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Religious Studies

Name:

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Date:

## Abstract

In this brief essay paper, we aim to critically analyze the question: “Given that there are multiple ways of defining religion, can New Atheism be described as a religious organization or movement?” We define and examine the terms “religion” “New Atheism” and expatiate on the “paradigms and dimensions of New Atheism” which is intended to form the basis via which the above highlighted question is answered.

## 1. Introduction

There is no significantly huge disparity in ascertaining the core differences that are extant between religion and the concept of secular institutions. Yet many are incapable of categorically defining the term religion. Articulating the paradigms and constructs related to religion is even a bigger challenge to even fundamentalists of religion. In the section below, we critically look at what religion implies.

### 1.1. Religion

Our societies and the world in itself is encompassed with a salient diversity of religious traditions. So it comes as a genuine surprise that there is very little consensus on what religion is or is not.

Academic focused definitions of the term religion accentuate that in trying to dissect the essentials of religion, one key element that has consistently stood out is “the belief about specific genus or sort of object. For example, Martineau validates that religion is the belief in an ever living, all knowing God.

Critics of this sort of generic definition of religion are quick to point out that such definitions are limited in the sense that they do not take into consideration, the other key attributes that have over time been associated to the concept of religion. For instance, the Martineau definition lacks conceptual elements such as piety which equates to religious emotions, the essence of faith, and the critical role of rites. These elements across varying traditions have been agreed upon as central paradigms of religion (Yandell, 1999). Another critique of the so called intellectual or academic focused definition of religion points out that

if belief must be centered on an object, such as God, then it is suggestive that religions such as Buddhism and Jainism would then have to be categorized as non-religions.

Affective and more robust definitions of religion encompass many more elements that have over time characteristically accompanied the term. Lindbeck (1984), writer of “the Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age” postulates that as long as belief as well as the many elements associated with religion was held with intensity and sufficient seriousness then such belief systems could be considered a religion.

The concept that religion encompassed a series of unifying paradigms did not come down well with another group of philosophers. Wilfred Cantwell Smith was quick to point out that this encompassing definition of religion was unideal as religion was incapable of picking phenomena that were naturally grouped together. Smith then emphasized that a better definition of religion would be “a divisive concept that was capable of stimulating ideological confrontation.”

## 1.2. New Atheism

New Atheism is the term given to a sect of contemporary atheism as spear headed by the works of the likes of Daniel Dennet, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris. New Atheism according to these individuals transcends a form of explicit atheism encompassing an intentional and pragmatically conscious rejection of the belief and concept of a God, spiritual supreme beings (gods), supernatural realities, or the super sensible. The New Atheism which has been perceived to be similar to agnosticism is significantly distinct from implicit atheism which was simply conceptualized as the absence of belief in God.

The New Atheism according to Ian Kluge, author of the “The New Atheism: A Baha’i Perspective” is exemplified via twelve (12) guiding principles:

- A commitment to explicit, dogmatic atheism as the single rational choice for modern independent free thinking people.
- A strong intentional and categorical rejection for any and all super sensible entities, and realities. Rather, a strong corresponding commitment to metaphysical or ontological materialism for the explanation of all phenomena.
- A militant approach to the opposition of not just religion in itself but to even the tolerance of any religious belief.
- A strident aggressive way of debunking religious dimensions.
- Commitment to the capacity of science to provide answers to all human questions via the use of measurability, predictability, repeatability, quantifiability, and falsifiability.
- A strong belief that faith is inherently a barrier to reason.
- A belief that religion is simply a part of our evolutionary heritage which must be overcome going into the future.
- A rejection of centuries of non-literal theological interpretations of relevant scriptures.
- An insistence that humankind already possesses an innate moral sense and an intuition that requires no guidance of religion
- Presentism: the inability of religion to recognize progressive revelation.

- The belief that religion and its many dimensions is unideal as it diminishes societies as a whole
- Rejection of the freedom of religion.

## 2. Analysis

The term “New Atheism” has come to be viewed as a fundamentalist form of Atheism. Although atheism has been agreed upon as not being a religion in light of the fact that it certainly does not conform to the possession of any stringent dogmas and active beliefs. However, the concept of new Atheism could be argued to somewhat contradict these notions.

A fundamentalist, is perceived as any individual who adheres strictly to a stipulated dogma or doctrine, thus allowing no capacity for deviation or change from these value systems. This ideology of New Atheism is the first core analytical construct in answering our question.

New Atheist are quick to emphasize on the purported inadequacies of empirical facts inherent in the support of common religious beliefs. Their premise is based on the notion that many dimensions of religion and the generality of religion is based on manmade ideologies, and is centered on what they perceive as is the foundation of problematic morality espoused by dogmas and scriptures of religion. Many advocates of the New Atheism construct consider this phenomena to be highly political (McAnulla, 2012, 2014; Kettell, 2013; Schultze, 2014). New Atheism evinces deep confidence and the strong belief that the world be a more progressive and better place without the intricacies of religious faiths and beliefs.

As such, the core focus of New Atheism is to politically limit if not to completely annihilate the influence of religion.

If we are to critically analyze whether New Atheism may be considered a religion, then we would need to retrace our steps back to the two definitions of religion and examine if the principles of New Atheism align with such definitions of religion.

If we say that religion imbibes a strong belief in an entity that in many cases, such beliefs have tended to equate to fundamentalism. Then could we not point to the notion that the core belief in the non-existence of a supernatural reality still identifies with the dimensions of belief in an ideology? The element of fundamentalism as seen in the constructs and context of New Atheism point to the element of belief in an ideology.

Secondly taking form Smith's definition of religion which implies that religion is a divisive concept that possesses the capability to stimulate ideological confrontation" might just be the deciding factor in distinguishing the true essence of what might be considered a religion.

### 3. Conclusion

New Atheism when examined, conforms to the paradigms and dimensions of belief in an ideology. It adheres to a strict dogma of rebuking every influence of religion. Though religion is the belief in a supernatural entity, it may be considered as the strong belief in even natural elements, phenomena and even ideologies as seen in Neopaganism. In whatever way we choose to under the non-belief of a supernatural reality, it still represents a strong belief in an ideology, and one that has encompassed intensity and sufficient seriousness to the point that it has generated a significant movement.

It is equally without doubt that the dogmas of New Atheism that point out that humankind already possesses an innate moral sense and an intuition that requires no guidance of religion as well as other related dogmas, establish the view point that New Atheism in all its constructs possesses the capability to initiate as well as stimulate high degrees of ideological confrontations.

Having considered the definition, the paradigms, constructs and principles of New Atheism, it is quite evident that many people would consider this fundamentalist movement a religion.

## References

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