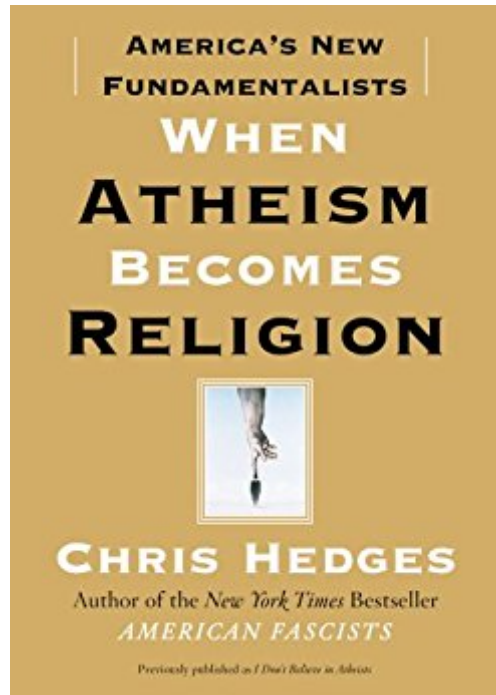


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When Atheism Becomes Religion: America's New Fundamentalists



Synopsis

From the New York Times bestselling author of *American Fascists* and the NBCC finalist for *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* comes this timely and compelling work about new atheists: those who attack religion to advance the worst of global capitalism, intolerance and imperial projects. Chris Hedges, who graduated from seminary at Harvard Divinity School, has long been a courageous voice in a world where there are too few. He observes that there are two radical, polarized and dangerous sides to the debate on faith and religion in America: the fundamentalists who see religious faith as their prerogative, and the new atheists who brand all religious belief as irrational and dangerous. Both sides use faith to promote a radical agenda, while the religious majority, those with a commitment to tolerance and compassion as well as to their faith, are caught in the middle. The new atheists, led by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, do not make moral arguments about religion. Rather, they have created a new form of fundamentalism that attempts to permeate society with ideas about our own moral superiority and the omnipotence of human reason. *I Don't Believe in Atheists* critiques the radical mindset that rages against religion and faith. Hedges identifies the pillars of the new atheist belief system, revealing that the stringent rules and rigid traditions in place are as strict as those of any religious practice. Hedges claims that those who have placed blind faith in the morally neutral disciplines of reason and science create idols in their own image -- a sin for either side of the spectrum. He makes an impassioned, intelligent case against religious and secular fundamentalism, which seeks to divide the world into those worthy of moral and intellectual consideration and those who should be condemned, silenced and eradicated. Hedges shatters the new atheists' assault against religion in America, and in doing so, makes way for new, moderate voices to join the debate. This is a book that must be read to understand the state of the battle about faith.

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Customer Reviews

I might not be the typical reviewer of this book. I am an atheist, but one who is as annoyed as Hedges over the excesses and irresponsibilities of the more dogmatic of "public figure" atheists. But, wait! I gave this book two stars. Why would I give a book whose message I essentially agree with 2 stars? Well, for starters, I don't agree with much in this book; surprising, because I thought that I would. Of the scores of things Hedges could have challenged these atheists - Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens - on, Hedges manages to miss most of them and add some that are quite illegitimate. Had I written this book, I would have taken the three authors to task on a few things: a.) their simplistic and baffling view that not only religious extremists, but moderates, are to be condemned. (Isn't religion a tool? Just as people can do bad with it, so they can do good, depending on their motive?) b.) these authors' occasional faith-driven zeal, that given enough time, science will explain all of the things it has tried and failed to explain (like morality, even though science deals with 'is' rather than 'ought' questions. (And don't get me started on the idea of 'memes' as opposed to the older, more sensible idea of 'ideas.')

c.) These authors' very frequent exhibitions of the type of fanatical extremism and dogmatism they rightly point out as a flaw of their opponents (fundamentalists). The only of these Hedges hits on is the third. Hedges is not even primarily against atheism. He is, rather, against dogmatism and fanaticism, which he rightly sees exhibited in spades amongst these new 'public figure' atheists.

Chris Hedges was a foreign correspondent for nearly two decades, and is also the author of many other books. He wrote in the Prologue to this 2008 book, "I flew to Los Angeles from Philadelphia in May of 2007 to debate Sam Harris, the author of *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*... I debated Christopher Hitchens, who wrote *God Is Not*

Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, two days later in San Francisco. This book is a product of those confrontations."He asserts that Harris's book was a "facile attack on a form of religious belief we all hate, his childish simplicity and ignorance of world affairs, as well as his demonization of Muslims, made the book tedious, at its best, and often idiotic and racist." (Pg. 2) He adds, "Harris, as well as atheists from Hitchens to Richard Dawkins to Daniel Dennett, has found a following among people disgusted with the chauvinism, intolerance, anti-intellectualism and self-righteousness of religious fundamentalists. I wrote a book called American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America. The Christian Right in the United States is the most frightening mass movement in American history.

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