
THE POLARIZATION OF THE US AND THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY: BELLAH AND GORSKI

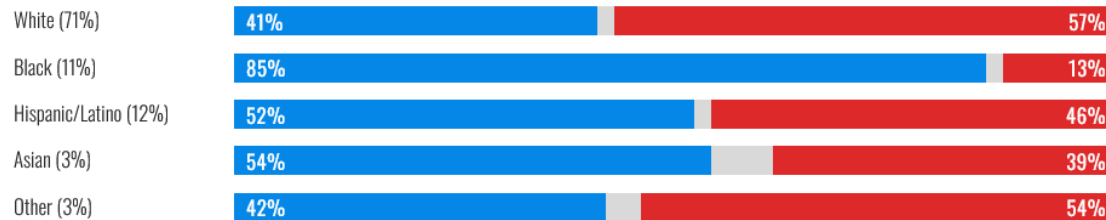


INTRODUCTION: THE POLARIZATION OF THE US

Gender



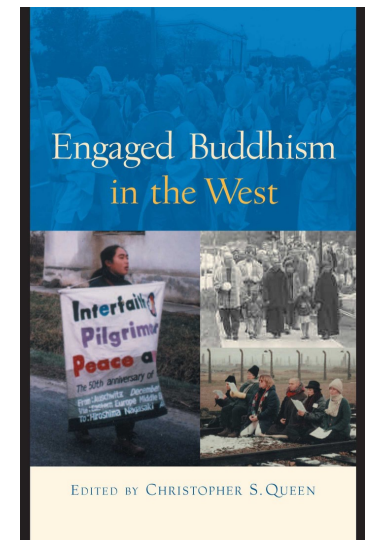
Are you:



- Stop AAPI Hate: nearly half of Asian Americans experienced a hate incident in 2023
- Anti-immigrant sentiment: % of Americans who think immigration should be decreased has doubled since 2020
- Polarized election

BELLAH'S TWO INSIGHTS

1. A Theory of Cultural Evolution with Religion at its Center
2. Critical Re-appropriation of Inherited Traditions for a Moral Stance of Responsibility toward Humanity



“Can the universal insights of the Axial Age religions and ethics be critically reimagined and restoried, ritually renewed and enacted in modern institutions?”

GORKSKI: DISENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD?

Differentiation: value spheres



Disenchantment: demagicification

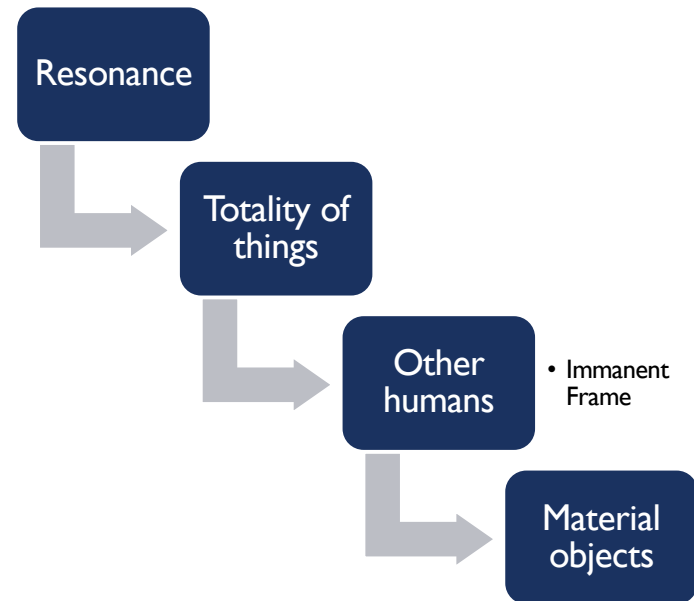
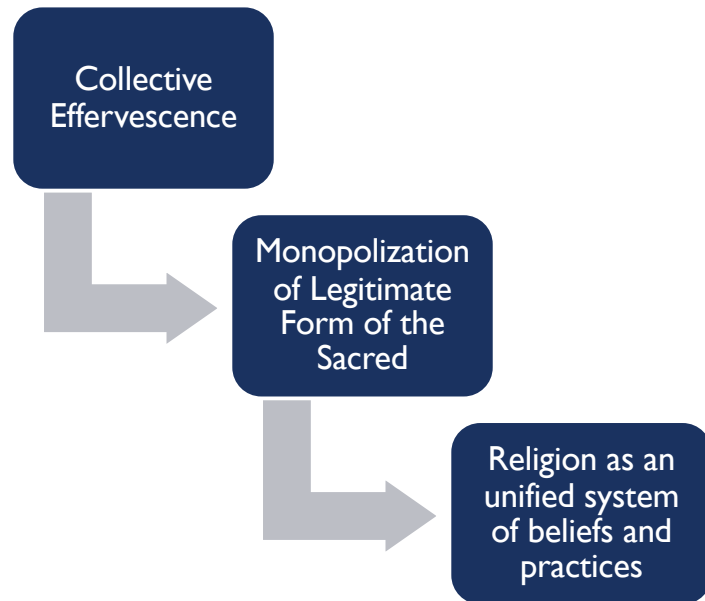


Rationalization: efficient means towards ultimate ends

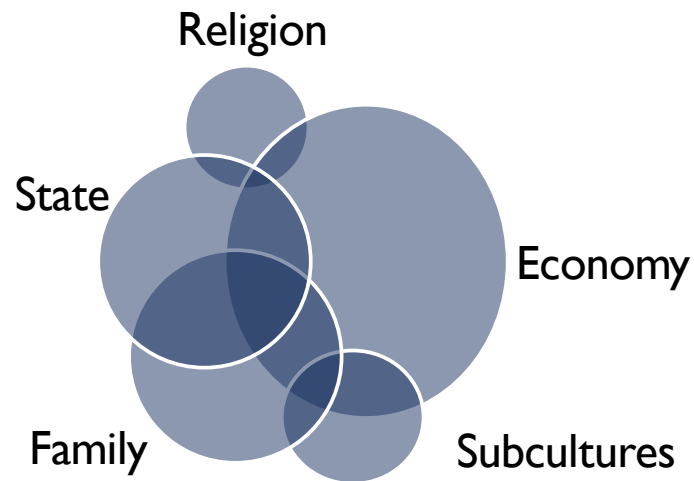


Secularization: differentiation of religious and nonreligious values

TWO THEORIES OF SACRALIZATION

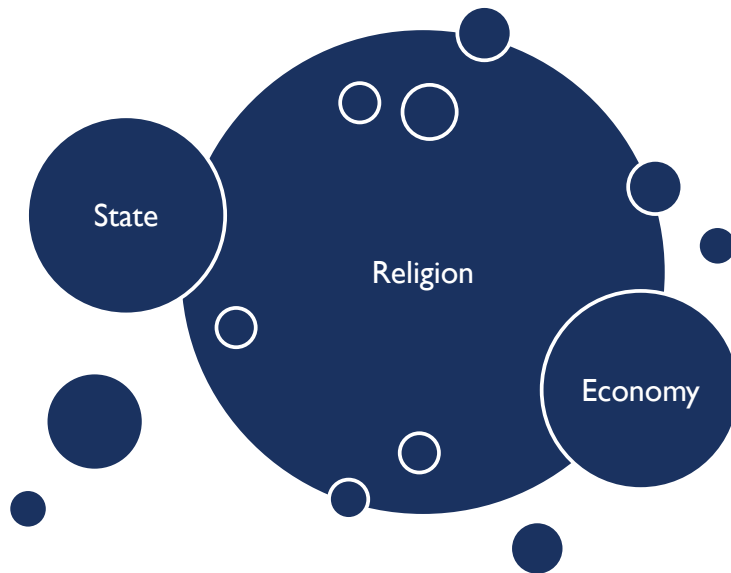


A THEORY OF WEAK FIELDS



- Fields and their boundaries are permeable
- Size of field varies
 - Population
 - Resources
 - Practices
- Sacralization of all fields, esp. the state and the individual
- “The sacred has not disappeared; it has simply become scattered and more diffuse.”

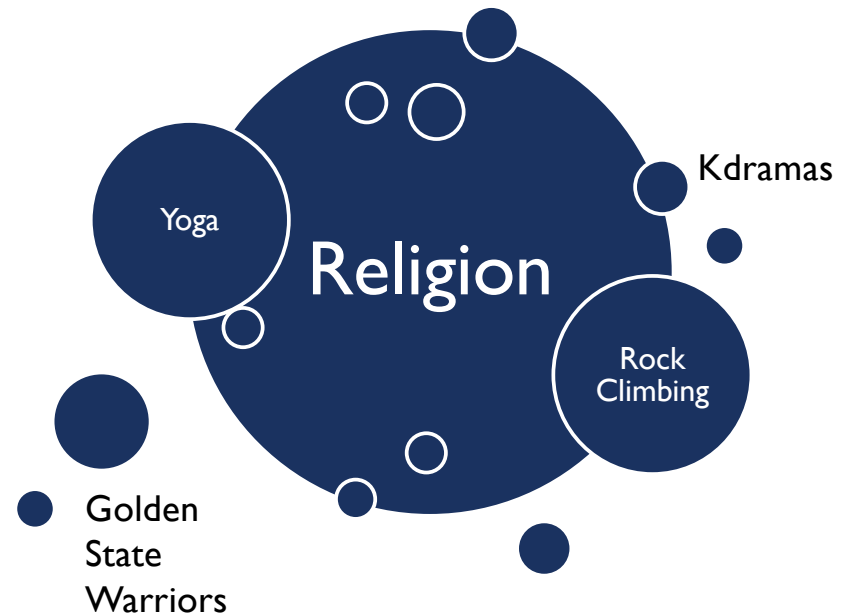
FRAGMENTATION THEORY



- Weber's Secularization Theory critiqued because spheres intersect, the world remains enchanted, and rationality has not been effective
- Fragmentation Theory continues Bellah's religious evolution from Axial Age to Late Modern, where we have a free marketplace for religious meaning

FRAGMENTATION THEORY

- Fragmentation generates individualism and challenges unity
- Rather than choosing among warring gods, we hybridize and choose religion and spirituality and secularity
- Rather than trapped in an iron cage without meaning, we face a surfeit of meanings



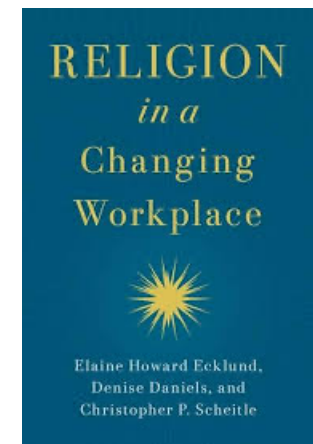
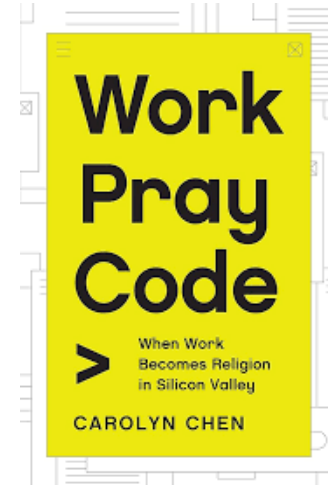
BEYOND FRAGMENTATION THEORY: CIVIL RELIGION



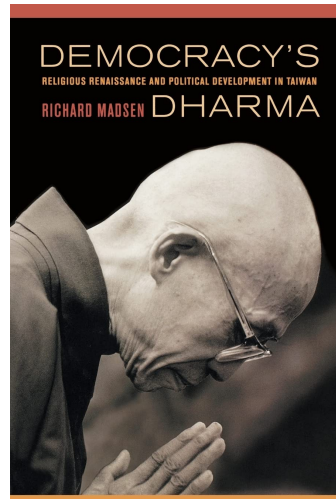
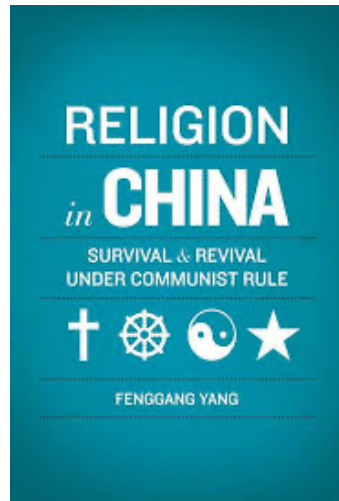
- The rise of MAGA and white Christian nationalism is an extreme form of civil religion, perhaps unforeseen by Bellah et al.
- Gorski might argue that this hybridized religion of race, exceptionalism, and nativism is an exceptional constellation of ideas of the moment.
- Beyond stating that social fields are weak and permeable, what factors and institutional logics led to this movement?

BEYOND FRAGMENTATION THEORY: THE SACRALITY OF THE WORKPLACE AND THE PRIVATE

- Work is not necessarily the iron cage, the new cathedral where meaning, purpose, and relationships, are found.
- Among Gen Z, family is not necessarily sacred but life/work balance becomes one's chosen identity and aim.
- How do the language and activities of the sacred become articulated across social fields?
- As this sacred becomes diffuse, how do religious institutions adjust?



BEYOND FRAGMENTATION THEORY: THE CASE OF CHINA



- Instead of hosting a religious monopoly, China has historically been religiously pluralistic
- State religion = civil religion
- Diffuse religion based on moral boundaries and rituals, not beliefs and churches
- Is modernity's challenge to the sacred different in this context? What does religious revival in China say about the persistence and redefinition of the sacred?

FRAGMENTATION THEORY: QUESTIONS FOR SACRALITY

- What offers the unified system of beliefs anymore?
Do persons continue to desire this meaning?
- Has the definition of the sacred lost its meaning?
- With the rise of nationalisms, have the state and the economy, with their rational ends of power and capital, also gained control over the sacred?



FRAGMENTATION THEORY: QUESTIONS FOR RELIGIONS



- Religion formerly was the site for rituals of the three forms of resonance (totality, humans, objects). Has it lost its ability to compete in the resonance marketplace?
- How do religiously pluralistic societies offer sacred canopies of meaning?
- What examples of religious moral re-imagination, ritualized unity, and re-storied narratives offer hope?