Book Reviews


Religion has been seen as a key factor influencing political tolerance since 1955 when Samuel Stouffer first reported the connection between church attendance and lack of support for the civil rights of communists in his influential book Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties. Social scientists—largely but not solely political scientists—have expanded on Stouffer’s original observation connecting religious participation and political intolerance in various ways over the last 60 years. This has been accomplished by emphasizing that church attendance may act as a proxy for conservative or evangelical Protestantism, that conservative Christian beliefs, affiliations, and social networks are associated with political intolerance, and that political intolerance is correlated with how emphatically people hold onto their beliefs. Religion and Political Tolerance in America seeks to expand on the existing body of knowledge that has been limited by, among other things, a methodological reliance on specific measures, populations, and sources of data. This collection of original empirical analyses is edited by Paul Djupe, though it may also be fair to refer to him as the primary author given that he wrote the relatively detailed introduction and co-authored seven of the 14 chapters.

Religion and Political Tolerance in America advances the topic in several directions, with chapters that address tolerance among elite actors, tolerance in the general population and in specific groups, and reactions to intolerance. Three of the four chapters on elite actors focus on clergy. These chapters address political tolerance among clergy, clergy and member tolerance of disparate views within the church, and, perhaps most important, the relation between clergy political tolerance and tolerance among members of their congregations. The final chapter on elite actors, however, may be the most interesting. In this chapter, Wilcox and Kim examine tolerance among Americans who donate money to political campaigns. They find that fundamentalists and nonfundamentalists each feel threatened by the other group, but threat is more strongly associated with political intolerance among fundamentalist donors. Readers interested in clergy as elite members of our society who wield influence through access to the bully pulpit will likely be satisfied with these chapters as they succeed in providing insights into clergy political tolerance and the interaction between clergy and congregant political tolerance. On the other hand, those interested in more high-profile elites, such as nationally prominent ministers, may not view these chapters as positively.

Six of the chapters focus on political tolerance among nonelite actors. These chapters are notable for their serious attention to the measurement of both religion and political tolerance. They move beyond the standard measures of religion—belief, affiliation, and participation—and compare results across measures of political tolerance, such as the least-liked approach and the Stouffer method of using preselected outgroups. Several chapters in this section explore the root causes of the religion-tolerance association. A chapter by Blume and Courtemanche, for example, employs survey-embedded experimental data to show that the emotion of disgust influences political intolerance in both the United States and Israel, and that the effect of religiosity on intolerance is partially mediated by sensitivity to disgust. Other chapters emphasize the potential mediating role of purity and exclusive/inclusive values. These chapters will be of particular interest to readers concerned with why religion is associated with political intolerance.

The final set of chapters focus on reactions to political intolerance. These chapters can be divided into two categories. The first is how people react to religious leaders promoting tolerance and intolerance. The emphasis here is on how reactions to a religious leader’s tolerance and intolerance are conditional on preexisting tolerance and affinity with the religious leader. The second category...
is how minority religious groups—Muslims and the nonreligious—respond to intolerance and threat. These chapters suggest that perceptions of local hostility are detrimental to both Muslim and nonreligious Americans. In other words, we begin to get a picture of the effects of political intolerance on outgroup well-being.

The greatest strength of Religion and Political Tolerance in America may also be its greatest weakness. Aside from one chapter that uses a mixed-methods approach, the analyses exclusively employ quantitative data and analysis techniques. Nonetheless, the range and depth of methodological approaches is impressive. Several chapters use experimental data and others employ unique survey items. Most chapters use data specifically collected for the purpose of examining religion and political tolerance, which leads to more precise measurement. Serious consideration is often given to potential mediation and moderation. Unfortunately, original data collections also mean some potentially problematic data limitations, with some low response rates, analyses based on small samples, and geographically-and age-restricted data that limit generalizability; limitations that are fully acknowledged by the authors. Regardless of these limitations, however, Religion and Political Tolerance in America achieves its goal, as stated in its subtitle, of advancing the state of the art. This book is not intended as a general overview of the topic, but is instead for the reader interested in new and novel quantitative analyses of the association between religion and political tolerance in the contemporary United States.

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The rise of the nonreligious in American society and abroad has resulted in a growing body of research devoted to the beliefs, identities, and lived experiences of those who fall within this group. American Secularism is not only a comprehensive compendium of the research to date on the nonreligious, but it also makes a substantive argument about why this research matters and offers a new theoretical framework for understanding secularism as a cultural phenomenon. This book will likely become a go-to resource for the growing number of scholars interested in nonreligion, not only because it is an exhaustive review, but also because it provides a much needed bridge between the sociology of nonreligion, the sociology of religion, and the sociology of culture, building on the groundwork laid by other scholars for over a decade.

The book begins by outlining a typology of secularities that the authors then use throughout the book; they use this typology to show how the nonreligious are an internally heterogeneous group and that some parts of this group are in many ways not all that different from the religious. The authors settle on four categories: atheists, agnostics, nonaffiliated believers, and the culturally religious. While this is certainly not the first attempt at classifying the nonreligious—and in fact I am not convinced there is one “right” way to divide up the different ways to be nonreligious—the authors’ use of this typology is productive and convincingly makes the case that to understand nonreligion you have to look at how belief, belonging, and behavior intersect.

With their typology in place, the authors move on to outline their theoretical contribution, one that I find persuasive and innovative. They argue for a cultural understanding of secularity, one that moves away from rational choice and secularization theory. Instead of positing secularity and religion as opposites, the authors argue that these perspectives should be seen as on a continuum—every individual is in a constant process of meaning making, and each individual varies in terms of how much use he or she makes of religion in order to make that meaning. The authors deploy the concept of cosmic belief systems as a way to understand how both secularity and religion are philosophical positions on this continuum, with substantive values and beliefs. This is a much
needed departure from secularization theory, which posits that the move away from religion results in an absence of values and beliefs and a move toward pure rationality. The authors emphasize that both religion and secularity can be both rational and irrational, and the concept of cosmic belief systems allows for a better understanding of the varieties of philosophies that fall along this continuum.

Another unique contribution that *American Secularism* offers is the naming of this historical moment—The Great Abdicating. While numerous scholars have noted the marked movement away from organized religion, this book makes the argument that this trend is substantial enough to be considered a real historical turn with serious cultural and political implications. The authors show how this shift in orientation away from religion has continued to increase despite numerous demographic constraints. While I was less convinced by their attempts to predict the future of trends in secularity, I think the argument that demographic changes in secularity have occurred because of cultural shifts in society is an important one.

The remainder of the book utilizes this theoretical framework to investigate the patterns of identification, belief, and behavior among the nonreligious. The authors use an array of data and methods to illustrate the varieties of secularities and their expressions, including numerous survey analyses, in-depth interviews, and historical biographies. One comes away from this book with a clear understanding that there are different ways of being secular and that we need to pay attention to not only how people identify, but also what they believe and how they orient themselves to religious and nonreligious groups and institutions. The authors devote entire chapters to the intersections of nonreligion with different structural locations, including gender, race, family, and political orientation. While many of these trends and patterns have been outlined elsewhere, *American Secularism* brings them all together into one sustained argument for the importance of understanding the heterogeneity of the nonreligious.

*American Secularism* offers an innovative framework for the study of both nonreligion and religion that will be an indispensable resource for both scholars of nonreligion as well as scholars of culture and religion who want to better understand this new historical moment and its implications. The book is well-written, full of interesting data and histories, and its argument for the necessity of an accurate understanding of secularisms and secularities in social research is one that should not be ignored.

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**ATHEIST AWAKENING: SECULAR ACTIVISM AND COMMUNITY IN AMERICA.**

*Atheist Awakening* opens with two stories. The first is a brief recollection of one author’s observations at a sparsely attended secular humanist meeting for a term paper in his graduate course on religious movements in the 1990s. Comprised of “mostly white elderly men,” this group was nonthreatening and, in fact, they collectively saw themselves under threat from the religious right (p. 1). The second story is a rich account of the Reason Rally—a slightly larger secularist gathering of over 10,000 nonbelievers in Washington, DC in 2012. The juxtaposition of these two accounts should leave readers wondering what happened between the 1990s and 2012 that transformed small-group ruminations into large-scale politicized collective action.

What factors are responsible for the increase of secularists groups and the corresponding uptick in secular activism in the United States? How do atheists form collective identity and engage in community building? What does secular activism look like in the 21st century? These are just a few of the questions that Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith answer in *Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America.* Drawing on data collected through surveys, observations, interviews, and textual analysis of secularist websites.
and publications, this book is among the first to provide a sociological examination of organized secularism as a diffuse social movement.

The authors situate their analysis of contemporary secularism within the political and cultural context of the United States. Chapter 1 explores the trajectory of atheism and secular humanism as separate movements during the 19th and 20th centuries. Ethnographic data demonstrate that secularism has failed to usurp religion as the dominant force in the United States, which has forced secularists to adopt an oppositional identity, much like the evangelicals in Christian Smith’s *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago 1998). The adoption of an embattled resistance identity was highly effective for stimulating growth in secularist organizations.

Chapter 2 examines the reciprocal impact of New Atheism, popular culture, and new media. The publication and wide reception of best-selling works by Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennet, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens are credited with enhancing the profile of atheism and secular humanism. New Atheists promote highly personalized and aggressive tactics stressing the role of argument and debate aimed at discrediting religious belief. Despite critiques of its divisive nature, the authors argue that the confrontational character of New Atheism, as an alternative discursive logic, has done more for secular activism than any other event in American secularist history.

The role of the Internet in facilitating collective identity and community building is examined in Chapter 3. The Internet and social media are new spaces in which secularists are able to come out, speak out, and meet other like-minded individuals in a religious society. As such, secularists’ blogs, YouTube videos, and discussion forums have become important components of secularist culture and atheist activism. The authors provide an in-depth discussion of how the virtual sphere functions as a discursive arena where the dynamics of solidarity and conflict play out between secularists trying to assert their particular brand of secularism. This analysis highlights the pluralistic and expressive nature of online secular activism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the impact of secular cyberactivism on secularist organizations and politics more broadly. The authors argue that online involvement both parallels and incites offline activity, and they contend that the greatest impact of secular cyberactivism has been on the development of group consciousness and the emergence of a mass secular constituency.

A major strength of this book is the analysis of contemporary secularism’s affective quality presented in Chapter 4. The prospect for a more positive atheism and the role of commemoration and ritual is situated within a broader examination of what the authors call “secular spirituality” (p. 124). Many secularists express the positive effects of rituals, while rejecting any notion of spirituality. Rituals and commemorations provide opportunities for reinvention, serve as a means of legitimation, and often utilize humor, parody, and mockery to symbolically affirm secular values. Moreover, secularist gatherings function as rituals of unity and create solidarity. Despite this last point, findings indicate that secularist rituals are less about creating collective cohesion and more about creative meaning making steeped in an individualist ethos.

*Atheist Awakening* provides a thorough analysis of the contributing factors responsible for stimulating growth in secular organizations and mobilizing online and offline grassroots activism in the 21st century. I applaud Cimino and Smith for articulating what others have not—that understanding contemporary secularism cannot be done independent of America’s unique religious culture. There are many things to like about this book; however, one issue I had concerns the authors’ historical account of secular humanism and their decision to exclude the American Humanist Association (AHA), the oldest secular organization in the United States, from their analysis. Much of the historical account presented in Chapter 1 is oversimplified or inaccurate. A more detailed history of organizational splintering would have revealed the division between religious and secular humanist organizations as nothing more than a strategically constructed symbolic boundary, and thus would have warranted including the AHA in the sample. Despite these shortcomings, the book is an excellent read and makes a significant contribution to several bodies of
sociological literature, including nonreligious studies, religion, deviance, culture, and social movements.

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To begin this work, Farrell presents an interesting puzzle: Why, with the almost exponential increase in and accuracy of all forms of scientific and technical evidence, have various conflicts over the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) only grown worse? Surely, with proliferations in technical knowledge groups on either side of various environmental debates should be better able to prove their stance as correct, right? Wrong. While prior work raises a variety of explanations—economic self-interest, social movement theories, or struggles for political power—Farrell argues that these only explain the “how” of the conflict, not the “why.” And to understand the why, Farrell encourages us to shift the analytic lens to uncover and identify the “fundamental moral beliefs, feelings, commitments, and desires” of those involved. In doing so, Farrell finds that the GYE conflict is not a struggle over facts, but over moral truths.

As Farrell points out, the arguments, facts, and research used on all sides tend to obscure what the conflict is really over. Building on prior work on moral commitments and moral order, Farrell outlines how people’s moral beliefs, feelings, and desires are the result of their being embedded in larger cultural systems and social institutions that define for them which actions are commendable and which are not. However, when there is no objective way to decide between two moral orders, conflict results. Because moral commitments are essentially faith commitments—not based on proof—no amount of facts or evidence will be able to win over the other side. Farrell skillfully demonstrates that in order to understand conflict over the environment, we must turn our attention away from all of the economic, legal, rational, and technoscientific “evidence” marshaled by various interest groups and look beneath the surface to find what it is about the environment that people find significant, sacred, and worthy of protecting. This work forcefully shows that conflict in the GYE is due to the diverging moral and spiritual commitments of opposing groups and their “struggle to enact and sustain incommensurable moral orders.”

The first three chapters introduce the work, his theoretical aims, and contributions, as well as situate the current GYE social context in historical terms, highlighting how contemporary discourse, values, and moral orders came to be. Central to this story is the fascinating shift from “old west” to “new west” and the accompanying economic, political, and status-market changes that cultivated the ground from which conflict over opposing moral orders could sprout. The next three chapters serve as case studies of various conflicts in the GYE. These “on-the-ground” investigations bring to life, in vibrant detail, his overarching claim of the foundational importance of moral orders and narratives to understanding intractable environmental conflict. This work moves swiftly from one fascinating insight to the next. One example—among many—is Farrell’s textual analysis and mapping (both geographic and thematic) of the vast collection of public letters written to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concerning the reintroduction of wolves into the GYE. This methodological angle yields multiple insights that would be impossible with other methods.

This work is the result of an impressive amount of research. Farrell gathered and analyzed a broad assortment of data that span several different methodological areas. For this reason, his work could serve as an excellent example for undergraduate and (especially) graduate methods courses. Examining longitudinal quantitative indicators and discourse texts (big data) alongside two years of ethnographic participant observation (as well as a lifetime of living near and enjoying the GYE, as he shares in the acknowledgments), Farrell leaves no stone unturned in order to build an extremely
persuasive case for his larger historical and theoretical claims.

*The Battle for Yellowstone* makes a substantial contribution to the field of sociology as a whole through its interaction with a diverse collection of subfields, especially in the way it brings the importance of morality and spirituality to the fore of environmental research, something neglected in the past. For the purposes of our own subfield, this work follows the recent call to examine the sacred outside of typical locations in order to observe if, when, and how it can influence daily life. He finds that communities with strong moral and sacred commitments can successfully attract and motivate ostensibly secular individuals. Interestingly though, when asked to provide explanations for their participation these individuals attempt to “mute” these moral commitments due to their integration within broader American narratives of moral relativism and individualism. Of particular importance, Farrell demonstrates that even in highly rationalized contexts, like the conflict over the GYE, spirituality and the sacred are not “dealt a death blow by such rationalizing forces,” but have instead become “deeply entwined within scientific and rational institutions we take to be secular.”

This is an impressive piece of scholarship that deserves to be (and I trust will be) widely read. Social scientists from a variety of fields will benefit from his insights. Well-written, thoughtful, and completely engaging, Farrell provides us a unique look at how being mindful of the sacred can lead researchers to previously undiscovered vistas of illumination concerning social life and conflict in the modern world.

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FROM CELIBATE CATHOLIC PRIEST TO MARRIED PROTESTANT MINISTER: SHEPHERDING IN GREENER PASTURES.


In the wide-ranging literature about changing or exiting roles, the men who transfer into and out of the Catholic priesthood have been little studied. Recently, however, two books have appeared in a single year: Paul Sullins’s *Keeping the Vow*, which covers, at least in part, men who became Catholic priests after being ordained in another denomination, and the book that is the subject of this review, *From Celibate Catholic Priest to Married Protestant Minister: Shepherding in Greener Pastures* by Stephen Fichter, which looks at men who have moved in the opposite direction.

Overall, this is an excellent book. It is well-written and accessible, and would be interesting to a lay audience as well as to sociologists. Dr. Fichter, who is himself a Catholic priest as well as a sociologist, interweaves the personal stories of three Catholic priests who joined the clergy of other denominations—two of them who became Episcopalian priests, and one who currently ministers in the United Church of Christ—with a more scholarly analysis of their initial socialization to priesthood, their subsequent exit from this role, their marriages, and their secondary socialization into their current positions. The chapters that quote Tom, Mike, and Bill put flesh, so to speak, on the more historical and sociological data in the other chapters. Dr. Fichter competently covers a wide range of disciplines and research: from the history and anthropology of religious celibacy (Chapters 2 and 6) and the writing of *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* and *Humanae Vitae* by Pope Paul VI (Chapter 6), to the sociology and psychology of role transitions, secondary socialization, and midlife crises (Chapters 4, 8, and 12). Chapter 16 provides a nice introduction to the concept of generational cohort effects as compared to period and life cycle effects. The theoretical discussion of these chapters is supported by Dr. Fichter’s own research: in-depth interviews (and in some cases multiple interviews) with 131 participants from the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, and Congregational denominations.

I have only a few criticisms of what is overall an excellent work. One refers to an inconsistency in the book’s head/heart model. In Chapter 14, these two categories referred to whether a man left the Catholic priesthood because of ideological/theological issues (“head”) or
because he had fallen in love and wished to get married (“heart”). But in the conclusion, the same two terms are used to refer to rational choice interpretations versus symbolic interaction/identity interpretations, respectively. The reader is left somewhat unclear as to exactly how the theoretical meanings postulated for these terms in the conclusion fit with the earlier application to falling in love versus having intellectual disagreements with church teachings. Perhaps this is simply because Chapter 14 refers to reasons for leaving the Catholic priesthood, while the conclusion refers to reasons for becoming a married Protestant pastor. But it would have been nice to have an explanation for this.

Another criticism concerns additional theories, arguments, and empirical findings that, if discussed in the present work, would have made for a deeper analysis. Iannaccone’s writings on “religious capital” might have added explanatory heft to the book’s observation that most of the respondents had moved from Roman Catholicism to the Episcopal Church, instead of to other denominations. Such a pattern could readily be explained by the fact that this is where their previous “religious capital” would have been the most congruent. Some writers (e.g., Greeley 2004) also argue that in denominations with married clergy, as in the leadership of many businesses, marriage serves as a proxy to certify personal normalcy, and single pastors are looked upon as a bit suspect. This argument might have been added to the practical implications covered in the final chapter.

Additional practical implications involve the job market in the receiving denominations. Many mainline Protestant denominations currently suffer from a clergy surplus that is exacerbated by their simultaneous decline in actual members. Given their difficulty in finding pastorates for their own clergy, it may be difficult for them to see an influx of former Catholic priests as a “boon” (p. 166). Did any of the book’s interviewees have difficulty locating a congregation to serve in this time of scarcity? If not, why not? Is there any resentment of their presence among the existing denominational clergy who were already looking for a (increasingly scarce) position, now that there is more competition for them? Similarly, the speculations on pp. 168–69 concerning whether the reinstitution of the married diaconate has deterred men from becoming priests seems unlikely. In general, married Catholic deacons tend to be older married men who decide to begin their training as deacons decades after they marry. This would be a good next project: to research when and why married men decide to become deacons, and also to hunt down laicized Catholic priests to ask them if they would be interested in remaining in church service as married deacons.

It is always easy for a critic to fault an author on what she/he did not say, and to recommend additions that would make another whole book in themselves. This is probably the case with the above objections. Overall, From Celibate Catholic Priest to Married Protestant Minister is an excellent book that illuminates a population that few persons—Catholic or otherwise—know about. It deserves a wide readership.

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REFERENCES