plant or animal will fossilize it is remarkable we have as many fossils as we do."[171] Somehow, that does not sound very impressive and has led to the problem of "gaps" in the chain. Furthermore, fossils only occur in sedimentary rocks while, for dating purposes, igneous rocks are needed. Hence, any dates are going to be approximations as they are based on the rocks above and below the fossils found.[172]

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168 First Dawkins deals with different religious beliefs concerning the creation of the first human, covering the beliefs of Tasmanian aborigines, the Hebrew tribes, and the Norse people. He deals with them to make sure that the young readers do not believe in such myths. See Richard Dawkins, *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True* (New York, New York: Free Press, 2011), pp. 32-37. He does not discuss Islamic beliefs which differ on many important points from that of the Hebrew tribes.

169 Dawkins, *The Magic*, p. 41.

170 Dawkins (*The Magic*, p. 51) states that chimpanzees are humans' closest cousins. To his credit though he does not quote the popular idea that chimpanzees and humans agree in 98% or so of their DNA. This popular misconception has been debunked by Daniel Haqiqatjou, "Can Islam Object to Evolution? Evaluating Human-Chimp Genetic Similarity," https://yaqeeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Can-Islam-Object-to-Evolution.pdf

171 "The 10 Myths About Evolution (And How We Know it Really Happened)," https://www.skeptic.com/downloads/top-10-evolution-myths.pdf

172 Dawkins, *Magic*, p. 43.

With respect to DNA, one can currently observe how DNA is passed from adults to children. Similarly, what happens when cross-breeding takes place. This process of transmitting of DNA is assumed to have happened continuously in the past, leading back to the last common ancestor.

Finally, one can witness today "evolution" taking place in bacteria, fruit flies and tilapia. Hence, the idea of evolution occurring seems to be a proven fact. This possibly could be an actual case where the definitiveness of the revelation contradicts what is claimed to be the definitiveness of science.

4.3.2 But Don't Homo Sapiens Seem Very Different from the Other Species?

A cursory look at the achievements of humankind in comparison to the "animal world" will most likely lead one to identify clear differences among them. The building of civilizations, culture, concepts of law, arts, aesthetics, abstract conceptualizations, and, yes, even religion are unique among *Homo Sapiens*. Being human goes much beyond the simple knowledge of "using tools," for example, which animals could do to some extent (as early humanoids did as well).[173]

It is now theorized that some 300,000 years ago, there were nine humanoid species on earth. According to Paleontologist and Evolutionary Biologist Longrich, by 10,000 years ago, they were all gone and only *Homo Sapiens* remained.[174] Longrich suggests that it was the appearance of the *Homo sapiens* that drove those other forms into distinction. He highlights one characteristic that separated the *Homo Sapiens* from the rest. He wrote, "But cave paintings, carvings, and musical instruments hint at something far more dangerous [than the violent nature of *Homo Sapiens*]: a sophisticated capacity for abstract thought and communication. The ability to cooperate, plan, strategise, manipulate and deceive may have been our ultimate weapon."[175]

It has been argued that the appearance of this very different, special creature was a "sudden emergence." A single mutation and a leap (saltation), it has been claimed, changed everything, according to Lanyon. She concluded her dissertation by arguing,

Apart from a few unsophisticated stone tools, our hominid ancestors appear not to have made any cognitive advance over that of extant Great Apes. Before the emergence of H. sapiens, our ancestors

173 See Peter Lawton Bond, "A Complex Systems Theory and Model of Cultural Evolution and Revolution: The Case of Homo Sapiens," (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Liverpool, 2017), p. 194.

174 Nick Longrich, "Were other humans the victims of the sixth mass extinction?" https://theconversation.com/were-other-humans-the-first-victims-of-the-sixth-mass-extinction-126638

175 Ibid.

did not engage in complex collaborative activities like hunting, preparing and sharing meals, and building shelters. They did not engage in any rituals that celebrate various life-stages, the most visible that we recognize as human-like being burial of the dead. The archaeological record has not brought forward any evidence of tokens relating to art, personal adornment, or items of any symbolic nature. These collective activities together with a sense of an ego are underpinned by social 'institutions' in modern humans, but we have no evidence of any social systems at all associated with our hominid ancestors. Only with the sudden emergence of H. sapiens do we find artefacts that might reflect something akin to human-like cognitive behaviour…

I have contended in this thesis that modern humans (H. sapiens) arose as the result of a single mutation that radically altered the developmental program of our immediate forebear…

Although we are a long way from identifying the crucial differences between human and ape-like cognition, we nevertheless are able to point to some of the radical differences in the building of the human brain during development. Ramus (2006) believes changes to regulatory systems of gene expression have been a major factor in determining the human phenotype. He finds that about 70% of our gene variants are human specific, and a large proportion are expressed most highly in the brain. I have outlined some of the recent findings from developmental neurobiology that offer tantalizing suggestions for how a radical change in human brain architecture has allowed us to escape the restraints on cognitive behaviour that is apparent in all other animals…

I have argued throughout the thesis that our hominid ancestors did not possess any of the cognitive abilities that appear to be unique to humans. We can see from the fossil record that H. erectus brain growth…

It is highly unlikely that the complexity of human cognition arose in a gradual and adaptational pattern. The unique traits commonly assigned to human cognition, including language, emerged in a saltational event, along with fully modern human anatomy, in Africa, around 120,000 years ago. The archaeological evidence, albeit scarce, supports my claim. No matter how unpalatable saltationism might be to adaptational gradualists, in making my case for a saltational approach for the evolution of human cognition and language in this thesis, I chose to go with the evidence rather than the majority view.[176]

The conclusion from the above, "humans" (the new *Homo Sapiens*) were indeed different. It turns out though that their "change" some 120,000 years ago was different from the change of any

176 Susan J. Lanyon, "A Saltational Approach for the Evolution of Human Cognition and Language," (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of New South Wales, 2010), pp. 243-249.

similar hominoid at that time or any animal since then. In fact, according to Bond, the traditional evolutionary explanations of *Homo* evolution are so deficient that some paleoanthropologists and archaeologists have sought new and different evolutionary models for *Homo* evolution.[177]

Thus, the appearance of the human was truly unique. This begs many questions, "Could all of the changes that took place simply be the result of evolutionary factors? Why was such an important and beneficial evolutionary change never replicated in any other species? Is it true that all those other animals are simply happy being in their state and see no reason to evolve, even as humans have for centuries devastated their environment while they remain defenseless?"

Language and Communication

In the context of describing the creation of Adam, Allah has stated,

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوٓاْ أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ وَعَلَّمَ ءَادَمَ ٱلْأَسْمَآءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنۢبِـُٔونِي بِأَسْمَآءِ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ قَالُواْ سُبْحَٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ

«And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." And He taught Adam the names - all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful." They said, "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise."» [Al-Baqara: 30-32]

In the soorah discussing how Allah is the All-Merciful, Allah begins the soorah by saying,

ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ عَلَّمَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ خَلَقَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ عَلَّمَهُ ٱلْبَيَانَ

«The Most Merciful Taught the Qur'an Created man [And] taught him eloquence» [Ar-Rahman: 1-4]

The above verses highlight characteristics that truly separate humans from all the other animals on earth: language and communication. This has been referred to as the "Speech is Special" (SiS) view. Two recent dissertations however cast doubt on whether or not these qualities must truly be unique for humans.

177 This formed the drive behind Bond's Ph.D. thesis: Peter Lawton Bond, "A Complex Systems Theory and Model of Cultural Evolution and Revolution: The Case of Homo Sapiens," (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Liverpool, 2017).

Heimbauer studied one language-trained chimpanzee, Panzee, and tested her in three specific experiments. The nature of the experiments was such that they tested those qualities that many would consider specific for humans alone. Here is the author's conclusion,

Panzee's performance was similar to that of humans in all experiments. In Experiment 1, results demonstrated that Panzee likely attends to the same "spectro-temporal" cues in sinewave and noise-vocoded speech that humans are sensitive to. In Experiment 2, Panzee showed a similar intelligibility pattern as a function of reversal-window length as found in human listeners. In Experiment 3, Panzee readily recognized words not only from a variety of familiar adult males and females, but also from unfamiliar adults and children of both sexes. Overall, results suggest that a combination of general auditory processing and sufficient exposure to meaningful spoken language is sufficient to account for speech-perception evidence previously proposed to require specialized, uniquely human mechanisms. These findings in turn suggest that speech-perception capabilities were already present in latent form in the common evolutionary ancestors of modern chimpanzees and humans.[178]

Later, Heimbauer states clearly, "These outcomes make the SiS [Speech is Special] view…appear highly unlikely—at least in any strict interpretation."[179] Hemibauer did say that Panzee did not come anywhere near routine human levels, noting, "Although Panzee can recognize familiar words in natural and synthetic versions, she is unlikely to be processing speech exactly as humans do. For instance, she is clearly less efficient than humans with speech in any of the forms tested. Her best performance never approached routine levels of speech recognition in humans."[180]

What is interesting to note from Heimbauer is that, according to her, all of the preliminary tools were there for the ancestors of modern chimpanzees to develop speech and language like humans did. Interestingly, over all of these years, they never did. Only humans did. So there is still some uniqueness to humans among all of the species on earth, even with respect to those who had the capabilities for language.

A little prior to Heimbauer, Anna Roberts analyzed cognition and gestural communication in both wild and language-trained chimpanzees. Roberts also found chimpanzees to be quite capable. She found, for example,

178 Lisa A. Heimbauer, "Investigating Speech Perception in Evolutionary Perspective: Comparisons of Chimpanzee (*Pan Troglodytes*) and Human Capabilities," (Ph.D. Dissertation: Georgia State University, 2012), abstract.

179 Ibid., p. 73.

180 Ibid., p. 75.

This study of wild chimpanzees has shown that they flexibly use a multifaceted repertoire of manual gestures to influence the goals and comprehension states of their interactants. They displayed complex cognition as evidenced in their ability to interpret the meanings of gestures in a flexible way in light of the interactant's ultimate goals and intentions. The episodes of gestural communication in both wild and language trained chimpanzees support this interpretation of cognitive abilities and complexity in chimpanzee gestural communication.[181]

Roberts presents many fascinating observations. For the purposes here, one example will suffice,

Wild chimpanzees displayed complex communicative tactics when attempting to achieve their goals by use of different communicative means with homogenous meanings. They ceased communicative attempts when immediately successful in achieving their goal but persevered at gestural communication when misunderstood, by both substituting and repeating their original signals. When the behaviour of the recipient was indicative of an only partially met goal, the chimpanzees repeated their original gestures more often, focusing on the original signals which had proven to work partially. On the other hand, when the recipient's behaviour was indicative of complete comprehension failure, chimpanzees avoided repetition. These results suggest that wild chimpanzees possess complex cognitive skills illustrated by their ability to recognise their desired goal state and to understand which necessary steps need to be taken to achieve these goals. Chimpanzee production of gestures is cognitively demanding because it requires possession of a priori awareness of the effects that the gesture will have on the recipients and possibly the attribution of mental states to the recipients when attempting to achieve the desired goals.[182]

Once again, the conclusion of Roberts, like Heimbauer, is that essentially all of the physical tools are there, yet the actual developments never took place:

Thus, these findings suggest that chimpanzees possess some cognitive skills considered to be necessary for language development, in terms of repertoire flexibility and intentionality. However, they lack some linguistic means, such as an ability to control vocal tract to produce vocal sounds. This is particularly evident with language trained apes, who despite being able to produce symbolic labels and syntactic forms with gestures… are unable to produce words… This suggests that the common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees would have possessed the cognitive skills necessary

181 Anna Ilona Roberts, "Emerging Language: Cognition and Gestural Communication in Wild and Language-Trained Chimpanzees (Pan troglodytes)" (Ph.D. Thesis: University of Stirling, 2010), p. 242.

182 Ibid., pp. 244-5.

for language acquisition, and thus that the underlying cognitive capacity required for language acquisition is shared within Hominoidea. *The presence of similar cognitive skills in both wild and language trained chimpanzees further supports the notion that the cognitive skills underlying communication in chimpanzees are not simply an acquired trait, resulting from language training or extensive contact with humans, but rather a shared capacity between humans, other apes and a common ancestor*.[183]

Thus, humans uniquely stand alone on this issue.

Of course, "language" that humans possess goes well beyond the idea of communicating some wants to others, like in the chimpanzee example above. The ability to conceptualize and communicate abstract thoughts—both through speech and writing (which forms a very important part of human language)—further sets humans apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. Dunbar has adequately described the distance between what humans possess and what other animals possess:

Language is a problem from an evolutionary point of view: our efforts to explain its origins and distribution are inevitably confounded by the fact that only one species actually has it. I decline to debate the old chestnut about whether bees or whales have language, since I do not believe it is especially relevant to the nature of human language and its origins. The bald fact is that no species other than our own has evolved a communication system of such sophistication and complexity. It is this that we have to explain, not whether any other species exhibit precursors for this capacity (which I am quite content to agree they do). The issue is not whether animals share some of these properties with us in some degree (something that, as an evolutionary biologist, I sincerely hope is not in doubt), but whether they exhibit the full-blown phenomenon as we find it in humans. On that score, the answer is surely no. And there is little more we can usefully say on the topic. The more interesting question then is: *Why* do only humans have language?[184]

That last question, Dunbar admits, is difficult to answer. One answer, which materialist scientists may not appreciate, is that the purpose and role of humans, as described in the verse from *al-Baqarah* above, was to be a different and unique role. The entire nature of the "species" was different from all others. Thus, ibn al-Qayyim, who noted a number of ways in which humans differ

183 Ibid, pp. 251-2. Emphasis added.

184 Robin Dunbar, "Why only humans have language," in Rudolph Botha and Chris Knight, eds., *The Prehistory of Language* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 12.

from other animals, mentions Allah giving humans the ability of language, speech, and writing as qualities specific for humans.[185]

4.3.3 Consciousness

There seems to be something else that is specific about humans that is difficult for science to put its finger on: "consciousness." As Sam Harris noted, "As a term of philosophical and scientific discourse 'consciousness' is notoriously ill-defined."[186] One definition offered, for example, is that consciousness is, "The capacity for a being to have a subjective perspective on the world."[187]

It is sometimes referred to as "the central mystery of our time." By definition, if there is something out there that is not observable by the scientific tools currently available—just like much of the cosmos was not observable to the scientific community for centuries—then it is virtually impossible for science, in its strict definition, to say anything about it. In fact, this has frustrated some thinkers so much that they even denied that a separate entity as "consciousness" exists. It is too paradoxical for them that there seems to be something that humans continuously experience and yet it escapes detailed scientific explanation. Balmer's entire dissertation is about trying to remove this clear paradox, that is laid out at the beginning of the thesis:

The philosophical confusion is interesting given that there is a strong intuitive sense that consciousness is what we are most familiar with. Our consciousness is what is present whenever we perceive the world from our own perspective, when we are presented with our own thoughts, emotions and feelings. That consciousness, which is present to us continuously throughout our waking lives, should invite such diverse philosophical speculation is almost as intriguing as the puzzles themselves.[188]

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185 Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah, *Miftah Daar al-Saadah wa Manthoor Wilaayat al-Ilm wa al-Iraadah* (Makkah, Saudi Arabia: Daar Aalam al-Fawaaid, 1432 A.H.), vol. 2, p. 792.

186 Harris, "The Moral," p. 52.

187 Adam Lee Balmer, "The Consciousness Science Paradox" (Ph.D. Dissertation: Keele University, 2019), p. 8.

188 Ibid., p. 1. He argues (p. 2) that those who think they can find an intermediate approach have failed: "Even many of those philosophers who regard consciousness as, in an important sense, lying outside the scope of scientific investigation, consider it to be possible to at least use scientific means to draw up correlations between the presence of consciousness and other empirically observable states, such as neurophysiological states (Chalmers 2003: 1113). This task, I wish to show, has not only failed utterly so far, but is *in principle* impossible to ever achieve." Balmer (p. 133) argues that the paradox lies in his understanding that both of the following claims seem to be true: "***Claim A:*** PC [paradigmatic conscious] states must, in principle, be possible to identify through standard scientific means such that statements about consciousness must be possible to verify or falsify on the basis of observation. ***Claim B:*** PC states cannot, in principle, be identified through standard scientific means and so statements about consciousness are not possible to verify or falsify on the basis of observation." In a sense, Balmer's research did not get him very far, as one of his main conclusions is (p. 256), "The final destination of this thesis was to realise that the concept of consciousness is paradoxical in a way that should affect all positions that have something to say about consciousness… It is very difficult to speculate on what a resolution to the paradox, if one is possible, would look like."

Other than the few who have gone to the extreme of denying "consciousness," virtually everyone agrees that there is something "out there" but the question is whether or not there is any way to actually scientifically monitor it. Proxies such as brain activity, measured via an EEG for example, are used but who knows how close those proxies are in capturing true "consciousness."[189] In fact, famed physicist Edward Witten is quoted as having said, "I have a much easier time imagining how we understand the Big Bang than I have imagining how we can understand consciousness."[190]

The debates on consciousness within the scientific community go back a while. Strawson describes some of this history,

"There is no escape from this dilemma – either all matter is conscious, or consciousness is something distinct from matter": Alfred Russel Wallace put the point succinctly in 1870, and it is hard to see how his colleague Charles Darwin, the great evolutionary gradualist, could disagree. Wallace, however, wanted us to have souls; he believed that consciousness was indeed distinct from matter. Darwin was a staunch materialist; he had no doubt that consciousness was wholly material. As early as 1838 he took it for granted that thought is "a secretion of brain", using the word "thought" in Descartes's way to cover any conscious experience. He wondered why people found this harder to believe than the fact that gravity is a property of matter.[191]

Nowadays, there is also a concept known as panpsychism, wherein, according to one of its views, some type of life or consciousness is attributed to all entities. From an Islamic perspective, there may be some truth to that proposition, as Allah has said,

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ ٱلسَّبۡعُ وَٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَمَن فِيهِنَّۚ وَإِن مِّن شَيۡءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمۡدِهِۦ وَلَٰكِن لَّا تَفۡقَهُونَ تَسۡبِيحَهُمۡۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

«The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting. Indeed, He is ever Forbearing and Forgiving» [Israel: 44][192]

189 For example, it has been found that EEG readings are similar during REM sleep and when a person is fully awake. A recent study casts doubt on exactly how reliable EEG readings are in capturing "consciousness" and "awakeness." See Dinesh Pal, et al., "Level of consciousness is dissociable from electroencephalographic measures of cortical connectivity, slow oscillations, and complexity," *JNeurosci* (2019; 10.1523/JNEUROSCI.1910-19.2019).

190 Quoted in "The Ultimate Mystery? –'Consciousness May Exist in the Absence of Matter,'" https://dailygalaxy.com/2019/12/the-ultimate-mystery-consciousness-may-exist-in-the-absence-of-matter-2019-most-popular/

191 Galen Strawson, "Galileo's Error by Philip Goff review - a new science of consciousness," *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/27/galileos-error-by-philip-goff-review

192 The various hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) interacting with inanimate objects lends further credence to this view.

In addition, though, the human conscious is different and distinct from that of the rest of creation—at a different and higher level. Allah mentions the aspect that distinguishes humans' consciousness and being from all other creation:

إِنَّا عَرَضۡنَا ٱلۡأَمَانَةَ عَلَى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱلۡجِبَالِ فَأَبَيۡنَ أَن يَحۡمِلۡنَهَا وَأَشۡفَقۡنَ مِنۡهَا وَحَمَلَهَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُۖ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ ظَلُومٗا جَهُولٗا

«Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant» [Al-Ahzab: 72]

In addition to that, in the very creation of this separate and unique creature, there was a non-material side that has also set this creature apart from all others:

إِذۡ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي خَٰلِقُۢ بَشَرٗا مِّن طِينٖ فَإِذَا سَوَّيۡتُهُۥ وَنَفَخۡتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِي فَقَعُواْ لَهُۥ سَٰجِدِينَ

«[So mention] when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration."» [Sad: 71-72]

Finally, about this *rooh* or soul, Allah has already given humans a clear sign that it is going to be beyond their means to truly understand the nature of this *rooh* or soul. Allah has said,

وَيَسۡـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلرُّوحِۖ قُلِ ٱلرُّوحُ مِنۡ أَمۡرِ رَبِّي وَمَآ أُوتِيتُم مِّنَ ٱلۡعِلۡمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا

«And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about the soul. Say, "The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little."» [Israel: 85]

In the contemporary literature, research is still being done on "consciousness," more tests are being done on the brain to identify the root of "consciousness," and the philosophical questions surrounding "consciousness" continue to be put forth. From a scientific perspective, one may argue that what is going on is a strange phenomenon. Perhaps nobody wants to deny that "consciousness" as a distinct human trait exists but at the same time, especially if bound by materialistic science, its study may result in nothing but frustration.

For the purposes of this brief paper, it is sufficient to conclude that even given all of the factors of evolution over the millions of years, the cosmos has not witnessed a creation that has this "consciousness" like human beings. Truly, one in many billions; miraculous one could even say!

4.3.4 On the Question of the "First Human," Which is It, Science or Revelation?

At the end of his chapter describing human evolution in his book directed towards children, Dawkins wrote after stating that all humans and even bacteria are related to each other, "All are our

cousins. Every last one of them. Isn't that a far more wonderful thought than any myth! And the most wonderful thing of all is that we know for certain it is literally true."[193] These are very strong words of indoctrination for young readers. These are especially strong words given that Dawkins' good friend Krauss once said, "I cannot prove that we were here three seconds ago. Maybe we were created two seconds ago with the memories of the delightful interview we had yesterday."[194] That is Krauss proclaiming that it is possible that everything Dawkins wrote about human evolution is truly a myth. What Dawkins should have written is that given the level of scientific knowledge today and given that the assumptions behind that knowledge are sound, this model of human evolution is the soundest scientific model in explaining where humans came from.

Dawkins' presentation definitely does contradict the very clear presentation of the first human that is found in Islamic revelation. There are actually a number of scenarios that one could pose that could resolve this contradiction—and which could not be disproven "scientifically." For example, there is what this author will term the "forgery model." Some forgeries are quite good and have reproduced originals down to some amazing details. Science today is saying that this cosmos is billions of years old. A believer in Allah can clearly conceive of how Allah could have created this complete cosmos, say, 100 million years ago and yet provided all of the details that made it look like it was billions of years old. Such a creative act by Allah would not be difficult. What would have been the wisdom behind that? Part of the wisdom could have been to see who believes in the clear texts of the revelation as opposed to human concocted scientific theories.

This author is not claiming that this "forgery model" is what actually took place. There is nothing in the Quran or Sunnah that explicitly supports the "forgery model." However, it is clearly theologically possible. It is also theologically possible that this cosmos is billions of years old and Allah simply created Adam at a point in time but, however, this unique creation looked like he had belonged to this cosmos for centuries.

Now the bigger question arises: Why even postulate such scenarios? The answer is, oddly enough, "certainty." The belief in Islam does not simply teeter around a philosophical argument concerning the existence of God. In many ways, a serious study of Islam produces rational certainty that the Quran must be a revelation from God and that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) truly was a Messenger sent by God. These aspects of Islam include, but are

193 Dawkins, *Magic*, p. 52.

194 Lawrence Krauss, "Lawrence Krauss: Atheism and the Spirit of Science," *The Agenda with Steve Paikin,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MawwCJ5q-2Y

not limited to, the following: (1) Eloquence and miraculous beauty of the Quran[195], including the minuteness in which different texts fit together, nuances that only a detailed study can perhaps understanding[196]; (2) The miraculous nature of the Quran in not transmitting clearly false information or egregious narrations about the earlier prophets[197]; (3) The sheer depth of teaching that has been derived from the Quran over the centuries; (4) The miraculous quality of the much understudied different readings of the Quran (*qiraat*)[198]; (4) The minute preservation of the hadith, texts and biographical information, alongside the unique and detailed use of the *isnad* (detailed mentioning of sources), producing consistent literature spanning from Spain to Afghanistan; (5) The miraculous quality of the Shareeah itself[199]; (6) The life and example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the complete victory that he was granted after being persecuted for thirteen years and leading a community for only ten years; (7) The complete change in the lives of the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that points to the miraculous "power" of the Quranic message; (8) The miraculous spread of Islam and its teachings and what that has meant for human civilizational development; (9) The above results all coming via an illiterate man living in a non-modern, remote area of the world, what the new atheists like to refer to as an "iron age peasant." Thus, one can rationally and unquestionably have confidence that the message of the Quran has come from none other than the God of the cosmos. In fact, one can argue that there can be no other "rational," "scientific-like" conclusion other than that the Quran has a supernatural source.

Hence, the clear, unequivocal texts of the Quran concerning the creation of Adam will be given precedence over contemporary "scientific" thought. Is this simply a case of flying in the name of science and dogmatically adhering to one's religious texts? No, it is not. This is a case of recognizing science—when it is not directly dealing with the observable—for what it is and recognizing God for who He is, His creative capacity and His truthfulness in speech.

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195 In the past decades there has been a lot of presentations concerning the "scientific miracles," "numerical miracles" and "linguistic miracles" of the Quran. In this author's opinion, most of that material, unfortunately, is bogus and is, therefore, not part of what is being referred to here.

196 It would entirely change the focus of this paper to explain these matters in detail. Short examples for some of them will suffice. On this first point, for example, one can note the significance of the difference in *al-Baqarah* 286 between the verb *kasaba* and *iktasaba*, or, another example, the difference between the intensive *kafoor* and the non-intensive *shaakir* in *al-Insaan* 3.

197 It is sometimes claimed that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) simply stole or borrowed his material from previous scriptures. However, the detailed differences are both amazing and illuminating. For example, in the Quranic story of Joseph (Yusuf), the ruler at Joseph's time is never referred to as Pharaoh while such is the case in the Old Testament and that is considered a historical error of the Old Testament. Similarly, all of the egregious stories concerning earlier prophets as found in the Old Testament are completely absent in the Quran.

198 The difference readings of the Quran often provide more in-depth or variant consistent meanings to the Quran.

199 The prohibition of *ribaa* (interest) and alcohol are actually amazing parts of the Shareeah when one realizes the overall and long-run harms that these two produce for society.

Actually, science is all about "plausibility." One can ask which model is more plausible in this case. The science of evolution is demanding that one believes that in all the cosmos that humans are familiar with, wherein the process of evolution and natural selection has been going on for billions of years, in only one case has "intelligent life" come into being. That one being has very special unique characteristics (language and consciousness) that, for some reason, none of the other earlier humanoids bother to develop through evolution, even though they were dying off, nor did other animals that had the same tools, such as chimpanzees, bother to develop. All of this were simply some rare, uncontrolled, random or natural selection, "freak of nature"[200] happenings that has led to this very special creation. Between this evolution model and the "forgery model," wherein one accepts the existence of the Supreme Being, which one seems more "plausible" and, therefore, more "scientific"?

This author is not denying a process of evolution in this cosmos. That is different than accepting specific conclusions about specific creatures, which is going to founded upon speculation and assumptions. The fact is that humans cannot go back in time and thus they cannot actually observe what happened when the first humans or *Homo Sapiens* walked on the earth and that is why much of it has to be guesswork. Amazingly, this is exactly what Allah has reminded humans of:

> مَّآ أَشۡهَدتُّهُمۡ خَلۡقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا خَلۡقَ أَنفُسِهِمۡ وَمَا كُنتُ مُتَّخِذَ ٱلۡمُضِلِّينَ عَضُدٗا
>
> «I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken the misguiders as assistants» [Al-Kahf: 51]

Note that this belief that humans are distinct and not simply a result of evolution does not require any "crisis of faith." Thus, for example, the Muslim scientist can continue to work and research as if humans did evolve from other species for one simple reason: the model works. That is all that is needed for science. One need not ask why the model works. In fact, many times the "why" is going to be outside of the scope of science and should not be asked by scientists in the first place. The important aspect is the "how" of its working in a contemporary sense. Thus, regardless of how Allah created Adam, if, when dealing with the worldly causes and effects, the "shared DNA-evolutionary process model" works, then there is no Islamic reason to discard that model or to have

200 Lawrence Krauss, when arguing against the anthropic principle, stated that one of the problems with the anthropic principle is that for it to be operational one has to assume that intelligent life is "typical." Then he stated, "If you used that typicality argument, we would have this discussion under water because most of the earth is covered with water. So if you were to ask where should intelligent life naturally arise, it should be under water because that is more probable." Lawrence Krauss in "Something From Nothing - a conversation w Richard Dawkins Lawrence Krauss - ASU Feb 4, 2012," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gH9UvnrARf8.

any qualms of conscience in using that model.

4.4 The New Atheists, Science and Morality

Science and morality have always had a tenuous relationship. In general, "morality" deals with what is "good" or "bad" while science deals with "what is," without making any normative judgment about "what is." Some atheists feel that they, via science, cannot also deal with the problem of "morality." In other words, science should be used to determine what is good or bad. This is Dawkins' view of "intelligent design," wherein morality is determined by thoughtful discussion and informed by science, not by myths.

The leader for the new atheists in this field is Sam Harris. Harris wrote an over 400-page Ph.D. dissertation entitled, "The Moral Landscape: How Science Could Determine Human Values." (He published a version of this dissertation in a book with the same name.) Harris lays out the premise of this thought in the opening of his dissertation,

> The principal aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the boundary between science and human values is an illusion. The moment we see that values depend upon the wellbeing of conscious creatures like ourselves and that our wellbeing is lawfully related both to states of the world and to states of the brain, we will see that questions about values are really questions about facts. Just as there is no such thing as Christian physics or Muslim algebra, there is no such thing as Christian or Muslim morality. In fact, I will argue that morality should be considered an undeveloped branch of neuroscience.[201]

One would have expected that after such a long dissertation and subsequent book that Harris' thoughts on this topic would have been well thought out, crystal clear, and very solid. Based on the following, it does not seem so. Here is the transcript of an exchange that took place between Harris and a graduate student:

Grad Student: This last hour has been a lot of fun to listen to because we have been engaging in what seems likes a very thoughtful, fruitful, intelligent exercise in secular moral reasoning which is an important thing to do. But I think why we all came here is because is that you seem to be claiming to be doing something which is much, much more interesting than that, namely that you could appeal to science to say something that is objectively true about morality rather than simply use science as a way to feed us facts into the normal secular reasoning that we all like to think that we can engage in. But when you put down the philosophical cornerstone of your case, you seem to

201 Harris, The Moral Landscape, p. 2.

appeal to common sense, sort of the low hanging fruit: Wouldn't everybody say that it is subjectively wrong, or really bad, as you put it, when you sort of qualify your statement, "Wouldn't you say it is bad to throw acid in someone's face?" We would all say it is bad but that is not the philosophically interesting case that you are proposing to make. So, it seems that you are caught either between making a common sense argument on the one hand or an inability to define your position in a strong sense on the other hand. How are you making that really interesting claim that we can turn to science to tell us what is objectively morally true without simply referring to the low hanging fruit of not throwing acid into people's faces?

SAM HARRIS: Yea, a good question. Well the moment you grant that we are talking about wellbeing—that we are right to talk about wellbeing as we cannot conceive of something else to talk about in this space, then all of the facts that determine wellbeing become the facts of science because wellbeing is emerging out of the laws of nature in some way. Our conscience states are constrained by clearly by the laws of nature, whatever they turn out to be. If they entail ectoplasm rising off the brain at death and going to the Christian hell, we are still talking about the way the universe is and science. That would have to fall into the purview of some completed science. Now obviously there is no reason to believe in any of that. So you could ask a question like, "Just how important is compassion, say. What is compassion? What is the genetic basis for compassion? What are the practices and uses of attention and institutions that allow compassion to thrive or diminish it? And if there is a trade-off, then how important is compassion? If we have a tension between compassion and bureaucratic efficiency, let's say, what is the right balance there?" Again, these are all—the details in the levels of brains and the levels of lived experience are incredibly complicated. If you get to conditions where it is just not at all clear which way to go, you are getting to conditions where figuring out which way to go in detail would be incredibly complicated—much more complicated than economics and economics is still struggling to be a science. So clearly we do not understand economic systems with any real success at this point. We keep being blindsided by how they behave. But nobody doubts that there right and wrong ways to respond to a global banking catastrophe. I think to carve out a space of truth, of real truth, a space where we recognize there are truth claims to be made about good and evil or truth claims to be made about economics, all we have to acknowledge are the easy cases. That is why I appeal to the easy cases. It is like, with economics, economists can disagree on how to respond to a global economic crisis. The science is such and the complexity of the system under analysis is such that we may never be confident about the right answer but we know that there are wrong answers. If someone got on CNN and said, "Well I've got the solution. Let's just destroy all material wealth, let's just have a huge potlash (*sic*) where we just burn buildings and ruin everything and then we will have to build it again and that is a

brilliant idea. It is going to put everyone to work." That is pretty clearly the wrong answer. So we know that there are right and wrong answers. We know that there are ways to fail where your beliefs are erroneous. I am arguing that if it is true for something like economics, it is also true for morality.[202]

It is somewhat humorous to see him begin this discussion with agreeing on "wellbeing." What could that entail? His dissertation spends a lot of time trying to answer this question, beginning with,

The question of what constitutes wellbeing—in the deepest sense of the term—remains genuinely open. And yet, as we will see, there is every reason to think that the question has a finite range of answers. Given that the wellbeing of conscious creatures is bound to be a product of, and constrained by, natural laws, it is reasonable to expect that this landscape will be increasingly illuminated by science. The concept of wellbeing is rather like the concept of physical health: it is not at all vacuous, but it resists precise definition.[203]

He argues that his reader only has to agree to two principles: (1) some people live better lives than others and (2) that is related to the states of the brain and to states of the world. Then he gives an example of the Bad Life—Congo 2009 and the Good Life—New York 2009.[204] As is his practice, he gives two extreme examples to supposedly prove his point. Actually, in that case, he did not prove his point. He leaves no room in the first scenario for someone whose faith has made their brains content even while living in what looks like a state of misery.

What is perhaps much scarier is that Harris also allows for himself (and, most likely, for others, such as a government) to decide whose wellbeing should be taken seriously and whose should not. Once again, he takes an extreme example, Jeffrey Dahmer. Still, though, his discussion is telling:

We will confront the problem of psychopathy in greater detail in a later chapter. For the moment, it seems sufficient to observe that in any domain of knowledge, we are free to say that certain opinions do not count. Indeed, we *must* say this for knowledge or expertise to be relevant in the first place. Why should it be any different on the subject of human wellbeing?[205]

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202 "Sam Harris at Oxford, questioned by a Grad Student," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuuTOpZxwRk This transcript was produced by this author. In the process, incomplete sentences and thoughts from the discussion, such as, "Is there a," with nothing following it, were left out of the transcript.

203 Harris, The Moral Landscape, p. 17.

204 Ibid., pp. 27-28.

205 Ibid., pp. 33-34. Even though he is presenting extremes, even the manner he presents it is cause for alarm, as on p. 35: "Such questions would have answers, and they would likely reveal that the life of a Stone Age cannibal has its downside. And yet, news that these jolly people enjoy

Thus, he starts his discussion of wellbeing by essentially discussing which humans deserve to be counted. Keep in mind that, given Harris' hatred for religion in general and Muslims in particular, it would not be surprising if Harris were to consider extremely religious Muslim psychopaths. During Hitler's time, the German government probably thought those who were not anti-Semitic were psychopaths—with the "science" of eugenics to back them up.[206] Harris, presumably, would use the science of neuroscience to back up his choices.

The fact that he sees the question of morality as an issue of neuroscience is also troubling. Throughout his dissertation he describes tests done on the brain to help determine wellbeing and should truly bring happiness to an individual. There are obviously a number of issues of concern here. Humans have a tendency to give more weight to immediate gratification. The short-term gratification from consuming alcohol, for example, may mask the long-term devastating effects of consuming alcohol on the individual. Since cause and effect are sometimes difficult to understand, those future problems that are rooted in the consumption of alcohol may be blamed on other issues. In addition, interpersonal effects of an individual action are perhaps impossible to capture in scanning individuals' brains. One person's acts harming another, even slightly, may bring great "wellbeing" to the actor's brain.

As in his response to the questioner above, in his dissertation he truly never proves or establishes anything. That is the amazing thing about it: It cannot really be considered scientific. It is more philosophical thought than anything else. Thus, in his conclusion, one finds, "we should observe that a boundary between science and philosophy *might* not always exist,"[207] might, as in it was not proven. "*If* I am correct… *If* I am wrong,"[208] again, because nothing was actually provable. "*If* my argument about the moral landscape is correct…"[209] "I have *claimed* that there is no gulf between facts and values, because values reduce to a certain type of fact. This is a philosophical claim, and as such, I can make it before ever venturing into the lab. However, my two experiments on belief suggest that the split between facts and values *may not* make much sense at the level of

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sacrificing their firstborn to imaginary gods would prompt many (even most) anthropologists to assert that this tribe was in possession of an alternate moral code, every bit as valid and defiant of refutation as our own. However, this is tantamount to saying that they are as happy and as psychologically healthy as any people on earth. The disparity between how we think about physical and mental/social health reveals a bizarre double standard: one that is predicated on our not knowing—or, rather, on our *pretending* not to know—anything at all about human wellbeing."

206 Cf., Richard Weikart, From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany (New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), passim.

207 Harris, *The Moral*, p. 386. Emphasis added.

208 Ibid., p. 387. Emphasis added.

209 Ibid., p. 388. Emphasis added.

the brain,"[210] again, "may not" because results are subjective. Then in the section on neuroimaging, he states, "these studies should be interpreted with caution."[211] "As a statistical matter, the failure to detect a difference does not mean that no difference exists,"[212] (as in failing to "detect" God definitely does not mean that God does not exist). "And yet, while I consider the so-called 'hard problem' of consciousness (Chalmers, 1996) a *real barrier to scientific explanation*, *I do not think it will hinder the progress* of cognitive neuroscience generally."[213] "And *if* the mental states and capacities most conducive to human wellbeing are ever understood in terms of their underlying neurophysiology, neuroimaging *may* become an integral part of any enlightened approach to ethics,"[214] if and may again. "Of course, *it may be that neuroscience will never shed much light on questions of meaning, morality, and human values*."[215] Again, the title of the thesis was about science providing the answers to the questions of morality. Besides philosophical musings, there was very little concrete science, if any, provided in the thesis. In other words, the entire thesis is about Harris' *faith* that such may happen one day.

In his response to the student above, Harris does not even seem to recognize the difference between a positive statement, which true science is supposed to be about, and a normative statement, which is a value judgment. He stated, "But nobody doubts that there right and wrong ways to respond to a global banking catastrophe." Most likely, he does not mean "right and wrong" in a moral sense in this question. He gives the extreme example (again) of destroying all wealth, to rebuild everything. Economists are not trained to say whether that is morally right or wrong. They would probably argue that the net result from that action would be a great loss in wealth and GNP and that is why it does not make "economic sense." The more realistic example, suggested during the Great Depression, is to have the government hire one group of people to dig a hole and then hire a second group of people fill the hole back up again, in order to generate some employment and income. Economists cannot really say whether that is morally right or wrong. Even the question of whether the government should interfere in the market to this extent is truly a political question and not an economic one. This is why the most economists came up with, which is very lacking, is the concept of Pareto efficiency and Pareto optimality, where one party can only be made better off (in an economic sense) at the expense of another party. If everyone gets more "goods," that is an

210 Ibid., p. 389. Emphasis added.
211 Ibid., p. 390.
212 Ibid., p. 390. Emphasis added.
213 Ibid., p. 391. Emphasis added.
214 Ibid., p. 392. Emphasis added.
215 Ibid., p. 394. Emphasis added.

acceptable outcome. If one hundred people are better off but at the expense of one person, that would not be Pareto optimal and economics as such, when it is a science, cannot state whether that new case should be considered "better" or "worse" than the old state. Certainly Harris probably then does not realize this, but this means that his last statement, "I am arguing that if it is true for something like economics, it is also true for morality," actually means, "In the same way that the science of economics cannot say anything about morality, it is also true that science as a whole cannot say anything about morality."

Like Krauss book on something from nothing, new atheist Harris failed to deliver what the title of his thesis promised. On top of it, he demonstrated that once again these "new atheists" who pride themselves on science and reason are actually truly lacking when it comes to logic, science, and reason.

Dawkins also does not believe in any absolute standard of morality while at the same time he is strident against any type of Biblical or Quranic morality.[216] He also admits that it is baffling where we get morality from, and why humans are nice to each other.[217] Instead, he spoke about morality as being "something in the air," that is discussed by the scientists, philosophers, journalists, and the like. If that is the case, then that which is "in the air" within the Muslim communities will be different than that elsewhere. If that is how morality is supposed to be derived, Dawkins has no room to blame anyone who any type of morality they develop. Actually, he admits that morality is not the realm of science (apparently, he was not very impressed by Harris' work).[218]

4.5 Why Blame Religion?

The new atheists seem to be filled with a lot of hate towards God. Actually, that cannot be true because they do not accept that God exists. Therefore, they turn their hatred towards religion and Islam in particular, as no one can deny that religions and Islam exist. They blame religion for violence and all sorts of social ills. This is somewhat fascinating because who or what exactly should be the target of their displeasure? In their view, isn't religion simply the product of evolutionary factors?

216 "Richard Dawkins on Absolute Morality," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgHoyTvyh4o&t=11s
217 "Richard Dawkins on the Source of Morality," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XtvWkRRxKQ
218 "Richard Dawkins: Letting Science Inform Morality," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2I2UazlMoNo

The leading new atheists, such as Dawkins, Krauss and Harris, claim to get some great spirituality from the awe of creation.[219] In Krauss words, "If there is a god I don't care. The beauty of the universe is what is worth celebrating."[220] Do they not realize that it is the one and same cosmos that created all the "evil of religion" that they are constantly complaining about? They should not blame religion; they should blame the marvelous and stupendous acts of evolution that created all of these harms. They probably cannot or will not do that because, in essence, that is their "god" and what would they be reduced to if they were fighting against science and evolution itself? It is then illogical for them to blame the very thing that they are trying to establish as great and that should produce awe in human beings.

On top of that, Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, Krauss and Hitchens have all explicitly stated that they do not believe in free will.[221] Essentially, everything that is a human does is predetermined by factors occurring in the brain and the surrounding environment. But, if nobody has free will, how can anyone be blamed for the actions they commit when it has all been predetermined by the forces of evolution? All the noise that they have been making since 9-11 truly makes no sense, as that act was a billion years in the making and the perpetrators could not have escaped the fixed results of evolution. They are in a more paradoxical situation than the extreme Sufis who do not distinguish between the creative will of Allah (*al-iraadah al-kauniyyah*) and the legislative will of Allah (*al-iraadah al-shariyyah*): when one such shaikh found a person committing adultery with his wife, the person's defense was, "This is what Allah wills," and the shaikh could not say anything.

It is amazing that they do not see or do not wish to see how illogical they are over and over. They are not using their God-given abilities to see and reflect. They are truly blinded by their goal of fighting against God and religion. Perhaps it is the new atheists who can make one appreciate the verse of the Quran,

إِنَّ شَرَّ ٱلدَّوَآبِّ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلصُّمُّ ٱلۡبُكۡمُ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعۡقِلُونَ

«Indeed, the worst of living creatures in the sight of Allah are the deaf and dumb who do not use reason» [Al-Anfal: 22]

What makes the new atheists worse is that they claim to be the champions of reason.

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219 Once Dawkins claimed to get tears in his eyes from seeing things pictures from the Hubble telescope. When the moderator asked him, "Tears in your eyes?" His response was, "Well, a lump in my throat." "Rise of the New Atheists?" *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* (April 30, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEClFXjx_fQ

220 "Rise of the New Atheists?" *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* (April 30, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEClFXjx_fQ

221 "Rise of the New Atheists?" *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* (April 30, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEClFXjx_fQ

5. Conclusions

Earlier there was a discussion as to whether "new atheism" is already dead. It probably deserves to be dead. As a movement, it was not much more than a façade or a sham, making claims on numerous occasions that were simply not delivered. It was one of the many negative results of 9-11. People, shocked by the violence of that event, were probably ready for a movement that was going to openly and viciously attack religion as a whole and Islam in particular. It is sad to think that any Muslims were seriously adversely influenced by this group of people, especially the being-educated on university campuses Muslim youth who are the future for the Muslim community.

Their appearance, their influence, the lack of adequate responses and the time-lag in adequate responses all point to the necessity of the Muslim community having a very academic thinktank to tackle such movements before they have any real effect. This would require a substantial financial dedication by the community as well as Muslim academicians who will be willing to be dedicated to research only, freed from other *dawah* obligations that take away precious time from serious research.

Finally, one of the saddest things that can be said about people like Dawkins, Krauss and many others is that the topic that they are studying—nature, cosmos, "science," should actually lead them to a very different conclusion than what they have reached. The should have realized that the Creator is much greater than having created all of this beauty and greatness for no purpose whatsoever. Krauss has argued that the cosmos behaves like it has no purpose.[222] Once again, he could not have been further from the truth. As if speaking directly to people like him, Allah has said,

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ قِيَٰمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَٰذَا بَٰطِلًا سُبْحَٰنَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ

«Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], "Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire» [Al-i'Imran: 190-191]

And Allah alone knows best.

222 "Rise of the New Atheists?" *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* (April 30, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEClFXjx_fQ

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