



The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism

Edward Feser

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The central contention of the "New Atheism" of Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens is that there has for several centuries been a war between science and religion, that religion has been steadily losing that war, and that at this point in human history a completely secular scientific account of the world has been worked out in such thorough and convincing detail that there is no longer any reason why a rational and educated person should find the claims of any religion the least bit worthy of attention.

But as Edward Feser argues in *The Last Superstition*, in fact there is not, and never has been, any war between science and religion at all. There has instead been a conflict between two entirely philosophical conceptions of the natural order: on the one hand, the classical "teleological" vision of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, on which purpose or goal-directedness is as inherent a feature of the physical world as mass or electric charge; and the modern "mechanical" vision of Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, according to which the physical world is comprised of nothing more than purposeless, meaningless particles in motion. The modern "mechanical" picture has never been established by science, and cannot be, for it is not a scientific theory in the first place but merely a philosophical interpretation of science.

Not only is this modern philosophical picture rationally unfounded, it is demonstrably false. For the "mechanical" conception of the natural world, when worked out consistently, absurdly entails that rationality, and indeed the human mind itself, are illusory. The so-called "scientific worldview" championed by the New Atheists thus inevitably undermines its own rational foundations; and into the bargain it undermines the foundations of any possible morality as well.

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