During the latter third of the nineteenth century there was a concerted effort to amend the Constitution to formally recognize the United States as a Christian nation. Opponents of this movement made a variety of arguments defending the separation of Church and State. One argument was Protestant in origin; another was nondenominational, but theistic in character; and a third was a-theistic and stridently anti-clerical in tone. What they had in common was a preference for a secular State, negatively defined by the withdrawal of State support for religion in nine areas of public policy. Francis E. Abbot’s “Nine Demands of Liberalism” encapsulated this image of the secular state.

My goal in comparing these versions of American secularism is to show that separation of church and State entails much more than breaking the connections between them. The separation potentially redefines the functions of the State, as well as its political composition, in several important ways. The actual extent of this redefinition depends on the terms of separation, or the underlying basis of the secular State. As I will show, the secular State can be minimal, liberal, or socialist in character, as the thinkers I compare demonstrate.
Separation of church and State is an article of faith in the United States, at least insofar as the establishment of religion is concerned. No one believes that government should favor one denomination over others, and very few support a religious test or formal qualification for holding public office. There is also near-universal agreement that government has no authority over the expression of religious beliefs, and remarkable consensus that religious practices must not be regulated unless they endanger public safety or the fundamental liberties of individuals. Thus, the wall of separation is particularly imposing when viewed from State side, which is of course how most citizens think about it.

The Constitutional cornerstones of this wall of separation are Article VI, which declares that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States,” and the First Amendment, which enjoins Congress from enacting any “law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” States, however, were not bound by these provisions until the 20th century, when the U.S. Supreme Court incorporated protections of the First Amendment under the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Although each state decided religious policy for itself in the 19th century, most began to separate church and State along the lines of the Constitution. To reach that point, however, some had to disestablish religions that were formally recognized under colonial rule. The process of disestablishing religion in the United States actually preceded the Constitution by a decade or more, when colonial charters were replaced by state constitutions in the revolutionary period. But disestablishment in the states was not complete until 1833, when Massachusetts finally eliminated state support for “the institution of public worship of God, and for the support and maintenance of public Protestant teachers of piety, religion and morality.”1 By then no state officially recognized any religion, and the Bay State was the last to impose taxes on citizens for the support of religion.

Religious tests survived longer at the state level. Seats in New Hampshire’s state legislature were reserved for Protestants until 1877, and state laws barring atheists from office continued in effect until 1961.2 Other religious laws survived, too. Many states outlawed blasphemy, or the ridicule of Christian beliefs by non-Christians and nonbelievers. Most states prosecuted Mormons for polygamy, but left Christian adulterers alone. Every state declared Sunday an official day of rest and prosecuted Jews, “Mohammedans,” and Saturday sabbatarians for working on Sunday. Of course, gambling, drinking, and other vices offensive to Christian fundamentalists were criminal acts every day of the week.

As these examples suggest the process of disestablishment at the state level was gradual, uneven, and highly contentious.3 Adherents of favored religions fought to maintain their privileges, and to defend their identification of the United States as a Christian nation. Secularists opposed such laws, albeit on

1 Article III, A Declaration of the Rights of the Inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (1780).
2 Cf. the compilation at ProCon.Org.
3 Stephen K. Green. The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth-Century America (Oxford University Press, 2010).
different grounds. One argument for the separation of church and State was Protestant in origin; another was nondenominational, but theistic in character; and a third was a-theistic and stridently anticlerical in tone. What they had in common was a preference for a secular State, negatively defined by the withdrawal of State support for religion in nine areas of public policy. Francis E. Abbot’s “Nine Demands of Liberalism” encapsulated this image of the secular state and was the political basis for a tactical alliance of three distinct secular movements, as I explain later.

In some respects, though, the various arguments for a secular State were as different from each other as they were from the Christian identity movement. In this paper I bring out these differences in a comparison of three emblematic thinkers, each of whom represents a distinct version of secularism. Thus,

- Alonzo T. Jones of the Seventh-day Adventists argued that total separation of church and State was necessary to protect freedom of conscience. The resulting diversity of beliefs would actually promote religiosity by increasing evangelical competition for souls. Increased religiosity meant less sinful conduct insofar as people put their faiths into action. It would then be easier to maintain order, and State powers might be reduced accordingly. Of course, the secular State would still guarantee rights and punish criminals, but most individuals would be self-governing. A weak State was all that a religious people required, once church and State were separated.

- Francis E. Abbot of the Free Religious Association demanded total separation of church and State, the better to improve society in accordance with universal laws of morality. These laws of right conduct would be apprehended scientifically, in the same way that physics discloses natural laws of the universe. Positive knowledge of morality could then be used to perfect human society over time, with the secular State being the principle agent of change in virtue of its role in promoting faith in human reason.

- Thaddeus B. Wakeman of the Liberal University of Oregon fought for the total separation of church and State, and the replacement of all religiously-inspired codes of morality with a natural morality based entirely on the scientific study of mankind, which disclosed material reasons why we owe each other support. This secular humanism was the appropriate moral system for human societies that have “outgrown” the need for religion, and would rather venerate humanity than worship God.

My goal in comparing these versions of secularism is to show that separation of church and State entails much more than breaking the connections between them. The separation potentially redefines the functions of the State, as well as its political composition, in several important ways. The actual extent of this redefinition depends on the terms of separation, or the underlying basis of the secular State. As I will show, the secular State can be minimal, as Jones suggested; liberal, as Abbot argued; or socialist, as Wakeman contended. It all depends on the terms of disestablishment, and hence the underlying conception of morality and its foundations.

Before I turn to these differences, however, let me revisit plans to re-establish a Christian nation in the U.S. after the Civil War, which is what energized secularists and led them to coordinate campaigns for the complete disestablishment of religion and creation of a purely secular State.
A CHRISTIAN NATION

The survival of religious legislation in the states past the middle of the 19th century has led some religious historians to describe the United States of this time as a “Protestant Empire.” If so, it was an empire in decline, for by the time of the Civil War Protestant Christians felt compelled to launch a movement to halt or even reverse the process of disestablishment in the states. Campaigns were organized in states, and federations were inaugurated to formally recognize Christianity in the Constitution. The ultimate goal of this antidisestablishmentarian movement was to preserve the United States as a Christian nation, operating under Christian laws.

In 1864 Protestant ministers from eleven different denominations met in Allegheny, Pennsylvania to assess the perilous state of the Union. Reflecting on the evil of slavery, the ministers concluded that “It is our first duty to repent of this and all our national sins, and to return to our obligations as a Christian people. By acknowledging the true God as our God in our fundamental and organic law, in order that we may consistently implore His merciful interposition in our behalf, to give victory to our national arms, and success to the national cause; to establish the unity of the nation and the authority of the Government, now assaulted and shattered by a horrible rebellion.”

These reformers sought Abraham Lincoln’s blessing for a National Association to Secure the Religious Amendment of the United States Constitution. Lincoln was noncommittal, but in the interest of redeeming a sinful nation the National Association submitted a Memorial asking Congress to replace the existing Preamble of the Constitution with an affirmation of the U.S. as a Christian nation:

We, the People of the United States humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ruler among nations, his revealed will as the supreme law of the land, in order to constitute a Christian government, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the inalienable rights and blessings of liberty to ourselves, and to our posterity, and all the people, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.4

Petitions supporting the amendment were presented to Congress in 1869, but debates over the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments shunted the Christian Amendment aside. Undeterred, the National Association convened in Cincinnati on January 31, 1872 to renew its petition drive. By this time, however, Congress was also receiving petitions from opponents of the Christian Amendment. On February 28, 1872, Senator Carl Schurz presented petitions with over 10,000 signatures from people throughout the nation “asking Congress to preserve inviolate the great guarantees of religious liberty,

4 Proceedings of the National Convention to Secure the Religious Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, Philadelphia: James B. Rodgers Co., 1872 at p. vii-viii. Here the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution is in normal font, additions are in italics, and deletions are struck-through so as to highlight the proposed changes.
and protesting against an amendment to the Constitution establishing religious tests.” Then in January 1874 Senator Charles Sumner presented a similar petition, which listed 35,719 names on a single scroll over 953 feet long. According to newspapers of the time this petition would have been more than a quarter mile long had it listed only one name per line, instead of two.\(^5\)

Opposition to the Christian Amendment was organized by Francis Ellingwood Abbot (1836-1903), editor of *The Index*, the official organ of the Free Religious Association. The association was formed in 1867 by Octavius B. Frothingham (1822-1895), Abbot, and other proponents of “liberal Christianity.” Like other ministers of the Unitarian faith, Frothingham and Abbot rejected the dogmatic teachings of Protestant theologians, including the divinity of Jesus Christ and the infallibility of Scripture. Instead, they preached a vision of Christian living as “primarily an *effort*, a putting forth of personal and social power, directed toward the one object of making human life here and now truer, better, and more beautiful—that is, more perfect.”\(^6\) Creeds, liturgies, and pious sentiments were no substitute for this effort, which was inherently ecumenical.

Abbot not only opposed the Christian Amendment, he counter-attacked, offering his own “Religious Freedom Amendment:”

\begin{quote}
Section 1. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or favoring any particular form of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peacefully to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Section 2. No State shall make any law respecting an establishment of religion, or favoring any particular form of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peacefully to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. No religious test shall ever be required as a condition of suffrage, or as a qualification to any office or public trust, in any State; and no person shall ever in any State be deprived of any of his or her rights, privileges or capacities, or disqualified for the performance of any public or private duty, or rendered incompetent to give evidence in any court of law or equity, in any consequence of any opinions he or she may hold on the subject of religion.\(^7\)
\end{quote}

In defense of the proposed amendment Abbot explained that “the First Amendment and Article VI, Section 3, which prohibits religious tests for office holding, applied only to acts of Congress.” There was no provision “prohibiting the several States from establishing a State religion, or requiring a religious test for office.” Encouraged by the National Reform Association, some states, e.g. Pennsylvania, were already moving in this direction and committing “grave infringements on the religious liberty of their


\(^7\) *The Index*, January 1, 1874: 6.
citizens.” The Religious Freedom Amendment would halt these intrusions and restore liberty to all Americans, Christian or not.

Faced with conflicting calls for amendments, Congress did nothing. Temporarily stymied, the National Association to Secure the Religious Amendment of the United States Constitution reconstituted itself as the National Reform Association in 1875, shortening its name and broadening its efforts to establish a Christian nation by means of legislation. Specifically, the NRA sought to “maintain existing Christian features in the American Government, to promote needed reforms in the action of the government touching the Sabbath, the institution of the Family, the religious element in Education, the Oath, and Public Morality as affected by the liquor traffic and other kindred evils; and to secure such an amendment to the Constitution of the United States as will declare the nation’s allegiance to Jesus Christ and its acceptance of the moral laws of the Christian religion, and so indicate that this is a Christian nation, and place all the Christian laws, institutions and usages of our government on an undeniable legal basis in the fundamental law of the land.”

The broader platform of the NRA created opportunities for collaborating with other reform organizations of a Christian persuasion. Thus, the NRA’s interest in prohibition led to an alliance with the well-organized Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Concern about “kindred evils” opened the prospect of cooperation with the Young Men’s Christian Association and Anthony Comstock, a leader in the efforts to suppress gambling and such vices as the circulation of obscene materials. And the NRA’s desire to maintain sabbatarian laws brought reinforcements from the newly formed American Sabbath Union, which believed state laws were being undermined by federal agencies, including the Postal Service, which continued to operate mail trains and conduct business on Sunday.

The coalition of reformers gained the ear of New Hampshire’s Republican Senator Henry W. Blair, a staunch prohibitionist and ardent Congregationalist. On May 21, 1888 Blair proposed a National Sunday-Rest Bill “to secure to the People the enjoyment of the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord’s Day, as a Day of Rest, and to promote its observance as a day of religious worship.” All areas under the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States, including the District of Columbia and western territories, would observe this day of rest. Commercial transactions would cease, public amusements would close, and labor would be restricted to chores of “of necessity, mercy and humanity.” Interstate commerce would be suspended, as would drills and parades at Federal military installations. In effect the bill would reinforce state actions to preserve the nation’s putative Christian identity.

8 The Index, January 1, 1874: 6.
10 The American Sabbath Union was founded in December, 1887 by Wilber Fisk Crafts and his allies; today the organization is known as The Lord’s Day Alliance.
11 American State Papers Bearing on Sunday Legislation, pp. 360-363.
Four days later Blair introduced a joint resolution to Congress in favor of a “Christian Education Amendment” to the United States Constitution:

Sec. 1. No state shall ever make or maintain any law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Sec. 2. Each state in this Union shall establish and maintain a system of free public schools adequate for the education of all children living therein, between the ages of six and sixteen years inclusive, in the common branches of knowledge, and in virtue, morality, and the principles of the Christian religion. But no money raised by taxation imposed by law, or any money or other property or credit belonging to any municipal organization, or to any state, or to the United States, shall ever be appropriated, applied, or training shall be given in the doctrines, tenets, belief, ceremonials, or observances peculiar to any sect, denomination, organization or society, being, or claiming to be, religious in character; nor shall such peculiar doctrines, tenets, belief, ceremonials, or observances, be taught or inculcated in the free public schools.

Sec. 3. To the end that each state, the United States, and all the people thereof, may have and preserve governments republican in form and in substance, the United States shall guarantee to every state, and to the United States, the support and maintenance of such a system of free public schools as is herein provided.

Sec. 4. That Congress shall enforce this article by legislation when necessary.

The Sunday Rest Bill and Christian Education Amendment were referred to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, which was chaired by Senator Blair. Testimony was heard, and Protestant dissenters, including Seventh-day Adventists, lodged a strong protest against efforts to privilege any particular religious tradition. Their argument is considered in the next section of this paper. Variations of this bill were proposed in succeeding sessions of Congress, and met with the same fate, failure in committee.

The Christian Education Amendment also failed in committee, although Blair nearly succeeded in winning approval for a discharge petition on the last day of the 54th Congress. In succeeding Congresses Blair replaced the language referring to “principles of the Christian religion” with “knowledge of the fundamental and nonsectarian principles of Christianity.” This fooled no one who read Blair’s letter to readers of the New York Mail and Express stating his conviction that “instead of selecting a final toleration of so-called religions, the American people will, by constant and irresistible pressure, gradually expel from our geographical boundaries every religion except the Christian in its varied forms.”

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13 Quoted in American Sentinel July 10 1890 repr. American State papers 366. See also, The Blair Education Amendment. The Result if Adopted. The Sentinel Library No. 5 March 1, 1889 (reprint of E.J. Waggoner editorial from the American Sentinel).
Christian reformers were victorious in other arenas, however. Congress admitted six new states to the Union in 1889 and 1890: North and South Dakota, Montana, Washington, Idaho and Wyoming (in that order). All entered with state constitutions acknowledging the ultimate sovereignty of the Almighty, following spirited convention debates between Christian reformers and confirmed secularists. More concretely, the advocates of a Christian nation defeated efforts in several states to remove tax exemptions for church property, and obtained stricter enforcement of sabbatarian laws.

A real break-through was achieved in February, 1892 when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a district court decision barring the English preacher E. Walpole Warren from fulfilling a contract to preach at the Church of the Holy Trinity in New York City. At issue was an 1885 law banning “importation and migration of foreigners and aliens to perform contract labor or service of any kind in the United States.” The Court decided the law only applied to manual labor, and unanimously upheld the Englishman’s right to preach under the terms of his contract. In justifying the decision, Associate Justice David J. Brewer openly declared the United States a “Christian nation” and gave evidence for his conclusion:

“If we pass beyond these matters to a view of American life, as expressed by its laws, its business, its customs, and its society, we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth. Among other matters, note the following: the form of oath universally prevailing, concluding with an appeal to the Almighty; the custom of opening sessions of all deliberative bodies and most conventions with prayer; the prefatory words of all wills, ‘In the name of God, amen;’ the laws respecting the observance of the Sabbath, with the general cessation of all secular business, and the closing of courts, legislatures, and other similar public assemblies on that day; the churches and church organizations which abound in every city, town, and hamlet; the multitude of charitable organizations existing everywhere under Christian auspices; the gigantic missionary associations, with general support, and aiming to establish Christian missions in every quarter of the globe. These, and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation.”

Brewer later denied that *Holy Trinity* blessed Congressional attempts to enact laws reflecting Christian beliefs or concerns. That is how Christian reformers interpreted the decision, however. As they saw it the Supreme Court had vindicated their view of the American republic and – they hoped – endorsed laws and practices explicitly embodying Christian articles of faith. Emboldened reformers returned to Congress and in an election year found it more receptive to sabbatarian legislation of an indirect sort.

In August, 1892 the Congress appropriated funds for the Columbian Exposition at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, on the condition that it would be closed on Sunday. Congress subsequently imposed the same condition on other events that received Federal funding, e.g. the Louisiana Purchase Exposition at the St. Louis Exposition of 1903, and the Jamestown Exposition in 1907. Thus, what Congress could not achieve directly – Sunday rest restrictions in Federal territory – it accomplished indirectly, via the

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appropriations process. Members of Congress could satisfy Christian reformers without seeming to impose orthodoxy on Christian dissenters, non-Christians, secular liberals and other opponents of Sunday legislation.

There was an added bonus, too. By manipulating appropriations Congress was no longer restricted to areas under Federal jurisdiction. It could influence Sunday activities in states where Federally subsidized events took place, which might otherwise be deemed beyond reach of Congress. The prospect of establishing a Christian nation seemed to be improving, and secularists of quite different political persuasions mobilized against it.

**SOUL LIBERTY AND THE SECULAR STATE**

Proponents of a Christian nation were opposed by secularists of different stripes, including some deeply devoted Christians. Among the latter were dissenting Protestants, such as the Seventh-day Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists, who kept Sabbath on the last day of the week instead of the first. For this deviation from Protestant orthodoxy they were prosecuted under state laws banning work on Sunday. These dissenters had special reason to resist efforts to establish a national day of rest, which would reinforce existing state laws and extend the ban on Sunday work to all Federal territories.

Protestant dissenters’ opposition went beyond sabbatarian legislation, however. They also rejected Senator Blair’s Christian Education amendment, as well as judicial oaths, religious holidays, and use of the Holy Bible in public schools. Indeed, they favored a strict separation of church and State on religious grounds. Rights of conscience were the centerpiece of their argument, which presumed that each and every person must determine his or her relation to the Almighty, and be accountable for that decision at the time of Judgment. In this deeply personal experience of God’s grace, laws have no place or force, dissenters believed.

An earlier version of this argument was advanced in 1648 by Roger Williams in *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience Discussed; and Mr. Cotton’s Letter Examined and Answered*, a protest against the Puritan theocracy of Massachusetts Bay Colony. It is important to remember, though, that Williams’ famous defense of “soul liberty” was deployed in the context of Calvin’s doctrine of limited atonement. Only a chosen few were saved by Christ’s death on the cross, according to Calvin, and the fate of these saints was not of their own choosing: it was predestined, as was the fate of the multitude of sinners bound for eternal damnation. Double predestination meant that soul liberty had no bearing whatsoever on any individual’s salvation. Thus, Williams’ point was that because salvation was preordained, all souls were free to praise the Lord in their own way, and no civil authority should

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16 Prominent rabbis and editors of Jewish newspapers also advocated separation of church and state, for the same reason as dissenting Protestants: their religious freedom was limited by laws rooted in mainline Protestant theology.
interfere with such righteous behavior, especially since human laws were powerless to alter the outcome.¹⁷

By the late 19th century Protestant theology in the United States was moving beyond, or at least away from, Calvinist dogmas of predestination and limited atonement.¹⁸ Adventists in particular believed that Christ’s atonement was universal, i.e. that it offered salvation to all who placed their faith in Him and lived according to His example. Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, was the new dogma, and it occupied a central position in Protestant theology at this time.

Freedom of conscience attained paramount importance in the context of universal atonement. Those who chose Christ of their own free will were saved, if their faith was true. Conversely, those who obstinately refused God’s grace brought eternal damnation upon themselves. Christ’s sacrifice gave individuals this choice, and complete responsibility for making it.

This position was ably expressed by Alonzo T. Jones, editor of the American Sentinel, the official organ of the Seventh-day Adventists at the time of Senator Blair’s hearings on the National Sunday-Rest Bill and Christian Education amendment.¹⁹ Jones began from the premise that “The only thing that will be accepted in the Judgment is works. The only righteousness that will be accepted or countenanced in any way whatever in the Judgment is the righteousness of God. And this righteousness is a free gift to man, and is wrought in man by faith alone.”²⁰

True faith, or righteousness wrought in man, was evident in believers’ compliance with the supreme injunctions of God as revealed in the Bible. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” was the first injunction, and it was elaborated in the First Table of the Decalogue – the first four commandments listed in the Book of Exodus and repeated in the Book of Deuteronomy. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self” was the second injunction; it summarized the last six commandments, or the Second Table of the Decalogue.

Both Tables were binding on Christians, but the Tables limited civil authority in different ways, Jones explained. The State had no authority whatsoever in matters pertaining to the First Table; hence no form of establishment was legitimate. It was harder to separate church and state in matters pertaining to the Second Table, however, because civil concerns might suggest laws that strongly resemble religious commandments: murder might be proscribed for civil, as well as religious, reasons, for

¹⁷ Roger Williams used very graphic language to capture the deeply personal nature of this violation: “The conscience ought not to be violated or forced,” he quoted the King of Bohemia and then commented that “indeed it is most true, that a soul or spiritual rape is more abominable in God’s eye, than to force and ravish the bodies of all the women in the world.” The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience Discussed; and Mr. Cotton’s Letter Examined and Answered (1648).

¹⁸ Some fundamentalists remained unreconstructed, and proudly so, including reformed Presbyterian covenanters seeking to ensconce “God in the Constitution.”

¹⁹ Alonzo Trévier Jones (1850-1923) co-edited the American Sentinel with Ellet J. Waggoner (1855-1916); this was the official organ of the religious liberty department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

²⁰ American Sentinel 9, 22 (May 31, 1894): 170B.
example. As we shall see, Jones suggested that such laws were legitimate, so long as they were enacted for civil purposes only.

Jones’ primary interest, though, was the First Table of the Decalogue, which concerns humans’ duties toward God:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:
But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:
For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.\(^\text{21}\)

Obedience to these commandments was a test of faith in God and could not be forced; it was a matter of conscience. Said Jones, the duty of honoring the Lord “rests solely between man and God; and if any man does not render it to God, he is responsible only to God, and not to any man, nor to any assembly or organization of men, for his failure or refusal to render it to God; and any power that undertakes to punish that man for his failure or refusal to render to God what is God’s, puts itself in the place of God.” Such presumptuousness signified a glaring lack of faith in the efficacy of God’s grace, and a sinful disposition to act unjustly toward others by forcing their will.\(^\text{22}\)

Jones insisted on this point in testimony before Senate Committee on Education and Labor Senator on the National Sunday-rest Bill in 1889: “there is a limit to the lawmaking power; and that limit is the line which Jesus Christ has drawn. The government has no right to make any law relating to the things that pertain to God, or offenses against God, or religion. It has nothing to do with religion.”\(^\text{23}\) Even if that government reflected the will of a majority, it had no more authority than a king to violate the God-given liberty of conscience.

\(^{21}\) King James Version of The Bible, Book of Exodus 20:2-17. I give the extended form of the fourth commandment, since sabbatarian legislation was so important in the controversies featured in this paper.


Whereas the First Table defines a person’s duties to the Supreme Being, the Second Table identifies humans’ obligations toward each other:

    Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

    Thou shalt not kill.

    Neither shalt thou commit adultery.

    Neither shalt thou steal.

    Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.

    Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Ordinarily, these commandments are willingly observed by the faithful; there is no need of enforcement when the prospect of eternal damnation is in view. But those without faith, or whose faith is weak, may violate these commandments – and even devout Christians will sin grievously upon occasion. In such cases it is necessary to protect the lives, possessions, and liberties of law-abiding citizens from violators in the first place, and to punish evil-doers in the next. This is the function of civil authority.

Jones asserted that the “powers that be” are ordained by God for the express purpose of maintaining order and meting out justice. To preserve order the civil authorities might well outlaw murder, adultery, stealing, and perjury, as these sins were also civil disturbances. They upset the peace and harmony of the community, placing its survival at risk, or at least offending its sense of justice. Either outcome makes it harder to be religious, which is presumably why God ordained civil authorities in the first place. But Jones’ point is different; it is that earthly justice ought to be served, and that civility provided its own reasons for action, independent of any particular religion, or even any religion at all. A notion of secular, or perhaps better, universal justice was essential to the well-being of a community.

Although the State must not prescribe religious beliefs or expressions, it could limit religious practices that were uncivil. Jones gave the example of religious rites involving human sacrifices. The State may not persecute those who believe and profess, however erroneously, that human sacrifices are pleasing to God. But the State may, and indeed must, prevent them from acting on that belief by attempting to sacrifice another. "The civil government exists for the protection of life, liberty, property, etc., and it must punish that man for his attempt upon the life of his fellow-man. The civil law protects man’s life from such exercise of any one’s religion, but in punishing the offender, the State does not consider the

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24 Jones suggested that it is impossible to legislate against covetousness (which is a state of mind, or perhaps an emotional state) until such time as the desire become active, i.e. leads to adultery, stealing, perjury, etc. It is the action that harms others, and so authorizes civil enforcement.
question of religion at all. It would punish him just the same if he made no pretensions to worship or to religion. It punishes him for his incivility, for his attempt at murder, not for his irreligion.”

This distinction, Jones argued, was wisely captured in the U.S. Constitution. Article VI stipulates that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” And the First Amendment says “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” These provisions embody the very principle announced by Jesus Christ, that the civil government shall leave religion to “every man’s conscience and his God. As long as he is a good citizen, the nation will protect him and leave him perfectly free to worship whom he pleases, when he pleases, as he pleases, or not to worship at all, if he pleases.”

Precisely because the Constitution already reflected Christ’s teaching, laws preferring one religion over others or suppressing unorthodox faiths were doubly wrong, according to Jones. They were at once unconstitutional and antichristian, in the sense of being antithetical to the work of grace. “Christianity persuades men, instead of trying to compel them,” observed Jones. “By the purity and love of Christ, Christianity draws men instead of trying to drive them. It is not by the power of civil government, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, that Christianity secures the obedience of men and the practice of Christian temperance.”

Laws that breach the wall of separation were also counter-productive. Instead of securing order, they disturbed the peace by politicizing religious differences. Those who felt persecuted under the law lost respect for civil authorities; they refused to obey laws that offended conscience, and some rebelled against laws that trammel upon core tenets of faith. And even those who relied on law to protect or promote their beliefs lost interest in evangelism and the power of grace to save others. To the extent that they leaned on law, their faith atrophied and could not hold those who confessed it, let alone attract those who might otherwise be drawn to it.

These arguments were interesting, but somewhat speculative, so Jones also argued more concretely. “Any attempt to enforce religious observances only enforces hypocrisy and multiplies sin, because love for God is essential to every act of religious duty. For a man to tender obedience or homage to God when he has no love for God in his heart, only dishonors God, and does violence to his own nature. For anybody to obey God, or perform religious observances from interested motives, is sin; and for the State to exert its power in compelling men to act religiously, and pretend to honor God when they have in the heart no love for God, is only to force them into hypocrisy, and to compel them to commit sin, which, increased and multiplied by the exertion of national power, can end only in ruin, and that speedily.”

The form of ruin was clear enough, to Jones. He warned that efforts to establish a Christian nation with a Protestant identity would backfire. Protestants were divided in their beliefs and might not agree on which articles of faith should be enshrined in Federal law. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, were

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27 They are also un-American, according to Jones, which claim I lay aside for the time being.
united in their beliefs – and they were the largest single denomination in the United States. Given their high level of organization Catholics might prevail in a political contest to impose their conception of Christianity on the nation. Blair and his allies were unwittingly opening the door to the emergence of a sacerdotal State controlled by Rome – just as the Roman effort to impose the pagan religion had created an opening for the Catholic Church to establish a Holy Roman Empire in Europe, Jones argued.

Paradoxically, then, Jones concluded that religious life was best served by a secular State, one that was neutral in the contest between religions for adherents. No religion was privileged, and none was persecuted, insofar as they remained civil. They would compete for souls, but the competition would be evangelical, featuring demonstrations of faith in action. The result would be a deeply religious society comprised of many denominations, each with its own form of worship and rules for right conduct. The State would benefit from this, insofar as civil authorities rely on willing submission to the laws for order to prevail. In counseling restraint and self-control religions would underwrite the civil order, minimizing the need for coercion and corrective action by the State.

POSITIVE LIBERTY AND SCIENTIFIC THEISM

Although Seventh-day Adventists believed salvation was offered to all, they did not expect everyone to accept God’s grace. Some would refuse Christ and at the Judgment their souls would be consigned to eternal damnation or perhaps even annihilation. More liberal theologians believed that everyone was forgiven by an infinitely merciful God; no one burned in hell for all time, though not all were admitted immediately to the company of saints. This belief in universal salvation was strong among Unitarians, and it was a defining feature of Universalism in the latter half of the 19th century in the United States.

“Free Religion” was even more liberal, insofar as it dispensed with the notions of heaven and hell altogether. Although few in number, the adherents of Free Religion passionately sought a religion that did not rest on the fear of hell or promise of heaven in the after-life. They thought such “other worldly” preoccupations were a distraction from the here and now. The reduction of injustice by the improvement of the human race was the dream of free religionists, who were certain this was God’s plan, too.

Francis Abbot (1836-1903) was a prominent exponent of Free Religion, or as he sometimes called it, Universal Religion. An ordained Unitarian minister, Abbot severed his affiliation with the Unitarian Church when it accepted the divinity of Christ and became doctrinally committed to worshiping him as the Son of God. Abbot certainly admired Christ, but he believed that the real point was to follow the...
loving example of Christ in daily life. Christians—even the Unitarians—had lost sight of the necessity of loving one another on earth as they strove to save themselves for all eternity, or so Abbot argued.

Abbot did not deny that confessional religion met important spiritual desires; to the contrary, he insisted that humans need religion to give meaning to their lives and provide consolation for death. Traditional religions did both, presenting a prospect of life after death in the company of Almighty God. But in exchange for this consolation church authorities demanded unquestioning acceptance of the word of God as revealed in the Bible. Thus, Christians were expected to believe that God created the world in six lunar days; that He created man from dust and woman from man; that Christ was God made man; and that His resurrection from the dead was a promise to the faithful of their own salvation. To accept any one of these claims, let alone all of them at once, required a willful suspension of reason, made harder by knowledge that the revealed word of God was actually the work of men, whose fallibility was evident in the internal contradictions of the Holy Bible.

What was worse, advances in science made Biblical assertions less believable with passage of time and accumulation of knowledge in biology, chemistry, geology and physics, to say nothing of Charles Darwin’s theory of natural evolution and Herbert Spencer’s adaptation of it to social development. The evidence seemed to contradict Christian teachings at every point, and increasingly the claims of religion appeared to rest on obvious superstitions, or worse, transparent assertions of clerical authority in defense of worldly prerogatives. Hence Abbot was confident that “the century now drawing to a close is emphatically the Age of Agnosticism. All the leaders of its characteristic thought have more or less consciously, more or less completely, broken with Christianity, —that is broken with that venerable theory of the universe for which the Christian theology and Christian church have definitely stood for nearly two thousand years.”  

From this perspective, the movement to put God in the Constitution and establish a Christian nation in the United States was the last gasp of a dying faith. Nonetheless, the casualties were horrific in this losing battle between religious superstition and scientific authority: bad men won promotion for putting good men in jail, and worse, the political contest over religious establishment overshadowed the real ills of modernization. As Congress debated an enforced day of rest, massive unemployment afflicted the working class. Celebrations of American industry occurred in the midst of labor unrest, and indeed in the very city where the violent Haymarket bombing took place. Farmers starved as the wealth of robber barons infiltrated Congress itself; the polis was burning, while its leaders fiddled.

Abbot was certain that Christianity would eventually succumb, but he hoped to hasten its demise by pressing for disestablishment of religion. In addition to his Religious Freedom Amendment, Abbot formulated “Nine Demands of Liberalism” for secularizing the American State.  

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31 American Sentinel 6, 7 (February 12, 1890: 51B-52C), “The Nine Demands of Liberalism.”
League and its successor, the American Secular Union, adopted the “Nine Demands” as their platform, as I have previously discussed.\textsuperscript{32}

1. We demand that churches and other ecclesiastical property shall be no longer exempt from taxation.

2. We demand that the employment of chaplains in Congress, and in the legislatures, in the navy and militia, and in prisons, asylums, and all other institutions supported by the public money, shall be discontinued.

3. We demand that all public appropriations for educational and charitable institutions of a sectarian character shall cease.

4. We demand that all religious services now sustained by the government shall be abolished; and especially that the use of the Bible in the public schools, whether ostensibly as a textbook or avowedly as a book of religious worship, shall be prohibited.

5. We demand that the appointment, by the president of the United States or by the governors of the various states, of all the religious festivals and fasts shall wholly cease,

6. We demand that the judicial oath in the courts and in all other departments of the government shall be abolished, and that a simple affirmation under the pains and penalties of perjury shall be established in its stead.

7. We demand that all laws directly or indirectly enforcing the observance of Sunday as the Sabbath shall be repealed.

8. We demand that all laws looking to the enforcement of “Christian” morality shall be abrogated and that all laws shall be conformed to the requirements of natural morality, equal rights and impartial liberty.

9. We demand that not only in the Constitution of the United States and of the several states, but also in the practical administration of the same, no privileges or advantage shall be conceded to Christianity or any other special religion; that our entire political system shall be founded and administered on a purely secular basis; and whatever changes shall prove necessary to this end shall be consistently, unflinchingly, and promptly made.\textsuperscript{33}

Total separation of church and State was the goal of these “Nine Demands of Liberalism,” but it was only the first step. Once State support was removed from orthodox Christianity, the latter’s weakness would be revealed. Science would discredit the claims of religious authorities and routinely produce spectacular “miracles” of its own. Eventually, orthodoxy would be relegated to the category of superstitious beliefs and a new theory of the universe would be needed to make sense of the world and give meaning to human life.

\textsuperscript{32}“Social Reformers in the National Liberal League, 1876-1886,” presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, April 2-5, 2009.

\textsuperscript{33} The Index January 4, 1873: p. 1, column 1.
Abbot provided one such theory, which he called “scientific theism.” By science Abbot meant the “philosophized method of science,” or the continuing search for knowledge that is verifiable and open to revision in light of new evidence. Such knowledge was positive, in the sense that it was acknowledged by all who were qualified to assess the evidence on which the knowledge rested. Of course, the scientific consensus is provisional insofar as knowledge claims are continuously assessed, refined, or replaced by a new consensus, based on additional information or evidence. It was this unceasing search for knowledge, and the subsequent use of that knowledge to improve the human condition, that mightily impressed Abbot.

Many of Abbot’s contemporaries held similar views, but their appreciation for science was tempered by a sense of its limits. Science, they said had nothing to say about First Causes, which was the domain of religion. And since God was beyond the reach of science, agnosticism was the proper intellectual stance of scientists qua scientists. Abbot strenuously disagreed. “If all knowledge of God, Freedom, and Immortality is impossible to man, the only escape from intolerable anguish, in the constant presence of pain and death, must lie in a stoical suppression of the power to feel—in a desperate resolve to think and feel no more, both to extinguish all deep thought and all high feeling through frantic self-absorption in the soulless details of life.”

Abbot insisted that the successful accumulation of scientific knowledge actually proved the existence of God, and hence offered a rational foundation for spiritual life, or Free Religion. In support of this conclusion he developed an elaborate proof, the crux of which was that science proceeds on the assumption that the universe is knowable. Every new discovery confirms this assumption: the universe is susceptible to the scientific method of inquiry. But if the universe is intelligible that is because its Creator made it in such a way that scientists could discover laws of the universe. As Abbot put it, “From the side of the finite, science is human discovery; from the side of the infinite, science is divine revelation; there could neither be discovery without revelation nor revelation without discovery; and science thus appears as the intellectual mediator between the finite and the infinite. The philosophy of


35 In this respect Abbot broke with Ralph Waldo Emerson and other Transcendalists who relied on moral intuitions to replace religious creeds as a guide to human conduct.

36 As he put, “The Love of truth is worth more to us than any particular truth; and in cherishing this love, in obeying it, and in making it the rule of life, we shall realize all the “salvation” we covet,—salvation from mean and dishonest and ignoble character.” From “The Two Infallibilities,” in The Collected Essays of Francis Ellingwood Abbot, American Philosopher and Free Religionist, edited by Creighton Peden and Everett J. Tarbox (Edward Mellen Press, 1996: 268).

science, therefore, when at last developed and matured by the universal reason of the race, will be the
supreme wisdom of Man and the self-evident word of God.”

Although he understood the universe to be intelligently designed, Abbot emphatically rejected any
suggestion that God-as-Maker is somewhere above, behind, or otherwise outside the universe. For him,
the universe is the self-objectification of God. In discovering the universe science comes face to face
with God’s immanence; He is in each and every empirical detail, including those we have not
comprehended, and may never fully fathom. The successful accumulation of positive knowledge of the
universe is therefore posterior proof of the existence of God.

Thus, for Abbot “Scientific Theism is more than a philosophy: it is a religion, it is a gospel, it is the Faith
in the Future, founded on knowledge rather than on blind belief.” By reconciling science to religion, or
at least Free Religion, his scientific theism gave reasonable answers to questions for which orthodox
Christianity no longer had convincing answers.

This included knowledge of questions about ethical behavior, which was no less amenable to scientific
inquiry than natural phenomena. True, the natural sciences were more advanced, but Abbot was
confident that the “philosophized method of science” would result in positive knowledge of right and
wrong. Ethics would be just as rigorous as physics, and the application of the former to human conduct
would generate social gains as impressive as the latter had in engineering, manufacturing, and
transportation.

Indeed, that is why Abbot’s eighth Demand called for the abrogation of all laws looking to the
enforcement of Christian morality, and the conformity of all remaining laws “to the requirements of
natural morality, equal rights and impartial liberty.” This natural morality was based on positive
knowledge of what is right and wrong for individuals and the various social units to which they belong.
Such knowledge reflected the “consensus of the competent” on the basic facts of moral life and its
possibilities.

Abbot claimed there has always been a high degree of consensus on morals across nations and over
time. With only a little reflection, thoughtful individuals realize that human life is intrinsically social and
that we may, and do, derive rights and duties from this existential fact. In particular, all reasonable
people will conclude that each and every human is entitled to certain rights essential to the exercise of
moral agency, and that each and every human is equally entitled to the same rights. The consensus will
then show that these rights are correlated with duties, or obligations to respect the rights of others.

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40 Not everyone was convinced. “The religion of the book seems to be only an appendage to a system of
metaphysics,” wrote Charles S. Peirce, “Dr. F. E. Abbot’s Philosophy,” a review of Scientific Theism, The Nation,
42,1076 (February 11, 1886): 135-136, at 135.
41 The Advancement of Ethics (1895), 26.
“The one absolute and all-inclusive word in ethics is justice,” said Abbot. Justice requires each to give every other person his due: “If my neighbor is in misery, I owe him relief; if he is in happiness, I owe him sympathy; if he is a hero, I owe him admiration; if he is a sneak, I owe him contempt; if he an oppressor, I owe him indignation and resistance; if he is oppressed, I owe him pity and succor; if he is a victim of vice, I owe him an effort to reform him; if he is good and affectionate, if he loves me, I owe him reciprocating love; and so on to the end.”

The same principle of justice applied to relations between individuals and the social organizations of which they were a part, and to which they belonged. Individuals were entitled to essential human rights, which organizations were obliged to respect. But individuals also had duties to the organizations that guaranteed their rights and provided the fellowship that everyone requires in order to thrive. To decide whether personal rights or social duties ought to prevail in given circumstances, Abbot turned to science for “Seven Ethical Laws of Rationalism.”

*Law of Individual Rational Existence*

Every mature rational being has the right and duty to govern himself by his own reason in all his individual concerns. This is the principle of personal self-government, “private judgment,” or individual reason.

*Law of Individual Self-Defence*

Every rational being has the right to defend himself against all encroachments upon his individual self-government. This is the right of resistance to aggression.

*Law of Individual Non-Aggression*

Every rational being has the duty to refrain from encroaching upon individual self-government of others, either by force or fraud. This is the principle limiting “private judgment.”

*Law of Social Rational Existence*

Society (or the community of all rational beings) has the right and duty to govern itself by its common reason in all common concerns. This is the principle of republican self-government, or social reason.

*Law of Social Self-Defence*

Society has the right to defend itself against all encroachments upon its social self-government. This is the right of revolution as against tyrants and of self-protection as against criminals — the right of holding aggressors responsible to social reason.

*Law of Social Non-Aggression*

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42 The Collected Essays of Francis Ellingwood Abbot, American Philosopher and Free Religionist, 149-150.
Society has the duty to maintain the three laws of individuality in full vigor, and to refrain from violating them. This is the principle limiting social reason.

**Law of Ultimate Jurisdiction**

1. The “private judgment” of the individual is the final appeal in all his individual concerns.

2. The “social reason” of society is the final appeal in all its general concerns, and also in case of ultimate disagreement between individuals.

3. The “social reason” of society is represented in each particular case by the Consensus of the Competent in that class of cases; i.e., by the concurrent verdict of all who are fitted by general capacity and special knowledge to understand its best. If the competent are divided, the question remains open; if they are unanimous, it is decided.

As a set, the seven laws carefully balance the claims of individuals on the societies of which they are members against the claims of democratic societies on each of their members. But the balance is not arbitrary, nor is it capricious, according to Abbot. It subjects the rights of individuals and their obligations or duties to “the sovereignty of reason,” in a manner that anticipated John Rawls valorization of public reason. The difference is that Abbot reduced the judgment of reason to the contingent “consensus of the competent.” Insofar as the issue is between an individual and the law, it was to be resolved juridically. If the issue was which laws should be enacted, it was to be resolved by a majority of all competent citizens who must live under them, subject to reasonable, which is to say constitutional, limits on their power.

Abbot viewed the State as a potential instrument for the perfection of society. Certainly, it existed to punish evil doing, in the traditional sense of that term. But evil doing was irrational behavior, by Abbot’s reckoning; it failed to understand that a person’s well-being was ultimately related to the well-being of the community to which they belonged. In Abbot’s world, the great end of human society was the freest, fullest, and highest development of the individual. The grand end of the individual soul was the realization, in itself and in the world, of the highest Ideal of Humanity, and was thus identical with the great cause of universal human progress. The failure to grasp the interconnection between personal well-being and communal development was a clear sign of “unreason” in his cosmology.

Seen this way, the functions of the State were manifold. It must punish selfish or immoral conduct. It might try to deter such irrational behavior and so prevent injustice. But the State also had positive functions to perform. It ought to cultivate reason, by providing public schooling to all, free of charge. It ought to expand the opportunities for political participation, and hence civic deliberation, by expanding suffrage to include women. And it ought to discourage or prohibit activities that clouded moral reasoning of citizens, e.g. the manufacture, sale and consumption of alcohol, the production and dissemination of obscene materials, or the spread of gambling and other vicious arts.

Thus, the promotion of some activities and the prohibition of others was a critical, and in the end unavoidable, function of the State. For Abbot the purpose of the state was to uplift society and deliver
justice on earth, without favoring any specific religion. The fact that any State conforming to the Nine Demands of Liberalism would be nonsectarian in the widest sense of that term was essential to his political theory. But that still left room for the scientific theism or the Free Religion of an ex-Unitarian minister.

UNIVERSAL MENTAL LIBERTY AND SCIENTIFIC A-THEISM

Like Abbot, Thaddeus Burr Wakeman (1834-1913) was a monist: he rejected any distinction between a material world knowable through science and an immaterial world accessible only through revelation, intuition, or some other nonrational processes. For Wakeman all the universe was material and substantial; what some men called immaterial or spiritual was simply a human craving that, like any other craving, was ultimately reducible to brain activity and could be explained by neurological science. In short, God was merely a human projection onto the universe, a result, not the ultimate cause of it all.

This was the great difference between Wakeman and Abbot, who otherwise had much in common. They collaborated in the formation of the National Liberty League, and shared an unshakeable commitment to the Nine Demands of Liberalism. Both were close readers of German philosophy, although Abbot dwelt on Kant and Hegel, whereas Wakeman was a devotee of Ernst Haeckel, a well-known evolutionary biologist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Most importantly both Abbot and Wakeman had complete confidence in the capacity of science to generate continuous improvements in the human condition. So great was this confidence that Abbot and Wakeman each invested science with religious qualities, but Abbot’s religion of science was theistic, whereas Wakeman’s was a-theistic, or as we might say today, secular humanist in orientation. Therein lies the difference in their views of secular State.

Abbot understood the development of the universe in evolutionary terms, and believed that positive knowledge of every aspect of the universe, including human behavior, could be obtained by the scientific method. Abbot insisted, however, that any coherent theory of evolution must be teleological. What made the theory of natural selection so compelling was the presumption that selection had a direction or purpose: the survival of the species, by the survival of its fittest or most adaptable members. Without that purpose, evolution made no sense, and once purpose was admitted, evolutionists were obliged to explain its source, i.e. its divine origin.

Haeckel and his disciple Wakeman would have none of that. There was no God, only the idea of God, formulated in an area of the cortex, as a placeholder for what we do not yet know – the real first cause. This aspect of Haeckel’s monism appealed to Wakeman, whose earliest devotion was to August Comte’s positive philosophy of social development. It, too, was evolutionary insofar as Comte posited a law of

43 Ernst Haeckel, “A Universal Monistic Alliance, The Humanitarian Review II, 12 (December 1904: 751-759): “The rational monistic conception of the world, in conformity with nature, is firmly based on scientific knowledge gained by the human intellect through critical experience (a posteriori).”
three stages through which human societies pass in the course of development. The first stage was theological, the second metaphysical, and the third stage was positive or scientific, in constitution. The third and highest stage acknowledged the egoistic or selfish basis of human behavior, as well as humans’ capacity for *vivre pour altrui*, or living for others, altruism. Each was necessary to human happiness, but neither was sufficient, so Comte proposed a “religion of humanity” to satisfy both needs simultaneously. What made it a religion of humanity was its veneration for Mankind, which replaced God at the center of religion and its elaborate rituals.

As the science of evolution advanced, Wakeman modified his Comtean view in light of Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinism. From Spencer, Wakeman took the proposition that “progress is a constant growth by means of a process of differentiation, individuation and liberty, followed and reciprocated by a counter process of assimilation and integration, attended by a final cooperation, coordination and organization of both processes in the interest of, and for welfare of the whole organization.” This would necessarily result from selective adaptation in the face of rapidly changing circumstances. Only those individuals who cooperated with others would survive the contest for survival, and only those societies that promoted cooperation without stifling individuality could meet the needs of all equally.

Spencer himself insisted that ethical conduct was an evolutionary advantage in the struggle for survival. Moreover, ethics itself was evolving and would culminate in a system of “absolute ethics” that yielded pleasure, with no pain, for all. Spencer based this conclusion on the general realization that no one could plausibly claim more freedom than anyone else, which meant that everyone is obliged to respect the freedom of others. This conclusion is the product of evolution, which teaches humans to sympathize with beings like themselves. We learn that it is pleasurable (and even advantageous) to aid others, even when it involves sacrifices on our part. Similarly, we do not harm others, if we can avoid it, because it pleases us to do so (and invites reciprocity on the part of others). In short, we learn that our own happiness depends substantially on making others happy – and we know that others realize their own happiness depended on making us happy, when they are able.

Thus, humans are in the process of becoming a community of individuals acting in accordance with their enlightened self-interest. At this time Wakeman was a prominent “free thinker” who fully subscribed to the credo of “universal mental liberty,” which dictated that each person ought to decide moral questions on their own, without interference by secular or religious authorities. In that way individuation would expand the range of lives people lead and maximize the evolutionary progress of the species. For some free thinkers, e.g. Benjamin R. Tucker, this way of reasoning culminated in egoism.

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46 In *The Principles of Ethics* (1897) Spencer refined arguments he made in *Social Statics: or, The Conditions essential to Happiness specified, and the First of them Developed* (1851), though his conclusions changed very little.
and anarchism. But Wakeman believed that too much egoism brought conflict and destruction, so there must be a moderating force, which he assumed was religion of a special sort.47

Wakeman had an abiding appreciation for the integrating function that religions perform, mixed with contempt for the specific bonds that religions forge between humans. In all societies, wrote Wakeman, religion “inspires, furnishes and controls” human activities. “Men have been and are chiefly moved, first, by their material necessities, and then by the beliefs and ideals of their religion; and all of the religions prior to the religion of science and humanity of ‘Monism’ have been of the spook variety, enforced, guided and used by ancestralism, paternalism, and despotism, under a very limited empirical knowledge of the facts, laws and processes of nature.”48

Whereas traditional belief systems were suspended in thin air, Monism was grounded in hard science; it was therefore an evolutionary improvement on “spook” religions. “As we outgrow the childish illusions of theology and the vain fancies of metaphysics, science teaches us to work, love, hope and enjoy, and so to live in heart, head and hand contentedly, usefully and nobly in our world-house and home here and now: thus gradually to pass our lives day by day into the new generation we are here to create, educate and enlighten, so that they may occupy ‘our home’ more worthily, happily and gloriously than we.”49

At times Wakeman seemed resigned to this labor in behalf of others: “The only hope for the future, for us and our kin, and kind, is, in the higher and better evolution of our race of which we are or can be factors, and not in sky or other-world fancies.” We must live the best we can—“cheerfully, bravely and usefully for ourselves and all whom we can reach or influence...to send forward the fruits and seed-work of life to a new generation still better and nobler.”50 But service in the advancement of the race was not entirely altruistic; it contained an element of self-satisfaction, too. Subsequent generations will appreciate the work of forebears, who may take pride in the anticipation or “forefeeling” of progress and expansion of happiness. They will be “justified under the laws of social evolution and its limitless progress.”51

As a young man at Princeton University Wakeman studied for the ministry and was at the head of his class in “Christian evidences,” i.e. the empirical evidence for various dogma. Of course he also understood the importance of justification in Protestant theology, and he surely used this term self-consciously in reference to forefeeling, which was a kind of faith in progress. Instead of being justified in the eyes of God, thanks to the intercession of Christ, and through grace that leads men to Christ, Wakeman’s alternative was secular through-and-through: in the course of their daily lives men and

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47 Personal experience confirmed Wakeman’s theoretical inclination; I have elsewhere discussed his challenges in organizing free thinkers in the National Liberal League, which surely brought home the need for cohesion as the basis for effective action. See my “Social Reformers in the National Liberal League, 1876-1886.”


49 Science is Religion, 44.

50 Science is Religion, 58, 60.

51 Science is Religion, 44.
women justify themselves to each other and to future generations by their contributions to the improvement of the human race on earth.\textsuperscript{52}

At the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century humans were entering a new era, evolutionarily speaking. The Era of Man, was the telos of Wakeman’s monism. The never ending development of the human species called each generation to maintain humans’ position as the dominant species on earth. That dominance was the result of humans’ superior capacity for organization, and progress in natural science made it possible to extend the advantage and make a richer life for all. “There is no limit to man’s dominion over nature except his capacity to enforce it...to extend this dominion man must rescue himself from ignorance and the evils which shorten his life and capacity life.”\textsuperscript{53}

Earlier secularists had discredited modes of organization based on religious superstitions, but their commitment to universal mental liberty was purely negative; they could not agree on the best or most appropriate alternative. But monism offered a basis for remaking the world in accordance with a scientific understanding of nature, including human nature. The time was ripe for political action, suggested Haeckel, or as Wakeman interpreted him, “the main thing to be done in order to make the new, true and good view of the world take the place of the old, false and bad, is that those who believe in the new should ORGANIZE and work together to learn, teach, practice and realize it, and so help to order human affairs accordingly.”\textsuperscript{54}

Wakeman agreed with Haeckel’s tactical suggestion that Scientific Monism should be represented by its adherents as a religion, albeit a religion of humanity. Upon being recognized as a religion Monists could then claim all of the privileges of religions, including exemption from taxation of their gathering places. This would level the playing field in the contest between freethinkers and orthodox believers, who had long enjoyed the protection of the State. A veteran of three decades of trench warfare in behalf of the Nine Demands of Liberalism, Wakeman complained that “nearly every Liberal religious society or church I have known has gone down, chiefly because it has been taxed out of existence; and so it has been with their schools, universities and libraries. They have to pay not only their own taxes, assessments, rents and other rates, but thereby are made to help pay those of the churches which are exempted.”\textsuperscript{55}

Claiming the exemption for Monists and insisting on equal application of the law was the surest way to achieve the total separation of church and state, under the maxim that “In order to get rid of a bad law,

\textsuperscript{52}Thus, there is a spatial displacement from heaven to earth, and a temporal one from the after-life to the sequence of generations in time.


\textsuperscript{54}Haeckel presented thirty theses on monism in an address sent to the 1904 International Freethought Congress in St. Louis, Missouri. The first twenty theses summarized the principles of monistic science, and the last ten suggested the formation of a Universal Monistic Alliance as a vehicle for reform. They originally appeared in The Truth Seeker of October 29, 1904 and were subsequently reprinted in The Humanitarian Review II, 12 (December 1904): 751-759. Wakeman’s Science is Religion was an exposition and commentary on Haeckel’s theses; this quote is from p. 90.

\textsuperscript{55}Science is Religion, 100.
have it effectively and honestly enforced.”

At that point, “The cultivation of denominations, as a distinct form of superstition, and only fit to provoke discord among the heterodox, must be energetically defeated,” insisted Haeckel. Thereafter the separation should be enforced by the State, which must declare “creeds of equal right and tolerating the same without discrimination, but at the same time reserving the right to prevent their practical encroachments.”

That did not satisfy Wakeman. For American audiences Wakeman rendered Haeckel’s thesis thusly: “when any church or sect, Russian, Greek, Roman, Mormon or other, practically educates its adherents into social enemies, law violators, drones, and the useless creatures of ‘spiritual’ and ‘other-world’ despotisms, it is the necessary function of the people to see that this state of things is brought to an end by proper laws gently but effectively executed.” He brushed aside protests that such laws interfered with personal religious liberty: “At bottom, there is no ground for this objection. The ‘celibacy,’ ‘confession,’ ‘indulgences,’ and frauds by ‘miracles’ and ‘relics,’ are of themselves at the very start, deprivations of the liberty that every citizen must enjoy as a condition of the safety of all; and the robbing of the young, the innocent and the ignorant, by the various phases of duress and fraud referred to, calls for the protection of the victims by the common law, in their interest as well as that of the community.”

Not only should the State should prevent sectarian religions from proselytizing, it was responsible for promoting secular humanism in public schools and as a matter of public culture. All sectarian subjects would eliminated, and Bibles removed from the classroom. The curriculum would emphasize various branches of natural science, as well as anthropology and the evolution of human society. In addition, “daily exercise in physical culture, baths, gymnastic exercises, excursions, outings and traveling, are to be made use of for the purpose of energetically developing and invigorating the organism from delicate childhood; the inclination for observation and love of nature must be aroused and stimulated by means of public libraries, continuation schools, and popular monistic lectures; also to persons of matured education, spiritual (mental) food must be extended continuously.

Ethics, and a strong sense of duty toward the progress of the human race, must also be promoted by State action as well. Like Haeckel, Wakeman took the Golden Rule to be the fundamental law of ethics, insofar as it blended and balanced self-love and love for others: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The rule captured the interdependence of human lives, and the reciprocity of duties—or in good monist language, the correlation of duties. But patriotism, or love of the republic, was also needed to insure that citizens devoted themselves to the general improvement of the race continuously and effectively.

56 Science is Religion, 100.
58 Science is Religion, 98-99.
Patriotism would blossom as the State became an agent of the people acting in their best interest. As people come to see the State as their “indispensable protector, guardian, and friend,” they will understand the linkage between its success and their own well-being. Each will be for all when all are for each, was Wakeman’s formula for generating the unselfish devotion to the State as the agency coordinating and directing the efforts of its citizens.  

As to how that coordination should proceed, Wakeman was a little evasive: “The answer to this question must come not from gods or popes, or priests, but from the people, guided by the science of sociology. Just as in navigation, the great questions are answered by astronomy and geography; and in the realm of life and mind, by the new biology and psychology, so in the matters of social cooperation and government, the facts, laws and motives—that is, the science of human welfare, there prevailing, must be the final arbiter and umpire.”

The idea that science should dictate the organization of social life, including its politics, was consistent with the determinist core of monism. Haeckel relegated the “dogma of free will” to the same category of superstition as belief in a Supreme Being. What is called free will in a person, he said, is caused or antecedently determined by hereditary factors interacting with environmental conditions. We do as we must, scientifically speaking, not as we will, wishfully speaking. However, scientific knowledge allows humans to shape heredity by stirpiculture, or selective breeding. Knowledge also permits humans to reshape their environment. In that sense science augments human agency, within and especially across generations.

Some of Wakeman’s associates, e.g. Drs. Edward and Ned Foote, were interested in stirpiculture, and Haeckel notoriously advocated its modern counterpart, eugenics. Wakeman preferred to emphasize the alteration of environmental conditions to generate progress. “Do not as an ethical society fear that the old moral lights will be blown out and darkness result. The true scientific foundation will replace the old, as in our cities the scientific electric light has come to take the place of the old smoky lamps.”

The best social science of his time told Wakeman that politics must be reformed before policy changes could occur. An opponent of plutocracy and its corruption of politics, Wakeman was a candidate for both the Progressive Labor Party and People’s Party in New York. As a candidate he advocated the

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60 “We cannot expect “each for all” unless all is for each, with a resultant interest and honor which will make the life and welfare of the republic that of its humblest socius, or member also.” Science is Religion, 179.
61 Science is Religion, 176.
62 A different way of making the point is to say that every act of will can be explained in terms of antecedent causes or causal chains; that was the sense of Haeckel’s “determinism.” Moreover, an act of will has consequences, so that will enters into the causal sequence as an expression of human agency. The question, then, is whether a will formed in a religious environment can be as efficacious as one formed in a scientific environment, and the answer was obvious to Haeckel and his disciples, including Wakeman.
64 In 1887 he was the Progressive Labor Party’s candidate for Attorney General of New York. For the People’s Party Wakeman was a candidate for Attorney General of New York in 1893, 1894 New York Court of Appeals in 1894, and 1895 New York Secretary of State in 1895. In 1899 he became President of the Liberal University of Oregon in
initiative and referendum, a parliamentary system, with nonpartisan elections, and the expansion of civil service. As an observer of American politics he also believed that “No republic is safe unless every political party within it is at bottom a republican party—whatever other name it may bear.” 65 It was, he said, a law of sociology that a republic required three such parties: a party of integration (or centralization), a party of differentiation (or liberty), and a people’s party of independent voters who hold the balance of moral and political power and so determine which of the other parties is best suited for leadership at any given time.

In terms of policies Wakeman endorsed nationalization of key industries, e.g. transportation and utilities. After reading Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward he took an even broader view State ownership and management of the economy, recommending that basic requirements for free and civilized life be provided to all by government. He favored public works as a solution to unemployment, collective bargaining rights for labor, workplace safety laws, currency reform, and banking regulation. This was, of course, socialism, the opposite of laissez faire, which was then the dominant ideology.66

The result, then, is the separation of church from State, but not State from religion. To the contrary the State may suppress religious practices that conflict with the “religion of humanity,” which it is the duty of the State to promote by scientific means. In other words, Wakeman’s State is charged with secularizing society, so that the human race may progress under the direction of science and in the name of reason. Whether this meant the State might eventually wither into the administration of things, he did not say.

**SECULARISMS COMPARED**

By the time of Thaddeus Wakeman’s death in 1913 separation of church and State was becoming a reality in the U.S. The formal disestablishment of religion was nearly complete. State support for specific denominations had ended everywhere, and nondenominational support for religion was waning, although church property was still exempt from taxation. Religious tests excluded atheists from office in some places, states still provided chaplains in prisons, and the armed services of the United States included paid chaplains in their ranks. Nevertheless, secularists who defended separation of church and State on religious grounds might cautiously hope that religion would be fully disestablished by the middle of the 20th century, as indeed it nearly was.

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Silverton, which subsequently relocated to Kansas City. It closed its doors after a fire consumed most of the library’s holdings of free thought.

65 *Science is Religion*, 180.

66 The social Darwinist William Graham Sumner was perhaps the best known exponent of *laissez faire*; cf. What Social Classes Owe to Each Other. His leading opponent was Lester F. Ward, a sociologist who defended socialism on evolutionary grounds in much the same terms as Wakeman, who was acquainted with this prominent sociologist.
Secularists standing on scientific ground may have been discouraged, however. Not one of the Nine Demands of Liberalism had been fully realized. Sunday was a day of rest, if not for legal reasons, then out of respect for orthodox Christian mores. Laws “looking to the enforcement of ‘Christian’ morality” abounded, and political leaders routinely deferred to Christian lobbies in such matters. Public funds were still used to support parochial schools, if not directly, then indirectly via support for transportation to private schools. A scientific theist would have been dismayed by the resilience of the antidisestablishmentarians, and scientific a-theists would have been positively apoplectic at the Scopes monkey trial in 1925, when the teaching of evolution was at stake.

The situation with respect to the free exercise of religion was more complicated. Virtually everyone agreed the State may regulate religious practices that endanger others or disturb the public order. But then, as now, there was disagreement over which religious practices fit this description. In the late 19th century, for example, Alonzo T. Jones called for the legal proscription of polygamy on civil grounds, and the American Sentinel routinely argued that Mormon claims to religious freedom must be set aside in favor of protecting the rights of others (including women in polygamous relations). For Jones, the argument was the same as it was for bigamy or any other proscriptions on marriage, e.g. bans on the marriage of close relatives.67

A scientific theist could support a ban on polygamy, invoking Abbot’s deference to the “consensus of the competent” in balancing individual rights and social concerns. But a scientific a-theist must oppose laws that fall disproportionately on one group of people, whether defined by religious belief or not. Thaddeus Wakeman held no brief for religion, and he was no defender of Mormon polygamy, but like other Free Thinkers he insisted that it was no business of the states (or Congress, where the territory of Utah was concerned). For him Universal Mental Liberty was not merely a psychological condition— it extended to consensual relations that harmed no one else.

On the other hand, Wakeman countenanced restrictions on religious practices that Abbot and Jones left free. At least that was the gist of his injunction that “when any church or sect, Russian, Greek, Roman, Mormon or other, practically educates its adherents into social enemies, law violators, drones, and the useless creatures of ‘spiritual’ and ‘other-world’ despotisms, it is the necessary function of the people to see that this state of things is brought to an end by proper laws gently but effectively executed.”68 Wakeman did not say which practices out to be suppressed, but Haeckel did. In his 30 theses on Monism Haeckel declared that “In the inevitable war of culture against papism ... the celibacy of the priests, auricular confession, and the traffic of indulgences, [must] be abolished by law.” Specifically, he

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67 Ellen White, the Adventist prophetess, counseled against racial intermarriage (Manuscript 7, 1896. Selected Messages Book 2, page 343). She also counseled missionaries in the South not to contest miscegenation laws, out of concern that it might undermine their evangelical mission. White did not endorse these laws, however, and may have opposed them in principle.

68 Science is Religion, 98-99.
mentioned the “cult of miracles (Lourdes, Marpingen) and cult of relics (Aix la Chapelle, Treve)” as targets for suppression.69

Neither Jones nor Abbot suggested that Catholicism ought to be suppressed or regulated, although both expressed special animosity toward “papists,” largely on theological grounds. So did Wakeman, but mostly for secular reasons. Submission to papal authority meant Roman Catholics in the U.S. could not be true patriots. They were not wholly dedicated to the secular republic and its survival over time. Given Wakeman’s stress on corporate duty, this was indeed a mortal sin and worthy of censure. In practice that meant denial of public funds for parochial schools, and perhaps even hostility to parochial schooling in and of itself, as an institution that cultivates an identify distinct from that of Americanism. But Wakeman did not go as far as Haeckel in suggesting that the State must engage in full scale war on the Roman Catholic Church.

Antiscientific cults might become an object of regulation, too, if they generated “useless creatures“ who would not join the collective effort to maintain and improve the human race. Wakeman held Spiritualists in utter and complete contempt, so the only question was whether they posed a danger to the public. If so, they might be regulated, but he probably deemed this unnecessary, given his confidence in Scientific Monism’s capacity for exposing superstitions and other irrational belief systems. Certainly he found Spiritualists noisome, but they did not pose the same threat as the ostensibly well-organized papists in America.

Thus, the disestablishment of religion did not eliminate conflicts between secular authorities and people whose religious practices had civil consequences. The nature of these conflicts was altered by the disestablishment of religion, however. What had once been a conflict between religions waged through the State became a conflict between secular authorities, on the one hand, and religious adherents, on the other. The mutation of this conflict affected the character of the secular State itself, i.e. the remainder of the State, once its ties to a church were removed.

In particular, the civil authorities needed to justify restrictions on religious practices, and they also had to legitimate new policies occasioned by disestablishment, e.g. the need to teach morality in public schools without invoking God in any way. A civil religion was needed to bolster the civil authorities, and the specific content of this civic religion had implications for the form and functions of the secular State, as Jones, Abbot and Wakeman realized.

For a religious secularist like Jones the democratic State has a limited brief to maintain order and uphold individual rights that are God-given. This may require the enforcement of morality, but only morality that is consistent with the revealed will of God. Because they are ordained by God, civil authorities have no authority to range beyond His will. Even within that constraint they have no authority except to punish, and hence deter, acts that offend the moral conscience of the community. Intentions, e.g. covetous thoughts, are beyond reach of the law, under the principle of harm.

Thus, Jones took a minimalist view of the Secular state. Much of what States did before disestablishment was the prerogative of churches, which had primary responsibility for teaching Christians how to treat each other. Of course each religion had its own moral code, but Jones seemed untroubled by the possibility of social conflict among religions. Perhaps he assumed that religions would form enclaves and have minimal contact with people of other faiths; in fact Adventists were forbidden to marry outsiders, and other religions had similar strictures or customs. Or perhaps Jones believed there was sufficient overlap in the Judeo-Christian United States to insure a rough consensus on the Second Table as the basis for a just society in a religious society, with the State as neutral umpire.

It is worth noting that secularism based on religious considerations placed limits on believers’ allegiance to the State. They only respected State actions that were consistent with the revealed will of God, and even then only because obedience was divinely ordained. In that sense there is no love for the State, nor any strong sense of patriotism in Jones’ account. Perhaps there cannot be, when sovereignty is God’s alone and the authority of the State is wholly derivative.

Monists like Abbot and Wakeman saw things quite differently; for them reason was sovereign, so long as it was scientifically informed. Both Abbot and Wakeman based the power of the State on the willing assent of those it governed. In Abbot’s case the assent was given for all by those who were competent to judge, but competence was universal, at least in principle. That is, every reasonable person would agree with the consensus of the competent, given a proper education and time for reflection. That is because the “philosophized method of science” yielded positive knowledge of justice and its dictates. Those who loved truth and craved justice would then submit to any State that acts reasonably, i.e. on the basis of scientific knowledge, which includes respect for human rights.

Of course, no person ever surrendered his or her judgment to the State, under Abbot’s scientific theism; they simply consented to its dictates, or contested them by reasonable and possibly quite vigorous means. A commitment to reason was therefore the foundation of the secular State, according to Abbot, who felt no need to offer anything substantial in the way of a civil religion.

Wakeman understood that more was needed to empower the secular State to undertake the reforms he and Abbot championed together (let alone the socialism that Wakeman advocated). He presented scientific a-theism as a form of positive knowledge, but he carefully represented it as the “religion of science and humanity.” This reflected his long-standing belief in the power of orthodox religion to unite people in common cause. The Free Religion of Abbot was no substitute for this purpose; it was too abstract to move people’s hearts. The religion of science and humanity was more concrete; it enlisted people in a cause that was relevant to their own lives, but which also had greater significance. “Paradise on Earth” was the promise of Wakeman’s secular humanism, and the organization of collective action by the State its means.\(^70\)

\(^70\) Wakeman even wrote secular prayers to underscore the “religious” nature of this cause. The chorus or echo for one, The Human Prayer, was:

So, Each for All,
And All for Each!
Beyond the religious symbolism, the secular State of Wakeman’s imagination provided material benefits to those who labored in behalf of humanity. His state was not merely secular; it was unapologetically socialist in orientation. It was also broadly inclusive, politically speaking. Thus, Wakeman was a staunch support of women’s suffrage, and had been from the start.

Abbot, too, defended women’s suffrage on the ground of equal rights. But he insisted that secularization must precede women’s suffrage, for then women would be enlightened voters, having been liberated from orthodox Christianity. If suffrage came first, however, the secular cause was lost, for the ranks of Christian voters would double and efforts to establish a Christian nation would succeed. Hence Abbot urged women to subordinate their demands to the larger cause: “Under a secularized State, every human individuality will be respected and protected; under a Christianized State, no one will be, but free thinking men and women alike must be oppressed with grievous disabilities.”

Jones was even less sympathetic to women’s suffrage. Like Abbot, he feared an influx of women voters who wanted to put God in the Constitution and make Sunday a national day of rest and worship. Under his version of the separation of church and State there was no reason to think women would ever lose the allegiance to Christian religions; if anything they ought to become more devout, as their churches became more evangelical in operation. The impression that Jones did not see how women could ever be trusted with the vote is confirmed by signed editorials in the American Sentinel expressing uncertainty about woman’s suffrage, alongside reprints from other Christian periodicals reserving the public sphere to men, and on Biblical grounds allocating women to the private or domestic sphere.

From these examples we see that a secular State is not merely a State that stands apart from any and all churches. Precisely because the secular State does not endorse any particular religion, it needs a civil religion to sustain its authority. That civil religion must draw upon universal values, and the search for an authoritative source of these values heads in different directions. In the twentieth century, for example, the Scientific Theism of Abbot led directly to religious humanism, which eschewed any belief in a Creator so as to focus attention on social injustices in this world. A leading exponent of this call to arms was John Dewey, whose 1933 essay entitled A Common Faith (1933) defended the scientific method as

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From Each his highest deed,  
To each as he may need!  
Amen—Amen!

“The Human Prayer,” Blue Grass Blade January 3, 1909: 3-4. The Blade was a freethinkers’ journal published in Lexington, Kentucky. At this time it was edited by John R. Charlesworth, an ally of Wakeman from the late 1880s and early 1890s.

the most efficacious way to address the ills of modern industrial society, and democracy as the process for generating the collective will to do so.\textsuperscript{72}

Whereas Abbot cherished the certainty of knowledge referring to an intelligently designed universe, Dewey was enamored of the provisional character of scientific knowledge, the potency of the scientific method, and the enduring value of experimentation to improve our knowledge of what works to improve the human condition. In that respect Dewey leaned toward the socialism of Wakeman, but with this critical difference. Wakeman was a determinist who dismissed the notion of free will, and with it much of the contingency that infuses the very idea of moral agency. Our concept of moral agency rests on the presumption that we can hold persons responsible for the actions they choose, from the alternatives available to them in their situation here and now. But if there is no free will, there can be no truly free choice, and without free choice it is exceedingly difficult to assign responsibility for actions.

So-called “new atheists,” e.g. Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett, are contemporary exponents of this view.\textsuperscript{73} They understand today’s social ethical injunctions as beliefs that survive because the behaviors they sanction conferred some evolutionary advantage in the past. Such beliefs, including the idea of free will, are adaptations selected by environmental conditions, not freely chosen codes based on some intellectual assessment of the ethical, or meta-ethical, worth of this stricture on conduct or that mandated action. For these new atheists the only question is whether these codes retain value in our present circumstances or under existing environmental constraints, i.e. whether they still contribute to general human well-being.

In fact, one of the most interesting new atheists, Sam Harris, formulates the problem in terms that echo Wakeman’s. For Harris, human well-being is the benchmark for evaluating any system of ethics, or any particular ethical injunction.\textsuperscript{74} What contributes to human well-being is for science to say, not religion, since the question is what allows humans to thrive, and societies to prosper on this earth, at this time, as best we know, judging from the evidence we have at hand. This does not preclude the possibility that the evidence we have now is ambiguous, and might support different or even divergent conclusions. Neither does it assume that what we now think contributes to well-being might later be discovered wrong. What it does preclude are appeals beyond reason, for reason is humans’ specific evolutionary advantage, which cannot be sacrificed without devastating consequences for individuals, and the species as a whole. It is this conviction that runs through the American secularism of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and into the present day.

\textsuperscript{72} Russell L. Hanson, “Rationalism, Secularism and Humanism in the United States, 1873-1934.” Presented at a panel on “The Founding Moment: The Importance of Mores and Constitutional Deliberation to Democratic Success” at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 13, 2013, Chicago, Illinois.

\textsuperscript{73} Russell L. Hanson, "The Ethics of Secular Humanism and New Atheism," a paper to be presented for a panel on Politics and Religion at the 2014 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois.

\textsuperscript{74} Sam Harris, \textit{The Moral Landscape} (New York: The Free Press, 2011).