

Chapter 11

Without God yet Not Without Nuance: A Qualitative Study of Atheism and Non-religion Among Scottish University Students

Christopher R. Cotter

The closer people's worldviews are probed – even among self-described secular or nonreligious individuals – the more difficult it is to neatly place many into the major categories that frame Western discourse on “theism” and “atheism” or “religion” or “irreligion”.

(Pasquale 2010, 63)

If the academic study of religion in recent years has taught us anything, it is that despite prevalent scholarly “preference for sharply dualistic or oppositional classes” (Smith 2000, 38–39), social reality rarely conforms to these rhetorical constructions. Unsurprisingly, this is also the case in the study of religion’s ‘other’, the “semantically parasitic” category of “non-religion” (Fitzgerald 2007a, 54) and its related-yet-distinct cousin ‘atheism’. This chapter presents the results of a small-scale research project (Cotter 2011c)¹ which focused on the narratives of undergraduate students and problematizes simplistic either/or understandings of these categories. Along the way, I discuss various definitional issues associated with the term ‘atheism’, and suggest an alternative strategy for understanding (non)religiosity which is ideal-typical, independent of religion-related categories (Quack 2012a, 26), and supported by contemporary academic discourse on the non-ontological ‘sacred’ (Lynch 2012; Knott 2013). This chapter represents part of a growing effort to further the in-depth and qualitative understanding of non-religious

¹This project could not have happened without the selfless support of dozens of colleagues, friends and informants. I am particularly grateful to my former supervisor, Dr Steven J. Sutcliffe, who went above-and-beyond the call of duty to provide support and sound academic critique at every stage.

C.R. Cotter (✉)

Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK
e-mail: chris.r.cotter@gmail.com

people in their own right (Bullivant and Lee 2012; Cotter 2011b; Cotter et al. 2012; Pasquale 2012) and to recognize:

that the ‘in between’ is a position which finds frequent attestation in the real world, and that this is not predominantly inconsistent, blurred or inconsequential, but a substantial and legitimate phenomenon which informs, and is informed by, a multitude of intersecting social identities. (Day et al. 2013, 6)

11.1 Introduction

The work on which this chapter is based was carried out in 2010–2011 amongst undergraduate students at the University of Edinburgh via electronic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and took a grounded theoretical approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Engler 2011). The study was initially motivated by recognising a substantial gap in existing literature concerning the non-religious,² who do not easily fit within standard models in the academic study of religion.³ Although there are a number of well-known sociological (Campbell 1971; Demerath 1969; Demerath and Thiessen 1966; Vernon 1968) and historical (Berman 1988; Budd 1977; Thrower 1979, 1980, 2000) exceptions to the rule, Stephen Bullivant and Lois Lee trace a historical neglect of ‘non-religion’ to the non-religiosity of many of the social sciences’ early pioneers who, in trying to understand why so many people could believe in something ‘so absurd’, “arguably failed to recognize that their own lack of belief might itself be amenable to similar research” (2012, 20). However, they also point to extensive interest in the anomaly of ‘unbelief’ from Catholic social scientists throughout the 1950s and 1960s (see Caporale and Grumelli 1971). From whichever camp, it is clear that “Much of the early research that mentions the non-religious has included non-religious individuals as a comparison group, a statistical outlier, or an afterthought” or, indeed, as a *problem* to be dealt with (Pasquale 2012). As a result, terminology used to refer to the non-religious in the social science of religion has often been ambiguous, imprecise, and even biased and derogatory (Cragun and Hammer 2011), and it is not uncommon to find ‘non-religious’ people

²As a subject in their own right. If one turns to debate on ‘secularization’, the ‘non-religious’ generally remains as an insubstantial category of individuals who ‘lack’ the variable that authors are interested in, or, in Rational Choice Theory approaches, as a temporary transitional stage ‘between’ religious positions (Lee 2012a, 31).

³My recognition of this was coincidentally shared with many others around the same time. Two key research groups were established in the early 2000s – the *Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society & Culture* (ISSSC) at Trinity College, Massachusetts, and the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN) – and each maintains a vibrant online presence. That these groups joined together to launch the journal *Secularism and Nonreligion* in August 2011, combined with a special edition of the *Journal of Contemporary Religion* on ‘Non-religion and Secularity’ (Vol. 27 No. 1, 2012), testifies to the growing interest in this area.

castigated for believing “anything rather than nothing” (Percy 2004, 39) or for holding nothing to be “sacred or holy” (Paden 1988, 48–49; cited in Thomas 2004, 51).

Against this backdrop, my main concern when conceiving the study was to avoid imposing preconceived categories onto informants (see Day 2009a, b, 2011), and this included an aversion to naively engaging with ‘non-religious’ organizations as if they served as mere substitutes for conventionally-understood religious institutions (Campbell 1971, 42). I proceeded by adapting Lois Lee’s concise definition of ‘non-religion’—“anything which is *primarily* defined by a relationship of difference to religion” (2012b, 131 emphasis in original)⁴—and pragmatically took advantage of the dependence of this definition upon a substantial definition of ‘religion’ by placing this issue at the feet of my informants. In the context of this chapter, I set aside the issue of primacy and take ‘non-religion’ to refer to aspects of my informants’ practices, beliefs, attitudes and identity which were *self-described* as *different* from their individual *self-definitions of religion*.

Concisely, the aims of this study were to: break open and demonstrate variety in the category ‘non-religious’, whilst critiquing the inadequacy of attempts to do this in terms of dimensions of religiosity (*non-belief*, *non-affiliation*, *non-attendance*, etc.); provide ‘non-religious’ informants with a narrative platform from which to speak in a non-prescriptive fashion about what mattered to them, and to digress on certain issues if they chose (cf. Day 2009a, 93); and to provide an alternative conceptualization of non-religion in the form of a typology that prioritized these individual narratives. It was hoped that by constructing questionnaires and interview schedules which allowed informants to express themselves in a manner which was not constrained by a priori definitions of religion, I would gain access to real-life subjective articulations of different ways of being (non)religious.

To briefly contextualize my sample, the University of Edinburgh boasts around 30,000 students, and is based in Edinburgh (population approx. 477,000), the capital city of Scotland (population approx. 5,300,000) (National Records of Scotland 2012). Scotland itself is a distinct nation within the United Kingdom⁵ yet, while retaining notably higher levels of church attendance (Guest et al. 2012, 64), shares with England and Wales (and more broadly, Western Europe) an undeniable narrative of declining church attendance and loss of normative Christian culture,

⁴The jury is still out on how useful this definition is to the academic study of religion. Lee has stated herself that one of the key conceptual issues we face is that ‘religion’ serves as both a first- and second-order definitional category, meaning that a much wider reformation in academic discourse may be necessary (Lee 2012a, 4–5). She has also acknowledged that ‘non-religion studies’ will have failed if the term is still being employed in 10 years (Lee 2012c). Ultimately, the study of the non-religious may contribute to the contemporary deconstruction of the category ‘religion’ (Fitzgerald 2000, 2007a, b; McCutcheon 1997, 2007). I believe the term to be rhetorically useful, in this context, for focusing attention on an otherwise neglected constituency. For further problematization of the term in Religious Studies see Connelly et al. (2012).

⁵Along with England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, the forthcoming (at the time of writing) referendum on Scottish Independence (September 2014) may change this situation.

particularly since the 1960s (Brown 1992, 75–76; Brown 2001; Brown and Lynch 2012, 344; Bruce 2013, 371).⁶ In 2011, 93 % of the Scottish population answered a question on the Scottish decennial census which asked “What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?” According to the National Records of Scotland,

54 per cent of the population stated they belonged to a Christian denomination (a decrease of 11 percentage points from 2001) whilst the proportion who stated that they had ‘No religion’ was 37 per cent (an increase of 9 percentage points from 2001). All other religions made up the remaining 3 per cent, an increase from 2 per cent from 2001. (2013, 4)

Turning to other factors, it is worth noting that whereas in 1900 Scotland had around 3,600 Presbyterian clergy (the national Church of Scotland is Presbyterian), this had fallen to around 900 in the year 2000 (Bruce 2013, 374, drawing on Brierley 1989, 55). It is also significant that Scotland has been alone in the UK in granting ‘humanist’ weddings legal status since 2005. In 2009 there were more humanist weddings in Scotland than those conducted by all churches except Roman Catholic and Church of Scotland (Brown and Lynch 2012, 339). Of course, there are enormous regional variations across Scotland in terms of religious practice and affiliation, with conservative Protestantism remaining strong in remote fishing villages in the north east (see Webster 2013), and Catholic/Protestant sectarianism, “particularly in the west (around Glasgow)” and “strongly linked to the footballing rivalry between the Glasgow teams of Celtic and Rangers,” remaining a major social and political issue (Nye and Weller 2012, 37). In Edinburgh, 45 % of the population selected ‘No religion’ on the 2011 Census (8 % higher than the national average), in comparison with 48 % for all other religious identifications combined (National Records of Scotland 2013, 33), and although some Christian congregations (see Roxburgh 2012) and other religious identifications are growing, the situation remains one of clear decline. Although these are by no means the only potential measures of ‘religion’ or ‘religiousness’, this brief discussion indicates that Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular, are sites in which a growing and significant section of the population self-describe as being other than ‘religious’.

The decision to utilize undergraduate students at the university at which I was based was unashamedly pragmatic, but was supported by existing research which suggested a strong correlation between low levels of individual religiosity, youth (Collins-Mayo and Dandelion 2010; Brierley 2006), and higher education (Hayes 2000; Beit-Hallahmi 2007; Guest and Sharma 2011). It was also significant that up until this point, with the notable exception of Bullivant (2008), Catto and Eccles (2013), and Tomlins in this volume, existing studies tended to focus upon ‘religious’ students⁷ and give little attention or nuance to those with low religiosity (which is itself a relative measure that promotes a normative religiosity (Pasquale 2007)). Due

⁶Although other ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’ phenomena have ‘always’ existed in Scotland (see Brown 2010, 138–142), the dominant narrative of ‘Christianity’ suffices for illustrative purposes in this context.

⁷For example, Bryant (2006, 2007), Dutton (2008), Gilliat-Ray (2000), Rees (1967).

to university regulations,⁸ it was impossible to conduct a university-wide survey, or one which extended beyond a single ‘school’ (faculty). With the exploratory nature of this research meaning that I deemed it of greatest importance to maximize the response rate, I disseminated electronic questionnaires to 17 student societies (‘clubs’) that were selected to provide a broad cross-section of the ideological and ‘faith-based’ perspectives represented on campus,⁹ in line with Edward Dutton’s theory that student societies act as locations where students “assert or find a strong identity” as a means of coping with the ‘liminal’ nature of the university experience (2008, 83).

Questionnaires were designed with the intention of allowing students to provide as much information as they wished, with many questions being left open-ended. When respondents were asked about which (non)religious terms they ‘identified’ with, they could choose as many as they desired, answer ‘none of the above’, and/or specify other terms if they wished. Ultimately I cast a wide net over the ‘non-religion’ side of the religion/non-religion dichotomy, rejecting only those students who did not self-identify themselves as ‘non-religious’ in their own terms *and* who scored highly on self-declared measures of what would traditionally be labelled ‘religious’ attitudes, beliefs and practices. This resulted in a subject group of 48 students, with an average age of 21, just under two-thirds of whom were female. Following an initial survey of the data, a loose interview schedule was constructed and 11 interviews of 60–80 min took place with a cross-section of respondents. This method resulted in a rich set of narrative data upon which the rest of this chapter is based.

11.2 What does this have to do with Atheism?

The term ‘atheism’ has taken on a variety of meanings throughout its long history, being used to refer to disbelief in specific divinities, and as a derogatory and accusatory term for those (deemed to be) outside the dominant religion (McGrath 2005; Hyman 2007). It is only in the past couple of 100 years that the term has become more widely utilized as a term of self-identification, beginning in France in the mid-eighteenth century and expanding to Britain and beyond shortly after (Thrower 2000; Quack 2012b).

To the best of my knowledge, there are currently three main understandings of the term ‘atheist’: (1) a person who *does not believe* in God—who takes ‘a principled and informed decision to *reject* belief in God’ (McGrath 2005, 175); (2) a person who *believes that* there is no God (see Shermer 1999, 256); (3) a

⁸See: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/committees/student-survey-ethics/applications>

⁹For example, the Young Greens, Scottish Nationalist Association, Humanist Society, Catholic Students Union, and Yoga Society.

person who “simply and unproblematically *lack[s]* gods” (Eller 2010a, 3), where “lack” should be interpreted in a strictly neutral and descriptive sense (Bullivant 2011, 1 fn.). Each of these definitions demonstrates variations on the theme of the non-existence of a deity. However, a lack of belief does not necessarily imply an opinion on whether this deity exists or not. Realising this, Michael Martin makes a distinction between “negative atheism” which exemplifies the etymologically rooted “someone without a belief in God” and “positive atheism” as “the belief that there is no God” (Martin 2007, 1; cf. Cotter 2011a, 79). Atheism can be viewed as immutably “inscribed” with theism (Hyman 2010, xviii), as *not* “parasitic on religion” (Baggini 2003, 9–10) or, through following Eller’s reasoning and acknowledging the Western, theistic origins of the term, as “*the most common form of religion*” (Eller 2010b, 3). From this discussion, it seems reasonable to suggest that the academic definition of an atheist should simply be a person who does not have a belief in a theistic god. However, settling on this understanding still leaves much ambiguity. The designation ‘atheist’ could apply to individuals who identify with a ‘World Religion’, who self-identify as ‘atheist’, who self-identify as ‘agnostic’, or who attempt to exempt themselves from this discussion altogether; atheism is *not the opposite of* religion (Lee 2012a). There are likely to be major differences between someone being an atheist in the technical sense, and someone consciously identifying herself as an atheist. Much like someone can identify as ‘Christian’ for a variety of meaningful reasons (see Day 2011), yet give little thought to the existence of—or actively disbelieve in—a god, so too someone can identify as an ‘atheist’ and yet when we delve beneath the surface things get much more complicated. The recognition of this dynamic is important for any investigation which purports to study ‘atheism’, but need not be a hindrance to research which provides a precise definition of the term from the outset. As for this chapter, the study which forms its empirical basis did not set out to engage only with atheists (however defined), but with a wider and more diffuse group of ‘non-religious’ individuals. However, the majority of participants in this study *did* explicitly self-identify as ‘atheists’ and, as shall be detailed below, even those who did not utilize this term, or who openly distanced themselves from the term, did not claim to believe in a *theistic* god. Therefore, every student involved in this study can be considered, at least at the level of the minimal definition suggested above, as ‘atheists’. My contention throughout the rest of this chapter¹⁰ is that if we look beyond this categorization these students have much more to say about the distinct-yet-related phenomenon of ‘non-religion’.¹¹

¹⁰Although this study did engage with practice, beliefs, values, and other dimensions of religiosity, the methods employed, and the space available, mean that the following account might appear somewhat intellectualized and identity-focused. See Cotter (2011c) for other notable trends and characteristics.

¹¹Where ‘non-religion’ should be understood as a contextually useful rhetorical device, and not as an umbrella term to subsume ‘atheism’ (cf. Quillen 2012).

11.3 Taking a Closer Look

Midway through the questionnaire, the 48 eligible participants in this study were presented with a list of 33 common (non)religious terms and asked the question “Do you consider any of the following terms to apply to you?” The numbers selecting each term were as follows Fig. 11.1.

‘Atheist’ was by far the most frequently used term amongst these students, with variations on all three definitions discussed above being provided upon further questioning. The most common of these was the ‘does not believe’ approach, exemplified by one student defining atheist as “literally one who does not believe in a god.”¹² However, this frequency of use is not necessarily reflected in other contexts. Courtney, who self-identified as an ‘atheist’ (amongst other things) stated in her interview that she would not use this as a self-descriptor when completing the Scottish census because she did not think atheism was a religion.¹³ Conversely, another ‘atheist’ claimed to have ceased regularly identifying with this term because they “realized that to many [people] this [...] was a faith system in its own right.” Although all definitions of the term appeared to exclude belief in a theistic god, the questionnaire returned examples of two ‘Catholics’, a ‘Jew’ and a practising ‘Buddhist’ who also self-described as ‘atheists’. Others added clarifying phrases such as “believes purely in science” to their definition, suggesting that ‘atheism’ can also be associated with positive ‘belief-in’ type stances. However, beyond this basic position of ‘lacking belief’, box-ticking on questionnaires tells us little else about the individuals involved. The situation was somewhat similar with the terms ‘non-religious’ and ‘agnostic’, whilst the other ‘traditionally non-religious’ terms—‘freethinker’, ‘humanist’, ‘materialist’, ‘rationalist’, ‘sceptic’ and ‘secularist’—seemed, in this context, not to be inherently non-religious—i.e. they

Atheist	32	Spiritual	8	Protestant	2
Non-religious	24	Bright	4	Anglican	1
Agnostic	16	Catholic	4	Buddhist	1
Humanist	16	Roman Catholic	3	Pagan	1
Freethinker	15	Christian	3	Presbyterian	1
Rationalist	13	Jew	2	Spiritualist	1
Sceptic	11	Materialist	2	Zoroastrian	1
Secularist	11	None of the above	2		

Fig. 11.1 Number of students selecting ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ self-descriptors (One shunned all labels; the other identified as a ‘feminist’)

¹²Where questionnaire respondents are quoted, no pseudonyms shall be provided. Where an interviewee is quoted, their assigned pseudonym accompanies the quotation.

¹³The Scottish 2011 census occurred contemporaneously with the interview phase of this project. Interviewees were shown the ‘religion question’—‘What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?’—at the conclusion of the interview and asked about how they would/did complete it, and for their thought process.

can be deployed with both ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ intent (cf. Campbell 1971, 18). This terminological ambiguity is further illustrated if we consider the 33 students who self-identified utilising more than one (non)religious term.¹⁴

11.3.1 *Multiple Identification*

For many individuals, the adoption of multiple (non)religious terms causes no obvious definitional conflict. For instance, when asked whether any of his seven selected terms—atheist, freethinker, humanist, non-religious, rationalist, sceptic, secularist—had greater prominence than others, Patrick answered: “I kinda consider them all sort of a nebulous group of things; they’re all kind of similar, and [I’m] sort of just a mix of all them really . . .” Whilst this type of multiple self-identification might be somewhat uncontroversial, there were others who self-identified using multiple terms in a manner which *appears* inconsistent to the external observer.¹⁵ For example, ten students selected both ‘atheist’ and ‘agnostic’—with some self-defining as ‘atheist-agnostic’. Fundamentally this dual terminology originates in an understanding of the terms in which *both* become types of ‘negative’ atheism—where the agnostic genuinely claims to reserve judgement, yet lives as if they did not believe in god(s) (Eller 2010a, 9). For some, there is a clear reluctance surrounding the term ‘agnostic’; it is adopted because it is seen as the scientifically honest position, but is adopted *reluctantly* because it gives the impression of ‘sitting on the fence’. For others, ‘agnostic’ plays a central role in their self-identification, demonstrating an openness to phenomena “other than what we can see or detect” (Malcolm) and, occasionally, towards ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’.

The key point here is that apart from those students who openly embraced the *inconsistency* of their position (discussed below), the (non)religious terms selected by respondents were compatible at a subjective level. For example, one male student selected ‘agnostic’, ‘atheist’, ‘Buddhist’, ‘freethinker’, ‘humanist’, ‘non-religious’, ‘sceptic’ and ‘spiritual’. This individual self-identifies as ‘Buddhist’ and ‘spiritual’, claims to believe in reincarnation, and designates “the Buddhist philosophy” as one of his most valuable beliefs. However, elsewhere in the questionnaire he conceptualizes religion as the “belief in a higher entity (God) and [the worship of] that entity.” Hence his assertion that he is ‘non-religious’ and, indeed, an ‘atheist’. Within his narrative, the ‘humanist’ element clearly related to the high priority he places on the well-being of other human beings, whilst ‘agnostic’, ‘freethinker’ and ‘sceptic’ all revolve around a fundamental attitude of questioning and challenging established thought. This individual demonstrates that, to adapt Swatos’ position, “it is quite possible to hold to more than one

¹⁴It would have been interesting to know which term these individuals would have picked if only allowed one choice.

¹⁵Not that consistency is to be expected in human beings.

‘religion’ [... or indeed ‘non-religion’] simultaneously” (Swatos 2003, 50). He is also illustrative of the way in which the individuals in this study negotiated the semantic minefield of ‘non-religious’ terminology in a pragmatic manner which is consistent throughout their contextually-constructed narratives.

As I have already suggested, this convenient kind of explanation did not easily map on to all instances of multiple (non)religious self-identifications. Other students attested to frequent contextual fluctuation between terms, in two overlapping forms: pragmatic self-representation utilising different terms on different occasions; and self-perceived changes in (non)religiosity. Some of the pragmatic reasons which individuals cite are quite mundane: for instance, Courtney described how she generally considers herself an ‘atheist’, and likes the ideas behind ‘humanism’, yet “secularist and non-religious seem like answers I’d put down on a census.” For others, however, this alternating of terminology was rooted in memorable—and *emotional* (see Mumford in this volume)—life-experiences. For example, one student suggested that although she would ‘identify’ as a secularist or atheist “in political debate, among friends, colleagues etc.”, she “avoid[s] the issue” with family because of the offence caused to Christian family members; Iona, who normally enjoys “atheist chat” is “really sensitive with people who actually are religious” because she is conscious of upsetting those in her life who use religion “as a way to cope”; and Séverine, who is a staunch atheist under normal circumstances, fondly said “I’m not gonna have an argument with a very old lady, [...] I don’t think I’m an atheist for my grandmother.” These observations suggest a pragmatism which prioritizes certain aspects of identity in specific contexts, and downplays or even denies them in others. Such manoeuvring understandably requires a significant amount of cognitive effort (cf. Bering 2010, 167) and the maintenance of differentiated narratives for differing contexts.

Other students suggested that their own understanding of their personal (non)religiosity frequently changed in more than a nominal manner. Although Scott had initially selected the term ‘atheist’ on the questionnaire preceding his interview, by the end of the interview he was reconsidering his position. Scott could not remember why he had not ticked ‘agnostic’, and surmised that he had been “feeling a little more defiant” at the time of completion, and not wishing to seem unsure. In the past, he had seen “the idea of an agnostic [as] not just somebody who doesn’t know [about the existence of a deity etc.] but somebody who doesn’t care,” and he continued: “I don’t think of it in such extreme ways just now, I’d be more happy to say that I’m open to doubt, and that’s what agnosticism is trying to get at.” It is clear from Scott’s account that he does not see his ‘non-religiosity’ as a constant, and postulates different emotional circumstances which might have been affecting him at the time. Niamh’s selection of ‘agnostic’, ‘atheist’, ‘Catholic’, ‘freethinker’, ‘humanist’ and ‘non-religious’ prompted her to respond: “Yeah, I think I ticked quite a few contradictory [terms] because like I fluctuate all over the place.” She describes an intricate relationship between all of these terms—from enjoying reading *The God Delusion*, to finding herself in church when personal circumstances are causing anxiety. In her own words: “I swing from not really knowing if there’s a God or not, to being adamant there isn’t, to finding myself

praying when I hit rock bottom.” Scott and Niamh’s accounts demonstrate that (non)religious self-identification can be fluid and dynamic. That individuals can struggle with their ‘non-religiosity’—for example, moving from one ‘non-religious’ belief to another, or lapsing into ‘religious’ belief—should serve as a caution against the reification of both ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ self-identifications as constants or, indeed, as ‘default’ positions.

11.3.2 ‘Nominal Christians’

A final relevant sub-group of these students who self-identify using multiple (non)religious terms are those who might, in another context, be referred to as ‘nominal Christians’. Given Abby Day’s *Believing in Belonging* thesis (2011), and recent scholarly comment on the results of the 2011 UK Census results (Chryssides et al. 2012), it is perhaps unsurprising that a number of students, who appeared ‘non-religious’ on other measures of (non)religiosity, claimed to self-describe themselves using ‘religious’ terms. Three interviewees—Gordon, Niamh, and Rose—provide useful examples of how complicated such ‘nominal religiosity’ can be.

For all intents and purposes Gordon is Roman Catholic—he is a member a Catholic students’ group, self-identifies as Catholic, attends religious services weekly and declares “I am not an atheist. I believe in God.” However, this is far from the full picture. He states:

I am from what I would call a [solidly] Christian family background [...]. But when I say “solidly”... [I mean...] very much as people who would mark it on the census, and would turn up at [...] Christmas, Easter, births, weddings and deaths, but [...] wouldn’t perhaps go every week.

Upon arriving at university, he decided to get confirmed—something which he now sees as “a reaction to leaving home” and feels that “if I had left it [for a while] I wouldn’t have done it.” He went through an “existential crisis” in his second year of study before arriving back where he had started, self-describing as a “Catholic-Agnostic” who believes “in something out there, [...] some sort of concept of deism, and [...] that this guy Jesus was a particularly inspired guy. [...] I am completely agnostic about an afterlife, [...] I have no proof [...] if it happens, it happens... if it doesn’t it doesn’t.” Yet despite a clearly ambiguous relationship with Catholicism, Christianity and ‘religion’ in general, and the fact that he “might not agree with the majority of what [the Church] say[s],” Gordon describes “a kind of identity-culture thing”: his agnosticism is a Catholic-Agnosticism and consequently he would “identify” as ‘Roman Catholic’ or ‘Christian’ on a census.

Niamh is a young, first-year student from the north of England, with a complicated family history relating to religion. Basically her mother’s side of the family is Roman Catholic (and Irish) whilst her father’s is Protestant. She describes her relationship with ‘religion’ as follows: “it was always about family relationships

and politics, basically. It was never about faith.” For Niamh, Catholicism is rooted in her familial situation:

You can’t escape your childhood really and I still... I would put myself as a Catholic mostly because I don’t want to be associated with my Grandma... and that sounds horrible, but [...] I don’t want to be like her in any way because she’s... done so much damage [...] and so if I identify myself as something, I identify myself as a Catholic because of that...

As discussed above, Niamh acknowledges fluctuating enormously in her personal (non)religiosity. She stopped regularly attending religious services aged 14 (having previously attended Catholic and Methodist services), is unsure how she feels about life after death, acknowledges that religion has “done a lot of bad things in the world” and concludes, laughing: “when I think about it I’m an atheist; when I’m in trouble I’m not.” However, regardless of her fluctuation and familial history, she would select Roman Catholic on the census because “I can’t think what else I would have put. I wouldn’t have put ‘no religion’.”

The third student was Rose, who self-identified as ‘Christian’ and ‘spiritual’, meditates and practises yoga on a daily basis, yet was interviewed because some of her questionnaire answers suggested a complex interplay of ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ attitudes, practices and beliefs. At many points Rose’s position conflicts with common interpretations of Christian doctrine, and twice in her interview she stated “I’m not religious.” Rose describes her relationship with Christianity as follows:

I celebrate Christmas and I don’t [...] relate to any other religion [...]. My Mum’s [and] my Dad’s parents are all Christian and Protestant so [...] in that respect I do relate to it. [...] and] I did go to church and [...] spent five years of my life going to chapel every day. [...] But] it doesn’t mean anything. [...] I guess I’m a Christian, but that just means that I have a day off on the 25th of December [...] which is great, you get presents, but you know there’s not a whole lot of meaning behind it.

Turning to her immediate family, her mother “was definitely not religious”; her father “might say he’ll go to church like at midnight on Christmas Eve” and then decide “Oh, I’m not that bothered”; all in all “there’s nothing, we’re just not a religious family.” However, Rose clearly *does not* see herself as an atheist or agnostic, and cannot relate to people who do. When presented with the ‘census question’ she answered: “[I’d p]robably go with ‘Other Christian’ and then write in Protestant, just because of my family. No other reason. Just because [...] I suppose you feel the need to label yourself with something, but... totally not practising.”

Are these three individuals to be classified as ‘non-religious’ or ‘religious’? Perhaps Rose could be seen as somewhere between Day’s “natal” and “ethnic” Christian nominalism (2011) due to her identification with her extended family’s vague religiosity, and her opposition to the non-spiritual ‘other’—‘atheists’ and ‘agnostics’. However, it is unclear why scholars should consider these students to be nominally ‘religious’ rather than nominally ‘non-religious’. Dependent upon the context and manner of investigation, an argument can be made that they are either/or,

or both/and. What can be said, however, is that these individuals comfortably negotiate multiple ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ self-representations in a pragmatic manner which appears consistent to them. Their very existence is testimony to the porosity of the boundary between ‘religion’ and ‘non-religion’ and demonstrates that scholars must listen attentively to what individuals have to say if they hope to understand the dynamics involved in this terminological melting pot.

My account so far has suggested that whether we distinguish between the ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ in terms of identity, practice, beliefs etc., or any combination of these, we will very quickly run into trouble. Survey methodologies force people’s hands and produce answers which do not mirror reality, which might be more complex, or might shift depending on the time and context of questioning. Whether someone is an ‘atheist’ or not tells us little about their (non)religiosity, their (non)religious history, or what (non)religion means to them in the real world.

11.4 Moving Forward

The working typology presented here cuts across ‘dimensions’ of religiosity, and categorizes according to the narratives through which participants claimed to interact with (non)religion. Given the discussion above, I determined that I needed to divorce my study from ‘dimensions’ of (non)religiosity—e.g. differentiating according to belief, affiliation, or practice—so as to not be guilty of reifying single dimensions. Narratives from the interview phase of this study played a dominant role in the construction of this typology, whilst questionnaire respondents provided useful insights and the theoretical thrust of the interviews. Through a process of (re)reading, (re)listening, and (re)coding of questionnaire and interview data, it emerged clearly that the participants in this study were articulating the ‘important’, ‘significant’ or perhaps (more contentiously) ‘sacred’ themes by which they differentiate regarding questions relating to ‘religion’, resulting in the emergence of a typology consisting of five ‘non-religious’ types: the *naturalistic*, *humanistic*, *spiritual*, *philosophical* and *familial*. These ideal narrative types cannot be assumed to be constant, and must be understood as firmly rooted in the context in which they were constructed, through a grounded theoretical approach. They represent the best fit from the information available, based upon a critical close reading, with individual students utilizing any number of types, and none exemplifying the ideal case. The intention here is not to reify a ‘protestantized’ non-religion based upon the ‘interiority’ of one’s ‘personal unbelief’, but simply to reflect the way in which students placed particular ‘importance’ or ‘significance’ on certain themes in their narratives, which formed the data for the study.¹⁶

¹⁶Had this study focused more upon practice than narrative this typology might have been very different. Another approach was taken by Lee (2012a) who typologized according to three broad ‘epistemological cultures’.

11.4.1 *The Naturalistic Type*

Naturalistic narratives are exemplified by an emphasis upon science and the scientific method, and an enthusiasm for the unhindered pursuit of knowledge. This ‘naturalism’ should be understood as a worldview where ‘patterns’ in nature are attributable to “properties that are intrinsic to the nature of the physical universe” (Pasquale 2010, 63). Typical statements emphasize the importance of ‘science’ and, in some cases, ‘faith’ in ‘science’ which “is capable of making one feel incredibly special and valuable.” This emphasis correlates with prime importance being placed upon accuracy, intelligibility and evidence: “Beliefs [. . .] do not require (and do not have) any hard evidence”; “I don’t think I can say how the entire cosmos is ordered without evidence” (Malcolm). These factors contribute to a distinct *naturalistic* form of non-religion, which has three further key characteristics.

Firstly, a negative attitude to the idea of ‘faith’: statements such as “[I] don’t really like the word faith” or “I don’t value faith” were common, and appear to be rooted in an understanding of ‘religious faith’ as being different from the ‘faith’ or ‘trust’ which is placed in scientists, for example, who have “proved themselves in some way” (Sarah). Secondly, a ‘materialistic’ outlook, where “biological existence is the beginning and end” of human life, and “the ‘real world’ itself is the wholly natural, physical one” (Malcolm). Questions of what happens after death were generally met with a simple “nothing,” whilst some added that “the equivalent of a soul would be recycled the way we are biologically” or that after death we “rot.” Thirdly, an attitude of agnosticism concerning the existence of a deity, rooted in lack of (the possibility of) definitive evidence—an atheistic position adopted as “probably true [without claiming] that it’s the absolute fact” (Malcolm).

The pursuit of knowledge and ‘ideas’ emphasized in this type of narrative extend far beyond the ‘scientific’ realm to include learning about ‘religion’ as well: “I think it’s a good thing to [. . .] guard against bigotry, [. . .] I think it’s always got to be good to open people’s minds a little bit” (Sarah). The emphasis on knowledge can also manifest itself as a justification for anti-religious attitudes. ‘Religion’ can be portrayed as a purveyor of false ‘knowledge’ and a barrier to the acquisition of knowledge, persuading people “to bypass actual evidence and get[ting] them to propagate these ideas.” In summary, *naturalist* narratives will be dominated by an emphasis on science, evidence, and a pursuit of knowledge which inevitably clashes with constructions of ‘religion’. *Naturalistic* statements also exemplify the central characteristics that Johannes Quack encountered amongst a group of Indian rationalists: “the basic conviction [. . .] that in principle all human problems and questions can be solved and answered through science,” and what Quack refers to as an “ideology of doubt” (2012a, 429–430).

11.4.2 *The Humanistic Type*

A central theme throughout the vision espoused by the British Humanist Association (BHA) is “shared human values”: “We take responsibility for our actions and base

our ethics on the goals of human welfare, happiness and fulfilment” (BHA 2011). This focus on the fellow human, and a passion for human rights and freedoms is the dominant theme in *humanistic* narratives. When the students were asked about the focus of their ‘faith’ and their most valuable beliefs, *humanistic* statements typically focused on ‘people’, ‘humanity’, or ‘virtues’ such as kindness and selflessness. Typical responses would be “I put my faith in people and their own judgement of what is right and what is wrong,” or the less optimistic, if no less heartfelt “I have faith in humanity . . . to be humanity and nothing else” (Courtney). This ‘belief’ or ‘faith’ in humanity correlates with the profession of humanitarian ideals, participation in charity- and/or activism-based societies, and/or placing importance upon consideration of others. *Humanistic* narratives tend to echo the BHA’s mission to promote “equal treatment in law and policy of everyone, regardless of religion or belief” (BHA 2011) and, in relation to the humanitarian endeavours which are a core emphasis in these narratives, ‘religion’ can be seen as “the willingness to believe in something good.”

However, such attitudes towards ‘religion’ should not be confused with *prominence* in *humanistic* narratives. Generally, the default position will be one of basic disinterest in (non)religion, for example: “identifying as a non-believers means that I’m not really interested in it . . . at all” (Iona). (Non)religious issues and identities are not a frequent topic of conversation in everyday life, and subjective ‘non-religiosity’ may be suppressed or even denied in order to avoid conflicts. That being said, this ‘disinterest’ or ‘lack of importance’ does not equate to neutrality. Due to the emphasis of these narratives, discourse is wont to become noticeably hostile when ‘religion’ is considered in conjunction with humanitarian issues. ‘Biblical’ morals, for example, are viewed as “contradictory and [responsible for] a lot of conflict in the society we live in right now” (Iona), with ‘religion’ being seen as something with positive potential that “often turns out to be despotic and oppressive.” Concurrently, and perhaps unexpectedly, whilst *humanistic* narratives may suggest substantive non-religiosity in terms of belief, practice and attitudes, they characteristically emphasize a fundamental respect for individual freedoms, which extends to the freedom to hold religious beliefs and act accordingly. Whereas a *naturalistic* objection to ‘faith schools’ might focus on their perceived effects upon knowledge, a *humanistic* one might focus on the potential impact of segregation: “they [end up] being not just a separation in terms of religion but in terms sometimes of class” (Harriet).¹⁷

¹⁷*Humanistic* and *naturalistic* narratives can effectively be conceptualized as occupying idealized sides of the critique embodied by contemporary atheism – with the *humanistic* focusing upon ‘religious’ inspiration for violence and perceived moral culpability, and the *naturalistic* on ‘religion’ as an ‘authoritarian barrier to knowledge and progress’ (Cotter 2011a, 83–86).

11.4.3 *The Spiritual Type*

It is well established that ‘spirituality’ is a particularly ‘fuzzy’ concept (Voas 2010, 206). As Anna King writes, “People can detach spirituality from institutionalized religion or regard it as its essence. They can define the spiritual in opposition to the material, the corporeal, the rational, the scientific, the secular or stress their fusion and interconnectedness” (1996, 345). Consequently, my use of the term ‘spiritual’ should not be invested with unintended significance relating to the contested terminological boundary between (non)religion and ‘spirituality’, but simply seen as the most useful term for distinguishing characteristics associated with this specific narrative type.

Spiritual narratives are rooted in a variety of experiential phenomena including “love and kinship,” “friends and family” and “the great outdoors,” accompanied by a *humanistic* altruism, and an anti-materialism that would typically be associated with “spirituality” (Van der Veer 2008, 792). *Spiritual* narratives include identification with the term ‘spiritual’ and/or expressions of a positive attitude regarding ‘spirituality’, exemplifying “individualized syncretic—even eclectic—combinations” of ‘religious’ beliefs and practices (Rose 2001, 205). ‘Religious’ issues are a frequent topic of conversation, and participation in prayer, meditation, or “other associated healing/therapeutic activities” might be alluded to. A typical response came from a student who “dabbled” in Buddhism “because I was interested in meditation. I am proud of being agnostic.” This more ‘seeker-like’ agnosticism distinguishes *spiritual* narratives from the others, and is reflected in subjective understandings of ‘religion’ which are less evaluative: “I’m not religious. [...] I think that you can believe what you want to believe, um, as long as you don’t hurt anyone, but I don’t do anything very religious at all” (Rose).

However, this openness does not extend to ‘institutional’ religion which *spiritual* narratives can portray as “boring,” a barrier to friendship, and something which “ultimately is dangerous.” This kind of ‘religion’ is portrayed as something which exerts unwanted authority over individual subjective experiences (cf. Knoblauch 2010, 30). *Spiritual* discourse can be summarized as anti-institutional and anti-hierarchical, characterized by its distance from institutional forms of (non)religion. This distance “must not be understood [as] opposition to religion” (Knoblauch 2010, 29; cf. Roof et al. 1999, 252) in general, although it is significant that ‘religion’ acts as the foil against which these students differentiate themselves when speaking in these terms.

11.4.4 *The Familial Type*

Throughout my work, I operate under the assumption that individual self-representations are informed by “persistent networks – of family, friends and colleagues – that continue to shape our identities as we develop throughout our

lives” (Guest 2010, 176). With this in mind, although ‘family’ and ‘relationships’ are themes which are likely to emerge throughout (non)religious narratives, their importance is much more evident in *familial* statements. In such narratives, beliefs, faith and values will frequently be located in the family unit, with a concern for their well-being that ‘bleeds over’ into concern for human beings in general. Niamh was particularly emotive on this issue, stating that “you don’t give up on relationships [...] even if they’re going to shit [...] you don’t give up, you stick by people.” The importance of family in these narratives does not necessarily imply ‘religious’ commonality across the family, but simply that ‘religion’ and ‘family’ are closely linked for the *familial* type. Niamh stated that when she was a child, “at some point my parents had to explain to me why it was that my grandma hated me [...] and from then, in my head, I had it that Protestants were bad and Catholics were good,” and it was Séverine’s experience of religion that if “you say yes to everything then you’re accepted in the [...] community, or if you ask [...] too many questions you’re [not].” In the context of these exemplary quotations, it is understandable that this emphasis on the family takes precedence over (non)religious identification, and is associated with an image of ‘religion’—positive or negative—which is closely linked to intimate relationships.

An ideal-typical *familial* narrative might well emphasize personal intellectual reasons for being non-religious, yet these will be subordinate to a commitment to their “main ‘source of significance’ [which] is more likely to be close family and friends than a [non]religious community and its [lack of] gods” (Woodhead 2010, 240). Far from being “profoundly individualistic” and living in a “morally insignificant universe,” these students are “firmly grounded in the significance of the social and the emotional” as opposed to a “grander,” yet no more legitimate, narrative (Day 2009b, 276; contra Smith and Denton 2005).

11.4.5 *The Philosophical Type*

It has become a common theme within contemporary theological critiques to castigate contemporary atheism for its non-philosophical nature. According to Alvin Plantinga, “many of [Dawkins’] arguments would receive a failing grade in a sophomore philosophy class” (2007), and it seems that certain critics almost lament that this “New Atheism” is not up to the standards set by “Feuerbach or Marx, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche” (Aslan 2010, xiii–xiv; cf. Fergusson 2009, 3). Presumably, these critics would prefer to engage with arguments couched in *philosophical* terms. This nomenclature should not be misconstrued as suggesting philosophical rigor, but this type of narrative is associated with a high degree of introspection and self-criticism, lengthy definitions, unsuppressed doubt, “freethinking,” and self-reflexive articulacy about the internal processes through which stances are appropriated. For example, one questionnaire respondent stated: “who [I] am lies somewhere in the middle of what [I] was, what [I] will be, how others see me and how [I] see myself. [J]e suis moi.”

Philosophical discussion maintains a neutral stance towards ‘religion’, yet displays a relatively high degree of knowledge relating to the specifics of many ‘religious’ worldviews, apparently resulting from personal—and frequently ‘enjoyable’—engagement with relevant literature and practices. Relevant examples of the considered and diplomatic style of the ideal type would be Gordon’s belief in “some sort of concept of God, but I wouldn’t want to take it any further because I can’t prove it [...] I’m fairly agnostic,” or another student’s thoughts about what happens after death: “I don’t know [what happens] and I don’t think I can ever reasonably say for certain until I die. Most likely I won’t ever know, as my mind will go with my body.” It would be disingenuous to label this self-critical introspection as ‘uncertainty’; *philosophical* statements will generally come from individuals who know where they stand, even if that place is “on the fence.” The associated openness to ‘spiritual’ and ‘religious’ ideas, in a much more critical and ‘rational’ manner than in *spiritual* narratives, further blurs the boundary between ‘religion’ and ‘non-religion’.

11.4.6 Implications

This typology represents an attempt to articulate an alternative way of understanding ‘non-religious’ individuals whilst avoiding the emphasis on particular ‘dimensions’ of (non)religiosity which is prevalent in current understandings. Rather than beginning with categories which reify a religion/non-religion dichotomy and which privilege normative ‘religiosity’, this typology was constructed through individual narratives, and calibrated to their strategies of self-representation. It is immutably rooted in the context of a small sample at a single Scottish university, and requires detailed and systematic follow-up studies to flesh-out and theorize each type within this and other contexts. However, through a grounded theoretical focus on students’ articulation of themes which are of ‘importance’ or ‘significance’ for them, this typology identifies five ideal typical ways in which students speak about (non)religion, which allows us to speak of the ways in which non-religion manifests itself in individual lives, without reducing it to an absence or negation of certain aspects of ‘religion’.

We know that these student ‘atheists’ did not believe in God. But paying more attention to the ways in which they invoke the concept, and the way in which this ‘non-belief’ manifests itself, without becoming distracted by the terms employed, allows a much deeper—and usefully reoriented—understanding of the place of (non)religion in these students’ lives. Each of these types is associated with particular ways of engaging with (non)religion which could, upon further research, be developed into a model of some predictive power and value. Although there was a great deal of variation in levels of emphasis and salience amongst the participants in this study, the majority of the narratives that emerged did not place much importance on (non)religiosity at all. Even amongst those statements which were classified as *naturalistic* or *philosophical*—which were those most associated with a high degree of thought and introspection concerning (non)religion—this emphasis was

largely due to the importance placed upon science and freethinking respectively, and not because of anything that marked (non)religion out as particularly significant in comparison to other phenomena. On the other hand, it is also very difficult to consider any of these students to be “utterly indifferent” (Strenski 2004, 147)—they are keenly aware of where they stand when (non)religion interacts with what matters to them—when, I would suggest, *their sacred values are challenged*.

For the sake of brevity,¹⁸ I will work with Gordon Lynch’s neo-Durkheimian definition of the ‘sacred’ as “what people collectively experience as absolute, non-contingent realities which present normative claims over the meanings and conduct of social life” (2012, 29).¹⁹ This definition makes no “claim that there is an actual ontological referent for sacred forms” (2012, 15) and is suggestive of my position (following Knott, 2013) that the sacred is not an exclusively religious category. As Kim Knott writes, “The ‘sacred’ [. . .] can be attributed by people in non-theological as well as theological contexts, irrespective of the nature of their belief systems: ‘It is not a uniquely religious category . . .’ (Anttonen 2000, 274)” (2013, 210). For these students, and given my account above, I contend that the interaction of religion with personal sacreds precipitates the recognition and reaffirmation of subjective non-religiosity. Knott continues:

Various things, places and people are set apart according to time and context. The boundaries that become the focus of sacred-making discourse and activities have the potential to erupt as sites of struggle but for much of the time lie dormant and, as such, invisible. (2013, 214)

Whether these students are “setting apart” concrete relationships with close family or friends, or the more abstract “unhindered pursuit of knowledge,” against this backdrop it is unsurprising that they should place little emphasis on their non-religiosity, yet are articulate about this same non-religiosity in relation to personal ‘sacred’ themes.

11.5 Conclusion

Understandably, any conclusions which can be made from this study are highly influenced by its exploratory nature and the limitations of the method employed. The university context severely limits generalization, and practicalities foreclosed the possibility of comparing with ‘religious’ narratives. By prioritizing narratives, I excluded the possibility of encountering those who were ‘truly’ indifferent,²⁰

¹⁸The following aside is elaborated more fully in Cotter (2012).

¹⁹See also Catto and Eccles (2013, 54–55).

²⁰Such as, apparently, the writer Ben Goldacre, who states: ‘I just don’t have any interest either way, but I wouldn’t want to understate how uninterested I am. There still hasn’t been a word invented for people like me, whose main experience when presented with this issue is an overwhelming, mind-blowing, intergalactic sense of having more interesting things to think about’ (in Williams 2011). See Beyer in this volume on ‘apatheists’.

and had to build my understandings upon the contextual and fluid utterances of individuals who desired to volunteer information. Although some attention was given to practice, my typology clearly suffers from a focus on the intellectual at the expense of ritual, embodiment, and other aspects of lived 'non-religion'. The typology is also quite noticeably 'positive' but could be developed to become more all-encompassing and focus on more 'negative' aspects as well. Further, as Lori G. Beaman suggested at the workshop where this chapter was initially presented, it is indeed *too early* to be settling on new terms. However, I have illustrated the merits of such an approach, which I am currently developing further, and have made a number of important points along the way.

Grounding this study in student narratives, and subordinating a priori understandings of 'religion' and 'non-religion' to these, provided an understanding which is potentially acceptable to 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and should be applicable beyond the study of the 'non-religious'. By inviting students to self-identify through any number of self-defined (non)religious terms, I have demonstrated enormous variation in understandings of the terms they utilized. Prevalent 'non-religious' terminology—particularly 'atheist'—was shown to be of limited use, and rooted in single dimensions of a Western-biased 'religion'. Each of my proposed types has its own characteristics, rooted in the specificities of what individuals considered as important and significant in their lives. However, in every case the student's personal (non)religious self-description was subordinated to the ideals implicit throughout their narratives. 'Religion'—and, by definition, 'non-religion'—was not something which these students invested with any significant amount of 'meaning' in-and-of itself. However, when 'religion' is perceived to interact with their sacred values, it becomes the 'other' against which their 'non-religious' stance is defined.

Finally, students were shown to self-identify through multiple (non)religious terms and to self-consciously fluctuate between these, intentionally or unintentionally, in a cognitively-effortful manner consistent with their narratives. This subject group is infused with all manner of combinations of (non)religious self-descriptions, practices, attitudes, beliefs, affiliations and levels of interest, which defy simple dichotomization and encourage a continued movement away from attempts to explain non-religiosity from a perspective of normative religiosity. Acknowledging and engaging with the non-religious can help us understand people in all their diversity in their own terms, and not simply because they are perceived to have or lack something which scholars define as 'religion'. These students may indeed be without god(s), but they are most definitely not without nuance.

References

- Anttonen, Veikko. 2000. Sacred. In *Guide to the study of religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, 271–282. London: Cassell.
- Aslan, Reza. 2010. Preface. In *Religion and the new atheism: A critical appraisal*, ed. Amarnath Amarasingam, xiii–xv. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Baggini, Julian. 2003. *Atheism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Beit-Hallahmi, Benjamin. 2007. Atheists: A psychological profile. In *The Cambridge companion to atheism*, ed. Michael Martin, 300–317. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bering, Jesse. 2010. Atheism is only skin deep: Geertz and Markússon rely mistakenly on sociodemographic data as meaningful indicators of underlying cognition. *Religion* 40: 166–168.
- Berman, David. 1988. *A history of atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell*. London: Croom Helm.
- BHA. 2011. Homepage. <http://www.humanism.org.uk/home>. Accessed 7 Aug 2011.
- Brown, Callum G. 1992. Religion and secularisation. In *People and society in Scotland III: 1914–1990*, ed. Tony Dickson and James H. Treble, 48–79. Edinburgh: John Donald.
- Brown, Callum G. 2001. *The death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation, 1800–2000*. London: Routledge.
- Brown, Callum, and Gordon Lynch. 2012. Cultural perspectives. In *Religion and change in modern Britain*, ed. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto, 329–351. London: Routledge.
- Brown, Stewart J. 2010. Beliefs and religions. In *A history of everyday life in Scotland, 1800 to 1900*, ed. Trevor Griffiths and Graeme Morton, 116–146. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Brierley, Peter. 1989. *A century of British Christianity: Historical statistics 1900–1985 with projections to 2000*. London: MARC Europe.
- Brierley, Peter. 2006. *Pulling out of the nose dive: A contemporary picture of churchgoing; What the 2005 English Church Census reveals*. London: Christian Research.
- Bruce, Steve. 2013. Post-secularity and religion in Britain: An empirical assessment. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28(3): 369–384.
- Bryant, Alyssa N. 2006. Exploring religious pluralism in higher education: Non-majority religious perspectives among entering first-year college students. *Religion and Education* 33(1): 1–25.
- Bryant, Alyssa N. 2007. Gender differences in spiritual development during the college years. *Sex Roles* 56: 835–846.
- Budd, Susan. 1977. *Varieties of unbelief: Atheists and agnostics in English society 1850–1960*. London: Heinemann.
- Bullivant, Stephen. 2008. Research note: Sociology and the study of atheism. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 23(3): 363–368.
- Bullivant, Stephen. 2011. Defining ‘atheism’: A modest proposal. Paper presented in the NSRN’s virtual conference on terminology, Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network. <http://nsrn.net/events/nsrn-events/>.
- Bullivant, Stephen, and Lois Lee. 2012. Interdisciplinary studies of non-religion and secularity: The state of the union. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27(1): 19–27.
- Campbell, Colin. 1971. *Toward a sociology of irreligion*. London: Macmillan.
- Caporale, Rocco, and Antonio Grumelli, eds. 1971. *The culture of unbelief: Studies and proceedings from the first international symposium on belief held at Rome, March 22–27, 1969: Symposium sponsors: The Agnelli Foundation, the University of California at Berkeley, the Vatican Secretariat for non-believers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Catto, Rebecca, and Janet Eccles. 2013. (Dis)Believing and belonging: Investigating the narratives of young British atheists. *Temenos: The Journal of the Finnish Society for the Study of Religion* 49(1): 37–63.
- Chryssides, George D., Christopher R. Cotter, David G. Robertson, Beth Singler, Bettina Schmidt, and Teemu Taira. 2012. Podcast: Religion in the 2011 UK census. *The Religious Studies Project*. <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/2012/12/14/podcast-religion-in-the-2011-census/>.
- Collins-Mayo, Sylvia, and Pink Dandelion (eds.). 2010. *Religion and youth*. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Connelly, Louise, Christopher R. Cotter, Frans Jespers, Ethan Gjerset Quillen, Steven J. Sutcliffe, and Teemu Taira. 2012. Podcast: Studying nonreligion within religious studies. *The Religious Studies Project*. <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/2012/12/17/podcast-studying-nonreligion-within-religious-studies/>.

- Cotter, Christopher R. 2011a. Consciousness raising: The critique, agenda, and inherent precariousness of contemporary Anglophone atheism. *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 2(1):77–103.
- Cotter, Christopher R. 2011b. Qualitative methods workshop (NSRN methods for nonreligion and secularity series). *NSRN Events Report Series*. NSRN. <http://www.nsrn.net/events/events-reports>.
- Cotter, Christopher R. 2011c. Toward a typology of ‘nonreligion’: A qualitative analysis of everyday narratives of Scottish university students. MSc diss., University of Edinburgh. http://www.academia.edu/1329691/Toward_a_Typology_of_Nonreligion_A_Qualitative_Analysis_of_Everyday_Narratives_of_Scottish_University_Students.
- Cotter, Christopher R. 2012. Secular sacreds and the sacred secular. *The Religious Studies Project*. <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/2012/11/07/christopher-r-cotter-secular-sacreds/>.
- Cotter, Christopher R., Rebecca Aechtner, and Johannes Quack. 2012. “Non-religiosity, identity, and ritual” panel session. Budapest: Hungarian Culture Foundation. NSRN. <http://nsrn.net/1523-2/>.
- Cragun, R., and J.H. Hammer. 2011. ‘One person’s apostate is another person’s convert’: What terminology tells us about pro-religious hegemony in the sociology of religion. *Humanity and Society* 35: 159–175.
- Day, Abby. 2009a. Researching belief without asking religious questions. *Fieldwork in Religion* 4(1): 86–104.
- Day, Abby. 2009b. Believing in belonging: An ethnography of young people’s constructions of belief. *Culture and Religion* 10(3): 263–278.
- Day, Abby. 2011. *Believing in belonging: Belief and social identity in the modern world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Day, Abby, Giselle Vincett, and Christopher R. Cotter. 2013. What lies between: Exploring the depths of social identities between the sacred and the secular. In *Social identities between the sacred and the secular*, ed. Abby Day, Giselle Vincett, and Christopher R. Cotter, 1–6. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Demerath III, N.J. 1969. Irreligion, a-religion, and the rise of the religion-less church: Two case studies in organisational convergence. *Sociological Analysis* 30(4): 191–203.
- Demerath III, N.J., and Victor Thiessen. 1966. On spitting against the wind: Organizational precariousness and American irreligion. *American Journal of Sociology* 71(6): 674–687.
- Dutton, Edward. 2008. *Meeting Jesus at university: Rites of passage and student Evangelicals*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Eller, Jack David. 2010a. What is atheism? In *Atheism and secularity*, Issues, concepts and definitions, vol. 1, ed. Phil Zuckerman, 1–18. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Eller, Jack David. 2010b. Atheism and secularity in the Arab world. In *Atheism and secularity*, Global expressions, vol. 2, ed. Phil Zuckerman, 113–137. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Engler, Steven. 2011. Grounded theory. In *The Routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, 256–274. London: Routledge.
- Fergusson, David. 2009. *Faith and its critics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fitzgerald, Timothy. 2000. *The ideology of religious studies*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fitzgerald, Timothy. 2007a. *Discourse on civility and barbarity: A critical history of religion and related categories*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fitzgerald, Timothy (ed.). 2007b. *Religion and the secular: Historical and colonial formations*. London/Oakville: Equinox.
- Gilliat-Ray, Sophie. 2000. *Religion in higher education: The politics of the multi-faith campus*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Guest, Matthew. 2010. Socialisation and spiritual capital: What difference do clergy families make? In *Religion and youth*, ed. Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion, 175–180. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Guest, Mathew, Elizabeth Olson, and John Wolffe. 2012. Christianity: a loss of monopoly. In *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, ed. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto, 57–78. London: Routledge.

- Guest, Matthew, and Sonya Sharma. 2011. Religion and university students (Conference Paper). In *King's College*. London: Religion and Society.
- Hayes, Bernadette C. 2000. Religious independents within Western industrialised nations: A socio-demographic profile. *Sociology of Religion* 61(2): 191–207.
- Hyman, Gavin. 2007. Atheism in modern history. In *The Cambridge companion to atheism*, ed. Michael Martin, 27–46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyman, Gavin. 2010. *A short history of atheism*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- King, Anna S. 1996. Spirituality: Transformation and metamorphosis. *Religion* 26: 343–351.
- Knoblauch, Hubert. 2010. Popular spirituality. *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 19(1): 24–39.
- Knott, Kim. 2013. The secular sacred: In-between or both/and? In *Social identities between the sacred and the secular*, ed. Abby Day, Giselle Vincett, and Christopher R. Cotter, 201–221. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Lee, Lois. 2012a. Being secular: Toward separate sociologies of secularity, nonreligion and epistemological culture. PhD diss., University of Cambridge.
- Lee, Lois. 2012b. Research note: Talking about a revolution: Terminology for the new field of non-religion studies. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27(1): 129–139.
- Lee, Lois. 2012c. Podcast: Lois Lee on nonreligion. *The Religious Studies Project*. <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/2012/10/08/podcast-lois-lee-on-non-religion/>.
- Lynch, Gordon. 2012. *The sacred in the modern world: A cultural sociological approach*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Martin, Michael. 2007. General introduction. In *The Cambridge companion to atheism*, ed. Michael Martin, 1–7. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCutcheon, Russell T. 1997. *Manufacturing religion: The discourse on sui generis religion and the politics of nostalgia*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCutcheon, Russell T. 2007. 'They licked the platter clean': On the co-dependency of the religious and the secular. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 19: 173–199. doi:10.1163/157006807X240109.
- McGrath, Alister. 2005. *The twilight of atheism: The rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world*. London: Rider.
- National Records of Scotland. 2012. 2011 Census: First results on population estimates for Scotland—Release 1A. *Government of Scotland*, December 17. <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release1a/rell1asb.pdf>.
- National Records of Scotland .2013. 2011 Census: Key results on population, ethnicity, identity, language, religion, health, housing and accommodation in Scotland—Release 2A. *Government of Scotland*, September 26. <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/StatsBulletin2A.pdf>.
- Nye, Malory, and Paul Weller. 2012. Controversies as a lens on change. In *Religion and change in modern Britain*, ed. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto, 34–54. London: Routledge.
- Paden, William E. 1988. *Religious worlds: The comparative study of religion*. Boston: Beacon.
- Pasquale, Frank L. 2007. Empirical study and neglect of unbelief and irreligion. In *The new encyclopaedia of unbelief*, ed. Tom Flynn, 760–766. Amherst: Prometheus. <http://www.trincoll.edu/Academics/centers/issc/Documents/Unbelief%20and%20Irreligion,%20Empirical%20Study%20and%20Neglect%20of.pdf>.
- Pasquale, Frank L. 2010. A portrait of secular group affiliates. In *Atheism and secularity*, Issues, concepts and definitions, vol. 1, ed. Phil Zuckerman, 43–87. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Pasquale, Frank L. 2012. The social science of secularity. *Free Inquiry* 33(2): 17–23.
- Percy, M. 2004. Losing our space, finding our place. In *Religion, identity and change: Perspectives on global transformations*, ed. S. Coleman and P. Collins, 26–41. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Plantinga, Alvin. 2007. The Dawkins confusion: Naturalism 'ad absurdum'. Review of *The God Delusion*, by Richard Dawkins. *Books & Culture*. <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2007/marapr/1.21.html>.
- Quack, Johannes. 2012a. *Disenchanting India: Organized rationalism and criticism of religion in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Quack, Johannes. 2012b. Organised atheism in India: An overview. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27(1): 67–88.
- Quillen, Ethan Gjerset. 2012. Closing the umbrella: Furthering the debate on general term assignment and an argument for staying inside the lines. Paper presented at the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network conference, Goldsmiths, University of London, July 4–6.
- Rees, R.J. 1967. *Background and belief: A study of religion and religious education as seen by third-year students at Oxford, Cambridge and Bangor*. London: SCM Press.
- Roof, W., C. Jackson, W. Carroll, and D. Roozen (eds.). 1999. *The post-war generation and establishment religion*. Boulder: Westview.
- Rose, Stuart. 2001. Is the term ‘spirituality’ a word that everyone uses, but nobody knows what anyone means by it? *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16(2): 193–207.
- Roxburgh, Kenneth. 2012. Growth amidst decline: Edinburgh’s churches and Scottish culture. In *Church growth in Britain: 1980 to the present*, ed. David Goodhew, 209–219. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Shermer, Michael. 1999. *How we believe: The search for God in an age of science*. New York: W.H. Freeman.
- Smith, Christian, and Melinda Lundquist Denton. 2005. *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. 2000. Classification. In *Guide to the study of religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, 35–44. London: Cassell.
- Strauss, Anselm, and Juliet Corbin. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. London: Sage.
- Strenski, Ivan. 2004. The proper object of the study of religion: Why it is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers. In *The future of the study of religion: Proceedings of congress 2000*, ed. Slavica Jakelic and Lori Pearson, 145–171. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Swatos Jr., William H. 2003. Differentiating experiences: The virtue of substantive definitions. In *Defining religion: Investigating the boundaries between the sacred and secular*, ed. Arthur L. Griel and David G. Bromley, 39–53. London: JAI.
- Thomas, Terence. 2004. The ‘sacred’ as a viable concept in the contemporary study of religions. In *Religion: Empirical studies*, ed. Steven J. Sutcliffe, 47–66. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Thrower, James. 1979. *Alternative tradition: A study of unbelief in the ancient world*. Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Thrower, James. 1980. *Religion and the rejection of religion in the ancient world*. The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Thrower, James. 2000. *Western atheism: A short history*. New York: Prometheus.
- Van der Veer, Peter. 2008. Spirituality in modern society. In *Religion: Beyond a concept*, ed. Hent de Vries, 789–797. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Vernon, Glenn M. 1968. The religious ‘nones’: A neglected category. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 7(2): 219–229.
- Voas, David. 2010. Quantitative methods. In *Religion and youth*, ed. Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion, 202–207. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Webster, Joseph. 2013. *The anthropology of Protestantism: Faith and crisis among Scottish fishermen*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Williams, Andrew Zak. 2011. Faith no more. *New Statesman*, July 25. <http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2011/07/god-evidence-believe-world>.
- Woodhead, Linda. 2010. Epilogue. In *Religion and youth*, ed. Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion, 239–241. Surrey: Ashgate.