Abstract: In spite of the apparent differences between the two, a number of commentators have suggested an underlying sympathy between new atheism and protestant fundamentalism (e.g. De Botton 2012; Vernon 2007; Flew 2007; Robertson 2010) While such comparisons are intriguing, it not always clear whether they should be taken seriously, as they are frequently asserted without sustained argument. This paper seeks to ameliorate this lack of clarity through a textual study of new atheist and protestant fundamentalist texts. This textual study reveals two presuppositions shared by new atheists and protestant fundamentalists: a literal, univocal, and perspicuous understanding of Scripture, and a disruptive and substitutionary conception of divine activity in nature. As such, for all their differences, both groups share similar beliefs concerning the Christian faith. While scholars frequently critique new atheist and protestant fundamentalist arguments by attacking biblical inerrancy or metaphysical naturalism, this paper concludes by arguing that a more successful critique of these two groups can be advanced by questioning the biblical and theological presuppositions that they share.

Keywords: New Atheism, Protestant Fundamentalism, Bible, Hermeneutics, Evolution

Introduction

In Britain, America, and other Western societies, there is an increasing tendency to view the question of religion as a struggle between irreconcilable opposites. On the one hand are new atheists such as Richard Dawkins, arguing that science has disproved religion. On the other hand are protestant fundamentalists, arguing for a range of quasi-scientific beliefs that culminate in the rejection of evolution. In spite of the apparent differences between these two groups, a number of commentators have suggested that new atheism shares a number of features with protestant fundamentalism. Such comparisons typically take the form of brief comparisons between the supposed extremism of the two groups, often coupled with some reference to ‘atheist fundamentalism’. While such comparisons are intriguing, they present difficulties of interpretation. First, it not always clear whether they should be taken seriously, or be considered as little more than insults. Second, when such comparisons are made, they are often asserted without sustained argument. While Cunningham’s *Darwin’s Pious Idea* has criticised new atheist and protestant fundamentalist understandings of science, as a primarily polemical and constructive work, it does not have as its focus a comparative analysis of each group’s thought. This article seeks to ameliorate this lack of clarity through a textual study of new atheist and protestant fundamentalist publications. A representative

1 E.g. de Botton, *Religion for Atheists*, 12; Vernon, *After Atheism*, 55-6; Flew, *There is a God*, xvi; Robertson, *Dawkins Letters*, 78-83.

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sample of new atheist and protestant fundamentalist texts will be surveyed, and their similarities and differences compared, noting, in particular, any presuppositions that they share.

As there are many different kinds of protestant fundamentalism, for the purposes of this analysis, protestant fundamentalist texts are those written by conservative evangelicals in the Reformed or Baptist traditions who call themselves fundamentalist, or who hold a belief in scriptural inerrancy, a preference for literalist readings, and a belief in a recent six-day creation. These criteria ensure that mainstream evangelicals are not included. While Zenk has questioned the utility of the phrase ‘new atheism’ to denote the flurry of anti-religious texts published since September 11th 2001, arguing that they have little in common with one another, as we shall see, this judgement is incorrect. Due to their commonalities, the phrase remains helpful for classifying an assortment of text with similar aims, methods, and assumptions.

A textual study of new atheist and protestant fundamentalist texts reveals wide-ranging agreement on a variety of issues, yet this article will confine its attention to the two most important presuppositions that they share: a literal, univocal, and perspicuous understanding of Scripture, and the belief that divine agency in nature is disruptive or substitutionary. Instead of critiquing isolated new atheist and protestant fundamentalist arguments, this paper will conclude by arguing that a more successful critique of these two groups can be advanced by questioning the biblical and theological presuppositions that they share. As it does not challenge inerrancy or naturalism, this critique is more likely to be accepted by both parties.

The Self-Understanding of New Atheists and Protestant Fundamentalists

On the face of it, a connection between new atheists and protestant fundamentalists is highly implausible, an implausibility that is increased when we consider what each group claims about itself. For Dawkins, scientists are those who are tasked with discovering what is true, and they do so through observation, the collection of evidence, and the making of predictions. Scientists determine the truth of things directly through the senses, or indirectly through special instruments. These observations then lead to the construction of scientific models. New atheists view the theory of evolution by natural selection as among the most important of all discoveries made using the scientific method. Whereas our existence once represented the greatest of all mysteries, this mystery has been solved once and for all by science. Darwin’s discovery is not only of paramount importance for the question of origins, however, but unifies the realms of science and meaning. For Dennett, evolution provides humanity with an objective basis for both natural science and the humanities, a “stable system of explanation that does not go round and round in circles or spiral off in an infinite regress of mysteries.”

When we turn to consider protestant fundamentalists, the differences with new atheists could not, on the surface, be any clearer. The foundation of fundamentalist thought is the inerrancy of Scripture, which takes precedence over all other forms of knowledge. According to Taylor, “God’s Word is the standard by which we judge all other academic pursuits. We can confidently use the Bible in this way, knowing it will not let us down.” Protestant fundamentalist understandings of science are structured by the distinction between observational and historical science. Observational science is based upon direct sense experience, and on repeatable experiments. Historical science, however, is not based on direct sense experience, but is a subjective interpretation of present evidence. Protestant fundamentalists claim not to reject any factual data uncovered by the sciences, yet because the theory of evolution and uniformitarian geology cannot be

3 Dawkins, Devil’s Chaplain, 284-5.
4 Dawkins, Magic of Reality, 12.
5 Dawkins, Blind Watchmaker, xvii.
6 Dennett, Darwin’s Dangerous Idea, 25.
7 Taylor, Six Days, 24.
8 E.g. Ham, The Lie, 25, 48; Patterson, Evolution Exposed 20, 24-9; Whitcomb and Morris, Genesis Flood, xxvii; Morris, In the Beginning, 12; Sarfati, Refuting Evolution, 29.
confirmed by direct sense experience, but relate to unrepeatable events that happened in the distant past, fundamentalists reject them as pseudo-science, and view them as little more than speculations.\(^9\) A recent six-day creation is to be preferred to evolution, because while no human science can give us knowledge of origins, Christians possess an eye-witness testimony of creation in the Bible. The Bible records the words of the one person who was there, and God’s Word should be trusted over the vain speculations of human beings.\(^10\)

### A Literal, Univocal, And Perspicuous Scripture

On the face of it, then, there would appear to be little similarity between new atheist and protestant fundamentalist thought. Yet in spite of these apparent differences, as we shall see, both groups presuppose a literal, univocal, and perspicuous understanding of Scripture.

Protestant fundamentalists claim to make use of the ‘historical-grammatical approach’ toward Scripture, which seeks to identify the meaning the biblical words as they were used in the language of their day, before taking them in their literal, or plain sense.\(^11\) Positively, the plain or literal sense amounts to little more than the belief that Scripture means what it says, and what it says is however a ‘reasonable’ or ‘common sense’ person would read it. Negatively, it is the rejection of polyvocal and allegorical readings of the text.\(^12\) This is particularly important for passages that purport to be historical. The ‘literal sense’ means taking them at their word, and affirming their direct reference a past, present, or future empirical reality, as opposed to some timeless moral or philosophical truth. The perspicuity of Scripture means that the meaning of Scripture is that which is most acceptable to the ordinary person. This gives rise to one of the most characteristic features of protestant fundamentalist hermeneutics: the denial of hermeneutics. This is illustrated well by the following question and answer from Morris and Clark:

**Question:** “How can a person know how to interpret the Bible?”

**Answer:** The proper way to interpret the Bible is not to interpret it at all! It was written to be understood and obeyed and should therefore be read like any other book of information and instruction.\(^13\)

In this hermeneutic, the meaning of texts is considered objective and fixed, and interpretation is the simple act of comprehending this meaning within one’s mind.

While atheists – unsurprisingly - reject the inerrancy of Scripture, this rejection is not simple but tangled, and heavy with assumptions drawn from the Protestant thought it rejects. As an example, we may consider the following quotation from Barker:

> I lost faith in faith. I was forced to admit that the Bible is not a reliable source of truth: it is unscientific, irrational, contradictory, absurd, unhistorical...\(^14\)

This is an uncompromising rejection, yet one which assumes that the Bible should be a source of scientific truth, a coherent whole without contradiction, providing historically precise information regarding past events.\(^15\) New atheists typically share the same presuppositions as fundamentalists regarding what Scripture should be, and, finding that it does not meet their assumptions, reject it as worthless. These same assumptions are latent within the exegesis that accompanies almost all of their works. The favoured

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\(^10\) Ham, *The Lie*, 35.


\(^12\) Boone, *Bible Tells Them So*, 13, 39-45.

\(^13\) Morris and Clark, *Bible Has The Answer*, 8.

\(^14\) Barker, *Godless*, 40.

The hermeneutical procedure of new atheism is to engage in proof-texting, lifting verses from different contexts and bringing them into relation with each other to show their mutual incompatibility. In the following example from Dennett, the following texts from the King James Version are held to demonstrate Scripture’s self-contradiction:

Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

These are held to be contradictory because the wisdom and prudence discussed in these texts are taken to be synonyms of a single abstract noun, possessing a univocal, objective meaning that is independent of the context in which they are used. For atheists, such a reading of Scripture is natural, and any other hermeneutic – for example, one mediated by the Church or theological tradition - is denounced as arbitrary and dishonest. As Barker writes, “People who are free of theological bias notice that the Bible contains hundreds of discrepancies.” This hermeneutic is not, however, borne of honest ignorance, but is held consciously and intentionally. Despite his antipathy toward religion, Hitchens expresses respect for the manner in which fundamentalists read Scripture ‘correctly’, in the manner Hitchens himself was taught to do as a boy. This reading, of course, is the literal, which atheists are swift to defend against theologians who would suggest non-intuitive, ‘spiritual’ readings. As Grayling asks “What are the principled grounds for saying what is true and what is metaphor in the texts and traditions?” At least fundamentalists have a consistent commitment to the literal sense. Likewise, Harris argues that fundamentalists cannot be criticised on theological grounds at all, because their understanding of Scripture’s meaning cannot be rivalled by anyone. To those who would accuse new atheists of having no real grasp of how to read Scripture, an appeal to perspicuity is often made: “What the bible means in plain English is what most people read. If it embarrasses itself in plain English, then it fails to make its point.”

A shared belief in the literal, univocal, and perspicuous nature of Scripture gives rise, for both groups, to the belief that Genesis 1-3 should be interpreted literally, and that Scripture teaches a recent six-day special creation. For Harris, “Any honest reading of the biblical account of creation suggests that God created all animals and plants as we now see them”, without the mediation of evolution. If we read Scripture truthfully, we must agree with the interpretation of six-day creationists, a view endorsed by a wide range of new atheist writers. Protestant fundamentalists agree, and argue that there is no reasonable interpretation of Genesis 1 other than a literal six-day creation. For Kelly, de Young, and Morris, there is no indication that the text is poetic, as its verb forms are fully consonant with a historical narrative, and the Hebrew for day – yom - in this context does not lend itself to a non-literal interpretation. Similarly, gap readings – which posit a vast period of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 – are dismissed as ‘an exegesis of desperation.” The rejection of non-literal interpretations of Genesis 1-3 is strengthened for fundamentalists by Scripture’s own testimony, as no biblical references to Genesis treat it as allegorical or poetic.

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17 Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 50-1.
18 Barker, *Godless*, 222.
19 Hitchens, *God is Not Great*, 2.
22 Harris, *End of Faith* 20.
27 Kelly, *Creation*, 84-5.
A Disruptive and Substitutionary Conception of Divine Activity in Nature

The biblical-hermeneutical presupposition of a literal, univocal, and perspicuous Scripture is closely related, however, to a second presupposition, that divine agency in nature disrupts or substitutes for natural processes. It is this belief that gives rise to the view that creation is mutually exclusive of evolution, for if divine agency substitutes for, or disrupts, natural causation, then the origins of a specific phenomenon will be divine or natural, but never both. ‘Functionally equivalent’ in this context does not imply that new atheists and protestant fundamentalists are unable to conceive of alternative forms of divine agency within nature. Rather, it is to argue that such alternative forms of divine agency play little or no functional role within their thought.

New atheists commonly operate on the presupposition that the activity of God must supplant or disrupt natural processes, and that, as such, science can detect, or fail to detect, this activity. For Stenger, if the Christian God exists, his activity should be observable:

My analysis will be based on the contention that God should be detectable by scientific means simply by virtue of the fact that he is supposed to play such a central role in the operation of the universe and the lives of humans. Existing scientific models contain no place where God is included as an ingredient in order to describe observations. Thus, if God exists, he must appear somewhere within the gaps or errors of scientific models.29

For new atheists, if God exists, then God’s activity must be empirically detectable as a constitutive element of the universe and its operations. God can be known through his effects, and is therefore “discoverable in principle if not in practice” by science.30 The form of activity envisioned here, however, is very limited. It does not take the form of general concurrence, or the creation and preservation of regularities in nature, nor a non-invasive providential ordering of phenomena, as all of these forms of activity are empirically undetectable, and do not add anything to scientific description. Instead, the activity in question must be physical activity, which disrupts or replaces natural causation with supernatural causes and supernatural effects. If such activity is not currently detectable, the only remaining place where it may be discovered is in scientific lacunae. Yet in the absence of sufficient lacunae that could accommodate the activity of such a Being, it is highly unlikely that an eternal, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God exists. We have no experience of such a God, while everything we do experience is finite and temporal.31 If science cannot detect any evidence of God’s activity, it is only reasonable to conclude that there is no God. The only God capable of existing for new atheists, therefore, is a ‘god of the gaps’, whose potential realm of activity recedes with every new scientific discovery. For as long as no such gaps exist, however, claims for the existence of God have the same epistemological status as the claim that there exists a species of invisible unicorns.32

This conception of God’s activity in nature as disruptive or substitutionary is also found within protestant fundamentalist thought. The significance of the divine agency recorded in Genesis, in both its creative and diluvian aspects, is that God exercises direct providential control over nature and human society. As Whitcomb and Morris relate in The Genesis Flood:

For that universal catastrophe [The Flood] speaks plainly and eloquently concerning the sovereignty of God... it warns prophetically of a judgment yet to come, when the sovereign God shall again intervene in terrestrial events, putting down all human sin and rebellion... The second purpose [of this work] is to examine the anthropological, geological, hydrological and other scientific implications of the Biblical record of the Flood, seeking if possible to orient the data of these sciences within this Biblical framework. 33

29 Stenger, Failed Hypothesis, 13.
30 Dawkins, God Delusion, 72-3.
31 Loftus, Why I Am An Atheist, 98.
32 Dawkins, God Delusion, 70-77.
33 Whitcomb and Morris, Genesis Flood, xix-xx.
In addition to its moral and spiritual significance, the historicity of the Genesis flood and the special creation of human beings demonstrate that God is in the world, bringing about physical changes by his immediate action. For this reason, our scientific understanding of nature is incomplete without him. For fundamentalists, then, the primary expression of God’s activity within nature is not taken to be his creation of natural regularities, or his general concurrence with natural processes, nor his non-invasive providential ordering of phenomena and chains of events, but his physical interposition within creation. For God to truly be said to act within the world, such activity must immediately disrupt or replace natural processes. As Kelly reminds us, it is only in this way that God’s existence can be shown to have any real effect on human existence.34 Sarfati, indeed, goes further: “A God who ‘created’ by evolution is, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from no God at all.”35

The presupposition of a literal, univocal, and perspicuous Scripture, and disruptive and substitutionary nature of divine activity in nature, gives rise to the belief of new atheists and protestant fundamentalists that creation and evolution are mutually exclusive, and that, if evolution is confirmed to be true, the Christian faith is effectively disproved. For Dawkins, Darwin’s discovery undermined centuries of theistic explanations for the origin of life, explanations which culminated in the design argument of Paley.36 For Grayling, evolution disproves the presence of supernatural agency in the formation of life, for natural selection has no purpose or intention or design that would warrant the conclusion of divine agency.37 In contrast to the intelligence and agency of Paley’s God, natural selection is a ‘blind watchmaker’, so that creation and natural selection are mutually exclusive, and are “close to being irreconcilably different”.38 By excluding design and divine agency from nature, and proving Scripture to be erroneous, Dennett concludes that evolution completely undermines religious belief.39 Fundamentalists concur with this assessment. For Morris, either the universe came about by naturalistic processes or it was created, and there is no third option. This is because, “evolution is naturalistic and materialistic by its very nature. It is merely an attempt to explain the origin of things without God”.40 If evolution is true then Scripture must be false, thereby throwing the Christian faith into serious doubt, for “If the Bible wasn’t true for history or science, then there was no reason to trust it for spiritual purposes: if the Bible can’t be trusted on what people can see, it is very unlikely that they will trust it on what they can’t see.”41

The biblical and theological presuppositions of new atheists and protestant fundamentalists therefore exclude the possibility of theistic evolution, the belief that God’s creative agency is mediated in some way through variation and natural selection. For atheists, there is no need to refer to God if natural processes can account for the origin and development of life. For Dawkins, the attempt to reconcile creation with a scientific cosmology is redundant and irrelevant, and perhaps even contradictory.42 This is because, as Stenger reminds us, ‘creation’ for new atheists implies the immediate action of God to disrupt or substitute for natural law.43 Following from the logic they share with new atheists, protestant fundamentalists believe that there is no difference between God working through evolution or being completely unrelated to it. If God’s activity in creation does not subvert or substitute for natural causes, it is irrelevant. For Johnson, given that evolution is inherently naturalistic and exclusive of design, theistic evolution is only an option if theologians and other appeasers are purposefully vague.44 A conception of divine agency as that which disrupts and replaces natural causes is thus held by both new atheists and protestant fundamentalists, and grounds their agreement over the issue of evolution.

34 Kelly, Creation, 17.
35 Sarfati, Refuting Evolution, 22.
36 Dawkins, Blind Watchmaker, 37.
37 Grayling, God Argument, 113.
38 Dawkins, Blind Watchmaker, 3; Dawkins, God Delusion, 85.
39 Dennett, Dangerous Idea, 18.
40 Morris, Science and the Bible, 39.
41 Upchurch, “Confessions”, 85.
42 Dawkins, Blind Watchmaker, 316; Dawkins, God Delusion, 143-4.
43 Spenger, New Atheism, 76.
44 Johnson, Darwin on Trial, 114-119, 168.
The mutual agreement of atheists and fundamentalists over the issue of evolution has been noted by a number of commentators. Cunningham writes of the ‘unholy alliance’ that colludes to raise evolution into the enemy of faith, while McGrath notes that “The Dawkinsian view of reality is a mirror image of that found in some of the more exotic sections of American fundamentalism.” Denis Alexander writes “Ironically, young-earth creationists agree with Dawkins! The opposite extremes in a debate are often more similar than either pole is ready to admit.” While non-fundamentalist Christians may find such a situation surprising, and assume that it is hidden to the two parties, atheists and fundamentalists are well aware of their agreement, and view it as the simple apprehension of the nature of creation and evolution. As Anderson puts it, “Dr Alexander writes that it is ironic that young earth creationists agree with Dawkins that evolution is inherently atheistic. This is not ironic, it is simply true.” Atheists and fundamentalists go much further, however, and praise each other for the intellectual honesty and coherence of their beliefs. Inveighing against ‘appeasers’ like Stephen Jay Gould who seek to stress the complementarity of science and religion, Dawkins claims “I do have one thing in common with the creationists. Like me, but unlike the ‘Chamberlain School’, they will have no truck with NOMA and its separate magisteria”. The foundation of this recognition is agreement over the terms of the debate. As Johnson writes of atheist evolutionist William Provine, “Provine and I have become very friendly adversaries, because our agreement about how to define the question is more important than our disagreement about how to answer it”. For Morris, Darwin, Bertrand Russell, and all those that reject Christianity due to evolution understand more about exegesis and biblical theology than most Christians do. As Young puts it, “The man who says ‘I believe that Genesis purports to be a historical account, but I do not believe that account’, is a far better interpreter of the Bible than the man who says, ‘I believe that Genesis is profoundly true, but it is poetry’.

**Explanatory Monism**

Having examined the new atheist and protestant fundamentalist belief in a literal, univocal, and perspicuous Scripture, and the disruptive and substitutionary nature of divine activity in nature, we are now in a position to see how these presuppositions give rise to what John Haught has called ‘explanatory monism’. The explanatory monism of new atheists and protestant fundamentalists is not simple, however, but is accomplished through a process of narrative reduction, where each group re-narrates the beliefs of the other and reduces them to their own worldview.

For protestant fundamentalists, Genesis provides the foundation “of all true history as well as of true science and true philosophy”. Unlike science, which depends on direct sense experience, and can therefore tell us nothing regarding origins, the Bible reveals to us the origins of life, and therefore completes our understanding of reality. As the conception of evolution held by new atheists is shown by Scripture to be false, fundamentalism re-narrates the beliefs of non-religion in terms of its own worldview, thereby robbing them of their independence and integrity. It accomplishes this through two strategies. First, it interprets science in the light of Scripture, reducing it to the worldview of the Bible. This process of interpretation and reduction is fully conscious. As Morris writes, “Call it naïve literalism if you will. I call it simply taking God at His Word, and then seeking to explain all scientific data in that context”. Through

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46 Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 180-1.
47 Anderson, *Why We Must Choose*, 89.
50 Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 165.
52 Young, *In the Beginning*, 19.
55 Morris, *Defending*, 90.
this method, a literal interpretation of Genesis, and the supposed evidence for the historicity of a six-day special creation, are mutually reinforcing, the latter integrating science and physical reality into the biblical narrative, and producing a single biblical-scientific description of reality as the locus of God’s creative and punitive activity. The second strategy is to argue that evolution is not a scientific theory at all, but a religious philosophy. As Ham writes “The controversy is not religion versus science, as the evolutionists try to make out. It is religion versus religion, the science of one religion versus the science of the other - God’s word versus man’s word”.56 According to Morris, a spiritual war has raged between theism and evolution since the dawn of time, an eternal rebellion against the Word of God, of which the recent controversy is only the latest instalment.57 Evolution, then, is not science, but a “total philosophy,” a “pseudo-scientific rationale” for sin and rebellion against God.58 It is to evade the judgement of God upon their sin and pride that atheists reject the historicity of Genesis, for God’s curse after the Fall, and the judgement of the deluge, show that God is active in the world, and will punish sinners.59 In re-narrating evolutionary science and non-religion in religious terms, then, fundamentalists reduce it to their own worldview, and use it as further proof of human disobedience, and the depravity of all those that would challenge God’s Word.

New atheist descriptions of reality are, however, equally exclusive and reductionist. As we have seen, the prize of evolution for new atheists is a form of description that explains “the whole of life”,60 an internally coherent and exhaustive account of reality encompassing material, personal, and social worlds.61 The construction and maintenance of this system of description is premised upon a similar epistemology as that of fundamentalism, yet differs from it in holding that there are not three sources of authority – Scripture, sense experience, and deduction – but only two: sense experience and deduction. The metaphysical position of new atheism is therefore naturalism and eliminative materialism: the only things in existence are physical, and the physical world is all that there is. For these reasons, the only conception of divinity and divine activity that is readily considered by atheists is, as we saw earlier, the ‘god of the gaps’, a god whose activity substitutes for and usurps the place of natural causes, and produces inexplicable, supernatural effects. That this conception of God and divine activity bears little relation to that of the majority of Christians is unimportant to new atheists for two reasons. First, given their metaphysical commitments, new atheists find it difficult to interpret Christian beliefs and practices as anything else than supernatural explanations for phenomena. In doing this, atheists such as Dawkins believe they are showing religion respect by treating them as they would treat any other scientific claim about reality.62 Yet if beliefs such as the soul, and practices such as prayer, are interpreted as offering supernatural explanations for consciousness and unexpected healings, then when alternative natural explanations are proposed, these beliefs and practices lose their explanatory value, and have no residual, rational content.63 As Hitchens summarises, “Religion has run out of justifications. Thanks to the telescope and the microscope, it no longer offers an explanation of anything important.”64 This means that, second, the only remaining meaning that these beliefs and practices can have are as expressions of irrationality and mental illness, or, more positively, irrational epiphenomena of underlying biological and chemical processes. The first option gives rise to the belief that religion is a “virus of the mind”, an “unclassified cognitive illness disguised as a moral virtue.”65 Bohossian therefore represents it as a public health crisis, one that should be “contained and eradicated”, its destruction an achievement comparable to the elimination of smallpox.66 The second option attempts to find the underlying objective basis for these subjective irrationalities, spurring the

56 Ham, The Lie, 40.
57 Morris, Long War, 151.
58 Ibid., 18.
59 Whitcomb and Morris, Genesis Flood, xxii.
60 Dawkins, God Delusion, 141.
61 Dennett, Dangerous Idea, 25.
63 Cf. Spenger, Failed Hypothesis, 77-85, 105-6, 94-102.
64 Hitchens, God is Not Great, 282.
65 Dawkins, Devil’s Chaplain, 159-64; Bohossian, Manual, 208.
scientist to provide natural accounts of religion through the use of evolutionary biology and psychology, and integrating them into a single scientific-materialist worldview. Such accounts constitute a good deal of atheist literature. This naturalistic account of religious doctrine and practice is supplemented, as we have seen, by biblical and theological presuppositions that allow new atheists to rule out alternative readings of Scripture and alternative conceptions of God and divine activity that would be compatible with scientific description. In their re-narration of religious beliefs, then, atheists reduce them to their own worldview, viewing religion as either failed science, or a symptom of human irrationality.

Overcoming the Secret Sympathy

In spite of many apparent differences, this article has uncovered a secret sympathy between new atheists and protestant fundamentalists, one that rests on two presuppositions: a literal, univocal, and perspicuous understanding of Scripture, and a disruptive and substitutionary conception of divine activity in nature. It is these presuppositions that structure the thought of each group, and which give rise to their belief in the mutual exclusivity of creation and evolution. I will now conclude with a proposal for overcoming the shared presuppositions each group holds concerning the Christian faith. Faced with such an uncompromising rejection of compromise by both parties, it can be tempting for those engaged in the science and religion field to launch direct attacks against either scientific naturalism or biblical inerrancy, the conscious basis of each group's worldview. Yet given the reductionist worldviews of both groups, such direct critiques will only be dismissed as unscientific or unbiblical. I therefore propose an alternative approach. Given that the belief of both groups in the incompatibility of Genesis and evolution rests on biblical and theological presuppositions whose cogency is highly questionable, those wishing to challenge the conception of the Christian faith shared by new atheists and Protestant fundamentalists should direct serious attention toward these presuppositions. This approach, which I explore in greater depth in my doctoral work, accomplishes two objectives. First, it reiterates that the Church has traditionally read Genesis in a variety of ways, of which the literal was only one. The literal, univocal, and perspicuous understanding of Scripture shared by atheists and fundamentalists can only be dated to the Reformation at the earliest, and did not attain its current form until the late seventeenth century. Second, when attention is directed toward these presuppositions, it is shown that atheist and fundamentalist readings of Scripture are more influenced by the biases they bring to the text than what the text teaches. Far from teaching the mutual exclusivity of design and evolution, passages such as Psalm 104:10-18, Job 38:39-41, John 1:1-18 and Colossians 1:15-20 teach the immanence of God's activity in all natural processes, an immanence that is Christologically mediated. These texts elide any easy dualism between natural and divine activity, and engagement with them has the potential to yield Trinitarian models of creation, preservation, and concurrence that repair the faulty biblical and theological presuppositions of new atheism and protestant fundamentalism. This approach, which discloses the secret sympathy between atheists and fundamentalists, and subjects their biblical and theological presuppositions to scrutiny, has the potential to move both parties beyond the dualistic and reductionist worldviews they currently inhabit, and to enrich the rather sterile public debate over the relationship between science, Scripture, and the rationality of the Christian faith.

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