

# Speculative Realms

MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2010

## A Crucifier of the New Gods

I ran across Chris Hedges's ideas listening to a [Point of Inquiry](#) podcast from May, 2008.

The show's host, D.J. Groethe, a devout skeptic, basically had his clock cleaned by Hedges, a man with educational and experiential credentials that blow most of us out of the water. Chris Hedges is a graduate of Divinity School. He has been a War Correspondent for twenty years. He was in Central America. He was Balkans Bureau Chief for the New York Times. He "was in the former Yugoslavia, including in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo when it was under siege." He spent seven years in the Muslim world, "most of them as the Middle East Bureau Chief for" the Times.

In the Middle East, Hedges learned the language, he lived with the people, and he has watched people die from suicide bombings and seen kids killed for sport in Gaza.

Chris Hedges is the real deal.

He is the perfect antidote to the gutless, embedded journalism we're subjected to by corporate media. When he says something about the Middle East, you know that behind his words are the dust, blood, sweat, and tears of tragic experience. He isn't repeating the talking points faxed over by the General or the [Center for a New American Security](#).

In [I Don't Believe in Atheists](#), published in 2008, Hedges gut punches Atheists with the charge that they are fundamentalists. It is a striking boxing maneuver, especially since, wherever they gather in debates, Atheists want to debate fundamentalists. In fact, they behave like they are debating Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell—no matter who they debate, be they Christian Apologist or Deist sophisticates or professors of theology from liberal universities. Doesn't matter. They are all second comings of William Jennings Bryan.

The gods of New Atheism, the likes of Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, inevitably attempt to lasso their opponent's necks with the fundamentalist rope. But Hedges, in his book and in his debate performances, beats the new atheist gods to the punch.

The fundamentalist you are looking for, ye gods, says Hedges, is you.

Look in the mirror.

Hedges is no fundamentalist. "I was raised in a church where my father, a Presbyterian minister, spent his career speaking out," Hedges says, "often at some personal cost, in support of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam antiwar movement, and the gay rights movement." In fact, Hedges was tasked by his father with starting a gay and lesbian organization at Colgate University, where Hedges matriculated.

"When I went into the dining hall [at Colgate] for breakfast, lunch, and dinner," Hedges says in his book, *American Fascists*, "the checker behind the desk would take my card, mark off the appropriate box, and hand it back, muttering, 'Faggot.'"

In one of his broadcast debates, Hedges says he dedicated the rest of his college life to seducing that checker's girlfriend.

To make matters worse for the Atheist gods, Hedges stitches their project into the fabric of fundamentalist geopolitics. "Too many of the new atheists," Hedges writes in *I Don't Believe in Atheists*, "support the imperialist projects and preemptive wars of the United States as necessities in the battle against terrorism and irrational religion. They divide the world into superior and inferior races, those who are enlightened by reason and knowledge, and those who are governed by irrational and dangerous

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religious beliefs. [Christopher] Hitchens and [Sam] Harris describe the Muslim world, where I spent seven years, . . . in language that is as racist, crude and intolerant as that used by Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell."

"They misuse the teachings," says Hedges, "of Charles Darwin and evolutionary biology just as the Christian fundamentalists misuse the Bible[.] . . . [T]hey engage in the same chauvinism and call for the same violent utopianism. . . . They believe, like the Christian Right, that we are moving forward to a paradise, a state of human perfection, this time made possible by science and reason. They argue that some human beings, . . . maybe many human beings, have to be eradicated to achieve this better world. They see only one truth: their truth."

The Atheist gods would like to assail Hedges's own Christian tradition, but he orchestrates a preemptive strike there as well. He sees a disconnect between sermons preached at pulpit on behalf of the poor and the lack of Christian boots on the ground. He says the liberal church likes the poor on Sunday, but they don't like their smell on the street. "The liberal church," he says, ". . . is a largely vapid and irrelevant force."

"The liberal church," writes Hedges, "usually buys into the myth that we can morally progress as a species. It, too, accepts, along with the atheists and the fundamentalists, Pangloss's rosy vision in Voltaire's *Candide*, that we live in 'the best of all possible worlds' . . . . It is this naïve belief in our goodness and decency—this inability to face the dark reality of human nature, our capacity for evil and the morally neutral universe we inhabit—that is the most disturbing aspect of all of these belief systems."

The belief that there is a kind of psychological, social, or political evolutionary process is a deadly illusion. Projects such as the [Rapture](#), the [Transhumanist Movement](#), or [American Exceptionalist fantasies](#) are doomed.

"There is nothing in human nature or human history," states Hedges, "to support the idea that we are morally advancing as a species or that we will overcome the flaws of human nature. We progress technologically and scientifically, but not morally. We use the newest instruments of technological and scientific progress to create more efficient forms of killing, repression, economic exploitation and to accelerate environmental degradation. There is a good and bad side to human progress. We are not advancing toward a glorious Utopia."

In *I Don't Believe in Atheists*, Chris Hedges emerges as a great critic of Utopian projects, be they religious or secular. His ethics is honed by firsthand experience. His spirituality was baptized by fire. Against the coming of the atheist *Übermensch*, the self-anointed gods of the current era, the hystros who have killed God and proclaimed themselves gods, these mock-olympians, I posit Chris Hedges. He has met the anthropocentric worshippers of "man" on the battlefield of debate and nailed them to the cross of their own hubris. The same hubris that did in the old God does in the new gods. That hubris bears a human face. It ruins religion and science alike.

Science and reason inoculate no one from the creep of evil. The [inerrancy](#) of the Bible inoculates no one from the creep of evil.

If I read Chris Hedges correctly, we have nowhere to hide.

#### Sources

Chris Hedges. *I Don't Believe in Atheists*. Free Press: New York, 2008.

Chris Hedges. *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*. Free Press: New York, 2006.

#### Follow ups

I recommend blending a reading of Hedges's *I Don't Believe in Atheists* with his [Point of Inquiry interview](#) and his broadcast [debate](#), sponsored by [Truthdig](#), with Sam Harris.

Posted by Gary Haden at 6:20 AM 

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