Foreword by
Michael Shermer

The
Secular
Landscape

The Decline of
Religion in America

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This book is dedicated to Stanton Gagel (1987–2016), who taught me more than he knew.

Foreword to *The Secular Landscape*

Can you imagine an America without religion? Or at least picture a country on par with most other Western secular democracies that are flourishing just fine with low rates of religiosity and an impenetrable wall separating church and state? I can, because it is already happening now, and it may be the most important trend of the new century. As Kevin McCaffree documents in this book, the most important analysis of the American religious landscape ever produced, the days of America the "Christian nation" are over. And to those of us who prefer to keep the Constitution and the Bible in separate drawers, it is a good thing indeed.

Through the hard-slogging and shoe-leather-wearing work of statistical analysis, data synthesis and hypothesis testing, McCaffree has debunked the myth of American "exceptionalism"—that the United States stood as a religious bulwark against the rising tide of secularism begun over a century ago—and shows that America was never as religious as certain priests, politicians and pundits mythologized. In point of fact, according to the Pew Research Center, the fastest-growing religious cohort in America is the "nones"—those who check the box for "no religious affiliation." Such unaffiliated numbers have been climbing steadily out of the single-digit cellar in the 1990s into a now-respectable two-digit 23% of adults of all ages, up from 16% just since 2007. More telling for politicians who cater their campaigns toward younger voters, 34% of millennials—those born after 1981 and the nation's largest living generation—profess to have no religion. A third! That's a viable voting bloc that should give pause to any politician or candidate contemplating ignoring these 56 million religiously unaffiliated adult Americans. There

are more nones than either mainline Protestants or Catholics, which is second only to Evangelical Protestants. Since 2007, there are 19 million more people who have no religion.

McCaffree presents trend lines that are as unambiguous as they are momentous. From the Silent Generation (born 1928–1945) to Baby Boomers (1946–1964) to Generation X (1965–1980) to Older Millennials (1981–1989) to Younger Millennials (1990–1996), both the percentage and raw numbers of religious faithful have been, and will continue to be, diminishing. In addition, people are changing religions—the Pew survey found that 42% of Americans currently adhere to a religion different from the one into which they were born and raised, further eroding the quaint notion of there being One True Religion.

Why is this trend important to document? Pulling back for a big history perspective, the shedding of religious dogmas and the demolishing of ecclesiastical authoritarianism have been under way ever since the Enlightenment, which I argued in *The Moral Arc* may well be the most important thing that has ever happened to our civilization. Why? The rules made up and enshrined by the various religions over the millennia did not have as their goal the expansion of the moral sphere to include more people. Moses did not come down from the mountain with a chiseled list of the ways in which the Israelites could make life better for the Moabites, the Edomites, the Midianites or for any other tribe of people that happened not to be *them*. The Old Testament injunction to "Love thy neighbor" at that time applied only to one's immediate kin and kind and fellow tribe member. It would have been suicidal for the Israelites to love the Midianites as themselves, for example, given that the Midianites were allied with the Moabites in their desire to see the Israelites wiped off the face of the earth—a problem modern-day Israelites are familiar with if you substitute Iranians for Midianites. It is in this way that religion is tribal and xenophobic by nature, serving to regulate moral rules within their community and impose them on other groups through force or conversion. In other words, faith forms an identity of *those like us*, in sharp distinction from *those not us*, variously characterized as heathens or unbelievers.

Yes, of course, most Jews and Christians today are not nearly so narrowly tribal as their Old Testament ancestors, but why? It is not because of some new divine revelation or biblical interpretation. The reason is that Judaism and Christianity went through the Enlightenment and came out the other side less violent and more tolerant. Ever since the

Enlightenment, the study of morality has shifted from considering moral principles as based on God-given, divinely inspired, Holy book-derived, authority-dictated precepts from the top-down, to bottom-up individual-considered, reason-based, rationality-constructed, science-grounded propositions in which one is expected to have reasons for one's moral actions, especially reasons that consider the other person affected by the moral act.

But the West rejected religion as a valid system for determining political decision only recently, and the change has been only relatively progressive—relative to more extreme and fundamentalist religious sects in the world. There are enough religious extremists in America today that we must be vigilant and insist that our political process—one design for all of us to participate in—not be taken over or unnecessarily influenced by particular homegrown sects bent on tearing down Mr. Jefferson's wall separating church and state. Here, the trends are also positive. In the case of same-sex marriage, for example, where only a few years ago religions like the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) could pour money into campaigns to block bills that would grant homosexuals the same rights as heterosexuals, but those strategies no longer work. Why? Because secular values are winning out over religious values in the marketplace of ideas.

We see too well everyday what religion can do to a state. The Enlightenment secular values that we hold dear today—equal treatment under the law, equal opportunity for all, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, civil rights and civil liberties for everyone, the equality of women and minorities, and especially the separation of church and state and the freedom to practice any religion or no religion at all—were inculcated into the minds of Jews and Christians and others in the West, but less so in Muslim countries, particularly those who would prefer a return to a seventh-century theocracy.

It's time we stop electing politicians who put their religion before the Constitution or insist that they will pray before making political decisions (like going to war), and instead rely on the best tools ever devised for advancing humanity out of the trees and to the stars—reason and science.

<div style="text-align: right;">

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Taking Religion Seriously

Imagine you are transported back in time—over 900 years ago—to the Catholic "Holy" Roman Empire of 1100 CE. The territory of this massive empire stretches across modern-day Switzerland, parts of Southern France, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Northern Italy, Romania, Greece and Turkey.

Just five years prior, in 1095, a decision was made at the Council of Piacenza in the heart of the Empire, Northern Italy, to begin funding military attacks against the Muslim Turks. This war against the Turks is considered to be a just and holy war; not only is it considered morally righteous to slaughter the Muslim heretics, but it would also remove them from the Christian holy land of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Catholic leaders insisted, belonged to the Christian God and, thus, also to God's representative on Earth, the Holy Roman Empire.

En route to Jerusalem, the Empire's military slaughtered every Muslim community they encountered and, for good measure, all the Jewish communities as well. These massacres, what later came to be called the Christian Crusades, killed roughly the same proportion of people as the Nazi's genocide of Jews in the twentieth century.

Why did the Roman Empire massacre these people during the Crusades? Well, it seemed clear at the time that these infidels had not only spit in the face of the Christian God by living sinfully as Muslims and Jews, but they were also occupying land (Jerusalem) promised to Christians in the New Testament. So, Jews and Muslims were heretics and thieves and deserved their violent deaths.

Now, imagine you are eating dinner in the countryside with a Roman peasant family during this period of history. None of these people are likely to be literate; even many of the elites of the time weren't literate. This peasant family has only the vaguest understanding of the specific politics of the Roman Crusaders that they have gleaned from village gossip, if they know anything at all. The male is the head of this household, as men run this militaristic, patriarchal society. Suppose this man turns to you during dinner and tells you something like the following:

> My family depends on Emperor Henry and Pope Benedict. This land is God's providence. My farm and this food we're eating are a result of the Lord's mercy. God gave his son Jesus so that we may know bounty, and when Jesus was raised after death, we were given a chance to live without sin. This is the greatest gift of all of life. Have you heard the recent news? I hear the Lord God Jesus Christ is working through our people to destroy infidels in a distant land. Tonight, we eat for them, so that the good word of God is spread and the purification of souls is completed. Will you attend the Nicene Mass tomorrow with my family? We must not miss it. Our prayers must persuade Jesus to protect God's warriors on the battlefield.

What must it have been like to have dinner with this family? These are people who understand their entire life—and everything they value—in terms of a watchful God who has taken an interest in caring for them only because of their consistent worship and reverence. These are people who want nothing more than for non-Christians to be killed (since they are participating with the Devil to make the world more sinful) or converted (so their soul can be saved by Jesus). These people see the welfare of themselves, their family and their country as critically dependent on daily demonstrations of earnest religious faith. The country they live in, as far as they know, only exists minute to minute because God is pleased with their activities and behavior.

These are people who take religion seriously. Very seriously. Devout religious belief and behavior are a matter of life and death. Prayer is taken deathly seriously, church attendance is taken deathly seriously and the power and legitimacy of the God-appointed empire are taken deathly seriously.

Now, compare this snapshot of the Roman Empire circa 1100 CE to a typical high school student in 2017. This student is not taking part in

any holy wars and would find it abhorrent to do so, given the violations of human rights that would occur. Regarding their religiosity, the student might say something like the following:

> My Dad is Episcopalian and my Mom was raised Catholic but she's more of a Buddhist now, I guess. I don't really know because we don't talk about it all that much. I was pretty much raised Christian, like, we celebrated Christmas and I played on a Christian basketball team for a few years. I think religion can give people meaning, if they use it for the right reasons. Personally, I think all religions have truth in them. No, I don't really go to church anymore but I used to a little bit when I was growing up. I'll still go for Christmas and stuff, but I mostly just have my own personal faith. I believe that there's probably something 'out there' greater than human beings, but I don't think it's right to shove your specific religion down other people's throats. Religion is a personal thing, and it's none of anyone else's business.

Does this person take religion seriously? In a sense, yes. They think that religion is important, a potential force for good. They know something about the religions of the world and how much some people care about their religion. In this polite and somewhat superficial sense, yes, this high school student takes religion seriously. They are not, however, willing to die for a specific faith, and they do not typically spend time throughout their day worshipping a specific deity. This person's religion is very casual, just one component of their general cultural milieu. They are religious in the same way that they are American. Their religious identity is a general, vague, background characteristic more than a pressing matter of life and death.

In some ways, I have concocted a false dichotomy here. Just as there are many deeply religious high school students in 2017, there were certainly some religiously apathetic and indifferent peasant farmers in the twelfth-century Christian world. Also, I have likely made my Roman peasant farmer more articulate than he would have been, and my high schooler in 2017 a bit less articulate. Yet, these characterizations represent a larger, very true, point. In the twelfth-century Christendom, religious authority played a greater role in the politics, economics and culture of the state than it does in the twenty-first-century United States. And, of course, we don't need to go all the way back to the twelfth century in order to find people taking religion seriously—it was a crime in Britain to deny the Holy

Trinity until 1813, a crime in the United States to blaspheme God until the 1950s and Catholics couldn't even vote in Protestant England until 1828.

Now, *that's* taking religion seriously. It is telling that, today, many would say *too* seriously.

Why is it that the common farmer in 1100 likely cared so much more about religion than the typical American high school student in 2017? The reasons for this are not only complex and numerous, but also very interesting and revealing. We are living today in a most unusual period in the history of religion—a period where half of the world is losing its faith while the other half rediscovers it. This book will focus on the Western world, specifically the United States, and will chart a course through this interesting historical development, along with the data and theory of religion's dissipation.

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Traditional religion is dissipating in the West.

Like a slowly moving glacier, secularization continues nearly unimpeded, save for the occasional bouts of religious revival[1] or religious apathy.[2] Some people on this planet live (relatively) stable lives, with (relatively) consistent access to food, shelter and medicine. Many of these people also live in cities or (relatively) cosmopolitan suburban areas where they attended (relatively) well-funded, mandatory schooling, which taught them the literacy they use each day to freely access the corpus of human knowledge via the internet.

It is these people who are becoming less religious. It is science and the pursuit of personal occupational and recreational goals that motivate these people more than commitment to a homogeneous religious social group with singular shared goals.

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[1] When rates of religiosity suddenly rise (usually in response to pathogenic, social or ecological crises) before falling to previous levels (or below) in ensuing decades. The clearest recent examples of this have been the Christian revivals in former communist countries in Eastern Europe, the current Christian revival in China or the current revival of Islamism in North Africa and the Middle East.

[2] When rates of religiosity stabilize. What can also happen, and this seems to happen typically when a country loses its previously devout religiosity rather quickly, is that rates of religiosity can halt at moderate levels, stabilizing for a time, due to a collective sense of apathetic, but traditional, politeness rather than fervent adherence.

The road to this point has been long and winding, but it is discernible. The first step of our journey ought to document the fact of secularization. The reality of the phenomenon must be established before its causes can be sought. And, it is not hard to establish the fact of secularization.

Everywhere one looks in the Western world, religion has eroded. Even the earliest data show declines. For example, in Britain, in 1851, somewhere between 40% and 60% of the population attended church on Sunday, March 30 (Bruce 2011). So, only about half of the population went to church that Sunday, over 160 years ago.

What was the other half up to? Perhaps they had more pressing business or family concerns, or perhaps they felt inauthentic worshipping publicly instead of privately. It is hard to say, given that there are no opinion poll data from this period. Nevertheless, at the very least, the importance of publicly displaying one's religious commitment must have begun declining prior to 1851 in Britain. That decline is still evident today, though its magnitude has increased—fewer than 10% of people in Britain attended church on any given Sunday at the dawn of the twenty-first century (Bruce 2011). In 1900, over half of all children in Britain regularly attended Sunday school. Today that number is 4% (Zuckerman et al. 2016).

It isn't just Britain that is losing traditional religion, but, again, so are all of the Western world and those parts of non-Western countries that are literate, educated and physically and existentially comfortable.

Around 75% of English newborns were baptized in the 1930s, whereas only 14% were baptized in 2006 (Zuckerman et al. 2016). In Ireland in 1965, 1375 men chose to become priests, and in 2000 that number was 61 (Bruce 2011). In Holland, the number of adults claiming no religious affiliation has more than tripled since 1930 (Zuckerman et al. 2016). The number of Scots who never attend church more than doubled from 17% in 1930 to 60% today. An astounding 95% of Swedes today seldom or never go to church. The number of Canadians with no religious affiliation jumped from only 2% in 1901 to nearly 30% of Canadian youth in 2011 (PEW, 2013a). Around 37% of the citizenry of the Czech Republic, and nearly 30% of Norwegians, Germans and Belgians do not believe in God. In France, 40% are atheist, and 42% of New Zealanders have no religion (Voas and Chaves 2016; Zuckerman et al. 2016). The number of people attending church once a week or more has dropped in Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Norway, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Greece, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and many other countries since 1970 (Voas 2009; Bruce 2011; Zuckerman et al. 2016).

In each situation, the circumstance is the same: for hundreds of years (though data are only consistent since 1960) each subsequent generation has been less religious than the last (Bruce 2011; Hout and Fischer 2002). Church attendance appears to be the first religious behavior to have slowly and silently fallen away, followed by a desire to affiliate with a church and, lastly, belief in God (Bruce 2013). In time, however, all have eroded to greater and lesser degrees.

Religious America

But what about the United States? Isn't the United States an exception to this trend of secularization? In short, no. American religiosity has been in decline for decades (Voas and Chaves 2016). There have been some confusions about this, simply because rates of religiosity remain higher in the United States than in other Western countries like Sweden, Denmark or France. Still, just because rates of religiosity are falling more slowly in the United States does not mean that the United States is an exception to the pervasive trend of secular modernity.

The United States has its own unique history and, as such, has taken its own unique path to secularization. Most analyses of the loss of religion in the United States begin after World War II, primarily because this is the period for which data are most prevalent.

What we know is that the people who fought in World War II had rough lives. They were children during the Great Depression of the 1930s before being whisked off to the most brutal war of the twentieth century a decade later. The American people, and perhaps especially the young men of this generation, were scarred, scared and made conservatively patriotic by this bombardment of physical and existential threat. This generation clung to the religion of their grandparents in order to interpret some stability and meaning in a life that seemed chaotic and cruel. This was perhaps the last seriously religious generation in American history.

Then came the 1960s.

The "sixties effect," as sociologists Michael Hout and Claude Fischer (2002, 2014) call it, was a profound generational shift away from orthodox Christian religiosity, church attendance and daily prayer. Unlike the generation of Americans that survived both the Great Depression and World War II, those who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s had an adolescence and young adulthood of comparatively little strife. There was, of course, the failed and violent Vietnam War being fought abroad, but the

US economy had improved and the average person in 1960 was enjoying a greater per capita income than people had experienced in the late 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

The period from 1960 to 1980 was a period of sexual and social liberation for many people. The widespread availability of the birth control pill beginning in the mid-1960s empowered women to make their own decisions about when—and with whom—to have children. No longer was child-rearing an accidental outcome of sexual impulses or the result of an inevitable failure of the "rhythm method." For really the first time in history, women had a reliable method of personal family planning. As we will see throughout this book, there seems to be a consistent, often tense, connection between sexual norms and religious belief throughout the world (see, e.g., Weeden and Kurzban 2013). This was no less true in the 1960s when women felt stuck, perhaps never more acutely, between the demands of the church that they be mothers and homemakers and the demands of public life that they become autonomous, educated, self-actualized members of the democratic process who have children when (and if) it is convenient for them to do so.

This was not the only tension of the 1960s—indeed, the 1960s were very much a period of social protest. Protests against the "old ways" of conducting wars of conquest and aggression, of discriminating based on skin color, or based on gender, abounded on college campuses. The feminist and civil rights movements reach their twentieth-century crescendos during this era with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 among other pieces of legislation.

It was perhaps inevitable that religion, as the penultimate representative of tradition, would take on a great deal of criticism in this era as well. Though 75% of Americans polled in 1952 said that religion was "very important" to them, this number had dropped to 70% in 1965 and to 52% in 1978 (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Weekly church attendance dropped from 49% to 42% in the 11 years from 1958 to 1969, the largest decline in such a brief period that had ever been recorded. And, as is always true, it was the younger generations during the 1960s who were leading the charge of secularization. Among those people who were aged over 50 years during the 1960s, there was no decline in church attendance. *However*, among those aged 18–29, weekly church attendance dropped from 51% in 1957 to 28% in 1971 (Putnam and Campbell 2010). In 1957, 69% of Americans felt that the influence of religion in America was growing. This number plummeted to 14% by

1969, before rising slightly to a little over 20%, where it remains today (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

In response to this devastating decline in American religiosity throughout the 1960s, religious organizations and religious entrepreneurs began affiliating with conservative republican political candidates. Organizations like Focus on the Family, whose founder Pat Robertson advocated the Bible-inspired physical punishment of children ("He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes"[3]) and the importance of women as mothers and homemakers, helped reinvigorate the socially conservative political platform of a Republican Party that had lost the presidency throughout the 1960s to Democrats John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

These socially conservative, and avowedly Christian, pundits like Pat Robertson, Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell helped make critiques of premarital sex, abortion, divorce, mothers working outside the home and homosexuality key components of mainstream Republican Party politics. This political platform appealed to those who were of the World War II generation and who saw the libertine sexuality and social protest of the 1960s as existentially threatening.

This close ideological association between conservative religious leaders and Republican political candidates led to something of a short-lived religious revival in the United States, especially among Americans over 50. The 1970s saw the election of the first openly born-again Evangelical Christian president, Jimmy Carter, along with rising rates of Evangelical church attendance through the 1980s. From 1978 to 1988, strong religious affiliation grew by 10% (Voas and Chaves 2016). A religious revival in the United States seemed inevitable.

The backlash, however, was severe. Throughout the 1990s, young Americans in their 20s and 30s came to view religion as judgmental, homophobic and overly political (Putnam and Campbell 2010). The tendency among young Americans to equate intolerant religiosity with conservative politics culminated with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. It was as if the soft, loving, playful, skepticism toward religion that had characterized the 1960s suddenly turned austere and panicked. The death of over 3000 Americans on 9/11—ostensibly justified by a fundamentalist, literalist reading of Islamic doctrine—forced Westerners to consider that perhaps too much religion could be a bad thing. Perhaps *especially* when religion was tied to politics.

[3] Proverbs 13:24, King James.

An avalanche of *New York Times* bestsellers released after 9/11 purported to show that the causes of extreme violence and stupidity were almost always, in the end, religious. Sam Harris' (2004) *The End of Faith*, Richard Dawkins' (2006) *The God Delusion* and Christopher Hitchens' (2007) *God Is Not Great*, among other bestselling works, made the case to millions of Americans that religion[4] when taken too seriously leads to ignorance, prejudice, discrimination, child abuse, sexism, racism and terrorism.

Of course, satirical, pop cultural critiques of religion had predated these post-9/11 bestsellers. Television shows like *The Simpsons, South Park* and *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* launched frequent attacks on religious fundamentalists, while shows like *The X Files* often promoted a more general skepticism toward orthodox religion. And, even before popular media felt comfortable taking jabs at religion, it was national organizations like the *Freedom from Religion Foundation*, founded in 1976, that promoted nonreligious politics and education in the United States.

According to the opinion polls of the time, around 95% of Americans had a religious affiliation in the 1950s (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Most were Catholic or some denomination of Protestant Christian. Only around 5% had no religious affiliation. As a result of the rebelliousness of the 1960s, the number of Americans who reported having no religious affiliation ticked up to 8% and remained stable at 8% until the 1990s. And then, after decades of collusion between Republican Party politics and conservative religious leaders throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the number of Americans with no religious affiliation doubled to around 15% in the late 1990s and has doubled again in recent years since the 9/11 tragedy—the proportion of Americans with no religious affiliation now stands at almost 30% (Baker and Smith 2015; Zuckerman et al. 2016). The proportion of Americans with no religious affiliation or belief may be as high as 42% among college students born in the 1980s and 1990s (Kosmin 2013).

The Longue Durée

While analyzing their *Faith Matters* survey—a nationally representative survey of over 5000 Americans—Robert Putnam and David Campbell (2010) found that people between the ages of 18–29 were the most secular

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[4] Or, really, any ideology.

Americans, with 30% forgoing church attendance entirely in any given year and 42% saying religion was not important to their sense of identity. By comparison, among those Americans over age 60, only 18% avoided church in a given year and only 20% claimed religion was not important to their sense of identity. The fact that younger generations are consistently becoming less and less religious tells us a lot about what to expect for the future.

In his study of seven generations of Americans, stretching from those born in the 1890s to those born in the 1980s, Vern Bengtson et al. (2013) finds that Americans have become more private, more individualistic and more selective about their religious beliefs. Specifically, Bengtson finds that Americans born more recently feel strongly that there is a difference between private religious belief and public practice (whereas older generations felt that private belief should be practiced publicly). Bengtson also finds that younger generations tend to distinguish between a communal church-based "religiosity" (which they increasingly reject/ignore) and a "spirituality" rooted in life experiences and personal, private thoughts about God and the afterlife. Where religion was once powerfully public, it is today, more than ever, discussed only occasionally, and lackadaisically, in private.

There were 1.3 million new Americans claiming no religious affiliation *each year* from 1990 to 1999 and 660,000 new nonaffiliates *each year* from 2000 to 2008 (Kosmin et al. 2009; Zuckerman 2014). This wasn't the result of some odd immigration of atheists to the United States—this was a result of Americans, most of whom were raised in slightly less religious households than their parents' parents (and so on), simply losing interest in affiliating with a religious tradition as they grew older.

Americans born between 1971 and 1994 were 315% more likely to leave the religion of their parents compared to Americans born before 1925. And, once people leave or ignore the religion of their parents, they are generally in no hurry to jump back into a religious community. Religious nonaffiliates tend to stay nonaffiliates and raise children in nonaffiliated households—almost three times as many people born between 1971 and 1992 were raised without a religious tradition compared to those born between 1925 and 1943 (Zuckerman 2014).

It's not just that Americans are increasingly declining to affiliate with a religious tradition, but they are also less likely to pray or go to church (Sherkat 2014; Schwadel 2011). Fewer than half of Americans today (48%) think that religion can solve "all or most of today's problems," and this number drops further and further each decade. Religiosity is even in

decline among those who take religion most seriously: 70% of those who strongly believe in a higher power go to church once a year or less (Sherkat 2008). Numbers of biblical fundamentalists, who believe that each word of the Bible is literally true, have been in steady decline from around 65% of the population in 1960 to less than 30% of the population in 2008 (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

When thinking about statistics like these, it is incredibly important to remember that Americans very often overreport their own religiosity (Voas and Chaves 2016; Bengtson et al. 2013; Bruce 2011; Hadaway et al. 1993). For example, though 38% of Americans claim to attend church weekly, only 26% reported attending church when they were asked about a specific, recent, week (Chaves 2011).

Americans report being more religious than they are for a variety of reasons. Two perhaps primary reasons why Americans overreport their religiosity are (1) a cultural tendency to equate "religiosity" with "kindness/sociability" and (2) a desire to fit in and avoid appearing deviant. Still, overreporting one's religiosity indicates some level of awareness that one probably *ought* to be more religious than one *is*. People are losing their interest in religion, and, in most cases, this loss of interest is a result of indifference, not anger.

Nonreligious America

Who are these Americans that are giving up their religion?

Perhaps it is more accurate to ask, "Who are these Americans that are giving up religion more than others?" since most everyone in the Western world (including the United States) is less religious today than their counterparts were 100 or 200 years ago.

The issue of sociologically and psychologically profiling religious non-affiliates is something I will return to in subsequent chapters, but, in short, religiously apathetic people tend to be political liberals and moderates more so than conservatives (though rates of nonaffiliation and nonbelief among conservatives also continue to rise—see Hout and Fischer 2014). Religious nonaffiliates also tend to be younger, not just in terms of generation, but also younger in the life course. In other words, each generation of Americans on record have been less religious than the last, but, it is *also* true that people in their teens and 20s tend to be less religious than people in their 60s and 70s (Baker and Smith 2015). As the sociologist Darren Sherkat explains:

Typically, people in their late teens and early twenties are single, childless, and either completing their education or entering the workforce for the first time. The time demands of educational attainment and of early career jobs are not conducive to maintaining ties to religious organizations… Furthermore, educational attainment and workforce participation often necessitate geographic mobility, which disrupts social ties supportive of religious participation. (Sherkat 2014, p. 92)

From the standpoint of explaining the secularization of society, however, it is important to note not only that people are more secular when they are younger in age, but also that this dynamic is occurring on top of a slower, more stable, intergenerational decline in religiosity. Though Americans younger in age are the least religious people in any given survey, even elderly people in 2017 are less religious than the elderly of 20, 50 or 100 years ago.

Other than political affiliation, generation and age, recent data from PEW's nationally representative Religious Landscape Study show that from 2007 to 2014 rates of religious nonaffiliation grew among college- and non-college-educated populations, among men and women, among whites, blacks and Hispanics and across all income categories measured (PEW, 2014c). Religious decline is a long-term historical trend impacting virtually every demographic group that can be measured (Zuckerman et al. 2016; Sherkat 2014).

The demographic group secularizing fastest, however, is educated, higher-income, white, males.[5] This is the demographic in American society most protected from threat and instability, as educated, higher-income, early career white guys are the group least likely in society to be faced with racism, sexism, poverty or imprisonment. As a result, this group feels disproportionately emboldened to shuck off the shackles of traditional dogma.

Groups in society that face more discrimination and prejudice are, in general, more hesitant to voluntarily take on stigmatizing identities like "religious non-affiliate" or "atheist" (Baker and Smith 2015). This is an issue I will be returning to throughout this book—once nonaffiliation and religious indifference reaches a critical point in the United States, religious nonaffiliation and atheism will begin to lose their stigma. This

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[5] As an example, college professors (especially elite college professors) who are disproportionately educated, high-income, white males are also the least religious people in American society (Gross and Simmons 2009; Ecklund et al. 2008).

will encourage racial minorities and women to decline religious affiliation at higher rates, thus accelerating secularization. We are already beginning to see this—the number of Latino nonaffiliates, for example, tripled from 4% in 1990 to 12% in 2008 (Kosmin et al. 2009).

THE WEST IN CONTEXT

Let's not forget that this trend of secularization has been studied mostly in the Western world of North America, Australia and Continental Europe. There are two reasons for this. One is that most of the sociologists of religion today who study secularization live in America or in Northern European countries. American politics are unusually religious for a Western country, and the politics of Northern European countries like Denmark or Norway are unusually secular. As a result, both are outliers of a sort and tend to produce the most interest in religion among their country's researchers. The other reason why secularization research is mostly confined to Western countries is because capitalist democracies secularize faster than theocracies or autocracies.

Now, it is true, of course, that there are countries outside of the West, for example Japan, that are also highly secular. It is additionally true that former (and current) communist countries report lower rates of religiosity, though this low religiosity appears to be a reflection of communist political ideology which is not so much "atheistic" as much as a replacing of "God" with "the Party." Theocratic Islamic countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan) tend to have very high rates of religiosity, while Northern European socialist democracies are the most secular countries in the world. In short, it becomes very difficult to draw broad conclusions about religion and religiosity as we move outside of the West.

Overall, the globe is home to 2.2 billion Christians (32% of the world's population), 1.6 billion Muslims (23% of the world's population) and over 1 billion Hindus (15% of the world's population) (PEW 2012). What's interesting, and often left out of these kinds of analyses, is that, actually, the third largest "religious group" globally are people with no religious affiliation. People who are religiously unaffiliated number over 1.1 billion, or about 16% of the world's population (PEW 2012). Granted, many of these people are living in communist and former communist states which enforced atheism on their people. Still, the global landscape of religion is interestingly diverse indeed.

This discussion of global religiosity becomes complex very quickly due to the magnitude of people and countries involved. In order to address this complexity, I focus in this book only on the Western world and, specifically, on the United States. I will be discussing various important theories of religion and secularism which would, of course, apply in any country under the right conditions. Nevertheless, when I make reference to statistics about religious belief, belonging or behavior, these statistics should be interpreted in the context of the economic, political and religious history of Europe and the United States.

I would like to say just a few things about the larger global context of religion and secularization. As many have pointed out, the secularization of the Western world does not necessarily imply secularization of the globe. Nonreligious people tend to put personal and professional goals ahead of family and child-rearing, especially when they are in their 20s. As a result, nonreligious people have fewer children, and they have them later in life compared to more religious people (Zuckerman et al. 2016). This dynamic is crucial because it means that if we look at *fertility/childbearing rates*, religious people all over the world will have more offspring every generation than will less religious people.

So, though the number of people who are religious is declining rapidly in some parts of the world, the overall number of religious people, globally, is increasing due to the higher fertility rates of religious, as opposed to more secular, women. This produces a paradox where religious belief, belonging and behavior are trending rapidly downward in the West but, overall, trending upward due to conservative Protestant, Catholic and Muslim women bearing more children, globally, each generation relative to nonreligious women (Adsera 2006; Heaton 2011).

American Exceptionalism?

For much of the twentieth century, sociologists of religion insisted that the United States was an outlier in the West. Yes, these scholars conceded, much of the Western world had secularized, but the United States was an exception. Rates of religious belief, belonging, and behavior have remained stable throughout the century, they argued. The chief proponent of this position is Rodney Stark, although Peter Berger famously changed his entire outlook mid-career and embraced the view that America was, and was likely to remain, uniquely religious. In this book, I will describe not

only how these scholars were mistaken, but also what the landscape of religion in America really looks like today.

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Religion Explained

Before discussing the loss of religion in any greater depth, we should first discuss what it is that is being lost.

Religion is a multifaceted institution in human society, composed of religious *beliefs* (in god(s), moral prescriptions, the afterlife, etc.), religious *belonging* (affiliation with a specific denomination or church), religious *behaving* (church attendance, prayer, fasting, tithing, etc.) and, as I will argue, religious *benefitting* (self-expression, reciprocal altruism, perception of existential security, etc.). Religion has been defined in many ways, with some scholars emphasizing belief over belonging, or behaving over believing.[1]

The nineteenth-century psychologist William James defined religion in terms of belief in an unseen order. For him, belief in an order unseen, which provides a harmonious psychological contentment and sense of understanding, is more crucial to defining religion than supernaturalness per se. William James writes in 1902:

> Religion, whatever it is, is a man's total reaction upon life, so why not say that any total reaction upon life is a religion? […] This sense of the world's presence, appealing as it does to our peculiar individual temperament, makes us either strenuous or careless, devout or blasphemous, gloomy or exultant,

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[1] In what follows, Jared Diamond's (2012) and Arthur Greil's (2009) reviews of definitions of religion over the last 100 or so years have been instructive.

about life at large…and the more fervent opponents of Christian doctrine have often enough shown a temper which, psychologically considered, is indistinguishable from religious zeal. (James [1902] 2013, p. 33)

Through this lens, religion is our, somewhat subliminal and overwhelmingly emotional, response to the brute circumstances of existence. As James points out, even an atheist with no interest in religion whatsoever other than his disdain for it, acts religiously insofar as his passionate enmity moves him to protest. With James, we might say that the harmony and order provided by religious cosmologies is akin to the harmony and order provided by ideology, and individuals will sacrifice themselves in various ways to demonstrate their ideological commitment to others.[2]

The nineteenth-century anthropologists James Frazier and Edward Tylor, along with contemporary philosopher Daniel Dennett,[3] define religion around submission to supernatural forces. For them, religious people are, due to perfectly natural errors of reasoning and perception, imagining superhuman forces and desperately attempting to appease them in exchange for knowledge, wisdom or protection. For Dennett, religious beliefs in the supernatural are "memetic," meaning that they are transmitted cognitively between people like a virus, an idea he gets from Richard Dawkins (1976).

Let me say that I am not contrasting Dennett, Frazier or Tylor with James. They all agree on much. Indeed, Dennett calls James, "a memeticist ahead of his time" (Dennett 2006, p. 186). I only intend to use these scholars as a basis for discussing different definitions of religion. I am not implying that they are mutually exclusive or in disagreement, although some of them most definitely are. Speaking generally, Dennett, Frazier and Tylor emphasize a view of religion as submission and capitulation to supernatural powers, while James portrays religion as primarily a comforting belief in order and meaning.

Other scholars portray religion as a ritualistic behavior. The twentieth-century anthropologist Melford Spiro, for example, describes religion as a "culturally patterned interaction, with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (Spiro 1966, p. 96). Contemporary anthropologist Scott Atran

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[2] This is the "hard-to-fake" or "costly" signaling of William Irons and others to be discussed shortly.

[3] Dennett is a renowned, though frankly somewhat apologetic, atheist. He is a member of the "Four Horsemen" of New Atheism discussed in Chap. 3.

combines the cognitive psychological focus of Tylor and Frazier with the "hard to fake" signaling work of William Irons. For Atran (2002), cognitive errors of reasoning and perception make belief in gods common, and these beliefs subsequently become the basis for the formation of community. This community is legitimated through members' ritualistic behavior, which is "hard to fake" (i.e., fasting, praying five times per day, celibacy) and thus a seemingly legitimate sign of devotion.

Durkheim's Theory of Religion as Collective Effervescence

Both owe their view of religion-as-ritual to early French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1912[1965]). His classic definition reads as follows,

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set aside and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (Durkheim 1912[1965], p. 62)

This definition of religion, in addition to making explicit reference to beliefs *and* practices, implies a relationship between ritualized interaction and the formation of a "moral community." Durkheim's definition is the most complete of any of the nineteenth-century sociologists, emphasizing as it does belief, practice and affiliation with a church. A more complete definition would not come until Talcott Parsons' unwieldy definition, which is over 100 words long and, in truth, improves very little upon Durkheim's.

The image Durkheim paints in his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912[1965]) is vibrant. He rooted his understanding of religion in his readings of European ethnographies of hunter-gatherer tribes in Australia. He noticed a fission/fusion dynamic where bands of the tribe would take care of profane matters on most days—things like fortifying shelter and gathering or hunting for food. However, on special and recurrent occasions, tribal festivals were held, with hunter-gatherers dancing and running around campfires and building an emotional energy with one another (Collins 2004). The synchronous, rhythmic physical interactions, the conversation, the ecstatic yelling, the singing and the dancing generated *collective effervescence*. This collective effervescence was overwhelming and overpowering in its emotionality—it felt forceful and external.

This repeated generation of emotional energy became symbolized, over time, in the tribe's[4] "totem(s)." Reference to these tribal totems, while individual bands of hunter-gatherers were doing something profane and mundane like gathering nuts, whittling spears or tending to children during the day, helped maintain a symbolic sense of cohesion with a larger tribal unit.

Theoretically, groups of people are fissioning and fusing. Let's imagine, arbitrarily, that a tribe of 150 people is composed of six bands of 25 people. These bands of 25 people are composed of mostly "fictive kin," or people who are not necessarily blood related, but who are well known to you (since birth) and everyone else. People are close and socially integrated not only because of familiarity. Morally, reciprocal altruism, or the "tit for tat" strategy, is the rule of the day: you go out of your way to help others, with the understanding that they will go out of their way to help you when you (inevitably) need it (Shermer 2004).

You are a member not only of your small band of 25 people, but also a member of the larger tribal consortium of bands, amounting to 150 people. How is it that these bands can operate more or less autonomously while engaged in mundane, everyday activities, but still maintain a larger tribal identity? Let's say our tribespeople identify themselves as the "people of the wolf," and have a wolf totem as the symbol of their tribe. How is it that this wolf totem can come to represent the life history and social bonds of all 150 members of the tribe?

According to Durkheim, the tribal totem, a symbol of a wolf in our example, becomes suffused with the collective effervescence of the constituent members of the tribe. This implanting of the totem with the effervescence of the tribe's social bonds occurs in the context of ritualized festivals, when all bands of the tribe come together to celebrate and to worship the totem. It was Durkheim's insight that, in worshipping and celebrating the totem at tribal festivals, individual bands of people were generating a common identity with members of other bands through a displacement of their own sense of comfort, love and ecstasy onto a shared tribal totem. Individual bands of people coalesce and congeal into a single

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[4] Durkheim would have called it a "clan totem." I think this nomenclature is superficial. The underlying theoretical dynamic is what matters—segments of a whole working instrumentally and independently but in concert and sharing resources. What motivates the functioning of the parts is an energizing, a creation of collective effervescence, that occurred during daily, weekly or monthly ritualized festivals.

tribe through recurrent, ritualized festivals of high emotional intensity. In this way, the sense of a tribal protector, of a god, was a direct result of physiological synchronization with others via festive song, dance and other forms of play (Bellah 2011).

This emotional intensity, really a mere result of enjoying the excited company of others (the giddy feeling any American high schooler or undergraduate experiences first upon walking into a buzzing house party), was being attributively displaced by members of the constituent bands onto a shared tribal totem, thus fusing atomized collections of individuals (composing the bands) into a more integrated, larger community/society (the tribe).

Durkheim postulated that the origin of religion was an attribution error about the source of collective effervescence. While people *thought* the source of their ecstatic sense of love and happiness during such festivals was the mystical spirit of the tribal animal (i.e., the spirit of the wolf), the source was actually more mundane—the inherent joy of belonging to a community that cares for you and that you have fun with.

Being in close physical proximity with others to whom you feel emotionally close, for example synchronizing your body through music or dance with them, creates a powerful psychic sense of unity. Quite literally, synchronous social activity with others reduces the brain's effort to draw boundary distinctions between self and other (Trehub et al. 2015). This sense of unity—this powerful feeling of being integrated and of having one's movements dictated for them by the pulsing synchrony of a collective—*feels* as though one is being controlled from outside of themselves. It *feels* as though an external force or spirit is animating you.

Of course, this is a fundamental attribution error—the source of your effervescence is other people, not a disembodied spirit/force/god. Still, this misattribution is critical for the formation of basic religious sentiment in a Durkheimian framework. Also, insofar as the totem came to unconsciously symbolize the cumulative effervescence of the collective, it served to aid the tribe in worshipping itself. The totem symbolizes the cumulative effervescence of the group, which is mistakenly attributed to a god/spirit/totem/force, instead of to the joys of group love. The totem, a Christian cross, for example, is a material symbolization of group effervescence. In externalizing such effervescence onto the symbol of the totem, it becomes possible for the group to indirectly worship itself by directly worshipping the totem.

Durkheim's definition and understanding of religion has been perhaps the most influential in sociology. Certainly Durkheim, more than anybody, emphasized the roles of physical co-presence, ritual synchronization and emotional energy as the foundation of religious belief and belonging.

The Durkheim scholar Guy Swanson describes Durkheim's view in this way:

> How can men's experience of their society produce the concept of supernature? Because, says Durkheim, the relation of men to their society is like that of the worshipper to his god. Like the spirits, societies dominate their members by so controlling their thoughts and desires that individuals find intangible forces within themselves directing their conduct. Second, men feel strong, confident, and at peace with themselves when fulfilling their society's mandates. Third…'all of a man's cultural possessions are the gift of society.' […] social customs seem to speak to individuals, chiding them for misbehavior, directing them to choose some goals rather than others, and rewarding their conformity. […] Durkheim's position is plausible just because it begins to explain why men come to know intangible forces which can enter human lives, controlling will and action, and why these are forces with which people must come to terms. (Swanson 1964, pp. 15–18)

For Swanson, as for Durkheim, society and its customs loom over the individual as a monolithic force, directing behavior and belief in ways that at times feel out of the individuals' control. This sense of the powerful externality of society and the invisible directing force of norm, habit and socialization are the foundation for humanity's belief in gods. We are destined to confuse the power of society with the power of some large disembodied human(s) floating above.

In his empirical analysis, Swanson (1964; but see also Sanderson and Roberts 2008) finds that societies are more likely to reveal widespread beliefs in monotheism to the degree that they have a hierarchy of three or more sovereign groups. Polytheism is more likely where societies have distinct social and occupational classes. Beliefs in reincarnation and ancestor ghosts are a function of the presence of extended relatives in the nuclear family. Belief in black magic and witchcraft increases when people in a society must interact with unknown others regarding important matters where there are no legitimate formal social control mechanisms. In short, supernatural and religious beliefs appear to mirror social relationships, even if they are not fully reducible to them.

Harvey Whitehouse and Lanman (2014) have since formalized a theory of religious ritual that identifies not only how religions reflect social relationships, but also how ritual, itself, helps to fuse people together under a common emotional state and shared identity. When a group of individuals gather and focus their collective attention on shared symbols of group membership, the resulting emotional arousal and sense of unity is distributed among all members. Ritual bonds people together by instigating in them shared synchronous movement and emotionality—this is a classic Durkheimian insight that Whitehouse has formulated in a testable way. All indications are that this account of ritual is accurate—ritual merges distinct individuals.

Beyond Durkheim

Yet, this grafting of religion onto social relationships and ritualized behavior was unsatisfying for those who wished to emphasize how religion is ultimately, if not only, a mentally constructed symbolic cultural system. After all, nonhuman animals have patterned, perhaps even "ritualized," behavior, but none have symbolic religion. To again quote anthropologist Melford Spiro's 1966 definition of religion as an "institution consisting of culturally postulated interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" makes this cultural turn in the study of religion crystal clear (Spiro 1966, p. 96).

Though Spiro was an exceptional scholar of religion in his own right, I would like to focus on the sociologist Robert Bellah as an example of the cultural study of symbolic religion.

Bellah leans on anthropologist Clifford Geertz throughout his career, from his earliest attempts to define religion (e.g., Bellah 1964) to his final articulations on the matter (e.g., Bellah 2011). He draws from Geertz, who in turn drew from Durkheim, and downplays the empirical fatuousness of religious supernaturalism in favor of highlighting how religions are socially constructed, imaginative worlds and, in this sense, *real* because they exist in peoples' minds. Geertz, for example, argues that the social construction of religious ideas envelopes "these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivation seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 1993, p. 90).

Bellah defined religion early in his career as "a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence"

(Bellah 1964, p. 359). This is obviously a broad definition, and one that includes both belief ("symbolic forms") and behavior ("acts"), along with a sense of comfort ("relate man to the ultimate conditions"). Notice, though, that there is no mention here of membership to human community as Durkheim's definition had emphasized. But, to be evenhanded, Durkheim's definition does not highlight explicitly the comfort and existential security that religious narratives of reality provide. Bellah and Durkheim both avoid explicit mention of supernaturalism or superhumanism in their definitions—beliefs and behaviors are primary.

Bellah's later thinking on religion expands significantly upon his, rather standard, initial definition. His most important revisions are twofold: (1) he underscores the importance of religion as a "relaxed field," where people can express themselves, ask existential questions, dance, rejoice and sing, and (2) he provides an evolutionary explanation for these relaxed fields. Bellah puts it simply by equating the religious impulse with the impulse to, in short, play. The freedom and safety of play—adventure, exploration, ecstatic excitement, fanciful imagination—is facilitated and legitimated by religious cosmologies and religious rituals. Bellah writes:

> In [the] tribal examples, we see how ritual takes place in a relaxed field, and that it takes considerable effort to create such a field. Among the Kalapalo, a major ritual requires weeks, if not months of preparation. Some of this involves rehearsal and the construction of the ritual paraphernalia that will be used during the performance, but there is also an intensification of economic effort to provide the surplus food that will be given out to the participants and attendees at a major ritual. Having to forage in the midst of a ritual would surely break the spell…We can see similar preparations among the Australian Aborigines and the Navajo. One can imagine that in pre-state times one would want to hold a ritual at a time and place relatively safe from outside aggressors as well. So human ritual requires work to prepare a relaxed field; animal play requires that the players be fed and safe, but no special or extended preparation is necessary…tribal rituals themselves usually exhibit features that we would characterize as play: such ritual is very much embodied as in singing, dancing, feasting, and general hilarity, but there is also a powerful element of pretend play that can have serious meanings. (Bellah 2011, p. 569)

Religion was the human institution wherein people first began contemplating the nature of their tribe and of the cosmos. For Bellah, religious rituals were first used to construct relaxed fields or places where people

felt safe enough to think and behave beyond immediate necessity. During religious ceremonies, food, shelter and safety were taken for granted; the relaxed fields of religious ritual were meant only for purposes of transcendence and imagination. Due to the heavy, existential nature of religious introspection, much religious symbolism is fanciful, exaggerated and clearly metaphorical.

Lastly, most all definitions of religion, from those referencing an "unseen order" to those referencing submission to superhumans, to those referencing ritual and human community, imply that religion will provide a sense of comfort and perceived stability. No one has described religion as a source of solace and comfort better than Karl Marx, who, of course, famously described religion as "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions" (Marx [1844]1977, p. 131).

Marx's "deprivation theory" that religion comforts the deprived has gotten plenty of recent empirical support and, most importantly, theoretical augmentation. Marx focused too much on the economy. Threat can be perceived by human beings from things other than poverty, unemployment and dismal work conditions—humans can also fear crime, war, stigma/lost status or disease and poor health. Convergent findings from cross-cultural research by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2011; Inglehart and Norris 2007), along with experimental laboratory research by Aaron Kay and others (2008; Tullett et al. 2015), show that the rigid predictability of religious ritual and belief reduces stress and anxiety when people feel chronically threatened.

Integrative Definitions of Religion

Definitions of religion seem to have these common components: belief (usually in supernatural or superhuman entities), ritualized behavior, a sense of belonging to a community, and a sense of existential, self-expressive or social benefit. Of the contemporary sociologists that study secularization, Steve Bruce's (2011) definition of religion is among the most commonly cited. He defines religion as

> beliefs, actions and institutions based on the existence of supernatural entities with powers of agency (that is, Gods) or impersonal processes possessed of moral purpose (the Hindu and Buddhist notion of karma, for example) that set the conditions of, or intervene in, human affairs. (Bruce 2011, p. 1)

This definition is reasonably complete, though not perfect. Bruce's focus on supernaturalism may be unnecessary, as not all comforting ideologies are supernatural. Consider European nationalists who comfort themselves with the thoroughly naturalistic, though scientifically discredited, eugenic theory of "master races." Or, consider government conspiracy theories, secular Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism, communism, scientific naturalism, patriotism, neoliberalism and other epistemically totalizing, but nonsupernatural, ideologies. Are these not religions in William James' sense?

An equally good, if not better, candidate for a definition of religion is the historian of science Michael Shermer's (2000, 2011) definition of religion as

> a social institution to create and promote myths, to encourage conformity and altruism, and to signal the level of commitment to cooperate and reciprocate among members of a community. (Shermer 2011, p. 166)

As will become clear momentarily, this definition is unusually accurate, given its brevity. Here, Shermer specifies that religion is a human institution that produces mythology and narrative—not necessarily supernatural narrative!—along with rituals that promote cooperation among members of a symbolic community. Shermer's definition is broad enough to encompass evolutionary explanations for religion as well as more narrative/mythological explanation of religion that, like William James', allows for the potentially nonsupernatural aspects of religious awe.

As examples, consider the mythological story of Christopher Columbus "finding" the Americas, Mao "purifying" China for the workers or, really, any origin story of any nation. These stories are incredibly, fantastically embellished, euphemized and sanitized (Trivers 2011). But they are not necessarily "supernatural." Humans seem to create symbolic narratives and rituals to support these narratives (for American patriotism, these ritualized celebrations might take place on the Fourth of July, 9/11 anniversary, Veterans Day, Memorial Day, etc.) that signal and maintain group/community belonging. Shermer's definition can accommodate supernatural belief as a component of religion, but it is not beholden to it, and this is a strength.

Ultimately, attempting a concise one- or two-sentence definition of something as complicated as religion is bound to be difficult. Bruce's, and perhaps especially Shermer's, definition of religion will be a capable guide

as we delve deeper into the nature of religion. Now that we have established the four important components of human religion—belief, behavior, belonging and benefiting—let's look at how religion has functioned in human societies.

The Origins of Religion

The cognitive science of religion—that academic discipline that applies neurobiology to the social psychology of religion—emerged distinctly in the 1990s and early 2000s with the work of Stewart Guthrie (1980, 1993), Justin Barrett (2000, 2004), E. Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley (1993), Robert McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson (2002) and Pascal Boyer (1994, 2001), among others. I want to talk a bit about the work of each of these people, as well as those who have been influenced by such work. The cognitive science of religion, though ultimately incomplete as a scientific approach to religion due to a tendency to reduce all of religion to cognitive processes, has nevertheless provided an evolutionary framework for the study of religion that all of the social sciences have benefited from.

Stewart Guthrie's 1980 article argued that anthropomorphism, a universal tendency to impute human characteristics to objects in our environment, is central to religious ideation. It is not that we *only* anthropomorphize in religious contexts. Guthrie's own website[5] contains a splendidly comical quote to make this point, *Seinfeld*'s George Costanza remarking, "The sea was angry that day, my friends. Like an old man trying to send back soup at a deli." So yes, we anthropomorphize the ocean (when we beg the waves to calm down because our boat has begun to rock), the sun (griping that the sun is "killing us" when it's hot out), our computers (when we yell at them because they are slow to load), our pets (when we want them to listen to us) and our cars (when we plead with them to start though we know the tank is all but empty). However, for Guthrie, religion is distinct from other human institutions like family or economy or politics by making invisible, intangible, humanlike beings (and symbols of such beings) *central*.

Guthrie ends his 1980 article with the following:

> It is simply that, just as anthropomorphism reasonably although mistakenly pervades our conceptions of those conditions that are proximate, so it

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[5] http://rel.as.ua.edu/faces.html

pervades our conceptions of those that are ultimate. To the extent that it pervades them systematically, they, and our resulting actions, are 'religious.' (Guthrie 1980, p. 194)

Guthrie (1993) is clear that the tendency to imagine other species-specific minds may emerge gradually with the evolution of the neocortex. When chimpanzees hoot and holler and pound the ground while hearing crashing lighting, Guthrie suggests that they may actually be imagining that a massive, intangible "chimp god" is causing the lightning. Guthrie's 1980 article, "A Cognitive Theory of Religion", was revolutionary in its attempt to explain religion in terms of a universal tendency, ultimately rooted in biological evolution, to find humanlike agency in nonhuman natural phenomena (the moon, the sun, an earthquake, lightning, etc.).

The psychologist Justin Barrett (2004; see also Atran and Norenzayan 2004) has hypothesized a "hyper active agency detection" module in the brain, evolved over millions of years to detect living, intentional beings that might cause harm. This "hyper active agency detection" neural network of the brain is a cognitive mechanism which drives this search for agents. For Barrett, our brain is wired by evolution to search for intentional agents in our world, and, for Guthrie, we will tend to impute humanlike features to these agents once we (think we) have discovered them. These two approaches go hand in hand—Guthrie contends that we perceive humanness in the agents that Barret claims we are wired to search our environment for.

From the standpoint of evolutionary adaptation, cognitive scientists of religion argue that perceiving minds—especially *over*-perceiving minds— may have been conducive to survival (Barrett 2004). The classic example in evolutionary psychology is that of a rustling bush on the savannah of Africa. Imagine that it is 1.5 million years in the past and that you are a member of the primate species *Homo erectus*, an ancestor to both *Homo sapiens* (us) and *Homo neanderthalensis* ("neanderthals"). Your survival is crucial as your numbers are not very big, and the subsequent existence of the human species may be impossible if you are wiped out too quickly. If you hear a rustle in the bush behind you, you might assume it is a tiger or some other predator (an agent with intentions), or you can disregard it. If it is a tiger, and you had assumed that it was nothing, you're dead. If it was nothing, and you had assumed it was a tiger, you have sacrificed nothing but a few moments of anxiety. Evolutionary psychologists suggest that, though this may have made animals more anxious, the over-detection of

agents may have also been adaptive for survival. As Dominic Johnson and his colleagues (2013) put it, we sometimes mistake a stick for a snake (which can keep us alive), but we tend not to mistake a snake for a stick (which would kill us).

It isn't just avoiding predation, either. A proneness to imagining the watchful eye of God may also serve social control purposes (Johnson et al. 2013; Norenzayan 2013). Laboratory and field research has shown that the mere presence of "eye spots" on a wall (either a picture of human eyes or markings that look like eyes) increases cooperation and pro-social behavior (e.g., Francey and Bergmüller 2012; Bateson et al. 2013; Nettle et al. 2013). So does being reminded of religious symbolism and of God (Shariff and Norenzayan 2007; Gervais and Norenzayan 2012a; Norenzayan 2013; Shariff et al. 2016). Will Gervais and Ara Norenzayan (2012a, b, c) call this their "supernatural monitoring hypothesis"[6]—imagining gods as overseeing agents increases pro-social behavior because it makes peoples' behavior feel "public" and "watched." To use a cute phrase out of this school of thought: "Watched people are nice people" (Norenzayan 2013).

The larger theoretical premise here is that religion evolved as a cognitive system (the tendency to perceive acting superhuman/supernatural agents in the environment) and was then ritualized as a way of communicating with these intangible, but all-controlling, agents. Once ritualized, religions become intergenerationally reinforced in cultural systems.

Societies have been growing larger in terms of both population and geographical territory over the last 10,000 years, and a basic question in the evolution of society and culture is how expansive geographical political territories of tens of millions of people have maintained a sense of group identity or "we-ness." For Norenzayan (2013), the pro-sociality and cooperation necessary for the rise of large-scale human societies in the Holocene was enabled by ritualized interactions that primed beliefs about supernatural overseers. We can clearly see this in the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, all examples of religions which have survived the harsh winnowing of history. In the Abrahamic faiths, rituals are deeply laced with references to God as someone very interested in the beliefs and behaviors of ordinary human beings. Though recurrent

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[6]A theory of religion, supervision and self-monitoring that Hecht (2004) attributes to the ancient Greek politician Critias, based on statements made by the Roman philosopher Sextus Empiricus.

religious rituals serve purposes of social integration and community, they additionally remind people that they are being watched by an entity with strict expectations for comportment.

And, again, this human tendency toward imagining the presence of gods is enabled by neural networks in the brain. These networks have been "prepared" to form genetically in each of us, and this pre-programming is a result of tens of millions of years' phylogenetic evolution (Guthrie 1993; Salva et al. 2015). As such, agency detection and some rudimentary form of social cognition are already evident in humans when they are infants (Decety and Chaminade 2003; Bloom 2013).

So, what part of the brain is responsible for our "hyper active agency detection"? Some say the superior temporal sulcus or the superior colliculus, others say mirror neuron, and still others say a large majority of the neocortex go to work in imagining intentionality (Lisdorf 2007). Nobody really knows, but it is a fact of our perception that we do, indeed, tend to think "bumps in the night" are intentional agents even when they're not. How many times do we yell at our slow laptops, despite the fact that another part of us knows that our laptops cannot hear us? It is not so much disputed that our brains are wired to generate thoughts about intentional agents in our environment. What *is* debated is whether or not this tendency to perceive humanlike agents in the world is sufficient to explain all of religion (Saler 2009). After all, if it was, why weren't the nineteenth- and twentieth-century supernatural/animist/ancestor theories of Frazier, Tylor and Spencer sufficient?

E. Thomas Larson and Robert McCauley (1993) and Robert McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson (2002) have had a significant impact on the emerging field of the cognitive science of religion. Their argument, in *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (1993), is that our mental representations of religious ritual piggyback off of our more general mental representations of action and behavior. Notice that non-religious behavioral events are processed cognitively in terms of (1) agents who initiate (2) actions upon (3) objects and/or other agents with or without (4) instruments/tools. Lawson and McCauley (1993) suggest that the basic neurological infrastructure, which makes action perception possible, also enables the construction of religious ritual when the agents to be communicated with are (5) assumed to be supernatural or superhuman.

Within this framework, religious rituals that are easier, that is, more intuitively cognitively processed, will be more central to the religious culture of the society. Lawson and McCauley (1993) contend that the

most basic principle of religious ritual is that it involves an object of ritual action. They write:

> Religious rituals always do something to some thing or somebody. Religious rituals have an instrumental dimension as construed within the religion's conceptual scheme. This is precisely the reason why concerns arise about rituals' efficacy. Participants perform rituals in order to bring about changes in the religious world. (Lawson and McCauley 1993, p. 125)

Following from this, religious rituals which require fewer actions to communicate with supernatural agents will be more central than rituals which require a larger number of actions. Or, as another example, rituals involving superhuman agents as direct participants will be more central to a society's religious culture than rituals that serve only to passively communicate with supernatural agents. Another example might be that rituals that are prerequisites to other ceremonies will be more central to religious culture. Lawson and McCauley (1993) claim that each of these deductions (and others) follow logically from the premise that religious ritual is produced by the cognitive heuristics employed to perceive standard action events.

Lawson and McCauley (1993) and McCauley and Lawson (2002), like many cognitive scientists of religion, are careful not to *reduce* religion to the cognitive processing of action events with supernatural agents. They concede that emotional religious commitments are ultimately cultural, inculcated in each generation by parents and community members. Yet, they maintain that these cultural commitments are made possible by a more fundamental perceptual heuristic that evolved to quickly process the actions of real agents, and has since been co-opted by culture to process attempted communications with imagined supernatural/superhuman entities.

The hyperactive agency detection of human cognition, along with our tendency to anthropomorphize such agents, provides a baseline explanation for the possibility of religious belief. The cognitive-ritual theory of McCauley and Lawson, further, provides an explanation for the perceptual scaffolding of religious ritual.

Pascal Boyer (1994, 2001) would help round out these cognitive explanations for the foundation of religious beliefs and rituals. Boyer's contribution would be to provide a mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of religious ideas. Specifically, he helped answer the question of how thoughts about immaterial agents were passed from one generation to another and from one culture to another.

Boyer defines religion specifically as beliefs in supernatural agents. Moreover, these beliefs, he suggests, are "minimally counter-intuitive." In saying that beliefs in supernatural agents are minimally counter-intuitive, Boyer means to direct your attention to how such beliefs tend to be only minimally fantastical. Supernatural beings—whether gods or the ghosts of dead ancestors—are quite human in that they perceive, think and desire in decidedly humanlike ways. Supernatural beliefs are thus, on balance, quite natural. They are, however, "minimally" counter-intuitive in that, in addition to having the typical characteristics of human beings, they *also* have surprising traits like immortality or omniscience or omnipotence.

Christian religious statues of the Virgin Mary which are said to "weep," are interesting to us because they are mundane (just a statue of a person) with a novel twist (it is crying). Similarly, the notion of a tree (mundane) of eternal life (spectacular), or the notion of a man named Santa Clause (mundane) who travels around the world in the sky giving presents to children (spectacular) are both minimally counter-intuitive. Boyer puts a twist on Guthrie in postulating the basic foundation of religious belief to be *counter-intuitive* anthropomorphism

On the one hand, a statue that does not weep or a tree that does not provide eternal life would be intuitive. Statues and trees tend not to do these things. On the other hand, a statue that wept, walked on water, shot fire from its eyes and was also, somehow, fully human would be so maximally counter-intuitive as to be difficult to remember. Minimally counter-intuitive beliefs seem to occupy a sweet spot in human cognition where the search for creative novelty and stimulation intersects with our ability to remember symbolic information.

Minimally counter-intuitive beliefs can develop about any one of the five possible objects: people, animals, plants, natural nonliving objects and cultural artifacts. These beliefs become minimally counter-intuitive when the standard, natural traits of that object are enhanced in any of the three ways: psychological enhancement (i.e., omniscience), biological enhancement (i.e., immortality) and physical enhancement (i.e., omnipotence). Entities without a biology or psychology (cultural artifacts, natural nonliving objects), which are endowed with either, are said to be *transferred* such traits. That is, giving psychological properties to an entity without a mind involves a *transfer* of agent expectations to a nonagent. This transfer makes, for example, a belief in an all-knowing rock minimally counter-intuitive. By contrast, entities whose preexisting biology or psychology is merely enhanced (e.g., an all-knowing or immortal person or plant) are

said to have had their expectations *breached*. That is, enhancing a person, plant or animals' psychological, physical or biological abilities *breaches* our intuitive conception, constituting a memorable, minimally counter-intuitive belief. Whether entities without psychological or biological properties are fancifully endowed with them or entities already so equipped are given further powers, our capacity for remembering and sharing stories of such mythical agents is enhanced.

Minimally counter-intuitive beliefs arise in society spontaneously as a result of the idiosyncrasies of human creativity interacting with cognitive predispositions toward anthropomorphism and hyperactive agency detection. Once such creative, minimally counter-intuitive beliefs emerge in culture, they are preferentially transmitted across generations because they are better recalled in memory.

Boyer's (2001) cross-cultural research does indeed show that minimally counter-intuitive beliefs are more likely to be recalled in memory than are intuitive beliefs or maximally counter-intuitive beliefs. In other words, claims about beings that appear normal, but with a supernatural twist or two, will be preferentially remembered relative to beings that appear normal or beings that have a very large number of supernatural traits. Minimally counter-intuitive beliefs tickle our thirst for novelty and curiosity more than intuitive beliefs, but not so much as to be overstimulating as would be the case for maximally counter-intuitive beliefs. Minimally counter-intuitive beliefs are, for Boyer, not merely the foundation of religion but the foundation of human creativity and imagination. They are, in an important sense, a foundation of culture more generally.

With evolved cognitive biases toward anthropomorphism, hyperactive agency detection, a cognitive heuristic for ritual-as-action, and a preference for remembering counter-intuitive beliefs, we have specified much of the basic cognitive architecture of religious ideation.

Mind-Body Dualism

The concept of a human "soul," or a unitary, constitutive, personality construct that surpasses death and can animate nonhumans (in addition to reanimating humans in the case of reincarnation), is a result of another natural tendency that humans have toward mind-body dualism (Forstmann and Burgmer 2015). Starting from preschool age, humans appear to have a tendency to assume that the thoughts of the mind are somehow different from the nerves, organs and gristle of the physical body.

Psychologists like Paul Bloom (2005), Maciej Chudek (Chudek et al. 2013) and others have researched and written at length on this matter. It is hard to say for sure why humans seem instinctually "prepared" to see their thoughts as distinct from their bodies. Certainly, going back to Descartes, we are far more intimately aware of the material physicality of our bodies than we are of the material physicality of our brains, housed as they are in the darkness of our skulls.

There are countless examples of this human tendency to think of minds and bodies as somehow distinct. We treat someone's body with great reverence after they have died (i.e., funeral rituals), even though it is not *their* body anymore as there is no *their* there—that person's consciousness has completely ceased with their brain activity. As another example, consider how easily we can imagine a vampire whose personality remains intact even as it physically transforms into a bat. We can, as Bloom (2005) points out, imagine waking up as an insect with our personality intact as Kafka has hauntingly described. We can imagine zombies whose bodies are dead but whose brains continue to function. We feel separate from our bodies—conscious awareness and intention feels divorced from the mechanical operations of our physical bodies.

Daniel Dennett (1991) refers to our assumptions about consciousness as a "Cartesian Theater." It is as though a smaller version of ourselves, a "homunculus," sits inside of our skulls, watching all of the incoming sensory processing of our brains on a big movie screen. The part of our "self" which contains personality, loves, dreams and hopes sits inside of our skulls, somewhere, viewing the sights of our eyes, smelling the aromas wafting in from our nose, hearing the sounds picked up by our ears. It seems that when our *physical* bodies die—when our eyes lose sight, our nose loses its ability to smell, our ears lose hearing and so on—all that will be left is that little *nonphysical* bundle of personality and insight which had been observing everything the whole time. When our bodies die and wither away, it is as though the husk of a great spirit is shucked off, and that little metaphysical personality bundle is finally freed to float unimpeded in the ether.

This is an intuitive account of the mind and the body, but it is completely false. The modern study of the mind as arising from the activities of the brain, or, in the words of Marvin Minsky, the study of minds as "what brains do," is only around 170 years old (Damasio 1994).

In 1848, railroad worker Phineas Gage was impaled in the face with a railroad spike that did not kill him. The railroad spike shot through his

prefrontal cortex, the chunk of brain tissue right behind the forehead, and landed 25 yards away. Had the railroad spike been angled differently when it shot through Gage's brain, it could easily have punctured his brain stem, killing him instantly. Moreover, the wound itself could have rendered him unconscious, or in a coma. Amazingly, Gage not only survived the ordeal, he didn't even lose consciousness. Because he could not return to railroad work after the ordeal, Gage traveled around New England, haphazardly working museums, sideshows and other odd jobs with his newfound fame as the man who cheated death.

Though Gage survived the ordeal, his personality did not remain intact. The damage done to his prefrontal cortex fundamentally changed his behavior and personality, though it did not threaten the functioning of his lungs or heart. While there is debate over how much Gage's personality changed after the railroad spike impaled his prefrontal cortex—accounts by doctors and family seem to indicate profound changes or mild changes depending on who is asked—there is no debate that the railroad spike altered his personality at least somewhat. If the mind was truly distinct from the brain, if the "stuff" of thoughts and the "stuff" of bodies are different, why did the damage to Gage's brain produce corresponding changes in his personality?

Beginning with the medical cases of Gage and others in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, medical doctors and neurologists began studying the mind as though it were reducible to the electrical-chemical neural networks of the brain. Outside of the medical and cognitive science professions, however, it is still quite common for people to assume that minds and brains are different sorts of things—minds being the seat of the soul, and brains being the gelatinous plop of physical gray matter in our skulls. The persistence of this illusion of mind-body dualism is a fundamental cause of religious notions of anthropomorphized souls and spirits, in addition to religious notions of an afterlife where the soul travels when the body has died.

Religion as a By-product of Evolved Cognition

According to the cognitive science of religion, the first expressions of religious faith emerged from universal, evolutionary, neurological adaptations (to seek agency, anthropomorphize and remember minimally counter-intuitive ideas), and, thus, religion is a natural and inevitable by-product of cognition (McCauley 2011).

Religion is considered a "byproduct," sometimes alternatively called a "spandrel," because it emerges as a side effect of cognitive mechanisms which evolved for other purposes (Gould and Lewontin 1979; Atran 2002). Agency detection, for example, aided social coordination, social learning and survival, while anthropomorphism aided social interpretation and theory of mind. Additionally, a preferential memory for minimally counter-intuitive supernatural beliefs is likely a by-product of our animal desire for novelty and sensation seeking.

McCauley, in a more recent book, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (2011), writes:

> Religious beliefs and behaviors emerge from routine variations in the functioning of components of our normal mental machinery. Crucially, the mind does not contain a specific "department" of religion. Humans' religious predilections are understood as by-products of our natural cognitive capacities. […] Because every normal human being is susceptible to such emotionally compelling cognitive misfires, every culture has emerged with collections of either ancestors or angels, demons or devils, ghosts or ghouls, or gods or golems possessing counterintuitive properties. Cultures everywhere take forms that manipulate our maturationally natural cognitive predilections. (McCauley 2011, pp. 154–159)

Anthropologist Scott Atran (2002) has offered an integrated theoretical account of religion, cognition and culture. For Atran, religion in human societies is indeed the by-product of an amalgamation of cognitive processes—most centrally agency detection, anthropomorphism and selective retention of minimally counter-intuitive ideas. But, religion is not *merely* a by-product of cognition because it has now been "exapted" or co-opted by culture. As a result of culture co-opting the amalgam of cognitive tendencies that produce supernatural ideation, religion is now, quite literally, more than the sum of its parts.

The integrated cognitive-cultural origin story of religion therefore looks something like the following. People involved in the founding of a group or society imagine agents of a certain sort in response to a sense of threat or uncertainty (Botero et al. 2014). Some of these postulated agents, the ones who are minimally counter-intuitive and most emotionally relevant, are disproportionately remembered and discussed among others. A greater prevalence of discussion around any given religion is ultimately assured when humans institutionalize their ritualistic attempts to communicate with these supernatural agents in the form of a status

hierarchy of priests or holy people. Once rituals oriented toward supernatural agents are institutionalized in a priestly hierarchy of some sort or another, younger generations can be systematically indoctrinated into an intergenerational religious culture.

Religions, as they develop over time through normative ritual reinforcement and intergenerational transmission, produce far more than just supernatural belief and ritual. As religious ideation becomes enculturated, it provides an integrative group identity, mobilizes people more efficiently for conflicts and provides existential comfort in the form of art, music, poetry and philosophy (Atran 2002; Norenzayan 2013). Religion in human societies thus emerged as a misfiring of our evolved propensity to ubiquitously find and communicate with agents in our environment, but now that religious rituals have become institutionalized and intergenerationally transmitted in society, they can be used adaptively to serve purposes of social integration and social control (Atran and Henrich 2010).

Religion in Human Society

The origin of religion—in the form of anthropomorphism, hyperactive agency detection, mind-body dualism and differential cultural reproduction of minimally counter-intuitive supernatural beliefs—is *at least* as old as anatomically modern humans, and we have been around for 200,000 years (Guthrie 1993). The earliest form of human religion, given what we know about extant hunter-gatherers, was probably a combination of ritualized animism (worshipping "souls" with humanlike intentions in animals, plants, the sun, the wind) and/or ancestor worship (imagining human intentionality, or "souls," in the form of ghosts or spirits).

Religion is the oldest institution in human society, along with kinship/family (Turner and Maryanski 2008 [2016]). Family provided physical sustenance and protection during infancy and early childhood; religion provided existential sustenance and protection during adolescence and adulthood when questions of death, the meaning of existence and moral conduct became paramount. The first art was religious art, the first philosophy was religious philosophy and the rule of the first law was divine.

There were not always "religious specialists" who claimed a monopoly on religious knowledge in these early human societies, although many such societies did seem to have "shamans" who essentially filled that role. Shamanistic activities in early tribal societies included "healing and

curing of illness, divination, protecting and finding game animals, communicating with the dead, recovering lost souls, and protecting people from evil spirits and the practitioners of malevolent magic" (Sanderson 2008, p. 145). Shamans would also sometimes take intoxicants and go on "vision quests" in pursuit of wisdom. Shamanic religious rituals involved drumming, dancing and repetitive chanting. The enchanted life of the tribal shaman was spent conjuring "anomalous experiences" through dissociation, hypnosis and fantasy (Sanderson 2008).

Tribal religion consisted of an origin myth for the tribe which was transmitted intergenerationally via oral tradition as there is no systematic writing/note-keeping in the earliest of human societies. This oral tradition of the origin myth of the tribe was transmitted by elders (who, of course, had the longest memories), providing them a privileged social status (Diamond 2012). Elders, in addition to the original "spirit," "ancestor," "force" or "god" which is thought to be responsible for the existence of the tribe, are both honored and legitimated in Durkheimian tribal festivals and symbolized in the form of a totem. This origin myth also contains elements that help tribe members interpret the purpose or meaning of individual lives—for example, every third birth of a boy may be said to produce a child animated by the wolf spirit, or the spirit of an athletic ancestor, destined to be a skilled hunter.

Religions in the earliest of human societies had several functions. Now, when I use the word "function," I am using it colloquially, not theoretically. The theoretical school of "Functionalism" in sociology and anthropology was dedicated to showing or "revealing" the sometimes-hidden functions of social institutions. The assumption was that central human institutions like family, religion, politics or economy arose and differentiated (i.e., grew) in society because they helped the society maintain an equilibrium of growth and stability. Those calling themselves "Functionalists" argued that a society without a "functioning" family system would collapse, a society without a "functioning" economy would collapse and, of course, a society without a "functioning" institution of religion would collapse. Because each institution played an integral role in the cohesiveness of the larger society, so the Functionalists argued, scientific analysis should be oriented toward showing the functionality/usefulness/integrative value of various institutions.

The problem with this classical Functionalist approach is that, oftentimes, institutions in human societies are anything but functional. Human societies are not pinnacles of integration and equilibrium—they are, always, works in progress teetering on collapse or recession. Societies do,

indeed, "grow" as their populations become larger—hunter-gatherer societies of 100 people do not have an institution of formal, higher education, but every industrial capitalist society on the earth does. So, it is true that human institutions emerged to integrate, educate, employ or care for increasingly large numbers of people as human population exploded over the last 10,000 years.

However, it is a mistake to assume some inherent "functionality" or usefulness to these institutions. Institutions in society may be expressly *nonfunctional*.

Consider a few obvious examples—the slave labor economy of the American South was not "functional" relative to the industrializing machine economy of the American North, but a slave economy continued nevertheless. This economic institution of slavery was not efficient, and not integrative, yet it persisted because it was a component of cultural heritage. Another example might be the political institution of monarchy. Monarchies were never efficient, with one person making centralized decisions for an empire of tens or hundreds of millions. Also, the monarchical bloodline probably didn't always produce offspring fit for leadership; history is riddled with the failed attempts of assertive but ultimately incompetent monarchs.

Were we to search through history for the hidden "value" or "functionality" of monarchy to the equilibrium or stability of society, we may well be on a wild goose chase. It may be that the political institution of monarchy, the economic institution of slavery and, as another example, the familial institution of polygamy were never "functional" in the sense of some societal optimality. Certainly, these institutions have existed, and there are anthropological, sociological and psychological reasons for their existence that should be studied. This is not in dispute. Rather, it is the assumption of "functionality," itself, that is problematic. Institutions in any given society *may* be functional and adaptive, but they may also be disintegrative and dissolutionary. The scientist cannot assume functionality; they must demonstrate it.

Having said this, I want to spend a bit of time on the "functions" of religion. I am not using "function" in the sense of optimality—for example, religions provide codes of conduct, but it may be that codes of conduct disseminated by secular government officials (i.e., police) are more effective/optimal/functional/adaptive than codes of conduct which are disseminated by religious clerics. So, religion does seem to serve several "functions" in the human societies of history, and of today, but I am in no way assuming that these "functions," are ideal, optimal or preferable.

Religions have served three basic functions in human societies. Let's have a look at each of these in turn.

The Perception of Order, Purpose and Control

Life was not easy in the first human societies. Extant hunter-gatherer populations suffered from a variety of threats to life and limb, including but not limited to poisonous snakes, scorpions and spiders, jaguar attacks, crocodile attacks, falling trees, infected insect bites and cuts, poisoned arrows from warring tribes and, of course, hunting and fishing accidents (Diamond 2012). In modern society, people are victims of, in descending order, motor vehicle accidents, alcohol abuse, gunshot wounds and botched surgeries and not to mention workplace accidents and disease.

Given the relative prevalence of threats to life and limb, the human condition is one that requires the perception of order, purpose and control. Many people cannot tolerate randomness and chaos at all, and most certainly avoid the perception of it. Even anarchists like taking a nap every once in a while.

Human beings, like any physical system, tend towards entropy. Entropy, conceptually, is the loss of organization or structure due to the dissipation of energy. For humans, this means that the energy comprising our bodies dissipates and decays, and that we must continually eat food and drink water in order to stay alive. We must, in a sense, displace our decay and disorder to the environment around us in order to survive; the environment degrades but we go on living. Notice that this is not true for a nonliving entity like a matchstick or a hamburger. These objects cannot consume energy from their environments and so they slowly wither away and dissipate. Humans, too, of course, slowly wither away, but this is only because our vain attempts to postpone the inevitable by consuming energy from our environment become less efficient as our cells age.

This fundamental problem of physical and organic existence—the problem of the loss of energy and organization—also effects, in an analogous way, our psychology (Hirsh et al. 2012). Human psychology is prone to bouts of uncertainty about our perceptions of things and about how to behave in a given situation. When we are uncertain, or anxious, we are not necessarily using our energy efficiently, because we are ruminating about choices, options or avenues we might take. Stress from anxiety and uncertainty—especially poverty and unemployment—is well known to be deadly if experienced chronically, and has been implicated as a cause

of ailments from heart disease to cancer (Marmot 2004; Schnittker and Mcleod 2005). In order to avoid these feelings of anxiety and uncertainty and to avoid this loss of energy debating options for action, our psychologies seek symbolic narratives that provide order and meaning (Park and Folkman 1997). These narratives orient our lives toward specific goals defined as meaningful, in a world with purpose, and this reduces our anxiety by reducing our perception of possible choices.

Just as we must eat and drink to avoid the damaging effects of thermodynamic entropy, so must we construct subjectively coherent narratives in order to avoid the damaging effects of psychological uncertainty. In addition to material fears of poverty, unemployment or criminal victimization, human beings also, of course, search for certainty in more existential matters: "What is the "self"?" "Why do I exist rather than not exist?" "What is the purpose of my life?" "In what form should I strive to exist after my physical death (i.e., in the form of offspring, a magnum opus book, great film or song)?"

That humans seek to reduce uncertainty in their perceptions is well established in the scientific literature. This reduction in uncertainty happens in a variety of ways, but the two most general ways are (1) developing self-concept or "identities" with stable meanings and (2) joining groups with ideologies that organize and interpret experience—groups that provide a "sacred canopy" for one's life (Berger 1967; Burke and Stets 2009; Hogg 2000; Hogg et al. 2010).

With regard to the first of these, developing stable self-concepts, Identity Theory (Burke and Stets 2009) in sociology and Uncertainty-Identity theory in psychology (Hogg et al. 2010) have much to say.

Research has shown that people experience increases in negative emotion when others in a situation treat them in a way that is discordant with their self-identity. To use a few examples, this means that if being a Christian and/or a college graduate is a central component of your general self-concept—making it very emotionally important—you will be more likely to not only behave in ways you define as Christian or college educated, but you will also behave in ways that you think will persuade others to think that you are Christian and/or college educated, *especially* if they seem to doubt it (Brenner et al. 2014). This basic dynamic—that people will behave in situations according to their self-understandings and that they will attempt to persuade others who treat them differently—is true for "person" identities (identities as a type of person, e.g., masculine or feminine, tall or short), "role" identities (identities where one has a

set of duties to carry out, e.g., father or mother or college student) and "social" identities (identities that show group affiliation, e.g., Christian or Democrat or Republican).

These various types of identities—person, role and social—overlap considerably. Indeed, peoples' overall self-concept is composed of numerous identities. Someone who is a Christian (a social identity) might also be a Sunday School teacher (a role identity) and see himself or herself as very moral (a person identity). Moreover, role identities, which have duties attached to them, are often embedded inside of social identities. So, as in the example just given, a Christian (social identity) may also be a Sunday School teacher (role identity). Another example of this embedding of role identities in social identities might be when a Democrat (social identity) is also a campaign volunteer (role identity), or when a family member (a social identity) is also a mother (role identity).

Identities are not personality traits, which one has whether aware of them or not. Rather, identities are *consciously held self-understandings* (Burke and Stets 2009). The person you carry around to the world is the person you understand yourself to be. Your desire for stability and certainty means that you will "control for" your identity meanings (as a wife or student or Republican) while in situations with others. To prevent uncertainty and anxiety, people develop through experience, and defend in situations, views of themselves they believe to be accurate (Burke 1991).

Humans also attempt to avoid the perception of uncertainty and disorder by joining organizations (i.e., creating social identities) that provide symbolic narratives about how life should be lived and about what is meaningful. These cosmological, existential, narratives themselves, as distinct from the person, social or role identities of individuals as members of such organizations, is the second component "(2)" mentioned earlier. In society today, religious organizations are the predominant supplier of cosmological narratives about existence. Religious organizations are not the only organizations that provide such narratives, scientific and political organizations do as well; and this is the point I will be returning to when discussing the future of religion (see, e.g., Farias et al. 2013).

Though overlapping in practice, the specific narratives about meaning and purpose that one gets from an organization are theoretically separate from the social or role identities one has as a member of that organization. Both are comforting, for different reasons. When someone's person, role and social identities are consistently confirmed by others in situations, on the one hand, they will feel authentic, efficacious and worthy. When some-

one accepts an organization's symbolic framework for interpreting reality, on the other hand, they situate their self-concept into a larger existential narrative.

Regarding the above-mentioned first point "(1)," religious social identities are still very common, and the identity verification people receive at religious services is probably considerable; regarding the above-mentioned second point "(2)," religious organizations today provide arguably the most comprehensive and widely disseminated narrative of human existence (Hogg et al. 2010; Hogg 2014; Park et al. 2013a).

Crystal Park and her colleagues, for example, write:

> Religious meaning systems seem to be particularly well-suited to provide a sense of coherence. That is, religions provide adherents with a comprehensive system for synthesizing their understanding of the world and their place within it. Religion helps individuals to create narratives that weave together 'the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their worldview—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order.' […] Religion provides a sense of agency and control, regardless of the objective controllability of any particular situation. Sometimes individuals perceive a collaborative working relationship with God, whereas at other times they may feel relief and comfort in putting their fate in 'the hands of God.' (Park et al. 2013a, b, pp. 161–162)

Part of this narrative of existence is that people have some measure of control over life's uncertainties through their pious behaviors and devout beliefs. The experimental psychologist Aaron Kay and his colleagues have demonstrated through a variety of studies that when people sense a loss of personal control, they will begin to think more about the role of large, external, controlling forces in their lives, in order to feel a sense of comfort.

For most Americans, this large, external controlling force is God. The more unstable, strife-laden and seemingly random someone's environment becomes, the more convinced they become of an imminent, present, controlling God (Kay et al. 2010). This represents an effort to obtain "compensatory control" over their situation (Kay et al. 2008, 2009; Kay and Eibach 2013; Landau et al. 2015). In other words, when the "self" senses that control is being lost due to a chronic mismatch between expectations and outcomes, an increased conviction in controlling external powers helps *compensate* for this loss of control by reducing anxiety and uncertainty.

Even more interesting, the supernaturalism (i.e., unfalsifiability) of religious belief insulates these beliefs from scientific and logical scrutiny. If someone believes they are safe walking in their dangerous neighborhood because "God is good and God is watching over me" but gets mugged anyway, he or she will wake up the next morning convinced that "My mugging was just a component of God's larger plan, and everything happens for a reason."

Religion, as an ideological system of existential and supernatural claims, is well insulated from empirical evidence and can thus be rationalized to an extraordinary degree (Friesen et al. 2015). God is invisible and immaterial, but everywhere. He is all powerful but capable of feeling threatened by evil. He is all loving and all good but allows suffering because humans have free will or because of an unknowable plan. This is all unfalsifiable dogma that can escape any critique precisely because of how vacuous it is. Thus, the unfalsifiability of supernatural beliefs only makes them better candidates for compensatory control. God is always in control even when it seems like he isn't, God always loves you even when it seems like he doesn't and God is always everywhere even though we never see him. And, in the bitter end, when the pain of suffering has finally swallowed someone's hope, they can still claim to be merely ignorant of God greater, glorious, plan.

The major world religions of contemporary society, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism, are the most refined packages of compensatory control currently on offer. These religious social identities provide people with a combined symbolic and behavioral package of order, meaning, purpose and control (Hogg et al. 2010).

Perhaps most importantly, however, *not everyone makes equal use of compensatory control*. It follows from the finding that compensatory control reduces perceptions of randomness and uncertainty that some people will make greater use of external systems as compensators than others—so long as some people are more uncertain than others, or more structurally unstable in society, there will be variation in the use of external systems as compensators for personal control.

Also, it is not that religion is somehow the only institution capable of providing meaning, purpose or a sense of control. Rather, it is that religion was the first human institution to do such. Among hunter-gatherers, religion is not clearly divorced from the history of the tribe, one's family ancestry or one's role in the tribe.

It seems that a second and third meaning-making institution has arisen, formally, over the last 500 years: scientific naturalism and democratic governments (Farias et al. 2013; Kay et al. 2008). Let's take a glance at each of these.

Scientific naturalism and religion have been clashing in society since the beginning of recorded history (Hecht 2004; Whitmarsh 2016). The primary epistemic difference between the two institutions is the reliance on verifiable evidence. Scientific naturalism assumes the existence of a stable external world, as do religious monotheisms, but in the scientific worldview, this stable world is fully natural and amenable to experimentation and testing. In the Abrahamic religious worldview, the world is stable because of the profundity of God's creative engineering capacities, but it is not fully knowable via experimentation because God's miraculous interventions can alter any and all aspects of the world at any time.

So, from a Christian point of view, the Earth was considered the center of the universe because God's greatest joy was his human creation. Then the scientific advances of the heliocentric revolution in astronomy put the Sun at the center of the universe. The reply of Christians then and now? To criminalize Galileo, heliocentrism's most famous advocate, and to assert that while the Sun may sit at the center of the universe this is only because God wants it that way.

The assault on religious creationism that came from Galileo was only the beginning—Darwin would not be born for another 167 years after Galileo's death, but the writing was on the wall.

The order offered by scientific naturalism is a biological order, established through principles like natural selection, genetic drift and speciation. The purpose offered by scientific naturalism is self-development and the achievement of self-relevant goals, in addition to caring for others who will reciprocally care for you. Put simply, the purpose of life in scientific naturalism is self-actualization and reciprocal altruism. The compensatory control offered by scientific naturalism is the promise of empirical truth, which can make our perceptions and self-understanding more accurate. The more accurate our beliefs about ourselves and others, the better we can discern how to live, and whom to live with. According to the meaning-making institution of scientific naturalism, happiness is a function of truth and accuracy.

Alongside the rise of science over the last 500 years, the rise of democratic governance has also provided an external system–serving purpose of

compensatory control. The dispute between science and religion is over what constitutes truth. However, the dispute between science, religion and government is over who should be cared for—only the devout, pious and righteous (religion), only those who are dependable, kind and rational (science), or everyone within national boundaries by virtue of their humanity and citizenship (government)?

The order and meaning offered by democratic governance is indeed secular but more humanistic than scientific; the basic organizing principle for order and meaning is that societal history and family history influence one's outlook and opportunities in life. The purpose of life follows clearly from this: people should dedicate their lives to social service, regardless of the religion or deservingness (rationality, decency) of those in need. Since the meaning of life, in this framework, is that histories of discrimination, poverty and abuse determine life chances, the purpose of life is to ameliorate social injustice. Lastly, compensatory control is provided by a belief that government will be caring and protective during difficult times. The poor, the sick and the elderly can be protected and cared for through redistributive government programs, and threatening foreigners can be held at bay with militaries. One need not worry about poverty, crime, unemployment or invasion—democratic governance is in control.

Religion was the first institution to provide narratives about meaning, purpose and control. It is not the only institution, however, that can do this. While religion's supernaturalism may fortify it from falsification, supernaturalism is actually a hindrance in the scientific framework because it is seen as impeding accuracy of what is, in fact, an entirely natural world. An apparent strength of religious ideological narratives is therefore a weakness as seen from the perspective of scientific meaning.

Alternatively, the indiscriminate kindness and compassion of the narrative of democratic governance (that narrative which defends the "welfare state") appears potentially wasteful from the religious standpoint (only good Christians should be coddled by government) and from the standpoint of scientific naturalism (only rational, deserving, hard workers should be coddled by government). The calculus of meaning, purpose and control thus changes depending on the symbolic narrative one is using to provide meaning, purpose and control to their experience of life.

It is nevertheless critically important to underscore the compatibility of scientific and governmental ideologies. Since both are at base secular, both appeal to data collection and experimentation as the most efficient methods of understanding the world. In both the scientific framework and

the governmental framework, our sense of meaning, purpose and control are contingent on our empirical understanding of the natural (and social) world. The primary difference between finding meaning, purpose and control in science, as opposed to in government, is that scientific purpose is slightly less humanistic. Scientific purpose includes the care of others, but *especially* those others who have been kind or caring to thee—this is the famous doctrine of reciprocal altruism in evolutionary biology which still forms the backbone of modern scientific analyses of morality (Trivers 1971; Krebs 2011). Morality in religion is tribal (be good to those who share your faith), morality in science is reciprocal (be good to those who have been good to you), morality in government is unconditional (be good to all of those who suffer in your society).

It is certainly possible that institutions other than religion, science and government will begin to develop into more encompassing sacred canopies. The future of religion may well be little more than the maturation of all human institutions into robust chapels of meaning, purpose and control. For now, though, I merely want to situate religion as the primary provider, today, of existential narratives of meaning, purpose and control. Religion occupies this position because humans first attempted to understand themselves and their world in whimsical, supernatural terms and, only later, in terms of scientific experimentation and representative government. Since meaning, purpose and control are essential to peoples' social and psychological well-being, religion's place in human society has, thus far, been profound and enduring.

Framework for Conduct and Punishment

The institution of religion also serves purposes of social control.

Anthropologist Christopher Boehm's (2012) review of extant hunter-gatherer tribes reveals that the accusation of "malicious sorcery," or the use of spirits or some other supernatural energy for antisocial purposes, are fairly common. Boehm finds that, of 50 hunter-gatherer societies, nearly half (24) had used some form of capital punishment, and the most common crimes to receive this death sentence were malicious sorcery (11 of 24 hunter-gatherer societies killed people for this offense) and violation of taboo (5 out of 24 societies killed people for this offense). Since taboos are often considered to originate in or be legitimated by ancestors or spirits, it is clear that a plurality, if not a majority, of the punishment meted out in the earliest of human societies was religious punishment.

This swallowing of law/punishment by religion was a function of low levels of institutional differentiation in society. When population levels are low, as they are in hunter-gatherer societies of 50–150 people, there is an insufficient number of people and stored resources to sustain institutions beyond kinship/family, religion and a nascent hunting and foraging economy (Lenski 2005). The institution of religion does not begin to compete with other institutions for power until the rise of centralized political authority in horticultural societies around 10,000 years ago.

And, even after the formal recognition of full-time political bodies, most political decisions for thousands of years were made under the auspice of religious grace. Prior to the French and American Revolutions, political monarchies ruled with the "mantel of heaven." It was not until recently, in the last several hundred years, that political authority has been formally, that is, legally, separated from religious authority. Nevertheless, ever since a full-time shamanic class has had to negotiate with a full-time political class—and this is not possible until the hunter-gatherer nomadic lifestyle is abandoned for a horticultural farming lifestyle where food surplus can be stored—disputes and powers struggles have been a mainstay.

A third institution competing for normative authority with religion was the institution of modern science, which emerged fairly recently with people like Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century. However, clashes between secular explanation and religious explanation predate the formal institutionalization of science, and can be seen in India with the Charvakas around 600 BCE, and certainly among the Greeks a few hundred years later (Hecht 2004). The institutionalization of science, through establishment of organizations like "The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge" in 1663, gave secular interpretations of meaning, purpose and control a cultural platform. The impact was significant. Early social scientists and criminologists like Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham fundamentally restructured European legal philosophy toward viewing criminals as rational, if impulsive and self-interested, actors instead of demonic. This move toward sentencing and punishing criminals proportionally, in accordance with the severity of their crimes, was a shift inaugurated by scientifically minded legal activists.

Still, religion had been the first institution to develop and disseminate norms, taboos and laws. And, as a result of "getting there first," the influence of religion on morality and rules of conduct remains significant.

In the Christian United States, moral conduct is assumed to be guided by the Ten Commandments of the Hebrew bible, otherwise known as the

Old Testament. God is said to have visited Moses on top of Mount Sinai in order to provide him with two stone tablets listing the most important rules for humanity (more specifically the Jewish chosen people) to live by.

These commandments, around 3000 years old, are as follows:

1. I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods
2. Thou shalt have no graven images or likenesses
3. Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain
4. Thou shalt remember the Sabbath day
5. Though shalt honor thy father and thy mother
6. Thou shalt not kill
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery
8. Thou shalt not steal
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness
10. Thou shalt not covet

Disobedience of these rules was punishable by eternal suffering in hell—disobedience was equivalent to a rejection of God.

Only the first commandment addresses belief itself; all the other commandments address behavior to be avoided. After the first commandment to believe in the correct god, commandments two, three and four provide direction as to how this belief should be performed: God is not to be callously depicted or drawn, God's name is not to be blasphemed or insulted and God is to be worshipped each day—especially on Sunday (the Sabbath day).

Commandments 5–10 address not how God is to be believed and worshipped, but how God's people are to behave toward each other. These commandments are concerned with forms of antisocial conduct found in all human societies: disrespect of parents, murder, relationship disloyalty, theft, false incrimination/accusation and vindictive jealously. The Hebrews may have thought that God was helping his chosen people with their specific problems, but the human writers of the Old Testament were, in fact, prohibiting actions that all societies condemn (Newman 1976[2008]; Brown 1991; Boehm 2012).

Many modern Christians attempt to boil the noise of these ten commandments down to a more basic rule, the "Golden Rule." This rule, to treat others as you would like to be treated,[7] was first spoken from the lips

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[7] Attributable, in the New Testament, to Matthew 7:12 or Luke 6:31.

of Jesus himself, adherents claim, and is therefore uniquely Christian. As it turns out, though, the Golden Rule not only predates Christianity, it predates humanity!

A central principle in the evolution of animal cooperation is reciprocal altruism (Trivers 1971). Animals that help hunt and protect young are preferred as relationship partners compared to those who help less (De Waal 2010). From an evolutionary perspective, animals that form reliable coalitions survive longer to pass on their genes compared to those who live and hunt alone.

What results, over tens of millions of years of selection, are animals "designed" by nature to search out and establish mutually beneficial coalitions. This "design" takes the form of evolved structures in the brain, for example, the prefrontal cortex, amygdala and hippocampus, where memories of others begin as perceptions that become soaked with emotion before being stored. This "design" also takes the form of chemical and electrical processes in the brain, for example, the release of the relaxing and calming hormone oxytocin all over the brain when coalitions are formed and maintained. Human brain structure is phylogenetic. This means that the form and functioning of our brain has emerged through tens of millions of years of additional natural selection on top of the hundreds of millions of years of selection that produced lower-order "reptilian" brain structures like the brain stem and cerebellum that help pump the heart and expand the lungs.

One of the clearest differences separating (almost all) mammals from reptiles or birds is the reproductive strategy of live birth instead of egg laying (Churchland 2011). This difference is critical for the evolutionary development of reciprocal altruism, because the structures and electrochemical processes that enable it evolved, at first, to increase the caregiving behaviors and empathy of mammalian mothers toward their extremely vulnerable infants (Preston 2013). Though selection was initially strongest on mammalian mothers, the brain structures and processes enabling reciprocal altruism evolved in both males and females as both sexes, once adults, will differentially reproduce to the degree that they can form coalitions to solve problems of survival.

On the one hand, if the "Golden Rule" is actually a principle of the evolutionary development of cooperation, it should be universal in human societies. On the other hand, if the "Golden Rule" is a unique tenet of Christianity, we should expect to find it only in historically Christian societies. Of course, we find that the former is true, not the latter. The

"Golden Rule" can be found in every human society for which there are surviving written records. Let's look at a few.[8]

More than 600 years before Jesus' disciples Luke and Matthew wrote the "Golden Rule" into the Bible's New Testament, the Chinese philosopher Confucius wrote, "What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to others." Around 500 years before the New Testament, the Greek education scholar Isocrates penned, "Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others." The Hindu Mahabharata, which originated in India some 250 or more years before the New Testament, states, "This is the sum of all true righteousness: deal with others as thou wouldst thyself be dealt by. Do nothing to thy neighbor which thou wouldst not have him do to thee hereafter." The Greek biographer Diogenes, 250 years before the New Testament, wrote "The question was once put to Aristotle how we ought to behave to our friends; and his answer was, 'as we should wish them to behave to us'."

So, if we wished to find the "Golden Rule" in the Western intellectual tradition, we can find it with Aristotle. If we wanted to find it in the Eastern intellectual tradition, we can find it with Confucius in China or in the Mahabharata in India. And, if we wanted to know why all human cultures seem to share this ethical intuition, we would look to natural selection and the biological evolution of reciprocal altruism.

Religions were the first meaning-making institutions in human society that provided purpose in life and an explanation for how people can control themselves and their environment. Because religions provided the moral canvass on which rule and taboo were written, the first justifications for moral behavior were religious justifications and the first moral principles were religious principles. But, this is only a consequence of the symbolic communication characteristic of human beings—rules and desired conduct were expressed symbolically, and the first human symbols were religious and sacred (Durkheim 1912[1965]).

People, lay public and scholars alike, tend to confuse the fact that human morality was first expressed with religious symbolism with the fallacy that morality has its ultimate origin in religion. Reciprocal altruism is an adaptive strategy for survival and reproduction in a harsh world of scarcity, and it is this biological principle that underlies the Golden Rule. Religions around the world have symbolized the sentiment of the Golden Rule in various ways, but they did not invent it nor unearth it.

[8] I have drawn these examples from Shermer's (2004) excellent list.

In fact, if we look close enough, it is not at all difficult to find a great deal of cruel and callous treatment of others in the Bible.[9] The God of the Old Testament commands his people, the Israelites, to commit numerous genocidal wars in order to seize the "Promised Land" from the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 20: 16–18; Joshua 6: 20–21, 8: 22, 10: 28–40, 11: 8–14). And, while committing these genocidal wars, God reminds his people to "spare the lives of the young girls who have never slept with a man, and keep them for yourselves" (Numbers 31: 17–18). This doesn't sound like the recommendations of an omnibenevolent follower of the Golden Rule so much as the reactive, panicked, strategizing of human pastoralists worried about territory and survival.

It goes on. At various points in the Bible, God threatens to punish people for the sins committed by their ancestors hundreds of years in the past (Exodus 34: 6–7; 1 Samuel 15: 1–3), besets humanity with a plague killing 24,000 people (Numbers 25: 1–9), orders Moses to cut a man's head off because he chopped wood on Sunday, (Numbers 15: 32–36), recommends that children should be beaten with sticks (Proverbs 13: 24, 23: 13–14) and even calls forth "she-bears" from the woods to kill 42 children who had been harassing Elisha, a prophet, for being bald (2 Kings 2: 33–34). God, additionally, recommends the death penalty for every crime from witchcraft to adultery to working on Sunday.

The institution of religion not only disseminated the first codes of conduct but also threatened the first universal punishments. Since supernatural beings are immaterial, they can be present everywhere at once. They are not bound by the corporeality of a physical body. In addition to being omnipresent, the Abrahamic gods of Christianity Judaism and Islam are also all-knowing, and all-powerful. These spectacular characteristics allow these gods to watch over all adherents (and heretics) simultaneously. And, as God's memory is not known to be faulty, no bad deed goes unpunished.

All-present, all-knowing, all-powerful deities are the ultimate peace-keepers, so long as belief and belonging can be maintained. When people monitor their conduct because of a fear of supervision and punishment, this has the latent consequence of producing a belief that *other* people, too, monitor their conduct for similar reasons. In other words, if God is watching me, then he must be watching you, and that makes you somebody I can trust. Evolutionary sociologists today who study the development of religion over the last several thousand years contend that this

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[9] This short discussion of cruelty in the Bible has benefitted from review by Smith (2015).

cooperative consequence of supernatural supervision is the cultural reason why monotheisms like Christianity, Islam and Judaism grew and developed (Norenzayan 2013; Norenzayan et al. 2016).

A recent study conducted by Benjamin Purzycki and his colleagues (2016) used qualitative ethnographic accounts, along with field experiments, to study the impact of beliefs in supernatural supervision on cooperation in eight different societies from around the world. The study sample from these societies included an average of 74 people each from inland Tanna, Vanuatu; coastal Tanna, Vanuatu; Yasawa, Fiji; Lovu, Fiji; Pesqueiro, Brazil; Pointe aux Piments, Mauritius; the Tyva Republic, Russia; and Hadzaland, Tanzania. These societies have very different economies, ranging from hunter-gatherers, to farmers, to small-business owners paying wages to employees. The societies included in this study were also religiously diverse, representing Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism in addition to ancestor/spirit worship and animism among the hunter-gatherers.

The results were predictable but nevertheless astonishing. Across societies, people who believed in supervisory, punishing gods donated tokens (which could be cashed out in local currency) to unknown people who shared their faith more often than did people who believed in gods that were less supervisory or less punishing. Even more interesting, this relationship was linear, with more punishing views of god producing more donated tokens to unknown others. This relationship held even when controlling for the participants' material instability/poverty and number of children. The authors conclude their study with the following:

> These results build on previous findings and have important implications for understanding the evolution of the wide-ranging cooperation found in large-scale societies. Moreover, when people are more inclined to behave impartially towards others, they are more likely to share beliefs and behaviors that foster the development of larger-scale cooperative institutions, trade, markets and alliances with strangers. This helps to partly explain two phenomena: the evolution of large and complex human societies and the religious features of societies with greater social complexity that are heavily populated by such gods. In addition to some forms of religious rituals and non-religious norms and institutions, such as courts, markets and police, the present results point to the role that commitment to knowledgeable, moralistic and punitive gods plays in solidifying the social bonds that create broader imagined communities. (Purzycki et al. 2016, p. 3)

Notice, however, that this effect was found only when the person donating the tokens thought the person they were donating to shared their religious convictions. The assumption is that the trading partner shares one's religion, but is not familiar due to geographic distance. This assumption is theoretically problematic for claiming that religions produce cooperation. Ample historical evidence shows that people who don't share one's faith tend to be, to various degrees, dehumanized. This is a problem that the "supernatural monitoring hypothesis" has yet to quite figure out. It is misleading to say that powerful gods produce cooperation, because this is only true if cooperator A assumes that cooperator B shares cooperator A's faith. If that assumption is violated, cooperation may invert itself into war. Nevertheless, for those who share a religious social identity, cooperation is most assuredly facilitated. And, recent research is suggesting that, while esoteric religious symbols that are specific to certain faith encourage within-group cooperation, abstracted notions of "God" that are non-culturally specific might encourage cooperation with out-group members (Preston and Ritter 2013). This is indeed a compelling area for future research.

Religions thus provide rules for moral conduct, and, Abrahamic religions, especially, provide the ideal overseer—an all-knowing, all-powerful and all-present punisher who will love you only if you obey him. The combination of religious rules with the constant threat of punishment provide the initial human context for social order and, consequently, for cooperation.

Costly Beliefs and Practices Denoting Community Belonging

A central component of religion is "belief in belief" (Dennett 2006). Many religious beliefs are fanciful—consider the Christian belief that the creator of all existence chose the son of a very poor, illiterate carpenter to spread his message of salvation to the universe, that Jesus was man and God and raised from the dead or that he was born of a woman who had never had sex.

If you were approached on the street during a particularly nice Autumn afternoon by a very friendly stranger who told you that his virgin mother had been impregnated by an angel and that the creator of existence loved him and, through him, loved you as well, it is a safe bet that you would walk briskly in the opposite direction, looking over your shoulder at each corner.

Why is this? On a certain level, we all understand that currently, in 2017, a "returning Messiah" would be promptly arrested and medicated for his (or her) own safety. They may well be the son of God, but they would also be speaking incomprehensibly, and, from a legal standpoint, it is certainly plausible that they might be a threat to themselves or others. Someone as fundamentally divorced from the day-to-day mundane realities as a religious messiah—someone who does little but talk of miracles they can commit and the salvation or punishment they are destined to provide—would be a clear case of mental illness in our modern societies. Perhaps they suffer from schizophrenia, or an extreme depressive dissociative disorder, or bouts of prolonged hypermanic states. Many of the messiahs of history were cruelly abused and tried as criminals. A few of them were so genuinely charismatic and interesting that their tragically short lives sparked entire religions.

But, clearly, even today, people profess a belief in virgin births, resurrections, talking snakes, parting seas, impregnating angels, original sins, transubstantiations and so on. When people profess a belief in these supernatural and quite evidently whimsically playful notions, what are they telling us?

They are telling us that they "believe in believing," as the Tufts philosopher and "New Atheist" Daniel Dennett. These fanciful ideas are not believed in the literal sense; people don't necessarily reflect, with any dutifulness, on each belief they accept, and they certainly don't expect to actually encounter talking snakes or suffer from virgin births or parting seas while planning out their lives.

To "believe in belief," means to think that professing agreement with fanciful notions is a good thing so long as they identify one as a member of a moral/religious community. Professed belief, regardless of the content of the belief, is a good thing because it marks one as an upstanding, moral Christian and, as such, an upstanding, moral person. People who raise a skeptical eyebrow to resurrected god men, or divine visions from burning bushes may, for all one knows, also raise a skeptical eyebrow to the Ten Commandments and, thus, to notions of basic human decency and fairness.

The conflation of religion with morality—which is understandable, as cosmic justification preceded secular reasoning in the formation of law—means that critique of religion will be perceived by people to be critique of basic moral standards. To avoid being labeled a moral deviant by parents or peers, people profess beliefs they might not hold upon reflection. It is

costly to profess belief in something one hasn't really considered rationally, but the benefits of social acceptance and assumed moral character are greater.

People have a "belief in belief," because this is a shortcut toward demonstrating character, decency and normativity. Professing to believe in any given Christian/Muslim/Jewish/Hindi/Daoist and so on tenet, however absurd or opaque, provides an initial symbolic and behavioral indicator of trustworthiness, of cultural embeddedness and pro-social loyalty. Professing belief, without (much) concern for the content of the belief, is a form of "costly signaling," or what I referred to above as "hard-to-fake" signaling. "Belief in belief" is hard to fake in that, generally speaking, it is difficult to feign interest in a belief one does not hold or accept. When somebody expresses a belief that is patently absurd, it provides the impression that the person is deeply embedded in ("indoctrinated into") the community that holds the belief. "Belief in belief" is thus ultimately a sign of group membership.

There are other forms of hard-to-fake behavior among religious people that signal group membership and trustworthiness (e.g., Irons 2001; Bulbulia 2004; Henrich 2009). Some of them are hard to fake precisely because of how painful they are. Indeed, among hard-to-fake religious signals "belief in belief" is perhaps the most benign, requiring the lowest degree of physical and emotional investment. A recent study of hard-to-fake religious rituals during the annual Hindu festival of Thaipusam will help to make this point (Xygalatas et al. 2013).

This Hindu festival of Thaipusam takes place throughout the Hindu world, though this study took place on the east African island country of Mauritius. Slightly less than half of the Mauritians are Hindu, and a large minority (around 30%) are Christian. The researchers in this study were interested in whether or not the amount of pain perceived during the ritual increased participants' and observers' willingness to expand their self-concept.

The two rituals they examined were quite distinct—the "easy to fake" ritual involved singing and collective prayer, while the "hard to fake" ritual involved piercing the skin with numerous needles and skewers, walking while carrying heavy bamboo structures and dragging carts attached to the body by hooks digging into to the skin for four hours before climbing a mountain barefoot (Xygalatas et al. 2013). These hooks and needles are dug into the skin expressly as a sign of devotion to Lord Murugan, a son of the god Shiva, and the festival can last for days. The study found

that such intense, painful ritual did, indeed, serve to increase participants' sense of group membership above and beyond easy-to-fake rituals.

Compared to the physically demanding and painful rituals of the Thaipusam festival, professing to believe what one has not reflectively or rationally considered seems a minor effort. It is significantly less costly and denotes significantly less group commitment than a ritualized behavior emphasizing physical pain, as the Thaipusam does. Professing "belief in belief" is even less costly and time consuming than attending church, praying or volunteering for a religious cause, all of which require a donation of time and money.

"Belief in belief" is an interesting phenomenon. Even when rates of intergenerational religious transmission are declining, people will need to use religious symbols to talk about morality, simply because no new lexicon has emerged. Professing a vague belief in unconsidered religious notions remains the most symbolically swift, if unreliable, method of preliminarily establishing that someone is normative and ethical.

The larger point, however, is that religions are composed of beliefs and behaviors that are costly—painful, absurd, difficult, elaborate, time consuming or literally costly in terms of money—in part so that adherents can demonstrate the degree of their loyalty and reap the subsequent rewards of communal belonging (Sosis 2005). To the degree that religions provide cosmologies and social hierarchies that people benefit from and participate in, costly rituals and hard-to-fake behaviors will continue to be good ways to find out who takes the religion seriously and who doesn't. People who do not profess the "correct" costly beliefs, or who do not engage in the "correct" costly behaviors, cannot be trusted as emotionally invested community members. These costly beliefs and behaviors thus help maintain the boundaries of the religious community.

Religion as a Social-Psychological System

To this point in the chapter, I have described four aspects of human life that religion impacts: (1) our beliefs, (2) our behaviors, (3) our community belonging and (4) our existential and social security.

Our behaviors inform our beliefs, and vice versa, in a reciprocal process, directed by parents, peers, school authorities and media, called "socialization." This combination of behaviors and beliefs marks us as members of communities. In the United States, these are often religious communities, but they may also be race/ethnic communities, or sporting com-

munities, or political communities and so on. Our routinized beliefs and behaviors, along with our embeddedness in a community, engender a social-psychological perception that the universe has order, and that the individual has purpose and control in that order.

I have further suggested that the institution of religion impacts these four aspects of human life by providing (a) explicit existential narrative myths that produce a perception of order, purpose and control, (b) general frameworks for conduct and punishment, and (c) costly beliefs and practices that signify community belonging and commitment. These are related to each other in reverse order: the (c) costly beliefs and practices of religions are justified/legitimated/required by (b) rules and laws, which are, in turn, justified/legitimated/required by (a) existential, narrative myths. Should the narrative myths appear suspect, incomplete or impossible, or should the rules and laws of a religion seem intolerant or anachronistic, costly beliefs and behaviors will appear *too costly* and will decline in prevalence.

Each characteristic of religion (a–c) implicates each of the four aspects of human life (1–4), to varying degrees and in varying ways. The characteristics of religions, (a–c) above, are all empirically interrelated. They are, however, theoretically and analytically separable. This is also true for human life, as belief, behavior, communal belonging and existential security are all distinct but interrelated.

The (a) mythological narratives that religions offer, supernatural or not, are believed when told to us by parents and other formative guardians and peers. Once we (1) believe them, or profess to believe them, we can (3) signal our group membership by sharing these beliefs with others and by engaging in (2) ritualized behaviors like church attendance. These beliefs also, because they comment explicitly on the nature of existence and how humans can influence this existence, provide people with the (4) perception that there is order and purpose in life. And, in addition to order and purpose, religions explain how human beings can control, direct or, at the very least understand, this order and purpose.

The (b) frameworks for conduct and punishment that religions produce come from two sources: "holy" or authoritative texts and exegesis, and credentialed authorities in that religious community. Religious rules and laws primarily affect peoples' (1) beliefs about what (and who) is right and good (or wrong and evil), (2) their actual or professed behavior, as when people fast to observe sacred obligations, and (4) their sense that their conduct is in line with the requirements of some large purpose or goal.

Adherence to religious rules and laws also certainly (3) denotes group membership, as one adheres to these laws out of social/peer obligation as much as out of religious obligation.

Lastly, the (c) "costly" beliefs and behaviors that religions produce (1 and 2) canalize human behavior and thought into a ritualized/habitual form and (3) signal one's degree of commitment to the group. In signifying commitment to the group, and in having one's commitment recognized by other community members, (4) perceptions of order, meaning and control are fortified (Hogg et al. 2010). The identity, goals and power of the collective, of God, become the sacred lens through which existence is viewed—unemployment, divorce, poor health and poverty are safe tests from God, who remains in total control, not frightening existential threats from a random universe. The more someone blurs their self-conception with a valorized collective whose goals are transcendent, the more they gain an existential framework—a sacred canopy—through which they can positively interpret the cruelties and setbacks of life.

I have attempted here to treat religion in very theoretical and analytical terms. Religions are a human institution, a social-psychological system that provides narratives about existence, ethical frameworks and time-consuming, effortful behaviors paired with beliefs that strain our credulity. The first religions were profoundly supernatural and mystical, but this may not be the only form religions can take. Other human institutions, like science and democratic governance, may, individually or in combination, be capable of providing the "functions" served by religious institutions.

Human societies have never undergone a mass secularization before the contemporary era, and the future of religion is thus precarious and uncertain.

This is a point that I will be returning to later in this book, and it is certainly a point worth considering in depth. The pervasive effects of secularization over the last 500 or so years cannot be overstated. On this topic, the sociologist Bryan Wilson wrote:

> Secularization relates to the diminution in the social significance of religion… the decline in the proportion of their time, energy and resources which men devote to super-empirical concerns; the decay of religious institutions; the supplanting, in matters of behavior, of religious precepts by demands that accord with strictly technical criteria; and the gradual replacement of a specifically religious consciousness (which might range from dependence on charms, rites, spells, or prayers, to a broadly spiritually-inspired ethical concern) by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation. (Wilson 1982, p. 149)

And this is where we turn next—the long, slow road to secularization, specifically, in this case, secularization in the United States. First, in order to explain the situation in its accurate depth, we must turn next to a snapshot of the religious and secular history of the United States.

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Religious America

America is the wealthiest nation in the world and the most advanced nation both technologically and militarily. It has therefore come as a surprise to social scientists that people in the United States are as religious as they are. If the modern world is secularizing, why does the United States seem to be an exception?

It certainly seems as though religion is always in the news. Presidents, singers, actors, athletes and others are always thanking God for their success and for their abilities. Politicians and pundits like the former governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee and *Fox News* host Sean Hannity decry the "War on Christianity" that they see all around them.[1] Prayer is being removed from school! Gays and lesbians can marry! Divorce is increasingly common! Women have easy access to birth control and, worse, often work outside of the home!

The picture in popular culture is that a basically religious American populace is under attack, every once in a while, from fringe loony atheist hippies. How accurate of a picture of American religion is this?

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[1] http://www.salon.com/2014/07/29/fox_news_war_on_christianity_how_right_wing_hacks_created_a_sect_of_victims/ ; see also http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0531-balmer-huckabee-victimization-20150531-story.html

Protestantism Before the American Revolution

The origins of the United States are certainly cloaked in Christianity, specifically Protestantism. This Protestant heritage played a supportive, if not ultimately formative as Weber suspected, role in the culture of American "individualism" (de Tocqueville 1889[2003]). Indulge me, for a moment, in a brief bit of history which will help set up Protestantism as a religious idea, and then, we shall move to the American religious experiment.

Martin Luther, the man credited with the reformation of Catholicism beginning in 1517, was himself an academic and a Catholic priest. His commitment to reforming the Catholic church emerged out of academic contemplation about, in part, the intellectual and logical justifications for the church's selling of indulgences. In Europe at the time, sufficiently wealthy businessmen/merchants, but for the most part nobles, were encouraged by the church to use their considerably growing wealth to "purchase" priestly forgiveness (known as *indulgences*) for their sins. This practice was encouraged by clergy as an ethical practice which raised funds for the church while purifying the souls of, mostly, politicians and wealthy merchants.

The problem, as Luther saw it, was a disjuncture between God's imminence—sending his only son, Jesus, to die for the initial sins of humanity—and God's distance in the church's scheme of selling salvation. If God is imminent and personal and omnipresent, then salvation is likely available to any Christian at any time, he thought, regardless of their financial ability to purchase indulgences.

This basic philosophical position, though perhaps theologically benign, amounted to a radical, and critical, analysis of church fund-raising polices. After all, how could it be that God loved all and gave his son to forgive all of humanity's (original) sin, but will only, presently, forgive the sins of those who can afford it? For Luther, the church was beginning to conflate its role as the house of God with its personal, earthly, goals for financial power.

Luther's ideas were, historically, in the right place at the right time.

The Catholic church of the sixteenth century had become unwieldy in its political power, control over the populace and role in justifying expensive foreign wars. Luther's position was very academic and theological, but his basic insight was that the (earthly) church had become corrupted with the pride, gluttony and greed of an all-too-human clergy. His dictum that salvation was possible through faith alone, with no rigid recourse to church hierarchy necessary, spread like a viral meme throughout the six-

teenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. After centuries of being subject to the whims of the Roman Catholic hierarchy of church clergy, salvation was now becoming democratized. Salvation, Luther argued, must be an individual "calling," not a product purchased from church clergy.

Martin Luther was not the only Protestant philosopher of the time that was beginning to question the centralized power of the Roman Catholic church, and his is certainly not the only flavor of Protestantism that then emerged. Indeed, for Weber, it was John Calvin's Protestantism which was most formative in modern Western history (Weber 1930[2002]). Calvin believed in theological predestination. His position conceded that salvation was possible through individual faith alone, but offered the caveat that salvation had been determined for each individual prior to their birth. In this way, one would only know they were saved by their earthly riches, and, conversely, one knew they were damned by the squalor of their surroundings.

Calvin essentially rooted salvation in class inequality—he justified income inequality by suggesting that such inequality had been ordained in advance by an all-knowing, and ultimately all-good, creator. This belief that societal stratification had a cosmic logic was an especially convenient justification for class inequality during the earliest stages of industrialization. Also, and equally, this ideology encouraged people to work stoically, for long hours, in order to appear well-to-do and, therefore, evidently "saved" by the grace of God.

Luther and Calvin are perhaps the best-known early Protestant Christians, but Protestant sects were popping up all over Europe at the time. Religious authority was decentralizing, very slowly, across the European world. The source of religious salvation had clearly begun shifting from the church hierarchy to the individual. This slow shift of religious authority from the clergy to the public, beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was also riding a wave of rising per capita incomes, a growing middle class and perhaps the highest levels of literacy attained by any society up to that point.

The Western world was changing, and changing rapidly.

The Religious Cosmopolitanism of American History

America was a promised land for Protestants who were being persecuted by the Catholic church for their beliefs about the nature of salvation. Throughout Europe at the time, non-Catholics of various sorts were

being haphazardly prosecuted and persecuted for blasphemy and heathenism. The new colonists in America sought a refuge from this persecution, and the recently discovered American continent provided a fertile ground for a populist Protestant religious revival of Christianity.

The Protestants who fled to the early American colonies were mostly Calvinist Puritans and Presbyterians, along with some Baptists who believed in *both* predestination and free will, and religiously moderate Methodists who rejected the doctrine of predestination. These Protestants, especially the zealous Puritans and Presbyterians, saw their travel to the Americas as a religious pilgrimage, an "errand into the wilderness," of a new world (Bellah et al. 1985).

This wilderness, however, would pose its own hurdles for religious integration. Outside of the New England colonies, nomadic frontier living made regular church attendance difficult. The individualistic conception of salvation inherent in Protestant faith was a convenient fit for the mercurial nature of frontier living—earnest personal belief coupled with inconsistent, pragmatic, church attendance was the norm (Finke and Stark 1992). Less than 20% of early colonists belonged to a specific church (Fuller 2001). Also, by all accounts, there were a good amount of explicitly nonreligious deists[2] who came to the Americas in order to flee persecution by the Catholic church (Finke and Stark 1992).

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[2] Deists were the atheists of the time. Deists believed that a God likely created the complexity of existence, but then left humanity to fend for itself. Deists therefore believed in a God, but also held that this God was remote and uninterested in human affairs. Humans were endowed with the gifts of reason, and it is this human reason and logic that must be used to solve social and environmental problems. Deists maintained their belief in God mostly out of a conviction that nature was too complicated to be self-organizing. Following were the two arguments for God's existence that seemed most persuasive to famous deists of the time: one, that humans were too biologically and psychologically complex to not have a divine creator, and, two, that the complexity of the universe, as a whole, was too sophisticated to not have a divine creator. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection and Hubble's expanding universe theory would both, of course, eventually provide nonagentic explanations for the origins of human beings and galaxies. Nevertheless, even today, many Christians take a deistic stance when they argue that though human evolution has been explained, the origin of life has not. Similarly, though the age and expansion of the universe is well documented, the ultimate cause of the "Big Bang" remains very much a disputed mystery in modern physics. So, deism is alive and well for many Christians today. This deism has also been pejoratively called a "God of the gaps" style of Christianity, because whatever science has not yet explained is credited to God.

It is definitely worth noting that the articles referenced when people discuss church-state separation, articles like the "Establishment" and "Free Exercise" clauses of the First Amendment, were not enacted so much to protect the state from religion as much as to protect freedom of religion from the state.

The head of the Church of England during the American Revolution was the king, and so enemies of the king very easily became enemies of the church. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Thomas Paine and others who influenced the framing of the Constitution were deists, not atheists and certainly not conventional Catholics, and so sought a country where freedom of religion could be expressed without political persecution.

The writers of the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights lived before the time of Darwin, who provided an answer for the origin of human life, Mendel, who provided the mechanism (genes) by which life continues and Lyell, who showed that this process had been going on a great deal longer than the 6000 years asserted by the Bible. The "Founding Fathers" were religious, though not nearly as fervent, supernatural or dogmatic as others of their generation. In being deists and, therefore, believing that a creator, God, had left humans to their faculties of reason in order to figure out how to live, these men sought a separation of church and state not to remove religion from society, but to keep religious expression safe from political repression.

I cannot be clear enough about this important aspect of the origin of the US government—the founders, though deistic, were *not* specifically Christian and they did *not* want the United States to be known solely as a "Christian nation." In fact, the founders couldn't have been clearer; there is not *one single* reference to Jesus, Christianity, Mary, Joseph, Jesus' disciples, the Gospels, Noah, Moses, the Ten commandments or any other esoteric Judeo-Christian folklore in either the US Constitution or the Bill of Rights. This omission of Christian demagoguery from the nation's founding documents was overt and intentional.

In fact, in one of the first treaties signed by the newly independent United States in 1797, the *Treaty of Tripoli*, which attempted to make peace with the Muslim pirates who were capturing American ships in the Mediterranean at the time, the founders reiterated their staunch desire to fully and utterly separate Christianity from politics.

The following statement, Article 11 from the *Treaty of Tripoli*,[3] was read aloud on the floor of the US Senate and subsequently signed by John Adams:

> As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of [Muslims]; and, as the said States never entered into any war, or act of hostility against any [Islamic] nation, it is declared by the parties, that no pretext arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.

The early American colonial religious landscape was a motley crew of diverse Protestant sects intermixing with people who were only casually religious. Some were concerned about the corrupting influence of religion in politics, but many more of this period were worried about the corrupting influence of politics in religion. The origin of American religious culture was deeply populist, ethnically cosmopolitan and distinctly critical of political-religious alliances.

In the 70 years from the end of the American Revolutionary War to the 1850s, the more religiously moderate, and inclusive, Methodist congregations outcompeted Puritan and Presbyterian Calvinist congregations in their recruitment of new adherents. Joseph Baker and Buster Smith (2015) cite Rodney Stark's shocking statistic that Methodists constituted 3% of all religious adherents in Colonial America in 1776 but ballooned to over a third of all adherents by 1850.

Baker and Smith (2015) also point out that the nineteenth-century religiosity in the American colonies was fairly amenable to naturalistic science. Not only were colonial Protestant congregations free from the centralized authority of the antiscience Catholic Church of England, but these congregations were also eager to suggest that the discoveries of science were simply shining a light on God's creations. These, still fairly new, Protestant sects were resistant to the idea of rooting their legitimacy in the sordid history of the old Catholic church—instead, many Protestant sects attached their general message to the rising authority of science. Some of these especially pro-science Protestant movements, like the transcendentalist movement that emerged in the United States in the nineteenth

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[3] http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/treaty_tripoli.html

century, led to the "New Thought" and "New Age" churches that still exist to this day.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of unprecedented social integration in the United States. Most large mass membership organizations in the United States were formed between the 1850s and 1960s, with an especially large spike in the 1910s, 1930s and 1940s (Putnam 2000). Organizations like the National Rifle Association ("NRA," founded in 1871), the Salvation Army (founded in 1880), American Red Cross (1881), American Federation of Labor (1886), Sierra Club (1892), American Nurses Association (1896), 4-H clubs (1901), Goodwill Industries (1902), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ("NAACP" 1909), Boy Scouts (1910) and the American Civil Liberties Union ("ACLU" 1920) among many, many other organizations, were all founded during this period (Putnam 2000).

Indeed, this period in American history was a civic renaissance, and churches were the epicenter. Various Protestant clergy used their places of worship as recruitment centers by opening their church doors to a variety of growing community organizations. Robert Putnam quotes E. Brooks Holifield on the vital role of churches in the nineteenth-century American public life:

> In the late nineteenth century, thousands of congregations transformed themselves into centers that not only were open for worship but also were available for Sunday school, concerts, church socials, women's meetings, youth group, girls' guilds, boys' brigades, sewing circles, benevolent societies, day schools, temperance societies, athletic clubs, scout troops, and nameless other activities. (Holifield, as quoted in Putnam 2000, p. 391)

But, why was the period from 1850 to 1960 so conducive to an American civic renaissance? The main reason is because churches were community and neighborhood organizations and, as such, they were ideal hubs for the integration of three groups of displaced people—African Americans, ethnic immigrants and domestic farmers migrating to the city for better-paying work.

During and after the throes of the American Civil War, African Americans faced overt occupational, residential, educational and legal discrimination.

Jim Crow racism further stigmatized black art and music before Elvis and the rock and roll revolution essentially co-opted and repackaged it for mainstream America. Let us not forget the atrocious and astonishing fact that over 10,000 African Americans were lynched in just the 50 years from 1880 to 1930 (Hattery and Smith 2010). During this period of overt social and legal discrimination, churches in the black community provided perhaps the only stable source of support for unemployment, childcare and poverty (Zuckerman 2002).

American churches also served to socially integrate and support the throngs of immigrants that came to the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The years 1870–1920 saw a mass immigration of people to the United States from Northern, Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as from South America and from China, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. Most of these immigrants were socially vulnerable and many were in search of an American identity.

And, at the same time, rural subsistence farmers in the American heartland began abandoning their family farms. Cities were teeming with factory jobs and the allure, at least, of a better way of life. Community churches were integrative hubs for all three of these groups of displaced people: African Americans, international immigrants and rural domestic migrants. In an important sense, American churches became cultural lighthouses in the storm of displacement.

Putnam (2000) calls this period of church-based civic integration the third "religious awakening" of American history. The first "awakening" (1730s–1760s), was the period of clamorous competition between Protestant sects in the early colonies, and the second "awakening" (1800s–1830s) involved the competitive dissemination, by "circuit riders," of various interpretations of the gospel to frontier settlements. But it was this third religious "awakening" (~1850s–1950s) that most tied disparate, and displaced, Americans into a common cultural fabric of American life.

However, I must underscore a critically important caveat: religious polarization was increasing during this third religious "awakening." During the period from 1870 to 1925, the United States was experiencing the fastest rate of industrialization of any country in the world at the time (Emerson and Hartman 2006).

This rapid societal change, from a largely agrarian, subsistence farming economy to a machine-based fossil fuel factory economy was more jarring in the United States than the slow, several-hundred-year transition that

Britain, for example, went through. People in the United States experienced an especially rapid increase in geographic and occupational mobility, which quickly exposed them to people of different ethnicities, religions and politics. For most people in the United States at the time, the contrast between the liberal, cosmopolitan culture that was emerging in the cities and the traditional, homogeneous, culture of subsistence farming had never been clearer.

So, while it is fair to call the period ~1850s–1950s a third religious "awakening," it was, to be as accurate as possible, composed of a small rise in moderate religious commitment buoyed by a slow, boiling, reemergence of Protestant fundamentalism. The stirrings of an Evangelical Protestant response to the liberal transcendentalists of the early nineteenth century can be discerned clearly by the 1870s (Emerson and Hartman 2006). World War II-era cultural unity was palpable, as I will describe further below, but this unity was being driven by a harried Evangelical Christian antagonism toward Darwin, non-Protestant immigration, urban cosmopolitanism and, ultimately, modernity. As Steve Bruce (2011) notes:

> Indeed, evangelicals and fundamentalists defined themselves by their refusal to modernize their faith…They remained poor, and their Puritanism helped reconcile them to their poverty. Television was unacceptable, because it carried Satanic messages, but then most fundamentalists could not afford a television anyway. When the prosperity of industrial America began to seep down to the communities in which fundamentalism and Pentecostalism were strong, puritanism waned. As more could afford television, the injunction against watching TV weakened. Fancy clothes and personal adornments were sinful until Pentecostalists could afford them, and then the lines shifted. (Bruce 2011, p. 162)

After the 1960s, liberal denominations began declining in number, and conservative Protestant denominations grew in number. Liberal Protestants became less observant and more casual in their religiosity, while conservative Protestants doubled down on traditional prohibitory views toward homosexuality, divorce, premarital sex, birth control and interracial marriage. This political polarization, between left-moderate liberals and far-right conservatives, has been growing ever since (Mann and Ornstein 2013). A religious awakening it was, but an awakening which was riding a subtle deepening rift of polarization.

EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHALLENGES TO CHURCH AUTHORITY AND THE MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

Let's zoom in on this time period in American history, 1850s–1950s, a bit more.

This stretch of time begins just after Ralph Waldo Emerson begins embedding Eastern Buddhism into an introspective, naturalistic, Protestantism Unitarianism. Emerson's religion, known as Transcendentalism, was promoted by poets and philosophers like Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller and, later, Ernest Holmes. But it is Emerson that is most remembered as the originator (Hecht 2004).

Emerson's transcendentalism wasn't only an opaque paganism. What is so compelling is his firm belief in self-reliance in the midst of a deeply secular reverence for a timeless natural world. It is hard to describe. Let me try to show you in his own words. First, here is Emerson on self-reliance. Notice how he playfully divinizes rebellion and independent, critical thought:

> Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist...Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world [...] Welcome evermore to gods and men is the self-helping man. For him all doors are flung wide. Him all tongues greet, all honors crown, all eyes follow with desire. Our love goes out to him and embraces him because he did not need it. We solicitously and apologetically caress and celebrate him because he held on his way and scorned our disapprobation. The gods love him because men hated him...As men's prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect. (Emerson 1926, pp. 35 and 57)

And here is his secular submission to a timeless natural world. Emerson writes:

> At the gates of the forest, the surprised man of the world is forced to leave his city estimates of great and small, wise and foolish. The knapsack of custom falls off his back with the first step he makes into these precincts. Here is sanctity which shames our religions, and reality which discredits our heroes. Here we find nature to be the circumstance which dwarfs every other circumstance, and judges like a god all men that come to her...The incommunicable trees begin to persuade us to live with them, and quit our life

of solemn trifles. Here no history, or church, or state is interpolated on the divine sky and the immortal year. (Emerson 1926, p. 381)

What was theologically critical about Transcendentalism, this unusually inclusive and liberal strain of Protestantism, were its tenets that Jesus was a *man*, a moral, wise man but still a human being. This rejection of the trinity, of "Trinitarianism"—that Jesus was simultaneously a man, his own father and the holy spirit—left transcendentalists with a very secular ideology. Original sin, supernatural miracles and the rest were viewed with skepticism, whereas an inherent beauty and meaningfulness was ascribed to the natural world. Transcendentalists were also openly critical of religion as you can read in Emerson. As another example, here is what transcendentalist Margaret Fuller wrote in 1852:

The missionary…vainly attempts to convince the red man that a heavenly mandate takes from him his broad lands. He bows his head, but does not at heart acquiesce. He cannot. It is not true…Let the missionary, instead of preaching to the Indian, preach to the trader who ruins him. (as quoted in Hecht 2004, p. 425)

This critical view of organized religion, coupled with an equally romantic view of nature and the power of individual critical thought, has survived to this day in a set of largely disconnected philosophies grouped as "New Age." Transcendentalists of the mid-1800s were, in many ways, ahead of their time with regard to their individualist ethos and worship of the natural world.

This was never clearer than in the "Scopes Monkey Trial"[4] of 1925. This court trial was a very cultural affair, and the American populace was enthralled with the drama. At issue was whether or not Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection—a bombshell that had only recently been published in 1859—could be taught in Tennessee public schools.

John Scopes, a substitute teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, decided to violate the "Butler Act," which had been passed that year, 1925 (Larson 1997). This Butler Act prohibited any teaching in public schools that denied the biblical account of the creation of man. Very clearly, the Butler

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[4]A brilliant name for the "State of Tennessee vs. Scopes" trial, coined by journalist H.L. Mencken, who helped win the court of public opinion for Darrow's position.

Act was an attempt to prevent Darwinian theory from entering American popular culture. The text of the Butler Act, otherwise known as House Bill #185, reads as follows:

> AN ACT prohibiting the teaching of the Evolution Theory in all the Universities, and all other public schools of Tennessee, which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, and to provide penalties for the violations thereof.
>
> Section 1. *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee,* That it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the Universities, and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.
>
> Section 2. *Be it further enacted,* That any teacher found guilty of the violation of this Act, Shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction, shall be fined not less than One Hundred $ (100.00) Dollars nor more than Five Hundred ($ 500.00) Dollars for each offense.
>
> Section 3. *Be it further enacted,* That this Act take effect from and after its passage, the public welfare requiring it.[5]

Scopes' decision to lecture on the theory of evolution was rebellious, but it wasn't until the ACLU decided to fund a legal challenge to the "Butler Act," on behalf of Scopes, that the issue garnered national attention. Scopes' defense attorney, Clarence Darrow, was unabashedly hostile to organized religion and, as a result, offered to provide free pro bono legal defense for Scopes.

Historian Edward Larson writes of Darrow:

> He sincerely believed that the biblical concept of original sin for all and salvation for some through divine grace was, as he described it, a 'very dangerous doctrine'—'silly, impossible and wicked.' Darrow once told a group of convicts, 'It is not the bad people I fear as much as the good people. When a person is sure that he is good, he is nearly hopeless; he gets cruel—he believes in punishment.' During a public debate on religion, he added, 'The origin of what we call civilization is not due to religion but to skepticism… the modern world is the child of doubt and inquiry, as the ancient world was the child of fear and faith.' (Larson, pp. 71–72)

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[5] http://www.ushistory.org/us/47b.asp

The state of Tennessee made their case through prosecutor William Jennings Bryan. Bryan was vociferously opposed to the teaching of evolution in public schools. For him, the theory of evolution was corrupting and immoral, indeed, the last thing that should be taught to children and young adults. In his mind, the theory of evolution by natural selection was characterized by ruthless, blind and ultimately purposeless competition between organisms. Bryan argued:

> The Darwinian theory represents man as reaching his present perfection by the operation of the law of hate—the merciless law by which the strong crowd out and kill off the weak. (Larson, p. 39)

Clarence Darrow conceded the potential ruthlessness of evolution by natural selection, but responded that this by no means invalidates the evidence for and reality of evolution. The cruelty of evolution does not, in some bizarre way, provide credence for the myths of Christianity—a garden of Eden, Noah's ark, a virgin birth and so on. Human evolution, Darrow insisted, was a fact of reality, discerned through careful scientific research and theory. This fact may make Christians uncomfortable, committed as they are to superstitious myth, but this was the problem of Christians, not of the theory of evolution.

Bryan's arguments in court were fourfold. He insisted that teaching evolutionary theory in public schools would (1) weaken peoples' commitment to Christianity, (2) reduce their capacity for empathy in favor of a selfish "survival of the fittest" mentality, (3) lead to disinterest in civic participation and social reform and, finally, (4) distract people from ascetic religious character building in favor of egoistic materialism (Larson 1997).

What is interesting about Bryan's case is that he is identifying legitimate social dynamics—a continuously creeping materialism driven by a nascent capitalist economy and a growing, entitled, cultural individualism. Yet, he was inclined to see only the negative side of these trends, and even more absurd, he attempted to root them all in Darwin's academic theory of biology.

Antievolution Christian fundamentalists may have won the court trial but, by all accounts, they lost the support of national public opinion. Throughout the much-publicized trial, Darrow's tongue was sharper, and his iconoclasm more daring and entertaining than the stuffy, stodgy, defense of scripture offered by Bryan. The authority of science was ascendant, riding a wave of technological advancements in industry, medicine,

media and transportation. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection was considered by many to be a consequence of this progress. Still, antievolutionists had garnered a certain momentum through the Scopes Trial, and a sizable minority of Christians, to this day, oppose the teaching of evolution in public schools (Shermer 2006).[6]

And, as the Scopes Trial came to a close, there was a religious revival waiting in the wings. As I will explain in subsequent chapters, the perception of social and environmental threat tends to produce in people a feverish need for control and predictability. When a culture has widespread religious narratives, these tend to be grasped tightly as sources of cosmic comfort during periods of strife. Remember that the Scopes Trial of the 1920s achieved national notoriety less than a decade after the bloodshed of World War I, before being followed by an unprecedented economic collapse in the 1930s, along with the bloodiest war in human history in the 1940s, World War II. The seeming prosperity of the Gilded Age of the early 1900s gave way to unprecedented mid-century suffering and death.

The young men born in the 1920s, who came of age during the Great Depression and who then served in World War II—80% of the men born in this generation served in the war—had been coarsened and terrified. As a result, their normative commitment to organized religion was generationally unique.

Following the work of experimental psychologist Aaron Kay (Kay et al. 2008, 2009; Landau et al. 2015), the existential horrors of war and extreme poverty may have produced a deficit in perceived control over the environment. This generation of Americans must have felt that death, hunger and strife were an all-encompassing fact of daily life over which they seemed to have little control. This state of mind—one of deep uncertainty—is conducive to the formation of beliefs in the power of "external systems" like religion or government. Both the churches and the US government experienced increases in support and loyalty as this generation of Americans came of age. Their patriotism and piety, though, may have had as much to do with needs for compensatory psychological control as it had to do with the policies of church or state.

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[6] Studies have shown that human evolution is still downplayed even in modern biology classrooms. One study, for example, found that 17% of high school teachers did not cover human evolution at all, while 60% covered the subject matter for less than five hours in total (Berkman et al. 2008). Only 23% of teachers strongly agreed that evolutionary theory was a unifying theme in their biology classes. Despite this, high school teachers, even today, tend to be more supportive of evolutionary theory than the general public.

World War II veterans—the white male ones in particular—took advantage of the government-funded benefits of the GI bill and flooded colleges and universities before moving to the newly constructed suburbs. Churches were, once again, a basic beacon of community, this time for Americans moving out of the city and into suburbia.

In fact, 51% of men in their 20s attended church weekly in 1957, an all-time record high in the United States (Putnam and Campbell 2010). By contrast, only 31% attended church weekly in 1950—this was a 20% increase in church attendance in only seven years! Only 49% of Americans declared a church membership in 1940, but this number had ballooned to 69% by 1960 (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Church construction also bloomed during this period; $26 million were spent on building churches in 1945, but by 1960, expenditures had grown to $615 million.

This American cultural experiment appeared to be succeeding after World War II. The war had necessitated drafting young Americans of all creeds and colors into a common corps of soldiers. Women massively increased their participation in the labor force immediately before, during and after the war. And, indeed, many women served in World War II, though not in combat.[7] This shifting—of men to war and women to the public sphere of employment—was ideologically justified in terms of an "American Dream," of unity, prosperity and "Judeo-Christian" values (Putnam and Campbell 2010). It was a time of great human integration—women were being latently inducted into the public sphere more than at any previous point in American history. Feminists would fight to maintain their place on the stage of public politics and discourse more than ever once the veterans returned home and demanded to return to an archaic patriarchy. It was a tense time between the sexes, to be sure, to say nothing of the widespread racial discrimination of the period. Still, it was also a time of cultural integration, where the identities of "soldier," "American," "worker" and, especially, "Christian" were becoming racially cosmopolitan and/or gender neutral to an unprecedented degree.

It was during this period that "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance (1954), "In God We Trust" was legislated to be the national motto (1956), and William Herberg's dictum that America was a "Judeo-Christian" country emerged. Institutional racism and sexism were formally outlawed in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, an act that was still riding the

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[7] Over 400,000 women served during the war: http://www.apa.org/monitor/2010/11/gi-bill.aspx

wave of this postwar sense of cultural unity. In truth, of course, these prejudicial tendencies simply became more implicit and private. Nevertheless, a certain postwar cultural unity had appeared, perhaps more clearly than at any point since the American Revolution, and this unity was maintained by a vague, shared sense of Christian group membership.

It is my contention here that "cultural unity" is driven, in large part, by population-level "needs" for compensatory control via external systems like religion and government, along with a preexisting religious or political infrastructure which can cater to those "needs." This is a macro-level sociological hypothesis rooted in the experimental findings of psychologist Aaron Kay and others. This "need" for compensatory control, which will be stronger during periods of instability (e.g., wars/high crime rates, disease, and/or poverty), can produce social and cultural integration. I will have much more to say about these theoretical dynamics later on.

For now, I only want to underscore that the generation of Americans born in the 1920s and who came of age during the economic crash of the 1930s and the world war of the 1940s experienced both an unprecedented level of threat and an unprecedented return to religion.

THE SIXTIES EFFECT

Then came the 1960s.

Sociologists Michael Hout and Claude Fischer (2002, 2014) published an article in 2002 that has since been cited almost 500 times. In the article, Hout and Fischer show a generational backlash to the religious and cultural unity of the postwar period. The amount of Americans with no religious affiliation had been stable at around 5% for those people born between 1900 and 1944. However, for those "Baby Boomer" Americans born from 1945 to 1974, the proportion of religious nonaffiliates more than doubled to around 10–15% (Hout and Fischer 2002). The proportion of Americans who reported feeling that religion was "very important" to them dropped from 75% in 1952 down to 52% in 1978. Putnam and Campbell (2010) note that, at any given point in their life, the average "Baby Boomer" will end up attending religious services 25–30% less often than their parents had.

This secularization was also reflected in several legal cases of the 1960s. Take, as examples, *Engel v. Vitale* in 1962, which held that it was unconstitutional for state political representatives to write prayers and advocate for their recital in public schools. Or, *Abington School District v. Schempp* in

1963 which established the unconstitutionality of school district-enforced classroom Bible readings. Madalyn Murray O'Hair's notorious "American Atheist" organization was founded in 1963 in large part as an effort to further these sorts of causes (Le Beau 2003).

Organized religion was again falling out of favor. But this time, it wasn't frontier hardship, Deism, Darwin or Transcendentalism. This time it was jobs, sex and, as always, politics.

Baby Boomers were born into a rapidly diversifying economy based less and less in manual labor, a new era of exploratory sexual permissiveness granted by the birth control pill, and a new youth culture which sought insight and transcendence through mind-altering drugs instead of pious asceticism.

The US Transition from Industrial to Postindustrial Society

The structure of the American labor force changed profoundly in the post–World War II years. National numbers of computer specialists, accountants/auditors, college professors, engineers, medical and dental technicians, lawyers and other nonmanual occupations all skyrocketed after 1960 (Wyatt and Hecker 2006). Most of these occupations required prolonged internships and, increasingly, a four-year college degree.

At the same time, jobs requiring no college degree began dropping from the economy—the number of Americans working as carpenters, construction workers, craftsmen, foreman, production line workers and farmers all declined precipitously after 1960. After World War II, America began shifting to a "post"industrial society where factory, farm, manual and low-skill clerical labor were all mechanized or outsourced to impoverished countries. While the United States was outsourcing much of its productive labor, it was growing the service sector of society. Jobs that provided a service instead of a physical, material product (from dentists to college professors to lawyers) grew in number. Though the national number of manufacturing jobs grew from 15 to 20 million during the period 1950 to 1980, this was a last gasp of growth, as the number declined back to 16.7 million by 2002 and has been declining ever since.[8]

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[8] https://www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/forms-documents/doc_view/75-u-s-textile-and-apparel-industries-2003

This slow, generational shift in the US economy—from a production economy to a service economy—co-occurred with the dissemination of mass schooling, in addition to the expansion of colleges and universities. In this era of the service economy, "useful knowledge" tends to be defined as a skillset that can be used to service others in order to make money. Students may have a romantic idea of college life, one of philosophizing and personal growth, but today, students are equally if not more interested in finding a "marketable" major and a job out of college.

There is, of course, a class dimension to this (Thelin 2004). Colleges and universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were places where very well-to-do men and women spent their days casually cultivating their taste for literature and art. This materially comfortable, lackadaisical orientation to higher education would never transfer to working- and middle-class college students, flooding into higher education in the 1960s and 1970s, who were more interested in using college as a ladder for upward mobility than for elitist erudition. Nationwide, colleges and universities adapted to this postwar shift from a production economy to a service economy by admitting an unprecedented amount of students and by shifting the curriculum from an appreciation of the "great works" of Aristotle, Bentham and Paine to a marketable skillset in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The restructuring of the American labor force along with mandatory, mass K-12 schooling and the expansion of enrollment in colleges and universities had its largest impact on the working and middle class. In order to obtain a well-paying, prestigious job, it was now necessary to leave one's family community and enter a larger public sphere of schooling and learning. Parents, family members and church authorities were no longer the important arbiters of materially useful, practical wisdom in the postindustrial United States—teachers, professors and employers were.

Where, on the farm, an unmarketable love and faith from family and church might be appreciated, in the competitive job markets of the city and suburbs in the postwar era, schools, universities and workplaces appeared more sensible in their offer of secular, technocratic, knowledge with immediate applicability. This tendency for young people to eschew abstract religious philosophizing in favor of practical, technocratic knowledge continues to this day. For example, a recent article published in a higher education magazine suggests the following tip for college professors trying to relate to their students:

Millenial students are generally resistant to highly abstract material if not given the opportunity to reflect on its relevance. (Cardon 2014, p. 34)

However, this general resistance to impractical abstraction, in addition to the specific tendency to see religion as an impractical abstraction, is not some recent disposition that affects only millennials. This disposition has been becoming more common at least since the postwar period. The shifting occupational structure and economy of the United States, coupled with an expanding system of schooling beginning at a young age and stretching into peoples' 20s, effectively moved the center of epistemic gravity from the family and neighborhood church to the school, university and workplace. Religious knowledge, because of its occupational impracticality and unwieldy depth, seemed overbearing for people never more aware of the litany of skills required in an emerging postindustrial job market.

American churches were now very clearly competing with the institutions of the economy and of education—materialistic salvation offered its own priesthood of professors and managers.

College enrollment in the 1960s was at its then-historical peak and college culture was influencing politics, media and journalism. Surprisingly affordable commodities like name brand clothes and cars and microwaves danced on television screens. According to the US Library of Congress,[9] only 9% of American households had a television set in 1950. By 1960, this number had exploded to 90% of American households. And, it wasn't just televisions but also homes and cars and appliances and clothes and music that were increasingly available and affordable. Census data show that national home ownership rates jumped from 43.6% in 1940 to 64.4% by 1980.[10] The average annual growth rate of per capita income and car ownership during this period was 2.1% and 2.8%, respectively (Dargay et al. 2007). These were relatively affluent, stable times. The Vietnam War was vociferously protested by middle-class college students of the time in part because of how jarringly out of place this war felt when juxtaposed with the affluent stability of their youth.

Speaking relatively, those Americans born after the end of World War II, who had evaded by birth the calamitous crash of the stock market in 1929 and the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, experienced more exis-

[9] https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awmi10/television.html
[10] https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/owner.html

tential security than those born before those infamous dates. The further we get from World War II, the better the economy, social welfare program funding and civil rights all become.

Now, there are a host of caveats—numerous smaller, more one-sided wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, along with a constant threat of nuclear annihilation ever since the Cuban missile crisis to say nothing of inflation-adjusted minimum wage stagnation since the 1970s, skyrocketing imprisonment in the 1990s and on and on. Still, relatively speaking, Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, experienced more stability and affluence than did those from the Greatest Generation, who were born between 1900 and 1924 and who came of age during the Depression and the two world wars.

Institutional Skepticism and Civil Rights

Boomers may not have lived through an economic depression or a world war, but they definitely inherited a certain healthy skepticism of authority, and authority's abuses of power. As Hannah Arendt notes, Baby Boomers were the first generation in human history to grow up with the tacit understanding that any given war-mongering tantrum by a politician could lead to a nuclear war which ends all or most of human life. Arendt put it this way in 1969:

> The technical development of the implements of violence has now reached the point where no political goal could conceivably correspond to their destructive potential or justify their actual use in armed conflict…The 'apocalyptic' chess game between the superpowers, that is, between those that move on the highest plane of our civilization, is being played according to the rule 'if either wins it is the end of both' […] If you ask a member of this [Baby Boomer] generation two simple questions: "How do you want the world to be in 50 years?" and "What do you want your life to be like 5 years from now?" the answers are quite often preceded by "Provided there is still a world," and "Provided I am still alive." (Arendt 1969, pp. 3 and 16–17)

Cold War-related events like the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and Vietnam War protests (~1967–1975), in addition to more domestic, national events such as the Civil Rights Act counterprotests (1964) and Watergate (early 1970s), produced a populist suspicion of powerful people. This is also clearly evidenced in the conspiracy theories of the time regarding Kennedy's assassination in 1963 and NASA's moon landing in 1969.

Given the relatively widespread dissemination of home television sets and higher education of the era, Americans had perhaps never been more aware of and educated about the prejudice and corruption of political and business elites.

The church did not escape this generational sensitivity to corruption and prejudice—after a rise during the wartime years, aggregate measures of religiosity started to slowly decline in the 1960s and 1970s (Grant 2008). Part of this was certainly a tendency for youth to look toward professors, employers and the market for stability and knowledge instead of the church. But part of it was, also, born out of an organizational/institutional skepticism and a slowly building preference for a private, personal "spirituality" instead of an organizational, public "religiosity" (Fuller 2001; Bengtson et al. 2013).

In response to this rapid drop in church attendance, the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic church quickly convened a conference in March 1969 that included numerous eminent sociologists of religion like Peter Berger, Robert Bellah and David Martin.

The purpose of the conference was to develop a research program into the causes of lowering church attendance and lowering public confidence in the church. Just that past autumn, sociologist Glenn Vernon[11] had published his article calling for further research into rising rates of religious nonaffiliation in the prestigious *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Bullivant and Lee 2012). The Catholic church hoped to get ahead of this rising tide of secularism by holding its own symposium on the matter, led by leading researchers. This conference, held at the Vatican, drew significant initial interest with over 3000 people in attendance, but fizzled quickly, and disappointingly, as participants struggled to define their terms and discuss just what "non- belief" amounted to. Simply put, the academic study of religion had not yet clearly distinguished between religious belief (i.e., in God, or in doctrinal tenets), belonging (i.e., affiliation), and behavior (i.e., prayer or church attendance). As a result, participants at the symposium disagreed as to what a "true" loss of religion really meant.

Relative to the "Greatest" generation that grew up during the Great Depression and World War II, those who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s were more skeptical of institutional authority (given widespread

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[11] Incidentally, Vernon was the first person to use the term religious "nones" to describe nonaffiliates in the social scientific research literature. Barry Kosmin would later rejuvenate use of this term in the early 2000s.

access to television and information more generally) and *also* more affluent materially while growing up (given mid-century advances in machine technology, manufacturing efficiency and, most of all, the continued spread of consumer markets). This gave the young adults of the 1960s and 1970s a certain outlook—an informed cynicism juxtaposed with a playful, childlike hopefulness. This childlike hopefulness was not immature, so much as idealistic, epitomized in the phrase "flower child," that emerged out of Bay Area hippie culture in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, this generation of Americans—informed and angry, while also fundamentally, and again, relatively comfortable—were hardly as fervently religious as their parents and grandparents.

An Extended Youth of Intellectual Openness and Sexual Exploration

Though the affluence of the 1960s and 1970s made college affordable, college was also never more important for obtaining affluence—it was during this period that college became the primary ladder into the middle class.

According to the US Census,[12] university enrollment would increase around 120% from 1970 to 2014. Overall enrollment is still increasing because, in large part, women and minorities experience fewer formal, legal barriers to higher education today than at any time in American history. Since 1988, the number of women in postbaccalaureate programs has exceeded the number of men, and, nationally, women today outnumber men on college campuses. Additionally, from 1975 to 2012,[13] the national proportion of Hispanic college students rose from 4% to 15%, and the proportion of African American students rose from 10% to 15%.[14]

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[12] http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/

[13] http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98

[14] It is telling that, since 2008, college enrollment has declined among working-class and first-generation college students. With the recession of the American economy in 2007/2008, due to the financial industry's practice of selling packages of unpaid debt to investors, many poor college students dropped out to get jobs. Economic downturns, driven by financial cultures of risky investment, always end up hurting the poorest people the most. It is they who are most dependent on college for upward mobility, and when they can no longer afford college due to recession-induced rising tuition or being fired from a job, they are doubly victimized. See: https://higheredtoday.org/2015/11/25/where-have-all-the-low-income-students-gone/

A college degree is important for entry into increasingly competitive white-collar industries. But a college degree provides more than a mere edge in the market. College life is, in many ways, an extension of youth. Instead of marrying and rearing children, the young college student continues to learn perhaps nonpragmatic but deeply interesting and revealing facts about themselves and their world. They postpone the care of others (a spouse, a child) for the continued cultivation of self. This can be seen as indulgent narcissism, but it is equally a liberating pursuit of truth.

And, so, college students in their 20s, coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s, began putting off marriage and child-rearing. The average age at first marriage was about 20 for women and 23 for men in 1960; however, by 2015, the average age at first marriage for men had crept, incrementally, up to 29.2 and for women 27.1 (Anderson and Payne 2016). Department of Health and Human Services data[15] show that the average age of a woman having her first child was 21.4 in 1970, and this had steadily risen to 24.9 by 2000. In 2014, the average age was 26.3. There is today a record proportion of Americans who are unmarried—nearly a quarter of men and a fifth of women (PEW 2014a). It is young college students who put off family formation the longest, and again, according to the US Department of Education,[16] college enrollment continues to expand.

This slowly shifting orientation to adulthood—away from early marriage and child-rearing and toward pursuit of job credentials and self-understanding in college—continues to this day. We are living through this transition. In truth, it is a transition that began not after World War II per se (though consumerism and demand for credentials is most noticeable after World War II), but after the spread of urban and suburban industrialized environments beginning in the 1800s, which are the ultimate cause of rising incomes and smaller families.

Historically, women delayed or avoided child-rearing in the 1800s before they began delaying or avoiding the custom of marriage in the 1960s and 1970s. Historian Nancy Cott writes of this period:

> More than a quarter of all the American women born in the first decade of the twentieth century, those who came of age in the 1920s, never bore children, despite the waxing marriage rate…parenthood at this time seemed

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[15] http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr51/nvsr51_01.pdf
[16] http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98

> fraught with responsibilities or stress that a lot of women wanted to avoid… People were marrying younger and more uniformly…but fewer of them were producing children. The trend toward smaller families was, of course, a long term one: the birthrate had been declining for more than a hundred years by the time the twentieth century opened. (Cott 1987, pp. 165–166)

Though the birthrate had been in decline since the onset and intensification of an industrialized market economy, marriage and birthrates, that is, *family formation in general*, began a distinct decline in the postwar period. Post–World War II levels of per capita income and urbanization had produced a demand for higher credentials in order to secure employment in lucrative industries. Colleges and universities are still struggling to meet the totality of this demand, but the impact of this economic and cultural shift on family has been clear. Marriages and births in the United States are now relatively fewer in number.

Yet, forestalling family formation in pursuit of educational credentials has a secondary, latent consequence. College provides time and an ample environment not only for the pursuit of credentials, but also for sexual exploration.

On June 23, 1960, the United States Food and Drug Administration approved the birth control pill for public consumption. By 1968, there were seven competing brands of oral contraceptive—today, an amazing 99% of sexually active American women have used some form of birth control at some point in their lives, and, for women aged 15–29, the pill is the preferred method.[17] Of course, oral contraceptives are hardly the only form of birth control. "Pulling out" and the "rhythm method" are two particularly heinous examples of alternative birth control,[18] but the pill is (and was) by far the most effective method of avoiding pregnancy outside of intrauterine devices. At any rate, the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* would legalize abortion nationally only 12 years later in 1972.

These events, the marketing of oral contraceptives to American women and the availability of legal abortion, would have considerable cultural consequences (Eberstadt 2013). The demands of child-rearing could now be easily postponed or avoided. A middle-class woman might feasibly, in

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[17] https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/files/8014/0552/6100/7-16-14-Birth-Control-Timeline-580x3985-2x.png

http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/contraceptive.htm

[18] Even condoms tear with insufficient lubrication, or due to poor manufacturing, see Yarber et al. (2004).

1965, have a number of sexual partners with no fear or concern about becoming pregnant in a way that would have been impossible in 1900 or 1800. Predictably, the proportion of Americans saying premarital sex is "not wrong" rose from 24% in 1969 to 62% by 1982 (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

The post–World War II combination of extended youth, via college, and the ability to have sexual relationships without risk of pregnancy, via oral contraception, produced a youth culture of intellectual openness and sexual exploration. It wasn't that churches of the time opposed sexual exploration and intellectual openness for adults. It was that the exploration and openness they supported occurred mostly within the confines of marriage, family and church. Never was this clearer than with the rise of the "Religious Right" in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Rise of the Religious Right

The term "fundamentalism" was first used in the 1870s to describe an especially conservative strain of sectarian Protestantism. "Fundamentalism" is a reference to a set of booklets, known as *The Fundamentals*, which were written by an informal, but international, antimodernist constituency of Evangelical Protestant theologians from 1910 to 1915 (Emerson and Hartman 2006).

In America, these "fundamentalists," most of them Baptists and Pentecostals, would be a key constituency supporting the religious prosecutor William Jennings Bryan during the Scopes Trial of the 1920s. It was during this trial, and in the context of their vociferous opposition to the teaching of evolution in high school classrooms, that the term "fundamentalist" entered the popular lexicon.

Though these early twentieth-century American fundamentalists opposed the teaching of evolution, they had more grievances than just this. The historian Grant Wacker describes the situation this way:

Drawn primarily from the ranks of "old stock whites," Fundamentalists felt displaced by the waves of non-Protestant immigrants from southern and eastern Europe flooding America's cities. They believed they had been betrayed by American statesmen who led the nation into an unresolved war with Germany, the cradle of destructive biblical criticism. They deplored the teaching of evolution in public schools, which they paid for with their taxes, and resented the elitism of professional educators who seemed often to scorn the values of traditional Christian families. (Wacker 2000)

Since 1925, each subsequent generation of American Baptists, Mormons, Nazarenes and other sectarian fundamentalist Protestant groups have been becoming more republican in their political party identification. After the Scopes Trial of the mid-1920s, however, fundamentalist groups went underground; they had been largely lampooned as luddites and ignoramuses in the popular media of the time (Wacker 2000; Emerson and Hartman 2006). Americans born from 1956 to 1970 exhibited the greatest relative increase in self-reported republican political identity—something known as the "Regan Revolution"—but each generation of conservative Protestants has become distinctly more conservative at least since the 1925 cohort (Sherkat 2014).

Republican Abraham Lincoln's crusade against slavery in the South during the Civil War and Democratic president Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 alienated white Southern voters. Ever since, the Republican Party has attempted to corral this demographic. These voters felt (and feel) marginalized and forgotten in the wake of abolition, desegregation and affirmative action. The national coverage of women's rights, gay rights and civil rights protests in the mid-1960s would provide the perfect political and cultural fodder with which Republican leadership attempted to reclaim the South (Mann and Ornstein 2013). Just as Democrats had captured the votes of workers' unions in the early mid-twentieth century, so too did Republicans in the mid-late twentieth century galvanize white, Southern, religious traditionalists opposed to birth control, premarital sex, abortion, divorce, homosexuality, interracial marriage and the teaching of evolution in schools (Bruce 2011).

"Born again" fundamentalist Christians represented as much as 40% of the population in the late 1970s (Domke and Coe 2010). This was a thriving potential voting constituency for Republicans, if only they could find a message that resonated. At the time, just under 90% of Evangelical religious Americans thought that homosexuality was always wrong, around 60% thought premarital sex was always wrong and just under half thought women should not work outside of the home (Putnam and Campbell 2010). These numbers were higher for specifically Southern Evangelicals, who were also more inflamed on racial issues. In 1972, for example, 60% of Southern Evangelical Protestants thought racial intermarriage should be illegal.

The 1970s and 1980s were, thus, a fourth period of religious "awakening" in American history, though this "awakening" was, in fact, only an increase of politically conservative fundamentalism. This "awakening" is not confined to only the 1970s and 1980s, though this is when it origi-

nated. Indeed, the fumes of this "awakening" can still be seen today in the very public,[19] but in many cases clearly feigned, displays of deference to the Bible by Republican politicians like Sarah Palin, Rick Santorum, Mike Huckabee, Ted Cruz and, to a notably lesser extent, Donald Trump.

The Republican Party's "muscular Christianity" began with feelings of alienation, especially among Southern rural whites, who were experiencing numerous forms of disruption. This disruption was perhaps primarily economic, including jarring shifts from a slave economy back to a family farming economy to an industrialized economy to a postindustrial service economy in the span of only about 200 years.

Moreover, economic growth had been buoyed by shifts in the labor force; 39% of women aged 35–44 participated in the labor force in 1950, and this had expanded to 77% by 1998 (Fullerton 1999). Theoretically, this is a domestic migration: women left the social and environmental context of the family home and entered a highly differentiated labor force. In order to compete in the labor force, women also entered college at record rates. Today, women far outnumber men in college—11.8 million women attended college in Fall 2015 compared to only 8.7 million men.[20] Women are not only more likely than men today to enroll in college, but also to graduate from college. This growth in female college enrollment, like labor force participation, began building in the 1960s. Relative rates of college enrollment and labor force participation were also rising for ethnic and racial minorities during the second half of the twentieth century (PEW 2014a, b, c).

The white males of this period, especially the white males living in the American South, perceived threats from all sides—relative poverty from the Civil War-induced lagged industrialization of the Southern states, educational and occupational integration with racial, ethnic and female "subordinates," and a loosening family patriarchy. When these transitions really began taking off in the 1960s, and before Southern religious male subculture could mount a political comeback in the 1970s, Census data show that the Southern United States already lagged far behind the Northeastern and Northwestern areas of the United States in both high school completion and college degree attainment rates.[21]

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[19] After all, Pat Robertson's "Christian Coalition," a mostly Baptist evangelical Christian Republican organization campaigning against gay marriage, abortion and other social issues, was started in 1989 and continues to exist today.

[20] http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372

[21] https://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/censusatlas/pdf/10_Education.pdf

The proud South had been economically decimated after the Civil War, and its relative disadvantage would boil over into a fundamentally nativist, cultural resentment that still exists to this day. The twentieth- and twenty-first-century economic and educational shifts discussed above have been alienating for those who feel left behind by higher education, technological complexity, racial and ethnic multiculturalism, and, most of all, female liberation. In discussing Evangelical preacher Mark Driscoll's "muscular Christianity" ministry, the *New York Times* very clearly unearth a latent rage against gender-role confusion. Molly Worthen[22] at the *Times* writes:

> What bothers Driscoll—and the growing number of evangelical pastors who agree with him—is not the trope of Jesus-as-lover. After all, St. Paul tells us that the Church is the bride of Christ. What really grates is the portrayal of Jesus as a wimp, or worse. Paintings depict a gentle man embracing children and cuddling lambs. Hymns celebrate his patience and tenderness. The mainstream church, Driscoll has written, has transformed Jesus into "a Richard Simmons, hippie, queer Christ," a "neutered and limp-wristed popular Sky Fairy of pop culture that . . . would never talk about sin or send anyone to hell." This reaction to the "feminization" of the church is not new. "The Lord save us," declared the evangelist Billy Sunday in 1916, "from off-handed, flabby-cheeked . . . effeminate, ossified, three-carat Christianity." […] In recent years, mainstream megachurches—the mammoth pacesetters of American evangelicalism that package Christianity for mass consumption—have been criticized for replacing hard-edged Gospel with feminized pablum.

Indeed, the Republican "muscular Christianity," characteristic of the 1970s and 1980s, was very much a defensive response to a muscular Rosie the Riveter who was growing more politically emboldened, educated and less white by the decade. While women and racial minorities were being exposed to public life to a generationally unprecedented degree, men were faced, to an equally unprecedented degree, with the prospect of forming public and professional relationships with segments of the population that had been systematically and institutionally subordinated to them for thousands of years.

The origins of this revival of "muscular Christianity" in the 1970s and 1980s—in the form of a distinctly religious, patriarchal Republicanism

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[22] http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11punk-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1

focused on homosexuality, abortion and women working outside the home—are numerous, but a few examples are interestingly telling.

Televangelist John Hagee, a fifth-generation pastor, started Cornerstone Church in the Southwestern United States in 1975 with 25 families. Since its inception, the Church, and the larger brand of the socially conservative "John Hagee Television Ministry," which advocates wives' pious obedience to their husbands, has garnered over 19,000 members.[23] As another example, fundamentalist methodist radio host Donald Wildmon started the nonprofit "American Family Association" in 1977. This association and its partners were successful in popularizing "reparative therapy," or the attempt to "cure" homosexuals of their homosexuality. In fact, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center[24]:

> The American Family Association has been extremely vocal over the years in its opposition to LGBT rights, marriage equality and allowing gay men and lesbians to serve in the military. The group's arguments are filled with claims that equate homosexuality with pedophilia and argue that there's a "homosexual agenda" afoot that is set to bring about the downfall of American (and ultimately, Western) civilization. In one October 2004 article, the *American Family Association Journal* suggested that gay influences are leading to a 'grotesque culture' that will include 'quick encounters in the middle school boys' restroom.' …Another claim was that "prominent homosexual leaders and publications have voiced support for pedophilia, incest, sadomasochism, and even bestiality."

Perhaps the largest fundamentalist Christian influence on Republican Party politics in the 1970s and 1980s came from Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and James Dobson's Focus on the Family and Family Research Council organizations, founded in 1978, 1977 and 1981, respectively.

Falwell's Moral Majority organization had as many as three million members at its height in the mid-1980s (Moen 1994). Falwell's primary concern, as he stated it, was that a returning Jesus would find much fault in the decaying morality of the modern American family—women were working outside of the home instead of mothering, and the family more generally was under assault from gay marriage, abortion, divorce and por-

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[23] http://www.sagu.edu/news/hagee-communication-center-named-in-honor-of-john-and-diana-hagee

[24] https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/american-family-association

nography (Wald et al. 2005). Given that, in his mind, Jesus' imminent return and evaluation of humanity would determine the course of cosmic history, Falwell felt that his concerns were inherently politically urgent. For example, Falwell famously interpreted the terrorist attacks of 9/11 as punishment from God for Americans not being conservative enough in their Christian values.

Falwell later integrated Moral Majority into his larger Liberty Federation organization, which includes the largest Evangelical Christian University in the world, Liberty University. He folded Moral Majority in 1989 after, in his words, achieving his goal of influencing Republican Party politics (Moen 1994). Falwell's son, Jerry Falwell Jr., had endorsed Donald Trump as the Republican candidate for the 2016 presidential elections.[25]

James Dobson's Focus on the Family (1977) and especially his Family Research Council (1981) also had large influences on Republican Party politics. Dobson's outlook was characteristic of many fundamentalist Christians who lived through the 1960s. Remarking on college campuses of the 1960s, Dobson says:

> Drug abuse was not only prevalent, but became almost universal for students and teachers alike. The Vietnam War soon heated campus passions to an incendiary level, generating anger and disdain for the government, the President, the military, both political parties, and indeed, the American way of life…Accompanying the social upheaval was a sudden disintegration of moral and ethical principles, such as has never occurred in the history of mankind. All at once there were no definite values. There were no standards. No absolutes. No rules. No traditional beliefs on which to lean…And as will be recalled, some bright-eyed theologians chose that moment of confusion to announce the death of God. It was a distressing time to be young—to be groping aimlessly in search of a personal identity and a place in the sun. (As quoted in Gilgoff 2007, p. 22)

Dobson is a developmental psychologist and author of *Dare to Discipline: Dare to Discipline: A Psychologist Offers Urgent Advice to Parent and Teachers* (1975). In this book, he advocated very strict corporal punishment for children beginning at a young age. His famous slogan was, "Discipline and love are not antithetical; one is a function of the other"

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[25] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/01/26/evangelical-leader-jerry-falwell-jr-endorses-trump/

(Dobson 1975, p. 18). His work generally discusses the need to break the will of children while they are very young and to introduce them to a strong, all-encompassing authority structure.

Dobson became more aggressively involved in politics with his founding of the Family Research Council, which was used to lobby for religiously conservative Republican House, Senate and presidential candidates (Gilgoff 2007). As Dobson saw it, modern social science had gone astray in assuming that it was environmental conditions that led to cruelty and violence. On the contrary, Dobson felt humans were innately selfish, cruel and belligerent (Dobson 1997). This, quite literally evil, nature had to be beaten out of children with rigid rules, obedience to a powerful authority and the continual threat of punishment. This is a dreary outlook on humanity, for sure, but it reflects Dobson's earnest fear that the relative intellectual, sexual and occupational freedom of the 1960s would continue to further unravel the moral fabric of American society. At their peak, Dobson's organizations reached more than 200 million people worldwide through radio shows, magazines, videos and books (Domke and Coe 2010).

Theoretically, Dobson and other figures of the religious right were and are advocating for a specific kind of family model. In this model, a "strict-father model," the father is the head of household finances and of household morality (Lakoff 1996). The father's orders are disseminated to a wife who dispenses rules to, and provides supervision over, his children. For any confusion or difficulty, the wife can consult the father who can solve the problem with his ascetic, strict, moral prescriptions. Children, in this model, are inherently selfish and uncooperative—their basic nature is a sinful nature. A child's moral character is thus forged through supervision, strict rules, submission to hierarchy and physical discipline. Supervision, rules, hierarchy and discipline are the raison d'être of the nuclear family, Dobson agued. Without a mother there is insufficient rule following and supervision, and without a father there is insufficient discipline and hierarchy.

This basic model of family can be contrasted with a "nurturant-parent" model, where familial power is more evenly distributed between marital partners, and children are viewed as basically good, albeit with a capacity for selfishness and belligerence. I will have more to say about these family models, as both relate to religiosity and nonreligiosity, later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters. For now, it is important to focus on the model of parenting advocated by the religious right of the 1970s and

1980s, what George Lakoff would call the "strict-father model" of parenting described above.

Why was Dobson's view of children so influential in Republican Party politics? Political journalist Max Blumenthal makes the argument that it was Dobson's view of human nature, more than his views on developmental psychology, that resonated with a certain segment of the American public and, consequently, with Republican Party leaders.

Applied to national and global politics, Dobson's endorsement of a strict-father model of parenting provided a psycho-religious framework whereby criminals, drug addicts, young single mothers, homosexuals, the homeless, illegal immigrants and other social "deviants" are all understood to be in desperate need of extreme punishment and discipline. Their plight is a result of their inherently sinful natures consuming them. Should they go much longer without proper discipline, their sin threatens the lives of everyone upon Jesus' impending return. The urgent desire of the moral father to disseminate rules and order in his household, lest his wife lose her direction in parenting and his child lose his or her direction in life, is politically analogized to the urgent need of good Americans to purify their nation of miscreants through harsh legal punishment.

In this way, the very ideology that leads to painful smacks and spankings in the family home leads, politically, to harsher legal penalties for low-level crimes, higher rates of imprisonment, slashed welfare spending and the criminalization of homosexuality (Lakoff 1996). The notion that people act illegally or nonnormatively because of an inherently sinful nature that only responds to strict discipline and enforced obedience implies a very austere set of political policies. This ideology is also, as Blumenthal (2010) argues, fundamentally sadomasochistic. Since no one escapes misfortune or moments of personal weakness, people must constantly be on the lookout for strong authorities to submit to, even as they seek out others to punish.

Religious Republicans like those mentioned above have had a profound impact on American political discourse throughout the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and today. David Domke and Kevin Coe (2010), two communications professors from the universities of Washington and Arizona, have studied how political discourse shifted to become more openly religious throughout this period.

Domke and Coe conclude that personal religiosity and God talk had become more common than ever, and for both political parties, although the clearest early example is the administration of Ronald Reagan. The

Republican Party's mobilization of religious fundamentalists—many of whom were unregistered to vote before the activism of Falwell and others—led to a series of political victories for Republican Party candidates. Domke and Coe (2010) describe it this way:

> Beginning in 1980, Republicans won the White House in five of the next seven presidential elections, captured the congress in the 1990s, and then added to their majorities in both congressional chambers in 2002 and 2004, the first time this had happened for a sitting president since Franklin Roosevelt in 1936. In 2006 and 2008, Democrats returned to national power by taking back congress and winning the presidency—but only by adopting and adapting the God strategy…For political parties today, gaining the upper hand in national politics requires a public religious profile. (Domke and Coe 2010, p. 18)

Political discourse has changed in four basic ways since the rise of the Religious Right: politicians have begun (1) "acting as political priests," (2) "fusing god and country," (3) "displaying more public religious behavior" and (4) "engaging in morality politics" (Domke and Coe 2010, p. 19). Let's look at each of these briefly in turn.

As for the first change, politicians since 1980 are more likely to assume the mantle of God, as opposed to asking for God's guidance or support. Political figures like Pat Robertson or Ted Cruz simply assert what God wants—traditional family, reductions in "entitlements," lower taxation for the "job creators" and so on. Political talking points are suffused with a latent, but manifestly righteous, moral certitude in the ultimate, specifically Christian, correctness of such political positions. Since 1980, political proclamations have become less about the content itself and more about the allegedly divine inspiration for the content. Republican Party candidates especially, from pizza franchise manager Herman Cain to preacher Mike Huckabee, tend to place the ultimate justification for their political views on purportedly religious insights.

The second shift in American political discourse since the rise of the Religious Right involves an equivocation between the economic, military and political goals of the United States and the desires of the creator of all reality, God. It would certainly be convenient if the desires of God were essentially indistinguishable from the strategic geopolitical desires of the United States. And, as though the convenience itself made the idea plausible, politicians began "fusing" God and country. It is true that the populace considered the United States to be an openly religious country,

guided by God, since its inception and, certainly, since "In God We Trust" was made the official national motto in the mid-1950s. Yet, Domke and Coe (2010) argue that never before had politicians so determinedly emphasized their conception of America as God's militarized force for goodness in the world. This can be seen most clearly, they suggest, in George W. Bush's speeches leading up to and during the Iraq War. A poignant 17 words in Bush's 2003 State of the Union address leaves no doubt: "The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity" (Domke and Coe 2010, p. 8).

Thirdly, political discourse was becoming more religiously theatrical, with candidates publicly demonstrating what were up to that point considered private or family matters—things like prayer, church attendance or visits to sacred religious sites. After 1980, presidents made public visits to religious sites at *twice* the rate of presidents prior to 1980 (Domke and Coe 2010). And, in addition to public displays of religiosity in the form of site visits and public prayers, American presidents after 1980 (beginning with Reagan and reaching a crescendo in George W. Bush) also began mentioning God and faith more often in public addresses. Since Ronald Reagan, 87% of all national presidential addresses have been ended with a "God Bless You," or "God Bless America."

Lastly, political discourse as influenced by the Religious Right has become especially focused on issues of female sexuality and heterosexual marriage. Republican political platforms began increasingly denouncing mothers working outside the home in the 1970s, opposing abortion in the 1980s and opposing gay marriage in the early 1990s. This focus on women's sexuality and homosexuality became a preoccupation for the religious right, and remains one today.

In total, these four shifts involve American political candidates growing more aggressively and publicly religious, especially regarding issues of gender and sexuality. These shifts in political discourse were a subculturally Southern, white religious response to the radical social and economic changes of the 1960s.[26]

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[26] Despite my specific focus on American religiosity, it is important to note that this fundamentalist religious revivalism was occurring outside of the United States as well. The mid-twentieth century was economically and culturally disruptive for many. Some have noticed the similarities between the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran and the rise of Falwell, Dobson, Pat Robertson and others in the United States . For example, Kenneth Wald and his colleagues write:

But, after decades of success, the populist appeal of this sex- and gender-focused religious political platform may be waning. Since at least the 1970s, General Social Survey data show that Evangelicals have been inadvertently liberalizing in their views. Evangelical Protestants today are much more likely to approve of homosexuality, divorce, interracial marriage, premarital sex and women working outside of the home than they were to approve of such behavior in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

In the early 1960s, for example, 81% of Evangelical Protestants felt that sexual groping among consenting but nonmarried people should be considered "morally wrong all of the time." But, by the 1980s, fewer than 50% held this view (Bruce 2011). The growth in religious fundamentalism during the 1970s and 1980s among American Republicans was more a gasp than a roar—though many Americans remained self-identified sectarian Protestants during this period, Evangelical viewpoints were actually becoming more liberal over time. Generationally, younger Americans are more likely to identify as a religious nonaffiliate and, also, *less* likely to identify as an Evangelical Christian (or any kind of Christian) (PEW 2014c).

And, even for those who belong to a sectarian Protestant church, there is reason to believe that there is less politicking from the pulpit today than there was 20 or 30 years ago. Putnam and Campbell (2010), for example, find that the proportion of Americans that report hearing church sermons on "social or political issues" has dropped dramatically. In 2006, 32% of their churchgoing sample reported hearing politically charged sermons monthly, but by 2011, this percentage had plummeted to 19% of those who had heard such sermons. The percentage of Americans opposed to

> This resurgence of scholarly interest [in religion during the] 1980s owes much to an unlikely pair of sources: the late Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran and the Rev. Jerry Falwell of Lynchburg, Virginia. Both emerged in the 1970s as leaders of social movements that profoundly altered two of the largest subfields in political science—comparative and American politics, respectively…The Islamic Revolution that Khomeini symbolized did not merely seize power in one nation; rather, it demonstrated the capacity of a movement rooted in "primordial" social forces to undermine what had been the very model of the modernizing state in the political development literature, the Shah's Iran. In much the same way, Falwell's emergence as the public symbol of what became known as the new Christian Right helped scramble the alignments in American party politics. The party system was shaken to its core by a [religious fervor] whose political salience was supposedly on the decline. (Wald et al. 2005, p. 123)

religious leaders influencing political voting jumped from 30% in 1991 to 45% by 2008 (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Though the Religious Right had succeeded in capturing a previously untapped voting population of mostly Southern and Midwestern white voters, they had simultaneously alienated nonmarried females, gays and the less religious among other demographics. The Republican Party's play for power after the tumultuous 1960s had been a Faustian bargain. In building the soul of the Republican Party around traditional religious sex and gender politics, along with arguments against the teaching of evolution in public schools, Republicans energized their Southern base, but lost the culture war—abortion and divorce have not been outlawed, prayer has not been restored in public school, it has been ruled unconstitutional to teach antievolution "Intelligent Design" in public school classrooms and more women work outside the home than ever (Bruce 2011). It is true that Evangelical pastors today still preach against evolution, abortion, divorce and homosexuality and that they do so now in megachurches housing thousands. While this might be mistaken for another religious revival, it is, rather, the concentration of a polarized, and increasingly fearful, minority.

"NEW ATHEISM" AND THE SPARK OF RELIGIOUS NONAFFILIATION FROM 1990 TO PRESENT

In antagonistic response to the rise of the Religious Right, the proportion of religious nonaffiliates rose from 5% in 1972 to 8% by the mid-1970s (Baker and Smith 2015). The proportion of Americans claiming no religious affiliation would sit at 8 % until a more noticeable cultural backlash to the Religious Right began taking place in the 1990s. Indeed, it was during the 1990s when the proportion of Americans claiming no religious affiliation doubled from 8% to around 15%. This proportion would jump again, from 15% to 23%, by 2015 (PEW 2015a, b; and see Zuckerman et al. 2016 for higher estimates).

This cultural response in the 1990s and early 2000s to the religious radicalizing happening in the Republican Party was swift and vicious. It was reminiscent of the sardonic and satirical response of journalists and liberal pundits to Jennings' defense of Evangelicalism during the Scopes Trial. American television in the 1990s and 2000s produced "irreverent impiety" on the order of *South Park*, *Politically Incorrect* (now, *Real Time) with Bill Maher*, the *Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and a number of comedy news

shows consistently critical of religion, hosted by people like Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert and John Oliver (Zuckerman 2014).

Though the Religious Right still harbored ascendant momentum, the 1990s and 2000s were a distinct period of American history where religious certainty was being openly mocked, in unprecedented ways, on television shows like *Family Guy* and openly questioned on television shows like the *X-Files*, or *House*. Also important, America Online brought the internet to millions of Americans for the first time in the 1990s and, in so doing, provided an avenue for limitless information on religions, Gods and religious hypocrisy. This was a period of continued, and building, religious polarization—technologically connected young people and liberals were growing more secular, while older people and conservatives were growing more aggressively pious.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Americans became especially attentive to the role of religion in terroristic violence (e.g., Harris 2004). When religion was being used as a justification for American foreign and domestic policy, everything seemed benign, but as soon as terrorists flew planes into buildings and killed more than 3000 American citizens, religion took on a darker shade. In the hazy aftermath of 9/11, Americans seemed to awaken to the understanding that most *everyone* thinks religion is on *their* side (not just Christians) and that most *everyone* thinks *their* religion justifies their behavior and public policy. It was a sober awakening for the United States to accept the deeply heartfelt and deeply religious motivations behind the 9/11 attacks. The fact that those terroristic motivations happened to be Islamic in the case of 9/11, as opposed to Christian, seemed to matter little. The overriding truism that religious fervor leads to ludicrous violence had been forgotten by a generation of Americans comfortable with their mostly lapsed, casual religiosity.

A group of writers emerged in the years following 9/11 that would attack religion, religious terrorism and the Religious Right more than anyone had yet dared. Neuroscientist and philosopher Sam Harris (2004, 2006), evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (2006), philosopher Daniel Dennett (2006) and journalist Christopher Hitchens (2007) all released a series of unflinchingly antireligious *New York Times* and international bestsellers. These four writers would go on to appear regularly on talk shows and news shows to discuss the immediate need for critical thinking and atheism.

Their message was clear: religion and the Religious Right in the United States were both a threat to civil rights (women's rights, especially), a

threat to knowledge and enlightenment (antievolutionism, especially), a threat to human kindness (dogmatic fundamentalists, especially) and a threat to human creativity (censorship of controversial works, especially). For Harris, Dawkins, Dennett and Hitchens—the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse"—religion poisons everything. Hitchens, for example, writes:

[Religion is] violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children: organized religion ought to have a great deal on its conscience. There is one more charge to be added to the bill of indictment…religion looks forward to the destruction of the world. Perhaps half aware that its unsupported arguments are not entirely persuasive, and perhaps uneasy about its own greedy accumulation of temporal power and wealth, religion has never ceased to proclaim the Apocalypse and the day of judgement. (Hitchens 2007, p. 56)

Hitchens and the other "Four Horsemen" felt that people continued affiliating with the religions of their parents, despite the viciousness of religion, because of an unwarranted nostalgia. Thus, these writers cautioned people about forgetting the historical behavior of religious organizations. Hitchens writes:

In the early history of mankind…[t]he state religion supplied a complete and 'total' answer to all questions, from one's position in the social hierarchy to the rules governing diet and sex. Slave or not, the human was property, and the clergy was the reinforcement of absolutism…An impure thought, let alone a heretical one, could lead to your being flayed alive. To be accused of demonic possessions or contact with the Evil One was to be convicted of it…Whatever you did, and however many precautions you took, the sins of which you were unaware could always be made to find you out. (Hitchens 2007, pp. 232–233)

A central theme of each of these books is that, as Hitchens has said, "Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it," (Hitchens 2007). As they saw it, religion could not be the *cause* of morality because people, in creating religious texts in the first place, were imbuing them with some (attempted) moral guidance. If this desire to act ethically wasn't coming from a "god," where was it coming from? Their collective answer rested on the latest scientific research into the matter which rooted the human moral sense in mammalian biology, dependent infancy and social living. The "Four Horsemen," in providing a zoological answer

to the question of human bonding, obviated the trite recourse to the Ten Commandments typically made to explain humanity's "moral sense." We are a "moral animal" for numerous complex reasons, but principally because we, and other mammals, are born helpless and in need of a mother's care, buoyed by a community's support and protection.[27]

Dawkins has said it most elegantly:

> An intelligent couple can read their Darwin and know that the ultimate reason for their sexual urges is procreation. They know that the woman cannot conceive because she is on the pill. Yet they find that their sexual desire is in no way diminished by the knowledge. Sexual desire is sexual desire and its force, in an individual's psychology, is independent of the ultimate Darwinian pressure that drove it. It is a strong urge which exists independently of its ultimate rationale.
>
> I am suggesting that the same is true of the urge to kindness—to altruism, to generosity, to empathy, to pity. In ancestral times, we had the opportunity to be altruistic only towards close kin and potential reciprocators. Nowadays that restriction is no longer there, but the rule of thumb persists. Why would it not? It is just like sexual desire. We can no more help ourselves feeling pity when we see a weeping unfortunate (who is unrelated and unable to reciprocate) than we can help ourselves feeling lust for a member of the opposite sex (who may be infertile or otherwise unable to reproduce). Both are misfirings, Darwinian mistakes: blessed, precious mistakes. (Dawkins 2006, p. 253)

This view of human beings as biologically moral animals has its modern roots in the work of sociology's founder, Auguste Comte, and, prior to the "Four Horsemen," writers like Robert Wright (1994) and Michael Shermer (2004) had been popularizing the idea that human beings were intrinsically social and altruistic (with, of course, person-to-person variation).

Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious texts in this scheme are not so much the source of morality—they are, rather, purely historical texts, the mad rantings and earnest philosophies of Bronze-age dissident pastoralists. Certainly, some of these rantings and philosophies are eloquent, wisely insightful, pieces of art. Other parts of these holy books are factually false, genocidal or bigoted. Holy books are works of human art, not divine inspiration. As such, they reveal the very human nature of their writers—petty tribalism and close-minded stupidity interspersed with illuminative insight and uplifting soliloquy.

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[27] See McCaffree (2015), where I have written at length on the topic of mammalian morality.

It is fine to view religious works as pieces of art, but it is preposterous, these writers argued, to claim them as our sole manuals of morality. How could they be? Christian groups, in just the last six decades, have at various times organized against granting civil rights to homosexuals, African Americans, communists, immigrants, atheists and criminals (see Smith 2015). Even today, for example, GSS data show that 21% of fundamentalist Protestants, the most religiously committed group in the United States, would not vote for a black presidential candidate and 65% say that immigrants can never become fully American (Sherkat 2014). On this, Shermer wrote in 2004:

> Religion has certainly inspired greatness out of ordinariness, and such hero-ics have been well documented throughout the ages, especially by the par-ticular religions to whom the heroes professed worship. But religion has a built-in system of intolerance that logically follows from adherence to a fixed set of dogmas. I think we can do better. (Shermer 2004, p. 260)

While TV shows like *Beavis and Butthead*, *South Park* and *Family Guy* poked fun at religion in the 1990s and 2000s, intellectuals from numerous fields attacked the historicity, morality and necessity of religious doctrines and behaviors. Like the litany of shows that jabbed at religion on television, the list of intellectuals who took aim at religion during this period could easily be made much longer. In fact, there is controversy as to whether or not there are, indeed, only "Four Horsemen" of the 1990s and 2000s "New Atheism" described above. Various arguments have been made that Michael Shermer, physicist Victor Stenger (2007) and activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2007) should each be added to the list of "Horesmen." Since Ayaan is a woman, perhaps the "Horsemen" moniker will need to be mercifully, and finally, dropped.

The cultural turn against religion in the 1990s and 2000s was ulti-mately, of course, undergirded by the impact of industrialization on the economy, education and the family. The transition from an industrial to a postindustrial economy, beginning in the 1960s and carrying through to today, is the ultimate cause of secularization in the United States, and cer-tainly, female participation in the workforce along with female and minor-ity access to college were at record highs in the 1990s and 2000s (Baker and Velez 1996; Buchmann and Diprete 2006).[28]

[28] Though college access and degree attainment are increasing for African Americans and Hispanics, both are at lower rates compared to whites. See Fletcher and Tienda (2010), for an argument that these disparities are a result of differences in the quality of high schools that white versus nonwhite students attend.

The US economy grew at record rates during the 1990s—tellingly, the longest period of sustained growth in the GDP since the 1960s. In part because of this unprecedented economic growth, violent and property crime was also dropping to the lowest levels since the 1960s (Zimring 2006). Whereas the youngsters of the 1960s had been more comfortable than the youngsters of the 1930s, the youngsters of the 1990s had it better still. And, what's more, the Gulf War of the 1990s took place almost clandestinely with no military draft. There was, also, surprisingly little human interaction on the battlefield during the Gulf War. The war was fought digitally and remotely (i.e., using technological interfaces on aircraft to kill people miles below) more so than any previous war, a fact that led the perplexed postmodernist Jean Baudrillard to assert that "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" (Baudrillard 1995). In a sense, Baudrillard was right—the Gulf War was the first American war with relatively little face-to-face interaction, although death had truly become faceless in Hiroshima and Nagasaki five decades before.

Also of critical importance in the 1990s and 2000s was the diffusion of dial-up and broadband internet. Phil Zuckerman, Luke Galen and Frank Pasquale (2016) actually suggest that internet access, and the cornucopia of information about religion, nonreligion, irreligion and everything else it provides, is perhaps the primary driver of secularization once a society has industrialized. There may be some truth to the parable of Adam and Eve in Genesis—eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil leads away from God. Though, of course, this is not because it leads toward Satan, but because unfettered access to information about morality and social life leads to the conclusion that religion is not necessary for either. Additionally, information about the litany of faiths around the world, all of which are adhered to sincerely by this or that geographic segment of the world, may numb people to the notion that any one religion is The One True Faith.

Once a household has access to the internet, and America Online provided this for tens of millions of Americans beginning in the early 1990s, all adults and children in that household have a device which, at the stroke of a few keys, will provide an endless stream of critique and variety in all matters religious and secular. This easy access to an unregulated and cavernous store of information—more than any one human could ever appreciate in a lifetime—is totally incompatible with strict adherence to a singular set of parochial dogmas.

The extended childhood, freedom and exploration enjoyed by those coming of age in the 1960s, along with the educated savvy that comes with unprecedented access to information, came to further fruition for those growing up in the 1990s and 2000s. It is not that the 1970s and 1980s were periods of lifeless stupidity. It is, rather, that the forces driving secularism—material comfort, cosmopolitan social integration and access to information—reached relative crests in the 1960s, 1990s and early 2000s and relative troughs in the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s.

The Modern American Religious Landscape

Today, about 25–30% of Americans are Evangelical Protestant, 20–24% are Catholic and 14–15% are mainline/liberal Protestant. These three religious groups account for the majority of the US population. Religious nonaffiliates make up the majority of the remainder, at around 17–23% (Putnam and Campbell 2010; PEW 2015b). Americans who tend to be institutionally vulnerable also tend to be more religious—female, Southern, African Americans with a high school degree or less and a household income of under $35,000 are the most structurally vulnerable *and* the most religious group in the United States (Froese and Bader 2010; Sherkat 2014; Zuckerman et al. 2016).

Now it is true that when we collapse these characteristics—Southern, female, impoverished and so on—together, we get a very specific view of someone who is struggling to make ends meet. However, each one of these characteristics—say, just being female, or just living in the Southern United states—independently increases the likelihood that one will report high levels of church attendance and belief in god. It so happens that lower household income, being female, and living in the South are all intercorrelated with Evangelical Protestant affiliation because, among other things, women in these households are discouraged from entering the labor force and pursuing higher education over motherhood (Glass and Jacobs 2005; Frederick and Balswick 2006; Colaner and Giles 2008; Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008; Schwadel 2014, but see also Denton 2004).

If I may be permitted to speak in generalities, those who generally feel safe and who trust the other people around them tend to believe in a loving God when they feel threatened. Those who feel that safety is uncertain, who do not trust others, tend to believe in a judgmental, punishing God when they feel threatened. It turns out that the least-trusting Americans, who view God as judgmental and punishing, are also often the

most religious (Froese and Bader 2010). A full 52% of white Evangelical Protestants believe in an ever-present judgmental God, and this number jumps to 69% for black Protestants (Froese and Bader 2010). Compare these numbers to those for Catholics and mainline/liberal Protestants who enjoy both a higher socioeconomic status on average and residence on the American coasts. For both Catholic and mainline Protestant groups, only slightly above 20% believe in a scrutinizing, critical God. For these groups, God is much more likely to be conceptualized as nonjudgmental, or disinterested/distant.

In short, the more economically or materially vulnerable people are, the more religious they are, and the more they see God as imminent, interested and vengeful. This is not to say that wealthy, powerful people cannot be deeply religious—it is rather to make a scientific statement about population-level variation in human religiosity.

Geographic locations that contain people who are disproportionately vulnerable, or who perceive disproportionate vulnerability, will reveal a more religiously committed citizenry compared to those geographic areas containing people who are less vulnerable. For example, states in the United States with higher crime rates, poverty rates, teen pregnancy rates and unemployment rates are also the most religious. States like Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee and Oklahoma are consistently the most religious, while states like Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Oregon and New Hampshire are consistently the least religious (Zuckerman et al. 2016). Religious systems provide "compensatory control" for chronically perceived vulnerability. People who feel vulnerable disproportionately, and unsurprisingly, fantasize about a God with ultimate power and no vulnerability.

On the other hand, people who feel relatively more secure and stable are less likely to think about what God wants/needs/requires (i.e., God is less judgmental), and they are less likely to think God is involved in day-to-day affairs (i.e., God is distant or disinterested). In short, they are less likely to think about God. When insecurity, instability and uncertainty threaten to envelope our psyches in anxiety and fear, we fortify our belief in agents that are omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent (Kay et al. 2009; Norris and Inglehart 2011). When people become more comfortable, when the vicissitudes of life have abated, they do not become philosophically sophisticated atheists. Rather, they simply begin to think less about the watchful and demanding eye of a punishing protector and more about their own personal desires, interests and goals.

And, for those who believe that God is interested and judgmental, what is it that he/she/it is most judgmental about? Well, sex, of course! Religions, the world over, in fact focus much of their efforts on regulating, controlling and interpreting human sexuality (Adsera 2006; Weeden and Kurzban 2013). There is no reason to overthink why this is: sexual concerns are pervasive for all species, and religion is, with kinship, our oldest human institution (Turner and Maryanski [2008] 2016). It is the institution which housed all of our naïve speculations, fears and recommendations for sex, marriage and children. Sex and family are very personal and potentially very terrifying contexts to navigate. What other institution in society claims to have such authority on matters of family and sexuality? Well, today, medical and educational institutions do, and this, in part, is causing the secularization of the West.

Still, the fact that religious institutions focus disproportionately on sex and family is easy to document. Americans who believe in a judgmental God are much more likely than atheists or mainline Protestants, according to opinion polls, to believe that adultery, gay marriage, abortion and premarital sex are "always wrong" (Froese and Bader 2010). More than half of fundamentalist Protestants today (55.1%) say that premarital sex is "always wrong," and the overwhelming majority (87.4%) say that homosexual sex is "always wrong" (Sherkat 2014); 57% of fundamentalists want pornography to be illegal, and between a quarter and a third of them oppose abortion even when the woman is raped. The average age at first marriage for fundamentalist Protestant women is 19.9, the youngest of any religious group measured in the General Social Survey (see Sherkat 2014). Fundamentalist Protestants are 1.8 to 2.2 times more likely to be married than the average religious nonaffiliate.

Fundamentalists are also relatively more patriarchal within their marriages—38.6% of fundamentalists agree that "women should run the home, not the country" (Sherkat 2014). Accordingly, between 30% and 37% of fundamentalist women are housewives who do not work outside of the home. Comparatively, only 24.6% of religious nonaffiliates and 26% of liberal Protestant women are housewives. Households with a single income are, of course, more economically vulnerable than houses with two incomes where both parents work (Sherkat 2012). Fundamentalist Protestants, as result, have the lowest family incomes of any major religious group in the United States.

The most devoutly religious Americans—whom I've been calling fundamentalists and sectarians—also have a very tribal morality. Due to their

more homogeneous social networks (in terms of race/ethnicity, religion and politics), religious fundamentalists see the world in very black and white, or "us vs. them" terms. Religiously moderate, and especially nonreligious, Americans tend to have more diverse social networks, composed of people from a variety of different race/ethnic and religious backgrounds. Consequently, their moralities are less tribal and exclusivist.

Opinion polling by the General Social Survey out of the University of Chicago, as analyzed by sociologist Darren Sherkat, paints a clear picture of Christian tribal morality in the contemporary United States.

Around 40% of fundamentalist Protestants nationwide report opposing the right of homosexuals, communists or atheists to speak in public (Sherkat 2014). A clear majority of these groups favor firing a gay, communist or atheist school teacher. Among mainline Protestants or Catholics, who tend to be more politically liberal and less likely to think each word of the Bible is literally true, about a quarter to a third oppose the right of homosexuals, communists or atheists to speak publicly. By comparison, among religious nonaffiliates, under 20% oppose giving these people the right to speak publicly.

This religious tribalism extends to fear of immigrants and other races. Of white Baptists nationwide, 37% say that whites should be able to legally segregate themselves from other races, 66.2% claim immigrants can never become fully American, and just over a quarter (26.1%) would not vote for a black president (Sherkat 2014). About 45% of white Baptists oppose interracial marriage. These numbers are comparable to other fundamentalist Christian Protestant sects in the United States. Though lower, the number of moderate Protestants and Catholics who endorse these views is still fairly high. Among moderate, white Protestants, 29.8 % say that whites should be able to legally segregate themselves from other races, and for Catholics this number is 25%. All of these numbers are higher than those for religious nonaffiliates.[29]

We can say, then, that devoutly religious groups oppose extending civil rights and moral concern to outsiders more than comparatively less religious groups do. Put simply, devoutly religious morality is a tribal, in-group morality. As people's moralities and self-identifications become less devoutly religious, they become more universalistic in their moral concern.

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[29] Though numbers for nonaffiliates are still shockingly high—16% of white nonaffiliates think whites should be able to legally segregate and 9.5% would not vote for a black president. Most surprising, 50.9% of nonaffiliates assert that immigrants cannot become fully American (Sherkat 2014).

Devoutly religious Americans are also more militaristic and defense oriented than are nondevout and/or nonreligious Americans (Sherkat 2014). About 88.5% of white Mormons, 82.5% of white Baptists and 76% of assorted other fundamentalist groups support capital punishment for criminals compared to 69.5% of white nonaffiliates and 51.7% of white Unitarians. Regarding gun rights, 75.2% of white religious nonaffiliates and 89% of white Unitarians support restrictions on gun possession, compared to only 60% of white Mormons, 67.9% of white Baptists and 70.7% of other fundamentalists.

What is interesting is that the majority of Americans, overall, support gun control legislation. Still, opposition to gun control is most likely to be found among devoutly religious Americans.

The most religious Americans also raise children differently. Recall James Dobson's biblical school of child-rearing—to love one's child is to love punishing one's child (Blumenthal 2010). Putnam and Campbell's nationally representative "Faith Matters" survey found that, of those Americans who reported "almost always" attending religious services, 54% said that "obedience" is the most important thing to teach children (Putnam and Campbell 2010). By contrast, 60% of those who "almost never" attend church said that "self-reliance" was the most important thing to teach children. The more fundamentalist and sectarian the parent is in their religiosity, the less they will desire critical thought, independent thought and autonomy for their child.

They will also physically beat ("spank") their children more frequently as a way of instilling obedience (Zuckerman et al. 2016). It is lost on devoutly religious parents that enforcing rigid conformity with regular beatings might not be *the most ideal* way of raising a loving and loyal child. This sadomasochism that Dobson advocated for in the 1970s has plenty of biblical support, lest we forget that "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (to quote another translation of Proverbs 13, p. 24).

As I mentioned above, the Berkeley linguist and cognitive scientist George Lakoff (1996) has demonstrated how American liberals and conservatives differ in their child-rearing practices, and how this subsequently reinforces and creates political rivalries between the two parties. Conservatives seem to favor this religious form of child-rearing described above where a strong, moral father runs his household with an iron fist, dispensing punishment frequently when the child's (or the wife's) character falls short. This punishment is said to be loving, ultimately, because

it is given so that the weak (the child or the mother) can build character, resilience or discipline. Because of what Max Blumenthal (2010) calls the "sadomasochism" of pairing social bonding with punishment/discipline, adult religious conservatives solve issues of poverty with austerity and issues of homelessness and drug addiction with harsh criminal penalties. The punishment-love framework learned in the family becomes the framework applied to national political issues as an adult (Lakoff 1996).

It is entirely fair, and quite important, to point out that Blumenthal's analysis is needlessly Freudian and that Lakoff's analysis is intentionally metaphorical. Still, we know empirically that the most religious people in the United States value obedience over autonomy and attempt, to various degrees, to physically beat compliance into their children while espousing beliefs in a sexually interested, judgmental and punishing God. This is a biblically "traditional" form of child-rearing that may well have found its way into the trash bin of history were it not for James Dobson's reenergizing of the idea in the 1970s, 1980s and onward.[30]

The landscape of religion in the United States is one where most people, in all walks of life, are increasingly religiously apathetic, lapsed or nostalgic instead of active. It is also composed of a sizable minority—a little less than a third of the country—who feel disproportionately economically and politically vulnerable and who express this disadvantage with a militantly patriarchal method of social integration justified by and draped with religious symbolism.

Religious Altruism

There is some reason to believe that belonging to a church-based social network makes people more altruistic and generous. Data from the "Faith Matters" survey, for example, show that religious people volunteer more often for religious *and* for secular organizations. A full 60% of participants in the highest quintile of religiosity volunteered their time at religious organizations in the last 12 months, and 61% volunteered their time at secular

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[30] If it had not fallen into the trash bin of history, perhaps it would have found its way into obscurity for the time being. Such a sexually repressive, violent and hierarchical form of social bonding is a form of social integration perhaps best adapted for, as I will develop later in the book, a short life marked by the uncertainties of disease, war/crime and poverty. With continuing industrialization and mechanization of the workforce, along with rising per capita incomes, absolute poverty and rates of disease and war will continue to fall, making this form of social bonding less and less appealing.

organizations (Putnam and Campbell 2010). By contrast, only 5% of those in the lowest quintile of religiosity volunteered for religious organizations in the last year, though 43% had volunteered for secular organizations.

Furthermore, 40% of those who attend church "at least weekly" reported volunteering to help the poor or elderly, and 36% volunteered for a school or youth program. These numbers, for Americans who attend church "rarely or never," hovered around 15% regardless of the form of volunteering

When it comes to donating their money, instead of their time, religious people unsurprisingly tend to give to religious organizations. In fact, an estimated 80–90% of the charitable monetary donations of religious people go to religious organization. Regardless, comparatively, religious Americans seem to donate more of their time *and* money to religious and nonreligious charity organizations. Putnam and Campbell (2010) argue that regular churchgoers are more likely to "give money to charity, do volunteer work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, give excess change back to a shop clerk, donate blood, help someone outside their own household with housework, spend time with someone who is 'a bit down,' allow a stranger to cut in front of them, offer a seat to a stranger, [and] help someone find a job." Regular churchgoers also appear to be more civically engaged in general; they are more likely to attend public meetings, vote and work with others to solve community problems.

This "generosity" or "civic engagement" effect of belonging to a churchgoing social network operates across religious traditions, for the most part, and is quite consistently found in the research literature (Putnam and Campbell 2010). The effect is also dose dependent: those who attend church frequently are more charitable than those who go to church occasionally, who are more charitable than those who go rarely, and so on. Also, I want to be clear that a vague, casual belief in "a higher power" is not the religiosity I am talking about. Rather, greater levels of civic engagement are most likely among those Americans with an earnest belief in the god of a specific religious tradition, along with daily or weekly conformity to ritualistic church attendance and prayer. People in *those* kinds of networks seem to be more charitable.

How can we understand such findings? For one, devoutly religious people feel watched and judged by an angry, vengeful God, implying that they have genuine fears of burning in a lake of fire for all eternity if they do not give to charity and volunteer (Norenzayan 2013). Equally important, these people are also more concerned about the judgment of other

people and are therefore more likely to exaggerate how much they volunteer (Batson et al. 1993; Brenner 2011). Thirdly, it is possible that they are genuinely more compassionate as a result of existing in denser social networks (i.e., being consciously aware of their social dependence) relative to nonchurchgoers (McCaffree and Saide forthcoming). Regarding this third possibility, Putnam and Campbell (2010) suggest that religious social networks might produce more discussion around charity. They write:

> Although we lack systematic information about exactly what is discussed in these religious networks, it is possible that religious friends are more likely to raise moral issues, principles, and obligations than friends from a nonreligious context and thus to heighten your own attentiveness to such concerns. (Putnam and Campbell 2010, pp. 477–478)

Another clue to this puzzle is that regular churchgoers *who are also politically liberal are the most generous of all*. Liberal devoutly religious people tend to volunteer their time less discriminately to religious and secular organizations. Conservative devoutly religious people tend to volunteer their time and money more discriminately to only religious charities and organizations (as opposed to also volunteering time and money to secular charities and organizations). While churchgoing in general increases the tendency for people to volunteer time and money, churchgoing liberals tend to donate more widely. In other words, conservative donating is more tribal than liberal donating, but both increase in prevalence to the degree that the donor is embedded in a ritualistic church network.

If we take religious liberals to be less threatened or vulnerable—the prediction is that they would be disproportionately white, live on the coasts and Northern Midwest, occupy an upper-income bracket, be college educated and male, or any combination of these—then we can explain why they are less discriminatory in their charitable donating. Existential security loosens tribal binding: as the individual feels comfortable and efficacious, they begin to resist the imposition of arbitrary rules and norms from an external, centralized authority. On the other hand, the less existential security a population feels—being nonwhite, being a woman, having Southern or Midwest rural residency, being poor, having less education and, again any combination of some or all of these—the *more* likely they will be to bind to homogeneous, discriminatory, intolerant, "high-commitment" ideologies and organizations for perceived protection. I will be delving more into this in the next chapter.

A Short Note on American Cocooning

The decline of church attendance, and of Americans' confidence in church authority, may also be a result of changes in peoples' *routine activities*. Especially since World War II, household commodities like television sets, computers with internet and videogames have kept people occupied inside of their homes. Putnam's (2000) groundbreaking study of the disappearance of civic involvement in the United States shows that the more people stay inside the home to seek entertainment (i.e., agree with the statement "TV is my primary form of entertainment"), the less often they volunteer, become involved in their neighborhood community, write letters to friends and relatives or attend church. Today, with iPads, iPhones and a litany of apps from Netflix to Facebook to Hulu to Angry Birds to Candy Crush, people spend more time indoors and online than ever.

It isn't just in the home where Americans spend their time, but also at work—Americans spend more time at work than any other people in the Western world (Ciulla 2001). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey,[31] the majority of employed persons in the United States are working or preparing for work from 7 am until 6 pm every weekday, and have from around 7 pm to 10 pm to eat, recreate and sleep. This is a slavish schedule. According to the OECD,[32] if we were to count every person who worked in 2014 (even if only part time or temporarily) and divide that number into the total number of hours worked, we would find that the average American worked 1789 hours in 2014. This is more than Germany (1371 hours worked), the Netherlands (1425 hours worked), Norway (1427 hours worked), Denmark (1436 hours worked), France (1473 hours worked) and 16 other countries. It seems that people in the United States work longer hours due to lower overall rates of unionization, and therefore, fewer occupational benefits like living wages, healthcare, paid maternity leave or longer vacation time.

The rise of home entertainment, coupled with this time spent working, glues people to their homes and to their cubicles. This dynamic should not be underemphasized; the rise of entertainment technology and media, coupled with long working hours, has competed for the scarce resources of Americans' time and attention. Church has lost out in this competition

[31] http://www.bls.gov/tus/charts/work.htm
[32] https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ANHRS#

because, for one, it does not provide any obviously marketable skills and, secondly, it does not provide the sensory stimulation of television, video-games and the internet.

I don't mean to insinuate that television and other forms of home entertainment have secularized the world, but they have certainly had an effect on how people spend their Sundays. Playfully claiming to feel guilty when one plans to watch football instead of going to church is now a banal, even trite, occurrence in the modern United States.

For now, I just want to point out that church attendance is no longer integrated into the routine activities of modern life because routine church attendance requires people to make sustained efforts to leave the home and workplace. Distraction/entertainment is provided by personal gadgets in the home, while sustenance and self-esteem comes from work—there just isn't enough time in the day for much else.

This cocooning is ultimately a secondary effect of a developed postindustrial economy oriented toward serving a mass consumer base. Increased technological development enables consumer products to be purchased cheaply, and even if were not distracted in our homes, we would be confined in cubicles and on sales floors for the majority of our days.

Is the United States an Exception to the Modernization-Secularization Thesis?

Due to the religious "awakenings" of the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s, many sociologists of religion have claimed that America is uniquely religious compared to other postindustrial nations like the United Kingdom, France or Canada. If self-reported church attendance is to be believed, for example, the United States would be more religiously adherent than most all other Western countries. Self-reported belief in God also appears to be very high in the United States. But, how much can self-reported survey statistics like these really be believed?

The sociologist of religion Peter Berger, in his 1967 classic *The Sacred Canopy*, argued that the United States was secularizing because religious narratives were suffering a "crisis of legitimacy." This crisis was due to the ascendency of naturalistic scientific explanations of reality and due to the dizzying number of possible religious denominations (and churches within denominations) people have to choose from. The combined effect of both, Berger argued, was leading to secularization in the United States.

And then, somewhat suddenly, he changed his mind on the matter.

In the introduction to a 1999 volume he edited, entitled *The Desecularization of the World*: *Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Berger argues that the modernization-secularization thesis is false for a number of reasons. He points to how the secularizing trends outlined in his earlier work have produced equally powerful "counter-secularization" movements like the Islamic revival that led to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the rise in Christian Evangelism in the former Soviet states of Eastern Europe and the rise of the Religious Right in the United States.

In an interview given in 2014, Berger told Valparaiso Christian University's literary newspaper *The Cresset* that the entire world was growing more religious by the minute, due to differences in fertility rates between religious and secular families He further suggested that secularization as most researchers have studied it—as the loss of belief in God—is only a Western and central European fad among intellectuals. Berger insisted that secularization among the masses in the United States had not happened, rather, religious nonaffiliation is rising simply because Americans are just overwhelmed with religious options. In the interview,[33] Berger says:

> Modernity does not necessarily produce secularity. It necessarily produces pluralism, by which I mean the coexistence in the same society of different worldviews and value systems. That changes the status of religion. It's a challenge for every religious tradition. But it's not the challenge of secularity; it's a different challenge. The problem with modernity is not that God is dead, as some people hoped and other people feared. There are too many gods, which is a challenge, but a different one.

What he says about pluralism and the apathy that results from being burdened with choice is absolutely spot-on. However, it is not *only* that people are faced with multiple religious options, it is also that they are offered an obviously better option—naturalistic science. Religious texts, as explanations for the world, as "sacred canopies," are theologically mutually exclusive, essentially supernatural and literally outdated. By comparison, scientific fields like astronomy, molecular biology or neuroscience seem intellectually revolutionary. Thus, people are provided, via internet and schooling, with a suite of information about numerous world religions, all of which have millions of adherents who claim their specific religion

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[33] http://thecresset.org/2014/Lent/Thuswaldner_L14.html

to be true. They are then offered the epistemology of naturalistic science, which, through data collection and hypothesis testing seems to, for the average citizen, naturally produce modernity in all of its technological glitz. Hardly a choice.

Steve Bruce (2011), an ardent supporter of secularization theory, concedes that the United States may be more religious than other Western countries, but points out that, oftentimes, immigrants to the United States are from more traditionally religious societies, causing a net increase in religiosity. And, beginning with the Religious Right in the 1970s, religious entrepreneurs have used private schools, summer camps, television shows, radio, magazines, mailing lists and the internet to successfully solicit religious and political donations and memberships.

For Bruce, fundamentalists in the United States can live in an ideological echo chamber unlike anywhere else in the Western world; from childhood, people are exposed to fundamentalist private schools, watch fundamentalist movies and TV shows, read fundamentalist books, take part in fundamentalist after-school projects and go to fundamentalist summer camps. He argues that this fundamentalist bubble is enabled, in part, by the federalist structure of the US government—outside of the fledgling US Department of Education, founded only fairly recently in 1979, school science and reading standards are largely state regulated. State-regulated standards are especially vulnerable to religious special interest groups who lobby against the teaching of evolution, climate change or a geological aging of the Earth (Shermer 2006). And, if state-regulated public school textbooks aren't religious enough, parents can always homeschool or place their child in an Evangelical private school. As adults, these people can go to an Evangelical college like Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, which claims[34] to serve 14,500 students in its physical campus in Virginia and 95,000 students take classes online.

David Voas and Mark Chaves (2016) in their excellent article "*Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?*" review much of the argument that the United States is, and will remain, a highly religious (or religiously stable) nation. A sizable number of eminent social scientists, far more than Peter Berger alone—from Grace Davie to Rodney Stark to Robert Putnam—have asserted and continue to assert that rates of religious belief, belonging and behavior are actually rising or, at the very least, remaining stable at high numbers in the United States.

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[34] https://www.liberty.edu/aboutliberty/index.cfm?PID=33803

Voas and Chaves (2016) insist that the religiosity of Americans has been chronically overestimated and miscalculated by researchers. Americans say they go to church a lot, but we know that they exaggerate their church attendance more than people in other countries (Brenner 2011). For the sociologist Phillip Brenner, who has conducted this research on exaggerated self-reporting, Americans have an unusually strong religious identity—their self-concepts are built around religious meanings. This does not mean that they attend church, or pray regularly, or read the Bible. It simply means that in American culture, historically, more than in other industrialized democracies, religious organizations have played a significant role in socializing youth and in providing communities of social support.

As a result, portraying oneself as vaguely but earnestly "religious" is akin to describing oneself as a well-socialized, dependable adult. In Richard Hoggart's study of religiosity among the working class, for example, he found that people who called themselves "Christian" felt that this meant that they were ethical, honest and respectable (Bruce 2011). Thus, when Americans are asked about their religious belief, behavior or belonging, they are especially likely to interpret this to be a question about their personal character or morality. After all, as described above, church attendance has long been the primary method of civic engagement in the United States (Putnam 2000; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Yet, even given this tendency to overreport their religiosity, Americans are still less religious today than they were several decades ago. In the 1980s, 40% of Americans thought the Bible should be taken literally; that number today is less than 30% (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Around 70% of Americans born between 1925 and 1934 felt confident that they "knew God existed" compared to 60% of those born between 1955 and 1964 and 40% of those born between 1985 and 1994 (Voas and Chaves 2016). Just under 65% of Americans born between the years 1925 and 1934 reported having a strong religious affiliation compared to 50% of Americans born between 1955 and 1964 and only 30 % of Americans born between 1985 and 1994 (Voas and Chaves 2016).

These declines may not be massive, but they are consistent and statistically reliable. Other social scientists have made the mistake of ignoring and dismissing relatively small declines in religiosity across generational birth cohorts. However, stable declines are more important for predicting future trends than noting that rates of religiosity remain fairly high.

Evidence is spotty prior to the 1950s, but the evidence that exists post–World War II suggests that Americans' church attendance began to decline around the 1960s. This decline happened first among Catholics, followed by Protestants (Hout and Fischer 2002). The decline in church attendance picked up speed in the 1990s and early 2000s—13% of Americans *never* attended church in 1990, and that number has now doubled to 26% as of 2014 (Voas and Chaves 2016). Despite the increased rate of secularization after 1990, the overall decline in Americans' church attendance has been slow and gradual over (at least) the twentieth century.

In order to make a fine point of the matter, I quote David Voas and Mark Chaves (2016) at length:

> […] we argue that the U.S. should not be considered a counterexample [to the thesis that modernization erodes religiosity] for two straightforward empirical reasons. First, American religiosity has in fact been declining for decades, and second, that decline has been produced by the same generational patterns that lie behind religious decline elsewhere in the West: each successive cohort is less religious than the preceding one […] Previous analysts have missed this decline, or have understated it, because the decline is slow, and only recently have we accumulated enough data over a long enough period of time to see it clearly. Some scholars have begun to notice these signs of erosion in religiosity, but few have grasped how strong the evidence for decades long decline truly is, and hence the significance of that decline is discounted even by those who notice it. […] The evidence for a decades-long decline in American religiosity is now incontrovertible. Like the evidence for global warming, it comes from multiple sources, shows up in several dimensions, and paints a consistent factual picture. The American decline may be slower than in much of the West, and it might have started later than in some other places, but it is moving the society in a similar direction. […] One might also wonder whether generational decline in religious involvement is largely confined to particular subsets of the population, such as white men. It is not. For example, using the full span of the GSS, 83% of black Americans born before 1925, but only 40% of those born since 1985, were or are strongly affiliated. More than three quarters (76%) of that older black cohort said that they attend at least monthly; less than half (48%) of the younger cohort says the same. […] Women tend to be more religious than men, but again the pattern of cohort decline is the same for both. (Voas and Chaves 2016, pp. 1520–1521, 1524, 1547)

Americans are losing their religion, but this loss is slow and gradual and, thus, somewhat difficult to perceive within any one person's lifespan.

America is also secularizing more slowly than other Western countries due to aspects of American society that are decidedly unmodern—for example, the high rate of incarceration, infant mortality and the abysmal dissemination of healthcare. The United States is indeed strong economically and militarily, but socially it is weak relative to other industrialized democracies. Americans experience more social vulnerability, more threat, than people in comparably modern countries, and the church has historically—especially in the United States—been a source of social support for people.

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Shades of the Secular

The topics of *secularity* (the declining importance of religion in society) and *secularism* (the adherence to and promotion of secular ideologies and worldviews) have never been more popular.

Yet, *secularism*, at least, is not new. From industrial urban sprawls, to rural agrarian farms, to hunter-gatherer bands, there are always some people who are less religious than others. This is not to say that a robust, philosophically sophisticated atheism has existed in all societies, but that, rather, degrees of religious skepticism and apathy have existed in all human societies.

Secularity, or the institutional differentiation of religion from politics and economy, along with declining rates of religious belief, behavior, belonging and benefitting, may, however, be a (relatively) more recent trend.

Secularism is necessary but not sufficient for secularity. By this I mean that individuals will concoct fully naturalistic philosophies of the world long, long before these philosophies ascend the hierarchies of worldly authority and become written in national constitutions, treaties and declarations. Secularism exists even under the iron canopies of the most repressive autocratic regimes, but whether this secularism is spoken aloud, whether it grows and spreads and congeals into organizations (or is alternatively, stamped out as heretical), is largely determined by the economic and political power of lower- and middle-income groups in society.

The earliest documented expressions of secular ideologies and world-views—of secularism—in history come from the Cārvāka of India, whose holy text, the Brihaspati Sūtra, provides a fully naturalistic account of human life (Hecht 2004). This text dates to 600 BCE, some 2617 years ago. The contemporary Indian philosopher Ramkrishna Bhattacharya (2012), an international authority on the Cārvāka, cites the work of his colleagues Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz (1998) in putting together the following sketch of Cārvāka philosophy:

> The world in all its diversity is only the result of various combinations of the material elements. There is no determinative principle, such as God or karma, which is responsible for the properties of things. They are due to their own nature; no agent makes fire hot or water cool. Cārvāka causality operates with material causes only… That we could have an unequal share of pleasure and pain is not due to any unseen force like karma, but to the different capacities of things caused by different combinations of the elements, just as bubbles on the ocean display a diversity of size, hue and duration. (Franco and Preisendanz 1998, as quoted in Bhattacharya 2012, pp. 594–595)

Incredibly, the Cārvāka even anticipated the modern theory of evolution with its aphorism that "the world is varied due to the variation of origin" (Bhattacharya 2012, p. 604). Cārvāka philosophy was fully naturalistic—no gods, no miracles, no mythology. There is only a natural order that endlessly grows, recombines and changes.

Such secular, natural philosophy probably did not *originate* in India around this period, but these are nevertheless the earliest examples of secular, natural philosophy in the historical record. We are left to speculate how extinct hunter-gatherer tribes, and perhaps even our primate ancestors, might have, rarely but certainly on occasion, considered reality in natural terms.

What we know from the historical record is that the epicenter of secular philosophy traveled from India in 600 BCE to the Greeks around 300 BCE, who added their own twists, before this literature is again reviewed and enhanced by Arabs, Persians and Egyptians during the "Islamic Golden Age" from 800 to 1200 CE and, most recently, by Europeans during the Renaissance and Enlightenment. In its totality, secular philosophy is an undoubtedly panhuman tradition.

The historical development and dissemination of secular philosophy is a fascinating topic.[1] It is, however, beyond the scope of this book. I mention this early history only to suggest that the theoretical process of secularization I will describe in this chapter can occur anywhere.

Secularity: Continuums and Dimensions

Phil Zuckerman, professor of sociology at Pitzer College in Claremont, California, is the founder of the nation's first "Secular Studies" college major.[2] According to Pitzer College's course catalog[3]:

> Secular Studies is an interdisciplinary program focusing on manifestations of the secular in societies and cultures, past and present. Secular Studies involves the study of non-religious people, groups, thought, and cultural expressions. There are many possible approaches, but the program emphasizes the meanings and impact of political secularism and philosophical skepticism, as well as various forms of private and public secularity. Seeking neither to applaud nor condemn secularism and secularity, secular studies instead attempts to critically understand and analyze both, utilizing the tools and approaches of social science, history, philosophy, as well as the arts and humanities.

By all accounts, Zuckerman's Secular Studies program seems to be a roaring success, drawing students from both religious and nonreligious backgrounds. As I described in Chap. 3, the United States during the 1990s and early 2000s experienced a renaissance of secularism, with the proportion of religious nonaffiliates doubling between 1990 and 2000 and then (almost) doubling again from 2000 to 2010. This incredible, seemingly inexplicable, rise of religious disinterest and religious apathy will preoccupy scholars for decades to come. But, if we look below the surface of the phenomenon, we can find the roots of secularity in societal developments beginning over 500 years ago.

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[1] For those interested in learning more about the history of secular philosophy, I recommend three texts. The first is sociologist Randall Collins' *The Sociology of Philosophies* (2000), the second is historian Jennifer Hecht's *Doubt* (2004) and the third is historian Tim Whitmarsh's (2016) *Battling the Gods.*

[2] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/08/us/08secular.html?_r=0

[3] http://catalog.pitzer.edu/preview_entity.php?catoid=3&ent_oid=153&returnto=171

First, let's consider for a moment what is meant by the term "secularity," or the declining importance of religion. Zuckerman's conception of secularity is complex and rich, while sharing much in common with other scholars, so it makes good sense to start here. For Zuckerman, secularity-religiosity exists on a continuum, with the left-hand side of the continuum denoting low levels of supernaturalism and other-worldliness and the right-hand side denoting high levels of supernaturalism and other-worldliness. Zuckerman further arrays several aspects of human life on this continuum—how we think about existence (our *beliefs*), how we think about ourselves (our *identities*), how we act by ourselves (our *behavior*s) and how we act with others (our attempts at *belonging*).

These four dimensions of human life—worldview, identity, behavior and belonging are analogous to the four dimensions of human life I discussed in Chap. 2; Zuckerman and I agree that belief/worldview, behavior and belonging are three fundamental aspects of human life impacted by religion, but while he sees the fourth aspect as internal-psychological (one's self-identity), I see it as a more general capacity to *benefit* from one's beliefs, behaviors and attempts at belonging.

This benefitting may come from, for example, a supernatural fortification of one's self-concept ("God loves me and has a plan for me"), but benefitting may also come from opportunities to socialize with others over shared politics at church, finding childcare for one's kids at an after-school religious program, or gaining employment through a church-based social network. Religious benefitting is thus an emergent property of religious belief, behavior and belonging.

Nevertheless, these four dimensions of human life can be arrayed along a spectrum of secularity-religiosity, as Zuckerman suggests. One's beliefs about the world (and about oneself) may be more or less supernatural and other-worldly; one's behaviors may be more or less supernatural and oriented toward a "future" life in heaven; one's attempts to belong with others may be more or less motivated by a desire to belong to a supernatural order of people; and, one's ability to draw social and psychological benefits from life may be more or less contingent on conceptualizing and orienting oneself toward supernaturalism and other-worldliness.

As we array these dimensions of human life along a continuum of secularity-religiosity, the true complexity of the modern sociology of religion emerges. Consider Figs. 4.1 and 4.2 as two examples. Imagine that each figure depicts the tendencies of a single individual as regards belief, behavior, belonging and benefitting.

Benefit

Belonging

Belief

Behavior

Secularity ←————————————————→ **Religiosity**

Low
Supernaturalism
Concerned with the
natural
environment and
the material
conditions of this
life

High
Supernaturalism
Concerned with
one's specific
religious
community and in
obtaining access to
an afterlife/eternal
life via heaven or
reincarnation

Fig. 4.1 Continuum of secularity-religiosity (Adapted from Fig. 1.1 in Zuckerman et al. 2016, p. 26)

Benefit

Belonging

Behavior

Belief

Secularity ←————————————————→ **Religiosity**

Low
Supernaturalism
Concerned with the
natural
environment and
the material
conditions of this
life

High
Supernaturalism
Concerned with
one's specific
religious
community and with
obtaining access to
an afterlife/eternal
life via heaven or
reincarnation

Fig. 4.2 Continuum of secularity-religiosity (Adapted from Fig. 1.1 in Zuckerman et al. 2016, p. 26)

Let's suppose that the person represented in Fig. 4.1 is a generationally older American who was raised strictly religious but who questioned the parochialism of his parents' faith during the raucous 1960s while dating women of a number of different faiths. This person, perhaps in his 60s, 70s or 80s today, likely feels a respectful, if not overly strong, affiliation with the Protestant religion of his upbringing. His affiliation is more nostalgic

than feverish. His friendship network is composed of mainly Christians his age who share his race/ethnicity—some are Catholics, some are Protestants. His beliefs are also fairly religious—he purports to believe in Christ as the messiah of humanity and in the Ten Commandments as the sole complete statement of morality known to humankind. So, as regards belonging (i.e., religious affiliation) and believing, the person depicted in Fig. 4.1 is considerably, if not dogmatically and fundamentally, religious.

Yet, this hypothetical person depicted in Fig. 4.1 goes to church only rarely—maybe on Sundays for a few weeks if relations with the wife, or at work, are strained, but, for the most part, only on holidays like Christmas or Easter or for the occasional wedding or funeral. Thus, despite a set of casual supernatural beliefs and a willingness to affiliate with the Protestant church of his upbringing, this American fellow would rather watch football than church choirs on Sunday. He respectfully attends, hat in hand, the obligatory weddings, funerals, baptisms and other ceremonial events marking rites of passage, but this man, a representative of a lot of Americans, expresses his personal faith mostly privately and not publicly at church. Would we call him secular for his avoidance of, or disinterest in, church attendance? Probably not, since his belief system is (at least partly) supernatural, and because he openly identifies as a Christian. Still, compared to his grandparents, and their grandparents before, his religiosity is dissipating subtly, coyly and quietly.

Overall, the hypothetical American depicted in Fig. 4.1 might be said to benefit from religion in that he is gaining a perception of control over life and over his own mortality, along with an abstracted sense of communal belonging in claiming an affiliation with Christianity. He is not, however, benefitting from the social networks that churches foster—a social network that might potentially provide informal marital counseling, opportunities for childcare and child-friendly recreation, opportunities for volunteering, connections for employment, legal advice, help finding housing and other forms of social support. This hypothetical American is drawing *psychological* benefits from his religiosity but not *sociological* benefits. The supernatural ideological edifice of Christianity provides him a measure of existential comfort and calm, and his self-reported affiliation as a Christian provides a waif-thin sense of communal belonging. His social network is not, however, being buoyed or enhanced by an extended church family. His profile of religious "benefitting" is thus different than a religious person who attends church more frequently.

Of course, just because our hypothetical person in Fig. 4.1 fails to attend church does not mean that he is a reclusive shut-in who joins no

organizations. On the contrary, to the degree that our hypothetical person benefits from community and shared behaviors with others, this benefitting will likely be more secular, as when he joins a new gym with a friend, starts a new job or joins a new meet-up group online for a specific hobby. This person's beliefs and self-identification remain religious, but his behaviors are mostly secular.

As a second example, consider the hypothetical American depicted in Fig. 4.2.

Demographically, this hypothetical depiction is more representative of a younger generation of Americans, maybe someone in her early 20s or 30s. This person has a vague, respectful belief in the Christian mythology with which she was raised, but she only attends church occasionally on holidays or for weddings and funerals. Moreover, when asked to state her religious affiliation, this person claims "none" or no affiliation. This person is likely to have a diverse friendship network consisting of people from all manner of religious and racial/ethnic backgrounds. When pushed, this person is likely to relent her parochialism and admit that all religions are paradoxically equally true and good. Still, when not pushed, she falls back into the comforting religious mythology with which she is most familiar, using this fuzzy warmth to avoid anxieties about purpose, death, meaning and so on.

Unlike the hypothetical American depicted in Fig. 4.1, the one depicted in Fig. 4.2 likely draws more psychological, social psychological and sociological benefits from secular as opposed to religious sources. The more someone is exposed to, and subsequently adopts, secular *beliefs*, secular *behaviors* and opportunities to *belong* to secular groups, the more her "benefitting" is, itself, secular in nature.

These are merely hypothetical, though representative, depictions of secularism in the twenty-first-century United States. As these examples make clear, the issue of secularity is complex. Many Americans hold religious beliefs, but will decline to identify with any specific church. Still others claim religious self-identifications but few religious beliefs—so-called cultural Christians.

The process of secularization, at the societal level, has been linear in that the institutional relevance of religion has been in decline in the West for much of the last 500 years or so. However, the secularization of society is also nonlinear, as regards individual persons, in that most Americans of the early twenty-first century have one foot in and one foot out of the religion of their parents. The Christian Jesus-as-God mythology has lingered,

and the Ten Commandments are indeed recognized as authoritative. But, behind this polite belief in Christian mythology, our behaviors reveal our true feelings. Belief in god remains high in the United States, but self-identification with a specific religious affiliation, church attendance and daily prayer have all dropped off precipitously.

To understand and explain these dynamics in their fullness, let's examine the origin and historical context of the term "secularization."

SECULARIZATION

The modern English-language origin of the term and concept of "secularization" dates to sometime between the periods of the Protestant Reformation (~1517), the American Revolutionary War (~1775) and the French Revolution (~1789).

This was a fascinating time in human history—a time of unprecedented literacy, learning and exploration. The printing press, originally a Chinese technology, had been brought to Europe and perfected by Johannes Gutenberg by the mid-1400s; Christopher Columbus, Francisco Pizarra and Hernán Cortés would stumble upon the Americas in the beginning of the 1490s; Martin Luther would nail his treatise on the abuses of religious clergy to a church door in 1517; Descartes would use reason and logic to found modern philosophy in 1637; and a middle-aged Isaac Newton would finally publish his *Principia* detailing the three universal laws of motion only 50 years later in 1687.

Then came the revolutions that have so shaped the world. The resistance powers in both the American and French Revolutions shared two basic understandings in common: (1) kings will use their power arbitrarily if they are not subjected to laws and (2) collusions of religion and state authority limit religious freedom, because religious leaders will inevitably use state authorities to impose doctrinal ideology. The "Founders" of the United States and the "Third Estate" of the French Estates-General of 1789 were composed of the same demographic of people—wealthy men who had made money from inherited land or from their prestigious professions as a lawyer, physician, writer or skilled craftsman. What made this conglomerated early "middle class" demographic so interesting was what they *weren't*—nobleman or clergy. For centuries up to that point across the European world, political nobles and religious clergy had dominated state power and decision-making. These two understandings thus bubbled up from a populace that had never been more literate, materially

comfortable, or aware of their shared interests against corrupt monarchs and priests.

The classic quip attributed to the French writer Denis Diderot curtly sums up the sentiment of this era: "Mankind shall not be free until the last king is strangled in the entrails of the last priest." The term "secularization," in modern Western parlance, was born from this revolutionary context.

In sociology, secularization, or the declining importance of religion in public and private life, was taken for granted. Durkheim, in his doctoral dissertation *Division of Labor in Society* (1893[1997]) writes:

> Yet if there is one truth that history has incontrovertibly settled, it is that religion extends over an ever diminishing area of social life. Originally it extended to everything; everything social was religious—the two words were synonymous. Then gradually political, economic and scientific functions broke free from the religious function, becoming separate entities and taking on more and more a markedly temporal character. God, if we may express it in such a way, from being at first present in every human relationship, has progressively withdrawn. He leaves the world to men and their quarrels. At least, if he continues to rule it, it is from on high and afar off, and the effect that He exercises, becoming more general and indeterminate, leaves freer rein for human forces. The individual thus feels, and he is in reality, much less *acted upon*; he becomes more a source of spontaneous activity. (Durkheim 1893[1997], pp. 119–120, italics in original)

We might even go further back in time to Durkheim's predecessor in France, and the founder of sociology, Auguste Comte, who postulated a "Law of Three Stages" to explain the evolution of human knowledge (Comte 1876).

According to Comte's reading of history, human reflection and consideration have been slowly progressing, slowly improving. The first attempts at knowledge and explanation, Comte thought, could be found in hunter-gatherer societies as well as in early Greek and Roman society. In these early societies, Comte argued, people instinctually conceptualized the world as being inhabited by numerous invisible and fundamentally irrational and emotional gods, spirits and ancestors. Human knowledge during this period was unfalsifiable, teleological and agentic; people believed the "forces" behind weather, animal migration, disease and so on to be invisible, goal oriented, irrationally emotional and, basically, humanlike. Comte calls this the first stage of human knowledge, a theological, fictitious, provisional, stage of human knowledge (Comte 1876).

Comte's second stage of human knowledge, the "metaphysical" stage, was a transitional stage between theological/supernatural knowledge and the final, third stage of scientific knowledge. This second intermediate stage of human knowledge begins roughly in Europe around the middle ages. Attempts at philosophy during this period underscored the power of human reason and human rationality. Philosophers of the era, people like René Descartes and Blaise Pascal and, before them, people like Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham, were religious, but not polytheistic. The spirits and gods and ancestor ghosts that provided fodder for explaining the world in hunter-gatherer tribes were replaced, for Ockham, Aquinas, Pascal and Descartes, by a singular, monotheistic supergod that ruled the heavens and the earth rationally with discernible laws.

According to Comte, the chaotic polytheism of hunter-gatherer spirit worship and of the pantheon of Gods found in ancient Greek and Roman society had coalesced, over centuries, into a singular, all-powerful, all-knowledgeable Abrahamic God. This singular supergod emerged with the Zoroastrians who spread their belief in a single supergod to the Jews, who then transmitted it to early Christians, who, in turn, influenced the development of the Islamic supergod.

Belief in singular supergod became an organized, militant and globalized phenomenon when Constantine, King of the Roman Empire from 306 to 337 CE, officially declared Rome a specifically Christian (Catholic) Empire around 312 CE. Up to this point, Christians had been violently persecuted as heretics who failed to demonstrate a proper piety to the polytheistic religion of Greco-Roman mythology. However, upon Constantine's sudden, seemingly overnight conversion to Christianity, the Roman Empire became the "Holy" Catholic Roman Empire. Wars would hence be fought in the name of the Cross of Christ. This political/religious centralization and consolidation of power provided the cultural and intellectual context for early-modern philosophers like Aquinas and Ockham to speculate about the rational, ultimately reasonable, and perfectly moral mind of the Christian God.

Comte (1876) situates the intellectual foundation for rational, scientific knowledge in the metaphysical-religious mist of early European monotheism. In the polytheistic systems of ancient Greece, Rome and India, Comte argues, reality was conceived of as an inherently unpredictable chain of events determined by the constant and capricious interactions of various gods, demigods, ancestors and spirits who each had their own agenda and their own individual powers and weaknesses. Inquiries into

the natural world within these polytheistic belief systems relied heavily on attempts to understand a never-ending set of battles and antagonisms between celestial rabble-rousers. This gave people the impression that reality and nature were inherently unpredictable and subject to the moment-to-moment whims of powerful entities beyond the control of lowly human beings. Monotheism, or the belief in a singular, omnipresent, omnibenevolent and omnipotent deity, gave people the alternative impression that the world was stable, interpretable and lawful (i.e., governed by invariant, regular, rules).

This is why Comte saw Isaac Newton's work establishing laws of matter and motion, the cornerstone of modern science, as ultimately traceable to the rise of religious monotheism. Since the work of Newton, the institution of science has abandoned recourse to religious theories of nature, but it is this commitment to search for rational, predictable, laws of nature that Comte attributed, paradoxically, to the initial growth and spread of belief in a rational, predictable, all-powerful God. In this way, Comte traces the beginnings of societal secularization, perhaps ironically, to the growth and spread of monotheism.

Comte refers to this second stage of human knowledge, where the majority of learned, literate people in a society begin to systematically attempt rational (if religiously inspired) philosophy, as the "metaphysical stage." He chose this name because, in addition to building systems of rational philosophy, philosophers also began widely using proto-scientific "metaphysical" terminology to explain people and societies. This terminology included concepts like "the individual will" to explain human behavior, "the spirit of a society" to explain fluctuations in national policy and leadership, "astrology" as the basis for a proto-science of astronomy, "alchemic forces" as the basis for a proto-science of chemistry, the search for "homunculi" as the basis of consciousness, or the search for a "vital force" of living beings as the basis for a proto-science of medicine and biology. These concepts were semireligious/semi-supernatural and semi-scientific. For Comte, they represented humanity's heretofore most mature, but still woefully fuzzy and inaccurate, attempt to make sense of reality.

This second "stage" of rationalized monotheism and speculative metaphysics provided the basis for Comte's third and definitive stage of human knowledge—scientific knowledge. Beginning around the time of the Enlightenment in Europe, with the benefits of unprecedented populist wealth and literacy, metaphysical concepts were shaved down to their

empirical core, and modern science emerged. Philosophy became increasingly focused on the demonstrable and provable—Francis Bacon (who lived from 1561 to 1626), for example, was immensely influential with his philosophy of empirics where truth was determined by sense-data. That which could not be seen, heard, tasted or touched was probably not real. Humans, Bacon argued, had a tendency to concoct fantastical notions to explain events before paying close attention to the natural details of such events. This, in essence, put the cart before the explanatory horse; humans ought to systematically collect data and test alternative hypotheses *before* (and, ideally, instead of) assenting to explanations forged whole cloth from our fantasies.

This "Baconinan empiricism" comported nicely with Ockham's old dictum that the simplest explanation for a phenomenon was probably the correct one. For example, we might initially posit that a storm was caused by the complicated desires of supernatural beings, but if storms, in general, can more parsimoniously be explained as the mindless climatological emanation of heat, cold, water and wind, then we should favor the latter, simpler explanation.

So, in Comte's reading of history, which may be said to be roughly, if not exactly, accurate,[4] human knowledge evolves from explanations that resort to fundamentally unpredictable humanlike beings, to explanations that resort to one predictable humanlike being, to explanations that resort to invariant, abstract natural laws. The last step from the second, metaphysical, stage to the final, scientific, stage was deism. If the singular, all-powerful, rational God who had created the world had since retreated from human affairs, as the Deistic worldview maintained, the only faculty left to interpret human existence was the rational faculties of men and women. Such a view undergirded the rebellious fervor that would spark the French and American Revolutions of the eighteenth century.

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[4] Naturalistic, scientific philosophy can easily be found prior to Renaissance and Enlightenment-era Europe. It can be found in Ancient Greece with, for example, the rationalism of Heraclitus or the atomism of Democritus. Likewise, the "Islamic Golden Age," of math and astronomy, which flourished while Europe descended into the Dark Ages, was also a period of widespread natural philosophy. Indeed, this Islamic Golden Age produced perhaps the first non-Western school of scientific sociology with the work of Ibn Khaldun. So, we must say that Comte was roughly, if not precisely, correct about his theory of the evolution of human knowledge. His "Law of the Three Stages" is, in the end, needlessly linear and Eurocentric.

Comte's (1876) theory of the progression of human knowledge is, ultimately, optimistic. Knowledge, for Comte, has undergone a fairly linear evolution from theological to scientific forms. His vision for the future was equally optimistic—not only would most people eventually view life in scientific terms but the institution of science itself would be promoted as the religion of humanity. Comte's incredible optimism that scientific rationalism would come to dominate politics, family, economy and *even* religion was unparalleled in his time.

For the German sociologist Max Weber, born seven years after Comte's death in 1857, the process of secularization should be mitigated, if not avoided, instead of heralded. Weber wrote at length on a variety of topics in the sociology of religion. My secular-religious continuum discussed above, in fact, makes use of a distinction first offered by Weber between (relatively) more secular *this-worldly* and more supernatural *other-worldly* orientations to reality (Weber 1922[1978]). However, he is perhaps most remembered for his dour, morose opinion about secular society.

Weber considers the secularization of society from the standpoint of the institutional breakdown of the Catholic church initiated by the Protestant Reformation (Weber 1930[1992]). The philosophies of Luther and Calvin helped shift the center of Christian gravity from the Catholic church clergy to the private minds of individual adherents; no longer was salvation a province only of the wealthy who could afford to pay money to the church to have their sins forgiven. After the Reformation, sects of Protestant Christianity began offering a new form of personal salvation—simply, though earnestly, asking the Lord for forgiveness—that did not rest on one's ability to donate money to the church. This decentralization of religious authority, from the hierarchy of the Catholic church to the personal thoughts of individual Christians, fed the development of what we today call "Western" individualism.

Weber was, however, more interested in how the economic-religious nexus managed to continue on. The Catholic church's monopoly on salvation had one obvious benefit—it was easy to discern whether or not someone had been saved because the church hierarchy had publicly blessed them. With salvation now the responsibility of individual adherents, discerning who was saved became more difficult. Only the individuals themselves, in the privacy of their own thoughts, knew that they were saved—or not saved—because only they knew whether or not they had asked God to forgive their sins.

So, then, how did people know who had asked for salvation and who hadn't? How were people to discern who had been saved by God and who hadn't? While Catholics had an easy answer, to simply ask the church hierarchy who was saved and who was a heathen, Protestants did not. Prior to the rise of Protestantism, the Catholic church hierarchy provided an external "proof" of salvation. With the rise of Protestantism, however, people had to rely on something else to determine who was in the good graces of God and who was not.

This "something else" would actually be something quite familiar—worldly wealth. Though Protestants were not required to donate their money to the church in order to have their sins forgiven, those Protestants who nevertheless happened to be wealthy certainly appeared smiled upon by God. One's existing income or inheritance thus became a proxy for their holiness; after all, why would God lavish wealth on a sinner? So, instead of donating that money to the church, in exchange for salvation, the wealthy individual was now free to simply point to their pile of cash and confidently assert a blissful, though personal, relationship with God.

In this way, the pious asceticism of the Catholic monk who lived only to answer the "calling" of faith slowly gave way to the dogged workaholism of early industrialists and factory workers, who answered the "calling" of capitalism. If, indeed, the most certain sign of salvation is worldly wealth, then an unwavering commitment to one's job and career was more important than a public religious devotion which yielded no profit. More money was to be made at work than at church, and if the church hierarchy was no longer the source of salvation, what reason was there to go?

As Durkheim (1893[1997]) had noted, preindustrial farming economies required no individual specialization from their workers. However, with the establishment and growth of factories at the dawn of industrialization, peasants could no longer rest on their common knowledge of farming; instead, they would be required to develop specialized skillsets enabling them to operate complicated machinery. And, in order for this nascent industrial/factory economy of the nineteenth century to take off, people would need to be *motivated* to learn and develop such skillsets. This is why Weber suspected that the ethic of Protestantism, and its search for individual salvation through worldly wealth, had given birth to the spirit of capitalism.

For Weber, as for Comte, secularization had religious roots. Comte discovered the origins of science in monotheism, and Weber discovered the origins of capitalism in the Protestant search for individual salvation

through wealth. Capitalism was a harbinger of secularization for Weber primarily because the goals of a capitalist economy—rationality, calculability, efficiency and productivity—favored a "disenchanted" view of the world where miracles, myth and emotion were downplayed in favor of a calculating industrialism more concerned with material profit in *this* life instead of spiritual salvation in the *next*. More basically, Weber saw this as a slow loss of "value-rationality," where people acted upon strongly held, emotionally laden universal principles, in favor of an "instrumental-rationality" where people pursued their own, ultimately idiosyncratic, material comforts.

The future, as Weber saw it, was bound to be a bleak, disenchanted world where slavish workers submitted themselves to the rote demands of an increasingly powerful workplace bureaucracy. There is no room in this world for any whimsy, fun, enchantment or emotion. The profit motive sacralizes calculability, productivity and efficiency over revelation, miracle and emotional sharing. Modernity was thus barreling toward an "iron cage" of disenchanted bureaucracy. In their search for salvation through worldly wealth, people had unwittingly built a capitalist market economy which now dominated their time and daily activity. Weber writes:

> A specifically bourgeois economic ethic had grown up. With the consciousness of standing in the fullness of God's grace and being visibly blessed by Him, the bourgeois business man, as long as he remained in the bounds of formal correctness, as long as his moral conduct was spotless and the use to which he put his wealth was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interests as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so. The power of religious asceticism provided him in addition with sober, conscientious, and unusually industrious workmen, who clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by God […] The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells and into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order… Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history…Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt… [concern for materialism and hyper-productivity] should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment." But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage. (Weber 1930[1992], p. 120, 123)

The history of secularization theory, in an important sense, sits conflicted between two giants: Comte's incredible optimism that human knowledge was refining itself in successive stages and Weber's incredible pessimism that the individualization of modern faith and salvation had unintentionally produced an emotionless workaholism and an egotistical materialism.

The Multidimensionality of Modern Secularization Theory

Karel Dobbelaere (1981, 1985, 1999), a Belgian sociologist of religion, has been among the more influential modern theorists of secularization.

Dobbelaere sees secularization occurring at three distinct levels in society. At the "macro," or institutional, level of analysis, religion in Europe and the United States has clearly receded from politics and from economic and military decision-making *relative* to prereformation Europe.

In America, specifically, this differentiation of economy, polity and religion into separate institutional and bureaucratic spheres is not just cultural but constitutional. The first Amendment to the US Constitution[5] couldn't be more explicit:

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Dobbelaere then proceeds to the next level of analysis, the "meso," or group/organizational level of analysis. Since the "macro," or institutional, level of society is composed of configurations of groups/organizations, if the institutional centralization of religion breaks down, as we see happening in Europe in the 1500s, the next sociological prediction is that we will begin to see a "pluralization" of religious groups/organization (e.g., Dobbelaere 1999). And, indeed, this is exactly what happened after the Protestant Reformations of Europe began openly challenging Catholic authority. Competing Protestant sects flourished, filling the power vacuum left by the (slowly) declining Catholic church.

At the "micro," or individual, level of analysis, Dobbelaere sees an increasing personalization of belief. The decentralization of religious

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[5] https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment

authority at the institutional level produces organizational pluralism, which, in turn, presents the individual with numerous (perhaps too many) options for religious affiliation. Confronted with a menu of religious organizations to choose from, many people began cobbling together their own, personal, private faith. People in young adulthood increasingly sample different affiliations instead of simply following the religion of their parents. The result is a creole of religious culture—the modern American citizen may identify as "Christian," but the meaning of this identification is much more likely to be personally constructed over one's lifespan, as opposed to being imposed consistently by a single, local, church.

In their classic study of American life, Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven Tipton (1985) describe religiosity in the contemporary United States exceedingly well when they write:

> Today religion in America is as private and diverse as [traditional religious expression] was public and unified…Sheila Larson is a young nurse who has received a good deal of therapy and who describes her faith as 'Sheilaism.' 'I believe in God, I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism…It's just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other.' (Bellah et al. 1985, pp. 220–221)

"Sheilaism" is not atheism, it's not agnosticism, and it isn't Christian, Buddhist or Islamic. It's an amalgamation of religious beliefs—maybe a little "everything happens for a reason" here, a little "God has a plan for me" there and a dash of "all religion is just love." This form of faith is vague and nonspecific; but Dobbelaere and others have argued, it is nevertheless a cosmopolitan patchwork of genuine religious commitment.

Later, Bellah and colleagues sum up their opinion about the personalization of religiosity in contemporary society:

> Radically individualistic religion, particularly when it takes the form of belief in cosmic selfhood, may seem to be in a different world from conservative or fundamentalist religion. Yet these are the two poles that organize much of American religious life. To the first, God is simply the self magnified; to the second, God confronts man from outside the universe. (Bellah et al. 1985, p. 235)

Here, Bellah and colleagues are telling us how the centralization of religious power has swung from the church hierarchy to the individual. When religious authority is imbued in a single earthly church, as was the case in pre-Reformation Europe, the church's power is magnified. But, when religious authority fragments from a single, formal church hierarchy into a prism of competing churches and denominations, the power of the self is magnified because it is the self that must decide which church/denomination is the "correct" one.

Dobbelaere's three levels of secularization are instructive, and they have had a significant impact on how subsequent scholars have conceptualized the issue. Mark Chaves, for example, has argued that the study of secularization is primarily the study of declining religious authority (Chaves 1994).

Chaves insists that societal secularization (as a decline of religious authority at the institutional level) does not always co-occur with widespread individual secularization (as a loss of individual belief in God). Still, despite Chaves' keen observation that institutional secularization neither linearly nor inevitably produces individual secularization, the modern Christian Westerner is significantly less religiously dogmatic than they were even 50 years ago.

The philosopher Charles Taylor (2007) has been equally influential in modern definitions of secularization. His definition of secularization is as follows:

> a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed unproblematic to one in which it is understood to be on option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace. (Taylor 2007, p. 3)

Like Dobbelaere, Taylor conceptualizes secularization as a similarly three-pronged historical process, but he ditches the specifically sociological "macro, meso, micro" analysis. First, Taylor agrees that the institutional separation of church and state initiated by the French and American Revolutions were formative for modern Western secularization.

Taylor next describes how this institutional differentiation, this sequestering of religious authority to its own sphere of influence separate from economics and politics, opened up a previously hidden platform for secular, civic dialogue. This is what we today call the "public sphere" where issues are debated with recourse to evidence and logic, instead of to accusations of heresy. Taylor writes:

One understanding of secularity then is in terms of public spaces. These have been allegedly emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality…the norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, generally don't refer us to God or to any religious beliefs; the considerations we act on are internal to the "rationality" of each sphere—maximum gain within the economy, the greatest benefit to the greatest number in the political area, and so on. This is in striking contrast to earlier periods, when Christian faith laid down authoritative prescriptions, often through the mouths of the clergy, which could not be easily ignored in any of these domains, such as the ban on usury, or the obligation to enforce orthodoxy. (Taylor 2007, p. 2)

Thirdly, and lastly, Taylor describes secularization as a process of personalization. The process he suggests is similar to that suggested by Dobbelaere; a legal separation of church and state produces a secular civic sphere, which produces a cosmopolitan religious culture where individuals' religious beliefs are determined by their own interests and life experiences instead of by a single church or denomination.

Sociologist Jose Casanova (2006) suggests that the process of secularization can be viewed in three distinct, but related, ways. Secularization can be studied as the (1) personalization of belief, that is, as the tendency for people to develop religious identities independent of churches, (2) as declines in the absolute rate of religious belief or of religious behaviors like church attendance or prayer and/or as (3) the process of institutional differentiation whereby religion is legally and/or bureaucratically segregated from the institutions of politics, economy and science.

Like Chaves, Casanova argues that individual secularization is not an inevitable consequence of institutional secularization (see also Hadden 1987; Yamane 1997; Stark 1999). He points to the United States as the best example of a modern Western country where religion is legally differentiated from politics, but where, nevertheless, populist belief in God is still prevalent.

If some scholars insist that societal secularization in modernity is not inevitable or linear, other sociologists, for example, Bryan Wilson (2001), suggest that complete secularization might be more inevitable and (relatively) linear than scholars had previously assumed.

For Bryan Wilson, the causes of secularization are intrinsic to modernity, intrinsic to the shift from Tönnies' (1887[2002]) *Gemeinschaft* of homogeneous, rural "community" to a *Gesellschaft* of cosmopolitan, suburban/urban "society." The transition to modernity for Wilson is a transition

from subsistence farming, where the local church is the epicenter of culture, to an industrialized market economy where anticlerical institutions of media/entertainment and science are the epicenters of culture. This shift is, of course, slow and occurs over many hundreds of years.

Modernity is, for Wilson, also characterized by a popular culture dominated by the calculating rationality so suitable to a market economy. Here, he is drawing on Weber. Marital partners are assessed for their prospective economic earnings, college degree majors are assessed based on how high paying a job they will net, political parties are assessed by the number of jobs added to the economy, arts and music departments in public elementary, middle and high schools all around the country are cut or downsized because they do not generate enough independent revenue and public parks fall into disrepair because they, as well, fail to generate revenue and "pay for themselves."

In this milieu, where efficiency, calculability and profitability determine what people value, the church's offer of intangible spiritual salvation falls on deaf ears. Spiritual salvation does not directly cause employment. But, a college degree or an employment seminar might. Perhaps, when the difference between feast and famine on the family farm seemed to rest on the capricious whims of the weather, prayer and piety seemed sensible. However, with one's job prospects now dependent on demonstrating an idiosyncratic and sufficiently documented skillset, time spent in the church seems like time wasted.[6]

This Weberian rationalization is *manifestly* a large-scale societal shift from valuing primarily emotion and tradition toward a valuing of primarily efficiency and profitability. But, with Wilson as with Weber, this rationalizing outlook on life, which finds meaning only in the quantifiable, practical and profitable both *latently* encourages the wondrous growth of science/ technology *and* fundamentally undermines the ineffable offerings of the church.

Wilson points out that methods of social control during this shift from widespread subsistence farming to widespread suburban/urban living have changed as well. Today, the majority of the rules people are expected to follow are bureaucratic in nature—work dress codes, lunch-break times,

[6] This is not true, of course. Church-based social networks tend to be tight and dense, and such networks may be ideal for providing assistance with the calamities of lifelike unemployment. Not only do such networks provide emotional and financial support, they can also be a pipeline to future job interviews (see Putnam and Campbell 2010).

properly formatted performance reviews—instead of deeply moralistic, as with Moses' Ten Commandments. Rules are today followed to avoid being written up or fired—rules yesterday were followed to avoid beheading. This transition from a medieval-era legal system based in retributive laws (which mete out harsh, corporeal punishment) to an Enlightenment-era legal system based in restitutive laws (which mete out reparative punishment intended to reform the guilty party or compensate the victim) is a transition first discussed by Emile Durkheim in his *Division of Labor in Society* (1893[1997]). Wilson incorporates this insight and attaches it theoretically to Weber's process of rationalization. In modernity, even the criminal is treated as efficiently and profitably as possible instead of discarded on the gallows.

These chronological changes in society—beginning with the Protestant Reformations across Europe and running through industrialization, urbanization and the rise of natural and social science—have conspired to produce groups and organizations with decidedly this-world orientations and mission statements. The individuals that comprise these modern groups and organizations are themselves often embedded in multicultural, cosmopolitan social networks.

Such a diverse, rationalized, scientistic culture, existing as it does in a larger legal context of constitutional separation of church and state, provides the theoretical scaffolding for interpreting secularization in the United States (and elsewhere). Religious behavior and belonging will drop first, Wilson maintains, as these are both more time consuming and emotionally intensive than a simple purported set of religious beliefs. The prediction, then, is that church attendance, prayer and religious affiliation will begin to drop off in society before religious belief. And, this is precisely what we've seen (see, e.g., Voas 2009; Schwadel 2011; Baker and Smith 2015).

Wilson, in his own words, describes how truly subtle the process of secularization is:

> [Secularization is a] process by which religious institutions, actions and consciousness, lose their social significance. What such a definition does *not* imply is that all men have acquired a secularized consciousness. It does not even suggest that most individuals have relinquished all their interest in religion, even though that may be the case. It maintains no more than that religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system […] For every social problem, whether of economy, polity, law, education, family

relations, or recreation, the solutions proposed are not only non-religious, but solutions that depend on technical expertise and bureaucratic organization. Planning, not revelation; rational order, not inspiration; systematic routine, not charismatic or traditional action, are the imperatives in ever-widening arenas of public life. (Wilson 2001, as quoted in Monahan et al. 2011, p. 230, 237)

One satisfyingly complete picture of secularization, as both a phenomenon and a field of study, emerges from a reading of sociologists Jay Demerath (2007) and Olivier Tschannen (1991).

Demerath (2007) makes several great points. First, he points out that different societies may secularize to different degrees depending on the history of the country and demographic makeup of their citizenry.

Second, he notes that the three levels of secularization—("macro") institutional, ("meso") group/organizational and ("micro") individual—need to be measured in different ways. Declining rates of church attendance or of prayer or of religious fasting are measurements of declining individual religious behaviors, not of the secularization of groups/organizations. Similarly, the study of legal cases defending church-state separation is a study of secularization at the macro-institutional level, not at the micro-individual level.

When social scientists attempt to test their hypothesis that society is becoming increasingly secular, they need to be specific about the measurements of "religiousness" that they are using and at what level of analysis they are demonstrating religious decline (i.e., secularization). Those opposed to the thesis that modernity automatically produces secularization, such as Mark Chaves (1994), Rodney Stark (1999), Jeffrey Hadden (1987), Jose Casanova (2006) and Jurgen Habermas (2008), all concede that religious elites have less political power today than they did 500 years ago, so institutional measures of secularization are, for them, not in dispute. However, these scholars push back and say that, though religion has been differentiated from politics and the economy and science, it does not necessarily follow that individual religious belief will also decline. Thus, Demerath insists on the importance of measuring secularization at all levels of analysis (macro, meso, micro) so that the process can be accurately understood.

Lastly, Demerath points out that secularization may lead not only to the disappearance of religion but also, potentially, to the radical transformation of religion. This radical transformation can occur as a "religious

awakening" in response to secularization, as we saw with the rise of the Religious Right beginning in the 1970s. But such a radical transformation of religion can also occur as when people become fervently patriotic or fervently political, or fervently occupational. In William James' sense, the religious impulse—as a calling to a goal and a community much grander than oneself—may show up elsewhere than the church. It may show up as a religious adherence to nation, as when the Chinese and German and Russian populace deified Mao, Hitler and Stalin into all-knowing, all-good earthly gods. Or, it may show up as a religious adherence to science, as when Comte insisted that scientists would be the high priests of the future, or as a faith in the economy, as with Adam Smith's "invisible hand," or Ayn Rand's worship of selfish entrepreneurialism.

Demerath calls the transformation of religion, in response to secularization, a process of *sacralization*. He writes:

> Sacralization is the process by which the secular becomes sacred or other new forms of the sacred emerge, whether in matters of personal faith, institutional practice or political power. And sacralization may also occur gradually or suddenly and may be sometimes temporary and occasionally reversible. (Demerath 2007, p. 66)

In addition to these three caveats regarding the study of secularization—that secularization occurs in degrees, that it needs to be measured at multiple levels and that it can cause a transformation in religion—Demerath (2007) also provides an insightful framework for thinking about various secularization scenarios. In Demerath's terms, secularization can occur *internally or externally*, and it can be a more or less *directed or undirected process*.

Mid-twentieth-century communist revolutions in Cuba, Vietnam, Russia, North Korea, China and elsewhere, which enforced atheism on the population, would be prime examples of secularization that is both (1) internal and directed/coercive. Secularization that is (2) internal and relatively undirected can be seen throughout the Western world; countries like Canada, Sweden, Denmark and, yes, even the United States are experiencing their lowest rates of church attendance and daily prayer on record. Yet, these declines appear to have occurred organically, and not by the threat of death as happened in the above-mentioned communist countries.

Alternatively, secularization that is (3) both external and directed occurs when a secular imperialist power co-opts or colonizes a foreign govern-

ment. As an example of this third scenario of secularization, Demerath (2007) points to the educational programs imposed by European missionaries in Africa and elsewhere that reduced the proliferation and number of supernatural beliefs.

And, finally, secularization can be (4) external and relatively undirected. This latter secularization process occurs as a result of globalization and the spread of Western culture. As more secular governments indirectly diffuse their popular culture to less secular societies via proliferation of media technology (i.e., radio, television, internet), overall secularization increases.

If Demerath helpfully delineates important research caveats and possible scenarios of secularization, Olivier Tschannen (1991) helpfully organizes the main components of secularization as a *theory* of society. Specifically, Tschannen reviews the work of numerous twentieth-century secularization theorists[7] and identifies several key dynamics that they share in common.

He finds that the only theoretical construct shared by all the theorists is *institutional differentiation*, or the process of legal/bureaucratic or cultural separation of the institution of religion from the institution of politics, economy and science. Especially since the rise of the Religious Right in the United States, we cannot quite say that the institution of religion has differentiated from the institution of family—indeed, religion continues to be a strong predictor of fertility throughout the world (Heaton 2011; Zuckerman et al. 2016). Still, it is clear in the United States that religion has differentiated from politics and economy and this differentiation, regardless of the theorist, is traced, in various Weberian ways, to the rise of Protestantism and market capitalism.

After institutional differentiation, Tschannen notes two other "core theoretical concepts" mentioned by secularization theorists: *economic rationalization* (i.e., concerns with profitability) and *this-worldliness*. Both are clearly Weberian, and both cause secularization by disenchanting and demystifying religious worldviews. Someone can claim to perform miracles, but if this ability isn't putting money in your bank account or healing your injuries so that you can return to work, it isn't, in a modern capitalist sense, useful. Miracles and supernaturalism in this rationalized, materialist worldview appear excessive and pointless if not deranged.

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[7] Specifically, Thomas Luckmann, Peter Berger, Bryan Wilson, David Martin, Richard Fenn, Talcott Parsons and Robert Bellah.

Blending Tschannen's (1991) conceptualization with Dobbelaere's, we can say that institutional differentiation, rationalization and this-worldliness are changes happening among and within the macro-institutional and meso-group/organizational levels of analysis. And, as a consequence, on the micro-individual level of analysis, people are becoming more autonomous (from church control), private (about their faith) and multicultural (in their choices of friends and romantic partners).

This collection of insights has been formative in building contemporary secularization theory. We can, however, dig even deeper into the theoretical sediment of secularization theory in order to unearth even more fundamental truths. The secularization of society is indeed a result of institutional differentiation, economic rationalization this-worldly group/organizational orientation and personalization of faith. However, the secularization of society is more than this.

Most fundamentally, secularization emerges from cultural loosening and self-dimensionality. When culture loosens, people perceive a greater freedom of behavior and belief, and when the self becomes multidimensional, people perceive a greater sense of individual power. The perception of freedom of belief and behavior and the perception of personal power are the antecedent foundations for secularization. Everything else sits atop this theoretical foundation. In order to show why this is, we first need a working theory of culture. This is what we turn to next.

Secularization Theory: A Contemporary Synthesis

Defining Culture

There are at least two ways to think about culture: as an entity or as a dynamic system (Kitayama 2002). The entity view portrays culture as basically static and composed of a "set of values such as self-assertion, uniqueness, duty, and group harmony. These values are internalized and cognitively represented (otherwise, they would not be measured with questionnaires). Furthermore, they are 'assumed to shape behaviors'" (Kitayama 2002, p. 92).

A common usage of the entity view of culture is to discuss cultural differences between "individualistic" and "collectivistic" cultures. "Individualistic" cultures are typically portrayed as Western and "collectivistic" cultures are portrayed as South and East Asian (Nisbett 2004; Varnum et al. 2010; Kessler et al. 2014). Each cultural entity—individual-

istic or collectivistic—is in some sense attributable to the individual mental states of the culture's inhabitants. Personal values are cultural values writ small and cultural values are personal convictions writ large (Kitayama 2002; Na et al. 2010). The "entity" that is culture can thus be measured with opinion surveys, and can be assumed to be a causal antecedent of all behaviors in that culture.

Unfortunately, this view of culture as an entity is metaphysical and circular. If people are more individualistic because they are more independent and autonomous, and they are more independent and autonomous because they were raised in a more individualistic culture, what are we really saying that is of any insight? How do we explain peoples' individual beliefs and behaviors without recourse to the general cultural beliefs and behaviors they were exposed to growing up?

Researchers that subscribe to the second view of culture conceptualize the matter in a different way (D'andrade 2001; Kitayama 2002; Uskul et al. 2008; Talhelm et al. 2014). In this framework, cultures are dynamic systems of related institutions, instead of static collections of values. For them, the interesting question is not why some cultures seem different from others, but, rather, why some people in "individualistic" cultures are more individualistic than others, or why some people in "collectivistic" cultures are more collectivistic than others.

Instead of conceptualizing culture as an entity to be discovered, these theorists think of culture as a dynamic system that oscillates between individualistic-collectivistic manifestations depending on the internal and external conditions of the system. In this theoretical framework, there are no individualistic and collectivistic cultures, just a basic human culture dispersed throughout the globe and oscillating slowly from one form of social organization to the other depending on the ecological constraints and institutional history of that specific culture (D'andrade 2001).

I will be using a systems view of culture as my theoretical framework for recasting secularization theory. Cultures are systems of institutions. These institutions address panhuman needs and interests. The institutions I will be focusing on, which are constitutive of "culture," are (1) the economy (or the large-scale behavioral and belief patterns associated with food collection/storage and material possessions), (2) the law/military (or the behavioral and belief patterns associated with managing crime, terrorism and war), (3) politics (or the behavioral and belief patterns associated with the formal regulation of institutional behavior and of civil rights), and, of course, (4) family (or the behavioral and belief patterns associated with

marriage and child-rearing). For industrial and postindustrial societies, I will also be making reference to the spread of literacy and the development of (5) institutions of science and mass education (or the behavioral and belief patterns associated with the gaining, storing and dissemination of technical/secular information).

Notice that the institution of religion is absent from my list of five institutions above—this is only because I will be arguing that religion grows and strengthens as a compensatory form of control and order when these other institutions begin to break down.

Within any given culture, these five institutions will be produced and reproduced in everyday interactions. Though we can speak of "large-scale behavioral and belief patterns" characteristic of different institutions, the making and remaking of such patterns occurs through the everyday exchange of verbal and nonverbal symbols, individual adherence to standards/traditions and use of a variety of tools/artifacts specific to that institution (e.g., guns for law/military, ledgers for economy and ordinances for polity). Often, these verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, adherence to rules, and use of tools/artifacts become, over time, so habitual that they are processed relatively subconsciously and implicitly. (Kitayama 2002).

These are not the only institutions in human society (see Turner 2010), but, as I will show, these are the primary institutions relevant to secularization. Viewing culture as a dynamic system of these five institutions provides ideal footing for developing a generalizable theory of secularization.

Next we turn to the two most fundamental processes of secularization: first, the loosening of culture, and second, the increasing multidimensionality of the self.

Cultural Tightness-Looseness

In 1968, anthropologist Pertti Pelto published a fascinating article entitled "The differences between 'tight' and 'loose' societies." In it, he describes how anthropologists throughout history have made scattered references to the ways in which some cultures insist on strict rule and norm following more than others, or how some cultures punish deviance more severely than others.

Pelto cited work by sociologist Murray Straus in suggesting three criteria for what he called "cultural looseness":

- Norms are expressed with a wide range of alternative channels.
- Deviant behavior is easily tolerated.
- Values of group organization, formality, permanence, durability, and solidarity are undeveloped, (Pelto 1968, p. 38).

By contrast, "cultural tightness" is a measure of how hierarchical, behaviorally rigid or intolerant of deviance a society is. Pelto argued that the following were 12 indicators of cultural tightness across societies:

- Permanent recognized political control
- Legitimate use of force
- Political authority differentiated within the community
- Some conscription of economic goods, including money, as taxation
- Priests and/or religious societies present
- Some conscription of labor
- Hereditary recruitment to priesthood or religious society when they exist within the local community
- Curing of illness in hands of community or sub-community leaders, priests, or religious society or of other persons identified with leadership
- Mainly corporate ownership and use of production property
- Some corporate ownership of stored food
- Some corporate control of incorporeal property
- Theocracy (Pelto 1968, p. 39)

So, for example, a society with a permanently recognized political body (vs. one without) or a society with a hierarchy of shaman or priest "doctors" will tend to have stricter norms and guidelines for belief and behavior along with stricter punishment for deviance.

Each of the 21 societies Pelto analyzed in his study (all were nonliterate, semi-settled foraging or horticultural societies) had a permanently recognized political body, but, for example, only five *also* had a hierarchy of shaman or priests dedicated to curing illness and only three of *those* societies were full-blown theocracies. The tightest societies, according to Pelto's criteria, were those that had the greatest number of these above such indicators.

Pelto classified all 21 societies in his sample according to the above 12-item set of indicators. According to his classification, the Hutterites of North America, Hano of Arizona and Lugbara of Uganda were the tightest societies while the Skolt Lapps of Finland, Cubeo of Brazil and the !Kung Bushmen of South Africa were the loosest.

Pelto suspected that his 12 indicators were actually reflecting three more basic phenomena: (1) unilateral versus bilateral family/kinship sys-

tems, (2) degree of dependence on agriculture and (3) population density per square mile.

Unilateral family/kinship systems are those in which descent and group membership is traced exclusively through *either* the father or the mother. In bilateral family/kinship systems, descent and group membership is traced through *both* the father's and the mother's side of the family. Bilateral systems are looser than unilateral systems because they permit the individual two possible avenues for self-understanding and norm acquisition instead of one.

Pelto also noticed that some societies were significantly more dependent on farming and agriculture than others (who foraged or fished for their food). He writes:

> High reliance on food crops may be another source of the tight structure. Growing and harvesting crops on a large scale requires teamwork, and rigid organization may be needed to mobilize and direct the people's efforts toward the common goal of an abundant harvest. (Pelto 1968, p. 40)

The high number of specialized skills and coordinated behaviors required for successful crop farming engenders, Pelto thought, more normative restrictions on behavior and greater punishment for deviance.

And, lastly, Pelto suggested that increases in population density should provide pressures for the formulation of strict behavioral codes so as to foster peaceful coexistence. Within a band of 25 hunter-gatherers, people can rely on personal friendships and shared memories to sustain cooperative interactions. In a settled agricultural society of hundreds or thousands, however, formal codes and standards for behavior become practical. Denser populations should thus be culturally tighter relative to less dense populations.

At the very end of his article, Pelto muses, "It is a curious fact that, throughout history, tight social planning has characterized most of the world's Utopias" (Pelto 1968, p. 40). Pelto found this curious only because he had not yet fully explored *why* cultures tighten or loosen. He had so far only demonstrated that some are tight and some are loose, providing indicators of each.

Tightness-looseness is a function of *differential exposure to threat within and among cultural systems*. Tight social planning has "characterized most of the world's Utopias," because when people are threatened, they bind together rigidly and hierarchically in hopes of collective survival. Why else would Utopia be so irresistibly tantalizing if not because one is suffering so horrifically in the moment? When people are not threatened regularly,

when they are not suffering to the same degree, they loosen their attachments to and requirements of others while enjoying the same freedom. When perceived threat is low, it is not collective survival people pursue but leisure and self-actualization.

Differential exposure to threat within and among institutions means that whether it is the institution of economy, law/military, politics or family that is being threatened, the accumulation of threat/strain/stress within and among these institutions will produce rigid hierarchies, strict expectations for behavior and strong punishment for deviance.

The notion that threat perception increases religiosity originates in classical sociology with Marx and, in modern sociology of religion, with Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2000).

Stark and Finke, at the time, were theorizing about the most basic way to distinguish between (relatively) dogmatic, hierarchical, behaviorally rigid *sects* and (relatively) decentralized and behaviorally casual *churches*. Citing sociologist Benton Johnson, they decided that what fundamentally separated sects from churches was what they termed "tension," defined as "the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the 'outside' world" (Stark and Finke 2000, p. 143). In their conception, churches are in low tension with their environment, and sects are in high tension. Stark and Finke are primarily defining tension in symbolic terms—as perceived threat from other religious groups or from the state. Yet, threats or "tensions" can emerge not only from territorial disputes and political repression, but also from disease, natural disaster, poverty and family disruption among other things.

Figure 4.3 depicts a representative set of threats within each institutional domain of a given cultural system, drawn from a sampling of researchers who have investigated the impact of threat perception on religiosity.

On the far-left side are ecological threats that are exogenous to the cultural system, but which nevertheless tighten the system. Famine due to climate fluctuation or nonarable land, along with the devastating effects of natural disasters, always threatens to disrupt or destroy economies and families within cultures. Additionally, chronic historical exposure to disease, called "pathogen prevalence" or "parasite load" in the research literature, has also been theorized to tighten human cultures. The biologist Randy Thornhill and the psychologist Corey Fincher (2014; Fincher and Thornhill 2012) argue that the rules and expectations for behavior that underlie social coordination become strict and circumscribed when groups

Natural Environment	Economy	Law/Military	Politics	Family	Science /Technology and Mass Education
Population density per square mile	Higher Dependence on Crops vs. hunting or fishing	crime/domestic civil unrest	autocratic rule that suppresses dissent	family disruption (divorce)	transportation access
natural disasters (floods, tropical cyclones, earthquakes and droughts)	per capita income	Territorial disputes/cultural tensions with neighbors	arbitrary restriction of political involvement for group/organizations	single-parent female-headed households	% literate
Historical disease/parasite/pathogen prevalence	% rural living	war/terrorism	fewer political rights and civil liberties	housing insecurity/ %homeowners	Educational attainment (especially tertiary educational attainment for women)
Famine: low proportion of arable land, low supply of protein and fat	Income inequality (gini)		political instability (non-democratic leadership turnover)	fertility	less access to and use of radio, television and other communication technologies
Low water or air quality	%unemployed/job insecure		more laws and regulations and political pressures and controls for media		broadband internet access
					life expectancy
					infant and child mortality rates
					access to immunizations
					Contemporary Mortality rate from communicable diseases (tuberculosis, hepatitis, AIDS)
					healthcare coverage

Fig. 4.3 Representative threats by institutional domain (representative researchers include Pelto 1968; Gelfand et al. 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2011; Zuckerman et al. 2016; Schwedler 2006; Immerzeel and van Tubergen 2013)

of people sense disease in others. Infectious diseases passed from human to human (e.g., measles, tuberculosis, cholera, hookworm, leprosy, dengue fever) are a threat in the most fundamental organismic way. Cultural and subcultural tightening provides perceived (if not actual) protection from infection because outsiders and those who provide the faintest indications of biological or psychological "deviance" are immediately killed or sequestered from group contact.

Using data from the World Values Survey, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control, Fincher and Thornhill find that, across 65 separate countries *and* across 43 states in the United States (for which there were data), pathogen prevalence was positively associated with closer family ties, higher rates of religious affiliation and valuing of religion. They write:

> We argue that the maintenance of [rigid in-group loyalty] by practiced and signaled religious allegiance provides two benefits: (a) the protective barrier provided by separation from out-group individuals who may harbor novel infectious diseases and/or perform non-normative behavior; and (b) in-group embeddedness that reduces the morbidity and mortality caused when infectious disease invades the in-group. Hence, measures of the importance of religion for people in an area should be predictable based on the area's position along the parasite gradient, reflecting the average infectious disease stress experienced by people in the region. (Fincher and Thornhill 2012, p. 67)

Tight cultures provide clear guidelines for interaction and comportment, along with substantially dense social networks that can provide aid in the event of infection. It is important to reiterate that cultural tightening in response to pathogen prevalence (or, for that matter, in response to famine, or natural disaster) typically occurs over dozens, if not hundreds, of years, though the rate of tightening/loosening can change depending on the severity of the threat experienced.[8]

Subsequent research supports this general *parasite-stress hypothesis* (Fincher and Thornhill 2012; see also Schaller et al. 2015). Reviews of studies indicate that the average correlation between index measures of pathogen prevalence and index measures of tightening is quite high (e.g., r = 0.73, Schaller and Park 2011). This relationship holds even after con-

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[8] In our modern globalized world—and in this age of social media—threat perception, and tightening, is destined to begin picking up speed.

trolling for confounding variables like poverty or demographic composition of the country.

Florian Van Leeuwen and his colleagues (2012), in still another study, find that historical pathogen prevalence (leishmanias, schistosomes, trypanosomes, leprosy, malaria, typhus, filariae, dengue fever and tuberculosis) and contemporary pathogen prevalence (filariae, leishmanias, leprosy, malaria, schistosomes, spirochetes and trypanosomes) positively predicted individual values associated with loyalty to the in-group and respect for authority. This relationship held across more than 100,000 people surveyed in over 60 different countries. And, to underscore the cumulative, slow nature of cultural tightening, historical pathogen prevalence was more predictive of in-group loyalty and respect for authority than was contemporary pathogen prevalence. This deference to authority and intense in-group loyalty can fairly quickly become authoritarian as people compete with one another to punish deviants or those perceived to be diseased or, more generally, "impure" (Murray et al. 2011, 2013; see also Willer et al. 2009).

Though recurrent exogenous ecological threats like famine, natural disaster or disease shock entire cultural systems, there are also institution-specific threats we can discern (see Fig. 4.3).

Some scholarships (e.g., Van Leeuwen et al. 2014) have found conflicting results when using measures of pathogen prevalence to predict tightness in the United States. This is because there are more sources of threat than cumulative exposure to disease or to ecological disruption. Though ecological threats may be primary, as they are shared by all species of animal, distinct threats in the institutions of economy, law/military, politics and family are also, nevertheless, cumulatively relevant to the tightening of human culture.

Cultural psychologist Michele Gelfand and her colleagues (2011) explore cultural tightness-looseness in a more multidimensional fashion among 6823 people in 33 nations. Regarding geographical/ecological threats, they find that higher population density in the year 1500 (r = 0.77, P = 0.01) is very strongly related to current cultural tightness. Frequency of natural disasters (e.g., floods, cyclones, droughts) (r = 0.47, P = 0.01), higher levels of food deprivation (r = 0.52, P = 0.01), years of life lost to infectious diseases (r = 0.59, P < 0.01) and lower access to safe water (r = −0.50, P = 0.01) were also strongly related to cultural tightness. Additionally, cultures with poor air quality (r = −0.44, P = 0.02), a lower percentage of arable farmland (r = −0.37, P = 0.05) and with lower

protein and fat intake ($r_{protein} = -0.41$ and $r_{fat} = -0.46$, Ps = 0.03 and 0.01) were tighter than those with cleaner air, more fertile farmland or greater access to dietary protein and fat.

In addition to these ecological indicators of threat, Gelfand et al. (2011) find consistent relationships between the tightness of culture and territorial threats with neighbors over the 83-year period from 1918 to 2001 ($r = 0.41$, $P = 0.04$). Possibly in response to territorial threats, tight nations are also more likely to have autocratic governments ($r = 0.47$, $P = 0.01$) that provide few political rights and civil liberties for their populace ($r_{political\ rights} = -0.50$ and $r_{civil\ liberties} = -0.45$, Ps ≤ 0.01).

Autocratic governments that repress dissent are a response to and a cause of perceived stress in the cultural system. Once the autocratic government is in place, it enforces rigid rules for behavior and belief, both of which may provide the perception of order and stability, reducing the sense of threat. However, autocratic governments also tend to punish and/or discourage creativity, self-expression and political dissent. Such arbitrary repression of individuality and of political organizing can foment resistance and revolt under the right conditions (Gurr 1970; Moore 1978).

Paradoxically, because tighter cultures have stricter implicit and explicit rules for conduct and punish deviance more severely, levels of social protest are lower in tighter cultures relative to looser cultures (Gelfand et al. 2011). In tighter cultures, protest is rare, severe and politically consequential, whereas in looser societies protest is common, more casual, and any one protest will be less politically impactful.

A multidimensional measure of threat, one that acknowledges disruption to the cultural system stemming from ecological *and* human-made threats (i.e., territorial disputes), has been robust enough to predict differences in tightness-looseness across various states in the United States.

Jesse Harrington and Michele Gelfand (2014) show in a recent study that states in the United States reliably cluster on various points along a tightness-looseness continuum. Measuring tightness as an index of state legality of corporal punishment in schools, the percentage of students hit or punished in school, the rate of state executions of criminals from 1976 to 2011 and the severity of punishment for commonly violated laws (i.e., marijuana possession), they find that Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky, South Carolina and North Carolina are the ten tightest states, while California, Oregon,

Washington, Nevada, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Hawaii, New Hampshire and Vermont are the ten loosest ones (Harrington and Gelfand 2014).

In accordance with the theory that threat perception within and among the cultural system produces tightening, Harrington and Gelfand (2014) show that state-level tightening is associated with a higher incidence of natural disasters, greater pathogen prevalence, fewer natural resources (i.e., rates of poverty and food insecurity) and greater degree of external threat (i.e., proportion of slaveholders in each state during the Civil War period [1860], or contemporary degree of military recruitment in each state).

Perhaps, most important of all, the tightest states in the United States are also the most religious. Subsequent studies confirm that institutional- and group/organizational-level threats predict religiosity at the individual level (e.g., Solt et al. 2011). Reviewing this research, Zuckerman et al. (2016) write:

> As is the case when comparing countries the world over, when it comes to nearly all standard measures of societal health—such as homicide rates, violent crime rates, poverty rates, domestic abuse rates, obesity rates, educational attainment, funding for schools and hospitals, teen pregnancy rates, rates of sexually transmitted diseases, unemployment rates, and domestic violence—the correlation remains robust: the most secular states in America tend to fare much better than the most religious. (Zuckerman et al. 2016, p. 83)

Political scientists Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2004[2011]) agree that religious belonging, behavior and belief emerges in response to the general perception of ecological and social threats. They call this the *security axiom*: basic living conditions and perceived vulnerability to risk impact religiosity. Again, they find that the perception of threat can have numerous sources: famine, disease, natural disaster, ethnic conflict, war, crime, inconsistent access to shelter, lack of healthcare, low per capita income and poor options for schooling/low literacy. People, they argue, perceive threats at the national, community and personal levels, and the more cumulative risk they perceive, the more security/comfort/meaning/control they will seek. Religion fills this vacuum, providing an ideal source of meaning and control for people experiencing high levels of vulnerability (Kay et al. 2009; Hogg et al. 2010).

People who experience a great deal of threat and deprivation are happier when they are religious (Hoverd and Sibley 2013). Religious belonging, belief and behavior *buffer* people from the unpleasant psychological perception of threat.

Subsequent research has been overwhelmingly supportive of Norris and Inglehart's security axiom (e.g., Rees 2009; Barber 2011; Baker and Smith 2015). For example, one study of 26 European countries using data from the European Social Survey (2002–2008) found that high levels of self-reported religiosity and frequent church attendance were more common among people who were unemployed (temporarily or not), had unemployed parents in childhood, lived through a wartime growing up, had health problems and/or lived in a country with lower social services spending (Immerzeel and Van Tubergen 2013). The authors of this study suggest that threats experienced growing up can have as significant of an effect on someone's adult religiosity as threats experienced in adulthood. This is a significant point, given the variable rate of intergenerational transmission of religion—cohorts that experienced threat in youth may be more religious over the life-course than those who experience less threat. This is obviously applicable to the generation of Americans who came of age throughout the Great Depression and World War II.

Results from yet another study of 60 countries found that an index measure of (1) perceived threat, (2) institutional separation of church from politics and (3) degree of parental religious socialization explained an incredible 75% of the variation in cross-national church attendance (Ruiter and Van Tubergen 2009). The index measure of threat used by these researchers was multidimensional with indicators across institutional domains and levels of analysis. Some examples of threat measures used in the study are: national tertiary education rates and individual educational attainment, national income inequality and individual per capita income, national proportion of people living in urban (vs. rural) areas and individual employment status.

In another multilevel analysis of 40 countries, rising levels of national income inequality positively predicted individual beliefs that public office holders should be religious and that religious leaders should involve themselves in politics (Karakoc and Baskan 2012). This effect was strongest among poorer respondents living in nations with high levels of income inequality. In nations with lower levels of income inequality, poor respondents were more secular.

Frederick Solt and his colleagues (2011) argue that income inequality attracts wealthy people to religion, because religion, in the right hands, is an effective tool of manipulative social control over the poor and desperate. Wealthy elites, they argue, are at least somewhat aware of the power they wield by using religious symbols and mythology to pacify the impoverished. Though interesting, and undoubtedly true to a degree, Solt et al.'s (2011) position strikes me as overly Marxist—at any rate, we can say that religion certainly comforts and provides perceived control for the powerless even if elites are not always nefariously directing this process.

Ekrem Karakoc and Birol Baskan (2012) suggest that the United States has higher rates of religious belief, affiliation and church attendance relative to other Western countries because technological advancement has reduced *absolute deprivation* (e.g., starvation) in the United States, but a stagnant inflation-adjusted minimum wage, occupational deunionization and outsourcing of manufacturing jobs has contributed to rising *relative deprivation* in the form of income inequality. Basic sanitation, nutrition and healthcare have steadily improved since the industrial revolution, but, ever since 1970, inequality in income has actually risen in the United States (Chetty et al. 2014; Long and Ferrie 2013). It isn't just income inequality that is unusually high in the United States (compared to, say, Northern Europe) but also general indices of crime and infant mortality as well (Paul 2005).

Despite this, rising numbers of people in the United States never attend church, and around a quarter claim no religious affiliation (Norris and Inglehart 2007). Even though the United States faces more threats to security relative to many other Western countries, it is immediate threats (starvation, disease) that most influence fervent religiosity, and most immediate threats, that is, much of the *absolute deprivation*, has been reduced in the United States since 1950 (Paul 2009). If secularization in the United States is occurring slower than elsewhere in the West, this is because Americans have perceived more daily threats from income inequality, job loss, crime and lack of healthcare over the last several decades (Inglehart and Norris 2007; Paul 2005). In considering the unusually high (if dropping) religiosity of Americans, Gregory Paul (2009) refers to the United States as "the most dysfunctional prosperous democracy."

Aside from these changes to the US economy and to US jobs after 1970, "modernization" (defined as industrialization, urbanization, mass

education and technological complexity) generally produces secularization by reducing threat associated with absolute deprivation (Inglehart and Norris 2007).

However, modernization also reduces fertility rates (as women increasingly pursue educational and occupational goals), and so, overall, fewer children are born to women in advanced industrial societies compared to preindustrial or industrializing societies. This is why the world, as a whole, is becoming proportionally more religious even if secularization continues in ever-loosening advanced industrial societies.

Tightness-looseness is not only an institutional-level phenomenon as depicted in Fig. 4.3. The tightness-looseness of a society can be viewed at multiple levels of analysis—certainly at the ecological or institutional level but also at the group/organizational and individual levels. At the individual and group/organizational levels, tightness-looseness is profoundly *situational*. From a dramaturgical perspective, an adherence to hierarchy and rigid rules (or conversely, self-expression and autonomy) must be performed and reperformed by individuals in tight (or loose) cultures throughout numerous situations each day (Goffman 1959, 1967; Giddens 1984). Michele Gelfand and her colleagues remark that tightness-looseness:

> is manifested not only in distal ecological, historical, and institutional contexts but also in everyday situations in local worlds (e.g., at home, in restaurants, classrooms, public parks, libraries, the workplace) that individuals inhabit. We theorize that tightness-looseness is reflected in the predominance of strong versus weak everyday situations. Strong situations have a more restricted range of appropriate behavior, have high censuring potential, and leave little room for individual discretion. Weak situations place few external constraints on individuals, afford a wide range of behavioral options, and leave much room for individual discretion… Individuals who are chronically exposed to stronger (versus weaker) situations in their everyday local worlds have the continued subjective experience that their behavioral options are limited, their actions are subject to evaluation, and there are potential punishments based on these evaluations. (Gelfand et al. 2011, p. 1101)

Thus, habitual exposure to "strong"/tight situations or "weak"/loose situations, from birth, produces reliable on-average differences in peoples' social psychology.

	Adaptations	
Domain	Loose Social Organization (Low Threat)	Tight Social Organization (High Threat)
Attention	Field Independent	Field Dependent
Reasoning	Analytical; Critical; Abstract	Normative; Traditional; Concrete
Attributions	Dispositional	Situational
Self-Understanding	Independent and Self-Directed	Interdependent and Other-Directed
Values	Individualism	Collectivism
Emotionality	Higher proportion of socially disengaging emotions; Happiness as social disengagement	Higher proportion of socially engaging emotions; Happiness as social engagement
Motivation	Personal Achievement; Self-Enhancement	Group Achievement; Providing Assistance

Fig. 4.4 Social psychological adaptations to threat perception (Adapted from Varnum et al. 2010)

Figure 4.4 depicts the general differences in the social psychologies of people in relatively tighter versus relatively looser societies. The information in Fig. 4.4 draws from literally hundreds of studies, and is adapted from Michael Varnum, Igor Grossman, Shinobu Katayama and Richard Nisbett's 2010 review paper, *The Origin of Cultural Differences in Cognition*.

On the left-hand side of Fig. 4.4 are the social psychological adaptations associated with low threat perception, while the right-hand side shows the adaptions characteristic of chronically high threat perception. In the next chapter, when discussing the psychology and social psychology of nonreligious people in the United States, I will be describing many of the characteristics depicted on the left-hand side of the figure. For now, just keep in mind that *nonreligious people are emblematic of cultural looseness.*

People in more cumulatively threatened, and thus culturally tighter, societies tend to focus more on the immediate physical characteristics of situations, along with the moment-to-moment emotional and physical states of copresent people. This bias toward "field dependence" can be contrasted with people in relatively looser cultures who will be more likely to ignore the physical characteristics of situations and the moment-to-moment dispositions of people around them. People in tighter cultures will also tend to reason in accordance with standard norms and tradition. It is not that they lack the capacity for analytical thought—all tight societies can loosen and vice versa—rather, it is that shared codes of conduct (norms) and traditions appear to have more intellectual and ethical power and legitimacy as cultures tighten.

People in tighter cultures will also tend to make more situational attributions for peoples' behavior. This means that the more threatened an individual becomes, the more likely he or she is to see the environment or circumstance as causing events to happen or people to act. Conversely, the less threatened an individual becomes, the more likely he or she is to believe that individual choice and personal character determine events and actions. A sense of agency, and the corresponding belief that others have agentic capacity, emerges when threat perception is relatively low.

People in tight cultures also have a slightly different self-concept than people in loose cultures (Nisbett 2004). As a corollary to the emergence of agency in conditions of low threat, people in looser societies tend to prefer self-direction and independence more than those in tighter societies, who prefer to demonstrate their loyalty and interdependence. Family obligations in a loose society, for example, are more likely to be perceived as onerous and demanding; family obligations in a tight society are more likely to be perceived as honorable and engrossing. Social engagement, in general, within loose societies is more likely to produce anxiety, trepidation and fear of judgment. Social engagement within tighter societies, on the other hand, charges peoples' emotional batteries instead of draining them.

Before concluding this section on a primary dynamic of secularization—the loosening of culture—I want to mention a few very important caveats.

First, the network closure and enforced network homogeneity characteristic of the tightening response to threat also, paradoxically, increases the perception of social threats by "othering" large numbers of people. This was a point clearly made by Stark and Finke (2000). Excessive tightening, that is, completely closing off one's networks and/or enforcing and following strict norms, can quickly become a downward spiral of panicked authoritarianism. Without a sufficient number of people of different race/ethnicities, political or religious backgrounds in ones' social network, the detection of any minor ethnic, political or religious deviation will engender a strong xenophobic or religiously intolerant response.

Second, when a society's institutions are threatened by some external foreign force, as in the case of war or terrorism, cultural tightening will increase religiosity. However, as external threats decline and the culture loosens, religious elites may attempt to attach religious significance to domestic political causes in order to maintain their power and relevance in conditions of low threat (Paul 2009; Solt et al. 2011). This dynamic was clearly evident in the rise of the Religious Right in the United States,

as discussed in Chap. 3—upon the abatement of World War II, Vietnam and the Cold War, Dobson, Falwell, Robertson and others began running domestic political campaigns on a religiously inspired platform of anti-abortion, antidivorce and antigay marriage. Unbeknownst to the leaders of the Religious Right, this pairing of religion with the platform of a specific political party tends to actually *increase* secularization over the long term, as people opposed to that political party, or to politics in general, begin to equate their political disinterest with religious disinterest.

Put another way, external colonial, terroristic (or purely environmental) threats will lead to cultural tightening and, thus, increases in strict, homogeneous religiosity among the populace. But, on the other hand, in the absence of external threat, religion will be used by elites of one party or another to justify their domestic political power and, in the process, they will religiously alienate those of other political parties and those who have no interest in politics. This process can reverse once external social or environmental threats arise again and people forget their religious-political differences in favor of attacking a shared enemy.

Lastly, it is important to remember that the perception of threat in society is *never* totally removed or completely minimized. Even if absolute deprivation (i.e., starvation) has been largely abated in the West, relative deprivation (i.e., income inequality) still, nevertheless, predicts self-reported happiness and health outcomes (Marmot 2004). Comparing oneself to another and feeling r*elatively* powerless, helpless or vulnerable will produce perceptions of threat analogous to (if less powerful than) conditions of absolute deprivation.

Threat is always present at some level; one's health, job and relationships are never consistently secure over the life-course. Indeed, the pressure in looser societies to pursue self-actualization and self-made goals can, *itself,* be a source of perceived threat (Giddens 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The pressure to know oneself, to find oneself and to orient oneself to an occupational calling can be overwhelming. The comfort of hierarchical group direction and loyalty to shared norms of conduct characteristic of tight cultures may seem appealing to those desperate for structure and guidance in a loose culture of anonymous entrepreneurs. Alternatively, the freedom, empowerment and fun of self-discovery may seem appealing to those who feel that their individual creativity is being stifled by expectations for social conformity. Whichever is appealing, to any given person in any given society, is determined by subtle social psychological adaptations to the cumulative perception of threats in the cultural system.

Increasing Self-Dimensionality

The early French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1893[1997]) wrote in his doctoral dissertation about two forms of human social organization.

One, *mechanical solidarity*, was representative of preliterate, preindustrial societies where the majority of the population subsist as poor farmers. Mechanical solidarity is "mechanical" because each person in the society behaves, believes and belongs very similarly. Everybody attends the same church, believes in the same gods, prays together over the dinner table and has the same aspiration for a good harvest and large families so children can serve as farmhands. Life is roughly the same for everyone; they live and die knowing the same people in the same geographic location. People in such societies move in step, like the segments of a single worm. And, mechanical solidarity certainly tends to be a component of a tight culture rather than a loose one. Farming is precarious and uncertain and, in the mechanical societies of history, penicillin and water sanitation were unknown. People's belief and behavior thus tend to become especially routinized, habituated and deeply traditional. Fear of deviance or transgression is also very salient.

In societies exhibiting mechanical solidarity, one's self-concept is certainly elaborate and rich, but circumscribed. Peoples' social networks in societies exhibiting mechanical solidarity tend to be homogeneous, a result of the low geographic mobility associated with farming life (i.e., the family line's primary source of income is the farm, which remains sedentary in a certain geographic location). One's self-concept is thus bounded—bounded to the local (homogeneous) community, bounded to the family, bounded to the church. These were the primary institutions in preliterate horticultural and agrarian societies.

Societies organized by mechanical solidarity tend also to be low in population density, though this is not always true. In general, though, rural areas require large swaths of land for cultivation, and as a result people tend to live farther from one another, relative to, say, an urban apartment complex. This makes it difficult to expand the self-concept beyond a local, homogeneous, largely familial, group of people. The self is relatively undistinguishable from the family, which is relatively undistinguishable from the community. This sameness, this perceptual overlap with surrounding others, produces a solidarity and an empathy for copresent others.

This is not to say that peoples' self-concept is simplistic or superficial in preliterate, preindustrial societies. The self-concepts—the identities—that

humans create are the most elaborate symbolic self-representations of any animal on the earth, as far as we know. It is the human being and not only the human being in a technologically advanced society that has a rich, multidimensional self-understanding.

The self-concepts of hunter-gatherers, the first form of human society and that form of society that humans have lived in for 99% of their existence, are amazingly complex (Moffett 2013). Forager self-identities include "hunter," "confidant," "band member," "parent," "warrior/protector" and "shaman/seer/healer," and many often have additional tribal identities associated with totemic spirit animals. Anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon (1968), for example, describes the complex self-identity of the Yanomamo foragers living in the jungles of Brazil in this way:

> The true or real portion of living man is his 'will' or 'self' (*buhii*). At death this changes into a *no borebo* and travels from this layer to *hedu,* the place above where the souls of the departed continue to exist in an ethereal state, much in the same fashion as the people do on earth: gardening, hunting and practicing magic […] The reason that children do not change into *no borebo* is that their '[selves]' (*buhii*) are ignorant or innocent (*mohode)*. Thus, one has a character only after a certain amount of knowledge and experience are gained; with this, one develops a knowledgeable '[self]' and can expect to enter *hedu* in the form of a *no borebo.* (Chagnon 1968, p. 48, italics in original)

Tribe members are expected to develop their understandings of themselves, of the tribe, of war and of their place in the community before they can expect to enter the afterlife. With the Yanomamo, as just one example, developing an educated, experienced, and rich self-concept is, literally, the key to salvation.

To say, then, that rich self-dimensionality only emerges in technologically advanced societies with a complex division of labor is clearly untrue. Durkheim overstates his case. Still, speaking relatively, self-dimensionality is lower in a foraging or farming society built upon mechanical solidarity than in an industrial society, built upon what Durkheim (1893[1997]) called *organic solidarity.*

Organic solidarity is typified in industrial and postindustrial societies, where technological innovation has provided the resources to feed, clothe and house larger, denser populations of people. In a society organized around organic solidarity, people are expected to develop a skillset before

entering a competitive labor market and specializing in some occupational calling. This division of labor, this proliferation of occupational niches, is catalyzed by peoples' desire to differentiate themselves from one another in an increasingly dense population so as to better compete in emerging markets.

Organic solidarity depends not on how similar each person's life is to their neighbor, but rather, on how different each person is. As people specialize occupationally—as a baker, a mechanic, a lawyer, a manufacturer of wares, a hair stylist and so on, each person develops in greater depth only one skillset. The result is that other people are valued not because they are so similar to self, but because of how they are helpfully different from self. The occupational division of labor produces solidarity because your neighbor depends on your specific expertise or talent for his flourishing and vice versa. A person may become an expert writer, but unable to fix his own roof, sew his own clothes, fix his own car or cut his own hair.

In a society organized mechanically, by contrast, each individual is a passable carpenter, a passable sewer, a passable mechanic and a passable stylist; each individual has a breadth of talents, but each individual shares this same breadth with his or her neighbor—in this way, each individual is more or less identical to the next. Very few have expertise, most all are generalists. For Durkheim, the population growth enabled by technological advancement can, with other mitigating factors, lead to a form of solidarity ("organic solidarity") where each person is dependent upon the other for a developed skillset that they happen to lack.

In addition to this development of occupational niches, people also become more geographically mobile in pursuit of ever more specialized training/education in some given skillset. As a result, people become less physically bound to a localized, homogeneous, largely familial community.

Contemporary evolutionary sociologists (e.g., Lenski 2005; Niedenzu et al. 2008; Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014; Turner and Maryanski 2008[2016]) eschew viewing societal evolution in terms of a dichotomous shift from mechanical to organic solidarity.

Rather, the evolution of human societies is described in terms of incremental, nonlinear technological advancements from subsistence foraging, hunting and/or fishing (i.e., hunter-gatherer and maritime societies) to plant cultivation (i.e., horticultural societies), to animal domestication (i.e., agrarian and pastoral societies), to energy production from inanimate resources like fossil fuels, wind, water, solar or nuclear reaction (i.e., industrial and postindustrial societies). Each technological advance enables

increasingly efficient food production and extraction of energy from the environment (White 1959). These technological advancements, which ultimately enable the feeding of more mouths, are in no sense inevitable over the course of human history. Indeed, for most of human history, people lived in relatively small, stable, nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers.

The first step toward plant cultivation is the use of a "digging stick" which has been found in human societies transitioning from a nomadic foraging way of life to a more semi-settled horticultural way of life. Digging sticks are refined into hoes which are further refined into plows, each more efficient in the planting and harvesting of crops than the last. Once the plow has been invented, the skill of animal domestication can be developed and used to train oxen to drive these plows through large fields. With this sort of technology, it becomes possible to plant and cultivate large plots of land year-round.

Life certainly becomes more sedentary when cultivating the same bit of land over and over becomes the central facet of the daily economy. When a society's economy depends on finding and hunting large game animals or searching for choice nuts and seeds, as it does for hunter-gatherers, life is quite nomadic and active. However, in a horticultural society, food is more plentiful and populations are therefore much denser, but life is more sedentary.

Societal evolution is thus a very slow, nonlinear process of developing more efficient ways to produce food and extract resources from the environment. It is undoubtedly the case that fossil fuel use, though serving as fuel for machines which work very efficiently, is also an egregious environmental pollutant. I am not, therefore, making an evaluative statement about societal superiority when I say that the technologies and division of labor in an industrial or postindustrial society are more complex than that of a foraging, horticultural or agrarian society.

Having said that, human societies over the last 10,000 or so years have grown in population density due in significant part to technological advance (Diamond 1997, 2012). This cumulative technological advance and population growth occurred, in its full human expanse, across numerous historical horticultural, and then agrarian, empires. Though societal evolution is not dichotomous as Durkheim suspected, he was right that rising population density tends to lead to the increasing development of occupational niches. The truth in Durkheim's model is that, very generally speaking, in the process from shifting away from an economy based on homogeneous, geographically bound farming toward an economy based

on heterogeneous, geographically unbound occupational niche construction, one's self-concept detaches, first somewhat and then in later generations a great deal, from one's family, religious or community identity.

People's self-concept, in this sense, becomes more multidimensional and more cosmopolitan.

We can further isolate another important dynamic influencing self-dimensionality, which begins to occur in the European world around the fifteenth century—the impact of state formation described by sociologist Norbert Elias (1978, 1982, 1983, 1987).[9] Here, I focus specifically on European history only because of the relevance of European history for the later development of Christianity in the United States.

Elias, best known for his two-volume work entitled *The Civilizing Process*, was curious as to why the medieval peasants of Europe appeared to change from people who engaged in little self-maintenance and self-control, to well-mannered merchants/businessmen, writers, lawyers, preachers and doctors over a several hundred-year period following the end of the Middle Ages.

Europe in the wake of the fall of the Roman Empire was composed of numerous fiefdoms that were, in turn, under the control of various knights and barons who answered only to local kings. This patchwork of fiefdoms spread across the expanse of France, England and Germany and were all that remained of the once-mighty Roman Empire, the Western half of which had collapsed slowly beginning in the fifth century CE. The collapse of the Roman Empire's political structure left thousands of territories throughout the European continent under the control of local kings who, themselves, had no standing army and little political authority outside of the knights and barons who did their bidding.

These kings gave barons pieces of land throughout their territories, who, in turn, gave land management responsibilities to roving knights. Knights maintained their territories through threat of violence and by extracting egregious and arbitrary taxes from local peasant farmers. Knights and barons also raided *each other* quite frequently as well, producing feud after counterfeud. Life during this period was poor, nasty, brutish and short, in the words of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes elaborates on the anarchical state of affairs in Europe during this period when he says:

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[9] Other than the three works of Elias cited, I recommend reading both the 1987 *Theory, Culture and Society* issue dedicated to Elias' work (volume 4, issue 2, edited by Mike Featherstone) and Steven Pinker's (2011) use of Elias' theory to explain large-scale declines in violence over the last 500 or so years. See also Linklater and Mennell (2010).

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time or war where every man is enemy to every man, the same is consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death. (Hobbes 1668[1994], p. 76)

Over time, some kings outcompeted others for land and goods, as well as in organization of their barons and knights. As a result, the total number of independent territories across Europe after the fall of Rome dwindled from around 5000 in the 1400s to just 200 by Napoleon's rein in the 1800s.

This consolidation of power and land in the hands of fewer and fewer numbers of kings, Elias argued, had a profound effect on the behavioral comportment and self-control of not only nobles like barons and knights but also peasants. Kings with control over large territories of land found constant, arbitrary, turf battles between barons and knights to be wasteful and threatening to their authority. To combat this wasteful violence, kings with control over large stretches of territory began encouraging an end to the frequent turf battles.

In exchange for not fighting over idiosyncratic, sectarian turf disputes, knights and barons were given the protection of a standing army—a luxury only available to kings who presided over large territories. This "social contract," to again use Hobbes' words, encouraged knights and barons to control their impulsive and violent behavior so as to better curry the favor of evermore powerful kings and their increasingly large standing armies. Social status and protection from harm for barons and knights therefore became closely tied to how mannerly, courteous and sophisticated they acted in the presence of the king's court.

Such efforts at self-control and self-cultivation, Elias thought, first emerged among the barons and knights who attempted to outclass each other in the king's court with their exquisite manners and comportment, but this culture of behavioral refinement quickly disseminated to peasants (Elias 1982).

Prior to this social contract of mannerly comportment in exchange for protection between kings and their aides (along with dissemination of these mannerly expectations to peasants), Elias argued that behavior across the European world had been decidedly unmannerly.

To prove this, Elias studied drawings, etiquette manuals and other writings from the fifteenth century as a way of attempting to understand everyday comportment during that period. The drawings Elias analyzed were mostly from the *Medieval Housebook*, a collection of drawings dating to between 1475 and 1480 (Elias 1978). The etiquette manuals and writings he reviewed, on the other hand, came from more numerous sources across the European world.

What he found confirmed his suspicions. Popular fifteenth-century drawings of social life frequently depicted violent raiding, public torture, public disemboweling of animals for recreation and constant instances of sexual aggression. Etiquette manuals of the time offered no better a picture of daily human behavior in Europe during the Middle Ages. Grown adults (nobles and peasants alike) needed to be taught and reminded not to defecate or urinate in public, fondle their genitals during conversation, fart loudly, blow their nose into the tablecloth at dinner, spit on people they did not like or stab people with knives upon minor, incidental provocation (Elias 1978).

Confirming Elias' suspicions, it did indeed appear as though a widespread culture of mannerly comportment emerged in a concerted way *only after* the centralization of power by a small number of kings and, especially, after the institutionalization and dissemination of standard modes of comportment in these kings' courts.

A second process that Elias thought contributed to self-awareness and self-control during this period of European history was the development of a complex economic division of labor (Elias 1982).

Similar to Durkheim's shift from mechanical to organic society, Elias proposed that the centralization of political power and the development of occupational niches in geographically expansive markets exposed people to new contexts, to different environments and to people of different ethnic or religious backgrounds and different occupational expertise. People consequently began building longer chains of interdependence with diverse others who had a different occupational skillset than ones' own.

Given that increasingly extensive chains of economic interdependence with diverse others have characterized the West since the fifteenth century, Elias suggested that *how* one displayed themselves to others (their behav-

iors) and *what* one conveyed with their thoughts (their ideas) became increasingly scrutinized and evaluated in interactions.

For Elias, paying attention to ones' behaviors and beliefs in order to appear mannerly to nobles, in addition to paying attention to ones' behaviors and beliefs in order to facilitate positive interactions with an increasingly occupationally and socially diverse network of other people, is a process akin to self-domestication. And, he argued, this self-domestication produced in people a sense of power, of efficacy and mastery, over their behavior and thoughts. Peoples' self-concepts become a lifelong project of development and refinement.

Elias' larger point was that our self-concept changes with the structure of our societies and vice versa. What I have endeavored to explain here are some of the societal factors influencing the multidimensionality of the self: the occupational division of labor, the circulation of people across geographic space in pursuit of occupational niches and/or training for such niches, and the proliferation of expectations for different behavior and comportment for different audiences in different contexts. The first factor influencing self-dimensionality, the division of labor, was a discovery made by Durkheim; the latter two and especially the third are, however, more from Elias' work.

Ronald Inglehart, cocreator of the *security axiom* discussed above that perceived threats lead to rising levels of religiosity as a form of compensatory control, agrees with Durkheim that technological development and the division of labor are inextricably tied to increasing self-complexity. Inglehart and coauthor Christian Welzel argue:

> Favorable existential conditions contribute to emerging self-expression values that give individual liberty priority over collective discipline, human diversity over group conformity… The emergence of these values transforms modernization into a process of human development in which the underlying theme is the growth of autonomous human choice (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, p. 299)

Paul Smaldino (in press), as well, contends that the development of an increasingly multidimensional self-concept has helped facilitate cooperation in large societies.

In a small hunter-gatherer band, each member is known on a first-name basis, and those who have been cooperative in the past (i.e., helping with childcare, or helping distribute meat from a successful hunt) tend to

be preferentially preferred as cooperative partners in the future (Apicella et al. 2012). In the context of a small foraging band of, say, 30 or 50 people, it is not difficult to recall with whom one has cooperated with last and how reliably that person cooperated. But what happens when technological shifts lead to population growth and a tribe of several small bands expand into a horticultural society of 5000 people, an agrarian society of a 500,000 people or an industrial society of several hundred million? How do people know who to cooperate with? In order to interact and cooperate with others in such a large, sprawling society, we need to have some indication that anonymous others can be trusted as cooperation partners. For Smaldino, the answer to this dilemma lies in the continual multidimensional refinement of our self-concepts.

In the following passage, Smaldino echoes Elias and Durkheim in describing how the development of evermore refined, multidimensional self-concepts facilitates cooperation in large, demographically diverse and occupationally differentiated societies:

> Complex societies pose two new problems for human cooperation. First, as human societies grew larger, members of cooperative groups would increasingly have to interact with individuals whom they had not previously encountered or otherwise knew little about, making finding partners for cooperation and coordination increasingly difficult. Second, as the diversity of roles within a society becomes greater, individuals would increasingly have to modify the expression of their social identities to relate to others in a larger variety of contexts.
>
> To be clear, I am not suggesting that individuals' social identities need be more or less rich in different societies. Individuals have complex and well-developed identities in all known societies. Rather, I argue that in more complex societies, the landscape of possible identities is more heterogeneous, and the multidimensionality of social identity is employed more directly as a coordination device. Thus, the advent of social identities in modern complex societies, such as national or regional identities, religious affiliations, or various fan communities for sport teams, film, or music, may be indicative of a cultural evolved solution set to the problem of assortment for cooperation and coordination in an expanding world.
>
> The point I want to make is that, because humans have to cooperate in many different contexts, *the multidimensionality of social identity is important for successful coordination*. (Smaldino in press, p. 15, 19–20, italics in original)

Though Smaldino limits himself to the term "social identity" in his discussion of self-dimensionality, peoples' self-concepts are composed

of more than just social identities. As I mentioned in Chap. 2, Identity Theory (Burke and Stets 2009) posits three bases of peoples' self-concepts—person identities (regarding the type of individual one is), role identities (regarding responsibilities that one has to others) and social identities (regarding one's membership in a group).

A rough schematic of increasing self-dimensionality is depicted in Fig. 4.5.
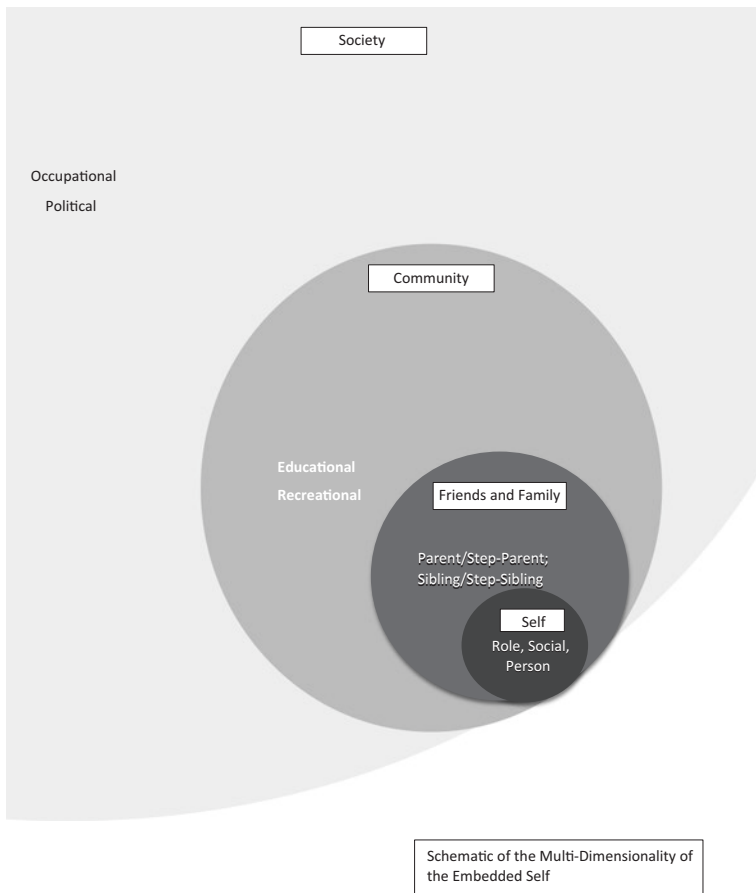
Fig. 4.5   Schematic of the multidimensionality of the embedded self

Person, role and social identities develop in and reflect the more or less differentiated structure of a society's economic, religious, political, familial and other institutions. These three bases of identity are, moreover, overlapping such that the groups people belong to expose them to different available roles, each of which emphasizes slightly different aspects of individual personality (Blau 1977; Hochschild 1983[2003]). In this sense, the various layers of peoples' identities are "structured" by society, and the more complex the structure of society, the more multidimensional the layers of identity will be (Stryker 1980; Stryker and Burke 2000).

People must also *perform* their various identities successfully during day-to-day interactions in various settings from the workplace, to school, to church, to family (Goffman 1959). The intensifying requirement to perform subtly distinct aspects of our self-concept is a cultural skill which has to be learned—for example, we may need to behave and believe differently in our capacity as Sunday School teacher than we do in our capacity as husband or wife, which will be a different performance than that required of us at work, in our local hiking group or with our best friend. Children in societies with high levels of self-dimensionality will, from a young age, be bussed to this or that music practice, or soccer game, or stage performance, or tutor, or summer camp or after-school program so that they can develop the self-focus, self-esteem and self-directedness necessary to maintain a subtly multidimensional "self" as an adult.

Cultural Tightness-Looseness and Self-Dimensionality

As cultures loosen, individuals begin to perceive that there are numerous courses for action and numerous possible legitimate worldviews to entertain. As cultures loosen, the self becomes a possible project to develop and maintain. Rigid adherence to hierarchy relaxes as threat recedes and people begin to think about life, and about themselves, at a slightly greater distance from the collective.

Cultural loosening (from the partial cessation of threat) relaxes normative expectations, punishment for deviance and hierarchical social organization The relaxation of normative expectations and threat of punishment, along with the unweaving of hierarchies, confronts the individual as an empowering, if at times overwhelming, opportunity for bold self-expression and self-development. Loosening thus produces social psycho-
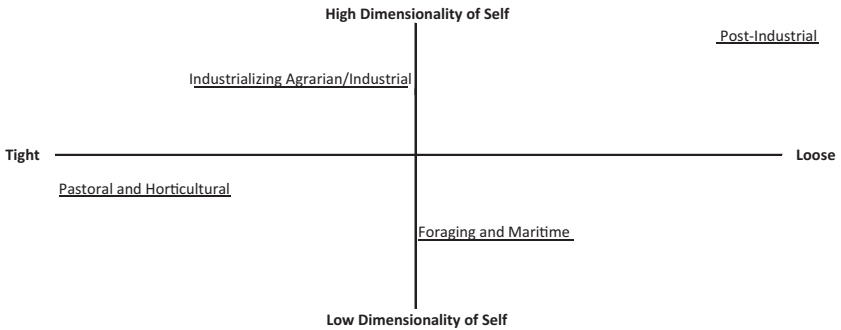
Fig. 4.6   Societal types arranged along a 2 × 2 continuum of tightness-looseness and self-dimensionality (variation in tightness-looseness and self-dimensionality also occurs within and not only between societal types)

logical individualism and self-empowerment, but it does not necessarily produce a multidimensional self.

Though loosening provides the affiliational, ideological and behavioral freedom to develop a richly independent self-concept, this freedom remains merely a *potential freedom* until people in the society are compelled by something else to take advantage of it. It isn't until technological advancement enables population growth and the development of a division of labor that the average member of a society feels compelled to develop an idiosyncratic occupational skillset and, in the process, an increasingly idiosyncratic self-concept.[10]

Figure 4.6 depicts the theoretical relationship between cultural tightness-looseness and low versus high self-dimensionality. These theoretical relationships lie on a continuum—they are relationships between relatively tight versus relatively loose cultures and between cultures where peoples' self-concept has relatively fewer versus relatively more dimensions. It is also crucially important to remember that variation in tightness-looseness and self-dimensionality *also occurs within and not only between societal types.* So we might say that the United States, as a postindustrial economy, is a fairly loose culture overall, with widespread encourage-

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[10] Elias would add top-down expectations for mannerly comportment that result from the centralization of authority, which is itself a sign of cultural tightening. To simplify, as regards multidimensionality of the self, I focus here just on the impact of a growing division of labor and the geographic mobility and network diversity this entails.

ment from birth to "be true to yourself" and to "make your own rules." However, this cultural looseness is nevertheless more pronounced in the Northern and coastal United States than in the Southern United States where per capita income is lower and mortality is higher and where the culture is thus tighter and more religious.

Conceptualizing societal types in terms of their levels of tightness–looseness and self-dimensionality means that it is possible, in principle, for a tighter culture to contain people whose self-concept has relatively more dimensions than other people in a comparatively looser culture, and vice versa. For example, Pelto's (1968) work suggested that societies whose main source of sustenance came from foraging or fishing would be looser than societies that farmed crops, because fishing and foraging are (relatively) more isolated activities requiring (relatively) less social coordination. Thus maritime, or fishing-based societies, will be looser than horticultural or agrarian societies, all else equal.

Loose societies, as with maritime and foraging societies, can exist in the absence of state formation and technological innovation, but only when the natural environment happens to be abundant in accessible resources. An abundant natural environment will lower net perceptions of threat, as an (relatively) abundant environment reduces famine and intersocietal competition over resources. When resources become scarce, though, threat perceptions will increase and this will put pressure on people within the society to innovate new forms of technology in order to better extract food/shelter/fuel from the environment in order to survive (Boserup 1965, 1976).

Cultural tightening—loosening is something groups of people do (though tightness-looseness is ultimately manifested situationally among individuals), while increasing self-dimensionality is something individuals do (though the self becomes increasingly multidimensional in response to the differentiation of institutional structures).

Following Emile Durkheim and Norbert Elias, the complexity of the division of labor and the rise of the state increased self-dimensionality and, thus, *self-empowerment* and *self-directedness.*

Following Pertti Pelto, Michele Gelfand and colleagues, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, aggregate perceptions of threat in a population increase survival-focused attempts to close off groups, increase enforcement of norms and punish deviants. Low aggregate threat perception, alternatively, loosens hierarchies and behavioral constraints while reducing the severity of punishment for normative deviation, all

of which help to provide a fertile context for self-expression. Lower relative aggregate threat perception in a population thus, over time, produces a *greater set of affiliational, ideological and behavioral options for self-expression*.

In sum, cultural loosening is initiated by a relative lowering of aggregate threat perception, while increasing self-dimensionality is initiated by the division of labor, and *both* lowered threat and a division of labor are fostered by a centralized state and technological development (Durkheim 1893[1997]; Pelto 1968; Elias 1978, 1982; Gelfand et al. 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2011; Lenski 2005). And, to reiterate, cultural loosening *produces individual perceptions of ideological and behavioral freedom* while structural pressures to build and refine a multidimensional self *produces perceptions of self-empowerment and self-directedness*.

Cultural tightness-looseness and self-dimensionality are inextricably present, on some level and in some configuration, in every society. These two dimensions are the foundational dynamics influencing secularization in any given society.

Contextualizing the Modern Secularization Paradigm

Steve Bruce (2011), a sociologist of religion, has recently produced an integrative model of secularization, drawing on decades of research and theory.

Bruce begins his synthetic theory of secularization with the rise of monotheism, and the effect of monotheism on producing beliefs in a stable, rational world of rules and laws. Here, he is drawing on Comte's analysis of monotheism in Europe. It is certainly true that modern philosophy and science have their (most recent) origin in late-medieval attempts to use reason as a way of discerning the laws and order of existence. However, the rise of monotheism itself needs explaining.

Historically, the rise of popular belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipresent God begins subtly with the Zoroastrians before diffusing to and being refined by the Hebrews, then the Christians, and then the Muslims (Choksy 2003). Though a complete review of the causes of the rise of monotheism would move us beyond the scope of this book, it is becoming clear in recent research that belief in (and fear of punishment from) large, powerful Gods help facilitate cooperation between people who are otherwise unfamiliar but share the same reli-

gion (Norenzayan 2013; Norenzayan et al. 2013, 2016; Purzycki et al. 2016). Monotheism, as a popular belief system, rose to prominence during the Axial Age, roughly from the eighth to the third century BCE, when Confucianism was emerging in China and Hinduism and Buddhism were emerging in India. This was an epoch of significant societal expansion, both in terms of the amount of territory claimed by empires and in terms of population.

Widespread belief in a supervisory God was adaptive for integrating ever-larger populations of people across diverse geographic space. This was never more important in human history than during the Axial Age when technological advances in horticulture and animal domestication helped grow populations significantly, producing the largest, most structurally differentiated societies ever seen to that point.

Yet, we can turn this around and look at it in a different way—the centralization of celestial power in a monotheistic deity was a *cultural tightening response* to the threat posed by managing (and living in) territorially vast, demographically diverse and politically unstable empires. In an analogous way, as Elias described, kings in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire responded to political and material instability by rapidly consolidating fiefdoms and, in the process, bringing large areas of territory under centralized rule. This tightening, this centralization of power and hierarchy under a common set of strict rules, is a clear group-level response to the perception of threat.

Of course, starting the secularization paradigm at monotheism is ultimately arbitrary. We certainly can, with Bruce, start our account of Western secularization with Axial Age cultural tightening, represented in the rise of popular monotheistic belief. But, since this tightening was manifested among the Chinese in Confucianism, the Indians in Hinduism and so on, we must say that the rise of a rational, scientific worldview (and, thus, secularization), paradoxically, has its roots in the rise of modern religions, not only in Jewish or Christian monotheism.

Bruce traces a theoretical line from the rise of monotheism to a view of the world as rational, and, then, to the development of science in the fifteenth century and, finally, to the rise of machine technology along with the very modern belief that technology can solve all social (and environmental) problems. He also identifies the Protestant Reformation as the antecedent cause of cultural individualism, industrial capitalism and economic growth. This part of his formulation of secularization theory is an obvious nod to Weber.

Now, as with monotheism, we can turn the Protestant Reformation around and look at it in a different, yet compatible, way. Whether the Protestant Reformation was the "origin" of individualistic, self-expressive values in the West or not, it was clearly an era-defining indication of cultural loosening. Martin Luther may have felt seriously threatened, if not physically than philosophically, by the Catholic Church, but his propensity to imagine alternative expressions of Christianity, and his conviction that he was acting out of piousness and not heresy (and therefore deserved and would engender little or no punishment from Catholics) are all tell-tale signs of an individual operating in a (slowly) loosening society.

Cultural tightening, as evidenced by the rise of monotheism, and later cultural loosening, as evidenced by the Protestant Reformation and its spread of individualism, are great examples of how cultural tightening and loosening can, at different points in human history and in different societies, contribute in later epochs to a single outcome. In this case, that outcome was the secularization of societies.

A slow, similarly nonlinear, trend of increasing self-dimensionality is also hidden in Bruce's model.

When Bruce acknowledges the impact of economic growth on social (i.e., occupational) and structural (i.e., institutional) differentiation, he can find the humble beginnings of this process in the first forager who began using a digging stick to plant seeds and turn over soil, or he can start this process with the consolidation of fiefdoms in eleventh-century Germany, or with the Protestant Reformation in Germany four centuries later. Secularization is not solely a Western phenomenon, indeed, it could not be, because cultural tightening-loosening and self-dimensionality are human, not merely Western, propensities. Bruce and I are no doubt in agreement about this, but it is nevertheless crucial to emphasize.

After tracing the impact of technological advancement and economic growth on social and structural differentiation, Bruce completes his schematic model of secularization by describing the psychological consequences of this social and structural differentiation.

Exposure to diversity, be it racial diversity, religious diversity, or occupational diversity, tends to convince people of humankind's *psychic unity*, or the idea that, though people might adhere to a different religion or go to a different job each morning, they are still fundamentally human and deserve fundamental human rights. People in complex, cosmopolitan societies will tend to adapt to such diversity by adopting a private, personalized (or in Bruce's words, "relativistic") outlook on religious belief

and behavior. As Bruce says so well, "When we can no longer be sure that those we meet share our faith, we tend to keep it to ourselves" (Bruce 2006, p. 38).

Secularization is complex. Both cultural tightness-looseness and changing self-dimensionality are abstract, large-scale, cyclical historical processes. On the other hand, specific events in history which characterize the process of Western secularization—like the Protestant Reformation or the US constitution's separation of church and state—are concrete, geographically localized, one-off historical events. Understanding both the abstract theoretical processes underlying secularization and the concrete historical precursors of secularization in this or that part of the world will provide the full picture of secularization in the West and elsewhere.

A Note on the Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Beliefs

The last basic dynamic of secularization I want to discuss in this chapter is that which connects one generation of human beings to the next—the intergenerational transmission of religion.

Religious affiliations, beliefs and behaviors have to be successfully transmitted from parents to children each generation in order for any given religion to continue enjoying cultural prominence.

The developmental psychologists Pehr Granqvist and evolutionary psychologist Lee Kirkpatrick open their article *Religion, Spirituality and Attachment* (2013) with the following quote from the modern founder of attachment theory, John Bowlby:

> An individual who has been fortunate in having grown up in an ordinary good home with ordinarily affectionate parents has always known people from whom he can seek support, comfort, and protection, and where they are to be found. So deeply established are his expectations and so repeatedly have they been confirmed that, as an adult, he finds it difficult to imagine any other kind of world. (Bowlby 1973, p. 208, as quoted in Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013, p. 139)

According to Bowlby's attachment theory, children learn how to develop relationships with people outside of their family—teachers, coaches, friends—by using *internal working models* of love and attachment learned from interactions with their parents. Parents, in essence, show their children

how to healthily attach to others; and, since each set of parents attaches to their children differently, children each generation will reveal subtle variations from one another with regard to their models of attachment.

The first attachment in not only humans but all mammals is the attachment of the infant to (usually) a mother who nurses and tends to it. This attachment is not only psychologically comforting to the infant—a distress cry is sufficient to garner the immediate response of a seemingly omnipotent caretaker—but absolutely critical for survival. Bowlby argued that the cognitive and emotional attachment models developed from infancy powerfully frame our view of people (especially romantic relationships), but also of the world more generally.

Bowlby (1969[1982]) suggested that children would seek out attachment figures when they were (1) sick, injured or tired, (2) threatened with abandonment or (3) frightened by something in their environment. These reasons are, of course, also why humans seek out an attachment to God (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013).

Secure attachment develops when children feel comfortable reaching out to caregivers for love and protection upon feeling threatened. When securely attached children are not feeling threatened, they openly explore their environment. The securely attached child safely takes exploratory risk, because they knew full well that their caregiver is nearby or, at least, powerful and reliable enough to solve any serious problem the child may confront.

Alternatively, when a threatened child experiences chronic rejection or neglect from a caregiver, they develop an *insecure attachment*. The insecurely attached child, when confronted with a threat, acts as though they do not deserve or will not receive care. The child therefore turns his attention, helpless, back to the environment instead of seeking out a caregiver.

Children may also develop an internal working model of *ambivalent attachment*. This model forms in the child when the caregiver's love and protection is inconsistent. In response to this inconsistency, the child preoccupies themselves with the caregiver, in hopes that they might somehow elicit more consistent affection. This preoccupation with currying the favor of a caregiver leads to fewer attempts to explore the environment independently.

Lastly, *disorganized attachment* results when a child is consistently beaten or otherwise abused by his or her caregiver. This form of attachment, as its moniker implies, is something of a creole of internal working models, one in which the child desperately needs love and protection

(from the caregiver) but can only get this love and protection from the person who is most terrifying (the caregiver). The child therefore seeks out the caregiver's attention, but only disinterestedly and hesitantly, while exploration of the environment is haphazard and impulsive.

Though some have levied legitimate criticisms against the assumption that parents are the sole most important factor in socialization and attachment (e.g., Harris 1995, 2009), I wish here to only discuss how attachment theory has been used to understand peoples' religiosity.

Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2013) review numerous studies (See also Kirkpatrick 2005; Granqvist et al. 2010) in support of the *correspondence hypothesis* that individual differences in religiosity (i.e., attachment to God) can be explained by ("correspond to") underlying individual differences in peoples' internal working models (i.e., attachment to parents/caregivers). So, for example, people who have secure attachments to religious parents tend to self-report feeling secure attachments to God. On the other hand, people who develop insecure attachments to their religious parents tend to avoid recourse to belief in God for comfort and so on.[11]

Philosopher Daniel Dennett (2006) argues that religiosity is not only, in part, an emanation of parental attachment, but specifically attachment to a powerful *male* parent, caregiver or leader. When bands of hunter-gatherers began cultivating plants sometime around 10,000 years ago, they began living less nomadically. This semi-settled life was the beginning of population expansion, because gardening enabled unprecedented food storage. One rather serious problem, however, was figuring out who was going to be in charge of this food surplus. Anthropologists who study semi-settled foragers find that these groups of people solve this problem of food and resource allocation by undergoing a differentiation of their political structure: they allow one person to enjoy the position of the "Big Man" or "Chief."

Nomadic hunter-gatherers tend to make democratic decisions, within the group, about how resources should be allocated—generally, whoever has been most helpful with a hunt or foraging expedition, and/or whoever has been most cooperative in the past, will be given first access to

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[11] There is also evidence that, under perceived duress and threat, insecurely attached people will succumb to god belief in order to compensate and find relief for the psychological turmoil (Granqvist and Hagekull 1999; Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013). Thus, though peoples' general attachment style will correspond to the internal working model developed in childhood, this model may be flexible enough to accommodate attachment to God or spirits under distressing conditions in adulthood.

valued resources (Apicella et al. 2012; Boehm 2012; Diamond 2012). However, once a collective of hunter-gatherer bands settle permanently or semi-permanently in order to cultivate small gardens and grow their own food, there is a need for a group member to monitor and disseminate these resources. And, of course, this person has to be perceived as trustworthy, generous and kind.[12]

The first people to fill this role were known as "Big Men" and the types of semi-settled hunter-gatherers who began utilizing this newly differentiated political authority are known as "Big Man" societies (Sahlins 1963; Lindstrom 1981; Turner and Maryanski 2008[2016]). "Big Men" from various tribes competed with one another to put on lavish feasts for their people—a show of generosity that cemented their authority to control such resources.

Dennett (2006) speculates that tribal figures like these "Big Men," in addition to less politically relevant but nevertheless influential male figures like tribal elders, shaman and medicine men, served as the model for developing a notion of a strong, male, supernatural god.[13]

The significance of the first male figure, the father, is therefore reinforced outside of the family home with more strong male figures like shamans and Big Men, reinforcing a belief that big, powerful men are always "out there," up to and including the biggest, most powerful man of all: God. As evidence, Dennett points to the ubiquitous use of "father" to refer to religious authorities, in addition to the excessive masculine protector imagery of the Confucians, Hebrews, Christians, Muslims and so on.

Hector Garcia, in his book *Alpha God* (2015), goes even further in suggesting that belief in a supernaturally powerful protector reflects humanity's primatological disposition to seek out alpha-male troop leaders.

Primates are a phylogenetically polygynous group of animals, with single males maintaining harems of multiple females. The alpha male in a

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[12] This doesn't mean that political elites in the earliest human societies weren't self-interested and Machiavellian—they undoubtedly were at least to some degree; see Hayden and Gargett (1990).

[13] A not-insignificant problem for this thesis is the historical prevalence of female shamans and medicinal practitioners (e.g., Tedlock 2005). I suppose the counterclaim would be that shamans, medical practitioners and early political elites were *relatively more* likely to be men. If this is the case, what accounts for this relative likelihood? Some will insist that males co-opted these tribal roles coercively because they were physically larger and more dispositionally aggressive due to higher baseline levels of testosterone, and though this is plausible, as far as I am aware, nobody knows for certain.

primate troop is strong and intelligent and has a high degree of status in the community hierarchy—he protects the young and vulnerable of the troop and is the first to confront serious danger. As a result of this prowess and willingness to confront threats, he attracts more females and raises, on average, more children. The ancient evolutionary evidence of this, still visible in modern humans, is the sexual dimorphism between men and women, with men, on average, around 15–20% larger than women to facilitate physical fighting to defend female harems.

Before European colonialism, the overwhelming majority of human foraging and horticultural societies on Earth were polygynous, with some men having multiple wives and other men having none (Walker et al. 2011). But, does this mean that cultural beliefs in male Gods can be boiled down to an ancestral desire to worship (and/or be in the good favor of) human alpha males?

To illustrate such a view, I quote the evolutionary psychologist David Barash's reimagining of the Old Testament Hebrew Psalm 23, in the light of a primate worshipping their alpha male:

The Hominin's Prayer

> The dominant male is my leader;
> I'll be okay.
> He helps me get food and water
> when I need it.
> He leads me to the best and safest places.
> He eases my anxiety.
> He tells me what to do to avoid
> getting into trouble, especially with Him.
> Even though the savannah is full of dangers,
> I will fear no competitors,
> For You are in charge.
> Your strength and Your vigor they comfort me.
> You protect me from other animals (and from Yourself).
> You help me out.
> I'm doing pretty well… considering.
> I feel safe in Your territory and among friends and relatives
> as long as I am in Your troop;
> and I submit and accept Your dominance.
> Forever. (Or at least until someone replaces You.)[14]

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[14] Retrieved on 7/18/2016 from Barash's online editorial "Is God a Silverback?" in the online cultural magazine *aeon*: https://aeon.co/essays/how-monotheists-modelled-god-on-a-harem-keeping-alpha-male

It is reductionistic to claim that all of religious belief is merely a desire to worship alpha males. As you can no doubt tell from your reading of this book so far, I conceptualize religion as a vastly more complex construct than alpha-male fetishism.

Nevertheless, it appears to be true that, psychologically, relationships with parents and caregivers help mold an idiosyncratic attachment orientation in children that, subsequently, is used to interpret their relationship with God in adolescence and adulthood. And, it is also likely true that humanity's evolutionary history as a mammal, more specifically a primate, will reveal a proneness (not an inevitability) toward imagining Gods as large, powerful, supervisory, punishing males. But, even if we grant both of these points, how do they help explain how religion is transmitted from one generation to the next? Religion is more than mere attachment to a God, and more than belief in a powerful, invisible man. Religion is cultural—it is a combination of affiliation, belief, behavior and benefiting.

Thus, when discussing secularization, we need a theory capable of accounting for the loss of religious *culture* from one generation to the next.

Recently, Vern Bengtson and his colleagues (2013) published the results of their study of religion in American families, which I mentioned briefly in Chap. 1. Their study was unprecedented in its scope and measurements—it spanned 35 years, from 1970 to 2005 and included a total of 3500 people representing seven generations, with some study participants having been born in the 1980s and some in the 1890s. Though 73% of respondents in the study lived in Southern California (Bengtson is a professor at University of Southern California), subsequent postestimation statistics show that the participants in his study were actually demographically similar to the demographic profile of the United States as a whole, so the study's regional bias was minimal.

The study revealed four kinds of parenting styles that influenced the transmission of religion from parents to children: warm-affirming, cold-distant, ambivalent and preoccupied.

Participants in the study who had a *cold-distant* relationship with their parent(s) (i.e., remembered their parent being very punishment oriented and authoritarian) were more likely to reject the religious beliefs of their parents in adulthood. Participants who had *ambivalent* relationships with one or more parents (i.e., parents were mercurially attentive and caring while at other times behaving distant or cruel) were also more likely to abandon their religion in adulthood. Similarly, children with *preoccupied* parents (i.e., parents who appeared consistently distracted due to health,

financial, marital or drug problems) were also more likely to have abandoned their faith in adulthood.

So, participants in Bengtson's study who came from cold-distant, ambivalent or preoccupied parents were more likely to abandon the religion of their upbringing, but more likely than *whom*? Well, more likely than those who had *warm-affirming* relationships with their parents, of course. Those study participants who remembered having a warm-affirming relationship with their parents (i.e., a "consistently close" relationship) were most likely of all to have retained the religious beliefs modeled to them by their parents.

Also of interest, results showed that participants' recollections of how warm they felt toward their father, specifically, was the most significant predictor of transmitting religious faith to children. Participants in the study who remembered feeling close to their fathers were, as adults, more similar to their father in their church attendance, religious affiliation and biblical literalism compared to participants that were not close to their fathers. Though both parents were important for religious transmission, peoples' relationship to their Dad appeared to be more predictive of successful religious transmission than was their relationship to their Mom. Still, what was most important, overall, was a warm-affirming parenting style.[15]

What is so compelling about Bengtson and his colleagues' findings is how intuitive they are—if you are a devoutly religious parent raising a child, but you ignore them (because you are so worried about money), impose numerous arbitrary rules and requirements on them (which you don't follow yourself) and hit them when they do wrong (instead of talking to them or punishing them by taking away something they value), then you will not be very successful in transferring your religious beliefs to your children because your children will not like being around you or listening to you.

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[15] Bengtson and his collaborators (2013) also found that grandparents aid in the intergenerational transmission of religion. When grandparents replace parents' attempts at religious socialization of children (in the case of religiously disinterested, or deceased, parents) and especially when grandparents reinforce parents' preexisting efforts at religious socialization, beliefs are more likely to be transmitted from one generation to the next. However, if grandparents critique or subvert parents' attempts at religious socialization, or if grandparents simply ignore parents' attempts to socialize their children, the effectiveness of religious transmission declines.

This is quite consistent with Bowlby's attachment theory as applied to religion—securely attached children are more likely to see their parents as caring and credible, and are thus more likely to adopt the faith of their parents.

In short, the piety of the parents doesn't matter in the transmission of religion if the child doesn't feel accepted, loved or supported (Vermeer 2014). Moreover, as a corollary, parents who speak of an interest in religion but never discuss it, who recite moralistic passages in the Bible against divorce before getting divorced themselves, or who insist on the importance of church attendance without ever attending are, actually, *showing their children how to be secular.*

Now, before I go into a bit more detail about how secularization is occurring in the family intergenerationally, I need to underscore an important caveat that has emerged over 40 years of research: parents will tend to report feeling warmer and closer to children than children will report being warm and close to their parents. This *Intergenerational Stake Theory*, as formulated by Bengtson and his colleagues, suggests:

> In describing their mutual relationship, youth tend to describe lower rates of closeness and higher rates of conflicts than do their parents. The Intergenerational Stake theory explains this as follows: Parents expend huge amounts of time, energy, money, and love in raising a child; consequently, they are highly invested in the relationship and are more inclined to see continuity and cohesion—they have a high 'stake' in the next generation. Their children, by contrast, have much less investment in their relationship with their parents. They are developing their independence and affirming their individuality; thus, they tend to see greater differences with their parents, less cohesion, and more conflict. Their "stake" will be invested in their own children, the generation to come. (Bengtson et al. 2013, p. 74)

This Intergenerational Stake Theory is built from critically important observations about how parents tend to retrospectively remember their relationships with their children and vice versa. The first mention of this observation was in 1971, in a paper coauthored by Bengtson himself, after early analyses of data from his Longitudinal Study of Generations. The Intergenerational Stake theory is so important because it means that *there is tension inherent in the intergenerational transmission of religion because parents, on average, will feel closer to their children than children will feel to their parents.* Intergenerational transmission is inherently precarious,

with the balance tilting toward lack of (or incomplete) transmission of any given religious affiliation, belief or behavior from one generation to the next.

The most important condition for the successful transmission of religiosity from one generation to the next, other than parental warmth and secure attachment, is how consistently parents model their own religiosity to their children. Thus, research shows that *parental religious homogeneity* (i.e., parents sharing religious affiliation, belief and behavior) is also a very important factor in the transmission of religious culture from one generation to the next (Voas 2003; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Lanman 2012; Bengtson et al. 2013).

Parents provide "credibility-enhancing displays" (identical to the "costly" belief and behavior discussed in Chap. 2) to their children which model their seemingly legitimate devotion to a specific religious affiliation, belief or behavior (Lanman 2012). Paul Vermeer (2014), in his recent review of research on religion and family life, argues that religious transmission from parents to children will be more difficult if the child is not exposed to consistent religious modeling, an intact family structure (divorces often devolve into one partner asserting that the other is insufficiently religiously pious in one way or another) and exposure to a wider church community. Even if parents are warm and affirming toward their securely attached children, and deeply religious themselves, inconsistent public displays of religious devotion will reduce the likelihood of successful religious transmission.

Mormons and Evangelicals in the United States have relatively high (though declining) rates of intergenerational religious transmission because Mormon and Evangelical parents cloister their children in homogeneous communities of devout believers. Results from Bengtson's study clearly show that Mormon and Evangelical parents (relative to parents with different religious affiliations) involve their children in more church-family activities, put a clear marital emphasis on modeling religious piety to children and build relationships exclusively with other families of the same religious persuasion.

This is, of course, a very high bar for any parent to meet, but that is precisely the point—intergenerational religious transmission is exceedingly difficult. When parents don't share the same religious faith, when they don't provide consistent modeling or, in the case of divorce, when the child is forced to choose between two parents who are only casually committed to their own different faiths, children tend to become either indifferent to religion or convinced that *all* religions are somehow para-

doxically true. But, a belief that all religions are equally true is the best defense against committing to any one of them too seriously

Theoretically, successful transmission is intrinsically difficult, following the Intergenerational Stake Theory; permissive, nonhierarchical parenting (cultural loosening) among parents with different, or multiple, religious identities (increasing self-dimensionality) only drops the rate of successful transmission even lower.

Empirically, secularization as regards intergenerational family transmission is operating through both (1) declines in parental religious homogeneity since at least 1960 and (2) an inverse relationship between warm-affirming parenting and devoutly religious parenting. Let's look at each of these points in turn.

By 2006, 57% of parents in the United States thought that their child marrying a spouse of the same religion was "not very important" or "not important at all," (Putnam and Campbell 2010). The only Americans who really seem to care about the religious affiliation of the person their child ends up marrying are devoutly religious groups like Mormons and Evangelicals. Even still, around 30% of Evangelicals and 15% of Mormons are themselves currently married to people of different religious affiliations (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Most significantly of all, openness to religious intermarriage is more common among younger generations of people—the voices of the future. Only 24% of Americans who reached adulthood in the 1990s feel that religious beliefs are important for a successful marriage compared to 60% of Americans who reached adulthood in 1930s and 50% of Americans who reached adulthood in the 1950s (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Across this period, Gallup Poll data show that public acceptance of marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant, for example, rose from 60% in the mid-late 1960s to 80% by the early-mid-1980s.

Increasing self-dimensionality in society means that people will develop more idiosyncratic role, social and person identities throughout their lives. Whereas in preliterate, horticultural societies, one's expression of religion may have been consistent from one context to another, in the contemporary United States, it is acceptable and encouraged to express your religiosity differently depending on whether you are at church, at work, at the gym, at home or on a first date. This increasing self-dimensionality also produces rising rates of religious intermarriage. And, recall, when two parents have different religious beliefs, the rate of transmitting any one of these faith traditions to their children drops significantly.

A second secularizing trend influencing the intergenerational transmission of religion, other than increasing religious intermarriage, is that of piously religious parents producing and reproducing cold, distant relationships with their children because of an overly rigid, authoritarian parenting style.

In Chap. 3, in discussing the rise of the Religious Right, I mentioned work by Max Blumenthal and George Lakoff which suggested that the child-rearing practices of conservative religious Americans were abusive and masochistic. There does indeed appear to be some truth to this, for example, 38.9% of Evangelical parents strongly favor beating ("spanking") their children and 30.2% think that the most important value to teach a child is strict obedience—only 37.5% report that having their child "think for themselves" is critically important (Sherkat 2014).

These numbers stand in contrast to Catholics and mainline/liberal Protestants, with only 15.8% and 20.5% of each group, respectively, thinking that obedience is the most important value to teach children. The contrast with religiously nonaffiliated parents is even more stark—only 9% of nonaffiliates think obedience is the most important value to teach children, and 59.5% think it is most important for a child to learn to think for themselves. Overall, it seems that, more than anything, devoutly religious parents tend to value obedience over autonomy in their children relative to less religious and nonreligious parents, and they tend to be more in favor of hitting their children as a form of discipline (see Zuckerman et al. 2016 for a review of studies).

Data from the Baylor Religion Survey, the General Social Survey and Bengtson's Longitudinal Study of Generations all show that authoritarian parenting emphasizing corporal punishment and obedience in children *drives children away from the religion of their parents* (Baker and Smith 2015; Bengtson et al. 2013). General Social Survey data show that atheist adults, for example, recall having been forced to go to church more often by their parents growing up than do casually religious adults (Baker and Smith 2015). Reflecting on their findings, Bengtson and his colleagues write:

[Study participants who rebelled against their parents' attempts at religious socialization] came from strongly religious families where… socialization efforts were experienced as excessive or intrusive. When highly religious parents pushed their resistant children to participate in religious activities (such as church, Sunday school, Bible study, youth activities, etc.) or to conform

to church doctrine or moral dictates, this was experienced by some children as having religion "shoved down my throat." The result was religious rebellion. (Bengtson et al. 2013, p. 142)

Bengtson and his team discovered that, although Evangelical and Mormon parents tended to transmit their religion to their children at higher rates than other groups, *they were also more prone than other groups to produce rebellious children who left religion behind entirely.*

Strict, pious parents push kids away from religion for three reasons: (1) their rigidity is interpreted by their children as intolerance, (2) when they themselves are not always perfectly pious to their own standards, they appear to be hypocrites, and (3) the combination of (1) and (2) produces a perception of parents as cold and authoritarian (Bengtson et al. 2013).

Most significant of all, the contrast of rigid rules and corporal punishments in religious households (subcultural tightness) juxtaposed against increasingly relaxed standards of belief and self-expression in civic society (cultural looseness) poses a *congruence problem* in the transmission of religion. As children raised in devoutly religious households enter public schools, then go on to college and enter the workforce, they are confronted by a world far less interested in coercively enforcing religious affiliation, belief and behavior than their parents were. Such parents, as the child ages, are therefore perceived to be intolerant, cold and irrelevant.

Of course, this congruence problem in the intergenerational transmission of religion can be (partially, temporarily) addressed if the child is homeschooled, or sent to a religious school where their close friends can be hand selected by parents for their degree of devoutness. Eventually, though, the child will likely leave this religious community for college or for a job, and this religious echo chamber that the parents had strived so desperately to maintain will be cracked open to reveal a larger world of people with their own (mostly very casual) religious beliefs.

Losing or questioning one's religious affiliation, beliefs or behaviors in adolescence and early adulthood is a very common maturational process in the United States, and it is initiated by the declining parental oversight that comes with growing up (Zuckerman et al. 2016). Because young people are increasingly expected to leave their hometown for college and work, this maturational process has become normative—Americans born between 1956 and 1970 were 188% more likely, and those born between 1971 and 1994 were 315% more likely, to abandon the religion of their parents compared to people born before 1925 (Sherkat 2014).

Joseph Baker and Buster Smith ([2015]) suggest that the proportion of nonreligious Americans at any given point in time can be calculated with the following formula:

$$P_s = (P_r * P_a) + (P_{rs} * P_{sr})$$

Where:

P_s = The proportion of secular people in a country or territory

P_r = The proportion of children raised devoutly religious (i.e., proportion religious)

P_a = The proportion of children raised in devoutly religious homes who abandon the faith in adulthood (i.e., proportion apostates)

P_{rs} = The proportion of children raised in nonreligious homes (i.e., proportion secular)

P_{sr} = The proportion of children raised in nonreligious homes who remain nonreligious in adulthood (i.e., secular retention)

Referencing their formula, Baker and Smith agree that, empirically, all variables are trending toward increasing secularity.

In fact, of those Americans who were raised in a religiously nonaffiliated household between 1971 and 1994, over 70% remained religiously nonaffiliated in adulthood[16] (Sherkat [2014]; Baker and Smith [2015]). By comparison, only 60% of people raised Protestant and 69% of people raised Catholic maintained those affiliations in adulthood (Sherkat [2004]). In other words, the parents most successfully transmitting their ideals to their children (outside of Mormons and Evangelicals) *are parents with no religious affiliation*!

This may seem like some great achievement on the part of nonaffiliated parents, but, in truth, it is not. It is only easier to transmit nonaffiliation from one generation to the next (relative to transmitting religious affiliation) because no modeling is required—all parents have to do is *not* openly identify with any religion in front of their children. This lack of required effort, paradoxically, eases the transmission of religious nonaffiliation over generations.

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[16] Twenty percent converted to some denomination of Protestantism, and five percent converted to Catholicism.

The Secularization of Society

Secularization is so often equated with modernity.

It is true that secularization in the modern Western world has reached an unprecedented level in the history of human societies, especially in Eastern and Northern Europe. Yet, what is new today is not a loss of interest in religion among some people in some countries, which has always existed, but, rather, a loss of interest in religion among most people in most industrialized countries. What is, new, in other words, is the *populism of religious indifference*—never before has the average man or woman been so disinterested in or dismissive of religion.

The reason for this populism of religious indifference can be traced to occupational niche construction, numerous Protestant Reformations across Europe, the constitutional or bureaucratic separation of church and state, the rise and spread of public education emphasizing science and multiculturalism, the spread of dense, cosmopolitan urban environments, access to unprecedented information over the internet and so on and so forth. Each of these is often traced to some point in European or American history over the last 500 or so years. And, each is regarded as accelerating the secularization of society by making people more diverse, better educated and less parochial.

All of these points are valid.

However, I have endeavored to show that modernity, more fundamentally, is merely a certain set point of cultural looseness and self-dimensionality. We can, and ought to, therefore, situate the antecedents and particularities of secularization in 2017 in the context of an endless cycle of reconfigurating cultural tightness-looseness and increasing/decreasing self-dimensionality. At the same time, the cultural results of such differentially fluctuating cycles are being differentially transmitted to each generation from parents to children. The totality of these processes constitutes the phenomenon of secularization.

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American Nones

During the 1968 annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Montreal, sociologist Glenn Vernon presented his paper *The Religious "Nones": A Neglected Category*. He opened his lecture to the audience by raking sociologists over the coals for their lack of research on religious nonaffiliates. In his review of the scientific literature, he was only able to find a single prior study of this population—published in 1932![1]

In order to address this dearth of research, Vernon analyzed data on religious nonaffiliates from several colleges and universities in the United States. He found that nonaffiliates described themselves in a number of ways: 23.5% called themselves atheists, 27.1% preferred the term "agnostic" and 7.1% of religious nonaffiliates actually firmly believed in the existence of God with no doubts whatsoever (Vernon 1968). Nearly 77% of religious nonaffiliates in Vernon's study were lower-middle-class men; but of those who identified explicitly as atheist or agnostic, 80% were upper middle class.

The year after Vernon published his talk, Mauss (1969) published an article detailing three possible motivations for not affiliating with a reli-

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[1] This 1932 study was nevertheless instructive (Vetter and Green 1932). It was a qualitative analysis of responses from 350 members of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism. Findings revealed that most members felt they became atheists because of their understanding of science and of the man-made origins of religion. The second most common reason given for being an atheist was a disgust of religious institutional (i.e., church clergy) hypocrisy.

gion. Mauss' work echoed the early 1932 article mentioned by Vernon and suggested that people leave religion because (1) they cannot believe any longer due to some aspect of science or history or philosophy or politics that makes religion seem false or superstitious, (2) they lose friends from church or gain friends from outside of church and/or (3) they are disgusted with religion due to sour relationships with religious family members.

Two short years after Mauss published his article, Colin Campbell published his 160-page study of nonaffiliates entitled *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* (1971).

In it, he argued that some religious nonaffiliates were essentially open to religiously affiliating but hadn't yet found the right church. Perhaps some of these people had recently moved to a new location and hadn't yet found a church, or perhaps they hadn't moved, but were simply looking for a new church distinct from the one they grew up attending. These people, Campbell insisted, enjoyed belonging to a community of cohesive believers who share in ritualistic behaviors like prayer, song, discussion and feasting. Such people reported being a religious nonaffiliate only because they had not yet found a church they really liked. On the other hand, a second type of nonaffiliate in Campbell's study had rejected religion out of hot hatred. For these nonaffiliates, religion itself was a symbol of corruption and stupidity (on this matter, see also Cimino and Smith 2014; Guenther 2014). For these nonaffiliates, it wasn't that they were looking for a different church; it was that they had rejected religiosity in its entirety.

Still other scholars, like Paul Pruyser (1974), argued sensibly that religious nonaffiliates should be, at least theoretically, as varied in their militancy, zealousness, sophistication and persuasiveness as are religious affiliates.

A scattered smattering of work on religious nonaffiliates followed in the intervening years (e.g., Hadaway and Roof 1979; Brinkerhoff and Burke 1980; Dempsey 1997; Fuller 2001). Nothing like a "field of study" focused on religious nonaffiliates, as Campbell, Pruyser and others had hoped to spark, would emerge until the early-mid 2000s when sociologists finally realized how extremely quickly secularization was advancing in the United States.

Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 depict the use of several different terms in English-language books from 1940 to 2000, using the dataset "Google Ngram" (Michel et al. 2011). The full dataset is a frequency distribution
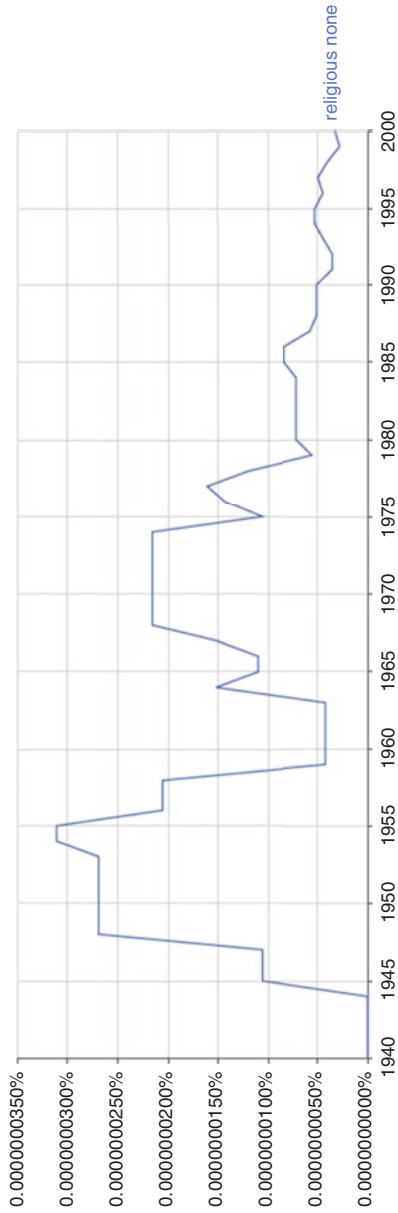
Fig. 5.1 Smoothed frequency distribution of phrase "religious none" in corpus of English-language texts 1940–2000 (Data points are calculated as five-year averages)
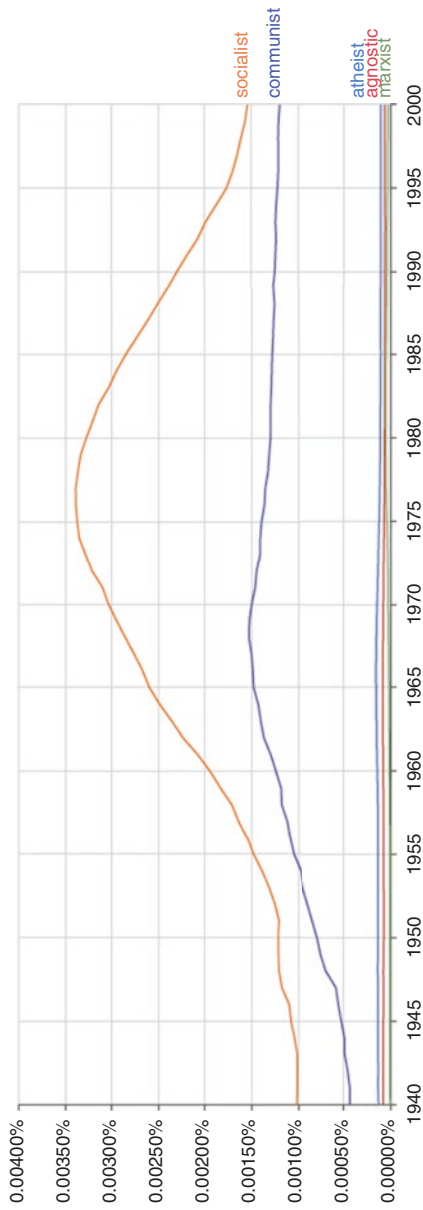
Fig. 5.2 Smoothed frequency distribution of terms "atheist," "agnostic," "Marxist," "socialist" and "communist" in corpus of English-language texts 1940–2000 (Data points are calculated as five-year averages)
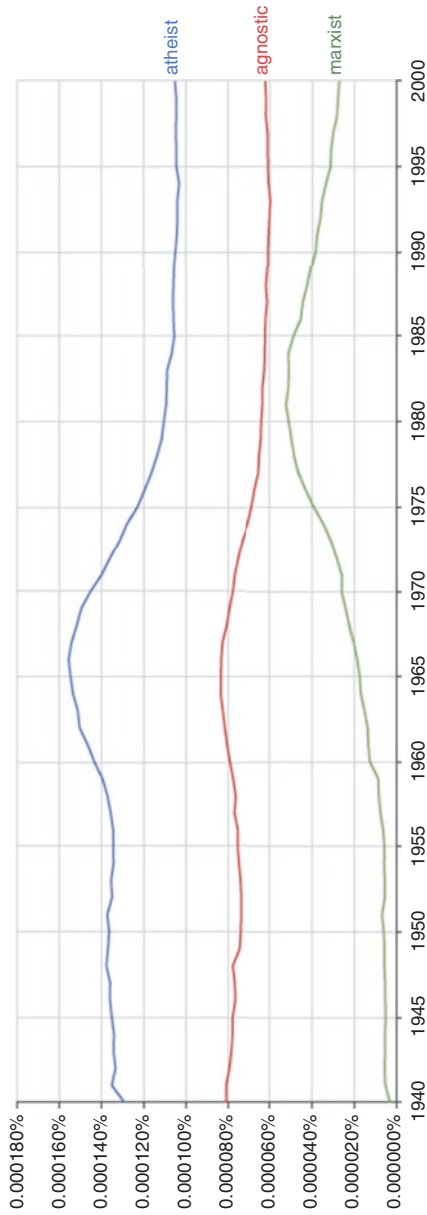
Fig. 5.3 Smoothed frequency distribution of terms "atheist," "agnostic" and "Marxist" in corpus of English-language texts 1940–2000 (Data points are calculated as five-year averages)
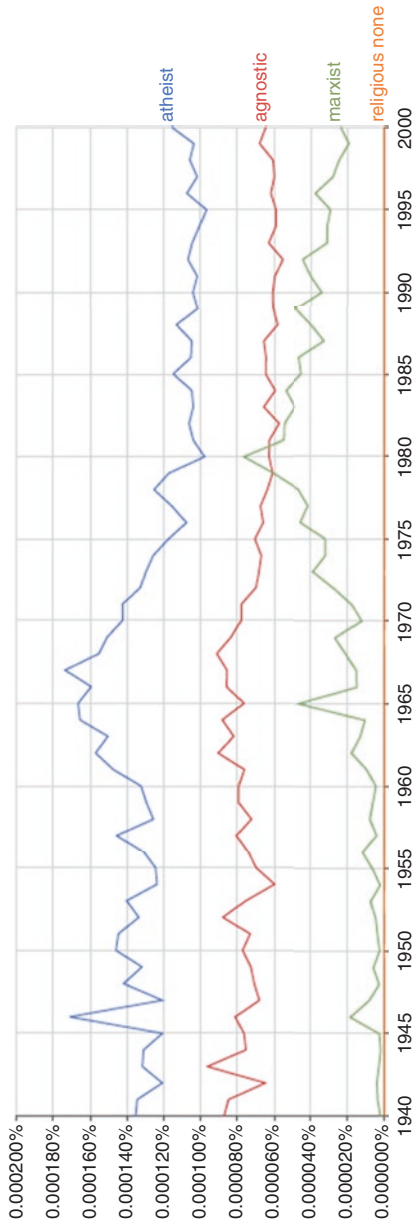
Fig. 5.4 Un-smoothed frequency distribution of terms "atheist," "agnostic," "Marxist" and "religious none" in corpus of English-language texts 1940–2000

of words and phrases from 4% of all the books that have ever been printed (about 5 million books of a possible 129 million). Here, I examine the usage frequency of several terms and phrases relevant to (or connoted with) the study of religious nonaffiliates.

Figure 5.1 depicts usage of the phrase "religious none[2]" from 1940 to 2000. The chart indicates that use of this phrase grew in the years following Vetter and Smith's 1932 article (not necessarily because of their article) before dropping in popular usage in the early 1960s. Around the time of Vernon's lecture and article in 1968, use of the term was again on the upswing before slowly receding from popular usage again after the mid-1970s.

To put Fig. 5.1 in context, I next plotted the usage rates of other terms frequently conflated with religious nonaffiliates. Figure 5.2 depicts usage rates of "atheist," "agnostic," "Marxist," "socialist" and "communist" in English-language texts from 1940 to 2000. This chart clearly shows that use of the terms "socialist" and "communist" grew steadily throughout the 1950s and peaked around the mid-1970s, right when use of the term "religious none" began to drop off. It is important to note that the terms "socialist" and "communist" were used much more frequently than "atheist," "agnostic," or "Marxist," which, when plotted on the same chart, barely register above zero.

Figure 5.3 zooms in only on usage of the terms "atheist," "agnostic" and "Marxist." Here, we see that, though "atheist" is the more commonly used term, all three share roughly similar trajectories. Marxism, however, does seem to peak in usage a bit later than the others, in the mid-1980s, while atheism and agnosticism were most popularly used in the mid-1960s.

Figure 5.4, lastly, depicts unsmoothed usage rates of "atheist," "agnostic," "Marxist" and "religious none." I plotted the unsmoothed trend lines for each term in order to show the full variation in usage of these terms. Most significantly, use of the phrase "religious none," was significantly less common than use of the terms "atheist," "agnostic," or "Marxist." In this sense, though often conflated with other terms in popular culture, "religious none" has been and remains a highly specialized term used largely by journalists and academics. Not only did popular usage of the term in English-language texts decline from 1975 to 2000, but academic work in the area also remained stagnant and sparse.

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[2] I plotted the phrase "religious none" instead of "religious nonaffiliates" because the latter term returned no results.

Since 2000, however, this has begun to change. In 2002, UC Berkeley sociologists Michael Hout and Claude Fischer published an article that would reignite the social scientific conversation about religious nonaffiliates. Hout and Fischer noted how substantially religious nonaffiliation had grown in the past several decades—after remaining stable at around 7–8% from 1972 to 1990, the rate of nonaffiliation doubled to 15% by 2000 (Hout and Fischer 2002). The dataset they were using, the General Social Survey, was (and is) both nationally representative and frequently used, which indicated that this relative explosion of nonaffiliation was a very real phenomenon in need of explanation. Four years later, in 2006, Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar (2006) would also help to reintroduce research on religious "nones" into popular social scientific discourse (Kosmin and Keysar 2009; Kosmin et al. 2009; Kosmin 2011).

A lot has followed. Here is what we've learned so far.

RELIGIOUS NONAFFILIATES IN THE UNITED STATES: A PROFILE

Subsequent work has confirmed the early insights of Vernon (1968), Mauss (1969), Campbell (1971) and Pruyser (1974). There is, indeed, a lot of variation among religious nonaffiliates, yet, some common observations about this population have emerged (Lee 2014). Most nonaffiliates in the United States today are not openly atheist, though an important subset are, and I will discuss them in a moment. Nationally, though, most nonaffiliates are simply apathetic toward organized religion. As Steve Bruce (2011) puts it:

> When pressed, people often give alternative proximate explanations [for their lack of religious affiliation]. They no longer attend church because they are too busy or they do not like the priest or they moved and never quite got around to finding a new church. But, as the stated reasons for defection usually cite some obstacle that could have been overcome with the merest effort, we can suppose that they no longer believe there is a creator God who will punish them for failing to worship him in the way he demands. (Bruce 2011, p. 3)

The most recent data show that only 12.5% of nonaffiliates are self-identified atheists, 21.7% believe in God with no doubts and as many as 62.5% of nonaffiliates describe themselves as "spiritual, but not religious" (Sherkat 2014; Baker and Smith 2015). These "spiritual, but not reli-

gious," types tend to have a belief in a God (or "higher power") while also rejecting organized religion as necessary for personal faith.

On average, religious nonaffiliates attend church a bit less than once a year (compared to a national affiliate average of once a month) and pray less often than every affiliate group (Sherkat 2014).

It seems that the likelihood of abandoning one's religious affiliation is strongly tied to geographic mobility (i.e., propensity to move to different locations for work, school etc.). Generally speaking, the more people are exposed to others outside of their immediate family and community, the more likely they are to realize that the way they'd been brought up to believe and behave is not necessarily the *only or best possible* way of believing and behaving. This realization leads to religious relativism which leads to religious apathy (Bruce 2011).

Moving to a new place, in a different city and state, is certainly a lifestyle change—consider the need to find a new place to live, a new grocery store, a new mechanic, a new doctor, a new job with new colleagues, a new school for the kids and so on. Such a move—specifically measured as a move to a non-Southern urban area in a different city and state—increases the odds that people will abandon their religious affiliation at some point in the future by an astonishing 332% (Sherkat 2014). Even moving to a Southern urban area, in a different city and state, raised the odds of apostasy by 181%.

Nonaffiliates, because of their wider travel and exposure to diverse others, are also much less likely to believe there are "absolutely clear" guidelines for good or evil behavior and are thus more morally relativist than are highly religious people (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Nonreligious people, of course, still attempt to behave ethically, though they think the guidelines for such behavior come from one's own best decision making instead of from a God. The following is an illustrative conversation between a researcher and a religious nonaffiliate, from Robert Bellah et al.'s (1985) famous work:

Researcher (R)	So what are you responsible for?
Religious non-affiliate (RNA)	I'm responsible for my acts and for what I do.
R	Does that mean you're responsible for others, too?
RNA	No
R	Are you your sister's keeper?
RNA	No

R	Your brother's keeper?
RNA	No
R	Are you responsible for your husband?
RNA	I'm not. He makes his own decisions. He is his own person. He acts his own acts. I can agree with them or I can disagree with them. If I ever find them nauseous enough, I have a responsibility to leave and not deal with it anymore.
R	What about children?
RNA	I…I would say I have a legal responsibility for them, but in a sense I think they in turn are responsible for their own acts. (Bellah et al. 1985, p. 304)

Now, this specific nonaffiliate is expressing an unusually strong individualistic ethos, even for nonaffiliates, but the point remains that this population tends to see the world through a rather individualistic lens. This is likely only transitionary—religious nonaffiliates are still a statistical minority in the United States. Relative to a majority population of religious affiliates, they likely feel atomized, cut off, afloat. Their individualism is their response to this perceived predicament.

And, it is not quite ideal to call such a disposition "individualism," though this is the convention. Religious nonaffiliates frequently report feeling connected to nature, science, music and art (Caldwell-Harris et al. 2011. It would be better to call it an *expectation of independence from coercive human communities*, the penultimate example of which is organized religion.

This desire to be free from external authority only describes some nonaffiliates, especially those with high-status positions in society. That nonaffiliate quoted above, for example, is a successful upper-middle-class female academic. Nonaffiliates, in general, are overrepresented among those with high incomes, prestigious occupations *and* high levels of education—nonaffiliates, for example, are way overrepresented among academics, especially those at research universities (Ecklund et al. 2008; Gross and Simmons 2009; Caldwell-Harris 2012).

On the other hand, nonaffiliates lower in the income, educational and occupational prestige hierarchies will perceive relatively more threats to personal safety, shelter, transportation and other survival-relevant goals.

This threat perception leads to subcultural tightening and a search for some powerful external authority that can provide order and control. But, for threatened religious nonaffiliates, this tends not to be God—it tends to be government, or science and technology (see also Rutjens et al. 2013; Farias et al. 2013). These are secular sources of external control that provide relatively more threatened religious nonaffiliates with a sense that essentially omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent forces are at work to support, sustain and protect them.

Now, let's look at some specifics. Religious nonaffiliates have been found, since the 1960s, to be disproportionately male, white non-Southerners (e.g., Putnam and Campbell 2010). They tend to be either young people who were raised in nonreligious households or lapsed Baby Boomers who lost their affiliation in adulthood.

Regarding race, as I've mentioned before, whites tend to claim religious nonaffiliation at higher rates because nonaffiliation is itself stigmatizing—religious affiliation remains the statistical norm—and racial or ethnic minorities will tend to avoid accruing further marginalization.[3] This doesn't mean racial or ethnic minorities are unfailingly religious (many are privately nonreligious), it just means that scholars shouldn't expect to pick up high rates of self-reported religious nonaffiliation among these groups at this early stage of American secularization. It also reinforces the idea that the less threatened/stigmatized the minority individual is (i.e., the higher their educational attainment or income), the more likely they will be to proclaim a nonreligious identity (Baker and Smith 2015; Sherkat 2014; Zuckerman et al. 2016).

Regarding gender, women are not only less likely to leave a religion, they are also less likely to stay nonaffiliated when reporting so in the past (Kosmin et al. 2009). Specifically, there are 1.4 male nonaffiliates for every female nonaffiliate, and this ratio only becomes more exacerbated as the form of secularity gets more extreme, with 2.1 male agnostics for every female agnostic and 2.6 male atheists for every female atheist (Baker and Smith 2015).

Thus, women are not only less likely to be nonaffiliated, they are also much less likely to be hardline antireligious atheists. Tiina Mahlamäki (2012) suggests that this is because *women are less likely to be extremists of any sort*—whether antireligious atheists or Islamic terrorists. Women his-

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[3] There is an exception—Americans from formerly (and presently) communist Asian and Eastern European countries tend to claim religious nonaffiliation at higher rates.

torically, she explains, have only been associated with religion and religiosity because they were the ones burdened with child-rearing. Women had to act sufficiently religious in order to be perceived as good mothers raising ethically conscious kids. In fact, she points out, it has largely been men fighting religious wars, still true to this day, and it is also largely men who make up national politically oriented atheist organizations.

Jessica Collett and Omar Lizardo (2009) argue that girls raised in patriarchal religious homes are socialized to become risk-averse women who wouldn't think of leaving the faith (or the home). When one parent (the mother) in society has systematically lower occupational prestige and household authority than the other spouse, a power imbalance is projected to young male and female children. This power imbalance inflates young boys' egos while deflating their sisters'. The sometimes-subtle message transmitted across the duration of children's socialization and development is that men's work is efficacious, is risky, makes money, is respected and occurs outside of the home, while women's work is basic, droll, unpaid, unrespected and bound to the home.

Boys raised in such homes grow up to be risk-taking men in the public sphere—they switch or abandon creative projects, educational programs, jobs and religions in order to get ahead. Girls raised in such homes, on the other hand, tend to avoid taking any substantial educational or occupational risks over the life-course in order to settle into family life at a relatively young age.

If Collett and Lizardo are correct, then the prediction is that, as more and more women climb the occupational prestige ladder in society, they will project more assertive, autonomous, risk-taking personas to their daughters, who will in turn express these traits to an even greater degree in their own lives—perhaps up to and including abandoning the religion of their youth. Collett and Lizardo (2009), in their analysis of General Social Survey data, find that, as expected, girls raised by mothers high in occupational prestige tend to grow up to be less religious (or completely nonreligious) women.

This gender imbalance in religious nonaffiliation is indeed changing as women and girls are offered more avenues for occupational and educational self-actualization (Hastings and Lindsay 2013). Female apostasy may even be climbing at a faster relative rate than male apostasy—women who forgo marriage and child-rearing in their 20s and 30s to pursue graduate school or to climb the corporate ladder feel especially alienated from

the traditional Christian heuristic of woman as mother and homemaker (Woodhead 2008).

Economically speaking, religious nonaffiliates are significantly more upwardly mobile (i.e., more likely to obtain a better-paying job than their parents) than are Evangelical Protestants, but not yet as upwardly mobile as liberal Protestants. Religious nonaffiliates also have, on average, higher household incomes ($62,432) than Evangelicals ($48,053), Mormons ($51,006) and even Catholics ($57,521), but not yet higher than liberal Protestants ($67,272) (Sherkat 2014). However, Pew Religious Landscape Survey data show that over 40% of self-reported atheists and agnostics, specifically, make above $75,000 per year, making them the highest income group overall (Baker and Smith 2015).

In general, this high household income among nonaffiliates is driven by nonaffiliated females who are more career oriented than female religious affiliates—the percentage of housewives that are nonaffiliated (24.6%) is lower than Mormons (37.3%), Evangelical Protestants (30.7–34.8%), Catholics (29.1%) and even liberal Protestants (27.7%) (Sherkat 2014).

Nonaffiliates also tend to have higher educational attainment and are more likely to self-identify as an "intellectual" (Zuckerman et al. 2016). Currently, as many as 40% of university students are nonaffiliates (Kosmin 2013). Except for extremely politically conservative men and moderately and/or extremely politically conservative women, each year of educational attainment linearly increases the probability that an American will report being a religious nonaffiliate. Specifically, women who report being extremely liberal are almost four times as likely to be a nonaffiliate (compared to being an affiliate) if they had a master's or PhD degree, while extremely liberal males are nearly twice as likely to be nonaffiliated (Baker and Smith 2015). And, critically, religious nonaffiliates, as a group, have the second smallest (behind Unitarians) gender difference in college degree attainment, with 27.5% of male and 26.3% of female nonaffiliates obtaining college degrees (Sherkat 2014).

Those nonaffiliates who self-report as atheists or agnostics tend to have the highest levels of educational attainment, with around 40% of atheists and agnostics holding *at least* a bachelor's degree. Also important to note, is that religious nonaffiliates, in general, been found to be more scientifically literate and analytical in their thinking than are Protestants and Catholics (Beit-Hallahmi 2006; Sherkat 2011; Gervais and Norenzayan 2012a; Caldwell-Harris 2012; Ritter et al. 2014).

Politically speaking, religious nonaffiliates skew liberal. Consider, for example, the death penalty and pot—two considerably controversial topics. General Social Survey data show that 82.5% of white Baptists and 74.7% of white Catholics support the death penalty compared to 69.5% of white nonaffiliates. Regarding pot, only 17.7% of white Baptists and 25.5% of white Catholics think marijuana should be legalized compared to 56.6% of white nonaffiliates (Sherkat 2014). Black Baptists and Catholics, who suffer at higher rates from both incarceration on non-violent drug charges *and* capital punishment, understandably support marijuana legalization and oppose the death penalty at higher rates than their white counterparts.

Though it's probably not politically correct to say so, religious non-affiliates are, on average, less bigoted than their affiliated counterparts. Only 6.7% of religious nonaffiliates report an unwillingness to vote for a hypothetical presidential candidate solely because she was a woman, compared to 18–22% of Baptists, Evangelicals and other sectarian groups (Sherkat 2014). Among white Baptists, 37.4% believe white people should be allowed to legally segregate themselves from other races and 26.1% would not vote for a black president just because they were black. Among white Catholics, 25% want the legal right to segregate racially, and around 10% would refuse to vote for a black president. Among both groups, opposition to immigration is also high: 66.2% of white Baptists and 58.1% of white Catholics say immigrants can never become fully American. In contrast, only 16% of white nonaffiliates want segregation, only 9.5% refuse to vote for a black president, and 50.9% refuse to grant American identity to immigrants (Sherkat 2014). The general nonaffiliate skew toward liberalism grows even larger with stronger forms of secularism—only 15.3% of atheists and 15.4% of agnostics in the United States are politically conservative, compared to 44.3% of actively religious people (Baker and Smith 2015).

Despite proclaiming support for liberal political causes, Joseph Baker and Buster Smith (2015) find, across all available years of the General Social Survey since 1972, that religious nonaffiliates voted 10% less often in national presidential elections than did religious affiliates. Nonaffiliates turned out to vote at the highest rate for the 1978 election to replace incumbent Gerald Ford after Richard Nixon's resignation, an election that would be won by Ronald Reagan. Nonaffiliates turned out at the lowest rate for the 1988 election between George Bush Sr. and Michael Dukakis. So, it seems, nonaffiliates are more politically liberal *and* more

politically apathetic, though we must keep in mind that religious nonaf-filiation and voter apathy are both more common among the youth of each generation.

Overall, the most important public policy issues affecting religious non-affiliation have been support for the legalization of gay marriage[4] and support for the legalization of marijuana, issues first introduced into popular culture in the 1960s (Hout and Fischer 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2010). These two issues have influenced nonaffiliation even more so since 1990—in that year, roughly 10% of Americans aged 18–29 had no religious preference and just over 20% of this population supported the legalization of marijuana or gay marriage. By 2008, however, almost 30% of Americans aged 18–29 had no religious affiliation, and during that same period, support for legalizing marijuana and gay marriage grew to 41% and 56%, respectively. More recent data show that only 22.7% of religious nonaffiliates, as a group, oppose same-sex marriage compared to, for example, 39.2% of Catholics, 61.8% of Baptists and 67.5% of Mormons.

A central remaining question in this area of research on nonaffiliates is how church-based religious social networks and secular social networks differ from one another (McCaffree and Saide forthcoming). Social networks can differ in a lot of important ways. Specifically, they can differ according to their (1) size, (2) density, (3) time, (4) diversity and (5) quality.

Religious people may have larger-*sized* networks because they join extended communities in the form of churches. However, what happens when a religious nonaffiliate decides to join multiple occupational or hobby clubs (online or in person)? Might they build a social network of a similar size? Alternatively, the *density* of religious networks—the degree to which people in one's network know each other—may be greater for religious people, to the degree that their friends are mostly members of a single geographically bound church. But, wouldn't this also be true for a nonaffiliate who regularly plays recreational sports at the local gym? This nonaffiliate is likely to see the same people year in and year out, and these people are likely to know each other as well.

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[4] Sexual politics, in general, are important to nonaffiliates and especially to the least person-ally religious nonaffiliates. Only 17.7% of nonaffiliates want to outlaw pornography (compared to 44.9–62.2% of Evangelicals and other sectarians), only 5.8% want to outlaw sex education in public school (compared to 17.9–25.4% of religious sectarians), and only 7.3% oppose abortion in cases of rape (compared to 22.8–36.4% of religious sectarians) (Sherkat 2014).

Network *time* may also vary depending on whether the network is embedded in church-based religious networks or not. Network time simply denotes the amount of absolute time spent with members of one's network. Time spent in church, at church activities, volunteering in church charities and so on is all time spent with members of one's network. Of course, again, the secular corollaries to this are obvious—isn't it possible for a nonaffiliate to attend college or work-related activities frequently, and thus spend the same amount of time with similar others as a regular churchgoer would?

Network *diversity* involves two considerations: (1) the number of diverse roles (e.g., friend, babysitter, neighbor, hair stylist) any one person in your social network plays (i.e., role diversity) and (2) the aggregate racial, gender, social class, political and/or religious diversity of members of your social network (i.e., demographic diversity). Both provide interesting avenues for comparative research on religious nonaffiliates and affiliates. Research has indicated thus far that church-based religious social networks are more geographically bound and homogeneous; such networks are likely high in role, and low in demographic, diversity.

But, what does this all mean for peoples' quality of life? The last structural aspect of networks, network *quality*, speaks to this. Are smaller, denser, less demographically diverse social networks more conducive to people's moment-to-moment well-being? Or, are larger, sparser, more demographically diverse social networks the key to health and well-being? Perhaps both networks structures work just fine, or perhaps one works better than the other under different conditions of cultural tightness-looseness and self-dimensionality.

The most important thing to keep in mind when reading this profile of religious nonaffiliates is that, if rates of nonaffiliation continue to rise in the United States, the profile of the average nonaffiliate will more and more approximate the profile of the average American citizen. Rates of nonaffiliation among racial and ethnic minorities are rising, as are rates for women and those with lower levels of education and occupational prestige.

The secular landscape is becoming the American landscape.

Types of Religious Nonaffiliates

As I noted above, some of religious nonaffiliation is merely circumstantial, that is, people who moved away from the family church of their childhood or young adulthood and just haven't had the time or sufficient reason to

find and commit to a new church. These nonaffiliates tend to have a soft spot for the religion of their youth, but nowhere near the genuine interest required to search out a new church to attend regularly.

Another type of nonaffiliate, specifically those that were raised in a warm, supportive religious household, unmarred by drug use, corporal punishment, parental dysfunction or divorce, may dabble in religion later in life in order to deal with difficulties like the death of loved ones, illness or unemployment (e.g., Bengtson et al. 2013).

And, of course, a rapidly rising number of nonaffiliates were themselves raised by nonaffiliated parents.[5] These nonaffiliates are the most likely to remain nonaffiliated throughout their lives.

But, these are only broad strokes.

Robert Putnam, David Campbell (2010) and Darren Sherkat (2014) provide two estimates, using different datasets, of the number of religious nonaffiliates who are completely secular with no belief in god. Using these estimates, somewhere between 50% and 58.6% of religious nonaffiliates, especially millennial nonaffiliates, actively reject religious affiliation *and* god belief. Most of these people, however, do not identify as atheists due to the stigma associated with that term[6] (I will discuss this stigma more in a moment). Recall that only around 12.5% of religious nonaffiliates, nationally, identify as atheists.

Putnam and Campbell (2010) suggest that the other 41.4–50% of nonaffiliates are what Wade Clark Roof called "spiritual seekers," who seek spiritual significance in the specific biographical events of their lives. For these seekers, churches come and go as friends or jobs or hobbies might come and go—each is merely a landmark in the grand narrative of Self. As Robert Fuller (2001) argues, these people are religious in the personal sense (they almost uniformly believe in a "force" or "higher

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[5] It seems as though religiously nonaffiliated parents are transmitting a combination of vague distaste and uncommitted nostalgia for religion to their children. Christel Manning (2013), for example, conducted interviews with 48 religiously nonaffiliated parents in the United States from 2005 to 2007 across Connecticut, Florida, California and Colorado and found that most of these parents were, if not indifferent to religion, only casual believers and occasional church attenders or "spiritual" practitioners of yoga, meditation and other non-theistic practices.

[6] In their 2006 Faith Matter survey, Putnam and Campbell (2010) found only 5 out of 3108 respondents self-identified as either atheist of agnostic. This is an incredibly low number, yet it is indeed true that most nonaffiliates simply identify as lapsed, indifferent or opposed to organized religion but not necessarily as atheistic.

power" or "god" guiding their own "path of meaning"), but are quite secular in their unwillingness to affiliate or commit to single church community.

These are not the only studies that have searched for "types" of religious nonaffiliates. The psychologist Christopher Silver and his colleagues (2014) conducted two studies, a qualitative coding analysis of 59 in-depth interviews with 37 nonaffiliated men, and a quantitative study of the survey responses of 1153 nonaffiliates both male and female. The nonaffiliates in their sample were restricted to those with little or no god belief. They found that, among this group, 38% actively enjoyed pursuing philosophical discussions with others, sometimes with strangers in public, about the drawbacks of god belief and of organized religion.

The second largest group of nonaffiliates uncovered in Silver's study—another 38%—was what Silver and his colleagues called "activist" atheists and "antitheists." These people felt either harmed by religious people in their personal lives, or harmed by the efforts of Evangelical Christian leaders to realize platform policies of the Religious Right to ban gay marriage, stem-cell research, abortion, birth control and so on.

Baker and Smith (2015) estimate that, of the entire US population, 14% are religiously nonaffiliated and also, privately, confident believers in god. This 14% stands as a majority of the 20–25% of Americans who now claim no religious affiliation. However, they also find that the number of purely secular, purely nonreligious nonaffiliates—with no beliefs in gods or miracles—is growing rapidly, as well, especially among younger generations. So, though God-believing nonaffiliates may make up a preponderance of nonaffiliates today, they may not necessarily still do so a generation or two from now.

Phil Zuckerman and his colleagues (2016) note, for example, that millennials are trending both away from philosophical humanism and toward "New atheism" and "militant atheism" in the combative vein of Christopher Hitches, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins. For this younger generation of Americans, humanism stinks of the soft, overly optimistic, religious nostalgia of their parents. A possible rising tide of hatred toward religious people has moved Jürgen Habermas (2008) to openly wonder what fate awaits the devoutly religious if the day finally comes when a majority of Americans are aggressively, resentfully, atheistic.

Setting Habermas' speculation aside, what is certain is that religious nonaffiliates in the United States today, as a whole, are at least as varied in belief and behavior as are religious affiliates.

But for simplification's sake, it is probably safe to delineate three basic types of religious nonaffiliates: *secular nones* (who don't affiliate and don't believe in supernaturalism or gods), *spiritual, but not religious nones* (who don't affiliate but do believe in a God/higher power) and *Unchurched believer nones* (who affiliate and disaffiliate inconsistently, but do believe—see Baker and Smith 2009). This preliminary classification of nonaffiliates into three broad "types" is consistent with all research that has been conducted of which I am aware.

Theoretically, these three types represent people with neither religious ideology nor any commitment to religious organizations (secular nones), people with religious ideology but no commitment to religious organizations (spiritual, but not religious nones) and people with religious ideology who commit to religious organizations inconsistently (unchurched believer nones).

For now, at least, there is little need to consider nonaffiliates who regularly attend church, but don't believe in any religious ideology—these people constitute less than 1% of all nonaffiliates (Baker and Smith 2015).

Becoming an Atheist

The least common subpopulation of religious nonaffiliates is self-identified atheists. Thus far, very little is known about the sociological differences between atheists and other nonaffiliates save that atheists tend to be (even more than nonaffiliates, generally) unmarried with no children, socially liberal and to come from high-status majority groups—whites, males and the highly educated (Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; Galen 2009; Galen and Kloet 2011; Pasquale 2012).

Sociologist Jesse Smith (2011) conducted interviews with 40 nonaffiliates (most of them were college-educated white women between 31 and 40) and concluded that becoming an atheist involved three stages of self-realization. The first stage involved questioning the religious faith of their parents (in Smith's study, respondents had not been raised in secular households), which was often met with familial arguments and conflicts.

The second stage involved completely rejecting the religious faith of their upbringing. This rejection felt authenticating because their parents' religious belief, behavior and belonging had always felt coercively forced onto them. The parental tendency to "shove religion down kids' throats"

is an absolutely key c*ause* of apostasy (see also Bengtson et al. 2013). Of course, whether or not a child perceives parental socialization as something being "shoved" down their throat likely has a lot to do with preexisting feelings of warmth and secure attachment. By the time a child or young adult feels religion is being "shoved down their throat," they've already been given cause (or disposition) to question their parents' legitimacy.

The last stage of atheist identity development is the "coming out" stage, a play on the LGBT "coming out of the closet," phrase first popularized by Richard Dawkins. This "coming out" stage involves presenting oneself to friends, family and coworkers as a proud, happy, healthy atheist. "Coming out" is both empowering and liberating for the newly awakened atheist, but conflicts with family members and others may also reach a crescendo.

It would be misleading, though, to focus on how "coming out" as an atheist leads to family conflict. It is true that most qualitative (i.e., in-depth interview) research on nonaffiliates finds that atheists openly complain about conflicts with family (and some quantitative surveys have found this as well; see, for example, Cheyne and Britton 2010). However, *most of these interview subjects are from community atheist advocacy organizations—they are not everyday citizens who happen to be atheists.* Atheists who seek out membership in atheist advocacy organizations are not necessarily representative of atheists, nationally. It is possible, for example, that those atheists who join activist organizations are seeking out greater compensatory control due to the threat which comes from a cold, distant relationship with parents.

Bengtson's study, on the other hand, did not draw its participants from atheist advocacy organizations, but from a near-random, nationally representative sample of 3500 Southern Californians from 300 different families. Results of Bengtson and his colleagues' (2013) study suggest that many, if not most, atheists, are today brought up in casually religious or principled nonreligious households. They write:

> Previous research has suggested that a majority of atheists or those who have taken the path of nonbelief have rejected their parents' religious faith. Many atheists describe themselves—or their family members describe them—as the black sheep of the family. However… in our study it was more common to see intergenerational similarity, children following in the same path as their parents as nonreligious nones. The degree of such parent—child similarity has increased over time. (Bengtson et al. 2013, p. 189)

We might also ask what it means, exactly, to self-identify as an atheist (Pasquale and Kosmin 2013). Is the person rejecting god belief? Supernaturalism in general? Religious rituals? A specific church or denomination? All of the above? Following the trend of survey data, it seems most people "coming out" as atheists are rejecting the sort of intolerant use of religion demonstrated by the Religious Right over the last several decades, in addition to rejecting the need for a god as a source of personal comfort. This is sure to shift and change over time, constituting an important area for future research.

Negative Attitudes Toward Atheists

In 2006, sociologist Penny Edgell and her colleagues published their article *Atheists as "Other": Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society*, which has since been cited nearly 600 times.

What caught the eye of so many was the finding not only that most Americans wouldn't vote for an atheist presidential candidate, but also that they'd rather vote for a Jewish, African American or gay president before ever considering voting for an atheist (Edgell et al. 2006). Their analysis also revealed that the three best predictors of whether someone will distrust atheists is (1) conservative political orientation, (2) devout personal religiosity and (3) belonging to a religiously homogeneous social network. Though devoutly religious whites tend to harbor racial distrust and a considerable homophobia, neither bias was as strong as the bias against atheists.

Other studies have since corroborated Edgell's. Faith Matters survey data show that, even when asked about "nonaffiliates" instead of "atheists," Americans on average still feel warmer toward Jews, Catholics and even Evangelicals (Putnam and Campbell 2010). But, interestingly, they feel warmer toward nonaffiliates than they do toward Muslims, who they feel least warm toward. Thus, Americans may distrust atheists more than other groups, but not more than Muslims.

Still, distrust of religious nonaffiliates in general, but of atheists in particular, is still absurdly problematic—numerous nationally representative survey studies show that Americans have intuitive conceptions of atheists as more likely to be criminals: specifically, murderers and purveyors of rape, incest and bestiality (Gervais et al. 2011; Gervais 2014). Americans also reveal a tendency toward seeing atheists as more likely to, for example, ridicule an obese woman, kick a dog and even eat human flesh.

Americans, perhaps unsurprisingly, reveal such biases toward a lot of groups, but their fears of atheists do seem to be stronger than their fears of other religious groups, homosexuals and even feminists (though not necessarily of Muslims). This sort of tribal intolerance has always been endemic to America; it is, theoretically, a result of the country's historically high levels of demographic diversity, though this cosmopolitanism has also produced the country's innovative culture.

Some evidence suggests that this distrust of atheists is also defensive; religious people feel attacked by the existence of atheists. One study, for example, found that when Christians were instructed to write out an inflammatory passage from Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion* (2008), they subsequently rated a lemon drink as more disgusting than subjects who had written out a control passage from a text unrelated to religion (Ritter and Preston 2011). This effect was entirely subliminal, but nevertheless statistically significant and suggestive that religious Americans, quite literally, find atheists disgusting.

People in the United States who are most fearful of atheists are motivated by what Penny Edgell calls *cultural preservation* (Edgell and Tranby 2010). Cultural preservationists are politically conservative regular churchgoers who, though capable of tolerating diversity, only tend to do so insofar as their idealized notions of Christianity are not challenged. Atheists, homosexuals and Muslims, each in their own ways challenge a monolithic Christian narrative that Jesus died for our sins and that only the Christian God/Bible provides salvation and moral righteousness. These groups are consequently disliked and distrusted and assumed to be prone to criminality. This "othering" fortifies the in-group bonds and intense solidarity of these Christian groups by providing clear contrast groups that supposedly demonstrate how *not* to believe, behave or identify (Choi and Bowles 2007; Bowles 2008).

Converging evidence indicates that cultural preservationists are also assuming that, because nonaffiliates and atheists do not belong to a religious community, they must not feel beholden to (i.e., internally and externally supervised by) the moral expectations of a god or gods, and therefore have no moral standards themselves (Gervais et al. 2011; Gervais and Norenzayan 2012b). Atheist distrust, at its core, is caused by an intuitive belief that the only checks on human behavior—the only reason to do good—is to avoid eternal damnation. This is intuitive because most all Americans are raised immersed in a culture (parents, politicians, entertainers, sports stars, news anchors) that carelessly and constantly equates religion with morality.

But, it isn't true! There are other, considerable, reasons why nonaffiliates or atheists would act kind and ethically—because hurting people is against the law and because hurting people hurts. Social isolation and disapproval, in addition to the background threat of arrest by police, are fully sufficient to keep most people (save psychopaths) from committing crimes, *including* atheists (Zuckerman 2008). Devoutly religious Americans are right that the threat of hell provides an additional deterrent, but this is only supplemental to the very immediate, earthly, threat of social ostracization and arrest.

The atheist Americans most likely to report having been discriminated against for their nonbelief are those that openly identify as atheist in public. Other than publicly identifying as an atheist, research indicates that being older and having higher income predicts the perception of discrimination among atheists (Cragun et al. 2012). These findings, from the nationally representative American Religious Identification Survey, seem to indicate that those with higher social status are both more likely to identify as an atheist *and* to perceive discrimination from others for doing so.

In response to this perception of discrimination, dislike and marginalization, many atheists have joined community advocacy organizations through websites like Meetup.com in order to find shared identity and solidarity with other atheists (Smith 2013; Pasquale 2012; Zuckerman et al. 2016). Of course, this is not new—atheists in the United States have been seeking out community with other atheists at least since the nineteenth century (Baker and Smith 2015). In the mid-late 1800s, for example, atheist Abner Kneeland's Free Enquirer organization began offering Sunday science lectures for those disinterested in Sunday religious worship.

These atheist advocacy organizations are most likely to be found in highly religious counties in the United States (Garcia and Blankholm 2016). I'm currently writing this book down the street from UC Riverside in Southern California, and the highest density of atheist Meetup groups and other community groups is, in my experience, in the Orange and San Diego County areas, where religiosity is also highest. Atheist community organizations thus emerge in response to the perception that atheists are disliked and untrustworthy. These community organizations are a shelter for people who feel vulnerable in what remains a predominantly religious country. Nonreligious areas have no need for atheist advocacy organizations because the label "atheist" isn't as oppositional or stigmatizing and it is therefore not symbolically salient.

There is reason to be optimistic about all of this perceived discrimination among atheists. Analyses of General Social Survey data from 1972 to 2008 show steadily rising acceptance of atheists over this period—only 57% of Americans supported the idea of an atheist being involved in public life (e.g., as a teacher and book author) in 1972 compared to about 70% in 2008 (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Besides, perhaps the biggest point of this subsection is that *steadily continuing intergenerational secularization will produce declines in prejudice against atheists because it will produce increases in atheist self-identification* (Sedikides and Gebauer 2010; Zuckerman et al. 2016). The levels of atheist distrust picked up by Edgell and others are an artifact of the United States being at a certain historical point in its secularization—by the time a majority of Americans are religiously nonaffiliated, in 50–100 years or less, prejudice against atheists will be firmly unpopular.

But, for now in 2017, atheist distrust is still quite prevalent. Americans, on average, trust religious affiliates more and assume that they will act more altruistically than nonaffiliates. The problem is that this can become a self-fulfilling prophecy—nonaffiliates, and especially atheists, who constantly perceive distrust in others may become distrusting themselves (Galen 2012). Put differently, *distrust of the nonreligious produces nonreligious distrust.*

Thus, if it is true that atheists are less altruistic and cooperative, as Putnam and Campbell (2010) suspect, this may be a defensive response to living in a culture that demonizes both nonaffiliation and atheism (Zuckerman et al. 2016). With the continued secularization of society, distrust of atheists will melt away, and, as a corollary, so too will any tendency among atheists to distrust those around them.

New Statistical Analyses of Variation Among Nonaffiliated and Nonreligious Americans

In this subsection, I will be presenting results from two recent sets of studies I conducted exploring variation among nonaffiliates and nonreligious people.

The first set of studies comes from my doctoral dissertation (McCaffree 2014), which was completed in 2014 and chaired by the social psychologist and identity theorist Jan Stets. The second set of studies comes from new analyses I conducted while writing this book. These new analyses make use of the General Social Survey's newly merged 2014 dataset

released only recently in April 2016. What I uncover is quite interesting. Let me explain it all beginning with the work that formed my dissertation.

Study One

The data I used for my dissertation came from The Morality Test, a previously unanalyzed online survey that was open to the public from 2003 to 2012. The host website for this survey is run by programmer Jeff Potter, and has been accessed by nearly 15 million people since 1997. To incentivize the public to take the various surveys offered on the website, people are provided with a profile of their political and moral leanings, compared to other users, upon completion of the survey. Michael Shermer (1997, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2011, 2015), cocreator of The Morality Test survey along with renowned Berkeley psychologists Frank Sulloway (1996) and Oliver John (John and Srivastava 1999), has also advertised the survey to a national audience through his monthly column in *Scientific American*.

The Morality Test, when I analyzed it, had a large sample size of 10,861 people (including 5551 religious nonaffiliates). The dataset, though large, was not ideally representative of the US population. Due to being an online survey, basic barriers to taking the test included needing internet access, a computer and a level of competence in navigating websites. The sample was consequently skewed (slightly) toward respondents who are white, of higher social class and younger, which is consistent with other findings on the demographics of people who take surveys advertised through online social media sites (see Duggan and Brenner 2013). Also, due to low sample sizes for African Americans, Latinos and Asians, only white respondents were analyzed in this first set of analyses (I include nonwhites in the next set).

I ran several different models as part of this first set of analyses. First, I checked to see what types of people were most likely to use "religiosity" and/or belief in a "god/higher power" to identify themselves. The results of two simultaneously calculated ordinary least squares regressions revealed that self-identification as religious was more highly correlated with church attendance($r = .80$) than was belief in God/higher power alone ($r = .41$). This indicates, as Fuller (2001) and others argue, that self-identification as "religious" more denotes a willingness to attend church than anything else. Religiosity is a more performative behavioral moniker than is "spiritual" or "god believing." Religious respondents were also

more likely to be male, married, less interested in science and more likely to believe that moral principles are determined by one's environment (e.g., as in a church environment).

I further found that the more religious a respondent was, the more likely they were to remember having harmonious relationships with mothers of strong moral character. On the other hand, the more respondents reported believing in God/higher power (as opposed to being religious), the more likely they were to remember having a harmonious relationship with a father of strong moral character. Adding to Bengtson and colleague's (2013) findings, my results reveal that relationship with mother may be more important for behavioral commitment to the church, while relationship with father may be more important for developing beliefs in gods/higher powers. It is plausible that *both* parents contribute to the transmission of religion to children, but that more fine-tuned survey questions must be devised to properly pick up this differential, though joint, effect. Results also revealed that more religious respondents tended to come from smaller families, suggesting that transmission of the faith is easier when fewer children are involved.

This survey also contained questions about fiscal and social politics. The more religious a respondent was, the more socially conservative *and* fiscally liberal (think charitable donating) they were likely to be. Respondents with stronger beliefs in God/higher power, on the other hand, were more likely to be socially liberal and fiscally conservative.

I next calculated a single logistic regression model to look for any general differences between religious nonaffiliates (i.e., respondents who marked "none" on the survey question asking for religious affiliation) and religious affiliates (i.e., respondents who marked anything other than "none" for this question). The religious affiliates in my sample were fairly diverse; Evangelicals, Catholics, mainline/liberal Protestants, Jews, Mormons, Muslims, Unitarians and Humanists, among others, were all represented. The question I'm interested in is how people who decided to affiliate differ from those who do not.

Contrary to expectations, I did not find that age or being male predicted identification as a religious nonaffiliate. Single respondents, however, were 80% more likely to be nonaffiliated than those who were married. Nonaffiliates were, on average, also from a higher social class though this effect was not very large. One of the biggest predictors of nonaffiliation in this analysis was actually moral worldview—nonaffiliates were significantly less likely than affiliates to believe that moral principles come from a god.

Specifically, each one-unit increase in confidence that moral principles are *not* God given raised the probability that a given respondent would report being nonaffiliated by 71%.

Respondents who remembered having conflicted relationships with their morally righteous mothers were slightly less likely to identify as a religious nonaffiliate in adulthood compared to those who remembered having harmonious relationships with mothers of few moral convictions. On the other hand, those who grew up having conflicted relationships with morally righteous fathers were slightly more likely to identify as a nonaffiliate in adulthood. The effects for both parents were statistically significant but small in size.

Respondents who had grown up in a larger family were also more likely to be nonaffiliated. With each additional sibling that people had, the probability of them identifying as a religious nonaffiliate in adulthood was raised by 22%. This finding is probably due to the difficulty of transmitting religious faith to large numbers of children. In order for parents to properly model their religious faith to their kids (thus transmitting it into the next generation), they must enjoy long and frequent bouts of religiously salient copresence with their children. Large families of three, four, five or six children make it increasingly difficult for parents to consistently model the beliefs and behaviors of the faith, ultimately reducing the likelihood of religious transmission. Relatedly, more frequent church attendance growing up (a proxy for parental modeling) decreased the probability of the respondent being nonaffiliated as an adult by 18%.

The political leanings of religious nonaffiliates in this analysis were also similar to those found by other researchers. In my analysis, the more socially liberal the respondent, and the more interested they were in science, the more likely they were to also report being a nonaffiliate. Interest in science, more than social liberalism, predicted nonaffiliation, though both were statistically significant. Specifically, each one-unit increase in reported interest in science raised the probability of any given respondent identifying as a nonaffiliate by 42%; each one-unit increase in strength of identification as a social liberal raised the probability by 19%. Respondents who were also fiscally conservative were slightly more likely—6%—to report being a nonaffiliate. Nonaffiliates, in sum, appear to be socially accepting and interested in science, but tight with their money.

The last model from my dissertation that I'd like to discuss here is a complex model comparing different "types" of religious nonaffiliates. I was curious to know how nonaffiliates compared to one another, but I

didn't want them to have to self-report a stigmatized identity like "atheist." Luckily, instead of asking respondents to self-report some specific secular identity like atheist or agnostic, The Morality Test survey instead had respondents self-report their feelings about religiosity and god belief.

So, I went back, gathered up all of my religious nonaffiliates and divided them up based on their self-reported levels of religiosity and belief in God/higher power. I ended up with three types of nonaffiliate: secular nones (with the lowest levels of religiosity and god belief), spiritual, but not religious nones (with the lowest levels of religiosity and highest levels of god belief) and unchurched believer nones (with the highest levels of both god belief and religiosity).[7]

I then compared these groups to one another using a multinomial logistic regression model, and I calculated the coefficients as relative risk ratios in order to achieve some consistency with the above analysis of nonaffiliates, which used odds ratios.

With secular nones as my baseline comparison group, I found that spiritual, but not religious and unchurched believer, nones were both significantly more likely to come from a lower social class. Also, males in the sample were 95% less likely than females to be a spiritual, but not religious none, and 85% less likely to be an unchurched believer none (compared to the likelihood of being a secular none). Regarding marital status, members in each nonaffiliate group were equally likely to be married.

These three types of nonaffiliates didn't differ much in regards to family upbringing. Spiritual, but not religious, respondents were, though, more likely to have attended church frequently at age 12 compared to secular nones.

Regarding politics, each one-unit increase in fiscal liberalism decreased the probability that a respondent was a spiritual, but not religious none by 25%. On the other hand, each one-unit increase in social liberalism raised the probability that a respondent would be categorized as spiritual, but not religious, by 30%. Spiritual, but not religious, nonaffiliates therefore appear to be, among nonaffiliates, both the most socially liberal *and* the most fiscally conservative.[8]

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[7] Only a very small number of nonaffiliates reported high levels of religiosity and low levels of god belief, so I didn't pursue any further examination of that group.

[8] Recall that spiritual, but not religious nones were also disproportionately female (compared to secular nones)—perhaps this group is representing those women who believe in God but reject the conservative social politics of the Religious Right and who do not, themselves, feel financially comfortable enough to be fiscally liberal.

One area that seemed to especially distinguish nonaffiliates was marriage and family politics. Respondents who were opposed to homosexuality, birth control, premarital sex and divorce were much more likely to be unchurched believer nones than secular nones. Each single-unit increase in support for liberal positions on the above issues led to a statistically significant 55% decrease in the likelihood of being an unchurched believer none.

The most important area of disagreement between nonaffiliate types was over whether or not a god was necessary to provide proper moral guidelines. My results show that each one-unit increase in strength of belief that morality comes from God raised the probability that a respondent would be a spiritual, but not religious none by 87%, and raised the probability that the respondent would be an unchurched believer none by 94%. Whether or not a god is required for moral behavior appears to be a fairly serious (though unacknowledged) source of disagreement among nonaffiliates.

Tellingly, the three types of nonaffiliates analyzed here did not differ whatsoever in their self-reported interest in science. Especially since Fuller (2001), researchers studying nonaffiliation have argued that scientific narratives compete with religious narratives when people are deciding whether or not to affiliate. When the local church pastor appears confidently anti-scientific, and the parishioner is a science or sci-fi fan, it may seem like a sensible choice for the parishioner to simply worship privately, at home, instead of risking an argument with the pastor over scripture and science.

Study Two

The second set of analyses I'd like to discuss here were conducted during the writing of this book. These analyses make use of a recently released merged 2014 dataset from the General Social Survey, a nationally representative survey conducted since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Council out of the University of Chicago.

This second set of analyses consists of six separate statistical models, each one examining a different facet of nonaffiliation, religiosity and spirituality in the United States. Each model, like the set of analyses above in Study One, controls for demographic characteristics like age, sex, class and marital status, but these new models also investigate racial differences and differences in educational attainment. In addition to these demographic variables, I also decided to look for differences in compensatory control,

Table 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
None1	3333	0.77	0.42	0	1
None2	1614	0.52	0.49	0	1
None3	1046	0.26	0.44	0	1
None4	1860	0.58	0.49	0	1
None5	1659	1.34	0.76	0	2
None6	729	0.59	0.49	0	1
Sex	3722	1.55	0.49	0	1
Age	3701	49.76	17.03	18	89
Degree	3722	1.67	1.22	0	4
Race	3722	0.24	0.42	0	1
Income	2261	15.12	5.98	1	25
Marital	3280	0.52	0.49	0	1
TooFast	2004	2.43	0.78	1	4
Advfront	1995	1.91	0.66	1	4
Helpnot	2382	3.2	1.27	1	5
Trust	2454	1.65	0.47	0	1

or in how nonaffiliates might be differentially using science and government (as opposed to religion) as key components of their narratives of meaning and purpose. Lastly, to address the research on secular people and distrust, I entered a variable into the models measuring whether or not the respondent thinks other people can be trusted (Table 5.1).

"None1"–"None6" represent different codings of my dependent variables which will be discussed as I go through the models. Each model additionally has six demographic control variables including sex, age, educational attainment, race, income and marital status. Specifically, "Sex" is a dichotomously coded measure of gender, where male = 0 and female = 1; "Age" is measured continuously; "degree" is a likert-scale measure of educational attainment running from "less than high school" to "graduate" school; "race" is a dichotomously coded measure, where white respondents = 0 and all nonwhite respondents = 1; "income" is an ordinal measure of respondents' income and is composed of 25 answer categories ranging from "under $1000" to "$150,000 or over"; and, lastly, "marital" is a dichotomously coded measure, where never-married and divorced respondents = 0 and married respondents = 1.

Each model (except Model 6) also contains a set of attitudinal variables that tap respondents' trust of science, government, government-science collaboration and trust of other people. Specifically, "toofast" is

a measure of how much respondents agree with the statement "Science makes our way of life change too fast," with answers ranging on a four-point likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree; "advfront" is a measure of how much respondents agree with the statement "Even if it brings no immediate benefits, scientific research that advances the frontiers of knowledge is necessary and should be supported by the federal government," with answers ranging on a four-point likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree; "helpnot" is a measure of how much respondents agree with the statement "Some people think that the government in Washington is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and private businesses. Others disagree and think that the government should do even more to solve our country's problems. Still others have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale?" with answers ranging on a five-point likert scale from "government should do more" to "government does too much." Lastly, "trust" is a dichotomous measure of respondents' answer to the question, "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" with agreement that people can be trusted = 0 and disagreement that people can be trusted = 1.

Models 1–4 investigate demographic and attitudinal differences between religious nonaffiliates and Christians in general (Model 1; see Table 5.2), religious nonaffiliates and Catholics specifically (Model 2; see Table 5.3), religious nonaffiliates and Protestants low in religiosity and spirituality, specifically (Model 3; see Table 5.4), and religious nonaffiliates and Protestants high in religiosity and spirituality, specifically (Model 4; see Table 5.5). Model 5 (see Table 5.6) and Model 6 (see Table 5.7) investigate demographic and attitudinal differences between individuals low as opposed to high in religiosity and spirituality.

In Model 1 (see Table 5.2), I compare 765 religious nonaffiliates to a general group of 2568 Christians composed of both Protestants and Catholics. I compared these groups by running a logistic regression, using nonaffiliates as the baseline.

Results show that female respondents were 57% (OR = 1.57; $p < .01$), nonwhites 54% (OR = 1.54; $p < .05$) and married respondents 48% (OR = 1.48; $p < .05$) more likely to be Christians than religious nonaffiliates. The Christians, compared to the nonaffiliates, also tended to be slightly, but statistically significantly, older. The two groups didn't differ with regard to educational attainment or income.

Table 5.2   Model 1: Comparison of nonaffiliates to generic Christian affiliates

Nonaffiliation [baseline]	Christian affiliation	
	Odds ratio	Std. error
Demographics		
Sex (male = 0)	1.57**	0.24
Age	1.02***	0.01
Degree (less than high school = 0)		
High school	0.6	0.22
Junior college	0.69	0.31
Bachelor	0.58	0.23
Graduate	0.53	0.23
Race (white = 0)	1.54*	0.3
Income	1.02	0.01
Marital status (single or divorced = 0)	1.48*	0.23
Compensatory control: science, government and other people		
Science makes way of life change too fast (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	0.89	0.09
Scientific research should be supported by government (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	1.71***	0.22
Government is too involved in fixing country's problems (higher scores indicate greater agreement)	1.16*	0.07
Other people can be trusted (agree = 0)	1.35	0.23
Constant	0.06***	0.04
Observations		1001
Pseudo R-squared		0.08

*.05; **.01; ***.001

Table 5.3   Model 2: Comparison of nonaffiliates to Catholic affiliates

Nonaffiliation [baseline]	Catholic affiliation	
	Odds ratio	Std. error
Demographics		
Sex (male = 0)	1.37	0.26
Age	1.02**	0.01
Degree (less than high school = 0)		
High school	0.44	0.18
Junior college	0.38	0.2
Bachelor	0.47	0.21
Graduate	0.4	0.2

Table 5.3   (continued)

Nonaffiliation [baseline]	Catholic affiliation	
	Odds ratio	Std. error
Race (white = 0)	1.15	0.27
Income	1.03	0.01
Marital status (single or divorced = 0)	1.53*	0.3
Compensatory control: science, government and other people		
Science makes way of life change too fast (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	.77*	0.09
Scientific research should be supported by government (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	1.69**	0.26
Government is too involved in fixing country's problems (higher scores indicate greater agreement)	1.1	0.08
Other people can be trusted (agree = 0)	1.4	0.29
Constant	0.07**	0.06
Observations		521
Pseudo R-squared		0.07

*.05; **.01; ***.001

Table 5.4   Model 3: Comparison of nonaffiliates to weak Protestant affiliates

Nonaffiliation [baseline]	Weak Protestant affiliation	
	Odds ratio	Std. error
Demographics		
Sex (male = 0)	1.11	0.3
Age	1.01	0.01
Degree (less than high school = 0)		
High school	0.93	0.54
Junior college	0.65	0.49
Bachelor	0.58	0.37
Graduate	0.34	0.26
Race (white = 0)	0.71	0.25
Income	1.04	0.02
Marital status (single or divorced = 0)	1.22	0.33
Compensatory control: science, government and other people		
Science makes way of life change too fast (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	0.94	0.17

(*continued*)

Table 5.4   (continued)

Nonaffiliation [baseline]	Weak Protestant affiliation	
	Odds ratio	Std. error
Scientific research should be supported by government (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	1.88**	0.43
Government is too involved in fixing country's problems (higher scores indicate greater agreement)	1.22	0.13
Other people can be trusted (agree = 0)	1.13	0.32
Constant	.01**	0.01
Observations		355
Pseudo R-squared		0.08

*.05; **.01; ***.001

Table 5.5   Model 4: Comparison of nonaffiliates to strong Protestant affiliates

Nonaffiliation [baseline]	Strong Protestant affiliation	
	odds ratio	std. error
Demographics		
Sex (male = 0)	2.29***	0.45
Age	1.04***	0.01
Degree (less than high school = 0)		
High school	0.71	0.34
Junior college	1.22	0.68
Bachelor	0.78	0.4
Graduate	0.85	0.46
Race (white = 0)	2.53***	0.59
Income	1.002	0.02
Marital status (single or divorced = 0)	1.83**	0.36
Compensatory control: science, government and other people		
Science makes way of life change too fast (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	0.94	0.11
Scientific research should be supported by government (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	1.75***	0.26
Government is too involved in fixing country's problems (higher scores indicate greater agreement)	1.22*	0.1
Other people can be trusted (agree = 0)	1.26	0.27
Constant	.004***	0.004
Observations		558
Pseudo R-squared		0.14

*.05; **.01; ***.001

Table 5.6 Model 5: Comparison of nonreligious and nonspiritual to strongly/ moderately religious and spiritual

No religiosity or spirituality [baseline]	Strong religiosity and spirituality		Moderate religiosity and spirituality	
	Relative risk ratio	Std. error	Relative risk ratio	Std. error
Demographics				
Sex (male = 0)	2.7**	0.89	2.47**	0.7
Age	1.04**	0.01	1.05***	0.01
Degree (less than high school = 0)				
High school	0.6	0.42	1.23	0.83
Junior college	2.5	2.24	3.13	2.7
Bachelor	0.93	0.72	1.88	1.4
Graduate	0.79	0.64	0.8	0.62
Race (white = 0)	2.5*	0.98	2.78**	0.97
Income	.92**	0.02	0.95	0.02
Marital status (single or divorced = 0)	3.64***	1.19	2.47**	0.71
Compensatory control: science, government and other people				
Science makes way of life change too fast (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	1.04	0.2	0.82	0.14
Scientific research should be supported by government (higher scores indicate greater disagreement)	1.85**	0.42	1.61*	0.33
Government is too involved in fixing country's problems (higher scores indicate greater agreement)	1.31*	0.17	1.13	0.13
Other people can be trusted (agree = 0)	1.26	0.422	1.33	0.39
Constant	.006***	0.009	.01**	0.02
Observations		464		464
Pseudo R-squared		0.11		0.11

*.05; **.01; ***.001

Table 5.7   Model 6: Comparison of nonreligious and nonspiritual to weakly religious and spiritual

No religiosity or spirituality [baseline]	Weak religiosity and spirituality	
	Odds ratio	Std. error
Demographics		
Sex (male = 0)	1.99*	0.54
Age	1.02**	0.01
Degree (less than high school = 0)		
High school	0.78	0.4
Junior college	0.83	0.57
Bachelor	0.67	0.39
Graduate	0.42	0.27
Race (white = 0)	1.21	0.38
Income	0.98	0.02
Marital status (single or divorced = 0)	1.28	0.34
Other people can be trusted (agree = 0)	1.71*	0.45
Constant	.13*	0.13
Observations		306
Pseudo R-squared		0.05

*.05; **.01; ***.001

Regarding my search for differential sources of compensatory control between these groups, I indeed found that nonaffiliates appear to have more confidence in government funded science and governmental ability to solve social problems. Specifically, each one-unit increase in strength of disagreement that scientific research ought to be supported by government led to a 71% (OR = 1.71; $p < .001$) increase in the likelihood that the respondent was a Christian. Also, each one-unit increase in strength of agreement that government is *too* involved in fixing social problems led to a 16% (OR = 1.16; $p < .05$) increase in the probability of a respondent being a Christian.

Why do Christians, as a group, appear relatively more opposed to the governmental funding of science and to government playing a role in solving social problems relative to religious nonaffiliates? I suspect that what is happening here is a subtle shift among nonaffiliates to see churches as less relevant, powerful or good (if not fraudulent) and to see science and government as more relevant, powerful and good. This is a shift among

nonaffiliates toward more secular sources of compensatory control, meaning and purpose. The Christians, on the other hand, may still be relatively more committed to using religious institutions, specifically church affiliations, as a source of control, meaning and purpose.

In Model 2 (see Table 5.3), I compare 765 religious nonaffiliates to 849 Catholics, specifically. As in Model 1, I compared these groups by running a logistic regression, using nonaffiliates as the baseline.

Findings here revealed married respondents were 53% (OR = 1.53; $p < .05$) more likely to be Catholic. Older respondents were also slightly more likely to be Catholic. Catholics, however, did not differ from nonaffiliates with regard to sex, educational attainment, race or income.

The real differences separating these two groups were attitudinal, not demographic—Catholics felt more threatened by science and were less interested in using government to fund scientific advance. Each one-unit increase in disagreement that "science makes our way of life change too fast" led to a 23% (OR = .77; $p < .05$) drop in the probability that a respondent would also identify as a Catholic. In addition, each one-unit increase in disagreement that scientific research should be supported by government was associated with a 69% (OR = 1.69; $p < .01$) increase in the likelihood of identifying as Catholic. Just like in Model 1, we see that religious affiliates, in this case Catholics, are less likely than nonaffiliates to see science as providing meaning, control or purpose to their life.

In Model 3 (see Table 5.4), I compare 765 religious nonaffiliates to 281 Protestants, specifically Protestants who reported being slightly or not at all religious. As in Models 1 and 2, I compared these groups by running a logistic regression, using nonaffiliates as the baseline.

Interestingly, the only difference I can detect statistically between the two groups is a difference in support for government involvement with science. A one-unit increase in disagreement that government should support scientific advance was associated with an 88% (OR = 1.88; $p < .01$) increase in the odds of being a weakly religious Protestant. Other than this shifting of compensatory control, there is virtually no other difference between nonaffiliates and weakly affiliated Protestants as modeled here.

In Model 4 (see Table 5.5), I compare 765 religious nonaffiliates to 1095 Protestants, specifically Protestants who reported being moderate or very religious. As in Models 1–3, I compared these groups by running a logistic regression, using nonaffiliates as the baseline.

Results reveal that female respondents were 129% (OR = 2.29; $p < .001$) more likely to be moderate or very religious Protestants than

they were to be religious nonaffiliates. Nonwhite respondents were also 153% (OR = 1.53; $p < .001$) more likely to be moderate or very religious Protestants. And, as I've found in previous models, these Protestants were also likely to be a bit older than the nonaffiliates.

Attitudinally, respondents who sought less compensatory control in science and government were more likely to be moderate and very religious Protestants. One unit increases in disagreement that scientific advances should be supported by government were associated with a 75% (OR = 1.75; $p < .001$) increase in the odds of identifying as a moderate or very religious Protestant. Also, one-unit increases in agreement that the government is too involved in attempting to solve social problems raised the odds of a respondent identifying as a moderate or religious Protestant by 22% (OR = 1.22; $p < .05$).

In Models 5 and 6, I halt my investigation into the differences between nonaffiliates and affiliates in order to look for differences among respondents based solely on their self-reported religiosity and spirituality.

In Model 5 (see Table 5.6), I compare 297 Americans with no religiosity and no spirituality to 487 very religious, very spiritual Americans and to 875 moderately religious, moderately spiritual Americans. I model these three groups using multinomial logistic regression, similar to the model used above in Study One, and coefficients were again calculated as relative risk ratios. In this model, respondents who report having no religiosity and no spirituality constitute the baseline.

Results indicate that females in the sample were 170% (RRR = 2.7; $p < .01$) more likely to be very religious and spiritual than they were to be nonreligious and nonspiritual. Women were 147% (RRR = 2.47; $p < .01$) more likely than males to be moderately religious and spiritual, as well.

Nonwhite respondents were 150% (RRR = 2.5; $p < .05$) more likely to self-identify as very religious and spiritual and 178% (RRR = 2.78; $p < .01$) more likely to identify as moderately religious and spiritual, than they were to identify as nonreligious and nonspiritual. Very religious and spiritual respondents had slightly lower incomes than the nonreligious and nonspiritual, and older age increased the probability of identifying as either very or moderately religious and spiritual.

The biggest effect can be found with regard to marriage. Married respondents were 264% (RRR = 3.64; $p < .001$) more likely to be very religious and spiritual, and 147% (RRR = 2.47; $p < .01$) more likely to be moderately religious and spiritual, than they were to be nonreligious and nonspiritual.

Similar to models 1–4, Model 5 also indicates that high spirituality and religiosity are less associated with using science and government as forms of compensatory control. Each one-unit increase in disagreement that government should support scientific advance raised the likelihood of a respondent being very religious and spiritual by 85% (RRR = 1.85; $p < .01$) and raised the likelihood of being moderately religious and spiritual by 61% (RRR = 1.61; $p < .05$), relative to the probability of being nonreligious and nonspiritual. Additionally, each one-unit increase in agreement that the government is too involved in solving social problems increased the probability of a respondent identifying as strongly religious and spiritual (RRR = 1.31; $p < .05$), but not as moderately religious and spiritual. The three groups analyzed in Model 5 did not, however, differ from each other with regard to educational attainment, as regards trust of others or in their belief that science makes their way of life change too fast.

In the last model calculated, Model 6 (see Table 5.7), I compare 297 nonreligious, nonspiritual people to 432 "slightly" religious, "slightly" spiritual people. I compared these groups by running a logistic regression, as in Models 1–4, using nonreligious, nonspiritual respondents as the baseline. Unlike in the other models, I dropped the variables measuring feelings about science and government—since not all respondents answered all survey questions, I didn't have a large enough sample size to model these two groups in the same way that I did in Models 1–5.

Results reveal very few differences between the two groups, though they are not as similar as religious nonaffiliates were to weakly religious Protestants (see Model 3 in Table 5.4). Female respondents were 99% (OR = 1.99; $p < .05$) more likely to report being slightly religious and slightly spiritual than they were to report being nonreligious and nonspiritual. Consistent with the other models, age is slightly correlated with identification as slightly religious and spiritual. Interestingly, a significant difference between these two groups involves views on the trustworthiness of others. Respondents who felt that others cannot be trusted were 71% (OR = 1.71; $p < .05$) more likely to be slightly religious and spiritual than nonreligious and nonspiritual. It appears that the nonreligious and nonspiritual in this sample felt people were more trustworthy than those with slightly greater feelings of religiosity and spirituality.

To summarize, several patterns emerged across both Study One and Study Two.

Across sets of analysis, religious nonaffiliates emerged as disproportionately single, higher income, socially liberal, white males who grew up in larger families that didn't attend church and who are, as adults, more likely to believe a god is unnecessary for the existence of moral principles and that government and science should be more involved in solving social problems. Theoretically, nonaffiliates appear to be coming from relatively less economically, occupationally, racially vulnerable groups, indicating that lower threat perception is indeed playing a role in peoples' decision to not affiliate. Nonaffiliates are also disproportionately more likely to look to government and/or science to enact moral principles in the world, instead of God. Nones seem to be developing new forms of compensatory control, whereas affiliates remain satisfied (though increasingly less so) with assuming a god controls reality and social life.

Moving the microscope away from comparisons of affiliation versus nonaffiliation, and onto differences in peoples' self-reported religiosity and spirituality, revealed that the most secular Americans (those who report "no religiosity" and "no spirituality") are disproportionately single, white, upper-income males who believe government should be more actively supportive of the advancement of scientific knowledge. Here, we can see that the most secular Americans are also the more racially and occupationally empowered, consistent with the theory that religious commitment is a cultural tightening response to threat.

Still, because no one lives in utopia, secular Americans still feel threats from unemployment, debt, health and so on. Heck, seculars may also be having romance difficulties, given that they tend to be single, though, really, this is most likely a function of them putting off marriage and family to pursue a career (seculars are, remember, disproportionately younger, upper-income men). Regardless of the source of threat, regardless of the specifics of what makes seculars feel like they are losing control or purpose or meaning in their lives, my results suggest that they will look to science and government for answers and not God.

Results reported in Model 6 (see Table 5.7) also suggest that the most secular Americans may be actually more trusting of others than those who are on the verge of losing their faith. This finding is extremely interesting and in need of future research—the implication is that people are less trusting of others while *losing* their faith, compared to when it is lost. The most secular Americans may be experiencing a greater degree of existential security, merely by virtue of their confident certainty that they are not religious and not spiritual. Americans who are

only slightly religious and slightly spiritual may have comparatively less existential security—they report identifying as religious and spiritual but only barely, and this lower existential security may be projected as a distrust of others. This is in need of future research, especially given the low sample size of Model 6.

The Complexities of Religious Nonaffiliation

If we are in search of religious nonaffiliates in any given year, we would be most likely to find them among the least threatened members of the American population.

When I say "least threatened," I don't mean to insinuate that these groups do not experience threats to their job, marriage, health or reputation. I mean only to suggest that, statistically, religious nonaffiliates are more likely to come from racial majority groups (i.e., whites), economically more stable groups (i.e., higher income or educational attainment), and the gender which has more elite political and occupational representation (i.e., men). Nonaffiliates, despite coming from relatively less threatened groups in society, are nevertheless motivated by socially liberal political causes and hope to see government and science emerge as a source of control, purpose and meaning in their lives.

And, as the secularization of society continues, due to cultural loosening and increases in self-dimensionality on a historical scale, religious nonaffiliates will come to look more and more like the average American. Indeed, I found in my analyses that, relatively speaking, income and educational attainment were unimportant in distinguishing nonaffiliates from religious affiliates (though race and gender were important).

And what might we say about the difference between those Americans who are religiously nonaffiliated but are privately religious and believe in a god/higher power, and those Americans who are religiously nonaffiliated but not religious or God believing? It seems, again, that the least threatened groups in society produce not only more nonaffiliates but also the most secular of the nonaffiliates; white males of higher socioeconomic status are far more likely than other groups to be nonaffiliated *and* completely secular.

But, what will happen when this group (and increasingly more Americans who become nonaffiliated and secular) begins to feel more threatened and begins to subculturally tighten in response to that threat? Threat perception, remember, is always understood *relative to prior*

circumstance, and so people would perceive threats even in utopia. When nonaffiliates and secularists begin to feel relatively more threatened, they will subconsciously ramp up the development of strict hierarchies, rigid rules and harsh punishments, but their totem and community identity is not likely to be traditionally religious.

Instead, their totem and ideology is far more likely to be that of a powerful but benevolent institution of science and government. How nonaffiliates and secularists are coming to supplant worship at church with worship of science and government, both ideologically and ritualistically/behaviorally, is the most important area for future inquiry.

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The Future of Religion

The future of religion in the United States can be analyzed in two ways. On the one hand, we might try to discern the future of Christianity (i.e., Protestantism or of Catholicism). On the other hand, we might look for the future of subcultural tightening—the universal human desire to submit to authority and punish deviance as threats in the environment (or in one's own body in the case of disease) begin to mount.

We can be sure of two things—that Christianity is in retreat in the United States (and in the West) after centuries of political and cultural dominance and that subcultural tightening continues, in pockets throughout society, nevertheless. The perception of threat, even if this perception is merely relative to the perceived threat of others, will always be present in human society.

When Steven Pinker (2011) published his lucid and engaging review of statistics on murder and violence, showing them to be in decline all across the Western world over the last 500 years, he was assailed by many other social scientists as naïve and unworldly, a solipsistic philistine. And yet, Steven had written one of the great works of this century. These scholars did not want to be told that violence was in decline; they did not want to be shown how much life had improved from the squalor and cruelty of the Middle Ages.

People search the world hungrily for threats not because they like to be scared, but because they like to feel as though their energies are being properly focused toward self-preservation, protection and defense.

Especially since the end of World War II and the Cold War when the external, imminent and legitimate threats of Nazism and communism were abated, Americans have turned their criticisms toward institutions in the United States—most specifically government and religion. Without an external threat to canalize peoples' search for danger, they turn their search for threat inward and begin tearing apart their own society.

Thus, to restate the matter, Christianity as a specific religious tradition is rapidly fading from American culture, but the perception of threat and the nascent religious impulse it sparks, will be with us into the future. So, when I am discussing the "future of religion," am I meaning to discuss the future of traditionalism or the future of fear?

People in the United States (and elsewhere) will continue to see horrible threats, when they are there and when they are not. When the perceptions of these threats begins to accumulate, people will begin organizing hierarchies, rigid rules of belief and behavior, and begin openly desiring severe punishment for transgressors. This phylogenetic aspect of human beings will continue on, and in this sense, so too will religion.

But, if religion will likely continue on, in one form or another, what might the future of religion look like? In this chapter, I provide my best answer(s) to this question.

Rising Religious Nonaffiliation, Falling Religious Right

Steady increases in the numbers of religious nonaffiliates in the United States are exposing religious affiliates to nonaffiliates at unprecedented rates.

Social scientists know (and have known) that mere exposure to a different person, preferably in the context of a friendship or cooperative relationship like being on a work team or local sports team, reduces prejudice and distrust over time. Religious fundamentalists and dogmatists in the United States have never in history been more exposed to nonaffiliates; their children are nonaffiliates, their spouses are nonaffiliates, their coworkers are nonaffiliates, their favorite TV show character never mentions their religiosity, and so on. This social network and media exposure to the less religious or nonreligious will not only reduce distrust of nonaffiliates (and atheists), it will, and has already, begun to swell their numbers (Hunter 2010). In 2006, 44% of Americans reported having a close friend

who was "not religious," and this number had climbed to 51% as of 2011 (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

The Religious Right influenced major political players for two solid decades in the 1980s and 1990s but has begun to slowly fizzle out, especially after the 2010 mid-term elections. The Republican nomination of Donald Trump had almost no religious motivation (indeed, Trump couldn't care less about religion), and the Tea Party of the 2010 mid-term elections was slightly less religious (and distinctly more "anti-establishment") than had been, for example, the grassroots Moral Majority activists and televangelists of the 1980s or 1990s. The rise of the Religious Right had been a mere speed bump on the solidifying road to secularization.

The Religious Right, in short, lost the culture war, and it had lost the culture war long before the 2000s. In 1951, nearly all respondents in a survey of Evangelical youth reported believing that social dancing was always morally wrong—having the gall to dance the tango was a sin against God and decency![1] Of course, by 1982, none of the Evangelical youth then surveyed cared one iota how people spent their time dancing. In 1951, nearly every Evangelical youth respondent felt that drinking alcohol was sinful; by 1982, less than a fifth of respondents felt that way. In 1951, half of respondents thought watching Hollywood movies was sinful—no Evangelical respondents cared about this by 1982. In the 1960s, 81% of Evangelicals thought heavy sexual "petting" was always sinful, and, like the other issues, this had already dropped to under 50% of Evangelicals by the 1980s. We could also take a look at national opinion poll data on divorce, abortion, interracial marriage, gay marriage and women's involvement in the workforce. On each of these issues, majority of Evangelicals were opposed in the 1950s and have, ever since, been increasingly accepting.

The Religious Right failed to win the culture war, and this failure has had a devastating impact on how the public perceives the Republican party and, especially, religion more generally.

For Steve Bruce (2011), this failure of the Religious Right is attributable to the fact that conservative politicians were building their platforms around an economically fearful population who were, actually, relative to the past 100 or so years, experiencing improvements in their quality of life that were simply too incremental for them to detect at the time. The constituency of the Religious Right in the 1980s and 1990s felt threatened by

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[1] I'm drawing these statistics from Bruce's (2011) excellent discussion.

modern technology (even as they were eagerly purchasing their first home computers), by interracial and gay marriage (even as their sons and daughters were marrying whom they wished and "coming out" with increasing confidence) and by abortion (even as their daughters secretly took the pill to postpone child-rearing until they had some occupational footing). Bruce sums this up very well:

> Indeed, evangelicals and fundamentalists defined themselves by their refusal to modernize their faith. In part, they were able to resist new ideas and attitudes because they did not benefit so immediately from the prosperity that encouraged the innovations. They remained poor, and their puritanism helped reconcile them to their poverty. Television was unacceptable, because it carried Satanic messages, but then most fundamentalists could not afford a television anyway. When the prosperity of industrial America began to seep down to the communities in which fundamentalism and Pentecostalism were strong, puritanism waned. As more could afford television, the injunction against watching TV weakened. Fancy clothes and personal adornments were sinful until Pentecostalists could afford them and then the lines were shifted. (Bruce 2011, p. 162)

In other words, as fundamentalists and Evangelicals became less threatened, they also became less fundamentalist and Evangelical. They had "tightened" in response to threat, and all throughout the twentieth century, and especially since 1990, this subculture has been loosening.

So, we can identify at least these two trends worth extrapolating into the future—rising nonaffiliation and declining political influence of the Religious Right.

"New Age" Religion

Sociologist Wade Clark Roof (1996) suggests that the future of religion will be something highly individualistic, private and skeptical of powerful organizations. He writes:

> It's hard to dismiss the fact that the religious stance today is more internal than external, more individual than institutional, more experiential than cerebral, more private than public… Introspection and self-discovery promised avenues to truth and insight for a generation that grew up as not very trusting and lacking confidence in social institutions, whether in the military, the banks, the schools, government, or organized religion. As ascriptive

identities gave way to more expressive identities, the language of the self emerged giving focus to the interior life, and no doubt helping to explain the rise of a broadly-based spirituality culture. (Roof 1996, pp. 153–154)

The modern "New Age" religious philosophy that emerged in the 1990s and grew into the 2000s spoke to this increasing individualism perhaps more than any other religious philosophy in US history to that point. This new religious ideology had roots in the early American Transcendentalist philosophy of Emerson discussed in Chap. 3, as well as in Buddhist, Daoist and Hindu mystic traditions. It's message, however, was wholly unique in its financial and self-help focus.

New Age religious philosophy emphasizes two points continuously. The first is that individual consciousness is not material and the second is that individual consciousness is all-powerful. New Agers deduce from these premises that the individual consciousness cannot die, and life-after-death/reincarnation beliefs are very popular in these circles (Houtman and Aupers 2007). You are not, New Agers argue, a physical body striving for status and prosperity in a shared world with other physical beings. Rather, you are a hyper-unique bundle of endless potential that will never die.

Research on New Age populations seems to suggest that New Agers skew toward being females high on individualism that distrust traditional church authority (Houtman and Aupers 2007; Farias and Lalljee 2008; Bruce 2011). Among women, New Agers that are college-educated, upper-middle-class professionals tend to prefer practices like yoga and meditation, while New Agers that are non-college-educated working-class women tend to prefer horoscopes and astrology. Both groups of women seem to enjoy self-help philosophy and "alternative" (i.e., nonvetted) medicinal remedies.

Bestsellers like Rhonda Byrne's (2006) *The Secret*, Eckhart Tolle's (2005) *A New Earth* and Deepak Chopra's (1996) *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, among many others, helped grow a global cottage industry of New Age books, DVDs and television shows marketed to casually spiritual people interested in consuming generic self-help platitudes written with a touch of academic sophistication. A study of 14 countries from 1981 to 2000, which included over 61,000 respondents, found that the prevalence of New Agers had grown over this period, though this growth was mostly concentrated in France, Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden (Houtman and Aupers 2007).

This New Age industry arose with force in the 1990s and is still fairly healthy today, though many argue that it reached its peak in the mid-2000s. New Age works achieved an incredible level of popularity—at the peak of popularity, they were discussed in recurrent back-to-back features on widely watched shows like Oprah—but the substance they offered was superficial from the outset. Byrne (2006) claimed that people could make themselves rich by "attracting" wealth through obsessively thinking about it, which is obviously false, and Tolle (2005) reduced global suffering to a resistance toward thinking optimistically, which is obviously simplistic. These books were not persuasive because of their content, but, rather, because people were in search of some warm-feeling fluff, and their previous dealer, the local church, was too busy feverishly condemning homosexuality, abortion and divorce.

Though New Age philosophy may be somewhat superficial and prone to supernatural self-aggrandizement, it nevertheless reignited discussion around several key aspects of human existence that are ineffable and intrinsically difficult to understand.

New Age works, harkening to Emerson, often discuss the concepts of mind and consciousness, both of which are still poorly understood by modern cognitive psychology (though progress is rapid). People today are quite aware of the plop of gray matter in their skulls, but it is hard for them to imagine that their hopes, goals, loves and dreams are somehow reducible to this plop. Indeed, they are, but how this occurs is not yet well understood outside of the hallowed halls of the nation's top neuroscience programs. As Marvin Minsky quipped, the "mind is what the brain does," but this understanding does not make the sensation of consciousness any less majestic. New Age philosophy, in overemphasizing the power of self, will and consciousness, actually provided an avenue for dialogue around how consciousness arises from the workings of the brain.

New Agers also touched on other complicated topics that remain *just outside* of the knowing grasp of scientific understanding. Topics discussed in various post-1990s New Age works include how creativity emerges from imagination, spontaneous emotionality, the emergence of intuition from experience, the emergence of a sense of authenticity from honest interactions with others and the persistent desire in all of us to be just a little bit better tomorrow than we were today (Heelas 2006).

It is possible that aspects of those topics will always remain just beyond our knowledge. Perhaps science will show us how novel experiences rewire our brains and produce creativity in moments of heightened emotion.

Perhaps science will someday fully describe the nature of consciousness, and how consciousness emerges incrementally from bacteria to insects to reptiles to mammals. This is all very likely. Yet, applying the general axioms and laws of science to one's own life is inevitably more complex. I may know something about the true nature of creativity, and about how brains produce creativity, without knowing for sure why I am, as a 30-year-old man, less (or more) creative than my neighbor down the street. I can speculate, of course, about facets of my upbringing or of my education or personality. But, in the end, my most certain knowledge must remain general, abstract, theoretical; my most certain knowledge must remain knowledge about human beings, not knowledge about this man I am named Kevin. Some of life's mysteries, especially mysteries about who we are personally and why we happen to be that way, seem persistent.

So, New Age philosophy will likely persist into the future. Some argue that the future of religion in the secularizing West is a "fuzzy" spirituality of superficial self-help overlaid onto a vague, scientific-sounding description of consciousness and creativity (Woodhead and Heelas 2005). Woodhead and Heelas call this prediction about the future their *subjectivization thesis*: religion (and culture more broadly) is shifting to cater to individual subjectivities and idiosyncratic desires. We can see this at restaurant chains like Chipotle and countless others that insist on customers choosing all of the ingredients for their entrees, we can see it in the rise of individually tailored college degrees known as "general studies" degrees, or we can see this in New Age gurus who insist to their followers that *what is real to you is all that is real.*

Though much New Age work continues to extoll a vague supernaturalism, the future of New Age philosophy, like the future of religion more generally, appears to be headed toward increasing secularism, that is, toward controlling one's life practically (not supernaturally) with meditation, diet, exercise and lay-scientific speculation (Bruce 2006; Voas and Bruce 2007; Pollack and Pickel 2007; Bruce 2013; Bruce and Voas 2010; Zuckerman et al. 2016).

Sketches of Religion's Future

As with any prognostication, speculating about the future of religion is inherently precarious. Religions are fantastically complex and dynamically responsive to subtle shifts in perceived material and social threats. Nevertheless, I will now provide a theoretical sketch of several possible

"future of religion" scenarios in the United States over the next 50–100 years, in ascending order of likelihood.

First, I will discuss the least likely possibility in my opinion—a clash of civilizations between Christianity and Islam or between Christianity and atheism. Next, I will discuss a more plausible scenario—a reinvigoration of the spread of megachurches and other very large, generic, festival-type gatherings centered on self-help and entertainment. Perhaps equally as likely is a third scenario where Americans will become increasingly distrustful of others, politically polarized and socially isolated. This is a dark scenario indeed, but not at all the most likely. Lastly, I will sketch what I consider to be the most likely scenario—a punctuated, largely secular, fuzzy spirituality which combines the state, science and technology into an all-powerful secular collective leading humanity toward a utopian future. *Please remember that I conceive of these possible futures of religion as dynamic and very likely intertwined—more than one scenario may (and likely will) co-occur with another.*

Clash of Civilizations

Some intellectuals argue that an impending clash of civilizations between Islam and the West looms like a morbid shadow over the next several decades (Harris 2004; Hitchens 2007; Harris and Nawaz 2015; Warraq 2013).

Though there is a great variety of ethnic and religious diversity throughout the Middle East, South Asia and North Africa, many of the world's theocracies can also be found here. The United States and Europe adapted to religious diversity by differentiating church and state, and effectively removing religion from the public sphere. Now, of course, there is plenty of religious rhetoric in American politics, but it is also a firm component of our legal system that religion is to be only a secondary concern when evaluating the traits of potential leaders. The separation of church and state—recognized legally in the United States and France, and informally throughout other countries in Europe—helps maintain the religious freedom of individuals and prevent the tyranny of a specific religious collective dominating people's beliefs and behaviors.

By contrast, governments in the Middle Eastern, South Asian and North African regions tend to be theocratic if not autocratic, and to have been historically unstable due to the fallout of World War II. Iran, for

example, was an ally of the USSR, but was also exploited for its oil, and continually had its political power undermined by Russian economic interests. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, so similar to the rise of the Religious Right in the United States, was itself a response to the extreme threat and instability posed by the postwar landscape. Areas of the world that are today dense with theocracies and autocracies were, not long ago, stuck between two abusive forces—the capitalists and communists—who were as manipulative as they were indifferent to the sovereignty of the nations of these regions.

There are really two reasons why some believe a clash of civilizations is imminent between the theocratic Muslim world and corporatist-capitalist Western democracies (Bruce 2011). Both reasons are cultural—the first reason is that Muslim immigrants are pouring into Europe to avoid the chaos occurring in their crumbling countries, *and*, secondly, these immigrants from Muslim-majority countries appear to be more conservative regarding their attitudes toward women, divorce, sex and free speech compared to the average European or American.

The proportion of Muslims living in countries throughout Europe has been steadily rising about 1% each decade, from 29.6 million living in European countries in 1990 to 44.1 million in 2010 (Pew 2011). This coexistence of cultures has stirred more than a few fears among Westerners. The recent vote by Britain to exit the European Union was largely driven by older generations of Brits fearful of such rapid immigration and the potential threats to Western liberalism this immigration posed.

What are they so worried about? Well, for example, 37% of Muslims in Jordan, 41% of Muslims in Malaysia, 53% of Muslims in Afghanistan and even more in places like Pakistan and Morocco are in favor of a collusion between religious clerics and government officials in running the country. Indeed, in half of all countries polled by the PEW's global Religion in Public Life survey (2013), majorities of Muslims favored a system where patriarchal religious authorities determined the manner and mode of public and political life. Places like Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Indonesia, Iran and Somalia, among other countries, all have formal laws or codes requiring women to cover their bodies in public (Pew 2016). Substantial proportions of people in countries like Bangladesh, Egypt, Afghanistan and Palestine believe that suicide bombings and other public acts of political violence are "at least sometimes justified" to get one's religious message across (Pew 2013). And, of course, depictions of the Prophet Muhammed in comics, art and newspapers throughout Europe

has drawn swift condemnation from Muslim communities that insists their idols receive special immunity in the public marketplace of ideas.[2]

There is, however, a growing concern in Muslim countries about extremist groups, indicating that a sea change may be occurring (Harris and Nawaz 2015). Indeed, according to at least one poll, a majority of Muslims around the globe now actively oppose the encroachment of religious extremism into public life (Pew 2013). Some even argue that an Islamic Reformation, akin to the Protestant Reformations of Europe, is nigh, uniting the most liberal voices of the faith with reformers who seek to separate church and state in order to preserve religious liberty.

Perhaps related to this Reformation is the possibility that extremist camps in the Muslim world will begin toning down their rhetoric in order to reach out to more moderate Muslims for support. When political parties—religiously influenced or not—compete for populist support in a demographically diverse marketplace of ideas, they tend to moderate their more extreme messages in order to appeal to a broader base of support. This is what Jillian Schwedler (2006) calls the "inclusion-moderation" dynamic. Throughout the Muslim-majority world, there are instances of formerly extreme groups moderating, at least somewhat, as they attempt to institutionalize their authority and reach out for support among nonextremists or less extremists (Aslan 2009). This also goes for Muslim entrepreneurs who inevitably find it easier to sell their products in a globalizing market society when such products appeal to a broad range of people. Religious movements may use violence and shock tactics to get initial attention and cultural traction, but movement longevity and institutional influence in a cosmopolitan society require moderation and tolerance.

Another possibility with regard to a "clash of civilizations," almost never considered by anyone, is that the West will experience a clash between religiously devout and atheistic individuals.

To the degree that fervent, self-identified atheists find religious believers to be stupid, unethical and dangerous—and vice versa—we may indeed be headed toward a series of very consequential cultural conflicts. Of the theorists of secularity, I have mentioned throughout this book, only Habermas (2008) seems to consider this future seriously. Studies of the

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[2] Surveys of peoples' religious attitudes, especially in theocratic countries, are bound to be precarious and unreliable. Socially desirable responding—wanting to fit in with family and friends—is likely inflating these cultural differences between Islam and the West, on both sides, at least to some extent.

formation of the atheist self-identity repeatedly find that a catalyst for see-ing oneself as firmly without gods is having felt that religion was "shoved down their throat" as a child. Bengtson and colleagues (2013) find this, Jesse Smith (2011) finds this and so do many others. We may be on the precipice of a wave of self-conscious atheists with an ax to grind against the oppressive religion of their parents and of the Religious Right.

If militant atheists, in their tribalistic and categorical hatred of religion, become dogmatically intolerant themselves, public sphere confrontations between angry atheists and devout believers may be the more likely cul-ture clash. Fundamentalists, the subculturally tightest and most threatened individuals in a society, have several tells (Emerson and Hartman 2006):

- A firm attitude that the future is being critically threatened by a dan-gerous group that has wrong beliefs and behaviors
- A firm attitude that morality and reality are divided between oppo-sites—good and evil, heaven and hell, darkness and light, stupidity and truth
- Sharp in-group and out-group boundaries; few, if any, "cross-pollinating" friendships with members of the out-group

It would do the study of secularity a great service if scholars, in addition to searching for and finding liberal attitudes among the nonreligious, also looked for distinctly conservative, threatened, subculturally tightened atti-tudes as well. It is probable that these will be found among self-identified atheists, as these are the individuals who are openly, and somewhat bra-zenly, even in 2017, claiming a stigmatized identity as a nonbeliever. Atheists may be socially liberal, and good critical thinkers, but they may also be resentful of certain religious people in their lives, or of certain religious social policies in society, that has cultivated in them a powerful hostility.

The Gradual Secularization and Spread of Megachurches

Higher fertility among religious families (in comparison to nonreligious and less religious families), and higher religiosity among immigrants, may tip the balance of secularization toward a middle ground where rates of religiosity stabilize at moderate-low levels. Some projections (e.g., Skirbekk et al. 2010) indicate that, by 2043, the proportion of Hispanic Catholics in the United States will have risen from 10% to 18%, largely due

to immigration. The proportion of American Hindus and Muslims is also expected to rise during this period due to immigration.

If secularization in the United States is slowed by immigration or higher fertility among religious couples, it is possible that people will begin to seek out generic forms of traditional religious worship which provide community and entertainment without any strict expectations for behavior or belief. People may desire an outlet for spiritual expression, and for religious identity, without the traditional claustrophobia of the local church where every missed Sunday service is recognized by the whole congregation. People may desire a more anonymous, more entertaining, form of worship focused on recreation and fun instead of doctrinal rigidity.

"Megachurches," as this term was used in the 2000s, emerged out of the Protestant Evangelical tradition in the United States. These churches were "mega" in that they were held in very large stadiums, warehouses or convention centers capable of providing religious services to thousands of people at one time. Charismatic pastors in their late 30s and early 40s glide across expansive stages providing light-hearted, uplifting Christian platitudes, and live music plays onstage enthusiastically between services. The atmosphere of these megachurches is ecstatic and of high energy—much more festival-like than stoically pious. This festival-like form of worship is, actually, just a further institutionalization and dissemination of the Pentecostal charismatic tradition of speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) and of losing oneself in the holy spirit. The pace and excitement of these megachurch services may be especially appealing to younger members, but numbers of Evangelical youth continue to decline anyway (Zuckerman et al. 2016).

Perhaps megachurches will jettison their esoteric conservative Protestantism in favor of a more secular, inclusive, family-oriented message about community, fun and artistic expression. There is no reason, in principle, why such megachurches cannot be repurposed into large, nostalgically but not dogmatically religious community centers where people meet to mingle, dance, chat, look at local art and have their kids play with one another. This view of the future is something like what Robert Putnam (2000) has in mind. He describes how megachurch pastors like Rick Warren have recently begun speaking less about the sinfulness of abortion and gay marriage (which don't poll so well with youth) and more about the virtues of volunteering and humanitarianism (which do).

Of course, as Putnam admits, this change in emphasis for Warren and other megachurch pastors is entirely strategic—their personal politics remain ardently opposed to homosexuality and abortion. These are, in

other words, pastors who are trying to haphazardly suppress the intolerance that motivates them because younger generations are much less interested than they are in condemning the private behavior of others. Ultimately, Christianity must do more than just modernize its message, it must actually say something new and compelling that cannot be found in cognitive psychology, secular philosophy or popular culture. This is a tall order, and as a result, there is not a terribly compelling reason to be optimistic about a substantial Christian revival actually unfolding.

Still, as I see it, the most significant logistical problem for the secularization and spread of megachurches is the task of continually fostering a vague sense of religious community and cohesion in a congregation of thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, of people traveling far and wide to attend services. Megachurches have become popular because they sell an inclusive, doctrinally vague message while providing a lot of high-quality entertainment and the ambience of a family-friendly music concert. Their popularity has been truncated, however, because the size and transient nature of the congregations makes it difficult for people to form a cohesive collective identity.

Some 20 and 30 somethings in the US Evangelical Protestant community are, nevertheless, hard at work to reform the faith. They are aware of the falling rates of Evangelical affiliation among their peers and eager to usher in a new reformation of the faith. The "Emergent Church" and "Post-Protestant" social movements are examples of this interesting recent revivalism of the faith among some millennials.[3] These movements eschew materialism and the financially focused "prosperity gospel" of Joel Osteen and others in favor of a humble communalism and attention to sustainable living (Marti and Ganiel 2014). The Emergent movement is also disinterested in the political causes of the Religious Right—premarital sex and gay marriage are nonissues, though opposition to abortion still looms as a significant moral cause for some.

If megachurches prove to be too big and vague, perhaps the Emergent and post-Protestant movements will be successful in advocating sustainable living and in building small communities of religious hipsters. This may be of considerable interest to some, perhaps young college students looking to make Christian friends who are not too dogmatic and conservative, but it is hard to see how putting a liberal, ecologically conscious, spin on Evangelicalism will reignite young peoples' interest in religion. It will,

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[3] See Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger's (2005) *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures.*

more likely, just continue to pique young peoples' interest in liberalism and environmentalism.

Dwindling Networks and Increasing Social Isolation

In their landmark work on individualism and the loss of community in the United States, Robert Bellah et al. (1985) interviewed an Episcopalian pastor named Father Morrison about the attitudes of young people toward religion. They write:

> The one thing he finds missing in the young people who come to him…who are otherwise quite mature, is 'any conception that their happiness and fulfillment depends on…those around them…The concept that a community can set standards, adopt values, capture conscience, and become authoritative in the life of human beings is not obvious in our culture.' (Bellah et al. 1985, pp. 240–241)

Isolation from community (whether intentional because "communities are always shoving rules down my throat" or unintentional because "I'm not sure how to fit in and conform myself to exactly what they want") produces not only a sense of normlessness or purposelessness in the sense of Durkheim's *anomie*. Isolation from community also, and perhaps equally, produces an illusion that the self, the individual, is more important and powerful than they really are. This can be empowering, but it can also be terrifying.

Phil Zuckerman, Luke Galen and Frank Pasquale (2016) make this point more beautifully than I could by strategically citing a passage from the excellently incisive work by Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's work is a stirring account of the social psychological fears and uncertainties that arise when individuals are forced to navigate an increasingly differentiated society, where "being true to yourself" is the only, horribly insufficient, guide to self-development.

The passage Zuckerman and his colleagues cite perfectly captures this sentiment in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's work, so I will reproduce that quote here:

> The do-it-yourself biography is always a 'risk biography,' indeed a 'tightrope biography,' a state of permanent (partly overt, partly concealed) endangerment. The façade of prosperity, consumption, glitter can often mask the

nearby precipice. The wrong choice of career or just the wrong field, compounded by the downward spiral of private misfortune, divorce, illness, the repossessed home— all this is merely called bad luck.… [T]he do-it-yourself biography can swiftly become the breakdown biography. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, as cited in Zuckerman et al. 2016, p. 70)

The precursor to this line of thought—that the freedom and individualism of modern society has a terrifying side of uncertainty—can be found in modern sociology in the work of Anthony Giddens (1991). Giddens understands this uncertainty in terms of a constantly reflexive self-identity. People in modern societies are pressured to construct ever more nuanced and refined self-identities that distinguish themselves from others. This task requires that one continually deconstruct the self—who am I? Is this who I am? How do I know? Who should I be? How should I go about becoming who I should be?

This rabbit hole of reflexivity might, through one lens, be interpreted as a sign of total individual freedom; people can finally be the captains of their own life without undue interference from family, community or the church. On the other hand, through a different lens, this habitual reflexivity can be overwhelming—an existential burden of self-understanding. That the self-in-modernity might not only be lonely but terrifyingly open-ended is something sociologists have considered only occasionally and only recently. Philosophically, it is no older than the existentialist school of Sartre, Camus and others.

While individualism can indeed be isolating—even terrifying in the sense of having to construct one's own personal biography—it is still conducive to political and social tolerance. When people are deeply embedded in tight-knit groups, a very pernicious tribal psychology is activated whereby those of us in the "in-group" are viewed as, by definition, more morally virtuous or intelligent (Haidt 2012). On the other hand, those in the "out-group," again by definition, are considered immoral or stupid. This dichotomous, tribalistic thinking emerges to reduce uncertainty about close members of one's in-group, while serving to justify or explain why out-group members should be avoided. Thus increasing individualism (or decreasing tribalism) should stimulate more tolerant attitudes toward others. In Putnam's words, "We no longer connect, but at least I don't bother you and you don't bother me" (Putnam 2000, p. 354).

What is interesting to ponder is how people will form tight-knit religious communities in the future if they had abandoned religion in the first

place because it appeared suffocating and oppressively tribal. People may be terrified—or emboldened—by the freedom of living in a highly differentiated, individualistic society. This we can study. But, whether fearful or confident, why would they voluntarily decide to sacrifice this individualism for an intolerant, tribalistic community? It is as though the notion of cloistering oneself in an intolerant sect is absurd to the modern person, but individualism is not yet fully satisfying.

Supposing Americans do not, en masse, rush back into intolerant homogenous groupish communities, will the pendulum swing the other way? Will Americans, as they leave their religious communities, become increasingly suspicious of one another, increasingly distrustful of one another, not because of the in-group they belong to but because of the vulnerability that comes with being groupless?

William Sims Bainbridge (2005) has presented data indicating that self-identified atheists are more socially isolated than others and also less interested in social connection. Bainbridge actually goes beyond the data to speculate that atheists and other nonreligious people avoid religion because they do not need to believe in a fantasy where their deceased loved ones have moved on to some sort of afterlife—after all, if nonreligious people avoid forming relationships with others in the first place, why would they care whether or not they ever see the deceased again?

Putnam and Campbell (2010) find that Americans low in religiosity are more likely to agree with the statement, "These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others." Only 26% of Americans in the highest quintile of religiosity agreed with that statement compared with 48% of Americans in the lowest quintile of religiosity. What is most important about this finding is that it is *not* religious beliefs, per se, that make highly religious people more altruistic. Rather, it is that highly religious people are more *socially embedded* in church communities. Verifying their results with several secondary datasets, Putnam and Campbell (2010) conclude:

> The fraction of one's closest friends who are actively involved in one's own religious congregation is a powerful predictor of giving, volunteering, civic engagement, and other good deeds…In no major national survey have we found evidence that specific religious beliefs predict good neighborliness, once we control for religious social ties. In every major national survey we have found that religious social ties predict good neighborliness, controlling for religious beliefs. (Putnam and Campbell 2010, Kindle location 7276–7277)

If people are altruistic not because they believe in a god but because they belong to a dense, tight-knit religious community, what does this say for the future of altruism in a rapidly secularizing, highly individualistic society like the United States? If, as Putnam suspects, highly religious people will be *both* more generous (to their in-group) and more hateful (toward out-groups) and that nonreligious people will be *both* less generous (to everyone) and less hateful (toward everyone), are we headed toward a future of atomized, if tolerant, social isolates?

It is also worth considering whether nonreligious people are *necessarily* less social, or only less social in the present epoch. Nonreligious people today may be less social, or less interested in joining a community, not because they are woeful misanthropes, but because they have felt wronged by religious people and religious communities and, as a result, are lukewarm on both. Perhaps younger millennials who are nonreligious, and subsequent generations, will be more trusting of community.

It is also possible, of course, that nonreligious people are *necessarily* less social. How could this be? Well, for one, nonreligious people do not believe they (or anyone else) are being constantly scrutinized by a knowing, watchful, punishing god who will enforce perfect moral rules. This belief in an all-knowing, all-good watchful god may keep some people from acting unethically when they are behind closed doors or otherwise acting anonymously (Gervais et al. 2011; Norenzayan 2013). Crucially, even if believing in a panopticon god had no impact on people's behavior, the simple assumption that it would might encourage those who are religious to associate with others (because they believe others can be trusted to act ethically in private because they are being watched by God), while discouraging nonreligious people from associating with others (because they believe nonreligious people will act unethically due to the *lack* of a belief in being watched).

As mentioned above, belief in God, alone, will usually be insufficient to encourage altruism, but perhaps social embeddedness *and* a belief in supernatural monitoring are the keys to reliable attempts at sociality (Atran 2002). Thus, once nonreligious people become isolated, or dis-embedded, from dense communities and, then, lose a belief in some supervisory, watchful entity, it may be psychologically and socially difficult for them to become accountable to any large community in the future. This is a dire outlook, and not one I am endorsing as obviously probable, but we must consider the possibility that humans can "forget" how to sacrifice to and belong with others and that relearning this skill of community integration may take time, perhaps even a generation or more.

There is indeed cause for concern about whether sparse, secular, social networks can sustain a sense of community. The anthropologist Richard Sosis (Sosis and Bressler 2003; Sosis and Ruffle 2003; Sosis 2005; Sosis and Ruffle 2004) has analyzed hundreds of communes in order to assess whether or not religious communes were more cohesive and longer lasting than secular communes. Nearly all of the communes he and his colleagues have studied have since disbanded for different reasons, for example, death of the commune leader or loss of interest in the group ideology. However, and critically, the religious and secular communes did *not* disband at the same rate. In any given year, secular communes were 400% more likely to disband than religious communes. Sosis concludes by speculating that, though communal living situations in general are hard to sustain, religious communes better persuade people to make sacrifices and commitments ("costly signals") to the group even when it doesn't appear advantageous to the individual to do so.

Other research demonstrates that religion may increase cooperation and behavioral synchrony due to the sharing of "sacred" identities (see also Norenzayan 2013). In a study of groups of Brazilian drummers, for example, researchers found that the drummers who listened to a taped recording describing their supernatural, mystical, shared heritage subsequently donated more money after their performance than did drummers who instead heard a recording of the secular history of Brazilian drumming (Cohen et al. 2014).

In another recent study, Luke Galen et al. (2015) compared perceived social support between religious church members and atheists who had joined atheist/"freethinker" clubs through Meetup.com. They found that while atheist group members were just as prosocial toward their group as religious church members were to theirs, church members perceived greater social support and interpersonal trust. But, why should this be?

Are church members *actually* more supported and trusted in church than atheists are at their group meetings? Or, rather, do religious people simply *perceive* their social interactions to be more positive? And, if church members are actually, in fact, more supported and trusted in their interactions with others at church, why is this the case? Is this merely a generational dynamic, with older people more likely to be church members and to be communally oriented, while younger people are less likely to be church members and less likely to be communally oriented? Put differently, do church members from older generational cohorts perceive greater support and trust than church members from younger genera-

tional cohorts? These are difficult and important questions, indeed, and they are questions that must shape future research if we are to shed a light on the future of religion.

The question of how (and whether) secular people will form social communities may be a life-or-death matter. Since Durkheim's *Suicide* (1951), sociologists have paid close attention to the dangerous effects of underintegration. When people feel isolated from community, isolated from the collectives in their environment, be they school groups, work groups, family groups or religious groups, they often feel lost and purposeless. This purposelessness, for some, can only be addressed through suicide. If, in fact, seculars are more socially isolated or socially disinterested than religious people, and if society continues to secularize, we may see a rash of suicides. This will likely only be a period effect, as seculars struggle to form new, dense, substantive, cohesive communities in order to feel secure and safe from threats. Still, this period effect may last one generation, or several, it is hard to say. Not to belabor, but merely to underscore, this sensitive point, numerous analyses using different datasets (both national and international) show that people who participate in religious activities and who attend church have significantly lower odds of dying by suicide than those who do not (Zuckerman et al. 2016).

The honest truth is that nobody knows, right now, how peoples' social network structure and degree of social embeddedness will change as society continues to secularize. Anondah Saide and I argue in a forthcoming article (McCaffree and Saide forthcoming) that studying the differences between secular and religious social networks holds the key to understanding whether the future will bring new forms of community and embeddedness or, alas, horrific isolation and depression. Hopefully, with the hyperbole of my wording, you can guess which one I suspect is the least likely.

Baseline Fuzziness with Punctuated Subcultural Tightening in Response to Threat

When the surrounding culture is predominantly religious (or perceived as predominantly religious), nonreligion or irreligion tends to be stigmatized, and people as a result avoid talking about their lack of religious interest (Sedikides and Gebauer 2010). As a culture secularizes, people become more and more comfortable voicing their religious disinterest, which is an important reason why I suspect rates of religious nonaffilia-

tion will continue to climb upward, at an accelerated pace, in the coming decades.

But I do not necessarily expect most people in the coming decades to identify as atheists or to have a completely naturalistic worldview. Rather, the baselines religiousness of a secular society appears to be an ideological *fuzziness* about the importance of one's own life, and about how powerful entities *out there* (government, science) will help keep the individual safe, and the society in order.

This vague hodgepodge ideology of self-empowerment and compensatory external control is, I think, the most likely option for the future of religion in the United States. Dogmatic Christianity it most certainly is not; neither is it a fully naturalistic worldview. In this fuzziness of the future, overly flattering beliefs about one's self-identity, accomplishments and life milieu (or *habitus* in Bourdieu's sense), in addition to a glorified, near-deistic conglomeration of government-science will give people all of the order, purpose and control they seek.

Aaron Kay and his colleagues (Kay and Eibach 2013; Toorn et al. 2015) have shown in their research that people seek compensatory control for the uncertainties they experience in their lives (joblessness, divorce, poor health etc.). This compensatory control can have numerous sources.

Personal compensatory control involves exaggerated beliefs in one's own self-reliance. This sort of personal compensatory control can be found among libertarians, political conservatives and adherents of New Age spirituality. *Social* compensatory control involves exaggerated beliefs in the power of government to recognize and solve social problems. This form of compensatory control is most obvious among liberals on the left-hand side of the political spectrum. It is a near-mirrored inverse of personal compensatory control—instead of the individual possessing idealized characteristics, it is the government (or aid organizations) which does. Lastly, *religious* compensatory control involves beliefs that gods and miracles will keep the individual safe and the society functioning normally. This latter form of compensatory control is rapidly dwindling, leaving us with a future composed of some combination of *personal* and *social* compensatory control beliefs.

A caveat is that government (and/or aid organizations) is but one pillar of secular authority. The US government functions orthogonally to the scientific and technological research taking place in universities. The average American, however, who will never work in a high-level government position, or as a scientist, may be prone to confusing both as a mono-

lithic Hobbesian *Leviathan* controlling, guiding and enhancing their lives, analogous to the gods of old. There is some good research indicating the plausibility of this interpretation of the future (e.g., Farias et al. 2013; Kay et al. 2009; Toorn et al. 2015).

And, it is equally important to note that occupations will likely become more important in peoples' lives. The "company/corporation," like government and science, will be an abstract, agentic force with great power over the individual's life. The degree of ritualized, sacred commitment to one's occupation is likely to ebb and flow with perceived threat levels. This is much along the lines of what Emile Durkheim speculated on in his dissertation. I have spoken in this book less about seeking compensatory control in one's occupation, and much more about seeking such control in government or science (in addition to, of course, religion). However, this is only because I am not aware of research studying the potential for occupational commitment to increase perceived control, order and purpose in one's life. Weber felt occupations were becoming a pseudo-religious "calling," and Durkheim felt that the division of labor would produce interdependence and a sacralization of occupational specialization. It's about time experimentalists pick up where they left off.

One further aspect of this fuzzy, self-help, government-science-occupation pseudo-secular religion of the future is that people will probably remain nostalgic toward the religion of their parents and grandparents. People will probably maintain a *cultural Christianity* that involves a comforting nostalgia in celebrating traditions that have become nearly devoid of religious significance (like Easter or Christmas). The vague perception of a monolithic power composed of government-science-occupation, along with a supplemental narcissism, in no way requires an anger or resentment toward traditional religion.

David Voas and Abby Day (2010) suggest that this cultural Christianity in the United States will likely take three forms. "Moderates" will self-identify as Christians and have a vague belief in a god, while only occasionally and half-heartedly attending church. Alternatively, "idiosyncratics" will self-identify as nonaffiliates who believe in a god, but they will rarely, if ever, attend church. "Secular Christians" will self-identify as Christian but only out of politeness or nostalgia—otherwise, they neither believe in a god nor attend any church.

In this proposed future scenario, churches will not be razed. Churches tend to be the most beautiful buildings in cities around the country, and these monuments to architectural achievement will probably continue to

be valued as solemn sites into the future. It is just that the solemnity will not be traditionally religious. For rites of passage like births, marriages, graduations and funerals, ornate church settings confer a *specialness* that perhaps cannot be duplicated in a plain auditorium or flat-roofed community center. Churches may slowly cease to be sites of traditional religious worship, but their unrivaled beauty and architectural majesty will continue to be used to mark sacred (if secular) events in the lives of Americans.

Why am I so sure of this? Phil Zuckerman has traveled throughout Northern Europe—perhaps the most secular place on Earth—and, according to him, churches over the last several decades have been co-opted for other significant life events outside of traditional religious worship. I see no compelling reason why this shouldn't also be the fate of America's gorgeous churches. Zuckerman observes that churches throughout Scandinavia and Great Britain are used today not only to mark significant rites of passage, but many churches have also been sold to private owners who have since reopened them as pubs, dance clubs, apartment complexes and even Laundromats and carpet stores (Zuckerman et al. 2016).

And, besides, community organizing and commerce are happening less and less in physical brick-and-mortar locations anyway. The subcultural tightening and religious organizing of the future will most likely happen online via social media (Cimino and Smith 2014). The "churches" of the future will be virtual spaces on sites like Reddit, Titter, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr and Meetup.com. Due to being mediated by technology (i.e., social media) instead of physical copresence, religious communities of the future may be characterized more by transient, thin connections to diverse others with this or that shared interest instead of by stable, intergenerational, thick connections to homogenous others (Granovetter 1973; Cimino and Smith 2014).

Fuzzy beliefs in idealized self-reliance and self-importance, along with a monolithic near deification of government-science-occupation, are only a baseline for the future. Fluctuations in subcultural tightening are bound to occur as people will never cease to perceive threats around them. Gregory Paul (2009) reminds us that societies begin to secularize when a robust middle class emerges (along with upward mobility for the poor). As the middle class in a society shrinks, and perceptions of opportunity begin to vanish for society's most vulnerable inhabitants, strict, hierarchical and punishing religions will begin to grow once again. Remember that

subcultural tightening emerges in response to perceived threats, and that this tightening into rigid hierarchies, rules and punishments feels "safe" or "protective" for individuals under chronic threat.

In an intriguing article, Charlotte Ward and David Voas (2011) propose that the future of religion in the secular West will be a combination of supernatural spirituality and conspiracy theorizing. They argue that both New Agers *and* conspiracy theorists share three beliefs in common: (1) nothing happens by accident, (2) nothing is as it seems and (3) everything is connected. Their prediction for a religion of the future, what they call "conspirituality," will involve a merging of two traditionally distinct demographics—conspiracy theorists who tend to be male, conservative, pessimistic and concerned with world affairs and New Agers who tend to be female, liberal, self-consciously optimistic and focused on personal affairs. The fundamental tenets of conspirituality are that a secret group controls or is trying to control the political and social order, and that humanity is undergoing a paradigm shift in consciousness or awareness.

Today, however, no one can say for sure what the future of religion will look like. We can be almost certain that it will not be a return to Christian dogmatism, though I suppose anything is possible. I have intentionally reached far and wide in sketching these possible futures of religion so that I could feel confident that the truth lies somewhere herein.

Regardless, the larger point is that the most likely scenario for the future of religion in the United States involves a baseline "fuzziness" of illusory narcissism, and a largely disorganized search for meaning, purpose and control in the "power" of government-science-occupation. This baseline fuzziness, however, can begin to tighten into a more clearly hierarchical, rigid, punishing religious community to the degree that increasingly numerous and severe threats are perceived.

Conclusion

A book on secularization is bound to be seen as an affront to people who think they cannot live without the religion of their parents and grandparents.

I was raised Catholic myself, and I have known a lot of devoutly religious people who are incredibly sensitive, insightful and open-minded. This book is not a treatise against religion; it is a description of our changing society.

And, we need to face the facts—traditional religion is waning, and it will not come roaring back. Science and secular government are now, and will be into the future, the most important "entities out there" influencing peoples' day-to-day lives.

The God of old is not dead, but he is dying; and, it is not because people in America (and the West) have given up on powerful entities influencing their lives. Rather, they have given up on the notion of a bearded man with supernatural powers and with allegiance to only one community. This is progress. When God was a man, he had the weaknesses of men—tribal, intolerant, judgmental, fickle and overly concerned with peoples' sex lives and private beliefs.

Now our God is becoming something else, though still powerful, still protective, still wise. God is becoming human rights writ large, naturalistic philosophy and technological progress writ large. God is becoming less and less a particular being, representative of a particular people, and more a powerful, secular, scientific collective of diverse, cosmopolitan humanity.

Facing these facts can be unsettling primarily because it is unclear whether or not religion is in a process of changing into a different form or vanishing altogether. I doubt the latter is true because when human groups are threatened, they will tighten into nascent religions with great reliability. The question, then, is not whether or not traditional religion in the United States will continue to silently fade away, but what form religion will take 50 or 100 years hence.

Let's roll up our sleeves and face the threats of the future head on. We can rest assured that the greatest tools of humanity are now at our disposal; not tribal religiosity, but unwavering commitment to free expression, human rights and a technological progress that finally brings humanity in touch with our nature, and with nature.

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