

'Neuer Atheismus'

'New Atheism' in Germany*

Introduction

Matthias Knutzen (born 1646 – died after 1674) was the first author we know of who *self*-identified as an atheist (Schröder 2010: 8). Before this, the term had solely been used pejoratively to label others. While Knutzen is almost completely forgotten now, authors such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Sigmund Freud are better remembered and might even be considered classic writers in the history of the atheist criticism of religion. Whatever may be said about the influence of any one of these authors, there is no doubt that Germany looks back on a notable history in this field. About a decade ago, Germany's capital Berlin was even dubbed 'the world capital of atheism' by the American sociologist Peter L. Berger (2001: 195).¹

Given this situation, I am bewildered by the expression 'New Atheism'.² Yet, undoubtedly, the term has become a catchphrase that is commonly used in the public discourse of several countries. The most prominent authors to be labelled 'New Atheists' are Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*, 2006), Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, 2006), Sam Harris (*The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, 2004, and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 2006), and Christopher Hitchens (*God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 2007). These authors and their books – all of them international bestsellers – have been intensely discussed around the world, including in Germany. In this paper, I intend to illuminate

some of the characteristics and remarkable traits of the German discourse on the 'New Atheism'. Here we can distinguish between two phases. The German media initially characterised 'New Atheism' as a rather peculiarly American phenomenon. However, it soon came to be understood to be a part of German culture as well.

The making of a German 'New Atheism'

The terms 'New Atheism' and 'New Atheist' were originally coined in November 2006 by Gary Wolf, an American journalist and contributing editor at the lifestyle and technology magazine *Wired*, in the article 'The Church of the Non-Believers' (Wolf 2006a).³

Interestingly, only two weeks later, the term 'New Atheist' appeared in the German media for the first time.⁴ In a newspaper article in *Die Tageszeitung* dating from 7 November 2006, Robert Misik wrote: 'The New Atheists are fighting against God and fundamentalism. ... In the US, a movement is attracting attention for wanting to put a stop to God's game – the New Atheist movement'⁵ (Misik 2006). It seems noteworthy that Misik still used the English expression 'New Atheist'.

Several weeks later, the German translation '*neuer Atheismus*' as an alternative to the English term was put forward for the first time. In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* edition of 22 December 2006, Christian Geyer (2006) wrote: 'Is there any resource today which is more dangerous than religion? ... It is no surprise then that "der neue Atheismus", or the "new Atheism", is booming in America.'⁶ While the German and the English terms stand side by side here, the German translation '*neuer Atheismus*' eventually replaced the English term completely. Furthermore, Geyer wrote of the possibility of a German adaptation

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of the American ‘New Atheism’ – a prediction that was to come true within only half a year. The temporal dimension is a remarkable aspect of the German reception indeed: ‘New Atheism’ was a topic in the media long before the first ‘neo-atheist’ book was translated for the German public.

I shall now attempt to reconstruct the events that led to the German variant of ‘New Atheism’.⁷ My main case study is Michael Schmidt-Salomon, who was the first German author to be labelled ‘New Atheist’. Other social actors to be considered are Philipp Möller and Andreas Müller.

**Against religion – with a piglet and a hedgehog:
Michael Schmidt-Salomon**

Michael Schmidt-Salomon (born 1967) is a freelance writer and German philosopher.⁸ Like Dawkins and Dennett, he is a member of Paul Geisert and Mynga Furtrell’s Brights movement (Kast 2007). He is the executive spokesman of the Giordano-Bruno-Stiftung (GBS, Giordano Bruno Foundation), a non-profit organisation that describes itself as a ‘think tank for humanism and enlightenment’ (‘Denkfabrik für Humanismus und Aufklärung’).⁹ Other characteristic mottos of the GBS are: ‘Enlightenment in the 21st century’ (‘Aufklärung im 21. Jahrhundert’) or ‘Knowledge instead of faith’ (‘Wissen statt Glauben’). The GBS was founded in April 2004 by Schmidt-Salomon and Herbert Steffen, a German businessman who still holds the position of the foundation’s chair. A number of public figures from areas as diverse as philosophy, psychology, sociology, political sciences, biology, physics, and art make up the foundation’s advisory board. As of January 2012, the GBS has 22 local branches in nearly all the major German cities or regions; foreign branches in Austria and Switzerland have also been established.

Schmidt-Salomon authored the *Manifest des evolutionären Humanismus. Plädoyer für eine zeitgemäße Leitkultur* (Manifesto of Evolutionary Humanism: A Plea for a Contemporary Culture, 1st ed. 2005, 2nd exp. ed. 2006). The book was commissioned by the GBS. It is critical of religion and, at the same time, proposes an alternative: the concept of an ‘evolutionary humanism’ (Huxley 1961, 1992). Concretely, the book introduces ‘Ten Proposals of Evolutionary Hu-



manism’ as opposed to the biblical Ten Commandments (Schmidt-Salomon 2006: 156–9).¹⁰

While the *Manifest* garnered plenty of attention within atheist/secular/humanist circles, Schmidt-Salomon’s atheist children’s book *Wo bitte geht’s zu Gott? fragte das kleine Ferkel. Ein Buch für alle, die sich nichts vormachen lassen* (‘Which is the Way to God, Please?’ Little Piglet Asked: A Book for All Those Who Won’t Let Themselves be Fooled, 2007) has also stirred debate at a national and transnational level (Aderet 2008, Axelrod 2008, Quetteville 2008). The story of the book, which has occasionally been

described as ‘*The God Delusion* for children’ (Quetteville 2008), is summarised as follows. One day, the little piglet and his best friend, a hedgehog, step out of their house and notice a billboard saying: ‘He who knows not God, is missing something!’ This marks the beginning of the two friends’ quest for God, which leads them into a synagogue, a church, and a mosque where they talk to a Jewish rabbi, a Catholic bishop, and a Muslim mufti respectively. Each time they are repelled by the religious doctrines that they are taught. Upon their return home, they again look at the billboard and cross out the ‘not’: ‘He who knows God, is missing something!’ Finally, the moral of the fable is told (Schmidt-Salomon 2007: 32–4):

And the moral of the fable is:
If you don’t know God, be glad about this...
They couldn’t fool our Piglet, when:
It laughed and laughed at all of them...¹¹

The aftermath of the book has been notable.¹² It was accused of containing anti-Semitic tendencies. In December 2007, the German Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth) submitted it to the Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien (BPjM, Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons) for further examination, which could have led to a ban on the sale or distribution of the book to minors in Germany (‘indexing’). The reactions on the part of Jewish social actors varied. While Stephan J. Kramer, the Secretary General of the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland (Central Council of Jews in Germany),

did not regard the book as anti-Semitic, he considered it dangerous nevertheless and thus pleaded for its 'indexing'. The prominent Jewish journalist and author Henryk M. Broder, on the other hand, perceived the attempt to ban the book as ridiculous. The GBS, which had sponsored the book, initiated the website www.ferkelbuch.de, dedicated to 'saving the little piglet' and to providing information about the 'attack on freedom of opinion'. In March 2008, the accusation was dismissed by the BPjM on the premise that the book is not anti-Semitic because it attacks all religions equally.

The ruling of the BPjM did not mean the end of the controversy. The Catholic Bishop of Regensburg, Gerhard Ludwig Müller, addressed Schmidt-Salomon and the *Little Piglet* during a sermon in May 2008. Schmidt-Salomon reacted to Müller's summary of his book and the portrayal of his person (see the section on the 'Characterisation of "New Atheism" in Germany's public discourse' in this article) by filing a lawsuit against Bishop Müller in August 2008, after which it went through three years of various appeals. In August 2011, the case was taken to the Bundesverwaltungsgericht (Federal Administrative Court of Germany). Here, Müller eventually lost the dispute. Schmidt-Salomon pointed out the significance of the court's ruling:



Michael Schmidt-Salomon, author of the atheist children's book *Which is the Way to God, Please?, Little Piglet Asked*.

This is an important signal for the 'Rechtsstaat' [State of Law]: Finally it has been judicially resolved that the church is not an area exempt from the law. Mr Müller and his colleagues are now, just like everyone else, obliged to quote truthfully.¹³

The controversy about the *Little Piglet*, particularly the petition to 'index' the book, has had an enormous impact on its sales figures. In December 2007, merely two months after its publication, it ranked number one on the Amazon.de bestseller list in the category of 'children's religion' (Schmidt-Salomon *et al.* 2008: 50, 60). By March 2008, more than 12,000 copies had been sold (Bauer 2008). In June 2008, it ranked number ten on the Buchreport.de bestseller list for picture books.¹⁴

We must also take into account the temporal proximity of the publication date of *Little Piglet*, which took place in October 2007, to German translations of other 'neo-atheist' books: Dawkins's *Der Gotteswahn* and Harris's *Das Ende des Glaubens* in September, and Hitchens's *Der Herr ist kein Hirte* in October. Also, Dawkins was given the Deschner Award by the GBS on 12 October, coinciding with the Frankfurt Book Fair.¹⁵ More generally speaking, at that time, 'New Atheism' was *the* hot topic in Germany. The *Zeitgeist* of that autumn of 2007 can perhaps best be described in economic terms by saying that there was a downright demand for a German 'New Atheist'. Schmidt-Salomon (2008: 1) himself mentioned the telephone calls he received from journalists in desperate need of an atheist.

With the media's attention directed at Schmidt-Salomon, he was written about, interviewed, and appeared as a guest on German talk shows on numerous occasions. In this process he became a person of interest to the broader public. He was at first only loosely linked to the American/British phenomenon 'New Atheism' but soon was explicitly labelled a 'New Atheist'.¹⁶ This can be regarded as a pivotal moment in the formation of a German 'New Atheism'. Once 'New Atheism' – initially, an American phenomenon – was described as a German phenomenon, and Schmidt-Salomon as its German spokesperson, other social actors and events were categorised as 'New Atheists' as well.

Advertising atheism - with a bus: Philipp Möller

In October 2008, the British journalist and comedy writer Ariane Sherine initiated the Atheist Bus Campaign as a response to a Christian bus advertise-



Philipp Möller, spokesman of the German 'Buskampagne'.

ment (Sherine 2008a–c). The campaign was supported morally and financially by the British Humanist Association and Richard Dawkins. In January 2009, the first buses started driving around London with the slogan 'There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.' Due to the popularity of the campaign, it was expanded to include

800 buses across the UK and advertisements on the London Underground. Additionally, the campaign was adopted by other countries, including Germany.

The German Buskampagne was supported by the GBS and several other foundations. The three main people in charge of the initiative were Philipp Möller, Carsten Frerk, and Peder Iblher. Following a call for donations in March 2009, the Buskampagne was able to raise the needed money for the atheist advertisements within a mere four days. Its slogan read: 'There's almost certainly no God.'¹⁷ The organisers

planned to place atheist advertisements on buses in Berlin, Cologne, and Munich for three months. Public transportation services in 18 German cities, however, refused to display them on their buses. The reasons – if any were given at all – were varied: 'no religious or ideological ads', 'contemptuous of God', 'due to massive protest of individual passengers', 'bound to neutrality', 'no available ad space', 'no ads that might cause dismay', 'ad space fully booked for one year'.¹⁸ In consequence, the Buskampagne rented a red double-decker bus, which travelled across Germany and stopped in 28 cities between 30 May and 18 June 2009.¹⁹ As a reaction to the Buskampagne, the evangelical ministry Campus für Christus, the German branch of Campus Crusade for Christ International, launched a counter-campaign: the Gottkennen-Tour.²⁰ As a result, the atheist's red bus was followed ('chased', according to Buskampagne – 'accompanied', according to Gottkennen-Tour) by the Christians' white bus displaying a sign, which asked: 'But what if He does exist...'²¹

Just as the British Atheist Bus Campaign, with its support by Dawkins, was considered to be an expression of the broader phenomenon of 'New Atheism', so was the German Buskampagne with its ties to the GBS (Jäger 2008). Thus, its spokesman Philipp



The bus of the German 'Buskampagne' in front of the TV tower at Alexanderplatz, Berlin.

Möller, who was called the ‘face of the Buskampagne’ by co-campaigner Carsten Frerk, was perceived as a ‘New Atheist’ (Frerk 2009, Buchner 2011, Koppe 2011).

Before the campaign, Möller (born 1980) was a schoolteacher from Berlin, unknown to the broader German public. In the course of the campaign, he was interviewed and appeared on TV several times. Currently, he is working for the GBS in public relations and is the central coordinator of its regional and university branches.²² He has also become the first chair of Evolutionäre Humanisten Berlin-Brandenburg, the Berlin-Brandenburg chapter of the GBS, and produces podcasts for the *Humanistischer Pressedienst* (HPD, Humanist Press Service).²³

‘New Atheism’ as self-identification: Andreas Müller

The last actor I want to briefly portray is Andreas Müller (born 1984).²⁴ Müller, who studied German literature, is the author of the blog *Aufklärung 2.0* (formerly *Feuerbringer*). In the past, he was a contributing editor to the GBS and the *Humanistischer Pressedienst*. Like Schmidt-Salomon, who called him a ‘hardcore naturalist’, he is a member of the German Brights movement.

Müller has repeatedly called himself a ‘New Atheist’.²⁵ His adoption of the label makes him an exceptional and interesting case, because those authors who are commonly labelled ‘New Atheists’ have neither self-identified as such nor did they ever claim to have presented a ‘new’ or especially ‘innovative’ criticism of religion. Dawkins, Harris and Schmidt-Salomon have even criticised the term.²⁶ Müller’s case is even more fascinating as he seems to have adopted not only the label itself but also one of the specific traits by which ‘New Atheism’ is often characterised



Andreas Müller, the German atheist activist who self-identifies as a “New Atheist”.

in German discourse: that of being disrespectful or aggressive towards the religious. While this aggressiveness is usually attributed to the ‘New Atheists’ in order to discredit them, Müller (2008a–c, 2009a–c) seems to consider it a positive trait. At the same time, he mocks all those who – despite their own atheism/agnosticism/non-belief/secularism – are tolerant towards the religious by calling them ‘Kuschelatheisten’ (‘cuddly atheists’) or ‘weichgespülte Atheisten’ (‘mushy atheists’). I do not need to elaborate on this here, as we will look at the characterisation of ‘New Atheists’ in more detail in the next section.

The characterisation of ‘New Atheism’ in Germany’s public discourse

Considering the way ‘New Atheism’ is portrayed in German public discourse, several topoi can be identified. This section contains some of the regularly asserted topoi as well as some more extreme and infrequent ones. The list is by no means complete. Furthermore, a precise demarcation between the individual topoi is sometimes difficult. For example, the characterisation of ‘New Atheism’ as ‘fundamentalism’ could be categorised as a ‘religion’ (fourth topos) or as a ‘danger’ (sixth topos). Similarly, the borders are not clear between ‘disrespectfulness’ and ‘aggressiveness’. While I will only consider discourse fragments from the German context here, I want to point out the similarity of the characterisation of ‘New Atheism’ in the American or British context.

First topos: vanity – arrogance. The ‘New Atheists’ have been characterised as vain and arrogant. The journalist Alexander Smolczyk (2007) only insinuates it: ‘Dawkins enjoys having an answer for everything.’²⁷ The Protestant theologian Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (2007), however, is more explicit: ‘Due to his vain demeanour as omniscient and enlightened, one is reminded of his colleague Ernst Haeckel, the solver of the world-riddle, the self-proclaimed antipope.’²⁸ The German atheist philosopher Joachim Kahl (2006) objected to Schmidt-Salomon’s ‘arrogant and derisive tone.’²⁹ He criticised Dawkins for his ‘know-it-all attitude’ (‘Besserwisserei’) and even said: ‘Dawkins’s arrogant pretence to infallibility far exceeds the Pope’s claim to infallibility’ (Kahl 2008).³⁰

Second topos: the scientific criticism of religion – science against religion. Again and again, it has been pointed out that the ‘New Atheists’ are scientists – or in Dawkins’s case more specifically, that he is a biologist – and therefore, science serves as the foundation of the ‘neo-atheist’ criticism of religion. The science

journalist Jörg Blech (2006a) wrote in *Der Spiegel*: 'Richard Dawkins is a fervent adherent to the theory of evolution. ... With the assiduousness of a natural scientist Dawkins expounds why "there is almost certainly no God", and calls for a renunciation of faith.'³¹ Alexander Smoltczyk (2007) wrote in *Der Spiegel*:

A new generation of sceptics and scientists has set out to free the world of faith. Their weapons are Darwin, the Internet, and ... science and reason ... In short, a creed to the scientific explanation of the world, free of gods and idols.³²

In regard to Dawkins, the Catholic theologian Manfred Lütz (2007) spoke of the 'pathos of the scientist' ('Pathos des Wissenschaftlers'). Reinhard Hempelmann (2008a), the director of the Evangelische Stelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (EZW), the centre for religious and ideological issues of the Protestant church in Germany, described Dawkins thus: 'He makes a supposedly scientifically-oriented general attack on religions that lumps them all together on the hot seat and pathologises them as delusions. He claims and suggests that a scientific world understanding leads away from faith and towards atheism.'³³ The Catholic theologian Johanna Rahner (2010: 9) summarised Dawkins's *The God Delusion*:

As an enlightened and thinking human being, influenced by science, one could not possibly be anything but an atheist. Anything else would be a morbid delusion. ... Against such a virus of the mind, which contaminates our brains, Dawkins invokes, armed with biologicistic terminology and evolutionary theory, ... an evolutionary 'naturalisation' of the religious.³⁴

Third topos: superficiality – one-sidedness – ignorance – incompetence. The 'neo-atheist' criticism of religion is depicted as superficial and the 'New Atheists', especially Dawkins, as ignorant or incompetent. Sometimes this is simply asserted. Other times, we find that the third topos is based upon the second topos. Here, the argument is, that while the (natural) sciences can competently speak of the natural and/or empirical world, they have no authority over the supernatural. Thus it is concluded that since 'New Atheism' is science-based it will fail when it comes to a criticism of religion. One could almost say: the (alleged) science competence of the 'New Atheists' necessitates their (alleged) incompetence in regard to religion. The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk

(2007: 74), himself an atheist and author of a book critical of religion, referred to *The God Delusion* as a 'monument to the immortal shallowness of Anglican atheism.'³⁵ Graf (2007) observes reproachfully that 'Dawkins isn't even acquainted with a single classic author of cultural or religious studies.'³⁶ In October 2007, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD, Evangelical Church in Germany) stated in a review of *The God Delusion* that 'Dawkins oversimplifies things.' Kahl rejected the 'intellectual meagreness' ('gedankliche Dürftigkeit') of 'New Atheism', describing Schmidt-Salomon's criticism of religion as 'faulty and one-dimensional' ('kurzschlüssig und eindimensional') and Dawkins's atheism as 'clumsy' ('plump') (Garhammer 2009; Kahl 2006, 2008). Hinting at Dawkins's Darwinism, Lütz (2007) elaborated:

Dawkins is by no means a polymath. The man is a biologist and, above all, an evolutionary biologist. And he takes the liberty ... of explaining the whole world in biological terms. ... A polemic that stubbornly adheres to one view and, at the same time, is derisively contemptuous of all other views is reminiscent of a delusion. Dawkins has a naïve idea of science. Science, to him, is natural science only. It is obvious that he is not familiar with the principles and methods of the humanities. ... He proudly proclaims that he has never seriously concerned himself with theology. ... He is like an Egyptologist who writes about Finland and, due to the complete absence of pyramids, flatly denies the existence of any Finnish culture.³⁷

Similar is the comment from Wolfgang Huber (2008), at that time chair of the council of the EKD: 'Darwin does not compete against God: whoever looks at the world exclusively from an evolutionary perspective, misjudges the relevance of the Christian belief in Creation.'³⁸ Archbishop Cardinal Joachim Meisner (2009) took a firm stand during his All Saints' Day sermon on 1 November in Cologne Cathedral: 'We can only advise these natural scientists: "Cobbler, stick to your shoes!" They are competent in the laboratory but they cannot claim any authority for the other realities of the world, such as defining new Ten Commandments.'³⁹ In reference to the 'New Atheists' Rahner (2010) stated:

Not only is their theological knowledge paltry ... also their theoretical and philosophical awareness is far behind that of the eighteenth

century and the big names of that time such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant. The intellectual level is undercut even more deeply with a German publication: Michael Schmidt-Salomon's illustrated children's book *Which is the Way to God, Please? Little Piglet Asked ...* whose content could hardly be more banal.⁴⁰

Fourth topos: biologism – scientism – ideology – religion or similarity to religion. The scientific aspect of 'New Atheism' (second topos) sometimes is morphed, specifically from biology to biologism or, more generally, from science to scientism. According to this logic, the science at the bottom of the 'neo-atheist' criticism of religion is no longer regarded as science but rather as an (unacknowledged) ideology or religion. A similar approach is the identification of 'New Atheism' with fundamentalism or dogmatism. It is certainly striking how often metaphors from specifically religious contexts are employed to describe 'New Atheism'. In May 2007, 'New Atheism' made the cover story of *Der Spiegel*. The subtitle read: 'The crusade of the new Atheists' ('Der Kreuzzug der neuen Atheisten'). Smoltczyk (2007: 56–66), in the following article with the nearly identical title 'The crusade of the godless' ('Der Kreuzzug der Gottlosen'), considered Dawkins's book tours as 'proselytisations' ('Missionierungen'), defined 'New Atheism' by its 'missionary habit' ('missionarischer Habitus'), called the 'neo-atheistic' actors 'high priests in a crusade of the godless' ('Hohepriester dieses Kreuzzugs der Gottlosen'), and approvingly quoted the Protestant Bishop Huber who accused Dawkins of a 'pseudo-religious belief in science' ('pseudoreligiöse[r] Wissenschaftsglaube'). As a summary of the message of the 'New Atheists' he listed 'ten commandments', including: 'Thou shalt have no other gods but science.'⁴¹ In the same *Der Spiegel* issue, the journalist Ansbert Kneip (2007: 64) characterised the Giordano-Bruno-Stiftung (GBS) as 'the spiritual leader of all those who do not trust spiritual leaders'⁴² Lorenz Jäger (2008), contributing editor at *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), even called the GBS a 'cult' or 'sect' ('Sekte'). Recently, Jörg Djuren (2012), a regular contributor to the anarchistic newspaper *Graswurzelrevolution*, referred to the foundation as a 'bio-religious mission' ('bioreligiöse Missionsgesellschaft'). The FAZ printed the German translation of an article by John Gray (2008a, 2008b). Here, the British philosopher described 'New Atheism' as a secular fundamentalism ('säkulare[r] Fundamentalismus') or a 'fundamentalist atheism that aims to proselytise the world'

('fundamentalistische[r] Atheismus, der die ganze Welt missionieren will'⁴³). He also used expressions like 'ersatz religion' ('Ersatzreligion'), 'evangelical type of atheism' ('missionarischer Atheismus'), and 'apostles of unbelief' ('Apostel des Unglaubens'). Kahl (2008) spoke of Dawkins's 'dogmatic atheism' ('dogmatische[r] Atheismus').⁴⁴ The sociologist Hans Joas (2009) characterised Dawkins's, Dennett's or Hitchens's criticism of religion as a 'quasi-confessional atheism' ('quasikonfessionelle[r] Atheismus'). The EKD, in its review of *The God Delusion*, declared 'how the apologia of secularism becomes a counter-religion.'⁴⁵ According to Rahner (2010: 9), 'Dawkins's atheistic mission acquires pseudo-religious dimensions and fosters a proselytising attitude.'⁴⁶

Fifth topos: disrespectfulness – intolerance. Another recurring trait of the public discourse on the 'New Atheists' is their depiction as disrespectful or intolerant towards religion. In his article 'Intoleranter Atheismus' ('Intolerant Atheism'), Hempelmann (2008a) of EZW wrote: 'Atheism can also become intolerant, especially when it is cloaked by a mantle of science.'⁴⁷ Rahner (2010) pointed out that Dawkins and Hitchens do not shy away from 'denunciations of religion' ('Denunziationen der Religion').

Sixth topos: aggressiveness – militancy – menace. The attribution of aggressiveness/militancy and, in consequence, menace, can be regarded as a culmination of the fifth topos. One encounters this portrayal of 'New Atheism' in the public discourse so regularly that the expression 'militant atheism' could be considered a synonym for 'New Atheism'. Aggressiveness, generally, is ambivalent. Is it 'merely' an aggression in regards to language and style or is it a 'true' aggression with the potential for physical harm? The same holds true in regard to 'New Atheism'. Sometimes, an 'innocent' interpretation is well within the realm of possibility. At other times, however, one cannot deny a more drastic interpretation. Graf (2007) alluded to Dawkins's Darwinism and referred to him as a 'biologistic hate preacher' ('biologistischer Hassprediger'). In a similar vein, Kahl (2006) described Schmidt-Salomon's rhetoric as 'demagogic' ('demagogisch'). He also rejected Dawkins's 'hooligan atheism' ('Krawallatheismus') (Garhammer 2009). Christoph Marksches (2007), a Protestant theologian and, at the time, president of the Humboldt University of Berlin, simply spoke of a 'militant atheism' ('kämpferischer Atheismus'). Rahner (2010) went a step further and called it 'militant vulgar atheism' ('militanter Vulgäratheismus') and 'militant hardcore atheism' ('militanter hardcore-Atheismus'). EZW's

Hempelmann (2008a) called Dawkins an 'aggressive missionary of atheism' ('aggressiver Missionar des Atheismus') and, hereby, simultaneously described him in religious terms (combination of the fourth and sixth topos). He also suggested that Schmidt-Salomon's world-view was anticonstitutional (Hempelmann 2008b):

Schmidt-Salomon describes his world-view as 'evolutionary humanism.' ... If that ... were to find greater resonance and acceptance, it would certainly become an important point of cultural conflict and also a new area of responsibility for the Verfassungsschutz [Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution]. This, because the aforementioned 'new dominant culture' stands unquestionably in opposition to the moral and ethical foundation upon which the understanding of human rights and dignity in our constitution is based.⁴⁸

Gray (2008a, 2008b) asserted that 'Dawkins compares religion to a virus: religious ideas are memes that infect vulnerable minds, especially those of children. ... [A]nalogies of this kind are fraught with peril.⁴⁹ A very drastic depiction of 'New Atheism' was given by Smolczyk (2007) who compared it to the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution:

Full of zeal and anger, the battle has begun against the slightest smell of unreason, superstition, incense ... Suddenly, it appears as if the anti-clerical battle-criers of the eighteenth century were again to be heard: Voltaire, Diderot, the lads of the Jacobin club... . The total attack from the proponents of the Enlightenment takes no prisoners.⁵⁰

Seventh topos: anti-Semitism – Nazism. Critics of 'New Atheists' have occasionally associated them with Nazism; others have even identified them explicitly as anti-Semitic. With Nazis representing the epitome of aggressiveness and menace the seventh topos could be classified as a subspecies of the sixth topos. However, I prefer to consider it a category *sui generis* and shall cite it in more detail. After all, the accusation of Nazism might very well be the most severe charge against a societal or political actor in the German context. Lütz (2007) wrote that Dawkins was paying homage to 'an intelligence racism. ... Nobel Prize winner sperm banks are a bizarre by-product of a mentality which was not unfamiliar to the invent-

ors of euthanasia'.⁵¹ The Catholic Bishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller (2008), who was already mentioned in the context of the *Ferkelbuch*, compared Dawkins and Schmidt-Salomon to Nazis and communists:

After the politically aggressive atheism of National Socialism and communism ... these days there is a new aggressive godlessness which only pretends to be based on science. The English author Richard Dawkins has written a book with the title *The God Delusion*. Here he claims that those people – Christians, Jews, and Muslims – who believe in a personal Creator and Redeemer are indiscriminately afflicted with a mental delusion. Dawkins claims that it is possible to disprove the existence of God by means of science, modern biology, and the theory of evolution. ... Michael Schmidt-Salomon, another author and member of the Giordano-Bruno-Society [*sic!*] wrote a book entitled *Which is the Way to God, Please?, Little Piglet Asked*. In this book he has a pig dressed as a Jewish rabbi, a Christian bishop and a Muslim cleric ask about God. Ultimately, with this he is saying nothing more than that everyone who believes in God has the mental capacity of a pig.⁵²

In a similar vein, Archbishop Cardinal Meisner (2009) sermonised from the pulpit:

While on our city mission to Düsseldorf during the Pentecostal week, we encountered on the street an atheist bus that was driving through the streets of Germany. Upon it was printed: 'There is probably no God, so stop worrying and enjoy your life.' Now this so-called scientific atheism is celebrating a resurgence. Hopefully people will see through this old trick that tries to make them lose their faith in God. It's important to remember that such undertakings are not just harmless experiments conducted by a few people. Just as before, it can literally also cost many people their lives today. Along with the belief in God, the positivistic materialism and evolutionism of the new atheists would like to wipe out both the Christian view of humans as the image of God and reasonable moral people. ... In a similar fashion to the way the National Socialists in their time saw individuals primarily as carriers of the genetic material of their race, the trailblazer of the new godless, the Englishman Richard Dawkins, also defines

humans as ‘packages of the all-important genes’, the preservation of which is our paramount purpose for existence. ... I am not trying to paint here some exaggeratedly horrific picture, no, this is the frighteningly present reality.⁵³

While both Lütz and Meisner have associated Dawkins with Nazi ideology, they do not go so far as to explicitly say he *is* a Nazi. A comparison, after all, is not an identification. The accusation directed against Philipp Möller, however, was more direct. On 24 March 2011, he participated in a panel discussion in Berlin on the topic ‘The world would be better off without religion.’⁵⁴ His opening statement ended with the following words:

Those who can split the atom, says Michael Schmidt-Salomon, and communicate via satellite, must have sufficient emotional and intellectual maturity. And a mythology, which is 2000 years old and was developed by a primitive culture of shepherds will not help us with this any longer.⁵⁵

In the course of the discussion, Möller referred to Albert Einstein, who ‘had broken away from his childish Jewish superstition and, thus, became a scientist with a naturalistic world-view.’⁵⁶ He was interrupted by the Catholic Monsignor Wilhelm Imkamp who was also on the podium:

‘Childish Jewish superstition’ is an impossible thing to say! Particularly in Berlin, you cannot speak of a ‘childish Jewish superstition.’ That’s just not possible! ... I’m angry that you – in the name of Enlightenment – are speaking of a ‘childish Jewish superstition’ and are disqualifying the Jewish religion. And then you act out and say that the Catholic Church has persecuted the Jews. The persecutor of Jews, that’s *you!*⁵⁷

While the seven topoi can undoubtedly be understood as varied approaches to defining ‘New Atheism’, this may not be their only function. By characterising the ‘New Atheists’ as arrogant or vain (first topoi), as disrespectful or aggressive (fifth and sixth topoi), or as Nazis (seventh topoi), the subject of discussion is shifted: instead of dealing with *what* is said, now the focus is on *who* said it (*argumentum ad hominem*) or *how* something is said (critique of style). I think, therefore, that the topoi – or some of them, at least – can also be considered as rhetorical devices.

Concluding thoughts and further questions

I have discussed the origins of the term ‘New Atheism’ and how it was adopted into German discourse. Besides authors from the English-speaking world such as Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, and Hitchens, several German social actors have also been labelled ‘New Atheists’ by the German media (or, in one case, has self-identified as such). Having demonstrated how ‘New Atheism’ is characterised in German public discourse, I have accomplished the main objective of my paper: to give a description of the German situation in regards to ‘New Atheism’. In my concluding remarks, I want to briefly reflect on this reception. Contrary to my demonstrations so far, the following thoughts are of a more interpretative – or even speculative – character.

I find it striking how many of the topoi found in the discourse on ‘New Atheism’ have negative connotations and are used pejoratively. While the attribution of arrogance or vanity (first topos) may still be considered as moderate or relatively harmless, the portrayal of ‘New Atheism’ as a militant and dangerous social movement (sixth topos) is certainly a different matter. This is true especially when ‘New Atheists’ are associated with Nazism or anti-Semitism (seventh topos). Here, the aim is the discrediting of ‘New Atheists’: by constructing them as the ‘other’, they are excluded as acceptable societal actors (Edgell *et al.* 2006).

How then, is this – sometimes even fierce – rejection of ‘New Atheism’ in German public discourse to be explained? Answering this question is a difficult task. Certainly, different factors come into play here, as different critics of the ‘New Atheists’ have different agendas and different reasons for their criticism.

I find it plausible to assume that the surge of atheist bestsellers has induced the aforementioned German theologians’ and church officials’ reactions to the ‘New Atheists’ as an expression of their fear: specifically of losing public influence, political power, and financial aid. Public intellectuals like Dawkins or Dennett did not write their books for a German audience. Because of the international prominence of these authors, however, ‘New Atheism’ has been discussed in Germany. With Schmidt-Salomon and the GBS becoming part of the discussion, the specific German situation has been addressed as well. Over the last few decades, the German religious landscape has changed fundamentally. The number of people attending Sunday services has steadily declined, while the number of people resigning their church membership has increased. Furthermore, the Ger-

man reunification has had a dramatic impact: 65–80 per cent of former East Germans are not religious and many of these self-identify as atheists. Today, 30 per cent of the German population have no religious affiliation (Wohlrab-Sahr 2008).⁵⁸ There was hardly any public awareness of this situation until the 1990s. From the churches' perspective, the existence of non-believers and atheists *per se* seems not to be the main problem – as long as they remain calm and do not organise themselves. In the course of the public debate on 'New Atheism', however, atheist activists have raised their voices and questioned the legitimacy of the special relationship between the German state and the churches. For example, Schmidt-Salomon (2006: 139–40) demanded a complete separation of religion and the state, the substitution of theological faculties in favour of institutes for the scientific study of religion, the introduction of comparative religion as a school subject instead of the presently existing religious education, and the termination of financial state support for the churches. Such specific demands pose a threat to the existence of the churches in Germany and their intense counter-critique is not surprising.

Such reasoning, of course, cannot explain why 'New Atheism' has been rejected by certain German *atheists* such as Peter Sloterdijk or Joachim Kahl. Kahl especially is very critical of Schmidt-Salomon and Dawkins (Garhammer 2009; Kahl 2006, 2008). While Kahl basically shares the same philosophical position as Dawkins or Schmidt-Salomon – after all, he considers himself to be an atheist, too – his reaction to 'New Atheism' is hardly distinguishable from that of the theologians (as we have seen in the previous section). Considering the ferocity of Kahl's reproach, it cannot be ruled out that personal animosities are involved. The case of Kahl, however, clearly shows that the public discourse is quite powerful. In order to distinguish and distance himself from fellow atheists, he refers to the label 'New Atheism' and explicitly defines himself *ex negativo*: as a representative of an 'old atheism' (Kahl 2008). Kahl's position in relation to 'New Atheism' is very similar to that of Andreas Müller – only in reverse. Both social actors use the label for their own self-promotion.

The public debate on 'New Atheism', which in Germany was at its height between 2007 and 2010, has recently calmed down, at the least in the media. It will be interesting to observe the future of 'New Atheism'. Will the label 'New Atheist' remain a category of exclusion (as the term 'atheist' has been for centuries and still is today in some parts of the world), or will

the word be used for self-identification more often? Or will the differences between 'New Atheism' and other forms of atheism diminish so that the term will eventually be forgotten? Apart from these terminological issues – and, I think, more importantly – we shall find out if the *status quo* regarding the relationship between the German state and the churches is preserved or if atheist activists succeed in promoting their cause, and to what extent. ■



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Endnotes

- 1 I cannot discuss the validity of Berger's judgement here, but I would like to at least contrast it with the empirical fact that more than 360 religious groups from different faiths can be found in Berlin (Grübel & Rademacher 2003: VI).
- 2 My bewilderment has persisted during three years of researching 'New Atheism' in the DFG-funded project "The "return of religion" and the "return of criticism of religion": The "New Atheism" in recent German and American culture' at the Freie Universität Berlin (further information at www.fu-berlin.de/ifr/forschung/DFG-Projekt_Neo-Atheismus). Yet, I intend not to write about New Atheism (as an entity) but about the *public discourse* on 'New Atheism'. Notice that I consistently use quotation marks in this paper: 'New Atheism', 'New Atheist', and 'neo-atheist'. My approach is, actually, not particularly uncommon in the academic study of religion. It is widely agreed that God himself – or the Goddess herself, or the gods themselves – cannot be the object of research. To us, actually, it is irrelevant if a deity exists or not. All we are concerned with are the statements about a deity made by religious actors. A similar approach, I think, is applicable in regard to 'New Atheism'.
- 3 More precisely, 'The Church of the Non-Believers' –

- thus the title of Wolf's article in *Wired* – was posted online on 23 October 2006, as Wolf indicates in his follow-up 'Milquetoast Agnosticism' (Wolf 2006b). Before he coined the label 'New Atheism' as a name for Dawkins, Harris, and Dennett, the three authors were already grouped together in other articles. This had been done possibly for the first time in a review of *The God Delusion* dating from 21 August 2006, in *Publishers Weekly* (www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-618-68000-9). Another pre-Wolf article is 'The New Naysayers' by *Newsweek's* Jerry Adler (2006).
- 4 Before the term 'New Atheism' appeared for the first time in the German media, Jörg Blech (2006a) wrote about the three authors Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris (in his article 'Glücklicher ohne Gott' in *Der Spiegel*, 23.10.2006) referring to them simply as 'atheists' (without a prefixed 'new'). The English translation of the article in *Spiegel Online International* on 26 October, however, was titled 'The New Atheists: Researchers Crusade against American Fundamentalists' (Blech 2006b).
 - 5 'Die New Atheists kämpfen gegen Gott und Fundamentalismus ... In den USA macht ... eine Bewegung von sich reden, die Gott das Handwerk legen will – die Bewegung der New Atheists'.
 - 6 'Gibt es heute eine gefährlichere Ressource als die Religion? ... Kein Wunder, daß in Amerika der neue Atheismus, der "new atheism", boomt'.
 - 7 Regarding the making of the German 'New Atheism', I am indebted to Ulf Plessentin, my colleague at the Institute for the Scientific Study of Religion at the Freie Universität Berlin.
 - 8 The biographical information is taken from www.schmidt-salomon.de/person.htm.
 - 9 See www.giordano-bruno-stiftung.de. Considering the political implementation of an atheist/humanist/secular agenda and the according consciousness-raising campaigns, the GBS would deserve to be portrayed in more detail than is possible here.
 - 10 Ten Commandment Alternatives have also been proposed by other 'New Atheists'. For example, Dawkins (2007: 298–9) quotes Ebon Musings's *New Ten Commandments* in *The God Delusion*. Hitchens (2010) wrote an article 'The New Commandments' for *Vanity Fair* and also was featured in a videoclip by Jacques del Conte of the same name.
 - 11 'Und die Moral von der Geschichte / Wer Gott nicht kennt, der braucht ihn nicht! ... Dem Ferkel haben sie nichts vorgemacht: / Es hat sie alle ausgelacht ...' (The above is the official translation at www.ferkelbuch.de/ferkelbuch.pdf).
 - 12 The following account is based on www.ferkelbuch.de/indizierungsantrag.pdf, www.zentralratdjuden.de/de/article/1536.html, www.ferkelbuch.de/presse.html, and web.archive.org/web/20080529033238/www.bundespruefstelle.de/bmfsfj/generator/bpjm/die-bundespruefstelle,did=108476.html.
 - 13 'Dies ist ein wichtiges Signal für den Rechtsstaat: Endlich ist juristisch geklärt, dass die Kirche kein rechtsfreier Raum ist. Herr Müller und seine Kollegen sind nun, wie alle anderen Bürger auch, dazu verpflichtet, wahrheitsgemäß zu zitieren.' www.schmidt-salomon.de/mss-mueller.htm.
 - 14 See [www.buchreport.de/bestseller/bestseller_einzelansicht.htm?tx_bestseller_pi1\[isbn\]=9783865690302](http://www.buchreport.de/bestseller/bestseller_einzelansicht.htm?tx_bestseller_pi1[isbn]=9783865690302).
 - 15 See www.deschner-preis.de.
 - 16 On 26 May 2007, 'New Atheism' was the cover story of the influential German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* (No. 22). Here, Ansbert Kneip (2007), in his article on the GBS paralleled Dawkins and Schmidt-Salomon. Only a few days later on 29 May, *Der Spiegel* initiated an online chat with 'Germany's chief atheist' ('Deutschlands Chef-Atheist') as a follow-up. Here, possibly for the first time, he was identified as a 'New Atheist' (www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/0,1518,485459,00.html). Since then, it has been common practice to address him as a 'New Atheist' (Jäger 2008, Garhammer 2009, Wilhelm 2011).
 - 17 The German slogan 'Es gibt mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit keinen Gott' is a modification of the British original 'There's probably no God'. The 'probably' is replaced by a technical term used in German jurisprudence which literally translates to 'with a probability bordering on certainty'. The English subtitle 'Now stop worrying and enjoy your life' was replaced by 'Ein erfülltes Leben braucht keinen Glauben' ('You don't need faith to have a fulfilled life', on the left side of the bus), 'Werte sind menschlich – auf uns kommt es an' ('Morals are human – it's up to us', on the right side of the bus), and 'Aufklärung heißt, Verantwortung zu übernehmen' ('Enlightenment means to take responsibility', on the back of the bus).
 - 18 See www.buskampagne.de/?page_id=28.
 - 19 See www.buskampagne.de/wp-content/uploads/buskampagne_tourplan_rgb_180509.jpg.
 - 20 See www.tour.gottkennen.de.
 - 21 'Und wenn es ihn doch gibt...'
 - 22 See www.giordano-bruno-stiftung.de/mitarbeiter/moeller-philipp and www.gbsbb.de/vereinvorstand.
 - 23 Möller's *HPD*-podcast 'Philipp Möller im Gespräch ...' is found at hpd.de/podcast. Among many others, he has interviewed Daniel Dennett and Rüdiger Weida aka 'Brother Spaghettus', a German member of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (fsm-uckermark.blogspot.com).
 - 24 See feuerbringer.com/about, www.terryrotter.de/feuerbringer/autor-und-werk/autorenportrat/, and www.feuerbringer-magazin.de. The name 'Feuerbringer' is a reference to Prometheus' sobriquet Pырphoros, 'bringer of fire'. Fire and light as a metaphor for reason and enlightenment is also a central theme in Müller's book *Das Prometheus-Trio* (2009d).
 - 25 In February 2007, he described himself as the one who is 'bringing New Atheism to Germany' ('Der Literaturstudent und Satiriker trägt den Neuen Athe-

ismus nach Deutschland, Müller 2007). In January 2009, he wrote about 'the anti-theism that he and the other New Atheists represent' ('Die Gelegenheit nutze ich, um ... zu erläutern, was der Antitheismus, den ich zusammen mit den anderen Neuen Atheisten vertritt, eigentlich ist', Müller 2009a). One and a half years later, in July 2010, he confirmed in his blog: 'I will continue to be a New Atheist' ('Ich bleibe ein Neuer Atheist', Müller 2010).

- 26 While recognising that the discussion of 'New Atheism' in the media has benefitted the atheist/secularist/humanist cause, Schmidt-Salomon (2009: 1–2) has criticised the label: 'Unfortunately the term [New Atheism] failed to display the actual intentions and ideas of the protagonists of this movement. ... I have always somewhat struggled with the imprecise definition of "atheism". ... The term "new Atheism", thus, is problematic as it hides the "Einsteinian religion" which bands together many new critics of religion. A much bigger problem, however, is that this term does not reflect what most of the authors are actually concerned with. After all, we are not so interested in the question of God, it is merely one small aspect of a much larger issue. In truth, the so-called new Atheism is but the religious criticism tip of the entire world-view iceberg. That which is beneath the surface of "New Atheism" is much more interesting than the parts that have been most visible thus far. Beneath the surface we can see the contours of a new world-view that goes far beyond the mere critique of religion. As opposed to "new Atheism", we can call this alternative world-view "new humanism" or (more precisely) "naturalistic humanism".' ('Doch leider zielte dieser Begriff [Neuer Atheismus] im Kern an den eigentlichen Zielen und Vorstellungen der Protagonisten dieser Bewegung vorbei ... [I]ch habe mich schon immer ein wenig gegen diesen unpräzisen Begriff "Atheismus" gewehrt. ... Der Begriff "neuer Atheismus" ist also insofern problematisch, als er die "Einsteinsche Religiosität" verdeckt, die viele neue Religionskritiker miteinander verbindet. Ein weit größeres Problem jedoch ist, dass dieser Begriff gar nicht das widerspiegelt, worum es den meisten Autoren geht. Im Grunde interessiert uns die Frage nach Gott nämlich gar nicht so sehr, sie ist nur ein Randaspekt eines sehr viel größeren Themas. In Wahrheit ist der sog. neue Atheismus nur die religionskritische Spitze eines weltanschaulichen Eisberges. Und das, was sich unterhalb der medialen Oberfläche des "neuen Atheismus" befindet, ist weitaus interessanter als jene Teile, die bislang sichtbar wurden. Unter der Oberfläche zeigen sich nämlich die Konturen einer neuen Weltanschauung, die über bloße Religionskritik weit hinausgeht. Man kann diese alternative Weltanschauung in Analogie zum "neuen Atheismus" als "neuen Humanismus" oder (etwas präziser) als "naturalistischen Humanismus" bezeichnen.')

In 2007, Dawkins talked about 'The New Atheism' at the 13th Conference of the Atheist Alliance

International (AAI). Here, he said: 'We've heard a lot recently about the so-called "new atheism". ... It's been suggested that we are too aggressive. ... We are frequently accused of being "shrill", "strident", or of "ranting". I think the accusation is exaggerated, to say the least.' (richarddawkins.net/videos/4599-the-new-atheism.)

At the same conference, Sam Harris expressed concerns regarding the usage of the label 'atheist' which certainly can be applied to 'New Atheism': 'Tonight, I'd like to try to make the case, that our use of this label [atheist] is a mistake – and a mistake of some consequence. ... I never thought of myself as an atheist ... I didn't even use the term in *The End of Faith*. ... While it is an honor to find myself continually assailed with Dan [Dennett], Richard [Dawkins], and Christopher [Hitchens] as though we were a single person with four heads, this whole notion of the "new atheists" or "militant atheists" has been used to keep our criticism of religion at arm's length, and has allowed people to dismiss our arguments without meeting the burden of actually answering them.' (Harris 2007.)

The only American author I am aware of who identifies with 'New Atheism' or, at the very least, uses the term affirmatively, is the American physicist Victor J. Stenger, as the title of his book *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (2009) clearly shows.

- 27 'Dawkins genießt es, auf alles eine Antwort zu haben.'
- 28 'In den eitlen Posen des alldeutenden Großaufklärers erinnert er an seinen Fachkollegen Ernst Haeckel, den "Welträtsel"-Löser, der sich von den Monisten einst zum "Gegenpapst" ausrufen ließ.'
- 29 'MSS [Schmidt-Salomon] schadet der Sache der Religionskritik und des säkularen Humanismus durch die plumpe Zerteilung der Menschheitsgeschichte – hier religiöser Mumpitz, dort aufgeklärter Wärmestrom –, vorgetragen in einem arroganten und hämischen Ton.'
- 30 'Dawkins' Unfehlbarkeitsdünkel übertrifft den Unfehlbarkeitsanspruch des römischen Papstes bei weitem.'
- 31 'Richard Dawkins ist ein glühender Anhänger der Evolutionstheorie. ... Mit der Beflissenheit eines Naturwissenschaftlers legt Dawkins dar, warum es "fast sicher keinen Gott geben kann", und fordert eine Abkehr vom Glauben.'
- 32 'Eine neue Generation von Skeptikern und Wissenschaftlern hat sich aufgemacht, die Welt vom Glauben zu befreien. Ihre Waffen sind Darwin, das Internet und ... Wissenschaft und Vernunft ... Kurz, ein Bekenntnis zur wissenschaftlichen Welterklärung, frei von Göttern und Götzen.'
- 33 'Bei ihm findet sich ein vermeintlich naturwissenschaftlich orientierter Generalangriff auf die Religionen, die allesamt auf die Anklagebank gesetzt und als Wahnvorstellung pathologisiert werden. Naturwissenschaftliche Welterkenntnis führe weg vom

- Glauben und hin zum Atheismus. Das wird von ihm behauptet und suggeriert.’
- 34 ‘Als aufgeklärter, naturwissenschaftlich geprägter und denkender Mensch könne man gar nichts anderes Sein [*sic!*] als Atheist, alles andere sei eine [*sic!*] krankhafter Wahn. ... Gegen diesen geistigen Virus, der unsere Gehirne verseucht, versucht Dawkins sich mit dem Instrumentar [*sic!*] einer biologistischen Terminologie und des evolutionären Denkmodells ... an einer evolutiven “Naturalisierung” alles Religiösen.’
- 35 ‘Daß bekennende Gottesleugner ihrerseits vom eigenen Eifer düpiert werden können, zeigt jüngst der Fall des Biologen Richard Dawkins, dessen Buch *The God Delusion* (2006) der unvergänglichen Seichtheit des anglikanischen Atheismus ein Denkmal setzt.’
- On 11 April 2011, in Berlin, I attended the conference ‘Neuer Atheismus: Eine humanistische Alternative zu den Religionen?’ which was organised by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. There Andreas Fincke expressed a very similar view. In his paper ‘“Neuer Atheismus” – Kampfansage an die Kirchen’ (‘“New Atheism”: A challenge to the churches’), he said that he would not mind the criticism of religion – if only it is intelligent, as in Nietzsche’s or Feuerbach’s case. The Anglo-Saxon superficiality from the likes of Richard Dawkins he considered unbearable.
- 36 ‘Dawkins kennt keinen einzigen Klassiker der Kultur- und Religionswissenschaften.’
- 37 ‘Richard Dawkins ist keineswegs ein Universalgelehrter. Der Mann ist Biologe, Evolutionsbiologe vor allem. Und er nimmt sich die Freiheit, ... die ganze Welt biologisch zu sehen. ... Doch das starre Festhalten an einer einzigen Perspektive und die hämische Verachtung aller anderen Sichtweisen in dieser höchst einseitigen Streitschrift erinnern dennoch bisweilen fatal an einen Wahn ... Dawkins zeigt ein naives Wissenschaftsverständnis. Wissenschaft ist für ihn nur Naturwissenschaft. Die Prinzipien und Methoden der Geisteswissenschaften sind ihm offensichtlich nicht einmal bekannt. ... Er gibt stolz bekannt, dass er sich mit Theologie nie ernsthaft befasst hat. ... Er ist da wie ein Ägyptologe, der über Finnland schreibt und wegen des völligen Mangels an Pyramiden den Finnen jegliche Kultur abspricht.’
- 38 ‘Darwin konkurriert nicht mit Gott: Wer die Welt allein aus dem Blickwinkel der Evolutionstheorie sieht, verkennt die Bedeutung des christlichen Schöpfungsglaubens.’
- 39 ‘Diesen Naturwissenschaftlern kann man nur dringend raten: “Schuster, bleib bei deinen Leisten!” Sie haben Kompetenz im Labor, aber für die übrige Weltwirklichkeit sind sie nicht speziell zuständig, etwa um neue Zehn Gebote zu definieren.’
- 40 ‘Nicht nur die Kenntnisse *in theologis* sind bei genauerem Hinsehen gottserbärmlich ... Auch der wissenschaftstheoretische wie philosophische Kenntnisstand bleibt hinter dem des 18. Jhs., wie sie sich mit Namen wie David Hume und Immanuel Kant verbinden, weit zurück. ... Das intellektuelle Niveau
- wird allenfalls noch durch eine deutschsprachige Publikation unterboten: Michael Schmidt-Salomons Kinder-Bilderbuch “Wo bitte geht’s zu Gott? Frage das kleine Ferkel”, das ... inhaltlich ... an Platitude kaum zu unterbieten ist.’
- 41 ‘Du sollst keine anderen Götter neben der Wissenschaft haben.’
- 42 ‘Die Giordano Bruno Stiftung ist das geistige Oberhaupt all derjenigen, die geistigen Oberhäuptern nicht trauen.’
- 43 The German translation that was printed in *FAZ* differs from the English original: Gray (2008a) spoke of an ‘*evangelical* atheism’ which was translated as ‘*fundamentalistische[r]* Atheismus’ (Gray 2008b, my italics) by Matthias Fienbork.
- 44 ‘Das ist der borniert dogmatische Sinn seiner Ausführungen. ... Dawkins dagegen immunisiert sich systematisch gegen jegliche Kritik. ... Allerdings haben diese Überlegungen Dawkins’ nichts mit seinem dogmatischen Atheismus zu tun.’
- 45 ‘Wie Apologie des Säkularen zu einer Gegenreligion wird’ (www.ekd.de/aktuell/55579.html).
- 46 ‘[D]as atheistische Sendungsbewusstsein Richard Dawkins’ [gewinnt] mitunter schon pseudoreligiöse Dimensionen und pflegt die Attitüde von Proselytenmacherei.’
- 47 ‘Auch der Atheismus kann intolerant werden, vor allem, wenn er sich mit dem Mantel der Wissenschaftlichkeit umgibt.’
- 48 ‘Schmidt-Salomon bezeichnet sein weltanschauliches System als “evolutionären Humanismus”. ... Sollte das ... größere Resonanz und Akzeptanz finden, würde dies sicher ein wichtiges Thema für weltanschauliche Auseinandersetzungen sein und auch ein neues Aufgabengebiet für den Verfassungsschutz werden. Denn die skizzierte “neue Leitkultur” steht fraglos denjenigen Werten und ethischen Orientierungen entgegen, die dem Verständnis von Menschenwürde und Menschenrechten in der Verfassung zugrunde liegen.’
- 49 ‘In seinem Buch “Der Gotteswahn” vergleicht Dawkins den Glauben mit einem Virus: Religiöse Ideen sind Meme, die anfällige Menschen (besonders Kinder) infizieren. ... [S]olche Vergleiche [sind] sehr gefährlich’ (translation by Matthias Fienbork).
- 50 ‘Mit Eifer und Zorn wird gegen alles zu Felde gezogen, was nur entfernt nach Unvernunft, Aberglaube, Weihrauch riecht. ... Plötzlich meint man wieder die antiklerikalen Schlachtrufer des 18. Jahrhunderts zu hören: Voltaire, Denis Diderot, die Jungs vom Jakobinerclub. ... Der Totalangriff der Aufklärer macht keine Gefangenen.’
- 51 Dawkins huldigt ‘einem Intelligenzrassismus... . Nobelpreisträgersamenbanken sind ein skurriles Nebenprodukt einer Mentalität, die auch den Euthanasieerfindern ... nicht fremd war.’
- 52 ‘Nach dem politisch aggressiven Atheismus des Nationalsozialismus und des Kommunismus ... gibt es heute eine neue aggressive Gottlosigkeit, die sich

- nur zum Schein auf die Wissenschaft beruft. Der englische Autor Richard Dawkins hat ein Buch mit dem Titel "Der Gotteswahn" verfasst. Darin wird behauptet, dass jene Menschen – Christen, Juden und Muslime –, die an einen personalen Schöpfer- und Erlösergott glauben, ohne Unterschied von einem geistigen Wahn erfasst seien. Dawkins meint, mit Hilfe der Wissenschaft, der modernen Biologie und Evolutionslehre könne man den Glauben an die Existenz Gottes widerlegen. ... Michael Schmidt-Salomon, ein weiterer Autor und Mitglied der Giordano-Bruno-Gesellschaft [sic!] hat ein Buch geschrieben mit dem Titel "Wo bitte geht's zu Gott? fragte das kleine Ferkel". Darin lässt er ein Schwein auftreten, das dann nach Gott fragt – als jüdischer Rabbi, als christlicher Bischof oder als ein moslemischer Geistlicher. Letztlich sagt er damit nichts anderes, als dass alle, die an Gott glauben, sich auf dem geistigen Niveau eines Schweins befänden.'
- 53 'Als wir bei unserer Stadtmission in der Pfingstwoche in Düsseldorf auf die Straßen gingen, begegnete uns ein Atheistenbus, der durch die Städte der Bundesrepublik fuhr und auf dem zu lesen war: "Es gibt wahrscheinlich keinen Gott. Also hört auf, euch Sorgen zu machen, und genießt euer Leben". ... Nun aber feiert dieser so genannte wissenschaftliche Atheismus fröhliche Auferstehung. Hoffentlich durchschauen die Menschen diesen uralten Dreh, mit dem sie den Gottesglauben verlieren sollen. Es sei nochmals daran erinnert, dass solche Unternehmungen keine harmlosen Experimente einiger Leute sind! Wie damals, so kann das auch heute viele Menschen buchstäblich das Leben kosten. Der positivistische Materialismus und Evolutionismus der neuen Atheisten möchte – zusammen mit dem Glauben an Gott – auch die christliche Sicht des Menschen als Ebenbild Gottes und vernunftbegabte moralische Person ausmerzen. ... Ähnlich wie einst die Nationalsozialisten im einzelnen Menschen primär nur den Träger des Erbgutes seiner Rasse sahen, definiert auch der Vorreiter der neuen Gottlosen, der Engländer Richard Dawkins, den Menschen als "Verpackung der allein wichtigen Gene", deren Erhaltung der vorrangige Zweck unseres Daseins sei. ... Das ist keine Horrormalerei, die hier vorgenommen wird, sondern das ist eine schaurige Gegenwart.' For a recording of Meisner's sermon, see www.domradio.de/video/embed/3792.html. For Schmidt-Salomon's reaction, see hpd.de/node/8113.
- 54 For further information, see www.disput-berlin.de/. For a complete recording of the whole event, see vimeo.com/22750350.
- 55 "Denn, wer das Atom spalten kann, sagt Michael Schmidt-Salomon, und über Satelliten kommuniziert, der muß die dafür erforderliche emotionale und intellektuelle Reife besitzen. Und eine Mythologie, die 2000 Jahre alt ist und von einer primitiven Hirtenkultur entwickelt wurde, wird uns dabei nicht weiterhelfen.'

- 56 Einstein, in a letter to the philosopher Eric Gutkind from 3 January 1954, wrote: 'For me the Jewish religion like all others is an incarnation of the most childish superstitions' (www.guardian.co.uk/science/2008/may/13/peopleinscience.religion).
- 57 "Kindischer jüdischer' Aberglaube geht absolut nicht! In Berlin kann man nicht vom "kindisch-jüdischen Aberglauben" reden! Das geht nicht! ... Ich ärgere mich ..., daß Sie – im Namen von Aufklärung – von jüdischen Aberglauben sprechen und die jüdische Religion disqualifizieren. Und dann kommen Sie hin und sagen, die katholische Kirche hat die Juden verfolgt. Die Judenverfolger, das sind Sie!'
- 58 Similar numbers are given by the Forschungsgruppe Weltanschauungen in Deutschland (fowid, Research Group on World-views in Germany) which is associated with the GBS and the HPD (www.fowid.de/). Not being religiously affiliated is, of course, not identical with being non-religious or atheist. Nevertheless, the numbers are impressive, especially when compared to those of 1970. Back then, 3.9 per cent were not religiously affiliated.

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