**The Rise of New Atheism**

Task: Read the article and come up with a blinder of a question in the first column for another class member to answer. Question one has been done for you as an example.

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| *1.Why might Dawkins believe that before September 11th religion was harmless and would Hooper agree?* | **The rise of new atheism** http://newatheism.org/  ‘*religion should not simply be tolerated but should be countered, criticized, and exposed by rational argument wherever its influence arises*.’ (Hooper, S.)  “Many of us saw religion as harmless nonsense. Beliefs might lack all supporting evidence but, we thought, if people needed a crutch for consolation, where's the harm? September 11th changed all that.” [**Richard Dawkins**](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1194.Richard_Dawkins) |
| 2. | The New Atheists are authors of early twenty-first century books promoting [atheism](http://www.iep.utm.edu/atheism/). These authors include Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens. The “New Atheist” label for these critics of religion and religious belief emerged out of journalistic commentary on the contents and impacts of their books. A standard observation is that New Atheist authors exhibit an unusually high level of confidence in their views.  Reviewers have noted that these authors tend to be motivated by a sense of moral concern and even outrage about the effects of religious beliefs on the global scene. It is difficult to identify anything philosophically unprecedented in their positions and arguments, but the New Atheists have provoked considerable controversy with their body of work. |
| 3. | In spite of their different approaches and occupations (only Dennett is a professional philosopher), the New Atheists tend to share a general set of assumptions and viewpoints. These positions constitute the background theoretical framework that is known as the New Atheism. The framework has a metaphysical component, an epistemological component, and an ethical component.  Regarding the metaphysical component, the New Atheist authors share the central belief that there is no supernatural or divine reality of any kind.  The epistemological component is their common claim that religious belief is irrational. The moral component is the assumption that there is a universal and objective secular moral standard. This moral component sets them apart from other prominent historical atheists such as [Nietzsche](http://www.iep.utm.edu/nietzsch/) and [Sartre](http://www.iep.utm.edu/sartre-ex/), and it plays a pivotal role in their arguments because it is used to conclude that religion is bad in various ways, although Dennett is more reserved than the other three. |
| 4. | The New Atheists make substantial use of the natural sciences in both their criticisms of theistic belief and in their proposed explanations of its origin and evolution. They draw on science for recommended alternatives to religion. They believe empirical science is the only (or at least the best) basis for genuine knowledge of the world, and they insist that a belief can be epistemically justified only if it is based on adequate evidence. Their conclusion is that science fails to show that there is a God and even supports the claim that such a being probably does not exist. What science *will* show about religious belief, they claim, is that this belief can be explained as a product of [biological evolution](http://www.iep.utm.edu/evolutio/). Moreover, they think that it is possible to live a satisfying non-religious life on the basis of secular morals and scientific discoveries. |
| 5. | **New atheism is defined in both positive and negative ways.** The positive definition of new atheism is a modern, 21st century movement in atheism and among atheists which is openly critical of theism and religion and which is less willing to be accommodating to religious beliefs, traditions, or institutions. Atheists themselves are most likely to use this definition, assuming that they acknowledge that anything like "new atheism" exists in the first place.  The negative definition of new atheism is a militant, fundamentalist movement dedicated to the eradication of religion. Something like this definition will be found among critics and opponents of atheism and even occasionally among a few atheists themselves — usually those who seem to be embarrassed that they are atheists in the first place and feel some sort of need to apologize for the fact that there are people who dare to criticize religion. |
| 6. | **Summary of new atheism -** The arguments for the existence/non-existence of God are no longer of interest. • There is no evidence for the existence of God. • Religion = belief in God. • Explanations for the origins of religion confirm that it derives entirely from social and psychological needs. • Religion breeds extremism, violence and ignorance |