

sacrifice is already pervasive. For example, the contributors call our attention to the sacrifices associated with “automobility,” including losses of life, health, clean air, unpaved landscapes, and even the loss of the community values and possibilities for active citizenship caused by suburbanization. As Cheryl Hall argues in her essay, we make many sacrifices for the current order, but they are usually unconscious and invisible (p. 72). Anna Peterson adds that the “American way of life already requires numerous sacrifices . . . time with families, open spaces, clean air and water, and security for future generations . . . many Americans have come to accept these sacrifices and even to believe that they are necessary and inevitable” (p. 109).

The volume is remarkably focused and coherent; each chapter’s analysis contributes to the volume’s problematizing redescription of the environmental politics of sacrifice. In his essay, Peter Cannavò describes the suburbs’ tragic evolution into a way of life that denies even the possibility of sacrifice for the common good. As he explains it, suburban life subverts authentic community by preventing the “realization of an expanded self beyond the narrow, impoverished life of privatized consumption” (p. 218). Justin Williams, in his chapter on urban biking policy, contributes to the volume’s effort to “discern the structural in the everyday” by demonstrating that automobile-centered infrastructures are the products of choice and need not represent “the immutable power of the status quo” (p. 256). Simon Nicholson similarly contributes to the goals of the volume in his chapter on the history of geoengineering efforts, observing that while “sacrifices are hidden, they are present and demand our close scrutiny, lest particular technological developments be allowed to draw us in unexpected, gnarly directions” (p. 274, and including perhaps the first and certainly a delightful scholarly use of the term “gnarly”: the electronic version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* [entry updated 2003] lists only popular sources such as surfer magazines, novels, and newspapers). Karen Liften voices a recurring theme of the volume when she argues that inquiry into the rhetoric of sacrifice enables “conscious choice” (p. 135).

In considering alternatives to the prevailing environmental discourses, the volume’s contributors look both within and outside traditional green politics. Pointing to an example outside green politics, Sudhir Chella Rajan notes that the resources for a robust politics of sacrifice are already available in our parenting practices (p. 182). Looking instead within green politics, Michael Maniates provides a case study of grassroots efforts to limit personal consumption and expand available free time, concluding that a “rights-averse, sacrifice-free strategy” is a mistake for green politics (p. 306). Similarly, Shane Gunster employs a brilliant analysis of British Columbia’s experiment with a carbon tax to demonstrate that framing environmental policies in terms of narrow self-interest undermines pub-

lic willingness to support collective sacrifice for the environment. “In bringing our political ambitions and discourse down to this [narrowly market-oriented] level . . . we call into being the fictional public that we fear the most: selfish, apathetic, and motivated by nothing other than the utilitarian calculus of financial cost and benefit” (p. 208).

The essays, like Gunster’s, that make the most progress toward the goal of redescription prevailing environmental rhetorics all focus on the real politics of conflicting interests that is ignored by the dominant discourse of individualized risk and sacrifice. Paul Wapner, for example, expresses doubt that “win-win” discourses like green consumerism will have much of an effect (he even dares suggest that locally produced food may not always be the greenest food, p. 42). Thomas Princen’s powerful indictment of the rhetoric of consumer sovereignty and heroic sacrifice also highlights the material conflicts of interest at work in the environmental politics of sacrifice: “In the end, the idea of consumer sovereignty is a myth convenient for those who would locate responsibility for social and environmental problems on the backs of those very consumers, absolving those who truly have market power and who write the rules of the game and who benefit most” (pp. 145–46; repeated on p. 152). When energy interests routinely spend on the order of \$500 million just to influence eighteen months’ worth of climate change policy (*New York Times*, October 21, 2010), we will not come closer to a reality-based debate on environmental policy without taking interest-group politics seriously.

In sum, *The Environmental Politics of Sacrifice* is an essential contribution to the literature on environmental political theory, environmental politics, and political theory generally.

The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion vs. Environmental Religion in Contemporary America.

By Robert H. Nelson. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. 416p. \$39.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.
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— Simon Nicholson, *American University*

Robert H. Nelson’s new book is engaging, provocative, and occasionally vexing. The basic message is that economics and environmentalism have emerged as oppositional “secular religions” in modern-day America—secular religions that owe a deep debt to, and now compete with, a set of American Christian traditions. Throughout the book, Nelson works to uncover and articulate underlying religious (read “Christian”) themes in American economic and environmental systems of thought. He does this on the assumption that greater intellectual coherence and maturity of policy will result from a deeper understanding of these secular religions’ largely Christian roots. Rich historical analysis is offered in support of this notion. Some of the implications of this analysis, though, are set forth in

a less convincing fashion, particularly on the environmental side.

The book is presented in four parts. In the first, Nelson offers a theological reading of mainstream American economics. This is an area in which he has a long record of scholarship. As such, this section can be read as a clear and useful summation of an already impressive body of work. The second part is titled “Environmental Calvinism,” and shows in a variety of ways that mainstream American environmentalism has deeply Puritan roots. Part III, “Environmental Creationism,” offers a sustained critique of mainstream environmentalist conceptions of nature and its protection, including a meditation on the theological implications of attempting to, as the author puts it, “recreate the creation” (p. 169). The final part, “Libertarian Environmentalism,” attempts a synthetic treatment of what he views as complementary Calvinist strands of economic and environmental thought.

To describe economics and environmentalism as “secular religions” certainly opens the way to a layered reading of these intellectual and political traditions. Nelson weaves together three rich layers throughout the book, to varying effect. The first layer is sociological. By suggesting that mainstream economics and environmentalism are replete with all of the trappings of religious orders, he is then able to employ the tools of theological analysis to interrogate the assumptions, narratives, and practices that sustain these traditions.

In developing a sociological reading of economics, Nelson treads familiar ground by arguing that mainstream economics is far from a hard, value-neutral science. Rather, it is a system of thought premised on an inadequately substantiated faith in material growth and the rightness of efficiency. Upon this faith an entire economic theology has been constructed. It is a religion that posits that “sin in the world has material sources” (p. 4), and that points the way to a new “heaven on earth” (p. 24) through the ultimate eradication of material scarcity and deprivation. This, though, is by the author’s reckoning a fraught endeavor. The book is worth examining for Chapter 4 alone, in which he sets out in careful detail the contours, and what he sees as the multiple shortcomings, of this quasi-religious “economic way of thinking” (p. 70). American economics has become, in Nelson’s rendering, the domain of a cloistered set of priestly practitioners. These “true believers” (p. 340) clutch at their belief system despite overwhelming evidence of the great environmental and social harm that can come from slavish adherence to narrow economic precepts.

Environmentalism receives parallel treatment. Nelson pays particular attention to the problematic notion of “nature” within mainstream American environmental thought—a concept that, he suggests, plays much the same role as “growth” and “efficiency” in the economic religion. He catches environmental theology, he says, “in a self-

contradiction” (p. 127). On the one hand, environmentalism looks to nature for “values and spiritual sustenance,” yet the core environmental message is that humanity should limit its actions in ways “found nowhere else in nature” (p. 127). Nelson writes on occasion as though he is discovering entirely new grounds for criticism, despite the fact that problematizing and seeking to make sense of nature has been part of the intellectual debate in environmental circles for many decades. Still, again, his sociological analysis on this front is relatively straightforward.

The second sense in which economics and environmentalism can be read as modern religions is a more overtly historical one. Economic and environmental thought are not just religious in a metaphorical or sociological sense; rather, Nelson claims, they offer “secularizations . . . of core messages of Christianity” (p. 21). By this, he means that these modern-day secular religions take their core messages straight from older Christian sources.

Much of the book is based around short studies of the works of leading figures within the American economic tradition, on the one hand, and the American environmental movement, on the other. It is a straightforward thing to show that the leading lights in what is now thought of as mainstream neoclassical economics all wrote with religious zeal. Nelson goes further, though, to show how key authors invariably drew on Christian tropes and traditions in their work. Tellingly, he notes that of the 50 founding members of the American Economic Association, 20 were former or then-practicing ministers. He traces how these Christian beginnings gave rise to a “hidden theology” (p. 24) that has animated economic thought to the present day. This gives great resonance to his claim that economics is based on deep value propositions, and provides clues as to their origin.

On the environmental side, Nelson shows that early American environmentalists were themselves deeply rooted in Calvinist thought. Environmentalist messages to the present day often read like parables of human imperfection and original sin, the necessity for self-restraint, a moral urgency that informs social activism, and spiritual or godly connection to the nonhuman world. All, he shows, are core Puritan concepts. These religious roots present challenges for a system of thought that, much like economics, purports to be scientific. In Chapter 8, for example, entitled “Environmental Science as a Creation Story,” he argues that much of the field of ecology is a Christian metaphor about apocalypse and redemption masquerading as science.

The third and final way in which Nelson employs the “economics and environmentalism as religion” idea is a little more difficult to unpack. He seems to assert in a number of places not only that environmentalism is, in this case, informed by Christian tradition but also that environmentalism can find coherence as a belief system only if it is animated by a Christian God—that it becomes “literally Christian” (p. 130).

In fact, Nelson already sees this literal Christianity within much environmental thought. One way he hints at this is by implying that many important environmentalists are really just closeted Christians, struggling to express themselves in a field that mistakenly, by his reckoning, views itself as scientific. In writing about famed biologist E. O. Wilson (a self-professed “secular humanist”), for instance, Nelson suggests that Wilson “may in fact be a Christian believer who . . . finds it impossible to express his Christian understandings in the traditional biblical language” (p. 211). More broadly, the author contends that whenever environmentalists say that certain actions should be taken for the good of “the planet,” the only coherent way to understand this is that “[environmentalists] are talking about submitting to God” (p. 128).

Exactly what Nelson means by such statements is unclear. In them, he appears to deny that there can be moral systems of thought grounded in something apart from the Christian tradition. This would strike many environmentalists as a deeply troubling proposition. One alternative way to read Wilson’s work is that he has spent his career arguing for the importance of protection of the planet’s biodiversity even in the absence of God. He may not be a closeted Christian, this is to say, but rather someone content to make moral assertions even in a world in which such claims have no final nonhuman arbiter. Modern-day systems of morality have a history, but are also shaped by the all-too-human battles over right and wrong action taking place today. The struggle between economic and environmental religions will surely continue, but whether such a battle can be meaningfully resolved only by assigning ultimate authority to God is a question that remains open in *The New Holy Wars*.

Automobile Politics: Ecology and Cultural Political Economy. By Matthew Paterson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 271p. \$100.99 cloth, \$33.99 paper.

Garbage In, Garbage Out: Solving the Problems with Long-Distance Trash Transport. By Vivian E. Thomson. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. 173p. \$49.50 cloth, \$21.50 paper.
doi:10.1017/S1537592710003610

— Paul Wapner, *American University*

Environmental problems are among the most profound challenges humanity has ever faced. Climate change, loss of biological diversity, fresh water scarcity, desertification, and the like undermine the quality of life for many and, in the extreme, weaken the organic infrastructure that supports all life on earth. How do we respond to such challenges? How can we steer in more sustainable directions? How can we fashion more ecologically sane and socially just ways of living that will respect the biophysical character of the earth?

The two books under review come at these questions from distinct perspectives, but arrive at remarkably similar conclusions. They argue for both nibbling at the edges of our current systems of unsustainability *and* undertaking wholesale transformation, albeit at different scales and scopes. Such dual strategies are key to the fashioning of environmentally sane paths.

Vivian Thomson dislikes trash. Americans daily throw away about 254 million tons (the equivalent of 4.6 lb./person-day [p. 13]), creating the problem of where to put it. While some trash is burned in incinerators, the majority ends up in landfills. Thomson’s book focuses on the patterns of landfill waste disposal and what we can do to change them.

For much of US history, local municipalities and counties governed landfills. Communities generated garbage and disposed of it in landfills close to home. Safety and transport regulation thus varied across communities. In 1976, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) empowered the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish a national floor of environmental standards for landfills, and to provide states with technical assistance as they develop plans and regulations for solid waste facilities. Under RCRA, governing power over landfills rests with municipalities, but such power has to comply with state and federal standards. As a result, many small landfills were forced to close if they could not afford the upgrades necessary to meet new standards; in turn, the waste disposal industry has consolidated in the form of privately owned mega-landfills. Mega-landfills are enormous facilities that can be hundreds of feet tall and thousands of acres wide. Meeting more restrictive environmental standards, they have liners to protect the dispersion of dangerous materials, mechanisms to address leachate (the liquid that collects in landfills through rain infiltration and groundwater intrusion), and procedures for addressing methane accumulation and emission. But as Thomson highlights, such protections do not always work. Landfills are notorious for leaking heavy metals (such as mercury, lead, and cadmium), nutrients (such as nitrogen compounds), and organic substances that, in high concentrations, combine to form toxic stews and endanger surrounding areas.

A second consequence of RCRA and the emergence of mega-landfills is that trash is now transported across vast distances. With the closure of local dumps, towns and cities have had to seek waste disposal destinations far outside their municipalities. New York City, for instance, annually transports almost three million tons of trash to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and other surrounding areas. (Thomson reminds us that until 1996, New York City disposed its garbage on Staten Island at Fresh Kills Landfill, which at more than two thousand acres, was allegedly the largest human-made feature on earth—more visible from space than the Great Pyramids and the Grand Coulee