

## The Great and Amazingly Rapid Secularization of the Increasingly Proevolution United States

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Long claimed to be a permanently pious population, multiple surveys indicate that nontheists have been expanding by as much as a demographically maximal tenth of total Americans per decade since the turn of the century. Also rising is support for bioevolution over creationism. Why is this proscience secularization surge occurring, will it continue, and how should activist antisupernaturalism respond as America becomes a more normally irreligious, proevolution modern democracy?

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In the summer 2002 *Free Inquiry* I authored a piece that noted that while the US remained the most religious, theoconservative, and creationist western nation, there were signs that in the new century the country was about to experience a secularization wave. In part because the young were much less pious than their parents had been when they were the same age. And surveys in the 80s going into the 2000s were starting to show modest but significant increases in those that were nonaffiliated – the nones – and/or nonreligious – the nons (note that the first are a smaller subset of the second, because a fair number who are not religious belong to a church or the like for social reasons).

Even the notoriously proreligious Gallup organization was measuring a small rise in those who dared tell pollsters they were atheists and Bible literalism was slipping, although belief in creationism appeared to be flatline and just one in ten supported evolutionary science.

It was widely assumed that the USA was in some way special, that unlike the rest of the west it was destined to forever remain highly religious. Perhaps because our atypical constitutional free market of religion encouraged the clergies to get out there and recruit and retain members, unlike those lazy state Eurochurches – a hypothesis based on faulty

statistics, and obviously wrong seeing as how some of the most religious societies are single state religions, usually Islamic.

Because of the belief that America would always be highly Christian, it was further presumed that if Americans were to ever accept evolution at the majority rates seen in other first world countries, it would have to be done by somehow convincing most seeking the grace of Christ to opt for the theory that evolution occurred over deep time, rather than waiting for the rise of atheists to automatically boost support for modern science as it has in other western nations – even though such had never been achieved elsewhere. As a result the National Center for Science Education, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, focused on trying to educate Christian creationists into becoming more science friendly Christian evolutionists.

The events of 9/11 seemed to boost the fortunes of Amerofaith with a burst of church attendance, theocons imagined that the rise of hardline Islam would inspire a fight-fire-with-fire rise in hardline Christianity. But that quickly fizzled as church going quickly slid back to its long term decline, surveys continued to record rises in those nones and nons, and slipping Bible literalism confirmed that the religious right was far from being the moral majority it had never been. In CFI's *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* in 2007 I wrote an entry documenting the now clear evidence that the USA was indeed secularizing – albeit at a modest pace that seemed to indicate it would take a long time to do so.

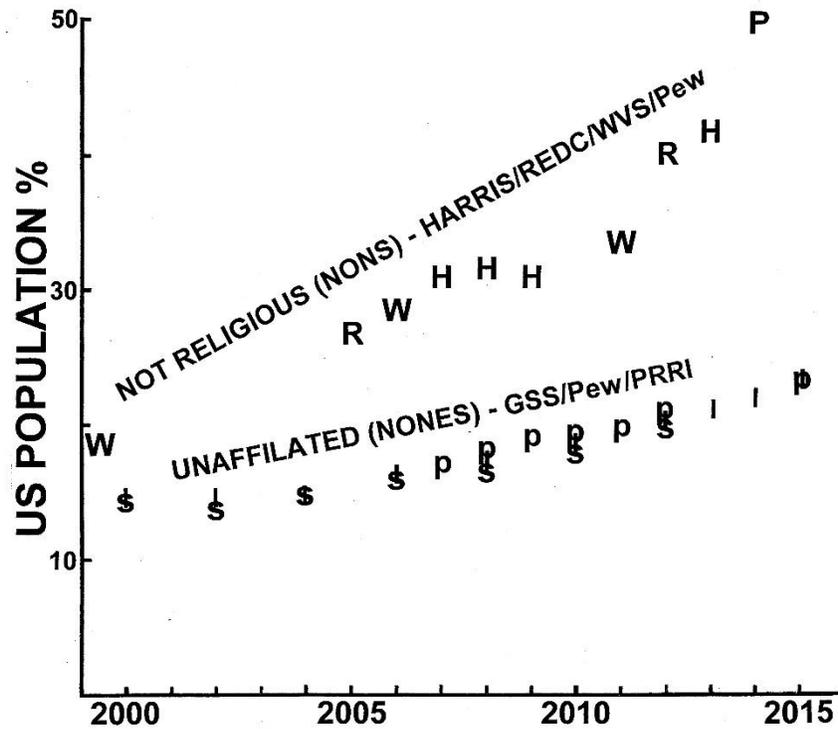
What really gave the world a heads up that America was no longer so exceptional religion wise was the 2012 Pew report “‘Nones’ On the Rise” in which a leading mainstream polling organization explicitly documented an unambiguous and strong increase in Americans who reported they were not affiliated, by ~5% of the total population in just half a decade.

What, unfortunately, did not catch the public's eye the same year was the more remarkable result from the lesser known RedC's “Global Index of Religion and Atheism” (<http://www.scribd.com/document/136318147/Win-gallup-International-Global-Index-of-Religiosity-and-Atheism-2012>). They recorded that Americans who deemed themselves religious nosedived from 73% in 2005 to 60% in 2012 – ouch for the churches.

That result was not a statistical oddity, as verified by another event little noticed even in the atheist community, next year the Harris survey released next “Americans' Belief in God, Miracles and Heaven Declines: Belief in Darwin's Theory Rises” (<http://www.harrisinteractive.com/NewsRoom/HarrisPolls/tabid/447/ctl/ReadCustom%20Default/mid/1508/ArticleId/1353/Default.aspx>). It measured a consistent rise in four pollings from 2007 to 2013 who did not consider themselves very or somewhat religious from 31 to 42%. Three World Value Survey results track the nons rising from a fifth to a third in a little over a decade.

So three surveys showed an extraordinary tenth of the total population losing their religion in just ten years in the nation that was supposed to never lose its religion.

Figure 1



Furthermore, a 2015 Pew report (<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape>) again observed a rise of the unaffiliated at a decadal rate of about a tenth of Americans, to nearly a quarter of the population.

In 2016 the Public Religion Research Institute (<https://www.prii.org/research/prii-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion>) produced nearly the same result. And this year, ABCNews/Washington Post (<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/protestants-decline-religion-sharply-shifting-religious-landscape-poll/story?id=54995663>) measured a one in ten rise in those who lack religion in about a decade and a half. Starting in 2015 the annual Latter Day Saint based American Family Survey is tracking a one or more percent rise in nones each year, and finds that only 43% of Americans consider being religious a core part of their identity (<http://religionnews.com/2018/12/10/religion-declining-in-importance-for-many-americans-especially-for-millennials>) – in view of such stats continuing to label America a religious nation rings increasingly hollow; although it remains more theistic than most or all other advanced democracies.

So we have seven polling organizations agreeing that freethinking Americans who are not interested in religion or theism are currently going up by around one out of ten of

residents in about a decade. That gross value is not, therefore, a statistical fluke limited to one or even two samples. One way or another it is real pattern. The next question is what is actually happening.

One thesis is that the Amerotheism is not really in decline. The chief proponent of this rejectionist of modernity reality is Rodney Stark. One of the founders of the sociology of religion, Stark was involved in the falsified hypothesis that freedom of faith is behind America's retention of religiosity. A hardcore theocon – he wrote a book on why the Crusades were a good idea – Stark is notorious for egregiously selecting data to favor his propositions, as I exposed in 2009 (<http://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/greg-paul-baylor1.pdf>). Stark continues to contend that religion is doing just fine thank you, as per his 2015 fantasy book *The Triumph of Faith, Why the World is More Religious than Ever* (see the information otherwise in the last paragraphs of this analysis). Stark and a few others think that even if many are dechurching, that those who believe in gods is holding steady, but as shown below that is not true. Stark is among the few who still argue that the high atheism of younger folks will fade as they age so national religiosity will remain stable, but because such low rates of theism have never been seen before in youth, the normal rise of piety that occurs within given generation cannot recover the situation for theism – which is why the decline has been going on for decades and is accelerating in all the surveys. It also appears that theism is not rising with increasing personal age the way it has in the past. Stark tries to get around these issues by proposing that the increasing difficulty of polling people due to the shift away from landlines is causing the survey organizations to somehow increasingly miss the truly godly. I say somehow because it is well known that it is the highly nonpious millennials and XGens who are most likely to use the hard to poll cell phones, so if anything the irreligious are being *undercounted* (as explained by Pew <http://www.pewresearch.org/2010/05/20/assessing-the-cell-phone-challenge>).

Indeed, a big problem with polling Americans regarding their a/theism has always been the undercounting of the nontheists – theoinflation – due to the well-known reluctance of nonsupernaturalists who are the frequent target of disrespect and discrimination ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-do-americans-still-dislike-atheists/2011/02/18/AFqgnwGF\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.d55c61d5829e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-do-americans-still-dislike-atheists/2011/02/18/AFqgnwGF_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d55c61d5829e); and also consult <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups>) to tell pollsters they are ungodly. For example, about 40% of respondents tell Gallup that they attend churches and the like regularly, but there are not enough pews to accommodate that many believing behinds, and technical studies show that the real figure can only be about half that. So it is likely that the above figures regarding those who tell pollsters they are not religious is significantly below the actual number of Americans who are. In particular, while 40% of respondents have told Harris and RedC they are nons, Pew – in an item buried in an appendix which a person kindly alerted me about ([http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2014/03/2014-03-07\\_generations-report-version-for-web.pdf](http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2014/03/2014-03-07_generations-report-version-for-web.pdf) at p. 45) – calculated that *about half of Americans are now actually nonreligious*, ranging from a little over a third in millennials to under two thirds in oldsters. Considering how the Pew calculation corresponds just as expected with the self-reporting rates in Harris and RedC, that half of Americans are now not religious is probably correct. Further supporting that

probability is how only a fourth or fifth of Americans are dedicated churchgoers (and those megachurches are not as mega as you might think, there being only a few thousand of them, around a percent of Americans actually go to such; <https://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=93111&page=1> - this story also notes that church attendance has slipped by a fifth of late). Meanwhile many neighborhood churches are being abandoned by worshippers, often being converted to other uses (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/11/what-should-america-do-its-empty-church-buildings/576592>). That is in accord with the Gallup long term Gallup polling exposing the implosion of Ameroworship as church membership which was nearly three quarters in the 1950s, then slipped gradually to about two thirds by the turn of the century, has since tobogganed down to just half the nation in the last two decades (<http://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>)!

The last points raise another possibility. That far from being more religious than the polls are indicating these days, that Americans have always been less religious than popularly thought; and that the recent rise of the unbelievers is at least in part due to an increasing percentage of the population being willing to tell pollsters what they really think. This is a very real possibility. That's logical in the same manner that increasing numbers of LGTBQ people have come out as their sexualities became more acceptable in general society. Although discriminatory opinions against atheists remain common, they have been becoming less discriminatory with time (those willing to vote for an atheist president are now the slight majority: <http://news.gallup.com/poll/155285/atheists-muslims-bias-presidential-candidates.aspx>). If as is likely the self-reported rise of the not pious involves a degree of increasing willingness to say so, I am not aware of a means to determine what that degree is with the data on hand.

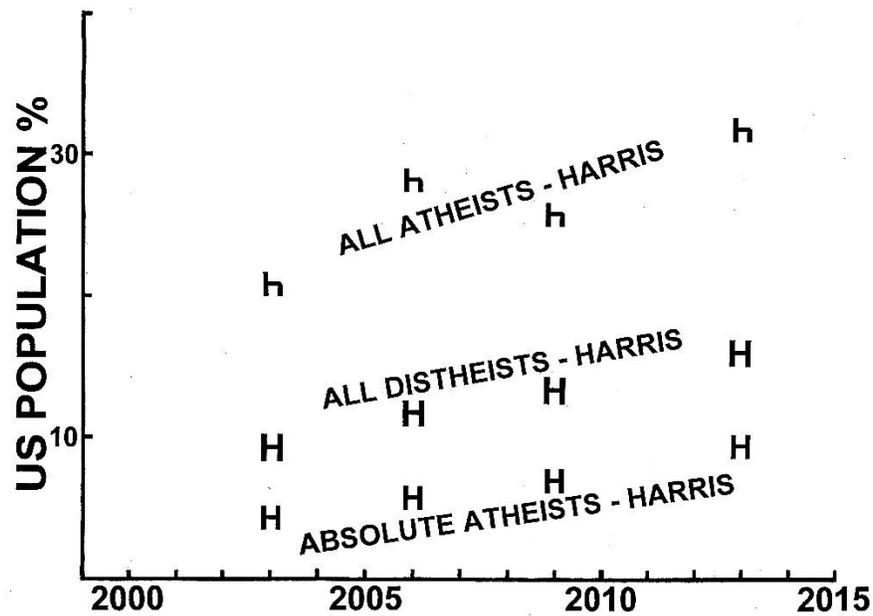
So far we have been chatting about the assorted nonreligious and nonaffiliated. Now not all nons and nones are atheists – one can have some level of belief in the existence of a deity or two or more yet not consider one's self religious or have an affiliation – indeed some theists blame and reject religion for besmirching theism. The next question is how many atheists are there in these United States? Assessing that requires that we define what an atheist is. According to the strict etymology of the word, a-theism is merely the absence of theism. So if one is not at least a marginal theist (a person who has at least a minimal belief in the existence of at least one god), then one is at least a marginal atheist (a person who lacks at least a minimal belief in the existence of at least one god). In this etymologically correct, broad definition, atheism is like theism a wide ranging, diverse opinion, and atheism includes agnosticism as originally coined by Thomas Huxley – as per Richard Dawkins who accurately labels himself an agnostic atheist. Correctly defining atheist is important because the failure to do so can lead to the size of the cohort being way undercounted, giving a false impression of limited numbers and corresponding small societal importance and influence, while facilitating discrimination against a minority that seems smaller and more out of the mainstream than it is.

Counting Ameroatheists runs into two problems. First, many consider themselves agnostics even though by not being theists they are at least marginally atheistic, so they will deny being an atheist if polled. And, because as discussed above those who do consider

themselves atheists are often reluctant to admit it, many of them clam up when asked. So in terms of determining who in absolute number really are ungodly, asking Americans straight out if they are atheists is pretty much useless (it does have other uses, such as recording the upswing in Americans who state they are atheists). Instead one has to use means less direct.

The best effort I am aware of are the 2014 Harris surveys cited above. They asked respondents if they were absolutely certain there is no God, somewhat certain, or not sure, all of which qualify as atheists by being nontheists. This atheistic collective from hardline to marginal rose from about a fifth to a third of the total population over a decade, another steep increase of a tenth of Americans. The strongly atheistic make up around half of the total, the hardline a quarter or more.

Figure 2



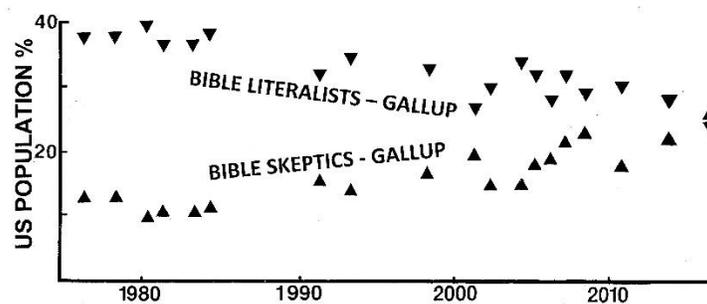
Backing the Harris results indicating that a whole lot of Americans are atheists is a study in *Social Psychology and Personality Science* (<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/05/170516143411.htm>). Gervais and Najle used methods others have devised to estimate how many discriminated against people actually hold an opinion relative to how many will say so pollsters, to estimate the number of Ameroatheists as probably in the area of a quarter of the population. This is in good accord with Harris, all the more so because the *SPPS* study may not be including the most marginal atheists. It can therefore be concluded with reasonable confidence that somewhere around a quarter to a third of Americans are at least marginal atheists, with around a fifth the population convinced albeit

not necessarily absolute atheists, and rising at a fast clip. Making this all the more remarkable is that nontheists don't reproduce as fast as the theists – especially the theocons – and organized atheism is tiny compared to organized theism, so the growth of atheism and irreligion is occurring because the theists are losing their faith faster than they can replicate and propagandize themselves! And the increasing atheism is good evidence that the rise of the not religious is in at least some portion, probably predominantly, due to increasing antisupernaturalism.

Of course the upsurge of Yankee atheism is coming at the expense of theism. Even blacks, long a bulwark of Amerotheism, are losing some faith. The white working class is dechurching too. Making up about a fifth of Americans, polls differ on whether Catholics are holding fairly steady or are slipping, in either case only massive Latino immigration is keeping the US wing of the Roman church from rapidly withering as whites leave in droves. The Protestants that once made up the great majority are now at minority status. Of course the center-left mainline churches have long been shedding big numbers. But rather than the Protestant right expanding at the mainline sects' expense as often thought, it is more likely that the maybe one quarter of the population that is theocon held fairly level during the late 1900s – the data is too skimpy to be sure. Nor is as many may think the theoright holding steady these days, it is shrinking (although the pace at which it is doing so differs between surveys). Since circa 1980 Gallup has been recording a steady and strong descent in Bible literalism from about 40% to now about a quarter, as those who think the Judeo-Christian scriptures are made up now match or exceed the literalists (<http://news.gallup.com/poll/210704/record-few-americans-believe-bible-literal-word-god.aspx>)!

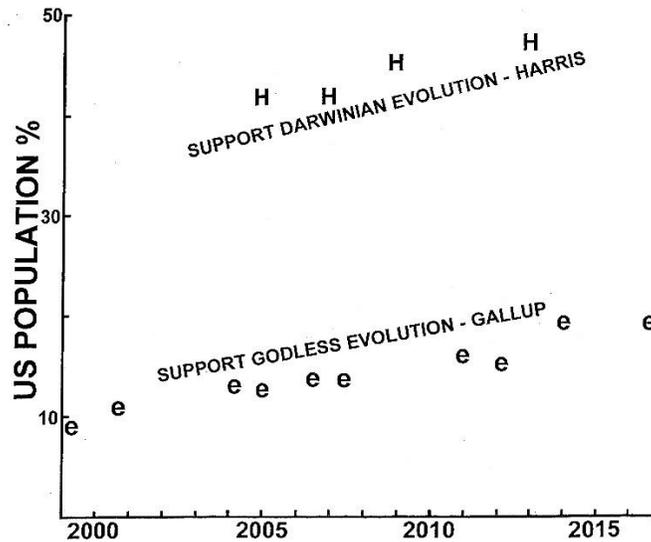
Southern Baptists are baptizing new members at the same rate as they did in the 1950s when the United States population was half as large ([http://equip.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/05sbt\\_091\\_spr05-rainer.pdf?\\_ga=2.205153561.822157947.1526693480-1350688713.1526693480](http://equip.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/05sbt_091_spr05-rainer.pdf?_ga=2.205153561.822157947.1526693480-1350688713.1526693480)). All other sects make up tiny portions of the total population, and although concentrations of Mormons, Orthodox Jews and Muslims enjoy local majorities, they show no signs of making big gains on the national scale despite rapid reproduction. Various forms of neopaganism and occultism may be enjoying modest expansion via conversion from Judeo-Christianity.

Figure 3



Obviously atheists do not creationists make, so the upswing in American disbelief in a creator is logically tied to a boost in popular support of evolution by entirely natural means sans a creator deity (see the 2014 Harris survey; and also <http://news.gallup.com/poll/210956/belief-creationist-view-humans-new-low.aspx>; and also <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/07/01/chapter-4-evolution-and-perceptions-of-scientific-consensus/>). At about five percent per decade the growth of proevolution opinion is not as fast as that of atheists because a substantial portion of former theists accepted evolutionary science before they dropped belief in the gods. Because the Gallup question explicitly includes the god factor, the response rates in favor of evolution is very probably too low, the Harris response may be too high because some may not understand that Darwin's theory excludes any creator entity, so the percent of Americans who really do support the fully scientific veracity of creation is probably in the area of a third, as indicated by the Pew result. That creationist opinion is correspondingly downsizing makes sense seeing as how Bible literalism is strongly withering – those who buy into the full young earth, flood story are probably a fifth or less taking theinflation into account. So as exasperating to those who accept reality they are, Ken Ham's Flintstone style Ark park and creation museum are not stopping the decline of fundamentalist creationism. Likewise the seemingly more sophisticated Wedge Strategy by Philip Johnson, Michael Behe and the Discovery Institute to somehow insert Intelligent Design creationism into academe and then make is increasingly popular among the public has flopped. As a result of the current weakening of Amerocreationism, the AAAS seems to have dropped making it a leading subject of concern, and even the NCSE is also putting as much emphasis on rejection of global warming as on the attack on evolutionary science.

Figure 4



(Not well understood are the demographics regarding certain subgenres of theism. Catholic exorcisms appear to be on the rise – <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/12/catholic-exorcisms-on-the-rise/573943> – as may be belief in the devil. But the last Gallup survey on the latter occurred in 2007, so the latest trendlines are not on hand. Any rise in such beliefs may be a response to the growing rejection of God by many Americans.)

So aside from a very few like Stark being in deep denial, most theists from left to right are rather in a panic as even the good old USA goes at increasing speed the way of the rest of the secular west. As per theocon John Dickerson's *The Great Evangelical Recession*. And of course many, mainly but by no means exclusively theoconservatives, are bemoaning and warning how the loss of mass faith in the existence of a moral intelligent designer cannot help but lead to American going to hell in a societal handcart. Which of course is a patent lie as shown by every large scale study on the issue, which shows that the more atheistic and evolution friendly democracies are, the better are their overall societal conditions both at any given moment, and over time (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/147470490900700305>). The growing body of scientific research since the turn of century showing that the most proevolution and atheistic societies are the best off, and the abject inability of theists to show otherwise, may be encouraging the growth of atheism – although to my vexation the research I am contributing too remains far less well known that it should be.

From a historical perspective, the great project by Billy Graham he launched in the mid 1900s to return America to its churchly roots has failed, while the secularization hypothesis that modernity is toxic to mass piety is proving true, even if it has taken longer to get into gear in the USA than antisupernaturalists prefer. And dead as a dodo is the myth that religion is universal to human brains, and can only be cast off with profound effort.

From a sociological perspective, if freethinkers in the form of nons, nones, and atheists are now increasing by 5 to 10% of total Americans each decade or so, then in objective demographic terms that is spectacular, and in practical terms is probably about as high as is demographically possible. That has critical implications for the further issues that need to be dealt with.

To start, that nontheism is demographically doing about as well as it can automatically establish both that activist atheism is far from failing, yet cannot do much to speed things up. In particular, the chronic debate about whether atheism should be deferentially respectful of theism, or on the hardline attack, or some combination, is irrelevant and should be dropped. When the aggressive “new” atheism appeared in the 2000s many feared that it would backfire by antagonizing fence sitters and driving them back to theism. Based in part on social research that suggests that confrontational tactics can be counterproductive, the argument has proven as false as is say creationism, because if

anything secularization has sped up in the wake of the advent of modern confrontational Ameroatheism. That does not, however, establish that take no prisoners antitheism is responsible for the atheist boom, the two available possibilities are that it is either a contributing factor, or irrelevant. To see if we can figure out what is going on is another kettle of sociological fish.

About that big question – why is America secularizing, and at a faster pace since 2000? – when I wrote the 2002 *FI* article on the decline of western religion there was little understanding of why a/theism is or is not popular. After a decade and a half worth's of research and analysis including by yours truly the subject is now far better understood – although even today many still imagine religion is universal to the human condition like language; which to be blunt is obtuse in view of the low religiosity of many modern cultures which are doing fine without much religion, while running societies without language is patently impossible, which is why language is universal.

Working against religion in general has been the tremendous power of modernity, although the way it does so is far from simple. It is a complex that includes how science and education has removed the need for divine supernatural explanations for our existence and how things work in favor of natural explanations (which is why people tend to leave college more atheistic than when they arrived). If, for example, science had left no doubt that the universe and our planet were of recent origin, and/or that bioevolution had not occurred, leaving no alternative to the existence of a creator intelligence, then we would all be theists. As it is the pathetic efforts of Ken Ham – a weird Aussie who has done more than any other to let Americans know that the fundamentalists actually think humans like Fred, Barney and Wilma used to ride dinosaurs that after they left the Ark were hunted to extinction by armored knights – may well be doing the creationist cause more damage than benefit (nor can it be good for Biblical creationists that they are OK with the descendants of Adam and Eve engaging in incest, <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/cain/who-was-wife-of-cain>). And the pseudoscientific creationist institutions are vastly outnumbered by the natural history museums and science centers that – backed by a major biotech industry that depends on evolutionary science – promote mainstream science regarding deep time and evolution. Because science has not produced evidence for any god, and because no gods (like aliens of bigfoot) bother to show up and establish their existence, religion is an optional opinion that is easily cast off by many.

Also – and quite ironically – working against theism is the very Holy Bible itself. Among the many atheists I know a good portion were believing JudeoChristians until they got around to reading the entire Good Book and were so disgusted by its dreadfully immoral contents and its obviously human inconsistencies – and by how their clergies had lied to them – that they went atheist. As per Julia Sweeney's *Letting Go of God*.

But the Bible effect is dwarfed by how a leading feature of modernity, the development via industrialization of secure mass middle class prosperity at a level never before seen in human history, has done more than anything else to remove the common albeit not universal, psychological drive to seek aid and comfort via supernatural gods that is the core foundation of popular theism and religion. As I detailed in *Evolutionary Psychology* (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/147470490900700305>), it is not

possible for a highly successful society to be highly religious and vice-versa. The secularization effect of running societies well works best in the hybrid capitalist/socialist countries that produce the best results, which is a key reason that the exceptionally dysfunctional, capitalism focused USA has lagged behind the rest of the more irreligious west. Growing knowledge that atheistic democracies are – directly contrary to the dire warnings that godless societies are doomed to perdition – is probably further encouraging secularization. That progressive socioeconomics is so consistently effective at secularizing societies means that the opposition of the religious right in favor of more laissez-faire policies is logical in that particular regard.

But while free-wheeling capitalism American style has somewhat suppressed a national shift to atheism, capital is itself a powerful force for large scale secularization. Mass industry produces far more goods than people actually need, so it is under intense perpetual pressure to push people to buy as much stuff and services as they possibly can. In practical financial terms, the last thing that corporate-consumer industrial scale capitalism needs is for the population to consist largely of pious, virtuous, spiritually oriented, frugal, tithing, and spending a lot of time at church people of God. What profit obsessed corporate-consumer industrial scale capitalism demands is that the population consist largely of hedonistic, materialistic, celebrity, sports, and sex obsessed consumers who are addicted to buying as much stuff and services as they can, preferably by going into the debt that generates additional income via interest, and who spend as little on noncommercial items such as non cash generating religion as possible. That is why American retail mounted a long term legal effort to repeal the Puritanical Blue Laws that kept their stores closed on Sundays. As a result the largest retail chain Walmart owned by the theocon Walton family, draws droves of employees and customers away from Jesus worship on Sunday mornings. Whether one likes corporate capitalism or not, that has to be eroding church attendance and membership.

Over the last two centuries the commercial conspiracy that is as tacit as it is enormous to hyper materialize the culture has been spectacularly successful. That is not surprising. Because the commercially financed promotional resources of corporate capital dwarf those of charity funded religion, *and* because the real world material pleasures offered up by cool, hip commerce blow away the unreliable spiritual promises of often hectoring, lecturing, dour, and square religion, organized theism lacks the ability to compete with modernity in much of the world. One of the great ironies of modern times is how the American religious right that claims to be anti-radical has naively embraced the culturally radicalizing and antireligious force that is capital. True, many wealthy theocons put a lot of their money into the religious right, and the theocon-corporate religious alliance has given the religious right political power it would otherwise not enjoy, but those benefits are being overwhelmed by the intense long term secularization effect of the capitalism they are part of. Consider how Rupert Murdoch whose early fortune was made in part via tabloid nudies makes big money off of his FoxNews that denounces nontheism, even as his more lucrative Fox entertainment empire produces enmass the very kind of secularizing product his FoxNews pundits whine about!

Not that all theists are so gullible – the Catholic Church has long warned of the dangers unrestrained capital poses to mass spirituality, and it is no accident that Islamic extremists want folks to live more like they did circa 1500 CE.

But we dwell in 2000+ CE, and a common casual theory among atheists these days is that social media is doing a serious number on religion by – for the first time in history – making it easy for uneasy supernaturalists and fence sitters to access the abundant information that makes theism look as absurd as it is, while showing that most atheists are not such bad folks after all. While there may be truth to that thesis, it is yet to be shown to be actually operative – after all social media is doing a scarily excellent job of promoting mass disinformation, including paranormalism, on a scale never seen before. What is quite likely is that this 21st century expression of corporate-consumer capital via social media is disassociating youth in particular from real world social organizations. Since churches et al. are among such social organizations, they are finding it increasingly difficult to draw in young folks and proceed to train them to be theists.

Conversely, it is very likely that a generational, demographic feedback effect is becoming increasingly efficacious, to the degree that it may be the biggest factor behind the current boom of Ameroatheism. Back when almost all parents were theists it could be hard for their kids to go atheist. Now that more and more American dads and moms are atheists it is increasingly easy to grow up without religion – and increasingly hard to be a theist – which leads to more atheists to beget yet more nontheists. And as atheists become more common they become more mainstream and socially acceptable to be, encouraging even more to go atheist. Also not helping religion is the increasing rate of theologically mixed marriages, which increases the theistic ambiguity of parents at the expense of dedication.

In an interesting new paper sophisticated statistical analysis of socioeconomic patterns in the 1900s appears to show that the secularization process ran ahead of the socioeconomic improvements (<http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/7/eaar8680.full>). It is not entirely certain whether the limited data available for the last century is sufficient to prove this scenario, but if at least partly true it means that atheization of societies is not merely the result of good societal conditions, but is a major force behind them. The researchers' postulate that that the rise in personal and societal freedoms damages dogmatic spiritualistic religion while it promotes the free-wheeling capitalism that tends to make lives better as it converts folks into materialists is plausible. One way or another, a powerful multi-factor feedback system of modernity is beating the living daylights out of religion.

And specific post-20th century recent events may be having their impact. Such as the end of the Cold War. Encouraged by President Eisenhower who put God into the national motto and pledge, to be a freedom loving American demanded being Godly because freethinking was seen as aiding Godless Bolshevism. Not only is that of little import to those born since, but the current hostile Russian regime is in bed with the Russian Orthodox Church. By graphically showing the dire dangers of taking the existence of a god much too seriously, the horror of 9/11 may have made the atheization of the USA more rapid than it would have been otherwise (same for all the religion related atrocities and strife abroad). And that theoterror assault sparked the wave of aggressive atheism that although it was probably not critical – the atheist boom probably would have occurred without it – certainly

did not slow things down, and may have greased the skids some. In part by making outright atheism cool and hip and out there for youth (consider how blacks and then gays shedding their deferential postures and becoming more aggressive improved their fortunes). And assertive atheism encouraged many atheists to come out of their closets, further mainstreaming the opinion (again as per the gay experience of normalization via coming out). Meanwhile the constant stream of jaw dropping Catholic and Protestant scandals can't be helping Amerofaith. But a common opinion that the sociopolitical excesses of the religious right are a major force behind Amerosecularization is problematic, because of the obvious fact that the most theoconservative western nation is also still the most religious - after all, all those theocon citizens are religious.

While activists on both sides are prone to see the contest between rational, scientific atheism versus faith-based, superstitious theism as a grand battle of ideas, it cannot be overemphasized that most whether theist or atheist are not ardent about it, and for the great majority their level of a/theism is a casual affair, based on nonintellectual lifestyle choices and social tribalism driven by the grand societal trends discussed above that no one has control of. Whatever has been causing America to lose the religion many have presumed it would always sustain, there has been a tendency even among activist atheists to way underestimate the number of nontheists – the secular community has been particularly over prone to cite Pew's modest counts of the unaffiliated nones, this when the unaffiliated nones and are a smaller subset of the nonreligious nons; many nons are church goers for social/familial purposes.

*In all scientific, statistical demographic, seriousness don't do that anymore, stop citing the PEW stats on the unaffiliated ad nauseam!!! Aside from being lazy, doing that is helping perpetuate the myth that American freethinking remains a minor demographic phenomenon.*

Instead, promote the much more pertinent and compelling Pew, Harris and RedC counts of the nonreligious at 40-50%, and of atheists instead – particularly the Harris atheist count and the Gervais and Najle study, I recently saw Bill Maher cite an undercount of atheists. With up to a fifth of Americans being convinced atheists, and perhaps half again at least marginal atheists, that means some 50 to 80 million teen and adult Americans are probably atheists of one sort or another. Aside from being accurate, it is important to spread the word on the big numbers in order to help boost the fortunes of nontheism. After all, such numbers broadly match those of Catholics and evangelicals respectively, and dwarf those of Jews, Mormons and Muslims. While the latter three remain the small minorities that atheists used to be, atheists are now a large minority like evangelicals and Catholics, but unlike those sects are growing. The number of all nonreligious may approach or match those of Catholics and evangelicals combined. About 3/4s of atheists and nonreligious are social and economic liberals and progressives (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/10-facts-about-atheists>). The rest of nontheists are largely libertarians (the ideology's founders including prominent atheists such as Ayn Rand) and moderate-conservatives, hardly any atheists are social conservatives.

On one hand, secularism is vastly more culturally influential than it was a century ago when the religious right pretty much ran the country via draconian cultural norms and

legal enforcement of puritanical social regulations. These days gays get married and folks run down sidewalks in athletic briefs and bras. But while the broad secular side and center-left have largely won the mainstream culture war to the point of driving the religious right into a minority parallel culture, the latter remain roughly equivalent contenders in the political war that is tearing the country apart, to the extent that hardly any atheists openly run for office notwithstanding the opinion being about one in four of the electorate. It is painfully obvious that despite being a large chunk of Americana, nontheists are politically punching way beneath their weight in view of the far more prominent role still being played by Amerotheism, especially theocons whose Republican politicians control the federal and most state governments despite being a minority about equal in number to nontheists. There are a number of reasons for this vexing political failure of the seculars.

For starters, organized religion is just that, organized, giving their tribe a big leg up in influencing sociopolitical events more deeply than their numbers should allow. Conversely, a reason that many reject organized religion is because they don't like social organizations – the last thing yours truly wants to do is go to some sort of scripted atheoservices on a weekly basis, I hated it as a kid and still do. So while tens of millions regularly attend churches, atheist groups are hard pressed to get a few dozen folks to attend social and discussion groups once a month in a given city. Efforts to build a major organized atheist movement that can come close to competing with the some 400,000 churches (the numbers are squirrely, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/september/how-many-churches-in-america-us-nones-nondenominational.html>) are correspondingly futile. But mass organization has major limits. After all, being organized is not keeping religion from losing their dominance of the culture and their numbers. When it comes to being politically powerful it's about the ballot box.

Here is a core truth that remains remarkably and foolishly under appreciated by seculars and other progressives. The core reason that the center-left both nonreligious and theolib has since the end of the last century failed to take greater control of the political situation is because for decades progressives, atheists included, and largely irreligious youth to an especially scandalous degree, have voted at a markedly lower per capita rate than have conservatives, thereby handing an inordinate level of political power to the theocon minority (<http://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/20/opinion/voter-turnout-democrats-republicans.html>). The rural versus urban population distribution of the country including its effect on the Senate, Electoral College, gerrymandering, and voter suppression also favor the theoright. But if seculars had simply been fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens of a democracy to vote as regularly as have theocons over the decades, then the center left would have won the 2000, 2004, 2010 and 2016 elections, and the nation would be politically be markedly more atheosecular and progressive than it is, and if seculars start voting as consistently at the right, then it will become so.

If on the other hand a large portion of nonreligious continue to be too lazy, disaffected, or ignorant of the workings of the national political system (as per how many liberals do not understand that past progressive Supreme Court decisions like Roe v Wade can be overturned; <http://thewashingtonpost.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/viewer.aspx>) to vote, the more reliably voting religious right will continue to enjoy political power through

the GOP well above their portion of the total citizenry, doing considerable damage in the process. But don't blame theocons for using the tools of democracy to try to establish a tyranny of the theocon minority; instead establish a rule of the center-left majority made up of seculars and religious moderates and liberals by fulfilling our duty to vote.

As for the demographic future, there is every reason to expect the USA to continue to secularize more towards the western norm at a fast pace despite the frantic but inherently insufficient effective counter efforts of organized theism. The unprecedented nonreligiosity of youth and the dechurching power of modernity cannot be overcome, which is why there never has been a serious religious revival in any advanced democracy. Because the rise of proevolution atheism is a largely automatic, casual lifestyle conversion in response to subtle but powerful socioeconomic forces usually done without deep thought, it will remain true that neither side can do much to alter the course of events one way or another.

In view of that future probability, it is advisable that the emphasis of the activist atheist-secular movement (as small as it is and will be) should shift to a substantial but not total degree. The main focus need not be to promote conversion to rationalism for the simple sake of increasing the number of the nonsupernaturalists, seeing as how modernity is already doing that job about as fast as can be done. Actively convincing those in one tribal worldview to switch to another is very difficult and will produce modest results. Secularists are often criticized for living in their own bubble and not paying sufficient, respectful attention to, and reaching out to, the white heartlander theocons. I personally know a fair number of such people via familial relationships, and believe me they are noncurious folk who care little if at all about the research, opinions or hopes of the intellectual, scientists, or anyone else outside the confines of their bubble which is much tighter than ours. Nor is debating whether aggressive or nonconfrontational tactics are best important because many techniques work depending on the circumstances – let a Darwinian freedom of means of presentation reign. The primary effort should move more towards further changing the political culture, both at the national level, and within the atheist portion.

Regarding the national scene, atheism needs to come out into the open to maximize its societal influence. That in turn requires individuals to come out of the atheocloset enmass. The way to do that is to make atheism increasingly less culturally out of the norm until it is a norm, by boosting comfort and indeed pride in not being a supernaturalist – after all, there should be nothing wrong with thinking and coming to conclusions scientifically, it's those who delve into irrational speculations about mysterious powers who have issues. All the more so because the best off societies are never highly religious.

Making it easier for atheists to be openly so requires among other things continuing to spread as much fact and science based information to the public as is possible, which will also help increase the rate of conversion at the margins. And because getting the rational truth out there is a goal in of itself. Especially important to improving the image of nontheism in informing the nation how atheism is not the source of America's problems. For example, the knee jerk theocon claim that the epidemic of mass school shootings afflicting the most religious western nation is a consequence of the declining fear of divine punishment and reward is readily countered by explaining that the most atheistic democracies enjoy the lowest murder rates in history, and suffer few mass murders aside

from those conducted by militant Muslims. And how rates of homicide and crime have been on the wane in the USA since the Reagan era. One can throw in the Godly violence contained in the Judeo-Christian testaments, including the violent side of Christ – think his criminal assault upon the temple for one thing (and that it is not possible for any creator of the gravely defective planet that we live on to be a moral, benign entity, <http://www.gspauldino.com/Philosophy&Theology.pdf>).

Regarding the atheosecular culture, at the same time that promoting that being an atheist should no longer be a matter of personal or societal shame in the culture at large, it is at least equally important to change the secular culture to make it shameful for a nontheist to not do all they can to save democracy by voting. And get atheists to openly run for office, and win by voting for them. In this regard the recent formation of the Congressional Freethought Caucus is a potentially ground breaking step (<http://thehill.com/homenews/house/385573-dem-reps-launch-congressional-freethought-caucus>). The main effort should not be to change the mind of the opposition minority, it should be to outvote them. The results of the 2018 election are encouraging in this regard, and we need to see the same in 2020, 2022, 2024... Also needing attention is that women are much less prone to being nontheists than are men ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/03/30/why-women-are-more-religious-than-men/?utm\\_term=.6287640a55b2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/03/30/why-women-are-more-religious-than-men/?utm_term=.6287640a55b2)).

As for the proevolution effort, the tactic of trying to educate theists to accept the evolution of humans over deep time is at best marginally effective – there is no such thing as a developed democracy that is both proevolution and highly religious and probably never will be – but if in the unlikely event it can be made to work it is the only means of speeding up the acceptance of bioevolution. The most practical strategy is to wait for the organic increase in the size of the atheist cohort to automatically boost proevolution opinion. As such the recent deemphasis of proevolution activity by the NCSE and AAAS is logical; but of course educational and legal efforts must continue as long as creationism is a serious societal and antiscientific issue – after all, we’re still dealing with flatearthers (whose views are often Bible based BTW).

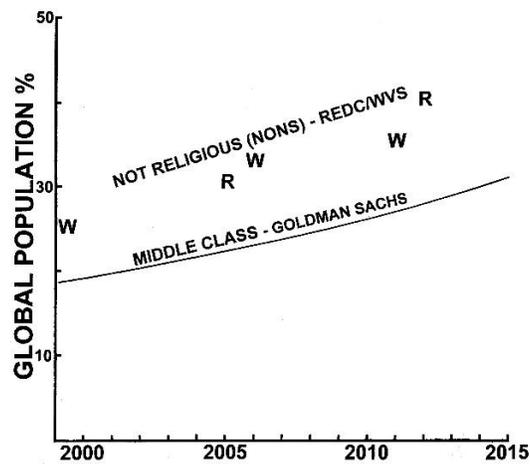
And for as much trouble as it is causing, the theocon minority – in alliance with an increasing secular white nationalist cohort – has handed Ameroatheism a big gift that will last forever – that a socially deranged faith-based theocon collective helped make Trump president bares like nothing else that they have long been pulling a colossal, cynical con as they proclaimed that as followers of the perfect creator they are the advocates of principled, unchanging morality and decency. By exposing themselves as in the main morally relative opportunists with a propensity towards neoracism, theocons have permanently wrecked their hypocritical pretense of having high moral principles, so much so that a minority of theocons are in despair over what has happened to the future prospects of their ideology. They can never take it back, and for decades to come when theocons start going on about their godly morality we can always bring up Trump.

Briefly turning to the international scene, a new report finds that Euroyouth are so highly nonreligious (<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-mar-europe-young-people-report-eng.pdf>) that the churches across the pond are pretty much permanently cooked, the same applies to the other advanced democracies, Canada,

Australia, New Zealand, as well as Japan. The same report reveals that fears that pious EuroMuslims are about to take over the subcontinent are false – aside from being small minorities, they too are overall secularizing (<http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2010/05/eu-muslims-go-to-mosque-less-often.html>). Ironically, it is the right wing, pseudopopulist reaction against the Muslim immigration (driven largely by the chaos in Syria and Libya) that constitutes the greatest danger to Eurodemocracy.

On the global scale, the World Values Survey and the RedC poll cited earlier find that those who lack religion have increased from 30 to around 40% since the beginning of the century, a steep rise that aside from being strikingly similar to that in America, is in good accord with the rise of the middle class over the same period. Not that all abroad is rosy atheist wise. Reactionary autocratic hyperpatriarchal religious elements, mostly Muslim but also Christian, Hindu and Buddhist, are waging campaigns of intolerant nationalism and populism, ethnic cleansing, terror and war that have killed a few million since the end of the Cold War largely ceased large scale violence by atheocommunists. In Mexico and some Central American states the Catholic hierarchy as allied with criminal cartels and autocratic regimes. Although the above noted anti-immigrant authoritarian elements infesting the European Union are not necessarily deeply pious, they cite Christian heritage and values. Perpetually dysfunctional Russia has seen a revival of religion as the Russian Orthodox Church allies with the dictatorial regime – but that church attendance remains low (<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church>) indicates that it is more about reactionary nationalism than actually thinking there really is a supernatural creator. The situation in China is interesting and disturbing. Even with significant growth of Christianity and especially Sinopaganism, RedC found that only one sixth are religious, and about half are convinced atheists – what is perturbing is that the officially atheist dictatorship with a Confuciusist veneer is constructing the closest thing to a 1984 style regime yet seen.

Figure 5



With 600 million strong atheists in China alone, there are probably over a billion atheists worldwide. Projections by Pew (<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050>) that global religion is bound to rise in coming decades due to more rapid reproduction are demographically obtuse and simplistic – the Pew people do not seem to understand that mass conversion driven by modernity can and is overwhelming retention of traditional supernaturalism by replication. Pew’s estimate that 1.1 billion are currently unaffiliated is a large undercount of the irreligious. Their calculation that in 2050 the unaffiliated will total just 1.2 billion out of a population of 9.5 billion comes across as naïve. They really should know better.