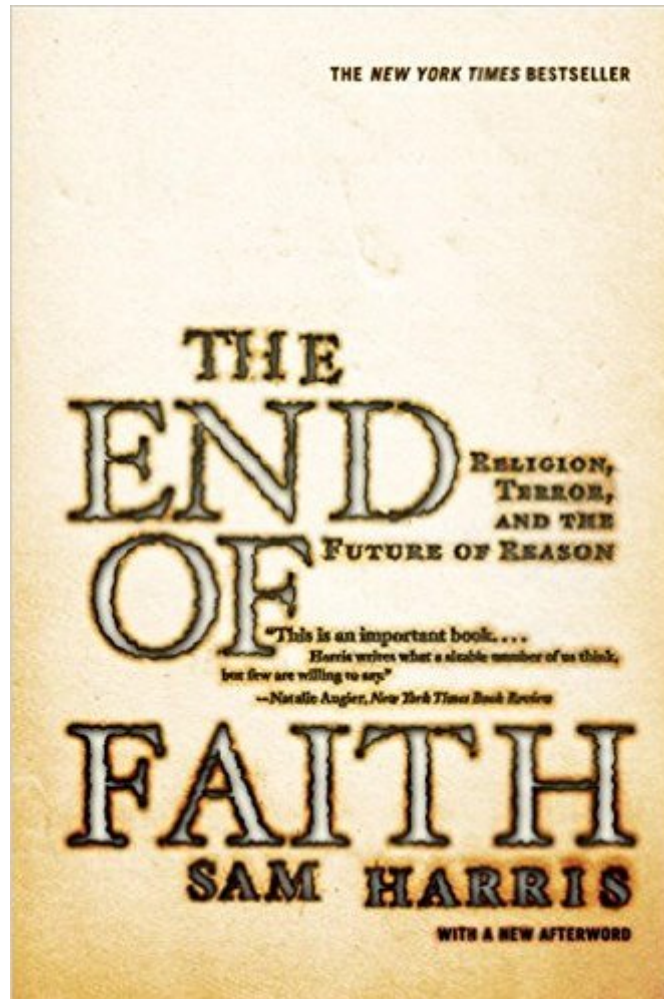


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The End Of Faith: Religion, Terror, And The Future Of Reason



Synopsis

"The End of Faith articulates the dangers and absurdities of organized religion so fiercely and so fearlessly that I felt relieved as I read it, vindicated....Harris writes what a sizable number of us think, but few are willing to say." •Natalie Angier, "New York Times In "The End of Faith", Sam Harris delivers a startling analysis of the clash between reason and religion in the modern world. He offers a vivid, historical tour of our willingness to suspend reason in favor of religious beliefs•even when these beliefs inspire the worst human atrocities. While warning against the encroachment of organized religion into world politics, Harris draws on insights from neuroscience, philosophy, and Eastern mysticism to deliver a call for a truly modern foundation for ethics and spirituality that is both secular and humanistic. Winner of the 2005 PEN/Martha Albrand Award for Nonfiction.

Book Information

Paperback: 348 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton; Reprint edition (September 17, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393327655

ISBN-13: 978-0393327656

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (1,289 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #6,312 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 inÂ Books > Politics & Social

Sciences > Philosophy > Movements > Rationalism #2 inÂ Books > Religion & Spirituality >

Religious Studies > Psychology #3 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Good & Evil

Customer Reviews

Author Sam Harris has a problem with the world's major organized religions. His thesis, in particular, is that while the foibles of religious fundamentalism (of various brands, though always essentially bespeaking the same mentality) may appear to be more or less harmless, they are in fact a gravely dangerous phenomenon that threatens humankind itself with extinction. The problem is that with the more rabid varieties of religious fundamentalism we are no longer looking just at the ravings of those halfwit television evangelists who run the credit card icons across the bottom of the screen for the ensnaring of the gullible. Now, on the contrary, we have entered an age- nothing similar to which has been seen since the Spanish Inquisition- in which whole hordes of religious zealots view

themselves as being commanded by the "will of God" (whatever in the world that means) to torture, mutilate, and brutally kill the rest of us. It is this unreasoning willingness to commit acts of atrocity for "God" (under whatever name), based upon belief systems that are not only of undemonstrated validity but of absolutely undemonstrable validity, that bothers Sam Harris, and he does a truly eloquent job of explaining why, in terms of radical Islam, Christianity, and other belief systems. While Mr. Harris takes on Islam with considerable fervor, he certainly does not neglect the sordid side of religion in the West. He argues, with regard to both the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, that it is only by selectively ignoring parts of the so-called sacred texts that many people, eschewing the more radical views of these belief systems, can function even as religious "moderates."

This is an important book. It delves into the rightness of religious belief, supernaturalism in particular. It shows an ugly scene - religious extremism is widespread and much of our world's hurt can be traced directly to it. The author shows that religion is not a benign force - so often it is detrimental to world peace and happiness. The author's observations do not just apply to Osama Bin Laden and his ilk, but also to President Bush and like-minded evangelical Christians. What took me aback is the position that Harris is advocating - that it is okay to subject religion to careful scrutiny, in fact, it is desirable as religion is having such a negative impact on us all. He's talking about a change in social norms, attitudes, what is considered mannerly... he's saying that we can no longer afford to be respectful and tolerant of others' religious beliefs when those beliefs could do us all in. He suggests that we ask: What is the evidence for your God? I learnt that a person's religious beliefs are his own private business - every person has to work out his own salvation - and it was not for me to question these beliefs. I learned that it is behavior that counts - how we treat others and the world we live in. But in America this has flipped. Now many people talk about their beliefs, the one-on-one they have with Christ, while they indulge in the most hateful and unchristian behavior. Worse, they think their beliefs call for such behavior. Harris suggests that it is time for us to grab this nettle and challenge religion's hold on so many people. I have been researching a book on Middle East peace. I was startled to learn the role that Bible prophecy is playing in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

It is both odd and a mistake to refer to this book as "ineffectual". Mr. Harris points out something which, one hopes, we all already know. And that is, despite its ability to blind us emotionally, despite the fact that in most cases people come to embrace religion through some form of indoctrination, or in the case of President Bush, come to it as a substitute for other forms of intoxication, religion as an

artifact of human thought has long outlived its usefulness. We are no longer tribes squatting in huts teaching our children that the world is flat and if the weather turns it's because some god is angry about the clothes we wear. Problem being that today, in place of sticks and rocks we have big, powerful and easily portable weapons. What is effective about this book is that it finally opens the door to this virtually taboo observation: Middle east or West, by being treated as infallible and unquestionable, religion quantifiably does more harm than good. Mr. Harris points out just how utterly antiquated and basically wrong so many religious tracts are by using the tracts themselves. Proof enough that religions no longer hold the key to human happiness is demonstrated by the convenient "editing" of some tenets of faith by none other than the faithful who, in our culture, get closer to god by picking and choosing those aspects of the word of god which best suits the starkly more secular and practical aspects of their lives. Is everybody comfy? Good. It is even more important and highly effective to point out how faith continues to divert our society from coming to terms with the objective facts which define the issues facing us today in favor of consistently relying on belief.

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