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The Sociopolitical Dimension of the Neoatheistic Worldview

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to reconstruct the sociopolitical dimension of the neoatheistic worldview. After a short review of my understanding of the concept of worldview I analyse various discursive tactics the New Atheists employ against the religious worldviews, tactics such as confrontationalism, aggression, radicalism, expansiveness, demythologization and selectiveness. The neoatheistic worldview is thus considered as a stance which is openly antagonistic to religion and its claim to participate in public spheres. Nevertheless there is a sense in which the presence of the neoatheistic arguments in the debates concerning the place of religion in the public sphere is desirable.

Keywords: atheism, New Atheism, religion, secularism

Worldviews

The following reconstruction of sociopolitical aspects of the neoatheistic worldview is a part of my wider project to conceptually understand the specifics of modern day worldviews: the networks of beliefs that determine the modes and limits of our relation to the world in both theoretical and practical contexts.

In my understanding the worldviews are formed when three elements coincide: *values*, *beliefs*, and *events*. Worldviews are always *relative* to historical time and place.¹ They are built upon *values* or *habitus*, which are received (mostly during an individual's formative years) but not demonstrative. Worldviews can consist of *scientific, ideological or philosophical components*, but they are not to be mistaken for science, ideology or philosophy. More importantly, they can be

¹ It is important to note that I do not understand the worldviews in ethno-linguistic terms, as they were perceived in the Humboldtian tradition (see: J.W. Underhill, *Humboldt, worldview and language*, Edinburgh 2009), nor do I conceive of them in more formal manner, as descriptive models of the world (D. Aerts et al., *World Views. From fragmentation to integration*, VUB Press 1994; C. Vidal, 'Metaphilosophical Criteria for Worldview Comparison', *Metaphilosophy* 2012, no. 43(3), pp. 306–347). I am more interested in cultural worldviews which might be speculatively or philosophically analyzed later but without reducing them to classical philosophical disciplines.

conceived as *dispositions to action*: the more ideologized the worldview is, the more likely its users are inclined to act on its principles. Worldviews also *need some institutional basis*, such as organized religion, science or social group. Not only do different worldviews *interpenetrate*, but also they are in conflict with one another, which is the result of their *natural expansiveness*. Despite a tendency toward *cohesion*, they are *not homogenous*, consisting of sectors, modules or parts; it happens quite often that a module of one worldview is a part of an altogether different worldview.

Lastly, *worldviews die* when their users lose connection with the values organizing a given worldview. Most of the time, it is the events that reconfigure the areas of possible values for any given worldview, such as the discovery of theory of evolution by natural selection changed the traditional way we had perceived the place of human beings in nature, thus constituting an entirely new set of beliefs.

The neoatheistic worldview

Speaking particularly of New Atheism and its worldview (although it may well be true of many other worldviews, especially religious ones) one can distinguish three basic levels corresponding to the three central human attitudes to the physical and social world. Every level is organized around a fundamental value.

On an onto-epistemological level the worldview is organized around values connected with scientific realism or naturalism. On a sociopolitical level the neoatheistic worldview draws on values related to secularism as a political mode of governance. Finally, an ethical or anthropological level relates to humanism as its core value.

Although religions are losing to science in the battle for the predominant description of the natural world (first level), they are nevertheless very active on the second level, prescribing ways of life and patterns of behaviour individually as well as communally and politically. Though religions used to function as a proto-science, as communal institutions, now they operate mainly within the social and political realms. The manner of interpreting this influence is twofold. One can investigate the real presence of religious values on a social level and of institutional and legal arrangements on a political level or a symbolic presence of religious meanings in the language of culture.

The neoatheistic worldview is not philosophically sophisticated (although it must be said that at least two of its main proponents, Daniel Dennett and A.C. Grayling, are first-rate philosophers) therefore in its articulations the distinction is virtually absent. The neoatheistic discourse is aimed at the social (and political) change and precisely because of that it is highly polarizing, stigmatizing and confrontational. Perceived evils of religions must be emphasized and their usefulness

diminished. Therefore, it is the first, more tangible or material aspect of religious presence that is targeted.

It is also worth noting that unlike Habermas, the New Atheists do not consider secularism a thing of the past (I will come back to it later), which means that all discussions about post-secularism are considered futile or at least untimely. It is not until the realization of secular ideal is complete that we can discuss the new place of religion and problematize it by searching for religious codes contained in our cultural practices and discourses. It is not the time for that yet as the presence of religion — open or hidden, pre- or post-secular — is still perceived as dominant.

This helps us understand the reasons why the New Atheists consider the presence of religion similarly to Carl Schmitt's categories: as the presence of an enemy. The inaugural book of the New Atheism begins with an outright hostility: "A glance at history, or at the pages of any newspaper, reveals that ideas which divide one group of human beings from another, only to unite them in slaughter, generally have their roots in religion."² Late Christopher Hitchens, another leading New Atheist, describes religion in even harsher words: "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. There is one more charge to be added to the bill of indictment. With a necessary part of its collective mind, religion looks forward to the destruction of the world".³ The one-sidedness and outright unfairness of these opinions is stunning, but as we will see shortly, to distinguish oneself from the antagonist is a crucial step in the process of justifying the neoatheistic framework for sociopolitical reality. We will now examine the values engaged in the neoatheistic political worldview and the tactics employed in its discursive and practical application.

Critique of religious influence on society, politics and culture

Although the epistemological aspirations of religions do not pass the empirical and pragmatic tests of modern day science, the religious worldviews are especially protected by most legal systems of the western world, partly due to the universality of what Daniel Dennett termed a "belief in belief".⁴ This special status, legally and epistemologically unattainable by other worldview options, is the main cause of religions' importance on social and political levels. The neoatheistic listing of religions' wrongdoings on a sociopolitical level is very extensive, and I do not

² S. Harris, *The End of Faith. Religion, Faith, and the Future of Reason*, New York 2015, p. 12.

³ Ch. Hitchens, *God is not Great. How Religion Poisons Everything*, New York 2007, p. 56.

⁴ D.C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell. Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, London 2007, p. 201.

intend to dwell on it for too long here. What follows is the short list of the evils Neoatheists are accusing religions of:

— *Promoting intolerance.* Sam Harris wrote famously that “intolerance is intrinsic to every creed”.⁵ Historically as well as in the contemporary world, the intolerance of religious institutions is among their chief characteristics. The victims of their dogmatic attitude are not only people of different creed, but also those who happen (or choose) to be non-heteronormative, promiscuous, female, divorced and so on.

— *Instigating the differences between people.* As Richard Dawkins put it, religion polarizes people mainly by means of labelling children (as “Protestant”, “Catholic” etc.), by segregated schools for children of the same denomination, and by “taboos against ‘marrying out’”.⁶ Oftentimes this divide cannot be undone in the future.

— *Repressing the freedom of speech.* An obvious example of this is of course the fatwa put on Salman Rushdie, who, by chance, was also a close personal friend of Christopher Hitchens.⁷ The New Atheists also mention the backlash against the drawings of Muhammad in *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 to illustrate the aggressive cultural stance of religious orthodoxy.

— *Damaging health and life.* Quite literally, as is the case with certain medical procedures among Jehova’s Witnesses and the Amish, religion is detrimental to our health or even life-threatening. The same is true for the prohibition on using condoms in spite of HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa, followed by interpreting the disease as a form of divine punishment for the sins committed, notably the sin of homosexuality.

— *Generating violence and terrorism.* Unprecedented violence was the modus operandi of Christianity for many ages (New Atheists like to recount the story of 50.000 women killed for alleged witchcraft). After 9/11, however, the debate has been dominated by the accusations of Islam being an inherently violent religion. Against Noam Chomsky, Jean Baudrillard, Terry Eagleton and many other left-wing thinkers, who attributed Islam terrorism to the perils of Western imperialistic hegemony, New Atheists perceive violence as a direct consequence of mainly religious motives.⁸

— *Supporting slavery.* For ages, religion served to support the institution of slavery, and the sacred texts of monotheistic religions were used as a divine justification of inequality and social oppression. The Catholic Church did not condemn slavery until 1888, and by that time it had been abolished in most of the countries.

⁵ S. Harris, op. cit., p. 13.

⁶ R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, London 2006, p. 261.

⁷ After Hitchens’ death Rushdie wrote a moving obituary for *Vanity Fair* (<http://www.vanityfair.com/unchanged/2012/02/rushdie-on-hitchens-201202>).

⁸ S. Harris, op. cit., p. 140.

— *Responsibility for the Holocaust.* New Atheists perceive the moral responsibility of the Catholic Church for the Holocaust in two ways. Firstly, they point to the ambiguous policies of the papacy and national churches during the Second World War.⁹ Secondly — and more importantly — they demonstrate that totalitarianism and racism (especially anti-Semitism) were related, as diagnosed by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. “The anti-Semitism that built the Nazi death camps was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity” wrote Sam Harris,¹⁰ listing many forms of Christian anti-Semitic prejudices and stereotypes (such as the desecration of the Host or ritual killings).

— *Subjugation of women.* The subjugation of women is a special and very common form of intolerance toward the other, as mentioned in the first paragraph of this section. The belief in the inferiority of women, derived directly from The Book of Genesis, has been a standard measure of women’s worth since the beginning of Judaism. It can be traced in the teachings of Paul the Apostle, in the writings of the Church Fathers, as well as in the resolutions of modern church councils and in practices of the vast majority of religious institutions.¹¹

— *Various contemporary influences that are politically detrimental.* The political influence of the churches mirrors the demographic maps of religious affiliation. Almost 60% of Americans are convinced that having a religious affiliation is a necessary condition for moral conduct (incidentally, Andrzej Duda, the President of Poland, expressed the same sentiment after his 2015 electoral campaign.) The beliefs of the majority of the population influence the narrative and the political practices of political classes as well as specific legal arrangements. Apart from obvious examples (such as the religious, gnostic/Christian justification of the war in Iraq by neoconservative Bush administration), New Atheists trace the influence of religious thinking in the prohibition on drugs, criminalization of non-normative sexual behaviour and orientation¹² (both stemming from the same Christian doctrine of sin, which deems pleasure as deserving of divine as well as legal punishment), the influence of international humanitarian aid on religious promotional programmes, deterring scientific innovation (by cutting funds for stem cells research and life sciences) and so on.

The above list is of course far from complete. It is also far from being a fair assessment of religions’ influence on society and politics. As a competitive and polarizing discourse, the neoatheistic worldview presents social and political reality in a binary, black and white perspective. When confronted with the issue of beneficial effects of religions, it is forced to fall back on the self-preserving strategy to which I turn now.

⁹ Ch. Hitchens, op. cit., p. 242.

¹⁰ S. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, New York 2006, p. 41.

¹¹ S. Harris, *The End of Faith*.

¹² As recently as in 2005 anal and oral intercourse was illegal in 13 states of USA (in nine of them the prohibition pertained to both homo- and heterosexual behaviours).

Through the glass, darkly

New Atheism's narrative is overtly critical, and the problem arises of how to account for the countless acts of charity performed in the name of religion and/or God. The New Atheists employ two strategies to tackle the issue.

The first one is based on *selectiveness* and *shifting*. Selectiveness means that the beneficial effects of religions get silent treatment. Shifting means that Neoatheists often deconstruct charitable narratives and practices, unveiling purely religious intensions that underlie them. The main reason for employing these tactics, as described by Sam Harris, is the fact that although many good deeds were performed both by religious people and in the name of a religion, the religious motivation is not a necessary condition for them, nor is their number able to match the perils of religions.¹³ A.C. Grayling adds that there is nothing that can justify causing harm and killing, thus making it impossible to think of beneficial deeds of religious agents as an excuse of any kind.¹⁴

The second strategy, although it uses the element of shifting tactics, is somewhat different. Every worldview erects its own monuments and chooses its specific heroes and heroines. That is why the tools of critical biographical analysis are being employed for the purpose of *demythologization* and *demystification*.

The most influential of the texts employing this tactics is Christopher Hitchens' pamphlet on Mother Teresa, famously and cleverly titled „The Missionary Position. Mother Theresa in Theory and Practice”.¹⁵ In less than 100 pages of his iconoclastic little book, Hitchens denounces the myth of Mother Teresa by exposing hidden religious and financial motivations lurking behind her charitable work, and her morally dubious political affiliations with the likes of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher or even the bloody Haitian dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier.

Disregarding the moral and cultural achievements of religious thought and ignoring the positive aspects of its influence on social reality unveils the underlying idea of *critical differentiation* as an element of the construction of every worldview. By distorting the complicated and ambiguous balance of religions' influence on society and politics, radical criticism serves the purpose of consolidating and unifying one's own worldview as well as of mobilizing those who are the addressees of the neoatheistic message.

¹³ S. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, pp. 33–35.

¹⁴ A.C. Grayling, *The God Argument. The Case against Religion and for Humanism*, London 2013, p. 40.

¹⁵ Ch. Hitchens, *The Missionary Position. Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*, London 1995.

Suffer little children: against religious education

But the most important task laying ahead before New Atheists is to establish the conditions of the worldview reproduction. Those mechanisms are working very well within the confines of the Christian worldviews which, incidentally, happen to be the confines of the Western culture. This is why the New Atheists must tackle two issues: the religious education in schools and the parents' right to bring up their children religiously.

In both cases the answers of neoatheistic authors are to be expected. In a controversial fragment of *The God Delusion* Richard Dawkins (in)famously claimed that religious education may have more harmful long-term effects than sexual molestation.¹⁶ The context of traumatizing young minds by the stories of hell and damnation and impairing their cognitive capabilities makes Dawkins wonder if "it is at least possible for psychological abuse of children to outclass the physical".¹⁷

The matter is more complicated if we turn to the question of religious education in the context of families. Is this possible for us to put the freedom from religion before freedom of parents to teach their children whatever they find preferable?¹⁸ The dilemma is of course a very complicated one, engaging many philosophical, political and social contexts. The proposition put forward by Daniel Dennett can be seen as a step in the direction of a final compromise:

As long as parents don't teach their children anything that is likely to close their minds

1. through fear or hatred or

2. by preventing them from inquiring (by denying them an education, for instance, or keeping them entirely isolated from the world)

then they may teach their children whatever religious doctrines they like.¹⁹

The religious education of children and young adults is incompatible with the neoatheistic worldview because it promotes (not solely but often enough) the values discordant with the canon of rational, scientific and humanistic attitude towards the world inhabited by humans and animals. Moreover, it makes young people unhappy by putting into their minds the content which is impossible to accommodate within the space of everyday verifiable experiences shared by the majority of population. According to New Atheists this content is ignorant, obscurantist and hostile to the ideal of toleration. Thus it is subversive in the context of the projected secular order.

¹⁶ R. Dawkins, op. cit., p. 317.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 318.

¹⁸ D.C. Dennett, op. cit., p. 326.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 328.

I mentioned that, concerning the secular diagnosis, New Atheists are in a fundamental disagreement with thinkers such as Habermas, Taylor, Critchley or Eagleton. The postsecularists find the realization of secular, enlightenment narrative to be outworn and are looking for new conceptual tools to describe contemporary sociopolitical reality including the religious aspects of it. According to New Atheists, though, there is nothing to suggest the realization of secularism. On the contrary, many social and political claims made by and/or in the name of religions suggest the opposite is true. Hence the secularism is projected as the ultimate goal of neoatheistic intellectual and public work.

The understanding of secularism is classically Jeffersonian. According to A.C. Grayling,²⁰ “secularism is the view that Church and State (religion and national government) should be kept separate”. As such it is an inherent element of liberal democracy, the society which “at minimum, [...] is a place where ideas, of all kinds, can be criticized without the risk of physical violence”.²¹

This connection between secularism and civil society can be traced in intellectual history of New Atheism. Hitchens includes Hume, Mill, Paine and Jefferson (among others), all of them the classical figures of political liberalism, in his compilation of atheistic authors’ texts.²² Secularism is thus understood here in the context of the negative freedom *from* religion: “The right to freedom from religion also means freedom from proselytization or coercive demands to belong to one, or harassment and punishment for not belonging to one, and — very importantly — from the requirement to live according to the tenets or demands of a religion to which one does not subscribe”.²³

The secular ideal is supported not only by the loyalty to the western liberal tradition but also by statistical data. Referring to Phil Zuckerman’s sociological data, the late Victor Stenger claims that that the “godless” societies, Denmark and Sweden, “by every measure of societal health — life expectancy, literacy rates, school enrolment rates, standard of living, infant mortality, child welfare, economic equality, economic competitiveness, gender equality, healthcare, lack of corruption, environmental protection, charity to poor nations, crime, suicide, unemployment — [...] rank near the top”.²⁴

²⁰ A.C. Grayling, *Against All Gods. Six Polemics on Religion and an Essay on Kindness*, London 2010, p. 25.

²¹ S. Harris, *The End of Faith. Religion, Faith, and the Future of Reason*, New York 2005, p. 150.

²² The last two of them had their biographies written by Hitchens in 2005 and 2007 respectively. Ch. Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer*, New York 2007.

²³ A.C. Grayling, *The God Argument. The Case against Religion and for Humanism*, London 2013, p. 20.

²⁴ V. Stenger, *The New Atheism. Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*, New York 2009.

This correlation may seem weak (for instance, the most “atheistic” society is Vietnam), but strong enough for New Atheists to conclude on its basis that the religious opinions and beliefs should be relegated from the public space to the confines of private lives. It does not mean the compulsory banning of religious institutions but rather placing them in their rightful spot in liberal democracies:

The standard secularist position is this: that religions and religious attitudes (however much one disagrees with them and thinks them mistaken, retrogressive, oppressive and sometimes downright dangerous) are entitled to exist and be expressed in the public square, but with no greater privilege than any other voice in the public square. This means that religious organisations should see themselves for what they are, namely, civil society organisations of the interest-group variety, existing to put their point of view and trying to persuade others to accept it. Political parties and trade unions and other NGOs are in the business of doing this, and religious bodies are the same kind of thing as these organisations. They should therefore take their turn in the queue alongside them, and like them rely on the actual support they can muster from individuals and their donations.²⁵

The road to the realization of this ideal is long and bumpy but nevertheless worth taking. Daniel Dennett urges secularists to work hard to make the world a better place to live in.²⁶ Pursuing education on many different levels and in many different environments seems to be a necessary condition of this endeavour.

Realization: public activity

It is important to remember that New Atheism is not a political movement per se, but rather a cultural movement, which tries to influence the public opinion by direct, public activities. Daniel Dennett uses the term “membrane” to describe the filter separating religious doctrines from the rest of social practices. The main role of the membrane is to control the channels of communication between the religious and the secular. The technological advancement unseals the membrane and generates the multiplication of channels of communication. The multivocality of the public sphere has become dangerous to consolidated, dogmatic religious worldviews and other closed institutions. As Dennett puts it:

The transparency of information engendered by electronic media has dramatically changed the epistemological environment — the environment of knowledge, belief, error, illusion, confidence — that we all inhabit. It threatens the security and stability of all institutions that depend on confidence and trust — which includes, besides religions, such disparate entities as newspapers, banks, hospitals, universities, and governments.²⁷

²⁵ Grayling A.C., *The God Argument*, p. 103.

²⁶ D.C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, p. 334.

²⁷ D.C. Dennett, *L. LaScola, Caught in the Pulpit*, Congruity 2013, p. 57.

This is exactly where the extensive public activity of the New Atheists comes in²⁸. It consists in a very prolific publishing activity, followed by unprecedented commercial success. Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* has sold more than 4 million copies in English version alone. *The End of Faith* by Sam Harris and *God Is not Great* by Christopher Hitchens earned the bestseller status as well. None of these authors repeated the success with their later books, but the sales numbers were nevertheless impressive.

Another notable form of neoatheistic proselytization are the so-called *God debates*, broadcast on television. Among the New Atheists it was Christopher Hitchens who was considered to be the best speaker and debater, and the most famous meeting of this kind was his clash with ex-prime minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair, in Toronto, on November 27, 2010, on the topic of "Is religion a force for good in the world?"

The New Atheists are also creating and supporting different forms of public events, such as the famous 2009 "Bus campaign" where a few hundred of British public transport vehicles had the sign "There's probably no god. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life" written on them.²⁹ The campaign was to be treated as an element of the wider "Out" campaign, whose goal was to encourage atheist people to publicly identify themselves as nonreligious, by analogy with gay-people outings.

But the most important aspect of public activity of neoatheistic authors is their work at the grassroots level, in organizing and supporting dozens of NGO's promoting liberal, scientific and humanistic worldview. The list of this institutions is almost inexhaustible, but one has to mention The American Humanist Association, The British Humanist Association, Brights Movement, The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, Freedom from Religion Foundation and The Clergy Project as the ones with the highest impact.

This intensified and manifold activity reflects one of the crucial elements of contemporary worldviews, their competitiveness and expansiveness. It also makes the neoatheistic intension clear: their narrative is not to be taken as an alternative cultural option but rather as the one true cultural option. It is a slightly deformed mirror image of the religious proselytization, so often reviled by the New Atheists.

Complications: political differences among new atheists

I mentioned that contemporary worldviews tend toward cohesion, but they are rarely homogenous. It is true also of the neoatheistic worldview, and there are

²⁸ S. Kettell, 'Faithless. The Politics of New Atheism', *Secularism and Nonreligion* 2013, no. 2, pp. 61–78.

²⁹ The campaign was created by Ariane revSherine and endorsed by Richard Dawkins.

many internal differences regarding the particulars of their political stance. The two informative examples are the war in Iraq and the admissibility of torture as a means of getting crucial information.

While Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris are the most radical of the first-tier New Atheists, they were outspoken critics of the military intervention in Iraq (Dawkins went as far as to write a piece for the book *Not One More Death*, where his essay was accompanied by texts from, among others, Brian Eno, John Le Carré, Harold Pinter, Haifa Zangana and Michel Faber).³⁰ Meanwhile humanitarian and otherwise left-wing leaning Christopher Hitchens many times voiced his support for Bush administration and coalition's actions in Iraq.³¹

The attitude towards so-called war on terror has evolved into another set of differences concerning the legality and admissibility of torture. Describing Western attitude towards religion as a war,³² Sam Harris openly endorses the policy of ends justifying means, opting for torturing and even killing enemies if necessary. At the same time, Christopher Hitchens, while supporting the misguided war in Iraq, unambiguously criticized the use of torture (especially the interrogation technique called waterboarding to which he voluntarily subjected himself). In *Mortality*, his last book, he wrote as a newly pledged American citizen: "I have the [...] right if not duty to be equally ashamed of the official policy of torture adopted by a government whose citizenship papers I had only recently taken out."³³

These two examples, and I have chosen only two out of many,³⁴ show that those discrepancies are present not only between the worldviews, but also — and perhaps more interestingly — within the confines of any given worldview. It is only natural that people's opinions differ when it comes to particulars, but it is important to remember that the differences must concern lesser, minor issues, otherwise the whole system of beliefs might crumble. On the other hand, it is those differences that make the migration of users between different worldviews possible.

Conclusion

The neoatheistic sociopolitical worldview seems to be organized around two axes: a negative one, built on the resistance to the presence of religious values in public life, as well as a positive one, based on the Western tradition of secularity

³⁰ R. Dawkins, 'Bin Laden's Victory', [in:] B. Eno et al., *Not One More Death*, London 2006, pp. 33–39.

³¹ The reason for this support perhaps being his previous encounters with the Hussein's regime in Iraq.

³² S. Harris, *The End of Faith*.

³³ Ch. Hitchens, *Mortality*, London 2012, p. 58.

³⁴ Steven Kettell walks through some of them informatively in his paper 'Faithless. The Politics of New Atheism', *Secularism and Nonreligion* 2013, no. 2, pp. 61–78.

as a desirable state of political reality. This twofold relation to the political (also true on other levels of neoatheistic worldview) explains various discursive tactics New Atheists employ against the religious worldviews: confrontationalism, aggression, radicalism, expansiveness, demythologization and selectiveness.

What this short analysis aims to show is the necessity of drawing back on the first-tier values, such as humanism, to justify the need of employing such strong discursive and practical methods. The analysis of the sociopolitical dimension of the neoatheistic worldview should also be supplemented with an account of the troubles that Neoatheism has with liberalism, notably in its neoliberal version. The authors associated with the movement are well aware that the social cohesion generated by religions can be conceived by some as a countermeasure against the atrophy of the communal sense associated with liberal philosophy, which has been brought about by industrialization and further developed by globalization and post-industrialization. From what I have said before, it is quite evident that religions' wrongdoings as perceived by neoatheistic authors easily outmatch the possible social gains from the unwarranted presence of religious institutions in the public sphere. Although generally liberals by heart, the authors associated with New Atheism perceive neoliberalism as a direct descendant of vulgar misinterpretation of the principle of natural selection. As Richard Dawkins contended in the conversation with American conservative activist and creationist Wendy Wright, a society based on Darwinian principles would be unbearable and would resemble a George Bush or Margaret Thatcher kind of society he would never want to live in:

I'll tell You quite freely that a society based on Darwinian principles is exactly the sort of society that I do not wish to live in. It would be a terrible society. It would be a sort of a George Bush kind of society, if I can put it like that, or Margaret Thatcher kind of society. I do not wish to live in a Darwinian world. I do however respect facts and I do recognize that the facts of science show that world of nature is a Darwinian world. It's a very unpleasant world, not the kind of world we wish to live in. So let us understand it so that we can construct the kind of society in which we wish to live, which will be a non-Darwinian society, a sort of society which departs from Darwinian principles. A society that was based on Darwinian principles would be a ruthless free-market economy in which the rich trample the poor, it would be the opposite of the liberal, socialist society.³⁵

This leads me to the conclusion that if religions do not get a free pass, because their harmfulness is evident and not counterbalanced by their capabilities for social cohesion, and if the neoliberal economic, social and political order is up to no good, then we need to find a new organizing principle and, as I said before, secularism is too weak a principle to be considered a sole core value on both political and social levels. The value in question may be found only in the tradition of humanistic thought. In short, New Atheists are demanding a new ethics, drawing on a different, non-religious vision of human beings, their place in nature, their relations to one another and to animals. But this is a different story altogether.

³⁵ The whole conversation can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AekFGksvuDU> [acc: 2.07.2015].

A neoatheistic critique of the religious claim to participation in the public and political spheres is then not only based on the religion's structural incompatibility with the political order, but also on the perception of the immediate dangers it poses to the ideal of secular democracy, which is confined to the realization of earthly and only earthly goals of its citizens. The unfairness in treatment of religions is thus ultimately being justified by the scale of the danger posed by the latter. Evidently, For Dawkins and his allies the end justifies the means. This calls for one last — personal — comment.

The modern day religious landscape demands a modification of Peter Berger's desecularization thesis. In spite of untimely declarations of the death of religion, not only is the number of believers constantly growing, but also, as Habermas and Taylor among many others have realized, due to the geopolitical, cultural and demographic processes, the religious mosaic is becoming increasingly complicated and multidimensional, and so are our attitudes toward religion(s). We may assume that Western societies will debate the issue of the place of religions in the public sphere for decades to come, and some new arrangements of legal order certainly must be made. Philosophically as well as politically, most of these debates have been carried out in the spirit of post-secular philosophy. It is encouraging, because the philosophical subtlety, sophistication and capabilities of empathy of the post-secularists far surpasses what New Atheists have to offer. Nevertheless, the latter are the voices in the same debate: voices that are more radical, confrontational, polarizing, but perhaps — even if only for the sake of the debate itself — bringing a necessary counterbalance to absolutistic claims of fundamentalist religions and ideologies, claims that are being made in the process of negotiating a new public consensus which, as many symptoms show, in the near future may substitute the Enlightenment principle of separation of religion and the state.

Socjopolityczny wymiar światopoglądu neoateistycznego

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest rekonstrukcja socjopolitycznego poziomu światopoglądu neoateistycznego. Po krótkim omówieniu mojego rozumienia pojęcia światopoglądu analizuję różne taktyki dyskursywne, które nowi ateści wykorzystują w walce ze światopoglądem religijnym. Taktyki te obejmują konfrontację, agresję, radykalizm, ekspansywność, demitologizację i wybiórczość. Światopogląd neoateistyczny jest więc traktowany jako stanowisko otwarcie antagonistyczne wobec religii i jej roszczenia do udziału w sferze publicznej. Niemniej jednak istnieje powód, dla którego obecność argumentów neoateistycznych w debatach dotyczących miejsca religii w sferze publicznej jest pożądana.

Słowa-kucze: ateizm, Nowy Ateizm, religia, sekularyzm

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