One of the lessons of 9/11 is that there is no greater source of terrorism, strife, bloodshed, persecution or war than religion.


This book concerns the growing acceptance of the distorted understanding of the past disseminated by New Atheist historiography, illustrated in this ad from the Freedom From Religion Foundation. We began with the Big Three of Harris, Dawkins, and Hitchens, but we conclude with a wider cast that includes followers who explicitly support the Big Three, plus fellow travelers and enablers who go along directly or indirectly with the New Atheist take on history.

Science and self-professed rationality furnish the cloak that covers New Atheist pronouncements on any number of subjects. Followers make the non sequitur of believing that the New Atheist profession of scientific method gives legitimacy to their assertions of truth on matters outside the realm of science, such as history and moral progress. Consider the testimony of Christian Koeder on “what the vegan movement can learn from Richard Dawkins”: “What can we learn from Dawkins? Answer: a scientific approach. This means rather than choosing a position and then defending it no matter what—using any possible argument we
can find supporting it, while ignoring arguments or information that might contradict our opinion—the scientific approach means never pretending to know all the answers, not hiding information because ‘it doesn’t look good,’ and using logic, evidence and reason to draw conclusions, not wishful thinking and blind faith. The scientific approach means looking at the evidence.” Koeder then invites his readers to watch Dawkins’s video on religion, “The root of all evil?”

The case presented here surveys and critiques the egregious failure of Dawkins and his cohorts to abide by the rules of evidence and reasoning employed by historians trained in the methods of their craft. Christian Koeder is not alone in accepting at face value Dawkins’s professions of scientific rationality while failing to notice that Dawkins’s rants on religion are based largely on citation of unreliable and distorted historical evidence.

Sam Harris’s *The End of Faith* got the New Atheist ball rolling. It struck a chord following September 11 in warning of the dangers of radical Islam and the political influence of right-wing American fundamentalist and evangelical Protestantism. Reviewers tended to applaud his effort, occasionally questioning his more extreme assertions. Overall, few challenged Harris or exercised skepticism toward his arguments, and virtually none commented on his abundant use of history to spell out the dangers of all religion throughout all history. His book earned him the PEN/Martha Albrand Award given annually to the best first book in nonfiction by an American author.

Natalie Angier in *The New York Times* comments that “Harris writes what a sizable number of us think” and follows by quoting Harris’s thumbnail sketch of Christianity and the danger that “allows otherwise normal human beings to reap the fruits of madness and consider them holy.” She seems to go along with his attack on religious moderates as well as his search for “a mystical dimension of life . . . without recourse to superstition and