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## The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Perspectives On Violence, Homicide, and War

### Chapter 25

#### Why Religion Is Unable to Minimize Lethal and Nonlethal Societal Dysfunction Within and Between Nations

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##### Abstract

The widely held premise that godly religion is important if not critical to maximizing the socioeconomic success of societies while suppressing criminal violence and war is undergoing growing historical and scientific scrutiny. Research indicates that theism is not reliably efficacious even when moderate or progressive, and often contributes to societal dysfunction and war when it is conservative or reactionary in nature. Theism cannot be part of the solution because theism is popular only when socioeconomic conditions are sufficiently defective to compel the majority to relieve their chronic anxiety by petitioning supernatural forces for aid and protection. The most successful and pacific societies in history have been the most nontheistic modern democracies, in part because a high level of secure prosperity always suppresses mass religion. So rather than being universal and integral to human psychology, religious supernaturalism is superficial and elective, and it is poorly developed even in some hunter-gatherers. The best human option is atheistic liberal democracy.

Key Words: religion, secularism, atheism, violence, war, societal dysfunction, societal success

#### Introduction: The Big “Is Religion Good or Bad” Question

On one hand, religion has experienced a historically unprecedented implosion in the most advanced prosperous democracies, dramatically reducing its social impact in much of Europe and North America, Australia and New Zealand, and Japan. At the same time, the opinion that at least one supernatural deity exists and plays a crucial role in human affairs continues to play an enormous role in most of the world at the individual, community, national, and international levels, including in civil and military strife and terrorism. Large numbers are obsessed with supernaturalistic religion, some to the extent that they are inspired to engage in lethal violence. It is therefore necessary to assess, on a scientific basis, whether religion and nonreligion are positive or negative influences on humanity, a test that is made possible by the wide variation and popularity of religion and associated societal conditions in modern nations.

The need for such an examination is reinforced because one of the most popular opinions over time and between differing peoples—the godly-religion socioeconomic hypothesis—has been that it is at best difficult if not impossible for societies to be successful and nonviolent internally and externally, unless the great majority of the population is supernaturalistically religious in that they believe that at least one moral deity exists and must be worshipped. At the same time, the presence of a strong religious component in most of the strife that is afflicting the world, and the aggressive stance of harsh fundamentalist doctrines, is raising concerns about the corrosive influence of religion.

The Great War<sup>i</sup> of 1914–1918 played a pivotal role in the growing social struggle between advocates of theism and nontheism because many theoconservatives interpreted the extreme death toll of the European war as exposing the perils of nations being insufficiently godly and under the undue influence of Darwinian thinking. William Jennings Bryan became a dedicated creationist for this reason, leading the notorious Scopes Monkey Trial and the ensuing and ongoing battle between creationism and evolutionary science in the United States (Numbers, 2005). Others argue that the Great War was yet another in a long series of wars in which Eurochristians fought Eurochristians, and that the scale of the conflict was the result of technological advances exploited by strongly religious societies. World War II and the Jewish Holocaust have become an issue because many theoconservatives vehemently contend that the primary cause of the war and genocide, Hitlerian Nazism, was an expression of Darwinistic atheism (Brooks, 2006; Coulter, 2006; D’Souza, 2007; O’Reilly, 2006), while others have presented the historical evidence that Nazism was profoundly theistic in origins and nature, and

that the racism often associated with early Darwinism was a pseudoscientific contamination inherited from Christian civilization (Hastings, 2010; Paul, 2003, 2004; Phayer, 2000, 2008; Scholder, 1988; Steigman-Gall, 2003). In the latter view, World War II was a religious conflict in which godly Fascists with the aid of major Christian elements attempted to extinguish irreligious communism as well as Jews.

How religion and the lack of it impacts daily lives in national societies not directly experiencing war had been insufficiently investigated (Bloom, 2007; Dennett, 2006; Paul, 2005), but it is seeing a rapid expansion of research (Barber, 2011; Gill & Lundsgaarde, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Paul, 2005, 2009a, 2010a, 2010b; Rees, 2009; Ruiters & Tubergen, 2009; Verweij, Ester, & Nauta, 1997; Zuckerman, 2008, 2009; Pinker, 2011). The history of the extensive support for the general godly-religion socioeconomic hypothesis is presented in Paul (2005, 2009a) and Zuckerman (2008, 2009). Many variants of the general theory are extant, so its complexity is high. The most widely held single subset is the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis that more specifically posits that mass worship of the one and only purposeful creator of the universe is necessary for societies to function properly and pacifically (Paul, 2009a, 2010b), and this is a vital tenant of the monotheistic Abrahamism that half the global population adheres to.

Contained within the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis are further important subvariants. Of course, many contend that a particular sect within the Abrahamist tradition produces the best results, the sect usually being the one that a given Jew, Christian, or Muslim belongs to. Some conservative and all moderate and liberal theists deny that mass acceptance of bioevolution contributes to social ills even if they think the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis as a whole is operative. Conservative adherents to the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis often contend that popular approval of Darwinian science is societally disadvantageous for two proposed reasons. Mass acceptance of evolution tends to suppress levels of belief in a supernatural creator that is necessary for properly functional societies, and the process of biological evolution is a purposeless, amoral struggle for survival that leads to ungodly brutal social Darwinism and individual immorality.

Especially in the contemporary United States, the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis is a core, driving belief among much of the political Right, who propose that the mix of laissez faire capitalism, minimal government, and low taxes of economic libertarianism

combined with faith-based charity is the godly version of socioeconomics best suited for producing a beneficent “opportunity” society (Boyle, 2005; Coulter, 2006; D’Souza, 2007; O’Reilly, 2006; Palin, 2010; Stark, 2008; Warren, 2002). The American majority agrees that “God has granted America a special role in human history” (PRRI, 2010). In the theoconservative worldview, the American Way is the best possible earthly arrangement, blessed by God. American Exceptionalism accordingly stands as the Reaganian “Shining City on the Hill” to the rest of the world. This contradictory belief—contradictory in that the unrestrained free markets the religious Right largely supports and promotes constitute the very Spencerian socioeconomic survival of the fittest, the materialistic socioeconomic “Darwinism,” that the same religious Right professes to oppose so strongly that they reject Darwinian evolution—is most common among Protestant economic libertarians and is most extreme within Prosperity Christianity. However, the hypercapitalistic version of the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis is rejected by some Protestant traditionalists who fear the secularization effect of the corporate consumer culture (including Warren, 2002 to a certain extent). It is also less accepted within the Catholic Right because church doctrine opposes free-wheeling capital (Benedict XVI, 2009). Many moderate and liberal Christians similarly dismiss the muscular capitalist expression of the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis. The rejection of capitalism by some Christians is properly scriptural because the Christian Testaments do not detail the free markets or property rights that theoconservatives contend are biblical, but instead describe the ideal Christian community as entirely socialistic. The general view that religion is a vital social positive is so strongly held in America (Public Religion Research Institute, 2010; Putman & Campbell, 2010) that atheists are the victims of a degree of bigotry as “others” outside the consensus norm so high that they are largely excluded from politics and marriage with theists, as well as the Boy Scouts (Edgell, Gertel, & Hartmann, 2006; Gervais, Shariff & Norenzayan, 2011; Paul & Zuckerman, 2011; Zuckerman, 2009).

Liberal theists and even some who doubt the existence of deities have often accepted that supernaturalistic religion among the masses can be helpful to keeping those masses in societal line (Armstrong, 2009; Wright, 2008). And some denounce both fundamentalism and assertive atheism as opposing yet equivalent extremes that each augment societal problems, unlike what they consider more benign mainline faiths (Egginton, 2011; Hedges, 2009). However, there are dissenters to the godly-religion socioeconomic hypothesis. This includes some theists who deny

that large-scale nonreligiosity is automatically dangerous to societies, but it has become prominent in recent years as a wave of popular antireligious and/or proatheist works have appeared (Bloom, 2008; Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006; Epstein, 2009; Harris, 2006, 2010; Hitchens, 2007; Paul, 2010c; Paul & Zuckerman, 2007, 2011; Shermer, 2007). It is also notable that the populations of some modern first-world countries express substantial skepticism about the beneficial effect of religion upon national societies (International Social Survey Program, 2001; Paul, 2005), and Euroatheists are accepted to the degree that they often openly participate in politics at the highest levels, while overtly religious figures are viewed with skepticism. It has been proposed that highly religious nations are inherently unable to achieve the level of overall societal success, including low levels of lethal violence, enjoyed by the most secular democracies, leading to the secular-democratic socioeconomic hypothesis (Paul, 2009a). The secular-democratic socioeconomic hypothesis generally presumes that a progressive mix of regulated capitalism and government assistance is associated with the best cumulative societal conditions in modern nations on an empirical and theoretical basis, although a few propose that libertarian policies can achieve the same results. With the failure of irreligious communism, the noncapitalistic, nondemocratic version of the secular socioeconomic hypothesis no longer enjoys substantial support.

The question of whether religious faith and practice are good, bad, or neither for national societies should have important implications for international violence. This is because the plausible hypothesis that well-run, pacific countries are less likely to engage in serious violence against one another than are more dysfunctional societies is empirically supported by the absence of major military conflict within and between the relatively well-run first-world democracies compared to the numerous wars ongoing in many second- and third-world countries. It follows that it is important for societies to better understand whether it is mass religion or irreligion that is more likely to produce superior democratic societies. Until recently all sides of the grand debate on these issues and questions were relying largely on anecdote and speculative opinion due to the scarcity of scientific analysis on the problem. Fortunately, this is changing as the technical research discovers how and why differing levels of organized supernaturalism and societal conditions interact with and influence one another. It is therefore becoming increasingly feasible for bodies politic to be sufficiently informed to make decisions concerning the future course of their societies based on sophisticated psychosociological analysis.

## It Is All Connected

Although examining the relationships between the societal conditions and religiosity is intrinsically important as well as interesting, it does not occur in a vacuum. A happy scientific and educational side effect of the research is that the information is proving critical to finally answering a number of long-standing, major questions about the psychology, origin, and popularity of religious belief and its absence.

The questions include the following. Is religion always sufficiently popular that it is essentially universal, as is often contended? Is religious supernaturalism deeply set in the human psyche, perhaps through a “God gene” or programmed “God module,” like language skills and materialism? Or is it usually a superficial opinion, in which case it cannot be strongly genetically programmed in response to selective forces? Are any of a host of popular proposals centered on internal workings of the human mind—fear of death and eternal torment, fear of societal chaos, the desire for social community and support, the euphoria of worship, memes, or the actual existence of the gods—primary causes of religion? Do higher levels of religious freedom and plurality create a Darwinian competition that boosts overall religiosity? Or is the quality of the human environment the most important factor driving the popularity of theism versus atheism? Specifically, the socioeconomic dysfunctionality hypothesis (a more specific version of the uncertainty hypothesis) states that religion is popular when societies are seriously dysfunctional (presuming that the government is not enforcing antitheist policies). The complementary socioeconomic security hypothesis (a more specific version of the existential security hypothesis) states that the development of a middle-class majority that is sufficiently financially and socially secure due to progressive secular socioeconomic policies results in a serious and measurable decline in religiosity. Also necessary to know is the way the mechanisms, if they exist, by which the level of popular non/religiosity effect societal conditions and vice versa operate—if, for example, lower levels of religiosity are correlated with better societal circumstances, is it because religion contributes to societal ills, or because good conditions suppress the popularity of faith, or both? And how do these factors influence one another? Conversely, determining how and why belief and disbelief in gods effects societal success and vice versa in modern times requires examining the nature, beginnings, and popularity of religious opinion from its remote beginnings up to the present. This, in turn, entails assessing and comparing the popularity of religious opinion and practice over time. Also required is a

comprehensive comparison of social and economic conditions in successful democracies. Comparing the popularity of religion to national conditions not only helps answer the question of whether secular or religious societies tend to be more successful, but it reveals whether it is possible for a faith-based or a strongly nontheistic nation to be successful.

## Defining and Grading Religiosity

A defect of a number of past analyses is to treat religion too simplistically and without sufficient definition. For example, claims that religion is as universal among humans as language (as per Bloom, 2007) are usually not testable because, while nonwritten language (including signing among the deaf) is well developed in all mentally healthy mature humans, religion can be extremely variable in characteristics and especially in intensity among individuals and societies. If all the world's people were head over heels, God-believing Christians who prayed hourly to their personal God and spent most of each Sabbath in church while avoiding leisure activities, then the globe would be far more religious than if all the world's people were equally convinced God-believing Deists who never prayed to the remote deity and never attended religious services. Actual differences in religious orientation and intensity have real effects. For example, Americans' level of belief in ghosts and haunted houses is nearly as widespread as fundamentalist creationism (Gallup, 2005, 2006a), but the former is not a major cultural ideology and movement that has the profound impact on national politics enjoyed by the creationist cause. Nor is the degree of belief in ghosts commonly cited as a potential causal factor in the level of national societal dysfunction either in academic studies or best-selling popular books, and it is rarely raised in electoral contests. Likewise, Gallup (2005) observes that Americans' belief in paranormal phenomena is almost as high as is the level of belief in god(s),<sup>ii</sup> yet the latter has a much greater effect on the culture war. The sociopolitical influence of organized religion compared to other supernaturalistic belief systems is due in part to its organization, combined with the claim that the deity of worship is an all-important moral agent.

For particular research purposes, insufficient attention has, therefore, been paid to the important differences that distinguish the type, depth, and universality of spirituality and religious belief and activity. In this chapter and in my own research, a spiritual person who believes in and worships a god with moral attributes and regularly attends religious services is rated more religious than one who equally believes in a moral god but does not participate in organized worship, who in turn is more religious than a person who does not believe in or

worship a god but does have a spiritual belief in amoral ghosts or astrology, and so forth. A set of measures of religious and nonreligious belief and practice are used to compare absolute and relative levels of opinion, as discussed later (and further detailed in Paul, 2009a). In general, religion is defined for the purposes of this chapter and my research to include a supernaturalistic element. Because the emphasis is on popular trends, terms such as “religious” and “secular” are used to characterize and contrast the views of national populations, rather than the configuration of governments. For example, the United States is labeled as religious compared to secular Britain because the population of the latter is less theistic than that of the former, even though the British government is officially Anglican and the American Constitution is secular.

The terminology for disbelievers is often mishandled. All persons are either theists who believe in at least one god, or atheists who lack belief in a god, there is no gap between them. Agnosticism is a philosophical methodology rather than a conclusion that can apply to both theists and atheists. Because agnostic is not, therefore, a demographic measure of a person’s degree of nontheistic belief that sits between atheist and theist, the term cannot be used to describe survey respondents that supposedly lie outside of theism or atheism. Basic atheists are simply all who at least lack belief in a god, core atheists are the subcohort that also reject higher powers, universal spirits, etc.

## War, Homicide, Socioeconomic Conditions, and Religion From Prehistory to the Present

### Hunter-Gatherers

It is widely assumed that prehistoric hunter-gatherers were and are consistently highly religious in that they are shamanistic animists (Boyer, 2001, 2008; Dennett, 2006; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008). This assumption is problematic because some hunter-gatherers exhibit minimal religion. The Hadza of east Africa are among the last true hunter-gatherers extant, and their lineage extends back into the Pleistocene (Marlowe, 2002, 2004, 2010; Paul, 2010a). Although they fear death, they do not believe in an afterlife. In Hadza cosmology, the sun is a supernatural entity, but they do not actively worship it or try to influence its actions in their favor. Pre- and posthunting rituals are absent, and other rituals are limited in scope. Shamans are absent, and the tribe proved highly resistant to Christian recruitment. Also unconvertible, Everett (2008) found

the Amazonian Piraha to be markedly less religious than devout Christians, especially in their absence of god figures that provide moral guidance.

Although shamanism is widespread in most recent and extant low-technology cultures (Boyer, 2001, 2008; Dennett, 2006; Epton, 2009; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008), the minimal spirituality of some current examples creates a serious data problem because it cannot be automatically assumed that most prehistoric cultures were highly spiritual, much less religious with a corresponding moral ideology. Perhaps the Hazda are a rare or unique exception to the norm, but it is possible that they are a remnant of what was once a broader or even predominant pattern of low or absent theism. An absence of serious spiritualism may help explain the scarcity of art in many Paleolithic cultures. The existence of prehistoric artifacts, including art and other preserved behaviors such as burials, may be of limited value in assessing ancient spirituality due to the difficulty of interpreting what was actually intended in a given case (Narr, 2008; Pfeiffer, 1985)—that may have varied between individuals as well as cultures—or of demonstrating that the messages being illustrated represented the majority or minority opinion at the time they were created. Assume that the modest majority of persons living circa 40,000 years before present were not highly spiritual, and as a result they had low rates of production of artifacts and preservable behaviors that might record their supernatural thinking. Also, some of their artifacts and behaviors are subject to incorrect interpretation as evidence of supernaturalism. Meanwhile, a large spiritual minority generates numerous artifacts and actions that record their supernaturalism. The paleoarchaeological record could seem to support a much higher level of protoreligion than was actually present. Perhaps in a given region supernaturalism ranged from very high in some groups to low in others living at the same time and general location—perhaps the hill people were one and the valley folks the other, or perhaps some hill people were nonspiritual while others in the same highlands were believers. The data needed to properly assess the level of supernaturalism prior to 10,000 BP may be permanently lost, precluding acquiring the degree of knowledge needed to determine the relationship between the beginnings of religion and violence in prehistoric peoples. What we do know is that the popularity and depth of religiosity in low-technology, nonfarming peoples is highly variable and can be minimal.

Socioeconomic conditions among prehistoric, preagricultural humans included short average life spans of about two decades, with juvenile mortality rates of one half or more (Paul, 2008, 2009b). Medical care was minimal and nonexpert (as it is among modern hunter-gatherers;

Marlowe, 2004). Nutrition levels may have been fairly good in many cases due to a varied diet, and prehistoric humans generally had larger brains and bodies than the more domesticated modern humans (Ruff, Trinkaus, & Holliday, 1997). Economic levels were severely impoverished by modern standards, but there were no examples of wealthier cultures, and any elites were not much better off than the rest, so envy levels were probably absent or modest. Lacking long-term food storage capacity, and vulnerable to severe periodic declines in food sources, early human clans may have been under substantial pressure to acquire and protect their resource bases with violent actions when necessary.

Levels of intraspecific violence vary widely among animals and can be quite high. The two primates most closely related to human, bonobos and chimpanzees, exhibit large differences in intraspecific violence. The latter are often violent within a clan and practice what may qualify as low-grade wars between neighboring clans for meat and territory (Goodall, 1986). Direct affirmation of intraspecific violence in early *Homo* species is so far lacking, perhaps because population densities were too low and new territory too abundant for chronic interclan conflicts. There is evidence for cannibalism in *H. neanderthalensis* that seems to represent aggressive violence (Rosas et al., 2006; White, 2001). That only one species of what was once a diverse array of hominins is extant may be because *H. sapiens* wiped out the competition, but nonviolent forms of competition and evolutionary chance may have been more important. Evidence for low-grade warfare in prehistoric *H. sapiens* increases as population density rises and may have included cannibalism (Keeley, 1996; Kelly, 2000; LeBlanc & Register, 2004; Otterbein, 2004; Pinker, 2011; White, 2001). That protohumans and prehistoric humans were well armed with stone, wood, and bone weapons at least in part for hunting purposes may have facilitated intraspecific aggression both within and between cohesive groups (Otterbein, 2004). It cannot be presumed that all nonagricultural groups practiced aggressive warfare, because some modern groups do not, including the Hadza and !Kung bushmen (Keeley, 1996; Marlowe, 2010).

### Ancient Agriculture and Civilization

The evidence concerning popular religiosity and violence improves immensely with the advent of agriculture and civilization. Data sources include stone, brick, and concrete religious structures and written records. Organized religion involving extensive priesthoods—generally patriarchal—was often well developed in preindustrial civilizations, but substantial variation in popularity and depth also occurs, to the degree that some societies have had little in the way of

theism. The oldest and largest civilization, the Chinese, never developed a major indigenous supernaturalistic faith—there is no great Chinese god figure comparable to Vishnu, Quetzalcoatl, Jesus, Allah, Zeus/Jupiter, Thor—or adopted a major foreign deity (Yang, 1970). Although minor deity and ancestor worship was widespread among the masses, a powerful priesthood did not develop, and philosophy has been emphasized over organized supernaturalism, largely nontheistic Confucianism being dominant over recent millennia.<sup>iii</sup> Even though China has not been strongly atheistic over most of its history, its level of paranormal faith appears to have been well below that of comparable civilizations more steeped in religion, such as neighboring Hindu India or old Christian Europe. Core Buddhism, Jainism, and Carvakism qualify as atheistic (Geertz & Markussan, 2010; Thrower, 1980), to the extent that the religious nature of the first is often debated.

Also highly inconsistent have been speculations concerning the nature of an afterlife. Relatively few religions have proposed the existence of a blissful paradise for the masses, Christianity and Islam being the major exceptions. Early religions were polytheistic and correspondingly usually tolerant of other religions, although often prone to claiming a degree of superiority. Some polytheistic religions imposed forms of faith-based terror, the Aztecs perhaps being the best example. Starting out small, Abrahamism became increasingly monotheistic and intolerant of other forms of supernaturalism, gained substantial numbers during the later stages of the Roman Empire, and made up nearly half the global population by the industrial era. The inability to survey past civilizations scientifically makes it somewhat difficult to quantify and compare their degree of religious supernaturalism, leading some to question the level of actual devotion of the masses (Stark & Finke, 2000) while others have emphasized how religion pervaded many societies (Summerville, 2002); the level of intensity appears to have varied considerably.

The advent of agriculture and even civilization initially did remarkably little to improve some basic aspects of human lives. Natural juvenile and adult mortality rates did not improve dramatically, and nutrition levels may have declined somewhat due to overreliance on a few agricultural staples in a given society. Famines resulted from mass crop failure, while high population densities facilitated mass mortalities from disease. Most persons continued to live impoverished lives, but income disparity soared as a small elite acquired the extensive wealth made possible by mass organized societies, producing significant envy among the lower class

majority. Wealth provided only minor advantages in regard to health and mortality because general medical knowledge remained primitive. Ancients often exhibited prejudice toward other peoples, and practiced primitive forms of eugenics, including extensive infanticide. Slavery was widespread and was made more pernicious still in that a slave state is automatically a terror state because the slaves will leave unless they are kept in perpetual fear of the consequences of seeking their freedom. Slaves are also vulnerable to routine abuse because of their lack of legal and social status. An opportunity was missed during the Roman era, perhaps due to the ready availability of slave labor: Water-driven industries were well developed (Wilson, 2002), and steam power was known but not exploited, precluding the possible early development of modern economics and politics, albeit with considerable cost to the environment and the risk of a mass nuclear conflict.<sup>iv</sup>

The ability to assemble large armies and equip them with abundant weaponry facilitated large-scale conflict, and the global tally of wars since the advent of civilization numbers somewhere in the thousands. Some old wars killed off people in numbers similar to those of the worst modern conflicts. Three Chinese rebellions probably dispatched about 30 million each; the Mongol conquests contributed to perhaps half that total.<sup>v</sup> The pagan Greeks invented democracy and the Romans the republic for nonreligious purposes, but both experiments failed without either adopting nonaggressive military policies. According to the Bible, God told the Israelites to wage an optional unprovoked war of conquest involving ethnic cleansing via terror and genocide, although the historical accuracy of these accounts is dubious (Bright, 2000). The Diaspora imposed by the Romans on the Jews has been disastrous in that allowing for normal population growth through reproduction, Jews should be 20 times more numerous than they are (Carroll, 2001). Christians established an exceptionally intolerant theocracy that threatened and used terror and violence to enforce religious conformity for a millennium and a half. This eventually evolved into the Inquisitions that threatened and sometimes employed torture<sup>vi</sup> and death by fire against alleged and real dissidents, while practicing violent anti-Semitism. The latter led to the “First Holocaust” associated with the beginning of the First Crusade in which large Jewish populations were exterminated, and soon after that Catholicism dispatched the entire Gnostic Cathar religion with another crusade plus the first stage of the Inquisition. Murphy (2012) explains that the Catholic Inquisition was perversely ground breaking because it was a new, modern systematic institution for gathering intelligence including by violent means on

civilians and dispensing punishment. It set the precedent for the modern form of bureaucratic state terror later adopted by more secular governments. The culture of the warrior Christian Knight developed among the elites, their propensity toward violence supposedly being moderated by virtuous chivalry. Christian Europe was afflicted by a long series of wars between Christians of differing sects as well as the effort to oust Muslims from the continent and the Middle East. The latter effort revived the cannibalism that appears to have been fairly common among “less” civilized peoples (Rubenstein, 2008; White, 2001).

Also targeted, largely by Protestants, were women accused of practicing witchcraft. Starting in the 1500s, Catholic and then Protestant nations used various forms of violence to defraud native peoples of their territory and/or resources as they colonized large parts of the planet in the first wave of globalization. The American end of the effort was bolstered by the ideology of Manifest Destiny, which proposed that the seemingly mysterious dying off of Amerindians (actually due to disease, Paul 2009b) was God clearing the way for European conquests, combined with the need to convert the heathens. During and following the religious wars that racked Europe in the 1500s and 1600s, zealous Protestants decamped to northern European colonies in North America in the hope of establishing godly utopias, and apparently priming the future United States for being more religious than the old countries, where the religious strife may have degraded mass interest in religion (Ruiter & Tubergen, 2009). Large-scale violence remained a largely male affair.

Late medieval Christian Europe provides some early sociological data. The people were well armed with blunt and edged weapons; brigands roamed about city, town, and country; disrespect of a man’s honor required extreme retribution; and “murderous brawls were . . . everyday events” anticipated by ordinary folk as ready sporting events (Beeghley, 2003); one observer noted that “few self respecting gentleman passed through the hot season of youth without having perpetrated a homicide or two.” Yearly homicide rates were around 20 to 30 deaths per 100,000, comparable to America’s most dangerous inner cities; in some cities, it was around 50. Beeghley (2003) characterizes the Europeans of the time as a “wild bunch.” Legal punishments were increasingly draconian and often lethal for relatively minor offenses. When secularization associated with the Renaissance began to take hold, lethal crime began to decline. By Shakespeare’s time the homicide rate was down to 15 per 100,000; it was 10 in the 1600s, 5 in the 1700s, and by the 1800s less than 2. There is some evidence that the United States was

more religious than western Europe at this time (De Tocqueville, 1835), and that it also suffered from higher levels of homicide.<sup>vii</sup> The rise of Western secularism and democracy degraded the position of the churches sufficiently that the Catholic Inquisition had to be abandoned. The initial stages of Western secularization were not associated with a concomitant decline in warfare, which remained frequent, and reached a new height with the first actual world war, the Seven Years' War (aka the French and Indian War).

## Modern Times

Early Western secularization was associated with, and may have been encouraged by, the development of scientific methodology that at the time was widely perceived as supporting the existence of a creator (Paley, 1802). The first influences of Deism and then atheism began to be felt in the later 1700s. Deists were instrumental to the American Revolution, which rejected the divine authority of the Anglican British crown. Deists were also an important factor in the French Revolution against the Catholic crown, including The Terror, Robespierre being an ardent Deist. Atheists were also involved in the revolt against the French crown. Matching the death toll of The Terror, the suppression of the Paris Commune was a battle between secularists and Catholics. In the mid-1800s, the advent of evolutionary science (Darwin, 1859) posed the most direct threat to traditional religion yet seen, and some theorized on how the biological system applies to human affairs (Spencer, 1884).<sup>viii</sup>

Because mass slavery is incompatible with industrial, corporate-consumer capitalism (Smith, 1776), the scheme rapidly disappeared after the appearance of modern economics. The primary opposition to ending slavery came from southern American Protestants who rejected modern capitalism (Catton, 1960; Freehling, 2007) in favor of a more primitive scheme that continued to concentrate wealth in the hands of slave exploiting elites to the detriment of free laborers and the overall regional economy. The result was the first mass industrial war—in other words, the first modern war pitted secular capitalism against slave-exploiting theism. Because the southern attempt failed, the United States remained large enough to become a superpower.<sup>ix</sup> The subsequent southern American development of a brutal apartheid terror state that featured regular, public lynchings (Dray, 2003) was the product of the same Protestant society. In the late 1800s in Germany, extreme wings of Catholicism and Protestantism developed ideologies that combined eugenics, a view of Germans as uber-Aryans, eliminationist anti-Semitism, and

extreme nationalism (Hastings, 2010). In some German colonies genocidal acts against African populations presaged those of the 1900s.

Many Christians presumed that the dramatic improvements in literacy and in communication and travel technologies in the 1800s that had contributed to a great expansion of Christianity until it made up a third of the global population in 1900 would continue into the 20th century, inspiring the Watchword movement (Barrett, Kurian, & Johnson, 2001). A contrary prediction based on the appearance of the science-based atheism in the 1800s postulated that religion would suffer serious losses in an age of rationalism.

In the 20th century, the Great War was triggered by Catholic versus Orthodox strife in the Balkans. With Europe still a significantly religious continent, the war was Christian versus Christian, with the monarchs of most of the combatants each claiming divine justification. The beginning of the war was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm by the bulk of religious citizens. In the Ottoman Empire Muslim action against Christians was another major genocide early in the century.

Toward the end of the war, communists seized control of the Russian empire that had already overturned the Orthodox autocracy. Atheistic Soviet governments would pursue policies that resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of citizens while preventing the empire from becoming a capitalist player and power on the global stage, to the benefit of the rising and still theistic United States. A long-term effort to remove the atheistic regime was mounted, led by fascism. The most extreme expression of fascism, Nazism, was established by hard-right German Catholics as a direct outgrowth of the prewar developments (Hastings, 2010). The Party was later predominantly Protestant with significant neopagan/occult influences (Hastings, 2010; Paul, 2003, 2004). In the Balkans Catholic Fascists committed exceptionally brutal genocide against Orthodox Christians (Phayer, 2000, 2008). Whether the Nazis or Soviets killed more civilians in eastern Europe remains unsettled (Snyder, 2010). During the world wars, both sides targeted civilians via artillery and especially bombing. Germany initiated these attacks in Europe during the two wars on a modest scale. The superior industrial capacity of the United Kingdom and the United States allowed them to upscale mass terror bombing to kill about a million civilians; area bombing of cities continued even after this did not force Germany to surrender before an invasion became necessary (Dower, 2010; Friedrich, 2006). America's unique scientific and industrial abilities allowed it to target cities with nuclear weapons just before the war ended.

When the Nazi war of conquest proved as impractical as it was, and the right wing attempt to extinguish communism by mass war failed, Soviet Communism took advantage of the power vacuum and occupied east central Europe—albeit without the large-scale genocide practiced by the Nazis and Croat Catholics. Although the nuclear arms race got out of hand to the extent that the existence of much or all of civilization was threatened, the uberweapons made further mass war impractical, so it was replaced by the lower grade Cold War containment strategy. The result was a series of mini-wars, including Korea and Vietnam. The Cold War was theologically intriguing in that both sides experienced significant secularization, complicating attempts to characterize it as a simple atheist versus theist confrontation. Until 1900, the number of basic atheists may have numbered only in the low millions; the new century saw an explosion of this cohort to a billion by 2000 (Fig. 25.1; Barrett et al., 2001; Paul & Zuckerman, 2007). In the Communist Bloc, antitheist policies and indoctrination were operative. In the Western Bloc, the aftereffects of the two most lethal wars of history may have contributed to the greatest spontaneous secularizing of societies in history as the dozen and a half democracies enjoyed unprecedented prosperity from the 1950s to the present (Bruce, 2002; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Paul, 2009a; Paul & Zuckerman, 2007). The only Western nation to retain a strongly religious position was the United States, where the concept of American Exceptionalism, also known as the American way, boasted that the combination of popular Christianity and libertarian capitalism is the best possible socioeconomic arrangement. Soviet suppressions of anticommunist movements in neighboring countries occurred until the last and most violent in Afghanistan contributed to the collapse of the economically nonviable Soviet empire. Mao reunited China, but his obtuse policies liquidated tens of millions as they held back economic development by 30 years, preventing the colossal country from becoming the largest economy by the end of the 1900s—Mao’s Sinofailure enormously boosted the fortunes of the United States from the 1970s to today. Having adopted autocratic capitalism circa 1980, China has become a fast-growing economic power, as has democratic and very theistic India after abandoning overly socialistic policies. Cambodian Communism proved to be genocidal; the North Korean variant—which includes considerable supernaturalism—is incompetent to the point of being lethal on a mass basis. The Marxist Tamil Tiger rebels initiated suicide bombing as an anticivilian terror tactic on a regional basis, although this may have involved some level of theism.<sup>x</sup> Currently

neither Fascism nor Communism is a major contributor to global violence, although they cause local problems in some places.

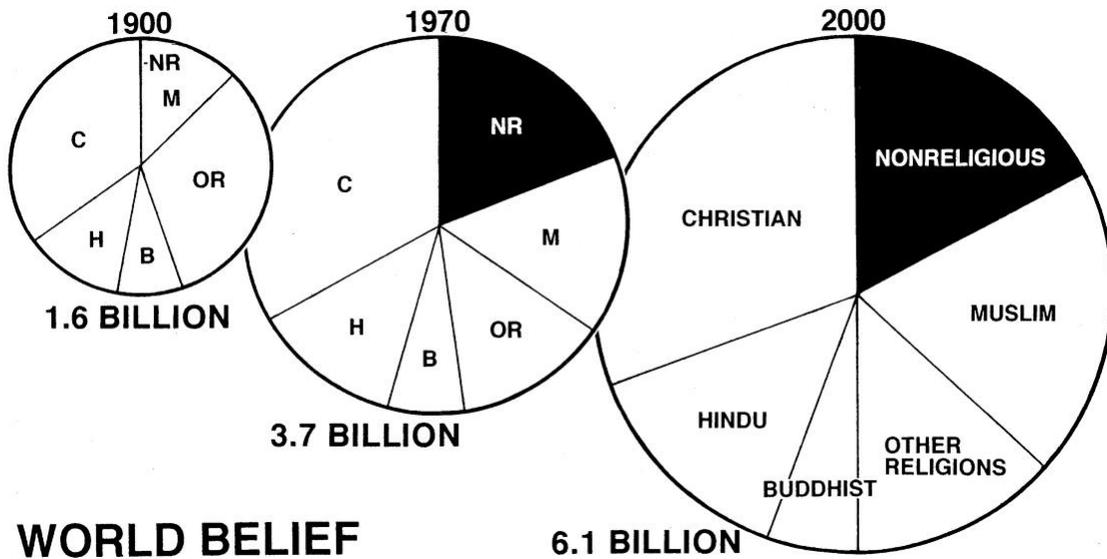


Figure 25.1. Changing distribution of religions and irreligion within the global population. (Data from Barrett et al., 2001.)

Also developing in the Cold War era was the faith-based strife in the Middle East between Muslims and Jews along with their Western allies. With the socioeconomic failure of communism, the Cold War terminated, dramatically reducing but not eliminating the possibility of a nuclear catastrophe. The end of the Cold War contradicted President Reagan's contention that the ungodly Communist bloc was the focus of evil in the world, or that its elimination would result in a Fukuyama (1992) end of history in favor of liberal democracy and capitalism. The decline of de facto empires, and the rise of India and especially China which lack a grand global mission, has and is facilitating global unrest (Kaplan, 2010), most of it in the form of religious conflicts. An early bout was the Balkans conflict of the 1990s. The 21st-century War on Terror involves Western Christians, Jews, and seculars along with moderate Muslims against militant Islam, which has developed suicide terrorism into a global institution, while parts of Africa are wracked by a regional conflict between Christians, Muslims, and animists. In the United States the greatest militant threat stems from right-wing theists, most of Christian influence, who see progressivism as against the will of their creator.

A notable and analytically important feature of the largely secular prosperous democracies is their friendly relations and corresponding lack of tendency to engage in war among themselves.<sup>xi</sup> Of these countries, the relatively religious United States is the most prone to go to war with less developed nations, including when not immediately threatened. However, even the advanced democracies have not been able to eliminate organized crime, which is expanding in much of the underdeveloped world.

From a psychosociological perspective, the later 20th and now the 21st centuries are data goldmines in terms of examining levels of religiosity and their relationship to socioeconomic conditions, because of the unprecedented survey and statistical information that is being gathered and recorded, especially in the more developed nations. For example, Google statistics show that the frequency of the use of the word “God” in books declined precipitously after the early 1800s and has held steady at a small fraction of the peak in recent decades (Jean-Baptiste et al., 2010). Until the Great War, the religious Right dominated mainstream Western culture, imposing strict social rules based on conservative doctrines. But Barrett et al. (2001) observe that after 1900:

massive defections from Christianity . . . subsequently took place in Western Europe due to secularism . . . , & in the Americas due to materialism . . . The number of nonreligionists . . . throughout the 20th century has skyrocketed from 3.2 million in 1900, to 697 million in 1970, and on to 918 million in AD 2000 . . . Equally startling has been the meteoritic growth of secularism . . . . Two immense quasi-religious systems have emerged at the expense of the world’s religions: agnosticism . . . , & atheism . . . From a miniscule presence in 1900, a mere 0.2% of the globe, these systems . . . are today expanding at the extraordinary rate of 8.5 million new converts each year, and are likely to reach one billion adherents soon. A large percentage of their members are the children, grandchildren or the great-great-grandchildren of persons who in their lifetimes were practicing Christians.

No religious philosophy has enjoyed similar expansion. Buddhism has suffered serious losses, as have a host of traditional polytheistic sects. Despite the rapid population growth of India, Hinduism has barely edged up and remains largely limited to the subcontinent. Assorted New Age movements are enjoying limited success. Christianity has been fixed at a third of the global population since 1900. Islam has made some major gains and now stands at nearly a

quarter of the world, but the growth has mainly been via rapid reproduction, and despite significant migration it is predominantly a belief of an eastern hemisphere zone lying above the equator. Irreligion alone has proven able to make big gains by spontaneous conversion, despite the low fecundity of nontheists.

The countries in which religion has lost the greatest ground due to spontaneous conversion are first-world democracies. In quantitative terms, the extent of the losses has been well documented (see Bruce, 2002; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Paul, 2009a, 2010b; Paul & Zuckerman, 2007; Zuckerman, 2008, 2009; contrary to Stark & Finke, 2000 and Stark, 2008); basic atheists constitute large minorities to strong majorities, and core atheists range up to a third of the population (Times/Harris, 2006), while levels of religious practice are very low in the same countries (Fig. 25.2a,b). In some Western nations, active Christians are now small minorities, and the religious Right is usually a fringe movement. The failure of alternative forms of supernaturalism to replace more than a fraction of the losses in Christian devotion in Europe (Bruce, 2002), and the reduction in popular religion in Japan, show that the first-world religious decline is general rather than specific to Christianity. The loss of supernaturalistic belief, including the existence of an afterlife, and activity has often proceeded swiftly (see Fig. 4.3 in Norris & Inglehart, 2004). Spain was still a Catholic-dominated Fascistic state the same year that the then-new *Saturday Night Live* parodied the death of Franco. Spain is now a secularized democracy so low in religiosity that most churches are centuries old and have reduced levels of attendance, and homosexuals can marry and divorce. Ireland saw a similarly dramatic shift from Catholic dominance to considerable secularization over the same period. Christians are in danger of becoming smaller minorities than Muslims in a few western European countries. Currently Muslims make up only a few percent of the population of the region (Pew Research, 2011). Substantial majorities, up to 8 in 10, support evolutionary science in first-world countries, aside from the United States. It is sociologically significant that the rapid loss of western European, Canadian, and Australian piety occurred without a major culture war in which atheistic and theistic organizations contended with one another for the adherence of the population. Secularization occurred with remarkably little sociopolitical fuss.

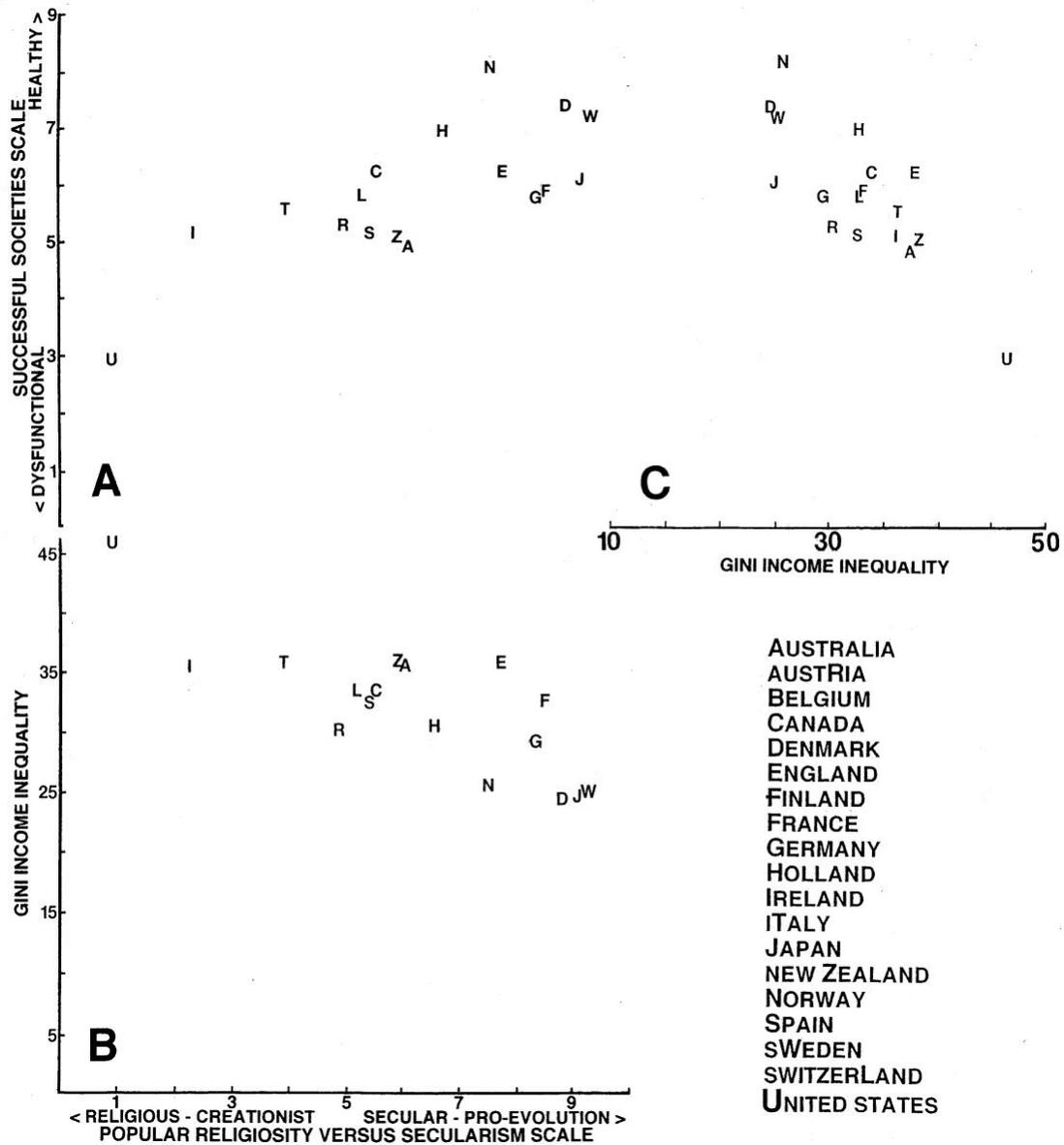


Figure 25.2. Relationships of socioeconomic factors relative to overall religiosity in first-world nations. (Plots from Paul, 2009a.)

Even though the United States remains the most theistic Western democracy, and the most theoconservative with creationism remaining popular, it is not nearly as pious as it used to be—or seems to many to be. Presumably because of the previously noted high levels of bigotry directed against nontheists, Americans significantly overreport their religiosity while understating their lack of belief and worship (Brenner, 2011; Marler & Hadaway, 1999; Taylor, 2003). Even without taking this phenomenon into account, America scores as only half as

religious as the most pious nations (Pew Research, 2002; Putman & Campbell, 2010; World Values Survey, 2007), and just half of Americans claim to believe absolutely in a personal God (Pew Research, 2008); these figures may require some adjustment downward. Nominal Christians have slipped from nearly 95% of the population to 75% (Smith & Kim, 2004). But only two-thirds of those are absolute believers when the Pew (2008) calculation on absolute believers is factored in, and only half of those are regular church goers, so about a quarter of Americans are dedicated church-going Christians, if that. Native Catholics are becoming a smaller portion of the population, only Hispanic immigration keeps the overall church percentage steady (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009; Smith & Kim, 2004). Protestants are about to lose their historic majority status (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009; Smith & Kim, 2004). Rigorous analysis finds that only a fifth to a quarter of Americans attend Sunday services on a frequent basis (Brenner, 2011; Marler & Hadaway, 1999), and church attendance has persistently declined (Gruber & Hungerman, 2006; Smith & Kim, 2004; contrary to Stark & Finke, 2000) with congregation size shrinking by a fifth in the last decade according to Rozen (2011) as the age of attendees rises; so the growth of megachurches represents a consolidation of less than a tenth of church goers, rather than a major expansion of religious activity. A large body of data refutes the common impression that the religious Right is thriving as the mainline churches shrink (Paul & Zuckerman, 2007; Putman & Campbell, 2010; Rozen, 2011). Fast-reproducing Bible literalists have decreased from 40% to 30% since 1980 (Gallup, 2006a), undermining the foundation of Genesis creationism, which may be starting to slip in popularity (Gallup, 2011). Fecund Southern Baptists are in gradual decline because they are baptizing new members no faster than in the 1950s when the nation's population was half its current size (Rainer, 2005); the church is especially losing ground among youth. Only a few percent of Americans live strict Bible-based lifestyles, and the broader religious Right has been driven into a large minority parallel culture perpetually unable to redominate the mainstream society, despite vigorous efforts to do so.

The increasing irreligiosity of American youth is especially informative. Commonly disregarding their elder's intolerance against nontheists, the number of nonreligious has doubled among 18–29-year-olds over just 20 years (Putman & Campbell, 2010). A new Lifeway Christian Research poll finds that just two-thirds of the twenty-something generation considers themselves Christian; and even that is inflated because only 15% qualify as deeply committed to the creed, and the majority are “Christian-light” who have little interest in the actual doctrines or

practices. The decreased piety of succeeding generations via conversion has been overcoming the more rapid reproduction of religious couples. As a given generation ages, its level of religious practice rises, but that succeeding generations are less faith focused than the previous one indicates that America is rapidly secularizing (contrary to Stark, 2008), and the progressive generational increase in secularism is being recorded in the general population statistics. Multiple surveys agree that the nonreligious have been rapidly expanding in recent decades, and the “no response” to Gallup questions on God belief shows that nonbelievers have quadrupled since the 1960s, easily outpacing the rise of the fast-breeding Mormons (Fig. 25.3). Gallup and Harris (Taylor, 2003; Times/Harris, 2006) polls indicate that a fifth of Americans qualify as basic atheists, core atheists are in the high single digits.<sup>xiii</sup> The slow breeders who think evolution and not God created humans have been edging up (Gallup, 2011). Thirty years ago outnumbered by Bible literalists four to one, skeptics of the Bible have risen so rapidly that the two categories are now nearly equal, with the doubters on a trajectory to become the larger group (Gallup, 2006a). America is currently following the other prosperous democracies as it rapidly secularizes. This is occurring in the context of an intense culture war in which the theoconservative minority has mounted an intense theopolitical countercampaign in reaction to secularization. To do so, the religious Right has formed an alliance with corporate interests, although as noted later this has proved to be a double-edged sword. Who has been dominating the culture in America and the rest of the West is measured by the rise of tolerance for nontraditional lifestyles, from the acceptance of sexual activity outside of marriage (Finer, 2007) to dramatic improvement in the social status of gays.

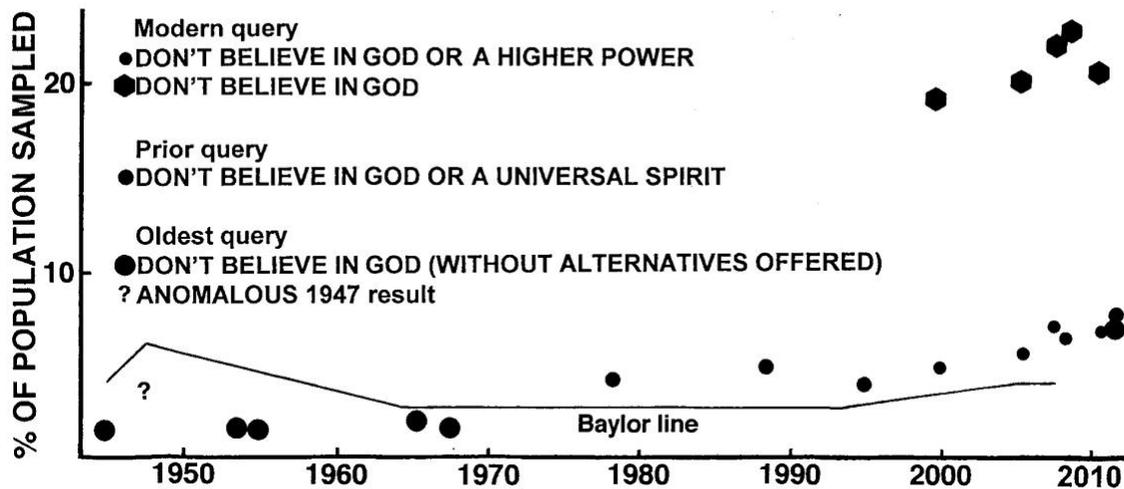


Figure 25.3. The rise of American atheism according to Gallup results. Only the modern query captures basic atheists who at least lack belief in any god. Although the two older queries captured only core atheists who also lack belief in higher powers, universal spirits, etc., they provide the best longitudinal tracking data that is available for the U.S. Baylor line is from Stark (2008) in which initial two Gallup values are inflated by including nonrespondents.

Although the data from less developed nations are of somewhat lesser quality than for most prosperous democracies, all these data are informative (Paul & Zuckerman, 2007). The most religious nations are Islamic, with some Christian nations and Hindu also scoring as highly religious (Pew Research, 2002). Some Catholic countries of the Americas have seen serious losses in religiosity, including acceptance of contraception to the degree that fertility rates have lowered dramatically. Claims of major gains in religiosity in formerly or less Communist nations are exaggerated, and in some cases interest in the gods remains low or has declined. Largely Islamic Turkey is moderately religious, although fundamentalism may be on the rise. The same may be true for Christianity in South Korea, which has a large irreligious population. The one area in which religion has made recent gains is in the area of reactionary fundamentalism (Kaufmann, 2010; Longman, 2006; Paul & Zuckerman, 2007; Putman & Campbell 2010; Shah & Toft, 2006). This is true among all three primary sects of Abrahamism and it is true of Hinduism. It is especially true in a number of underdeveloped regions, and in Israel.

The data for societal and economic conditions in first-world nations range from excellent to good; for less developed countries these data vary from excellent to not available. For example, nonlethal crime statistics are not sufficiently reliable for cross-national comparisons even between the prosperous democracies because of inconsistencies in reporting, recording, and definition (Barclay & Taveres, 2002; Beeghley, 2003; Paul, 2005, 2009a, 2010b). Only homicide is sufficiently reliably recorded because it is not self-reported and involves the counting of bodies after forensic investigation. Even in developed nations, levels of sexually transmitted diseases are only approximately known; in underdeveloped countries such statistics are less reliable, if they exist at all.

The most comprehensive comparison to date of socioeconomic conditions in the most successful prosperous democracies is the Successful Societies Scale (SSS; Fig. 25.2a,c [[although this figure is first referred to earlier, it is mainly pertinent to this section, so it might

better be renumbered and placed here]]) presented by Paul (2009a, 2010b, which include an extended justification and sourcing of the over two dozen factors used to construct the SSS, data tables and plots, plus a description of the method of scoring the results; at the same time, Wilkinson and Pickett [2009] presented the second most comprehensive comparison up to that time). Factors compared between first-world countries include homicide, incarceration, juvenile mortality, life span, adolescent and all-age gonorrhea and syphilis infections, adolescent abortion, adolescent births, youth and all-age suicide, fertility, child well-being, marriage, marriage duration, divorce, life satisfaction, mental illness, alcohol and illicit drug consumption, corruption, trust, education performance, per capita income, income disparity, poverty, employment, social mobility, work hours, and resource exploitation base. These factors individually and collectively are correlated with levels of mass opinion on non/religiosity as measured by absolute belief in a supernatural creator deity (a superior measure of religious devotion than general belief in God because the latter includes partial doubters), Bible literalism (a proxy for the conservatism of mass faith), frequency of attendance at religious services and frequency of prayer as assessments of religious activity, belief in an afterlife, percentage of atheists, and acceptance of human descent from animals—a converse measure of creationist opinion (Fig. 25.2a,b). Also compared are levels of immigration and ethnic diversity.

Homicide rates remain far lower in the more secular prosperous democracies than the United States, which is an outlier in this regard, despite a significant decline in the last two decades. Lethal violence is especially prevalent in urban America, particularly among minorities, and is also higher in more religious regions of the nation. With 1 in 500 deaths attributable to murder, the lowest homicide rates seen in the secular democracies may represent the minimal levels achievable in human societies. The available data indicate that nonlethal crime is often common in the nations examined, with America being a high crime nation. Zuckerman (2008) notes that the modest crime rates in some secular democracies are achieved with minimal police presence, and recent declines in American murder appear to be more dependent upon the application of effective secular methods of addressing the problem (Kennedy, 2011; Pinker, 2011) than upon the popularity of theism. Incarceration has soared in the United States to the degree that no other country, even China, has more prisoners in absolute terms, and America is about a dozen times higher than the Western norm in proportional rates. The United States is again a statistical outlier, including in its draconian punishments (Zuckerman, 2008). The US

prisoner population is strongly skewed toward minorities, to the degree that the male population of inner cities has been seriously impacted. Although all first-world countries have low juvenile mortality compared to historical norms, an almost two-fold variation remains, with higher rates correlating strongly with greater popular religiosity, the lowest losses being in the most secular nations sampled, while they are the highest in the most religious sections of the United States. All advanced nations enjoy long cumulative life spans, but America now has the shortest within the group and performs even worse in time lived in good health (Muenning & Glied, 2010). The correlation between lower religiosity and longer life span is significant but not tight. The United States is losing ground in regard to this factor, and life spans are actually decreasing in regions of the Bible Belt, where lives are already on the short side. No other advanced nation is experiencing regional reductions in life span (Ezzati, 2008). Americans used to be exceptionally tall, but they have lost substantial ground relative to other prosperous democracies and are now below the secular maximum as health levels slip relative to the other countries (Komlos & Lauderdale, 2007). Suicide rates are disturbingly high in all nations examined; correlations with religiosity are not highly significant, and the United States and Scandinavian countries are not atypical.

Regarding alcohol consumption, marriages, fertility, life satisfaction, and employment, large correlations between lesser religiosity and better conditions do not exist, and/or the United States performs typically or well. The United States used to score typically in corruption, but revelations of the massive financial manipulations that are primarily responsible for the Great Recession have lowered its ranking to near the bottom of Western nations (Transparency International, 2010), and the nation is mediocre when it comes to trust (Uslaner, 2002). Moderate to large correlations between lesser religiosity and better conditions do exist regarding abortion, sexually transmitted disease (STD) infections, teen pregnancy outside of marriage, and resource exploitation. The United States performs poorly in the just-listed factors, often being the worst off, sometimes by very large degrees. America is also seriously dysfunctional in high work hours, mental illness (Bijl et al., 2003; Friedli, 2009), illicit drug use (Degenhardt, 2008), child well-being (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2007), overall education performance (United Nations [UN], 2008), and gender equality (UN, 2009).

In the cumulative SSS, 0 is the lowest possible score among the nations sampled, 10 the highest (Paul, 2009a, 2010b). The observed variation is from below 3 to 8, with a very strong

statistical correlation between greater atheism and superior socioeconomic conditions (Fig. 25.2a,c; Paul, 2009a). The highest scoring countries are all among the most secular; the United States has the lowest overall score. Fundamentalist (including creationist), moderate and liberal theism all correlate similarly with inferior circumstances, atheism (including acceptance of evolution) with better environments (Fig. 25.4; Paul, 2009a, 2012). Other cross-national comparisons—including the Happy Planet Index and Human Development Report—have produced broadly similar rankings of socioeconomic dysfunction, with the United States not scoring particularly well (Barber, 2011; Gill & Lundsgaarde 2004; Marks, Abdallah, Sims, & Thompson, 2006; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Rees, 2009; UN, 2008, Verweij et al., 1997; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Zuckerman, 2008). The United States is the most second-world-like nation of the first-world countries socioeconomically and religiously, to the degree that its first-world status is marginal in many regards and may be at risk. In recent years, the World Economic Forum has downgraded the United States from its long-standing first-place status in global economic competitiveness, ranking some other democracies, including Sweden and Switzerland, as more competitive (World Economic Forum, 2010), and Germany’s economy appears to be the strongest overall (Geoghegan, 2010); America is no longer the leading “opportunity society” because it is below average in upward income mobility, is no longer the leading generator of small businesses or innovation, is investing an unusually small portion of its wealth in infrastructure, has lost more of its industrial base than most other prosperous democracies, and has higher national debt and a lower credit rating than a number of more fiscally disciplined secular nations (Blanden, Gregg, & Machin, 2005; Geoghegan, 2010; Vastag, 2011). Levels of lethal and nonlethal crime have generally improved as the United States secularizes. So have STD rates and youth pregnancy rates, but not to the same extent as the more secular democracies. Immigration levels and population diversity do not correlate significantly with levels of socioeconomic dysfunction, including lethal crime, in part because the United States is no longer exceptional regarding these factors (Fearon, 2003; Geoghegan, 2010; Paul, 2009a).<sup>xiii</sup> Nor is there a significant correlation between per capita income and religiosity in the most prosperous countries, although the United States ranks high in this factor. Lower income disparity and lower poverty intensity correlate strongly with both lesser religiosity and with superior societal conditions, including deadly malfeasance (Fig. 25.2c). Levels of media violence are not a critical factor because the American model has spread across the prosperous

democracies (Tomlinson, 1991). Muenning and Glied (2010) found that higher rates of homicide, accidents, obesity, and smoking do not adequately account for the inferior health outcomes of Americans. The relatively poor health of Americans is all the more perturbing since the nation spends much more per person on health care (Anderson, Frogner, Johns, & Reinhardt, 2006; Banks, Marmot, & Smith, 2006; Kawachi & Kennedy, 2002; Muenning & Gleid, 2010; Paul, 2009c; Reid, 2009; Schoen et al., 2005).

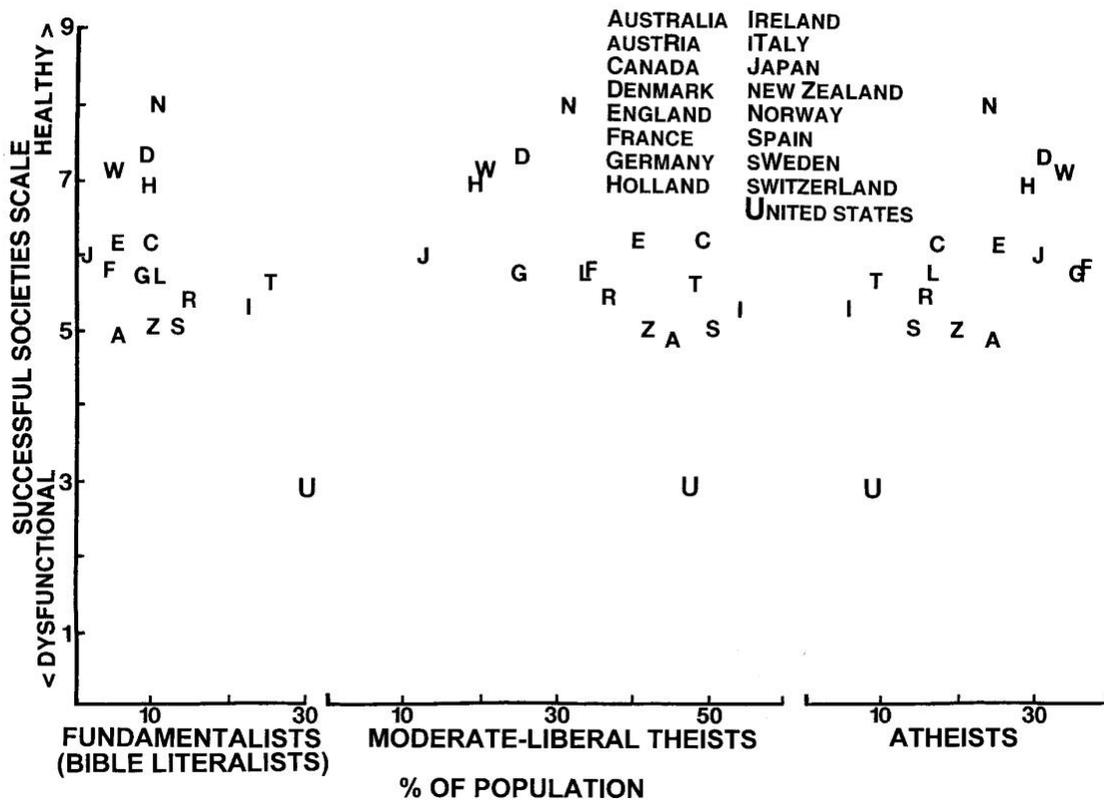


Figure 25.4. Relationships of fundamentalism (as measured by Bible literalism, moderate-liberal theism (as measured by belief in god less Bible literalism), and atheism relative to Successful Societies Scale in first-world nations. (Plots in part from Paul, 2009a.)

The first-world pattern also applies within the United States. Social pathologies tend to be elevated to a lesser or greater degree within those regions and populations – such as the Bible Belt and inner cities -- of the United States that exhibit higher levels of theism (Aral & Holmes, 1996; Barna, 2004; Beeghley, 2003; Delamontagne, 2010; Doyle, 2000, 2002; Edelman, 2009; Paul, 2005; Zuckerman, 2008; Kennedy, 2011).

The good conditions enjoyed by the citizens of irreligious first-world countries appear contrary to the widespread hypothesis that individuals within a given first-world nation benefit from participating in religious worship and/or activities (as per Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003; Brooks, 2006; Inzlicht, McGregor, Hirsh, & Nash, 2009; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2004), leading to an apparent sociological paradox (Bloom, 2008; Shermer, 2006). But the paradox may not be real. Galen and Kloet's (2011) statistical reanalysis indicates that committed atheists and theists share similar levels of quality of life—it is theistic fence sitters that appear to be doing less well—and other studies cast doubt on the hypothesis that the less religious are less well off (Blumenthal et al., 2007; Chida, Steptoe, & Powell, 2009; Keister, 2008; Paul, 2008; Powell et al., 2003; Putman & Campbell, 2010)<sup>xiv</sup>; this is compatible with the tendency of religiosity to decline with increasing financial and educational status (Gallup, 2006b).<sup>xv</sup>

## The Total Toll

The total human population has amounted to some 100 billion (Haub, 1995/2004). About half of those born have died as infants and children, and the vast majority of premature natural deaths are attributable to disease (Paul, 2009b). Domestic infanticide may have resulted in the culling of about one tenth of the population (Pinker, 2011), in which case it is by far the most widespread form of human death via human action. Post infant homicide is responsible for perhaps half a percent of all deaths, or some half a billion over history. The basic death toll from wars and genocides over human existence is in the area of 300 million,<sup>xvi</sup> so about one-third of a percent of deaths are attributable to war and genocide. Of the historical total, at least half, perhaps 150 million (at least two-thirds in the two super wars) occurred in the 1900s, a century in which 10 billion lived, resulting in a war-induced mortality rate of about 1.5%. Losses due to famines resulting from political repression or ideology probably exceed 50 million, and deaths attributable to colonization are perhaps 100 million. The total number of deaths due to war and especially homicide is therefore in the area of 10 billion, almost all of that figure being newborns. Older humans lost to human action are about 1 billion, or 1 in 100. The figures, especially the latter, are too low to seriously impact the global population over time -- war is therefore not a form of population control -- although the wastage can effect more local populations. To dramatically increase the percentage of deaths stemming from deliberate human action requires a large-scale nuclear war or the intentional release of an easily transmitted

pathogen with a high mortality level and no ready means of medical defense. Pinker (2011) details how relative rates of lethal violence have tended to decline over history.

## The Male Factor

Overt physical violence has been predominantly a male activity, and noncombatant victims of violence have often been women, including via rape. Whether this strong trend is largely cultural or genetic-hormonal in nature remains a matter of controversy, and some matriarchal societies, including Polynesian and Amerindian, have been militaristic (Buss, 2005; Coie & Stucky, 1997; Goldstein, 2001). The major exception to the trend is infanticide, which often involves the actions of the mother, albeit in some but not all cases under the pressure of males.

## Analysis

### The Godly American Way: Not All It's Cracked Up To Be

The evidence indicates that at the first-world level, mixed economies that modulate capitalism with progressive socialistic policies are producing superior overall national circumstances compared to the more laissez faire capitalism and private charity favored in the United States (Delamontagne, 2010; Geoghegan, 2010; Harris, 2006, 2010; Kawachi & Kennedy, 2002; Marmot, 2004; Reid, 2004, 2009; Sapolsky, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Zuckerman, 2008). America is performing so poorly in many regards despite its immense wealth that it should be a matter of grave national concern—rather than the overglorification of the American way by its promoters.

Because highly secular democracies are significantly and regularly outperforming the more theistic ones, all versions of the godly-religion socioeconomic hypothesis are refuted, while the secular-democratic socioeconomic hypothesis is strongly supported. These conclusions are in general accord with an expanding body of research (Barber, 2011; Gill & Lundsgaarde, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Paul, 2005, 2009a, 2010b; Rees, 2009; Ruitter & Tubergen, 2009; Verweij et al., 1997; Zuckerman, 2008, 2009). The examinations of a broad range of first-, second-, and third-world nations in some of the aforementioned studies generally falsify the godly-religion socioeconomic hypothesis. A study to the contrary that utilizes a broad range of socioeconomic factors has yet to emerge, despite the widespread promulgation of the godly-religion socioeconomic hypothesis. The next task is to uncover the factors that are producing the real world results.

## The Nonuniversality and Noninternal Nature of Popular Religiosity

A remarkable facet of investigating the origins and evolution of human violence and religion is that critical data are, it turns out, found among the least supernaturalistic of both the least and most advanced current societies. The failure of strong supernaturalism to appear among some hunter-gatherers, and the broad and rapid loss of popular religiosity among a number of highly developed democracies in the absence of a concerted antitheist campaign, disproves the thesis that religion is universal among humans. So does the significant variation of religious intensity in preindustrial civilizations. Far more universal is basic materialism in terms of the interest in material goods and services. Materialism is not consistently developed among individuals and groups, but it is always significant.<sup>xvii</sup> The specialized opposable thumbs of humans, dedication of large areas of the brain to manipulating the environment, and the inability of humans to survive and thrive without tools indicate that materialism is strongly genetically programmed and inherent to humans (Paul, 2009a). Language is truly universal in that all mentally capable adults have excellent, complex speaking or signing skills, the language of all peoples being roughly comparable in sophistication. The uniquely configured human vocal tract, dedication of large areas of the brain to language, the rapid ease with which it is learned by children, and the inability to run any level of human society without well-developed language abilities indicate that language is strongly genetically programmed and correspondingly integral to the human brain and condition (Deacon, 1998; Pinker, 1994; although Prinze [2010] disagrees). Writing, in contrast, is nonuniversal, being totally absent until a few millennia ago and still lacking among a significant number of individuals and groups. Nor is art entirely universal, being absent in some individuals and variable in its presence across societies. The ability of societies to exist without art or especially writing indicates they are not genetically programmed but instead that they are secondary effects of the presence of opposable thumbs and high-level mental capacity, including imagination.

Because religion is highly variable, in the manner of art and writing, and is not necessary for the existence of human societies, religiosity is correspondingly optional, like writing and art. Because supernaturalism is variable and elective rather than universal, there cannot be a “God gene” in that religiosity cannot be strongly genetically programmed—religion is therefore no more genetically programmed than writing and art. So there cannot be a specialized “God module” in the brain, and religion is not inherent to the human psyche. The lack of a strong

genetic component means that selective pressures could not have been a primary force behind the appearance and development of religion—in other words, religiosity did not evolve in order to improve social cohesion in a manner that imparted a reproductive advantage to group members (contra the position taken in Volland and Schiefenhover, 2009). This conclusion is reinforced by the absence of strong spirituality in the Hadza, who have survived for a tremendous stretch of time without social cohesion via religion, and whose low religiosity may have been more widespread among Paleolithic peoples. It follows that religious devotion is a by-product of the imaginative human mind, broadly similar to writing and art.

The nonuniversality of religion also rules out other factors as primary causes. Fear of death and hell in preference for a pleasant afterlife is not a critical motivator in most persons (contra Becker, 1998) in view of the lack of belief in an afterlife in the Hadza and hundreds of millions of first worlders (Paul, 2009a; Zuckerman, 2008).<sup>xviii,xix</sup> The same principle applies to a desire for social community and support, a fear of societal chaos sans a godly population, a means to acquire greater power, childhood gullibility continuing into adulthood, memes that spread religious ideas like viruses, and so forth. At most these can be secondary causes of religiosity or play roles in the Darwinian societal competition between sects to recruit and retain those who are already religious largely for other reasons. The perfect afterlife promised to all adherents by Christianity and Islam may help explain their massive displacement of other faiths. Nor is the theistic speculation that people believe in the transcendent because the latter is real and it is therefore normal to connect with the transcendent supported by the nonuniversality of religion, so religion is natural in origin (as per Bloom, 2007) rather than supernatural. An additional implication of the nonuniversality, and frequently easy loss, of religiosity is that in most persons it is not a deeply set worldview but is a more superficial opinion subject to rapid change. This does not mean that all persons whose religiosity is superficial will admit it; they may ardently defend their faith-based opinions. But humans are prone to overdefending their commitment to a given opinion even if it is fundamentally superficial; consider how a sports fan can be fanatical about a local team until the fan relocates and supports another with equal ardor. So although religious opinion is frequently obstinate, it is also often fragile in the same persons.

## Why Western Religion Is on Life Support

### The Socioeconomic Security Factor

The absence of a fundamental internal mental root of serious religious supernaturalism indicates that the essential cause must be environmental. The relatively low religiosity present in some hunter-gatherers and some preindustrial civilizations establishes that dysfunctional socioeconomic conditions do not necessarily result in high levels of supernaturalism (Paul, 2010a; contra Paul, 2009a). However, a growing body of research is supporting the uncertainty hypothesis (Malinowski, 1954) that the insecurity that stems from a seriously defective social and especially economic environment is necessary for religion to be highly popular on empirical and theoretical grounds (Barber, 2011; Gill & Lundsgaarde, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Paul, 2009a, 2010b; Rees, 2009; Verweij et al., 1997; Zuckerman, 2008). Higher levels of prosperity tend to be associated with lower levels of religiosity on both an individual and national basis (Gallup, 2006b; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Pew Research, 2002), but matters cannot be so simple since the United States is a partial outlier due to its unusual combination of wealth and religiosity. The strong correlation between religiosity on the one hand and income disparity and the cumulative societal conditions measured by the SSS (Fig. 25.2a-c) suggests these factors are influencing one another. All the more so since the most religious and dysfunctional first-world country has the most socioeconomically Darwinistic arrangement, including the unique absence of universal health care. The discussion in the subsequent three paragraphs stems from the information and analysis found in the following works (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1998, 2000; Anderson et al., 2006; Banks et al., 2006; Barber, 2011; Beeghley, 2003; Delamontagne, 2010; Finer, 2007; Geoghegan, 2010; Gill & Lundsgaarde, 2004; Himmelstein, Warren, Thorne, & Wollhandler, 2005; Kawachi & Kennedy, 2002; Lane, 1997; Marmot, 2004; Muenning & Gleid, 2010; Neapolitan, 1997; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Paul, 2009a, 2009c, 2010b; Paul & Zuckerman, 2007; Pratt & Godsey, 2003; Rees, 2009; Reid, 2004, 2009; Rosenbaum, 2009; Ruiters & Tubergen, 2009; Sapolsky, 2005; Schoen et al., 2005; Trenholm, 2007; Verweij et al., 1997; Wellings, 2006; Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Winkleby, Cubbin, & Ahn, 2006; Zimring & Hawkins, 1999; Zuckerman, 2008).

The socioeconomic security hypothesis explains that national societies that provide a prosperous middle-class majority with a high level of social and especially economic security encourage the propensity of increasing numbers of individuals to lose interest in the gods with increasing personal security and wealth. In all but one first-world countries, the great majority of a population enjoys the modern comforts and advantages of life typical of advanced

democracies, and their middle class status is strongly protected by government policies that minimize the possibility that a given person or family will suffer financial ruin and physical endangerment. The latter threat is also alleviated by anticorporal punishment policies, antibullying policies, handgun control policies, and rehabilitative incarceration on a modest scale. Workers' leisure and family time are protected, and child care support is extensive. Universal health care ensures all given citizen that they and their loved ones will receive adequate medical care regardless of their personal finances, while protecting the latter. As a result of the high level of earthly comfort and security, a large portion or majority of the population no longer has sufficient interest in seeking the aid and protection of supernatural deities in their daily lives to continue to worship or believe in them. The reduction in interest in religion reduces attendance at religious ceremonies, further reducing the influence of the religious industry upon individuals, resulting in additional decreases in religious activity and opinion. The partial replacement of faith-based charitable institutions with government agencies further reduces the outreach of religious organizations into the general public.

Because religious opinion is usually casual rather than deeply set in most minds, the consistent outcome is a downward spiral, often rapid, of theism. This superficiality of opinion means that the loss and absence of religious opinion is in itself typically superficial, in that most do not drop supernaturalistic thinking because they have carefully considered and weighed the options, but because the circumstances of their daily lives have improved to the degree that they no longer have much interest in theism. The process therefore does not require significant promotion by evangelically antitheistic organizations that have remained very small—much smaller than organized religion—even in the most atheistic democracies. That there are no major first-world exceptions to this pattern, that the process is often rapid, and that a significant religious revival has yet to occur in a secular democracy indicate that the socioeconomic security process of democratic secularization is a highly effective side effect of progressive economic policies. The universality of the effect is further supported by pagan Japan experiencing the same basic secularization process as the EuroChristian secular democracies.

The United States is the most religiously aberrant prosperous nation because it is the most socioeconomically aberrant member of the group, the country standing as an example of the socioeconomic dysfunctionality hypothesis that predicts that insecure life circumstances favor religiosity. Provided with comparatively low levels of government support and protection in

favor of less restrained “cowboy” capitalism, members of the middle class are at serious risk of financial and personal ruin if they lose their job or private health insurance; around a million go bankrupt in a year, about half due in part to often overwhelming medical bills. The need to acquire wealth as a protective buffer encourages an intense competitive race to the top, made worse by the “Reaganomics” that have made the nation’s economy the most efficient at transferring large funds from the middle class to the small wealthy elite through a number of devices. The corporate effort to move into debt people in the middle and bottom (see later discussion) results in the latter paying massive interest to the top. Lower wages and benefits, including retirement funds associated with deunionization, reduce costs for capital while increasing worker debt and interest loads. Poorly regulated high finance regularly devolves into legal but unsustainable pyramid schemes that defraud middle-class investors of enormous sums before the ploys collapse. Lowering taxes on all classes serves the upper tier most by increasing the amount of lower and middle level money that can be shifted up the class scale, and then allowing the upper class to keep more of their gains. The result of this Darwinian economy has been growing income inequality that leaves a large cohort mired in poverty while stagnating the financial growth of the middle class, forcing a large portion into debt, reducing or eliminating medical and retirement security, and raising habitual anxiety levels. Gun control policies are weak, and incarceration is retributive and abusive on a mass scale that discriminates against minorities, especially urban. Not surprisingly, levels of societal pathology, including lethal crime, are high. The majority of Americans are left feeling sufficiently economically and physically insecure that they think they must seek the aid and protection of a supernatural creator, boosting levels of religious opinion and participation. The nation’s high ratings in life satisfaction and happiness are compatible with a large segment of the population using religion to psychologically compensate for high levels of apprehension. The ultimate expression of this phenomenon is the large minority who adhere to the evangelical Prosperity Christianity and Rapture cultures (which are highly Pentecostal), whose Bible-based worldview favors belief in the Genesis creation story, as well as Mormonism, which is not young earth creationist.

### The Corporate-Consumer Factor

In view of the absence of the hybrid capitalist-socialist economy that drives secularization in the rest of the West, why is religion losing ground in the United States—including the religious Right, which, despite being well organized, is persistently unable to break out of the parallel

minority culture it has been driven into? An important, if not the leading, factor driving American secularization appears to be the corporate-consumer culture. It is in the interest of profit-focused capitalism to exploit the strong human genetic propensity toward materialism in order to radically alter society by converting pious, “square” traditionalist citizens who contribute time and money to religious organizations into materialistic, individualist “hip” consumers who center their lives and resources around goods and entertainment to the point that they go into interest-generating debt. To a fair extent, commerce is in competition with religion. Corporations began to displace churches as the dominant feature of American culture in the 1920s as new technologies further facilitated mass production and mass advertising, contributing to the “flapper” culture that overturned long-standing traditional mores. The historically revolutionary counterculture of the 1960s began as a grassroots anticorporate movement, but it was quickly captured and exploited by the corporations to further radicalize Western societies. A major portion of the profit-based secularization project has centered on the transformative power of the mass entertainment media that attracts enormous audiences. American mercantile interests also backed the repeal of the puritanical “Blue Laws” intended to boost church attendance at the expense of retail traffic, helping lower the rates of church attendance (Gruber & Hungerman, 2006). The financial resources that capitalism can call upon to materialize societies dwarf those that churches can deploy in resistance.<sup>xx</sup> Although led by capitalists, the corporate-consumer culture is not imposed on the majority against their will; despite persistent complaints, the Western public has largely gone along with the extreme materialization of their societies. Overtly religious programming is scarce on the commercial networks because it garners insufficient viewers.<sup>xxi</sup> The hip factor of the corporate-consumer society gives it a particular advantage among younger generations because it is difficult for religious cults to shed their square image even when they adopt aspects of modernity.<sup>xxii</sup> It is all the more ironic that the recent commercialization of Christianity that has been heralded as evidence of a national revival may be contributing to the decline of religiosity in youth who find it cynical (Boorstein, 2010).

### The Science and Technology Factor

The third factor helping secularize societies, especially Western societies, is the combination of modern science and advanced technology. Had science verified the existence of a supernatural creator,<sup>xxiii</sup> then atheistic secularization would have been aborted in favor of some form of fact-based (rather than faith-based) theism. Instead, science has effectively removed the need for

persons to believe in any form of supernaturalism, both allowing and encouraging the rise of nontheism (Dawkins, 2006; Hawkings & Mlodinow, 2010; Paul, 2010b). It is probably not a coincidence that the frequency of the use of the word “God” has dropped, while usage of “evolution” has soared (Jean-Baptiste, et al., 2010), and it follows that irreligion is widespread among the well educated, especially scientists (Gallup, 2006b; Larson & Witham, 1999; Preston & Epley, 2009). The god-like achievements of modern science and technology are lowering the awe factor that has facilitated religion (Paul & Cox, 1996). The chronic use of various technologies by ordinary middle-class citizens can degrade mass religiosity simply by absorbing time that could otherwise be dedicated to godly pursuits. As Putman (2000) argued, air conditioning, television, and, more recently, digital media have been suppressing membership in social clubs. Because religion is a time-consuming social club, it is vulnerable to such sociotechnological temporal pressures. The advent of digital personal electronics may be posing a particular threat to the religiosity of younger generations because of an exceptional diversionary impact—one that helps explain the dramatic decline in youth faith.

### The Triple Threat to Western Faith

The combination of secure middle-class prosperity, the corporate-consumer culture, and advanced science and technology constitute the triple threat to Western faith (Paul, 2010b). The three dynamics work synergistically in that they blend together and reinforce one another—the first two factors, in particular, would not be possible without the existence of the latter. In most advanced democracies, the first factor is the most important, and when combined with the other two it has produced the most potent secularization effect. In the United States, the first component is not sufficiently operative because of the “Wild West” economy to produce a secular progressive majority, but the second dynamic is prevalent and has proved effective enough to terminate Karl Rove’s grand project to establish a permanent theoconservative Republican majority. As effective as these secularization forces can be, they are largely accidental side effects rather than calculated efforts to destroy popular supernaturalism. Putman and Campbell (2010) attribute much or all of American secularization to yet another—and ironic—theosociological accident. They contend that the rise of the religious Right intended to return the nation to the churches in reaction to large-scale secularization is instead causing its own reactionary backlash as the younger generations reject its intolerant stridence. This effect may well be a fourth component to American secularization, but it does not explain Western de-

Christianization in general, ignores that it is the moderate denominations that have suffered the largest losses, and it neglects the effect that digital personal technologies are probably having on youth (the last is an especially surprising failure for Putman; Paul, 2010c). Based on a statistical analysis, Ruiters and Tubergen (2009) conclude that, in addition to socioeconomic conditions, the religious heritage of a nation plays a role in its long-term religiosity, including the degree of religious regulation; however, the hypothesis that a free market of religion is a major factor behind high levels of religiosity has been falsified, as per Norris and Inglehart (2004).

### More on the Superficiality of Religion—and Popular Nontheism

The ease and rapidity with which religion has lost much or most of its popularity in the advanced democracies despite the absence of a potent atheistic movement, and often in the face of organized religion, indicates that religious belief and practice are a common but usually superficial psychological coping mechanism for alleviating the high level of anxiety associated with living in a sufficiently dysfunctional socioeconomic environment, and that religious opinion is readily abandoned in many or most people if their daily lives become sufficiently secure and prosperous. This not only refutes the hypothesis (as per Barrett, 2004) that most people must deliberately strive to overcome a supposedly strong natural human propensity to be religious if they are to become irreligious, but also it means that nontheism is similarly superficial in the hundreds of millions who have casually lost their faith without thinking about it all that much. That the great Western secularization has established that religious opinion is inconsistent and often casual in turn allows us to better examine the beginning and evolution of religiosity and its relationship to individual and mass violence; in particular, we can avoid errant conclusions that stem from assuming religion is universal and deeply set in the species.

It follows that the fact that the great majority of humans have and continue to be religious is not evidence for religiosity being the human default mode, because the great majority of humans have and continue to live in the dysfunctional circumstances that promote religiosity. To better discover the actual propensity of people to be pious or not would require running the entire planet so that every person enjoyed the level of secure middle class or higher prosperity and peace now prevalent only in the most successful democracies for a sustained period of time. Presumably, popular religiosity would sink to the low levels currently extant in such nations—whether nontheism would continue to grow to even higher or consensus levels is unknown and

open to question. Also questionable is whether this pacific prosperity experiment will ever be run.

## The Interactions Between Theism, Nontheism, and Violence

Because intraspecies violence and war are not human inventions, being present in nonhumans, including some apes, they are not the result of religion. Increasingly complex language and materialism probably evolved due to selective pressures before the evolution of advanced *Homo sapiens* and involve a strong genetic component. The nongenetic and nontranscendent nature of religion indicated by its usual superficiality, along with the minimal religiosity of some societies, including some living hunter-gatherers, plus the difficulty of assessing the presence and degree of supernaturalism in prehistory, means it cannot be presumed that intense shamanistic supernaturalism appeared before or among early *Homo sapiens*, and it was widespread before the advent of agriculture. But it may well have appeared early and been common. The development of basal religion is likely to have been primarily a side effect of the human imagination that evolved as a means of inventing a variety of mental concepts and can diverge into less functional areas. The process is likely to have been facilitated by dreams, which can seem to represent a connection to spiritual realms, and the use of mind-altering drugs that can produce the same impression. The propensity of humans to be obstinate in their opinions regardless of whether they are justified further facilitates supernaturalism. Considering the strength of these effects, it is the minimal religiosity of some hunter-gatherers—rather than the emergence of religion—that is rather surprising, and it verifies that religious devotion is not the human default mode. Because it cannot be presumed that all prehistoric peoples were religious and believed in an afterlife, and because the actual distribution of religiosity and violence among them cannot be assessed and correlated, it is not now and is unlikely to ever be practical to determine the relationship between religion, homicide, and war prior to 10,000 BP. It cannot be determined whether supernaturalistic thinking encouraged or discouraged prehistoric strife, or if it conferred an advantage or disadvantage in combat. Studies that come to strong conclusions on these matters probably go beyond the recoverable data. Because religion lacks a strong genetic component, its evolution as a powerful force of social cohesion in a survival, including military, context is improbable at best and studies that conclude otherwise are probably errant. The nonuniversality of war in human cultures and the rarity of homicide indicate they too are not genetically programmed (Kelly, 2000) and are more similar to art and writing than to language and

materialism. It remains possible that the higher propensity for males to engage in violence involves a genetic component.

As history comes onto the modern human scene, assessing and correlating faith and violence becomes more practical. The combination of widespread religiosity in early agricultural and civilized peoples with substantial levels of homicide and war leaves no doubt that mass polytheism did not come close to solving the violence and brutality problem, to the detriment of the godly-religion socioeconomic hypothesis. This was true even though most polytheistic cults were relatively tolerant of other sects. Most of the wars appear to have been struggles over territory, resources, and slaves. Polytheistic doctrines did not promote nonviolent worldviews to the degree necessary to dramatically suppress or prevent these wars and murder, and the tendency of a given people to believe that their gods are better than the other's gods can facilitate conflict. The development of the Roman Empire is an interesting case because not only did the Romans not wage aggressive war on religious grounds, but also they even adopted the gods of one of the peoples they conquered. An example of a polytheistic religion leading directly to wars occurred in middle America, where doctrines required the capture and sacrifice of enemy persons for what were considered urgent theistic purposes. The Aztecs developed this system to such an extreme degree that surrounding client states were maintained as targets for annual campaigns purely to capture thousands of victims each year (Hassig, 1988). Khan was a devout animist (Weatherford, 2004), and his conquests were driven in part by a feeling of religious unity and perhaps superiority.<sup>xxiv</sup> The many tens of millions killed by the Mongol conquests demonstrates the potential lethality of polytheistic wars. The even greater numbers lost in the Chinese civil wars in the 700s, 1600s, and 1800s shows the same for their less supernaturalistic culture. The most recent expression of mass war caused by polytheistic racism was the attempt by Japan to conquer China and the rest of Asia; such a strategically impossible effort seemed justified only on the premise that the Japanese were divinely special and protected.<sup>xxv</sup> Many polytheistic societies were tolerant of or required torture, draconian punishments, and human sacrifice, including sacrificing children, in some cases.

Buddhism is interesting because in its original and most basic form it is a nonsupernaturalistic philosophy. It and some Hindu sects have developed pacifist philosophies. On the other hand, Hindu doctrine centers around the extremely discriminatory caste system, and

the Indian polytheists have engaged in intense strife with Muslims, peaking with the mass atrocities sparked by the independence of India and Pakistan.

Abrahamic monotheism did not seriously improve the human situation concerning homicide, war, torture, and slavery, but its helping suppress most infanticide or human sacrifice that may stand as the greatest antiviolence successes of the ideology.<sup>xxvi</sup> Assessing the early stages of the evolution of Hebrew monotheism is complicated because the anthropological data contradict the wars of extreme genocidal aggression and ethnic cleansing during the unprovoked conquest of the Promised Land described in scripture (Bright, 2000). Jews were the victims of Roman aggression, but although their rebellions were justifiable, the terror tactics invented by Hebrew religious zealots were not. Nor were the repeated revolts, driven by religious ideology rather than strategic assessment, a sound proposition because they were bound to fail and led to the permanent destruction of the temple, and the disastrous Diaspora. Upon being elevated to the top religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity failed to promote democracy, tolerance, and political individual freedom. It did the opposite by imposing a terror state, where torture, agonizing execution, slavery, and anti-Semitism were legal and normal. Actions against Jews included ghettoization, economic restrictions, wearing of badges of identification, and forced conversion (Carroll, 2001). The tradition of anti-Semitism was continued by Protestants (as per Luther, 1543). The very poor socioeconomic performance of Europe when it was at its most Christian seriously undermined the Christian version of the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis. Matters began to change when the growth of mercantile capitalism in parts of northern Europe, the Netherlands especially, pressured entrepreneurial Protestants to adopt tolerance for other sects and began to elevate general living conditions. The degree to which Christianity suppressed and/or encouraged the development of modern economics and science is controversial (Diamond, 2005; Stark, 2006); for example, it has been proposed that the cultural and political diversity resulting from the complex geographic topography of the European peninsula was the crucial factor behind the development of modernity. In the end, the confession at least allowed or was unable to prevent the advances; the absence of a scriptural requirement for a theocracy may have facilitated this result.

Nor did Christianity adopt nonaggressive military policies upon becoming the dominant cult of Europe. The Catholic nation invented the concept of “just war,” and then used the theory to justify a series of unethical wars. Wars between Catholics did not involve a religious dispute,

but they did establish the inability of the faith to suppress warfare, further damaging the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis. The war against the Cathars was pure, unprovoked religious genocide facilitated by mass theft (Pegg, 2008). The eastern Crusades were religion driven on multiple levels that were interlinked. Aside from the desire to push back the aggressive Islam that was threatening Christendom and regain the Holy Lands, the operation was so strategically untenable in the long term that it could be justified only on the premise that the creator of the universe favored the Christian cause. At the beginning of the Crusades, the Pope promised eternal rewards for combatants and declared that Muslims were heathens outside the protections of the Decalogue (Asbridge, 2004, 2010).<sup>xxvii</sup> The first encouraged participation, and the latter allowed the use of the terror tactics that were necessary for the Crusaders to achieve their initial victories. This included the murder of the inhabitants of the Muslim and Jewish citizens of some of the cities seized and the practice of cannibalism on non-Christians during some sieges (Asbridge, 2004, 2010; Peters, 1971; Rubenstein, 2008).<sup>xxviii</sup> At first, eating Muslims was compelled by hunger, but it appears to have evolved into a prominent means of inspiring terror as a military tactic. Occasional assaults upon Orthodox Christians during the Crusades, including the sacking of Constantinople, were largely opportunistic.

The expansion of Islam was largely achieved through military conquest. An exception was Indonesia, which is predominantly Sufi. The latter is more pacific than the Sunni and Shiite sects. The notorious Hashshashin proved that the faith was capable of generating extreme terror, setting an unfortunate precedent. Islam was markedly more tolerant of Judaism and Christianity than the last was of other forms of Abrahamism,<sup>xxix</sup> but it has been just as bigoted against polytheists, apostates, and nontheists.

Significant pacifist Christian sects have evolved, Quakers and Mennonites among them, but these have been minority movements that have not precluded the frequent involvement of Christians in a long series of conflicts. The European wars of the 1500s and 1600s were largely religious, with Catholicism attempting and failing to destroy the new sects. In the theologically diverse English American colonies, religious strife, sometimes lethal, between assorted Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Deists contributed to the new democracy being officially secular. Because the distance between the American colonies and the English crown gave the American colonists substantial experience with local democratic practices and removed the need to directly attack the monarchy, the revolution did not descend into outright terror—although

atrocities did occur on both sides, especially in the southern colonies, where the conflict devolved into an often ruthless civil war. The high level of societal violence in the early American republic when it was more pious than less homicidal Europe offers further contradiction of the moral-creator socioeconomic hypothesis. In France the need to outright destroy the monarchy to prevent its return, and a lack of democratic experience, led the Deistic regime to employ extreme terror. Counterattacks by Christian elements against French secularism proved equally ruthless. As the fortunes of the Papal States waned in the face of secular modernity, the Holy See continued to employ military forces in an ultimately futile effort to prevent being reduced to a normal church (Pollard, 2005).

Had industrial-consumer capitalism rather than Christianity appeared in Roman times, slavery very probably would have become too uneconomical to remain legal two millennia ago. Had the Gospels strictly prohibited slavery, then major portions of Christianity would not have defended slavery for two millennia, leading to a theological civil war between Christians in the late 1700s and 1800s—the Southern Baptists formed in 1845 specifically to defend the peculiar institution—and the actual civil war might have been avoided. The Vatican still defended slavery after the American Civil War (Maxwell, 1975). That slavery finally and quickly became illegal at the same time that modern economics was developing, and long after the advent of the Abrahamic faiths, strongly indicates that finances had much more to do with the end of the system than did religious abolitionists. Conversely, if not for the advent of Smithian capitalism, it is likely that slavery would still be legal and common. Ergo, even taking into account religious abolitionists, religion slowed down, making slavery illegal. The Jim Crow lynching culture enabled by Southern and Midwestern Protestants after the war was so out of control that most of the killings were public spectacles, held every few weeks, in which the victim was brutalized to death, often in an obscene manner (see Dray, 2003). There was no significant involvement of atheists in this terror; indeed, a person who publicly proclaimed his or her atheism or proevolution stance at that time and place was at risk. The termination of the American apartheid terror state involved center-left religious and atheist elements,<sup>xxx</sup> but the system was unsustainable in a prosperous democracy in which television was exposing the brutality and hatred of racist Christians.<sup>xxxi</sup> Afrikaner apartheid was based on biblical Protestantism, and it was defeated by an atheistic liberation movement headed by nonbeliever Nelson Mandela allied with liberal Christian elements.

Catholics initiated the transatlantic slave trade in the Caribbean (Maxwell, 1975). As North American Protestants took over the African traffic while wishing to avoid being enslaved themselves, they elevated the theory that only lesser races were suitable for human bondage (as per Jefferson, 1783) to a new level. Christians then perpetuated this deception in modified form in the apartheid era, contending that those of African heritage were not suitable for participating in democratic politics, and that Black males posed a sexual threat to virtuous White women (Dray, 2003).<sup>xxxii</sup> By the 1800s, Christians had developed a broad array of prejudices against others both within and outside the faith. As late as World War II, democratic Western and other societies that were still religious remained racist to a degree that is difficult to comprehend today. They largely excluded Black Africans from combat duties in part due to theories of mental inferiority; African Americans who did serve were unable to utilize public facilities in the southern states that German prisoners of war could enjoy, while Japanese families were interned. Because the scientists of the era were steeped in a heritage of Christian bigotry, the latter inevitably contaminated the new science of human biology (Paul, 2003, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that the new pseudoscientific version of eugenics was widely adopted by Protestants, as well as some Catholics (Hastings, 2010).<sup>xxxiii</sup> A majority of American states adopted eugenics laws—some of those states also banned teaching evolution.

Theology-grounded racism and forced eugenics backed by pseudoscientific theories were developed to their most extreme in Germany by rightist Christians and neopagans (Paul, 2003, 2004; Hastings, 2010). The Nazi opinion that Jews were the creations of Satan (Hitler, 1925) ultimately led to the tremendous effort to exterminate the Hebrew “race.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> The retention of anti-Semitic attitudes by the Catholic Church and many Protestant sects abetted the Nazi version (Carroll, 2001; Gellately, 2001; Paul, 2003, 2004; Phayer, 2008; Scholder, 1988; Steigman-Gall, 2003). Nazi ideology presumed that the supernatural superiority of Aryans who alone among humans had been created by the creator gave Germans the capacity to achieve enormous conquests that would have otherwise been understood as strategically impractical for a modest-sized population (Hitler, 1925; Paul, 2003, 2004).<sup>xxxv</sup> A Vatican panel commissioned to assess the relative dangers of Communism and Nazism recognized that the latter was theistic and concluded that it posed the greater threat due to its aggressive racism (Phayer, 2008)—far from being atheistic in origin, Nazism was the most deadly form of theism yet seen.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The Holy See decided otherwise, so the church directly aided the ascent of Hitler to power and backed the

Fascist powers in their war against Communism to the degree that American and British aid to the Soviet Union was denounced, criticism of Fascist atrocities and mass genocides was minimal while the lesser crimes of leftist forces were emphasized, and Fascist war criminals were protected after the war (Phayer, 2008). Protestant elements were often virulently anti-Semitic, and both Christian confessions exploited slave labor in Germany (Gellately, 2001; Legg, 2008).<sup>xxxvii</sup> Since the war, the Vatican has engaged in a periodically bizarre series of collaborations with organized crime that has destabilized the Italian democracy and led to murders, as well as the better known scandals involving the abuse of children.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Anti-choice Christians are putting far more effort into making women who have abortions legally guilty of murder than opposing the growth of international organized crime.

The secular Left used to be a leading source of terror acts, and it still produces some of the latter as well as substantial street protest violence against the forces of capital. In the United States, right-wing militants tend to be Christians.<sup>xxxix</sup> The ongoing strife in Africa includes extremist Christian elements such as the Lord's Resistance Army and The Army of the Ten Commandments that have engaged in radical atrocities and rape against other Christians, Muslims, pagans, and "witches" as a standard course of action (Griswold, 2008; Lester, 2002). Genocidal leaders such as Charles Taylor and Joseph Kony regularly use Christian rhetoric (Vick, 2003), and Rwanda and Congo are majority Christian (Barrett et al., 2001). Muslims have also engaged in atrocities in these conflicts (Griswold, 2008). On the global stage, the Islamic world is too economically and militarily weak to directly engage the Western powers if it wished to do so. Although the oil-rich Saudi Arabian monarchy itself is not hard line, their funding of the strict Wahabbi sect, and Western backing of militant Muslims fighting atheist forces in Afghanistan, has encouraged the global development of extremist Islamic elements that reject socioeconomic modernity and have copied and greatly expanded upon the comparatively secular Tamil Tigers suicide terror tactics<sup>xi</sup>; but to date, modern Islamic terror has far from matched the scale of anticivilian terror achieved in World War II.<sup>xii</sup> It is notable that Muslims have recently revived the use of nonmurderous suicide in the form of self-immolation—in the 1900s first used to oppose governmental corruption in Southeast Asia—as part of a more secular and democratic movement against corrupt autocracies whose future prospects are uncertain in the face of reactionary Islam. In Israel, the growth of the Orthodox through fast reproduction and immigration from the United States has increased strife with secular Jews and complicated

achieving peace with Muslims. Fundamentalism in the modern second- and third-world countries is proving so dysfunctional and sufficiently popular that it is raising concerns among those who predict a recovery of mass religiosity in coming decades (Kaufmann, 2010; Longman, 2006; Shah & Toft, 2006).

That Abrahamism has failed to produce sufficiently pacific results over the millennia up to current times makes it necessary to examine the ideologies that about half of the world has been following. The basic monotheistic doctrine that a single omnipotent deity created the world is highly problematic. The planet is so defective in construction that it is a death trap for immature humans, most of whom die before reaching adulthood, aborting the ability to express free will that is supposed to justify the creator's failure to control earthly events (Paul, 2008, 2009b). The scale of this disaster is so maximal—higher juvenile losses would crash the population—that it refutes the core premise that the creator is a pro-life source of sound moral guidance,<sup>xliii</sup> and the premise that one should not kill humans primarily because of the instructions of a God that has overseen the death of many billions of children; this is a classic example of doing what the authority figure says, not what the authority figure does. Note that the absence of a benign creator also applies to monotheistic Deism and to pacific Bahaism.

Written by ancient peoples who lacked advanced ethics, the Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic scriptures are similarly defective.<sup>xliiii</sup> Note that whether the events described in the texts actually occurred is not as critical as the fact that many adherents think the texts represent the word of a deity that cannot be disobeyed. The Decalogue did not ban war, homicide, or slavery on a universal basis or torture on any basis. The commandments were an exclusive covenant between God and observant Hebrews, and they left the Jews free to kill the nonobservant. So when Moses was about to present the commandments, he was justified in having the Israelites who had returned to worshipping a pagan deity slaughtered for doing nothing more than expressing their religious preference. Genocidal wars of conquest against and enslavement of gentiles were justifiable for the same reason, and the Decalogue does not mention torture or promote democracy and freedom of speech, religion, and sexuality—deficits that characterize the rest of the monotheistic scriptures. According to some interpretations, the commandments apply to observant Christians, but they do not pertain to heathens. The curse of Ham is potentially racist because his descendants are supposedly the Africans. Not only is slavery not banned in either the Hebrew testaments or the Gospels, but slaves are warned not to seek their freedom in

the latter, and abuse and death are described as legitimate punishments in the former and by Jesus. The Old Testament deity either kills enormous numbers of humans preborn, immature, and adult directly or orders his loyal followers to do so. Jesus specifically denies that he has come to Earth to bring peace, cites the death of the opponents of kings as a warning against disbelievers, allows his entourage to purchase swords,<sup>xliv</sup> and instead of employing peaceful protest methods as per Gandhi or King criminally uses a whip without prior warning against nonviolent fellow civilians in the temple. In Revelations, Jesus is a warrior deity who slaughters humans. The Quran does not describe genocide to the same extreme, but it does not condemn slavery, and it does discuss the use of discriminatory policies, including violence against nonbelievers, polytheists and atheists especially, the latter requirements stemming from the need for the state to be an Islamic theocracy. Abrahamic scripture is archpatriarchal to the point of misogyny, and it is antihomosexual. The socialism described in the Gospels is contaminated because it is enforced by the death of Christians who fail to comply. Almost all the tenets proffered in Abrahamic scriptures are one way or another enforced by threats of violence and death, with the ultimate expression of abusive retribution being unrelenting torture in hell. The Bible's chronic fear factor stems from being composed in antiquated societies in which intolerance and violence up to death were a regular means of dealing with perceived difficulties, so the volume is not able to provide the formula for peaceful national societies.

Not being universal, the peace offered by the Bible and Quran is the impractically ideological peace of extreme conformity in which strife will cease only when all agree with the one correct creed. The mixed moral messages—ranging from forgiveness, turning the other cheek, and love for one's neighbor and enemy, on one hand, to extreme retribution and violence, on the other—contained within the archaic Abrahamic scriptures is a psychological recipe for moral confusion and conflict that has only been partly cured by the liberalizing effect of the Enlightenment upon Judeo-Christianity, which did not moderate more theocratic Islam to the same extent. It follows that Wright (2008) and Armstrong (2009) are overly optimistic concerning the pacific foundations and positive evolution of religion. Abrahamic patriarchy overempowers men at the expense of women, leaving the latter more vulnerable to oppression and worse from the former. The absence of support for democracy and individual liberties aborted their adoption in the Christian world for millennia and has facilitated draconian inquisitorial policies. According to doctrinal ideology, in order to obtain rewards a follower of

God must obey all his orders, including instructions to kill or otherwise abuse innocent persons as occurs in scriptures; so those who believe they have received such instructions are vulnerable to concluding that they have no choice, and the aspiration for a heavenly reward promised by Christianity and Islam precludes true altruism.<sup>xlv</sup>

Because the biblical commandment against killing does not apply to nonbelievers, the Pope felt justified in declaring Muslims outside its protection, increasing the rapaciousness of the Crusades to the point of cannibalism. The story of Ham and discriminatory policies in the Bible and Quran have contributed to bigotry on racial, ethnic, and religious grounds, to the degree that some contemporary creationists describe the races on blatantly prejudiced grounds. The scriptural support for slavery allowed and encouraged its retention among Jews, Christians, and Muslims to the beginning of modern times, resulting in a massive war. The charge by Jesus in the Gospels that Jews are the children of Satan, the Gospel portrayal of Jews as his killers, and the violent side of the Jesus story were integral to the development of the Aryan Deutsch Christianity that evolved into Nazism. In this interpretation of scripture, Christ was an Aryan warrior sent by God to combat the Jews.<sup>xlvi</sup> Even mainstream Bible scholars cite the whipping delivered by Jesus as an example of why violence is sometimes necessary (as per the commentary in Shelley et al., 1994), despite the lack of sufficient provocation in the Gospel story. The militant, anti-infidel, theocratic aspects of the Quran, exacerbated by the absence of an Islamic Enlightenment, form the basis of suicidally extremist Islam.

Turning to the daily lives of contemporary ordinary citizens, the extreme death toll of immature humans undermines the thesis that the creator is truly opposed to murder, and God-ordained violence in the Bible is so intense and extensive that experimental exposure appears to elevate levels of aggression in the manner of violent media (Bushman et al., 2007). The repeated use of extreme personal and mass violence to address various problems in the scriptures may have enabled “honor cultures” that demand extreme retribution for even trivial slights (Dray, 2003; Ehrman, 2008; Ellison, Burr, & McCall, 2003; Grasmick, Davenport, Chamblin, & Bursick, 1992; Messner & Zevenbergen, 2005; Neapolitan, 1997; Niditch, 1993; Nisbett & Cohen, 1999). The results of Jensen (2006) support the hypothesis that populations that follow a conservative “malevolent” theology centered on battling Satanic forces are prone toward higher levels of homicide than are followers of less fear-based, more “benevolent” doctrines. Bible-based juvenile corporal punishment (Dobson, 2007a, 2007b) appears to contribute to a tendency

toward violence in adult years (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1998, 2000). The warrior nature of God's followers in the Bible is used to oppose gun control in murderous America (Paul, 2009c).<sup>xlvii</sup> Hood et al. (1986), Scheepers et al. (2002), and Hall et al. (2010) find that higher levels of conservative religious practice are associated with elevated levels of racial and ethnic prejudice. The concept that there is but one god of salvation compels insufficiently enlightened Islam to impose harsh punishments on alleged critics of the faith via antiblasphemy laws, and to direct threats and attacks upon those who fail to exhibit demanded respect. Scriptural injunctions against homosexuality fuel homophobia, sometimes violent; this is resulting in massive and increasing oppression of gays by evangelicals and Muslims in Africa.<sup>xlviii</sup> Hard-line Islamic patriarchy justifies extreme of oppression of women. Although less harsh, the patriarchal nature of traditional evangelical marriage may contribute to high levels of violence and instability (Bennett, 2007), and conservative religious values do not appear to suppress uses of pornography that sometimes is violently misogynist to levels as low as those with more liberal views (Edelman, 2009; "Evangelicals are addicted...", 2006). Extensive research indicates that the biblically inspired abstinence-only sex education programs are not as efficacious in reducing adverse consequences of sexual activity as the less traditionalist, more pragmatic, protection-emphasizing programs directed toward European youth (Finer, 2007; Panchaud, Singh, Darroch, & Darroch, 2000; Paul, 2009c; Rosenbaum, 2009; Singh & Darroch, 2000; Trenholm, 2007; Wellings et al., 2006), and Strayhorn and Strayhorn (2009) explicitly demonstrate a link between high levels of theoconservatism and unintended pregnancy. Not scriptural, however, is the religious project to stop abortions by making it murder subject to harsh punishments<sup>xlix</sup> because the procedure is not banned in the Bible, and it is impractical because abortion is common regardless of whether it is legal (Sedgh, Henshaw, Singh, Ahman, & Shah, 2007; Shah & Ahman, 2009).

Powerful elements of the American religious Right have strategically focused on promoting a series of what they claim are scripturally based wedge issues rather than addressing social ills (Phillips, 2006; Putman & Campbell, 2010; Weisman & Cooperman, 2006). The ideology of these conservative forces favors the deregulated, reduced taxation (especially for the wealthy), free market economy that raises personal risk. As a result, the incoherent religious Right that is the main opponent to Darwinian science and to socialism has become a leading proponent of socioeconomic Darwinism despite the promotion of socialism in the Gospels. As an

adjunct to privatization, religious conservatives are promoting the displacement of government services with faith-based charities that increase outreach into the general population, even though data showing that faith-based charities are more effective than government alternatives have not been produced (Johnson, Tompkins, & Webb, 2002), and charities lack the enormous financial resources and infrastructure needed to provide the comprehensive assistance that the government can offer (contra Brooks, 2006). America's high levels of adult and especially juvenile mortality are largely due to the lack of a comprehensive, cost-efficient medical system that is opposed by most elements of the religious Right because of opposition to socialistic policies in favor of more faith-based treatments (Anderson et al., 2006; Banks et al., 2006; Kawachi & Kennedy, 2002; Muenning & Glied, 2010; Paul, 2008, Reid, 2009; Schoen et al., 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Winkleby et al., 2006).

Not only can the tragedy of Nazism not be attributed to nontheism, but the socioeconomic component of both nationalist socialism as well as Communist doctrine is not atheistic since the concept of socialism enforced by the fear of lethal retribution first appeared in the Gospels as the ideal form of Christian community, or Christocommunism. Even so, irreligious dictatorships have proven capable of committing mass violence comparable to the record of theist powers. This is not surprising in that both atheism and theism are morally neutral—gods or the one God can be as bad as they can be good. Although the absence of belief in a moral deity can allow depravity, the ideological belief in a “purposeful” deity that is perceived to be moral even though it cannot be so can be even more dangerous because of the supernaturalistic justification, requirements, and rewards the latter imparts.<sup>l</sup> The absence of absolutist supernatural justification may help explain why mass Communism has faded with remarkably little trouble and considerable speed.<sup>li,lii</sup> Conversely, the perception of godly compulsion and an eternal paradise in exchange for ardor is probably reinforcing the hard-line stance of fundamentalists whose religiosity would be less intense or absent if not for dysfunctional circumstances.<sup>liii</sup>

The greater danger posed by theism may be reflected in the numbers. To date, the number killed by the nonsupernaturalists is somewhere between 50 and 100 million,<sup>liv</sup> a significant but minor fraction of the order of magnitude larger casualties attributable to supernaturalists. The latter have had a much longer time over which to dispatch fellow human beings, but wrongdoing nonreligious people have had modern technology and a larger population base to work with, and

Pinker (2011) shows that the lethal violence rate of the 1900s was not exceptional on a per capita basis. Attacking and killing fellow humans on a group scale is always driven to at least some extent by the desire to steal land or resources. But some conflicts and genocides are unlikely to have occurred if not for religious motivation or cover of other motives (the Holocausts, the Aztec wars of sacrifice, the anti-Cathar/Muslim Crusades, some of the European conflicts of the 1500–1600s, the Inquisitions, and the war on witches fall into this category) or ill-advised strategic thinking due to the illusion of divine superiority (the Middle Eastern Crusades, the German and Japanese assaults of Russia and China, respectively, in World War II). Many conflicts predominantly over territory and assets have been exacerbated by supernaturalistic disputes (currently the Jewish-Muslim conflicts and much of the strife in Africa) or belief of divine favor for the aggressors (the conquest of the Americas). In even more cases religion has not been a primary cause or exacerbation of violence from the largest scale to the smallest, but it has proven impotent to stop conflicts between peoples of faith, often the same faith (as per the Great War, and homicide in general). And although it is true that infanticide was ended by theists, it was also largely practiced by theists.

The telling truth is that the general reduction in human violence (Pinker, 2011) has occurred at the same time that atheism has been waxing at the expense of theism.

## Conclusion

Dictatorships, religious or atheistic, are dangerous, and none has produced a highly successful society. Neither was democracy created for religious purposes; it arose out of political pragmatism among pagans. There is no evidence that patriarchal fundamentalism can produce successful societies. Only democratic cultures that maximize women's rights can provide socioeconomic success in the context of human freedom, so the question is whether it is better to be highly supernaturalistic or nonsupernaturalistic. No strongly monotheistic or polytheistic democracy has been as successful at providing its citizens with the degree of secure middle-class prosperity and safety as have the most irreligious and progressive examples. Although the latter are not utopias, which probably cannot exist, the most atheistic democratic societies are the most successful in history. They are also the least likely to engage in unprovoked war. If, as it seems, the best cumulative socioeconomic environments invariably suppresses popular religiosity across the left-right spectrum, then it is not possible for a highly successful, pacific nation to be highly religious contrary to what appear to be the psychosociologically naïve hopes of theomoderates

(like Egginton, 2011; Hedges, 2008). That even a progressively religious country cannot succeed in that the very achievement of success will repress the religiosity no matter how enlightened and pacific it may be explains why mainline theism is as statistically tied to poor national conditions as is dysfunctional fundamentalism; the latter being somewhat more resistant to the secularization process because its reactionary nature garners adherents who resist secular modernity.

The psychoideological reasons for the exceptional social success and nonlethal nature of the least religious democracies have yet to be properly researched (Zuckerman [2008] being an early effort); it is not attributable to atheist or secular ideology, of which there is none, nor to active popular adherence to secular humanist doctrine because the movement is too limited in scale and popularity to be a major influence. The reduction of the popularity of the more dysfunctional aspects of religious ideologies may contribute to the posttheism success. The most important component may be the mere presence of benign conditions that, while suppressing mass religiosity, alleviate anxiety (Sapolsky, 2005). Simple salutary lifestyle practices, such as family dinners, may be as or more effective than grand ideologies to improve individual and societal function (Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2003; Eisenberg, Olson, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Bearinger, 2004). The promotion of the rights and participation of women in the public sphere, both private (see Adler, 2001; Stephenson, 2004) and political is vital in view of women's ability to suppress reckless and aggressive behavior—this requirement is not religion friendly because the major sects are patriarchal. The nonreligious, pragmatic moral justifications for treating fellow humans well and fairly that work in the more secular democracies are practical reciprocity and the altruism of being good for the sake of goodness (Epstein, 2009).

The fact that progressive socioeconomic policies damage popular faith helps explain why the American religious Right is opposed to such policies (Gill & Lundsgaarde, 2004) and why American conservatives regularly denounce other first-world societies, despite their obviously superior conditions (Boyle, 2005; Brooks, 2006; Coulter, 2006; D'Souza, 2007; Murray, 2009; O'Reilly, 2006; Palin, 2010; Stark, 2008), while proclaiming the American way as superior, despite its equally evident flaws. The best hopes for theism to remain as prevalent as possible are for most of human society to remain mired in the dysfunctional environment that popular religion requires, and for the reactionary fundamentalists that are most likely to spawn dangerous militants to reproduce as fast as their anticontraceptive doctrine allows them to. Ergo, religion

cannot be the solution.<sup>lv</sup> The ability of religion to suppress secularism is dubious. The alliance of Western theoconservatives with capitalism is the unavoidable deal with the corporate devil that continues to secularize cultures, especially those of the most developed nations, while digital technologies promise to further divert youth from organized supernaturalism at a rate that threatens to overwhelm the rapid reproduction of fundamentalists.<sup>lvi</sup> Conversely, if humanity succeeds in further and greatly enhancing the safety and prosperity of the peoples of the world, then religion will further fade from the scene;<sup>lvii</sup> if the US health complex becomes more universal then the nation's religiosity should decline.

Perhaps that would be for the best. With the secular superpower nuclear contest over, the most likely way that the numbers of humans killed by fellow humans can be driven to much higher levels than already seen—by hundreds of millions or billions—is via biowarfare involving the release of virulent pathogens.<sup>lviii</sup> The persons likely to execute such an act are religious extremists who see all outside their narrow cult (presumably protected by a vaccine) as warranting death, and/or who wish to initiate an apocalypse. Assuming that mass bioterror is technologically practical, religion constitutes the greatest human threat to humanity.<sup>lix</sup>

Although eliminating theism will not necessarily solve the world's troubles because atheism can also decline into depravity on an individual to national basis, only the later in a liberal democratic context has proven able to thrive in the most successful societies. That is the atheist advantage.

## Future Directions

The general need is for extensive scientific investigation of the relationship between theism, nontheism, and societies. To do so requires overcoming deeply set theopolitical correctness, which has suppressed research by implying that such work is offensive to the sensibilities of the religious or contradicts the demands of one or more gods. Also required is an end to the common evasion and denial of the morally flawed nature of religious dogmas, as well as scientific investigation of the potential dangers posed by scriptures (initiated by Bushman, Ridge, Das, Key, & Busath, 2007). There is an urgent technical need to conduct extensive research on how nontheistic inhabitants of the highly secularized democracies are living lives and running societies successful or not in the absence of popular organized religion, a neglected project initiated by Zuckerman (2008). Hypotheses on the origin and popularity of religion based on the

errant premise that religion is universal and deeply set in the human mind need revision in view of the low level of supernaturalism in some hunter-gatherers and more developed cultures. How differing levels of theism and nontheism impact the life quality of individuals needs deeper investigation. On a cross-regional and cross-national basis, comparisons of socioeconomic conditions as a function of religiosity and other factors will become increasingly comprehensive. As per the challenge by Paul (2005, 2009a), those who continue to defend the godly-religion socioeconomic hypothesis must produce comprehensive data showing that deity worship actually does produce superior results on a national scale, as well as at the level of the individual, in view of the questions raised by Galen and Kloet (2011).

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## Notes

- i. It is the “Great War” in that the conflict was concentrated in Europe, and the earlier Seven Years’ War (aka French and Indian War) was a true world war.
- ii. Similar comprehensive data on rates of paranormalism appear to not be available for other prosperous democracies.

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- iii. The scarcity of ardent faith in China may help explain the lack of greater resistance to communistic atheism.
- iv. Another downside to the early development of advanced technologies would have been the defrauding on the aboriginal peoples of the Americas of their lands and freedoms, and mass mortality due to exposure to Old World diseases (Paul, 2009b).
- v. A compilation of death statistics due to wars and other anthropogenic catastrophes is at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_wars\\_and\\_anthropogenic\\_disasters\\_by\\_death\\_toll](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wars_and_anthropogenic_disasters_by_death_toll). [AQ: [Please check the URLs is invalid.](#)]
- vi. Among the tortures developed during the Inquisition was water boarding (Scott, 2004; Murphy, 2012).
- vii. American homicide was exacerbated by long-term, honor-driven clan feuds in the southern states, which are bitterly exposed by Twain (1884).
- viii. Spencer's application of Darwinian biology to socioeconomics was misapplied in that the former did not fully understand the latter's science, but the basic concept that free-wheeling capitalism resembles bioevolution in many regards is valid.
- ix. The potential for recurring wars between North and South following a successful splitting of the United States has been portrayed in the speculative "Southern Victory" series by H. Turtledove.
- x. The actual nature of the non/theism among the Tamil Tigers and how it related to persuading or compelling persons to kill themselves for political persons has been little researched, and it may remain so considering the situation. It is possible that the leaders and suicide terrorists were influenced by Hindu beliefs.

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- xi. The last major military contest between the Western democracies was the naval arms race between Great Britain and the United States in the 1920s, although it was partly driven by competition with an increasingly autocratic and militaristic Japan. The expensive competition was aborted by treaties.
- xii. Additional evidence that Americans are not as religious as they pretend is found in the study of atheistic clerics by Dennett and LaScola (2010).
- xiii. Nor is the United States exceptional in having a frontier past because this also applies to Canada and Australia.
- xiv. Putman and Campbell (2010) show that the higher level of charitable giving reported among religious Americans is attributable to their greater social networking vis-à-vis the less organized nonreligious.
- xv. In recent decades, nonreligion has been rising among less educated Westerners (Putman & Campbell, 2010), perhaps because of the breakdown of social organizations and networking.
- xvi. See note 5.
- xvii. Materialism is well developed, even among many who deny its extreme modern expression. The Mennonites, for example, are proud of their properties and the goods they produce. True rejection of material items, as among some religious ascetics, is very rare.
- xviii. Interviews of Danes by Zuckerman (2008) reveals their common casual lack of concern about death and an afterlife, and ISSP (2001) found a majority of Danes do not believe there is life after death.
- xix. The absence of an eternal paradise in the doctrine of many religions further undermines the thesis that death is a leading cause of religion.

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xx. For example, with revenues in the hundreds of billions, Wal-Mart, whose stores directly compete for attendance with churches on Sundays, enjoys about 10 times the annual income of the global Catholic Church.

xxi. Rupert Murdoch is an example of how even theoconservative capitalists can damage religion. Although his popular FoxNews is a strong opponent of secular progressivism, his Fox entertainment empire is a leader in presenting antitraditionalist, edgy programming that is helping secularize the culture.

xxii. Such as Christian rock and hip-hop, which rarely breaks into the mainstream.

xxiii. For example, if organisms appeared in the fossil record in a random manner that precluded evolution, and/or genetic systems in different organisms were too radically divergent, then natural evolution would be precluded in favor of some form of supernatural creation. If the geological record showed that the Earth was only a few thousand years old and a global flood had occurred, then the Abrahamic deity would be technically verified. The existence of a benign creator who granted all humans free will would be indicated if children possessed such remarkably effective immune systems that they were not vulnerable to death by disease.

xxiv. The polytheistic Khan was religiously and intellectually tolerant.

xxv. The seemingly miraculous destruction of the otherwise unstoppable Mongol invasion fleet in the 1200s by the “divine kamikaze wind” produced by a typhoon facilitated the belief of divine favor. The involvement of religion in the motivation of the Japanese kamikaze attacks is uncertain because many if not the great majority of the pilots were forced to commit suicide (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2006).

xxvi. However, the story of the Israelite King Jephthah involves his sacrifice of his daughter to God. The general Abrahamic ban on these actions is based on the premise that human lives are

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owned by their creator and cannot be taken without just cause by humans, a premise undermined by the Holocaust of the Children (Paul, 2009b).

xxvii. In his moral defense of the crusades, Stark (2009).

xxviii. Again, apologist Stark (2009) downplays these events.

xxix. However, this tolerance was limited, with non-Muslims being second-class citizens periodically subject to abuse.

xxx. Two of the men murdered by Klansmen during the 1964 “Summer of Freedom,” Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, were nonbelievers (Schwarz, 2006). Their deaths along with Christian James Chaney contributed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

xxxi. This exposure would force conservative Catholic W. Buckley (1957) to abandon his pro-segregationist stance.

xxxii. The truth was that it was White men who posed a persistent threat to Black women.

xxxiii. The Vatican was not entirely opposed to eugenics (Gerrard, 1914).

xxxiv. That Jews were the creations of Satan supposedly explained how they could be subhumans, yet so intelligent that they posed a grave danger to the Aryans created by God. That Hitler actually believed this explains why so much exertion went into eliminating Jews that would have been better used against the invading Allies.

xxxv. The ability of Nordic Aryan Finns to resist the onslaught of the huge but Slavic Soviet army in 1940 probably contributed to this opinion.

xxxvi. Sections of Hitler (1925) read as a religious tract.

xxxvii. Further evidence of the involvement of religion in the Nazi regime is presented in Scholder (1988) and Steigman-Gall (2003).

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xxxviii. The collaborations between Paul VI and John Paul II with organized crime elements is detailed in Martin (1982), Fonzo (1983), Dionne (1986), Colby (1987), and Raw (1992). Vatican involvement in the largest-ever American insurance fraud is covered by Behar (1999), and current Vatican banking troubles are detailed in Donadio (2010).

xxxix. Timothy McVey appears to have been an idiosyncratic theist when he committed the Oklahoma bombing (Cole, 1996).

xl. The opinion that it is inherently difficult to recruit suicide terrorists is psychologically naïve in that suicide is fairly common. A large portion of Muslim suicide-murderers appear to be mentally and physically afflicted persons that terrorist elites appear to be searching for and exploiting by providing an “honorable” path to suicide in a culture in which the latter is otherwise strictly taboo (Lankford, 2010; Merari, 2010).

xli. Whether the use of conventional and nuclear bombs to destroy cities and many of their inhabitants shortened the war is doubtful (Dower, 2010; Friedrich, 2006; Hasegawa, 2005), and the operations over Europe resulted in extremely high Allied aircrew casualties.

xlii. See last observation in note 23.

xliii. Ehrman (2008) provides a seminal analysis of the moral flaws of the Bible. Asbridge (2004) applies the defects to the specific issue of the Crusades.

xliv. An example of how such biblical passages directly influence current thinking occurred during competing rallies for and against gun control following the 2011 Tucson massacre: A reverend cited the passage in which Jesus approves the purchase of swords as justification for his carrying both the New Testament and a semi-automatic (Kunkle & Helderman, 2011).

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xliv. The anti-Christian Twain (2010) exposed this critical moral defect when the God-fearing character Finn commits true altruism by declining the reward of heaven in order to do the right thing for his friend Jim (Twain, 1884). Actual altruism cannot occur in the presence of a reward.

xlvi. Early in his political career, Hitler carried a whip to honor Christ's assault upon the Jews in their Temple.

xlvii. As per note 44. A lesser but also telling example of how theoconservative ideology can automatically oppose attempts to alleviate societal dysfunction is how Sarah Palin rejected a campaign led by Michelle Obama to improve childhood nutrition as interfering with the God-given right of parents to feed their offspring as they see fit.

xlviii. The bigotry has been abetted by American evangelicals and includes an attempt to make homosexuality a potentially capital crime in Uganda (Raghavan, 2010); the most gay-friendly nation on the continent is relatively secular South Africa.

xlix. In El Salvador, women who are caught after performing an abortion on themselves are imprisoned for murder.

l. For example, because a nontheist is a moral free agent, he or she is free to pledge to obey all laws banning the murder of children and refuse instructions from a higher authority to the contrary. Because a monotheist derives all his or her moral authority from his or her proposed creator and is depending upon the deity for boons, he or she cannot refuse his or her god's instructions to harm innocents as per the Israelites killing the children of the people's they were ethnically cleansing.

li. Christianity did not play the fundamental part in defeating Communism; the role of churches was important only in Poland and Romania. East Germany was and is one of the most atheistic regions on the planet, and the Russian Orthodox Church was too compromised by its

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collaboration with the Czarist regimes and, to a lesser extent, the Communists, and does not have a large membership. Most critical were inferior economic performance and suppression of cultural freedom, especially among youth.

lii. The Soviet dissident most responsible for defeating communism, Andrei Sakharov, was an atheist. The leading opponent of the nominally communist Burmese regime, San Suu Kyi, is a nontheist Buddhist.

liii. This does not mean that Islamic terrorists directly derive from impoverished circumstances; instead, for historical and theological reasons the Islamic world is sufficiently dysfunctional in a number of regards to promote violence against civilians.

liv. The broad range of this figure is due to the uncertainty of the numbers killed by the Stalin and Mao regimes; see note 5.

lv. It follows that predominantly Islamic countries that overturn autocratic regimes will enjoy greater socioeconomic success if they adopt a democratic secular government as per booming Indonesia rather than a theocratic state as per stagnant Iran. Which of these alternatives occurs will further test how well Islam can accommodate enlightened modernity, an important question because rapid reproduction means the religion will be the fastest growing in coming decades (Kaufmann, 2010; Pew Research, 2011), although the latter show the demographic gains should not be overemphasized because Euromuslims fertility rates are dropping, also only a small minority are highly observant much less militant.

lvi. That younger Americans are more progressive than the boomers also favors long-term secularization (Paul, 2010b; Putman & Campbell, 2010; Zogby, 2008). The Tea Party movement is predominantly boomer in demographic nature (Przybyla, 2010)—their propensity to invoke such historical nostalgia as tricorn hats has limited appeal among generations X and Y.

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lvii. The development of a rapidly expanding population of super intelligent, cognitive machines has the potential to further complicate and degrade the future status of religion in multiple respects (Paul & Cox, 1996).

lviii. The disease agent may be a modified microbe, or a form of replicative nanotechnology (Paul & Cox, 1996).

lix. The Aum Shinrikyo terrorists who tried to deploy anthrax were religious, via an amalgam of Christianity and Buddhism (Kaplan & Marshall, 1996).