



Timothy O'Brien
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Friday, November 6th
12:00 noon – 1:00 pm
Bolton 757

One Nation, United?

Science, Religion, and American Public Opinion

ABSTRACT

Science and religion are often seen as competing ways of understanding the world. Yet, scholars increasingly recognize that these two ways of knowing are more compatible in the public imagination than is sometimes assumed. In this talk, Timothy L. O'Brien discusses his research on the relationship between science, religion, and the public. Moving beyond the usual narrative of broad-based conflict, this talk focuses on the cultural, not just epistemological significance of reason and faith in the United States. Highlighting the diversity among religious Americans' views of science and among scientific Americans' views of religion, this talk argues that perspectives on science and religion reflect cultural tastes rather than epistemological understandings. As such, worldviews related to science and religion are more central to United States political culture than is sometimes realized. This helps to explain the persistence of public controversies about issues such as abortion rights and stem cell research, and it suggests that reducing political polarization depends on building empathy for different worldviews more so than appealing to the cognitive authority of science or religion.

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