

The Social Science of Secularity

Frank L. Pasquale

Something novel happened during this century's first decade: Social scientists (re)discovered the nonreligious. Call it "reaching critical mass" or a "tipping point," but suddenly quite a few researchers in quite a few places began to focus their attention directly on the nonreligious—not just as a foil for better understanding the religious but as a subject of inquiry in their own right.

There have, of course, been studies in the past few decades of the phenomenon of religious doubt and populations with labels such as "nones" (those who profess no named religious affiliation or identity), "apostates" (an unfortunate term for those who exit or abandon religion), the "unchurched," and the "unreligious," among others. But apart from a few notable exceptions, much of this work has aimed to learn why religion was failing these people rather than learning who they are, how they think, how diverse they are, what they do, and why.

Four decades ago, "unbelief" and "irreligion" were briefly explored as coherent fields of study, but these initiatives were regrettably short-lived. The focus on unbelief was an initiative of—*mirabile dictu*—the Vatican! The Baby Boom generation was experimenting with various beliefs—and with unbelief. It seemed to most social scientists at the time that the Enlightenment vision of religion's decline was well under way, at least in the Euro-American sphere. Secularization was top of mind.

"Responding to the challenge of unbelief and religious indifference" and drawing "lost sheep . . . back into the fold" were on the minds of congregants at the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s.¹ By decade's end, many of the world's foremost sociologists of religion gathered—at the behest of the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-believers—for a conference in Rome to consider "the culture of unbelief." This failed, however, to congeal into a coherent field of study. As the proceedings published in 1971 make clear, conferees were mired in uncertainty about definitions of "unbelief" and how to study it.²

More important, 1971 also saw the publication of British sociologist Colin Campbell's groundbreaking *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion*—a cogent and richly detailed outline for a new field of study. Despite a brief flurry of activity, the sociology of irreligion ultimately proved to be, as one observer later put it, "stillborn." This had nothing to do with the importance of such a field or the quality of Campbell's work, which is as timely and insightful now as then. It had more to do with the preoccupations of social scientists at the time and what immediately ensued.

In much of Western Europe, Christianity's salience and societal grip quietly continued to wane. But in the United States, the sixties' sensibility and significant Supreme Court rulings on religious expression and abortion triggered an increasingly public and politically active Christian conservatism. Confidence in straight-line secularization faltered.

By the 1990s, however, data sources like the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) and the General Social Survey (GSS) detected a sudden increase—from about 7 to 14 percent—in Americans who declined to identify themselves as members of named religions. The louder and more politically involved the religious right had become, it seems, the more some people—especially the young—were backing away from formal, public, or private religious identification.

As the new century began, dramatic acts of religion-related terrorism convulsed the country and the world. Soon thereafter came the gallop of “new atheist horsemen” straddling the Atlantic who took broad, strident issue with religious beliefs, behavior, and institutions.

Social scientists were not immune to these developments. Signs of activity began building around the turn of the century, but by mid-decade the proverbial rubber hit the road. Papers and special sessions concerning irreligion and the nonreligious began to appear increasingly at professional meetings such as the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. An Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture was established in 2005 by Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, authors of the ARIS studies. In the same year, William Bainbridge published an article titled “Atheism” using data from an Internet survey gathered in 2001. Bruce Hunsberger and Bob Altemeyer published *Atheists: A Groundbreaking Study of America's Nonbelievers* (2006) based on data gathered earlier in the decade. (They had already devoted the better part of another book to “amazing apostates” in 1997.) Benson Saler and Charles Ziegler speculated about biological bases for atheism (2006). Penny Edgell and her colleagues focused attention on attitudes toward atheists in the United States (2006). An article first drafted in 2005 on the empirical study and neglect of unbelief and irreligion became an entry in the *New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (2007). Also in 2007, a paper by Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith—originally presented at a professional meeting in 2003—explored shifts in strategy among freethinkers in the United States. Intellectual historian Charles Taylor was concluding that ours is—in several distinct senses—*A Secular Age* (2007), while Phil Zuckerman was gathering data in Denmark for a book on *Society without God* (published in 2008). This barely skims the surface, and since mid-decade the pace has only increased.

The new social scientific focus on the nonreligious is exemplified by two innovative organizations—the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN, the “Network”) and the Center for Atheist Research (CAR, the “Center”). The Network was spearheaded by Lois Lee, a doctoral student in sociology at the University of Cambridge (United Kingdom) in 2008 (with Stephen Bullivant, Nicholas Gibson, and Stacey Gutkowski becoming codirectors soon after). The Center, established in 2009, is a collaboration among three young scholars: Ryan Cragun, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Tampa; Joe

Hammer, a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Iowa State University; and Karen Hwang, who received her doctorate in counseling psychology at Rutgers University.

Each provided insights into this emerging field for this article through a series of e-mail exchanges and some of their work, both published and unpublished.

NSRN and CAR

As Lee, Cragun, Hammer, and Hwang approached professional academic careers mid-decade, each began to explore what was known—based on systematic research—about nonreligious or secular people. Reviews of the research literature yielded the same conclusion: surprisingly little. And some of what they found was disconcerting.

Lee was interested in modernity, with a focus on nonreligion and the secular, but when she began working in the area in late 2005 and early 2006, it became apparent that there was “a marked absence of research.” Similarly, Cragun’s “initial interest came from [his] own experience, but then as [his] attention turned to the literature, it became apparent that this was a neglected area of study in the social science of religion.” Moreover, “the closest you could find was research looking at why people leave religion and it was all done by religious scholars who framed such behavior as deviance. I didn’t feel like I was being deviant in my own life by pursuing what made sense and was seemingly rational. So, I figured it was time for someone who was sympathetic to nonreligion to step into the fray and contribute.”

Hammer had “learned about stigma, prejudice, and discrimination in the context of racial/ethnic and LGBT minority experience.” But two seminal studies published in 2006—one by Penny Edgell and her colleagues on attitudes toward atheists in the United States and Hunsberger and Altemeyer’s study of atheists themselves—prompted him to “begin wondering about how findings regarding the nature and impact of discrimination might apply to secular individuals.” Hwang was confronted by a wave of research and practical emphasis on “spirituality” and religion in medicine while completing a postdoc in physical medicine and rehabilitation. This prompted interest in “atheists with disabilities—a neglected minority in religion and rehabilitation research.”

Since atheism, nonreligiosity, and the like have been somewhat controversial subjects both within and outside mainstream social science, the wisdom (or potential drawbacks) of such a professional focus may have been a concern. Perspectives on this issue seem to reflect a shift in prevailing attitudes in social science but also differences between the United States and Europe (or at least the United Kingdom). Hammer and Cragun reported greater initial concern than Lee, who said that she hadn’t “any particular concerns about choosing this area of study. . . . There are some clear differences in U.S. and European work, which follows from the very different status that nonreligious people occupy in these two settings. My feeling is that, in general, social scientific work in the U.S. tends to give nonreligion a minority status and concepts of ‘deviance’ seem to play a much greater role. I think this is less common in the U.K. and in Europe, where nonreligion accounts for much larger shares of the population and the majority in many places.” By contrast, both Cragun and Hammer “absolutely” felt

that “this has been a concern.” Both consulted academic mentors early on to test the waters. Their advisors did not, however, discourage such a choice. Instead, as Hammer’s advisor suggested, “make sure whatever research you conduct and publish is addressing an important societal issue; if secularity fills the bill, go for it.”

Although both NSRN and CAR are “going for it,” they are doing so in different ways. NSRN is, as its name indicates, a network of scholars across the globe, academic disciplines, and the religious-secular spectrum who share professional interest in systematic research on secularity and the nonreligious.³ Its aims are “to share and disseminate social scientific research on nonreligion and secularity; to facilitate new research by enabling researchers to be in touch with one another across disciplines, nations, and other boundaries; and foster opportunities for collaboration.” To these ends, said Lee, “the bulk of NSRN activity involves three things: (1) email lists which provide a way for scholars to keep in touch with one another and key events in the field; (2) the website (<http://www.nsrn.net>), which makes much of that research centrally available, both to researchers and non-academic users; and (3) organized events which include face-to-face conferences, methods workshops, an annual lecture series, and virtual conferencing.” NSRN “is growing with perceived demand, and this shows no sign of abating. Further projects are being developed all the time and include building an online resource for teachers of nonreligion research, an online archive of primary data, and an interactive bibliography of relevant research.”

Aims at the Center are similar but place greater emphasis on direct research by the principals. Its objectives are to “draw attention to the importance of the social scientific study of secular individuals, inform the public about research, communicate and collaborate with other colleagues, assist individuals and organizations interested in this field, and provide opportunities for people around the world to participate in research studies through the Internet [<http://atheistresearch.org>].” Research projects currently under way include: studies of the health and well-being of nonreligious women; comparison of health data between secular and religious people; development of a cross-culturally valid self-report measure of secularity; a nationally (U.S.) representative survey of rates and types of discrimination reported by secular individuals; and a study of relationships between discrimination and reported well-being.

While the Center’s name suggests a focus on atheism, as its aims and research activities indicate, the scope is broader than this. *Atheist* was used in the Center’s name, Hammer noted, because it is “more recognizable to the public. If ‘secularity’ were more widely recognized and understood, we would have preferred to go with that.” This has been a consideration at NSRN as well. Said Lee: “For many, the term *atheism* has become so laden with connotations of activism, if not militantism, that it was, especially a few years ago, often difficult to engage the interest of scholars. The perception was that we were a mouthpiece for some New Atheist agenda. We have thus taken great pains to distance ourselves from any philosophical, theological, or popular discussions and to emphasize our fundamentally social scientific agenda.”

A scholarly focus is of utmost concern for both groups. This said, there are some differences in perspective and focus that reflect the cultural contexts in which they are based.

Current Issues and Research in the Field

What has been most impressive about this nascent field for Lee is “the enormous diversity of approaches researchers are now taking toward the study of nonreligion and secularity.” In one of NSRN’s early workshops in Cambridge, twenty scholars reported on research being done in Egypt, England, India, Israel, Germany, Scotland, the United States, and other countries. In addition to survey and interview research with nonreligious people, subjects included critiques of religion and ideology by professional comics, secular visions of apocalypse, the meaning and roles of religious festivals in secular contexts, the role of the Internet in secularism, and religious or secular themes in museums and material culture.⁴ “The social sciences,” said Cragun, Hammer, and Hwang in a joint statement, “have only just started to examine the lived experience of nonreligious individuals, so the questions are legion.”

What are some of the most salient issues and research questions at the present time?

Accurate description, categorization, and terminology. One of the most pressing challenges facing the social scientific study of nonreligion or secularity is honing the tools of the trade—words—to validly and reliably describe secularity and its distinguishable forms. The field has inherited some problematic terminology from scholarship on religion—whose aim, after all, was not to elucidate the nature and types of secularity. As Cragun, Hammer, and Hwang said jointly, “Much of the early research that mentions the nonreligious has included nonreligious individuals as a comparison group, a statistical outlier, or an afterthought. Rarely has the aim of most existing research been to explore the lives, experiences, and characteristics of the nonreligious.” As a result, terminology used to refer to the nonreligious in the social science of religion has often been ambiguous, imprecise, and even—as Cragun and Hammer point out in an article on this issue (2011)—“biased and derogatory.” (Consider, for example, the use of “religious defectors,” “deserters,” or “dropouts” for those who exit or abandon religion). Lee, too, notes that there has been no “comprehensive and centralized treatment of the core terminology. . . . The result is language that is used inconsistently, imprecisely, and often illogically.”

This issue is not merely semantic. It concerns accurate and consistent description of distinguishable degrees or types of secularity. This applies to some of the most prevalent terms used in everyday speech. As Colin Campbell pointed out forty years ago, “words like ‘atheist’, ‘agnostic’, ‘free-thinker’, ‘humanist’, ‘infidel’, ‘pagan’, ‘rationalist’ and ‘secularist’ are all dangerous ones for the social scientist who is not aware of their ambiguity.” More recently, Stephen Bullivant concluded, based on a survey of Oxford University students’ understanding of prevalent terms, that “respondents did not understand the terms ‘atheist’ and ‘agnostic’ in any uniform manner. Thus questions must be raised as to the usefulness of unqualified ‘atheist’ or ‘agnostic’ options in surveys. At the very least, researchers must not simply assume that participants interpret these terms in any single, specific way.”

Data on self-described or publicly avowed atheists, for example, are sometimes mistakenly generalized to a much broader population of “atheists”—used to mean nonreligious people in general. Findings on “nones”—a category that includes privately

religious and explicitly nonreligious people—are conflated with those who are resolutely or thoroughly nonreligious. This has happened quite often, as Hwang, Hammer, and Cragun point out in an article on the study of religiosity and health (2011). Moreover, it is problematic for a very important reason.

When greater care has been taken to compare resolutely religious or nonreligious people with those “in between,” an intriguing pattern has repeatedly emerged. The resolutely religious and nonreligious are similar to one another but different from the undecideds or “weakly” religious. One example of this phenomenon was reported in the pages of *FREE INQUIRY* in 2000. Franz Buggle and his colleagues found that “determined” atheists and Christians both reported less depression than “lukewarm Christians.” More recently, Luke Galen (another *FI* contributor) and Jim Kloet (2011a) found that strong believers and disbelievers in God were higher in reported life satisfaction and emotional stability than those who were unsure or who believe “sometimes.” (The disbelievers, by the way, were members of the Center for Inquiry [CFI].)⁵ The same patterns have been reported in studies stretching back at least half a century (if you look for them!) concerning issues ranging from alcoholism, anxiety, and authoritarianism to independence of moral judgment, paranormal beliefs, prejudice, racism, and xenophobia. Curiously little has been made of this pattern—until now. When distinguishable degrees or types of religiosity and nonreligiosity are conflated, resulting findings misrepresent all of them, and such patterns are obscured.

This is not to suggest that all data indicate such a pattern or that this applies to all “strongly” or “resolutely” religious and nonreligious people. There are finer distinctions to be made among types of secular or nonreligious convictions, just as there are among religious ones. Frank Barron demonstrated a half-century ago that there are differences between what he called “enlightened” and “fundamentalist” believers *and* unbelievers—all of whom may be strong or resolute in their convictions. There are many more such distinctions to be explored in the content of people’s worldviews and the ways these are held. This will require much greater care, consistency, and discipline in methodologies and the ways terms are used to describe and categorize distinguishable forms of secularity.

Cragun and Hammer (2011) have recommended more neutral and precisely defined terms to begin to rectify the problem (like religious “exiting” rather than “apostasy”). Similarly, Lee has led an effort to develop a shared glossary of key terms for the field. Under her leadership, NSRN recently held a virtual conference to consider a working glossary and the need for greater accuracy and consistency in the ways nonreligious phenomena are described, categorized, and labeled.

Secularity/religiosity and health. The diversity of both religious and nonreligious worldviews and ways of living raises questions about broad comparisons between these two mega-categories. Lee suggested that “we have to be cautious about broad-brush assessments of the nonreligious. There really is a large diversity of outlooks—many more than the naturalist/atheist viewpoint many of us immediately associate with nonreligion. The differences between nonreligion and religion are much more subtle than they have often been considered to be. The idea that there is some-

thing fundamentally and obviously different about religious and nonreligious people is, I think, unhelpful. Old questions like 'Are religious people more healthy than nonreligious people?' seem to me highly problematic."

Nevertheless, a great deal of research (in medicine, psychology, and the study of religion) continues to focus on broad comparisons of the physical and mental health of religious and nonreligious people. Cragun, Hammer, and Hwang noted that many scholars of religion and spirituality have been marshalling empirical evidence in support of the position that being nonreligious is a liability to one's physical, emotional, and existential health. Some research suggests that atheists tend to experience more psychological problems and are generally less happy than religious people.

They join Richard Sloan and others in observing that findings from this research are arguably "overstated and controversial" due to "inconsistencies in defining terms like 'religious', 'spiritual', and 'atheist'; failure to consider confounding variables; drawing conclusions about causation from correlation; and investigator bias."

This said, it is hardly surprising that some health benefits are associated with various features and forms of religion. After all, religious ideas and related institutions are human creations purposefully fashioned, in part, to address human needs. While the rapidly growing mass of data undeniably indicates such benefits, the results are often subtle, complex, or inconsistent. Moreover, it is not entirely clear whether, or to what extent, health findings (that survive methodological and interpretive scrutiny) are attributable to belief, personal behavior, or social belonging and group involvement. When social activity and demographic factors are controlled among resolutely nonreligious and religious samples, there is some evidence that differences in health or related personality characteristics disappear, as in a recent study by Luke Galen and Jim Kloet (2011b). Shared convictions and active social engagement are, of course, equally available to secular people. Again, it may be more important to ask about the health-promoting correlates and consequences of particular approaches to secular (or religious) worldviews and lifestyles. This is being considered, for example, by Christopher Peterson, Martin Seligman, and others in the study of "positive psychology" or the "psychology of character."

As Hwang, Hammer, and Cragun point out (2011), it is frequently assumed that any benefits associated with aspects or forms of religiosity involve an equivalent disadvantage for secular individuals. This is, however, the result of a fixed-sum conception of religiosity and secularity rather than a necessary, logical, or empirically accurate reflection of reality. It also reflects, to some extent, an assumption of the pathological character of secularity. Since truly nonreligious control groups and types have been noticeably absent in much of this research, comparatively little is known about adaptive or beneficial health-related behaviors and strategies among affirmatively or resolutely secular people. This is particularly true, as Galen and Kloet point out, regarding those who are affiliated with organizations on the basis of secular philosophies (2011b).

Hammer, Cragun, Hwang, and Smith have pursued yet another aspect of this question—the degree to which discrimination may play a part in findings (that survive appropriate method-

ological controls) of lower self-reported physical or mental health among the nonreligious. Based on data from the nationally representative ARIS, they point out that 41 percent of atheists in the United States reported discrimination—double the rate among “nones.” In another study of a self-selected (nonrandom) sample of 682 self-described atheists in the United States, 97 percent reported slander or harassment; 93 percent reported coercion or proselytizing; 56 percent experienced rejection or exclusion (by family, friends, or others); 16 percent were denied employment, housing, or courteous service at area businesses; and 14 percent experienced property damage, physical threats, or physical assault due to their atheism. More representative and rigorous studies of annoyance, anxiety, and stress resulting from such experiences, and their relationship with various health measures, are now under way at the Center. It will, of course, be important to compare findings in the United States with those in countries where discrimination against atheists is not as strong.

Critical reevaluations of data on the relationship between religiosity or secularity and health, subjective well-being, and quality of life have begun to appear from other quarters. The purportedly deleterious effects of secularity have been challenged, for example, by analyses of country statistics (by Gregory S. Paul), psychological findings (by Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi), and data from throughout the social sciences (by Phil Zuckerman, 2009). Zuckerman’s rich description of the quality of life in Denmark—a country substantially “without God” (2008)—has also contributed importantly to the issue. Studies such as these—and more direct and detailed scrutiny of the “varieties of secular experience”—are raising the ante on another of the big, abiding questions: Exactly how secular (or religious) are things getting, in what ways, and where?

Secularization or pluralization of worldviews? The view from Europe continues to differ from that in the United States. Lee reminds us that

... In the U.K. and Europe, nonreligion accounts for much larger shares of the population and the majority in many places. There, debates are much more constrained by a bias towards the secular (that is, being without religion in general) and this diverts attention from the very real and substantive nonreligious positions that exist and shape society. Such positions emerge most forcefully when religion intervenes on the nonreligious person’s life in some way, but otherwise go hardly noticed. Billig’s notion of “banal nationalism” is instructive here. In Europe, social scientists need to attend to the possibilities and impacts of “banal nonreligion” that may be quietly interwoven into social life. Of course, these tacit forms of nonreligion are important in the U.S. as well, but I think there are definite differences between the most pressing issues for social scientists working with nonreligion in the U.S. and U.K.

While there has been some increase in affirmative atheism and irreligion within the past decade, numbers remain comparatively small in the United States (9 percent atheists and agnostics in the 2010 GSS). The bigger story may be a broader movement toward “soft” rather than “hard” forms of secularity (Kosmin, 2007). NSRN codirector Stacey Gutkowski stressed in an e-mail exchange “the sheer diversity of what makes up the grey area between so-called nonreligious and religious orientations. I think there is a great deal of work to be done on challenging the Western-centric

focus to the study of nonreligion, to look at non-‘culturally Christian’ secularities. . . . Religion is, after all, a Western construct—how is this implicated in our study of nonreligion and secularity? . . . The NSRN is planning a working day on this topic.”

Religious “nones” (who name no religious identity in surveys) are—in the Euro-American sphere—numerically much greater than those who are affirmatively atheistic, irreligious, or secular. The “nones” category, of course, includes the latter as well as religious undecideds, seekers, “liminals,” and the unaffiliated religious. It may be closer to the mark to speak of the “individualization,” “pluralization,” or “syncretization” (mixing) of worldviews rather than “secularization,” even in Europe and the United States. In a narrow sense, secularization—as the erosion of the formal, cultural, and institutional dominance of Christianity—has unarguably been happening in much of Europe. But what has taken its place, in the main, is a range of worldviews that do not fit comfortably in either strictly “religious” or “nonreligious” categories. While there has been some growth in numbers of what Barry Kosmin calls “hard” seculars, both in Europe and the United States, greater numbers and growth are found in “soft” seculars, the “spiritual but not religious,” or what David Voas has called “fuzzy fidelity.”

The social science studies of secularity and religion each have their primary purviews at either end of the spectrum, but each will increasingly need to direct attention to the vast and apparently growing mass of “seculous,” “religular,” or “fuzzy” types in between. As Lee said, the sheer variety of secular outlooks and approaches to studying them “give rise to more questions than answers, which shows the vitality of the enterprise.”

Looking Forward

This barely touches on the questions and research now being pursued. Lois Lee and Stephen Bullivant sounded this multidisciplinary call in a recent issue of *New Scientist*:

What we need now is a scientific study not of the theistic, but the atheistic mind. . . . Psychologically, we need to know how the self functions without theistic belief, and how our emotional resources might be altered by its absence. Anthropologically, we need to understand how people without religion make sense of their lives, how they find meaning, and how non-theistic systems of thought are embedded in, and shape, the different cultures in which they are present. Sociologically, we need to know how these alternative meaning-making systems are shared between societies, how they unite or divide us, and whether non-religious groups contain pro-social elements commonly associated with religion itself.

As suggested in my opening comments, what is happening now seems substantially different from what transpired forty years ago. Colin Campbell was by no means completely alone when he broke ground on a sociology of irreligion. Susan Budd was studying secularist organizations in England, and N. J. Demerath offered a brief “prolegomena” to the study of irreligion together with substantive contributions to it, for example. But it was Demerath who also later observed that as a coherent field of inquiry, the endeavor was effectively stillborn. We are just now picking up where Campbell and a handful of colleagues began some four decades ago.

This time the scope of activity and the numbers are different. Thanks, in part, to the Internet (and NSRN), more researchers in

more disciplines in more far-flung locations have been drawn to the subject and into productive contact with one another (much as secularists themselves have been). The designation of ours as “a secular age” by Charles Taylor—and his analysis of several distinguishable kinds of secularity—has, if anything, lent an added degree of urgency and scholarly gravitas to the endeavor. Attention-getting controversy triggered by the “new atheist horsemen”—Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens—has been both subject and stimulus for scholarly analysis and data gathering.

Phil Zuckerman and his colleagues recently succeeded in establishing a Secular Studies field at Pitzer College in the United States—a development that has attracted both popular and scholarly attention.⁶ Several universities in Europe have increasingly been attending to the study of secularism, humanism, atheism, and related subjects for some time. And the emergence of initiatives like NSRN and CAR indicates that a new generation of social scientists is determined to contribute substantially to our understanding of such phenomena.

Prediction is always risky business, but these and other developments suggest that this time the social scientific study of secularity and the nonreligious is—at long last—coalescing into a coherent and enduring field of inquiry. 

Notes

1. *Catholic with Attitude* (blog). “Evaluating the Catholic Church’s Attitude Towards Unbelief/Atheism Since Vatican II.” Blogpost Tuesday, 2 November 2010. Available at <http://catholicwithattitude.blogspot.com/2010/11/evaluating-catholic-churchs-attitudes.html>.

2. Two decades later, in 1991, a symposium was held at the Catholic University at Leuven, Belgium, to consider the psychology of both belief and unbelief in Europe (summarized in Corveleyn and Hutsebaut, 1994). Also in 1991, a Harvard dissertation by Thomas H. Davenport focused on the “unreligious” in the United States.

3. There are some sixty formally affiliated scholars and more than 250 individuals on NSRN’s e-mail list.

4. Report by Christopher R. Cotter on NSRN Qualitative Methods Workshop, Methods for Nonreligion and Secularity Studies, Tuesday, 14 December 2010. Available at <http://www.nsrn.net/events/events-reports/>.

5. An early report on this research was provided in *FREE INQUIRY*; see Luke Galen, “Profiles of the Godless: Results from a Survey of the Non-religious,” *FREE INQUIRY*, August/September 2009.

6. Laurie Goodstein, “Pitzer College in California Adds Major in Secularism,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2011. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/08/us/08secular.html?scp=1&sq=zuckerman&st=cse>.

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Frank L. Pasquale, PhD, is a cultural anthropologist studying individual and institutional forms of secularity in the United States. He is a research associate with the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut). His work has appeared in the *Archive for the Psychology of Religion, Atheism and Secularity* (Praeger, 2010); *Secularity & Secularism* (ISSSC, 2007); *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (Prometheus Books, 2007); and elsewhere.

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ABSTRACT

At long last, a new generation of social scientists is studying the nonreligious as a subject in their own right.