

## **Grist for the Mill?: Secular Encroachments on Sacred Values**

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We live in a world of scarce resources where policy elites increasingly propose “rational” market solutions to our problems. This approach tacitly assumes an intuitive economist model of human decision making, in which people reliably consent to treat all values in the trade-off calculus as fungible. We also live in a world in which organizations increasingly use marketing techniques to better recruit, retain, and serve their “customers.” This approach assumes that people readily accept the use of business principles, generally, and marketing strategies, specifically, to determine organizational priorities and offerings. Our interest is in the domains in which these assumptions do not hold.

Overall, the research program investigates people’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions to taboo trade-offs (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997): encroachments of secular values, in particular, market- and marketing-mechanisms, into domains that people perceive as sacred or beyond monetization. Tetlock’s (2002) sacred-value protection model (SVPM) proposes that taboo trade-offs trigger varying mixtures of moral outrage (directed at perpetrators) and moral cleansing (directed at self).

We are particularly interested in the conditions under which, and the mechanisms by which, the intrusion of market- and marketing-driven calculations and strategies undermine sacred values that people perceive to be intrinsic in common domains, organizations, and exchanges. We are also interested in the power of social-relational framing to mitigate negative reactions to taboo-tradeoffs (see McGraw & Tetlock, 2005). Relational framing refers to rhetorical efforts to transform taboo trade-offs into more acceptable routine trade-offs (secular versus secular values) or tragic trade-offs (sacred versus sacred values).

The domains of inquiry and questions we will address include:

**Higher education:** How “should” colleges and universities fit into the marketplace? How do constituents react to the use of market mechanisms and business principles to cope with rising costs and to remain educationally competitive?

**Religion:** How should religious organizations institute marketing solutions designed to better recruit, retain, and serve members of religious organizations? How does marketing undermine the sacred and communal aspects of religious life?

**Health care:** How do policy makers’ assumptions about consumer driven health care fail to understand people’s reluctance to trade off health and money? How do marketing strategies and price justifications for pharmaceuticals differ from other consumer products?

**Death care:** How does the reluctance to trade-off a loved one’s memorial with money make consumers susceptible to predatory sales practices? How does the Federal Trade Commission’s rules for the death care industry fail to take into account how consumers make decisions about funerals?