

Secularism and International Relations Theory

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association
February 15-18, 2009
New York, NY

I. Introduction*

Contemporary international relations (IR) theory takes the Euro-American definition of religion and its separation from politics as the starting point for social scientific inquiry. When Christine Sylvester wrote that IR “smacks of debates within the hierarchy of one church,” she was right in more ways than one. For the most part, at least until quite recently, it has been a secular church.¹ I adopt a different starting point, approaching secularism as a powerful political settlement and fundamental organizing principle of modern politics, including modern international politics. In this essay I discuss the international politics of two “invented traditions” of secularism: laicism, from the French *laïcité*, in which religion is portrayed as an impediment to modernization and development, and what I call “Judeo-Christian” secularism, in which religion is portrayed as a source of unity and identity within cultures and civilizations and a source of conflict between them. I develop four take-away points for scholars of international relations:

- International relations theorists need to pay closer attention to how foundational cultural and normative categories such as the secular and the religious operate politically in international affairs. The varieties of secularism discussed here are not reducible to material power or resources but play a constitutive role in creating agents that represent and respond to the world in particular ways and in contributing to the international normative structures in which these agents interact.
- Until recently, and to the extent that they have received any attention whatsoever, a consensus has separated a Christian or Judeo-Christian-derived “sacred” from an allegedly universal “secular” reason. This consensus has defined the terms through which the sacred and the secular have been conceptualized in the field of international relations. Yet as other formulations of the sacred-secular binary make themselves heard this consensus is showing signs of strain. How these strains are addressed

* This essay is a revised and expanded version of Chapter 2, “Varieties of secularism,” of my book *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Thanks to Jack Snyder, Al Stepan, Peter Katzenstein, Michael Barnett, Dan Philpott, Monica Toft, and Courtney Bender for their helpful comments.

¹ There are dissenters; see the work of the contributors to this volume.

is critical to the future of world politics: from the perspective of democratic pluralism claims to universality grounded either in the claim to have overcome religio-cultural particularities (as in laicism) or to have located the key to successful moral and political order in a particular religio-cultural heritage (as in “Judeo-Christian” or any other tradition) are equally problematic.

- Different forms of secularism developed at the domestic and regional levels are influential at the systemic level in international politics. These secularisms reflect shared interests, identities, and understandings about religion and politics and constitute part of the social and cultural foundations of international relations. They contribute to the construction of national and supranational interests and identities, serve as strategies for the management of religious diversity and religious pluralism, contribute to the creation of inclusionary and exclusionary group identities, and play diverse roles in international conflict and cooperation.
- The historical particularities and philosophical contingencies of various forms of secularism suggest that realist, liberal and constructivist theories of international relations, international law, and international order that consider religion to be a private affair need to be reevaluated.

Each form of secularism has its own history. Laicism, which comes out of the Enlightenment critique of religion, is associated with attempts to distil a particular understanding of religion and ban it from politics. The secular spheres are emancipated and expanded, as Casanova argues, “at the expense of a much-diminished and confined religious sphere.”² Judeo-Christian secularism is a matrix of discourse and practice that claims the secular as a unique Western achievement that serves to reinforce a particular understanding of Euro-American history, civilization and culture. Each of these traditions of secularism is a productive form of power located on a broader spectrum of theological politics. These “invented traditions” that are not mutually exclusive, nor are they the only forms of secularism in existence. There is no strong or necessary dividing line between them. An individual or an institution may be immersed in and orient their

² José Casanova, “A Reply to Talal Asad,” in David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (eds.) *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 23.

understanding of the world using resources from both traditions simultaneously. At the same time, these forms of secularism are not free-floating discourses but are disciplined into individuals and collectivities. For this reason, the study of secularism, like the study of nationalism, requires an examination of particular historical contexts and particular social and political practices.

This analysis of secularism draws upon the rich conceptual vocabularies provided by Charles Taylor, José Casanova, William Connolly, and Talal Asad, amending their arguments when necessary to attune them to the concerns of international relations. Taylor offers the original impetus for the idea of multiple secularisms in his essay “Modes of Secularism,” which describes an “independent political ethic” variety of secularism and a “common ground” strategy of secularism that turn out to be “ancestral to rather different understandings of secularism today.”³ In *Public Religions* Casanova also lays the groundwork for the concept of multiple secularisms with his reference to two paths for managing the public/private distinction: liberal and civic/republican. Like Taylor and myself, he is cautiously critical of both of these traditions, “the liberal perspective because it insists on the need to confine religion to a private sphere, fearing that public religions must necessarily threaten individual freedoms and secular differentiated structures; the civic-republican perspective because...like the liberal perspective it also conceives of public or civil religions in premodern terms as coextensive with the political or societal community.”⁴ From an IR standpoint Casanova’s work is particularly provocative because he underscores three ethnocentric prejudices in Euro-American theories of secularization: a bias for Protestant subjective

³ Charles Taylor, “Modes of Secularism,” in Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 33-36.

⁴ Casanova, *Public Religions*, p. 216.

forms of religion, a bias for “liberal” conceptions of politics and the public sphere, and a bias for the sovereign nation-state as the systemic unit of analysis. Connolly also underscores the particularities of modern secularism when he observes that the secularism of Rawls and Habermas draws cultural sustenance from the “private faiths” of those who embody the European traditions from which Christian secularism emerged.⁵ And Asad explores the construction of modern categories of the secular and the religious together, unpacking the assumptions that govern Western forms of secularism, including the specific concepts of religion, ethics and politics that they presuppose.⁶

It is also worth specifying the geographical scope of the argument. The secular traditions discussed in this essay have been influential within and between countries that inherited, borrowed, had imposed upon them, or somehow ended up living with and against the traditions (both secular and religious) of historical Latin Christendom, including Europe and its settler colonies, Turkey, Iran, India and elsewhere. Practitioners, theorists, journalists and ordinary people rely upon and continually reproduce these discursive traditions to organize their responses to events and processes involving religion and politics, including international politics. Laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism pre-structure discourse and practice involving politics and religion, in the sense described by Hayden White.⁷ In the language of IR theory, they are productive modalities of power that work “through diffuse constitutive relations” to contribute to the “situated social capacities of actors.”⁸ They are vehicles through which

⁵ Connolly, “Liberalism, Secularism and the Nation,” in *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), pp. 73-96.

⁶ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 2.

⁷ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

⁸ Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Power in International Politics,” *International Organization* 59 (Winter 2005), p. 48.

shared interests, identities and understandings involving religion and politics developed at the domestic, regional and transnational levels become influential at the systemic level in international relations.

If the secular is constructed differentially across time and space, as I argue, there are at least three immediate implications for IR theory. First, charting the influence of forms of secularism in international politics challenges the clash of civilizations narrative in which religion is portrayed as a fixed source of communal unity and identity that generates conflict in international politics. Tracing the history and politics of the construction of the categories of the secular and religious makes it clear that to identify something called religion and then assign to it a permanent and fixed role in politics is itself a political move. In my understanding of the social construction of secularism,⁹ elements of religion escape attempts to define and confine it to particular roles, spaces or moments in politics. The contestation surrounding these categories indicates that it is not possible to stabilize the category of religion and lock in its relationship to politics.

Second, these forms of secularism, and others as well, play a significant role in creating and contributing to inclusionary and exclusionary group identities locally, at the level of the state, and globally. These boundaries assume political significance as certain religious actors are brought in as fit for political participation in state politics for example while others are villainized and excluded. As such, secularisms are observed to be cultural-national projects of normalizing various religions and particular religious actors as either fit or unfit to participate in global or local politics. One benefit of this approach is that it moves away from the “good religion” versus “bad religion” framework that emerged from within the old story of the “universal secular,” which ended up privileging

⁹ See Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, Chapter One.

particular Protestant or European forms of Christianity while denigrating other religious forms.¹⁰

Third, this more complex picture of religion and politics presents an alternative to realist, liberal and constructivist theories in which religion is considered to be a private affair. According to conventional accounts, religion was privatized in 1648 at the Peace of Westphalia as a solution to sectarian violence in Europe. Yet this attempt to privatize religion emerged out of a specific context: attempts to manage and moderate sectarianism in European history. The following section takes a brief look at this historical context as reflected in the writings of Immanuel Kant. This historical and philosophical excursion, charting the debts owed by modern forms of secularism to Kantian philosophy and ultimately to Christian tradition, lays the groundwork for the subsequent discussion of Euro-American varieties of secularism in contemporary international politics.

II. Christianity, Kant and secularism

Though best known in the field of international relations for his contributions to idealist theories of cosmopolitanism, Kant was also an important forerunner of modern forms of secularism.¹¹ In fact the legacy of Kant's rational religion may be judged to outweigh his contribution to theories of cosmopolitanism and idealism. Kantian universal moral philosophy sought to address the adversarial effects of religious sectarianism in Europe. To do so, Kant laid a template for a generic form of Protestant Christianity that was intended to supersede sectarian faith. This template served as an

¹⁰ Thanks to Courtney Bender for suggesting this language.

¹¹ Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 33.

important historical precursor of and political resource for later articulations of modern secularism.

To overcome sectarianism, Kant proposed elevating universal philosophy, or rational religion, to the position previously reserved for Christian theology.¹² Rational religion was a generic form of Christianity that would replace and render publicly inert sectarian faith. As Connolly argues, the key to Kantian rational religion is that it is anchored in a metaphysic of the supersensible that is presupposed by *any* agent of morality.¹³ “Kant anchors rational religion in the law of morality rather than anchoring morality in ecclesiastical faith.”¹⁴ This allows Kant to retain the command model of morality from Augustinian Christianity while shifting the proximate point of command from the Christian God to the individual moral subject.¹⁵ By shifting the point of command to the individual moral subject, however, Kant also ensures that “authoritative moral philosophy and rational religion are now only as secure as the source of morality upon which they draw”—individual apodictic recognition.¹⁶ In this way, Kant’s rational religion, although it seeks to displace Christian ecclesiastical theology, actually retains at least four traces of it:

First, it places singular conceptions of reason and command morality above question. Second, it sets up (Kantian) philosophy as the highest potential authority in adjudicating questions in these two domains and in guiding the people toward eventual enlightenment. Third, it defines the greatest danger to public morality as sectarianism within Christianity. Fourth, in the process of defrocking ecclesiastical theology and crowning philosophy as judge in the last instance, it also delegitimizes a place for several non-Kantian, nontheistic perspectives in public life.¹⁷

¹² Ibid., p. 30. See Immanuel Kant (trans. Gregor) *The Conflict of the Faculties*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

¹³ Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 30.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

Kant was a forerunner of secularism rather than a secularist himself.¹⁸ Yet the forms of secularism that evolved out of the Kantian settlement consisted, as Connolly argues, of “a series of attempts to secure these four effects without open recourse to the Kantian metaphysic of the supersensible. Secularism, in its dominant Western forms, *is* this Kantian fourfold without metaphysical portfolio.”¹⁹

This Kantian influence is discernible in laicism, and to a certain extent, Judeo-Christian secularism. Laicism aspires to be an authoritative public morality based in a singular conception of reason. It rejects theology in public life as dangerous sectarianism. It harbors an antipathy toward non-theistic and non-Kantian philosophies, as well as philosophies of public order derived from Islamic tradition. Laicism attempts to contain ecclesiastical intrusions into public life.²⁰ Its overarching objective is to provide “an authoritative and self-sufficient public space equipped to regulate and limit ‘religious’ disputes in public life.”²¹ There is an emphasis on “protecting the authority of deliberative argument in the secular public sphere.”²² To achieve this Kantian effect, laicism constantly re-inscribes the boundary between public and private, secular and sacred, mundane and metaphysical. These boundaries are legitimated through reference to the dictates of logic, reason, or nature; as Connolly concludes, “many secularists who have lost confidence in a god replace it with an overweening confidence in the power of

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 32 (emphasis in original).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

²¹ Ibid., p. 5.

²² Ibid., p. 22.

logic, reason, or nature as a guide to life.”²³ Connolly describes this move toward moral universality as “the secular variant of Christianity.”²⁴

In this secularized Christian moral order, which, one could argue, characterizes certain dimensions of the modern international order, the spheres of social control are divided between the realm of the Judeo-Christian sacred, on the one hand, and the realm of secular morality, international law and international order on the other. A consensus separating the Judeo-Christian sacred from universal secular reason defines the terms through which the sacred and the secular are conceptualized in international relations. The idea that a single logical, natural universal moral order is slowly replacing religion has been influential in Kantian-inspired contemporary theories of international relations; the work of David Held, Martha Nussbaum and Francis Fukuyama all reflect this assumption.²⁵

Like laicism, Judeo-Christian secularism also aspires to serve as an authoritative public morality based in a singular conception of reason. It marginalizes nontheistic and non-Kantian philosophies, including Islamic ones, and seeks to regulate particular kinds of religious intrusions in public discourse. The difference is that unlike laicism, which claims to have superseded religion and religious origins altogether, Judeo-Christian secularism elevates and then expands upon a different aspect of Kant’s moral philosophy: his insistence that among all ecclesiastical creeds available, Protestant Christianity comes

²³ William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 189.

²⁴ Connolly, *Ethos*, p. 181.

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, (trans. Ted Humphrey) *Perpetual peace, and other essays on politics, history, and morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983). David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), Martha C. Nussbaum, (Joshua Cohen, ed.) *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), and Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16: (1989), pp. 3-18.

closest to “universal rational religion.”²⁶ Judeo-Christian secularism positions itself more warmly toward the metaphysical portfolio rejected by laicism, drawing upon different elements of Kantian philosophy to sustain a distinctive narrative of modern secularism, in which Christianity, and then later Judeo-Christianity (with all of the tensions inherent in the hyphen), is depicted as informing and sustaining the moral foundations of modern Euro-American secular order. The Christian or Judeo-Christian origins of modern secularism are held up and valued in this story; claims to secular order are emboldened and not scuttled through reference to them. Unlike laicism, in which secularism is considered universal, or at least universalizable, in Judeo-Christian secularist narratives modern Euro-American secularism is often portrayed as culturally embedded, fixed and largely unproblematic. Yet both forms of secularism are replete with historical, cultural and religious specificities, and one of the central arguments of this paper is that claims to universality grounded either in the (laicist) claim to have overcome religio-cultural particularity altogether, or in the (Christian, or Judeo-Christian secularist) claim to have located the key to successful moral order in any single religio-cultural heritage are both problematic.

This discussion calls attention to the complex relations between Christianity (and beginning in the mid-20th century, the moral tradition referred to as Judeo-Christianity) and secularism, a subject of heated debate among philosophers, theologians and historians.²⁷ The theologian John Milbank for instance argues provocatively that, “all the most important governing assumptions of [secular social] theory are bound up with the

²⁶ William E. Connolly, “Europe: A Minor Tradition,” in *Powers of the Secular Modern*, p. 80.

²⁷ See Carl Schmitt (trans. George Schwab), *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), and Hans Blumenberg, (trans. Robert M. Wallace) *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986).

modification or the rejection of orthodox Christian positions. These fundamental intellectual shifts are...no more rationally ‘justifiable’ than the Christian positions themselves.”²⁸ Milbank concludes that only Christian theology offers a viable alternative to both secular reason and “nihilism.” Christian theologian Arend Theodor van Leeuwen, according to Mark Juergensmeyer, argued that, “the idea of a secular basis for politics is not only culturally European but specifically Christian.”²⁹ For van Leeuwen, “secular culture was, in his mind, Christianity’s gift to the world.”³⁰ While Juergensmeyer argues that van Leeuwen’s thesis about the Christian origins of modern secularism “is increasingly regarded as true, especially in Third World countries,” he criticizes van Leeuwen for suggesting that secularism was *uniquely* Christian, and argues that other civilizations do have distinctions between priestly and secular authority.³¹ Juergensmeyer does not suggest, as does van Leeuwen, that Christianity is the *unique* foundation of secular democracy. Instead, he appears sympathetic toward the argument that particular forms of secularism are historically specific and contingent formations. Juergensmeyer therefore supports van Leeuwen’s argument, as do I, that “the particular form of secular society that has evolved in the modern West is a direct extension of its past, including its religious past, and is not some supracultural entity that came into being only after a radical juncture in history.”³²

In reaching these conclusions, however, Juergensmeyer wrestles with and ultimately leaves unresolved an important tension in the study of secularism. On the one

²⁸ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990, 1993), p. 1.

²⁹ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 16. Arend Theodor van Leeuwen, (trans. H.H. Hoskins) *Christianity in World History: The Meeting of the Faiths of East and West* (New York: Scribner’s, 1964).

³⁰ Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?*, p. 17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

hand, he acknowledges the complex yet much-interrupted relation between Christian history and doctrine and modern Euro-American secularisms. On the other hand, unlike van Leeuwen he wants to leave open the possibility that alternative forms of secularism can and have emerged in non-Christian settings. Yet, in the same moment that Juergensmeyer gestures toward the need to disaggregate secularism and examine its historical trajectories and variable relations to religion, he describes religion and secular nationalism as opposing “ideologies of order” and concludes that, “there can ultimately be no convergence between religious and secular political ideologies.”³³ I disagree. Rather than close down inquiry by setting up the religious and the secular as mutually exclusive ideologies of order, it is worth investigating how specific trajectories of secularism are constructed and how they influence politics at all levels.

III. The international politics of laicism

In *The Secular City*, Harvey Cox suggested that, “it will do no good to cling to our religions and metaphysical versions of Christianity in the hope that one day religion or metaphysics will once again be back. They are disappearing forever and that means we can now let go and immerse ourselves in the new world of the secular city.”³⁴ Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* also describes the evanescent quality of religion, suggesting that, “every metaphysical tradition is now completely worn out.”³⁵ This view has been particularly influential in the academy, in which, as Esposito observes, “religious faith was at best supposed to be a private matter. The degree of one’s intellectual sophistication and objectivity in academia was often equated with a secular liberalism

³³ Ibid., p. 197.

³⁴ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 4.

³⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), cited in William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 150.

and relativism that seemed antithetical to religion...Neither development theory nor international relations considered religion a significant variable for political analysis.”³⁶

In this view, “the mixing of religion and politics is regarded as necessarily abnormal (departing from the norm), irrational, dangerous and extremist.”³⁷

Laicism is a powerful tradition of the secular city, world “empire,” and Western academy that presumes that metaphysical traditions have been exhausted and transcended. It is one of the founding principles of modern political thought and one of the pillars of the modern separation of church and state. There are many dimensions and variations of laicism, including the exclusion of religion from the spheres of power and authority in modern societies (structural differentiation), the privatization of religion, and decline in church membership and individual religious belief. I focus here upon the exclusion of religion from spheres of modern power and authority because it is most relevant to global politics.

Laicism is a powerful organizing principle of state politics that has been influential in France, the former Soviet Union, Turkey, and China. Derived from the Jacobin tradition of *laïcisme*, it is associated with what Partha Chatterjee describes as “a coercive process in which the legal powers of the state, the disciplinary powers of family and school, and the persuasive powers of government and media have been used to produce the secular citizen who agrees to keep religion in the private domain.”³⁸

Laicism, like other forms of secularism, is a form of discipline. Casanova has suggested

³⁶ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 2nd ed.), p. 200.

³⁷ John L. Esposito, “Islam and Secularism in the Twenty-First Century,” in John L. Esposito and Azzam Tamini (eds.) *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 9.

³⁸ Partha Chatterjee, “The Politics of Secularization in Contemporary India,” in Scott and Hirschkind (eds.) *Powers of the Secular Modern*, p. 60.

that the privatization of religion is “mandated ideologically by liberal categories of thought which permeate not only political ideologies and constitutional theories but the entire structure of modern Western thought.”³⁹ According to Taylor, the overarching objective of the “independent political ethic” mode of secularism, which is similar to laicism and pursued by Grotius and others, is to identify features of the human condition that allow the deduction of exception-less norms about peace and political obedience, making religion irrelevant to politics.⁴⁰ As Grotius famously argued, “*etsi Deus non daretur*...even if God didn’t exist, these norms would be binding on us.”⁴¹ The result is that “the state upholds no religion, pursues no religious goals, and religiously-defined goods have no place in the catalogue of ends it promotes.”⁴² Van Der Veer and Lehmann observe that, “it is a fundamental assumption of the discourse of modernity that religion in modern societies loses its social creativity and is forced to choose between a sterile conservation of its premodern characteristics and a self-effacing assimilation to the secularized world.”⁴³ King describes laicism as the attempt to define and then exclude (whatever laicists identify as) religion:

The Enlightenment preoccupation with defining the “essence” of phenomena such as “religion” or “mysticism” serves precisely to exclude such phenomena from the realms of politics, law and science, etc.—that is, from the spheres of power and authority in modern Western societies. Privatized religion becomes both clearly defined and securely contained by excluding it from the public realm of politics.⁴⁴

³⁹ Casanova, *Public Religions*, p. 215.

⁴⁰ Taylor, “Modes of Secularism,” p. 33.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴³ Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, “Introduction,” *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 10.

⁴⁴ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘the Mystic East’* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 11. In 1951 Adiver described Western positivism as “the official dogma of irreligion.” Advan Adiver, “Interaction of Islamic and Western Thought in Turkey,” in T.C. Young (Ed.), *Near Eastern Culture and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 126, cited in Esposito, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, p. 7.

International relations theory operates on the assumption that religion was excluded from spheres of power and authority in modern societies in the course of creating the modern state. Realist and liberal approaches to international relations are part of a tradition of social theory that operates on the assumption that religion has been confined to the private sphere or has diminished altogether.⁴⁵ As Katzenstein observes, “because they are expressions of rationalist thought deeply antithetical to religion, the silence of realist and liberal theories of international relations on the role of religion in European and world politics is thus not surprising.”⁴⁶ The operative assumption that religion has been privatized is what Thomas refers to as the Westphalian presumption.⁴⁷ It is now increasingly clear that a more complicated story is waiting to be told.

Most of the voluminous literature on religion, the Protestant reformation, and the Westphalian settlement (which ended the Thirty Years War between 1618 and 1648) describes the decline of religion in European public life. Skinner, for instance, observes that after Luther “the idea of the Pope and Emperor as parallel and universal powers disappears, and the independent jurisdictions of the *sacerdotium* are handed over to the secular authorities.”⁴⁸ Pizzorno refers to this transition as the “Gregorian moment,” describing it as the most emblematic episode of what he calls “absolute politics” in Western history, which “lies at the root of the transfer, as it were, of the collective responsibility for ultimate ends from a collectivity having the boundaries of Christianity,

⁴⁵ Scott Thomas argues that this applies equally to the English School in “Faith, History and Martin Wight: The Role of Religion in the Historical Sociology of the English School of International Relations,” *International Affairs* 77: 4 (2001), p. 926.

⁴⁶ Peter Katzenstein, “Multiple Modernities and Secular Europeanization?” in Peter Katzenstein and Timothy Byrnes (eds.), *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 31.

⁴⁷ Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 33.

⁴⁸ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 353.

and including all believers tied by this particular bond of faith, to separate collectivities defined by the territorial boundaries of one state and including all the individuals identified by their living within those boundaries.”⁴⁹ Philpott emphasizes in this volume and elsewhere the significance of the Protestant Reformation and processes of secularization that emerged out of it to challenge the temporal powers and decrease the public role of the church, while contributing to the emergence of a proto-sovereign states system.⁵⁰ Krasner suggests that, “the idea of sovereignty was used to legitimate the right of the sovereign to collect taxes, and thereby strengthen the position of the state, and to deny such right to the church, and thereby weaken the position of the papacy.”⁵¹ He concludes that Westphalia “delegitimized the already waning transnational role of the Catholic Church and validated the idea that international relations should be driven by balance-of-power considerations rather than the ideals of Christendom.”⁵² Cavanaugh argues that the conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries inverted the dominance of the ecclesiastical over the civil authorities through the creation of the modern state, preparing the way for the eventual elimination of the Church from the public sphere.⁵³

Westphalian republicanism was organized on a modern conception of social and political order in which individual subjects assembled a society under a single sovereign

⁴⁹ Alessandro Pizzorno, “Politics Unbound,” in Charles S. Maier (Ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 34.

⁵⁰ Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Stephen D. Krasner, “Westphalia and All That,” in Judith Goldstein & Robert Keohane (Eds.), *Ideas & Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 238.

⁵² Stephen D. Krasner, “Sovereignty,” *Foreign Policy* (January/February 2001), p. 21. On the alleged violation of state autonomy in the Westphalian settlement by provisions enforcing religious toleration that undermined the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* see Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 77-84.

⁵³ Cavanaugh, “A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,” pp. 398-400.

authority. By challenging the arbitrary rights of kings in the name of the common good,⁵⁴ the new republicanism did de-legitimize and transform pre-existing hierarchic forms of order, as conventional accounts have it. Yet the new republicanism also reinforced a particular kind of distinction between natural and supernatural order that came out of, and remained indebted to, a broader Christian framework.⁵⁵ Early republican order was characterized by a strong idea of providence and a pervasive sense that men were enacting a master plan that was providentially preordained. Taylor has suggested that the idea of moral order underlying this arrangement would in fact be unrecognizable to non-Westerners due to its emphasis on a providential plan to be realized by humans.⁵⁶ That early republicanism was situated within this broader Christian context fits with Krasner's observation, also noted by Philpott and Shah in this volume, that in the Treaty of Osnabrück (one of two treaties that made up the Peace of Westphalia along with the Treaty of Münster) religious toleration was limited to Lutherans, Calvinists, and Catholics.⁵⁷ Westphalia, as Nexon concludes, contributed to a "territorialization of religion" leading toward the "formation of polities in which territory, state, and confession were closely linked."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), p. 70.

⁵⁵ This is not to ignore the deep divisions between Christians in Europe at the time. As Nexon observes, "when we view Europeanization as a long historical process, we inevitably confront the creation of Europe as a community through, first, the extrusion of religious difference and, second, the management of religious schism within a broader Latin Christian community." Daniel Nexon, "Religion, European Identity, and Political Contention in Historical Perspective," in Katzenstein and Byrnes (Eds.) *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, p. 260.

⁵⁶ Charles Taylor, Seminar on Secularization, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, Spring 2003. This argument is elaborated in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007). For the argument that theological contributions underlie key components of the Westphalian settlement including the legitimacy of private property, absolute sovereignty and active rights, see Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 9-26.

⁵⁷ Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, p. 81, citing Treaty of Osnabrück 1648, 240, 241, Article VII.

⁵⁸ Nexon, "Religion, European Identity, and Political Contention," p. 277.

Laicism emerged gradually and fitfully, and not without rivals, out of this Christian-influenced Westphalian moral and political order. Although laicism presents itself as a universalizable discourse that emerged out of the Westphalian settlement as a solution to the wars of religion, this historical context suggests that William Connolly's description of it as a "a specific fashioning of spiritual life... carved out of Christendom"⁵⁹ comes much closer to the mark. Joshua Mitchell takes this argument one step further, observing that even "the idea of the sovereign self, the autonomous consenting self, emerged out of Christianity... paying attention to the religious roots of consent in the West alert us to the fact, that it is in fact a provincial development, not necessarily universalizable."⁶⁰ My argument is that the influence of Christianity upon the original Westphalian "secular" settlement makes it difficult to subsume modern international order into realist and liberal frameworks that operate on the assumption that religion has been privatized. The traditions of secularism identified in this essay contribute to the constitution of particular modern forms of state sovereignty that purport to be universal in part by *defining* the limits of state-centered politics with "religion" on the outside.

Modernization theory, the policy expression of the commitment to build a modern Westphalian state, is a paradigmatic example of laicist assumptions at work. It is characterized by the assumption that "managing the public realm is a science which is essentially universal and that religion, to the extent it is opposed to the Baconian world-image of science, is an open or potential threat to any polity."⁶¹ As Falk argues, the

⁵⁹ Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Joshua Mitchell, Comments presented at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and the Pew Christian Scholars Program conference on *Theology, Morality, and Public Life*, The University of Chicago Divinity School, Chicago, Illinois, February 25-27, 2003.

⁶¹ Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance," in Rajeev Bhargava (Ed.), *Secularism and its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 129.

exclusion of religion from the spheres of power and authority “was intended to facilitate governmental efficiency as well as to provide the basis for a unified politics of the state in the face of religious pluralism, and a background of devastating sectarian warfare.

Ostensibly, in the modern world religious identity was declared irrelevant to the rational enterprise of administering the political life of society.”⁶² In viewing religion as an impediment to the scientific management of the domestic and international public realms, modernization theory reflects laicist assumptions. Modern state-builders were to confine religion, however defined, to the private realm to ensure the proper demarcation of public and private, religious and secular. This paradigm was considered to be universal, or at least universalizable. As T.N. Madan wrote in one of the earlier articles on the politics of secularism, “the idea of secularism, a gift of Christianity, has been built into Western social theories’ paradigms of modernization, and since these paradigms are believed to have universal applicability, the elements, which converged historically—that is in a unique manner—to constitute modern life in Europe in the sixteenth and the following three centuries, have come to be presented as the requirements of modernization elsewhere.”⁶³

Laicist assumptions also underlie structuralist and materialist approaches to international relations insofar as religion is seen as epiphenomenal to more fundamental material interests. Neo-realism proceeds on the assumption that states have fixed and innate interests and that state behavior is constrained by international structure defined by factors such as the distribution of power, technology and geography. Historical materialism, following Marx, famously dismisses religion as “a mode of consciousness

⁶² Richard Falk, “Religion and Politics: Verging on the Postmodern,” *Alternatives* XIII, (1988), p. 381.

⁶³ T.N. Madan, “Secularism in its Place,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 4 (November 1987), p. 754.

which is other than consciousness of reality, external to the relations of production, producing no knowledge, but expressing at once the anguish of the oppressed and a spurious consolation.”⁶⁴ Materialist approaches to state interests neglect the constitutive and productive role of social norms and practices.⁶⁵ As Bukovansky argues, “materialist approaches tend to view rules and norms as being contingent upon, and thus reducible to, material configurations of power or resources.”⁶⁶ Yet the argument developed here suggests that contrary to the assumptions underpinning these theories, secularism cannot be reduced to material power or resources but plays a constitutive role in creating agents and contributing to the normative structures in which they interact.

Like their realist and liberal counterparts, constructivists have paid little attention to the role of the secular-religious binary in constituting state sovereignty. Focusing on the interaction of pre-existing state units to explain how international norms influence state interests, identity, and behavior,⁶⁷ the literature on the social construction of the state system has ignored the secular and religious or treated religion as essentially private by prior assumption,⁶⁸ leaving little space for examining the history and politics of secularism.

The most significant implication for international relations of these differing attempts to expel religion from politics or assume that it has been privatized within the

⁶⁴ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 46.

⁶⁵ On historical materialism see Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society* (London: Verso, 1994) and B.K. Gills, “Historical Materialism and International Relations Theory,” *Millennium* 16 (1987), pp. 265-272; on neorealism see Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), and Waltz’s chapter “Political Structures” in Robert Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 70-97.

⁶⁶ Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 19.

⁶⁷ Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Authority in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁶⁸ Thomas Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (eds.), *State Sovereignty as a Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

state is that they demand “not only the sharing of the (independent political) ethic but also of its foundation—in this case, one supposedly independent of religion.”⁶⁹ Laicism defines religion by designating that which is not religious, or the secular.⁷⁰ In doing so, laicism demarcates the legitimate limits and boundaries of public space. In defining the temporal, it aspires to define or at least delimit the transcendent. Laicist settlements are a form of politics that, as Pizzorno argues with reference to absolute politics, “set(s) the boundaries between itself and other activities. To define what is within or without the scope of politics, one needs laws, or abolition of laws, hence political decisions, political activities, and discourse.”⁷¹ Laicism sets the terms for what constitutes legitimate politics and legitimate religion, but as anthropologists have shown this is a culturally and historically variable determination. As Scott observes, “part of the problem to be sketched and investigated therefore has precisely to do with the instability of what gets identified and counted by authorized knowledges as ‘religion’: how, by whom, and under what conditions of power. In other words, the determining conditions and effects of what gets categorized as ‘religion’ are historically and culturally variable.”⁷² Euro-American traditions of secularism are forms of authorized knowledge and forms of discipline that emerged out of Latin Christendom. They rely upon and reproduce particular definitions and assumptions about the secular and the religious.

These traditions are not universal and are constantly shifting. As an example of how the categories of the secular and the religious shift over time, consider the derivation

⁶⁹ Taylor, “Modes of Secularism,” p. 38.

⁷⁰ “In the discourse of modernity ‘the secular’ presents itself as the ground from which theological discourse was generated...” Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 192.

⁷¹ Pizzorno, “Politics Unbound,” p. 28.

⁷² David Scott, “Conversion and Demonism: Colonial Christian Discourse and Religion in Sri Lanka,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 2 (1992), p. 333.

of the English term “religion” from the Latin *religio*.⁷³ In the pre-Christian era, Cicero provided an etymology of the term linking it to the Latin verb *relegere*: to re-trace or re-read.⁷⁴ In pre-Christian times, *religio* referred to “re-tracing” the ritual of one’s ancestors. As King observes, “this understanding of the term seems to have gained provenance in the ‘pagan’ Roman empire and made *religio* virtually synonymous with *traditio*.” The Roman idea of *religio* tolerated a variety of different traditions, since the exclusion of one tradition in order for another to be practiced was not required.⁷⁵ Early Christians were referred to as atheists because they did not belong to a recognizable *traditio* and did not acknowledge the gods of others.⁷⁶ As Christians increased their power among the Romans, King argues that they also transformed the meaning of *religio* by severing its association with ancestral traditions:

It became increasingly important within early Christian discourses to drive a wedge between the traditional association of *religio* with *traditio*. This occurred through a transformation of the notion of *religio*. Thus in the third century CE we find the Christian writer Lactantius explicitly rejecting Cicero’s etymology, arguing instead that *religio* derives from *religare*, meaning to bind together or link.⁷⁷

So as Christianity became more powerful, *religio* came to be associated with “a worship of the true and a superstition of the false.”⁷⁸ For Christians and Westerners more generally, religion began to denote a bond of piety between *one true* God and man.

⁷³ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, pp. 35-36.

⁷⁴ Derrida argues that *relegere* is from *legere* (harvest, gather) and is a Ciceronian tradition continued by W. Otto, J.-B. Hollmann and Benveniste. He notes also a second etymological source of the word *religio*: *religare*, from *ligare* (to tie, to bind), and traces this tradition from Lactantius and Tertullian to Kobbert, Ernout-Meillet, and Pauly Wissola. Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” in Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds.), *Religion* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 34-35.

⁷⁵ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, p. 36. The only restriction on *religio* in the Roman context was that practices were not allowed to impinge upon acceptance of civic responsibilities.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷⁸ Lactantius, *Institutiones Divinae* IV.28, trans. Sister McConald, 1964, 318-320, cited in King, *Orientalism and Religion*, p. 36.

Cavanaugh argues that this modern concept of religion dates to the late fifteenth century and the writings of Marsilio Ficino, whose 1474 *De Christiana Religione* represents religion as a universal human impulse. As he concludes, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries “religion moves from a virtue to a set of propositions...at the same time the plural ‘religions’ arises, an impossibility under the medieval usage.”⁷⁹

The reformulation of *religio* by European theorists is important to understanding religion and contemporary international politics because it established “the monotheistic exclusivism of Christianity as the normative paradigm for understanding what a religion is.”⁸⁰ The representation of “religion” by European political theorists as if it were only about Christian belief or a set of propositions influenced European social order, European perceptions of and ways of relating to other civilizations and, later, European forms of secularism. Kant for example could not fathom the idea of more than one valid religion:

*Differences in religion: an odd expression! Just as if one spoke of different moralities. No doubt there can be different kinds of historical faiths, though these do not pertain to religion, but only to the history of the means used to promote it, and these are the province of learned investigation; the same holds of different religious books (Zendavest, the Vedas, Koran, and so on). But there is only a single religion, valid for all men in all times. Those [faiths and books] can thus be nothing more than the accidental vehicles of religion and can only thereby be different in different times and places.*⁸¹

Writing in the same decade, Joseph Endelin de Joinville, the Surveyor-General in the Administration of Frederic North, first Governor of British possessions in Ceylon, reaffirmed the view that religion could refer only to a Christian belief system.

An uncreated world, and mortal souls, are ideas to be held only in an infant state of society, and as society advances such ideas must vanish. *A*

⁷⁹ Cavanaugh, “A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,” p. 404.

⁸⁰ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, p. 37.

⁸¹ Kant, (trans. Humphrey) “To Perpetual Peace: a Philosophical Sketch,” in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, p. 125.

fortiori, they cannot be established in opposition to a religion already prevailing in a country, the fundamental articles of which are the creation of the world, and the immortality of the soul. Ideas in opposition to all religion cannot gain ground, at least cannot make head, when there is already an established faith...⁸²

Crucially, and for reasons having to do with the problems associated with the management of religious pluralism in Europe, European political theorists emphasized the idea of religion as a set of beliefs and not the more embodied Ciceronian understanding of *religio* and *traditio*.⁸³ As King concludes, “modern discussions of the meaning and denotation of the term *religio* tend to follow Lactantius’s etymology, thereby constructing a Christianized model of religion that strongly emphasized *theistic belief* (whether mono-, poly-, heno-, or pan-theistic in nature), exclusivity, and a fundamental dualism between the human world and the transcendent world of the divine to which one ‘binds’ (*religare*) oneself.”⁸⁴

My point here is to suggest that modern Euro-American forms of secularism have inherited, among other influences, a definition of “religion” that is indebted in specific ways to the European experience of managing religious diversity in a Christian-majority Europe. In modern religiously diverse societies, attempts to manage the terms through which this inherited understanding of “religion” is defined (and then confined) lead to conflict between laicists, policing the boundary of what they define as the public sphere, and their rivals who view this policing as an extension of religion in the name of a rival (laicist) set of metaphysical assumptions.⁸⁵ As Taylor explains:

What to one side is a more strict and consistent application of the principles of neutrality is seen by the other side as partisanship. What this

⁸² Joseph Endelin de Joinville, “On the Religion and Manners of the People of Ceylon,” *Asiatick Researches* 7 (1803), pp. 397-444, cited in Scott, “Conversion and Demonism,” p. 347.

⁸³ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, p. 37. Thanks to Courtney Bender for her suggestions on this section.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁵ Taylor, “Modes of Secularism,” p. 36.

other side sees as legitimate public expressions of religious belonging will often be castigated by the first as the exaltation of some peoples' beliefs over others. This problem is compounded when society diversifies to contain substantial numbers of non-Judaeo-Christian religions. If even some Christians find the "post-Christian" independent ethic partisan, how much harder will Muslims find it to swallow it.⁸⁶

By holding fast to a particular definition of something called "religion" and then excluding it from politics, laicism defines the temporal domain in a particular fashion. This is a political move. Some may also consider it a religious one. Laicism marks out the domain of the secular and associates it with public authority, common sense, rational argument, justice, tolerance and the public interest.⁸⁷ It reserves the religious as that which it is not, and associates religion with a personal God and beliefs about that God.⁸⁸ Laicism, then, is not simply the absence of religious or theological discourse; it is more complex than a clean laicism-religion oppositional binary would suggest. Rather laicism enacts a particular kind of theological discourse in its own right, insofar as it "theologizes" the religions that it oversees, by which I mean to discourse and reason theologically, to speculate in theology.⁸⁹

Connolly alludes to this when he notes that for many secularists, religion is "treated as a universal term, as if "it" could always be distilled from a variety of cultures in a variety of times rather than representing a specific fashioning of spiritual life engendered by the secular public space carved out of Christendom."⁹⁰ Milbank, arguing from within a Christian ontology, refers to the "critical non-avoidability of the theological and metaphysical" and observes that differing approximations of this appear

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁸⁷ Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See the OED definition of theologize at <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/cgi/o/oed/oed-idx?q1=theologize&type=Lookup>.

⁹⁰ Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 23.

in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Gillian Rose, René Girard, Guy Lardreau and Christian Jambet.⁹¹ Stephen White, from within a different ontology, argues that “the supposedly neutral, ‘freestanding’ nonontological standpoint is, in fact, a perspective constitutively infused with an ontological desire to hold an authoritative center in the flux of political life...the desire for a definitive center is what needs to be diffused.”⁹² In different ways each of these thinkers suggests that although laicism purports to stand outside and above the contested territory of religion and politics, it does not and cannot. Laicism is located on a spectrum of theological politics.

In its strongest formulations, laicism leads to normalization of various religions and religious actors as either fit or unfit for participation in global or local politics. As Taylor observes with regard to global politics, “defined and pursued out of the context of Western unbelief, it understandably comes across as the imposition of one metaphysical view over others, and an alien one at that.”⁹³ In legislating the terms through which the secular and the religious are defined and experienced, laicism rules out particular kinds of linkages between (the laicist concept of) religion and spheres of power and authority such as law, science, and politics within states. In defining the limits of state-centered politics with religion on the outside, laicism contributes to the constitution of a template for the management of religious pluralism within states and the conduct of state sovereignty between them. The exercise of this productive power encounters obstacles and incites opposition. As Casanova observes regarding religious interventions in the secular public sphere, “the purposes of such interventions in the undifferentiated public sphere is not simply to ‘enrich public debate’ but to challenge the very claims of the secular sphere to

⁹¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 3.

⁹² Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 140.

⁹³ Taylor, “Modes of Secularism,” p. 37.

differentiated autonomy exempt from extrinsic normative constraints.”⁹⁴ It should come as no surprise that challenges to dominant formations of secularism are most pronounced in non-Western contexts where Western-imposed or inspired forms of laicism do not map cleanly onto local political and religious traditions.

In defining the starting point in relation to which the religious is constructed, laicism contributes to the production of the categories that it presupposes. It is most powerful when this process of construction remains invisible or unseen. In this way, laicism represents itself as the natural order that emerges when there is no ideology present.⁹⁵ In its most influential legal, social and political instantiations, laicism posits itself as public, neutral and value-free, while positing religion, religious actors, and religious institutions as private, affective and value-laden. Religion is denominated as the domain of the violent, the irrational, the undemocratic, the “other.” Thus Cavanaugh argues that, “liberal theorists...assume that public faith has a dangerous tendency to violence,”⁹⁶ and Appleby refers to the “conventional wisdom that religious fervor—unrestrained religious commitment—inevitably expresses itself in violence and intolerance.”⁹⁷ Laicism is the “conventional wisdom” adopted by Cavanaugh’s liberal theorists. The secular public sphere is construed as the domain of reason, objectivity, deliberation and justice, and the religious private sphere as the domain of subjectivity, transcendence, effeminacy and affect. Laicism guards against what it defines as religion in the public sphere. Religious presence is seen as unnatural, infectious, undemocratic,

⁹⁴ José Casanova, “Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad,” paper presented at workshop on *Secularization and Religion*, Erfurt, Germany, July 2003, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Melani McAlister makes this argument pertaining to gender in *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 232.

⁹⁶ Cavanaugh, “A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,” p. 409.

⁹⁷ Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, p. 5.

and theocratic.⁹⁸ Adapting Bonnie Honig's insight about virtue theorists, laicists "distance themselves from the remainders of their politics and that distance enables them to adopt a not terribly democratic intolerance and derision for the other to whom their democratic institutions are supposed to be (indeed claim to be) reaching out."⁹⁹ These religious subjects, as Roxanne Euben has shown, tend to become repositories for laicist anxieties about relations between politics, religion and violence.¹⁰⁰ Laicism incites counter-reactions by pushing dissenters, both secular and religious conventionally understood, out of the domain of the political. As these internal "remainders" of laicism are shut out of politics and come to sense that the domain of the political itself is in fact regulated by laicist forms of discipline, some resort to extreme tactics to air their grievances.

IV. The international politics of Judeo-Christian secularism

Judeo-Christian secularism is a discursive tradition developed in the mid-20th century, primarily though not exclusively in the United States, distinguished by the partial displacement of the dominant narrative of Protestant hegemony and the representation of certain moral and political values as held in common by Christianity and Judaism and connected to particular Western traditions of law and governance. While laicism seeks to confine religion to the private sphere, this second invented tradition of secularism connects contemporary Euro-American secular formations to a

⁹⁸ See for example the biological references to Islamism as a contagion in French media coverage of the dispute surrounding the 2004 law as discussed in John Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁹⁹ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

strong historical legacy of Western Christian, and beginning in the mid-20th century and then only selectively, Judeo-Christian, values, cultural and religious beliefs, historical practices, legal traditions, governing institutions and forms of identification. The common claim of Judeo-Christian secularism of all varieties and the key to understanding it as a form of authority that disciplines individuals through discourse and practice is that Western political order is grounded in a set of core values with their origins in either Christian or Judeo-Christian tradition that cannot (should not?) be diluted or denied.

Let me be very clear about my argument. First, in referring to “Judeo-Christian” tradition, I do not want to suggest that there is agreement between or within either Jewish or Christian tradition about what this term means, or even whether it should be used at all. There is not. Rather, of interest to me is the fact that the term has become a signifier of a particular and extraordinarily powerful point of view, which is the argument that there is such a thing as a “Judeo-Christian” religious and moral tradition, and that it serves as the fount and foundation of modern political values such as liberty, equality, and secularism. Many individuals are socialized or disciplined into this worldview and rely upon it implicitly to organize the world through the lens provided by its assumptions.

Second, the narrative of Judeo-Christian secularism, which tells a story that connects a broad and diverse set of religious traditions to Western models of secular governance, emerged historically in the mid-20th century and has been particularly influential in the American political imagination. In attempting to come to terms with the cultural and political significance of this form of secularism, I am not suggesting that Christian or Judeo-Christian values *actually* form the basis of Western institutions or styles of governance such as secular democracy but rather that the *conviction* among

adherents to this narrative that these moral values serve to ground Western practices of secular democracy is in itself powerful enough to warrant critical scrutiny. I am not suggesting that the concept of “Judeo-Christian” is or is not a valid one; this is not for me to decide.¹⁰¹ I am suggesting that a specific variety of civic republican tradition emphasizing the connections between moral values allegedly held in common by Judaism and Christianity (Old Testament, Ten Commandments, etc.) and particular styles and traditions of governance including but not limited to liberty, equality, and the separation of church and state has become quite powerful and therefore merits scholarly attention. This tradition is real *because* it is imagined; I am not asserting that it is imagined because it is real. To make the latter kind of claim, as President Obama might say, would be above my pay grade.

An example of this narrative is the religious populism of Richard John Neuhaus.¹⁰² Neuhaus argues that universally valid traditional Catholic moral arguments should replace secular public godlessness and re-clothe the naked public square as the basis of American identity, community and foreign policy. Americans in his view are a Christian people, and Catholic natural law theorizing should serve as a universal moral-religious foundation for American public life.¹⁰³ Drawing on the arguments of John Courtney Murray, Neuhaus argues that Catholicism is not the enemy of liberalism but “its

¹⁰¹ For a recent discussion of “secular witnesses belonging to the Judeo-Christian tradition” and the attempt to come to terms with their response to suicide bombing that is suggestive of one way in which this categorization may be helpful see Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 91.

¹⁰² For another variation see Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

¹⁰³ Damon Linker, “Without a Doubt: A Catholic Priest, a Pious President, and the Christianizing of America,” *The New Republic* (April 3, 2006). On Neuhaus’s philosophy see his *Catholic Matters: Confusion, Controversy and the Splendor of Truth* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984) and *The Catholic Moment* (New York: Harpercollins, 1990). For two very different critiques see Damon Linker, *The Theocons: Secular America Under Siege* (New York: Doubleday, 2006) and Cavanaugh, “A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House,” pp. 410-412.

true source and indispensable foundation.”¹⁰⁴ For Neuhaus and others who represent different variations of this tradition, religion (understood as Catholicism, Christianity, and/or Judeo-Christianity, depending upon who you ask) is the elemental defining feature and moral basis of Western civilization. Ted Jelen has described this position with reference to Peter Berger’s concept of a sacred canopy: “in the United States, a ‘Judeo-Christian’ tradition is thought to provide a moral basis for political life—what some analysts have described as a ‘sacred canopy’ beneath which political affairs can be conducted. Religion is thought to perform a ‘priestly’ function of legitimating political authority.”¹⁰⁵ Christian and/or Judeo-Christian-derived forms of secular order, in this view, are among the core values of Western civilization and help constitute the common ground upon which Western democracy rests. Religion plays an important constitutive role not outside but *within* secular politics, serving what Jelen describes as “the basis of an ethical consensus without which popular government could not operate.”¹⁰⁶ This tradition of secularism draws on a long trajectory described by Casanova as a “celebratory Protestant reading of modernity, going from Hegel’s *Early Theological Writings* through the Weber-Troeltsch axis to Talcott Parson’s interpretation of modern societies as the institutionalization of Christian principles.”¹⁰⁷

In the laicist story of secularization, the Christian identity of the West has been superseded, radically transformed and for all practical purposes rendered irrelevant. A modern, rational West was reinvented and rejuvenated by democratic tendencies inherited from its Greek and Roman predecessors. The Judeo-Christian secularist story

¹⁰⁴ Linker, “Without a Doubt.”

¹⁰⁵ Ted Jelen, *To Serve God and Mammon: Church-State Relations in American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), p. 11. On the sacred canopy see Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967) and Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*.

¹⁰⁶ Jelen, *To Serve God and Mammon*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ Casanova, “A Reply to Talal Asad,” in *Powers of the Secular Modern*, p. 21.

does not share this assumption that after the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment linkages between Western politics and public forms of Christianity were definitively severed. It works out of a different set of assumptions about the relationship between Christianity and modern political identities and institutions. Rather than eschewing religion, this narrative draws upon and refigures earlier European arrangements in which church and state were unified, each representing as Gedicks argues a different aspect of the same divine authority:

Prior to the Reformation...the concepts “religious” and “secular” did not exist as descriptions of fundamentally different aspects of society. Although there clearly was tension and conflict in the relation between church and state during this time, the state was not considered to be nonreligious. Both church and state were part of the Christian foundation upon which medieval society was built.¹⁰⁸

The Reformation led to the distillation of two separate spheres of influence: the spiritual, led by the Church, and the temporal, overseen by the State. Luther and Calvin revived and strengthened Augustine’s concepts of the “city of God” and the “city of men,” which described two aspects of the sovereign authority of God as embodied in the church and the state. However, they also made this split more fundamental by claiming that, “God had instituted two kingdoms on earth, one spiritual to be ruled by the church, and the other temporal to be ruled by a civil sovereign.”¹⁰⁹

In the United States the sense of a larger Christian context within which both church and state were embedded set the terms of American public discourse until quite recently, and it could be argued that at some times and places it still does.¹¹⁰ Following the influx of immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

¹⁰⁸ Frederick Mark Gedicks, “The Religious, the Secular, and the Antithetical,” *Capital University Law Review* 20, no. 1 (1991), p. 116.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

centuries, however, in most places it became politically expedient to couch political programs in increasingly non-sectarian terms in order to ensure success at the polls.¹¹¹

While Protestant discourse at that point took a back seat to a more generic civic religion, a de facto Protestant establishment continued to set the ground rules: “Protestantism still affected public business, but implicitly, more as the source and background of political movements than as the movements themselves.”¹¹²

The civic republican imagination of the Protestant majority in early America formed the basis of a particular understanding and practice of both religion and democratic politics. The influence of the Protestant majority in early America was evident in Legislative prayer, state acknowledgment of Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving and the Christian Sabbath, and the outlawing of blasphemy and punishment of atheism.¹¹³ Protestants “opposed a particular Protestant denomination to Protestantism in general, which later they did not equate with an establishment. The notion of prayer and worship based on the Bible accepted by all Protestants did not amount to a general establishment, but constituted an essential foundation of civilization.”¹¹⁴ To be secular, in this reasoning, meant to not privilege one Protestant denomination over another. The “common ground” of Protestant civilization was taken for granted, though of course dissenting Christians and many others were excluded from this common ground. A similar situation prevailed contemporaneously in the English political imaginary; in his analysis of nineteenth-century debates between British evangelicals and their utilitarian rivals Peter van der Veer notes that despite their differences both sides agreed that, “civil

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 122.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 122.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 123.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Curry, *The First Freedoms*, pp. 123-4, quoted in Gedicks, p. 123, note 30.

society and the forms of knowledge on which it was based were ultimately part and parcel of Christian civilization.”¹¹⁵

This Protestant claim to a “common ground,” though slowly eroded by the increasing religious diversification of the American population and eventually modified to incorporate both Catholic and, after World War II in particular, Jewish influences, has nonetheless retained a kind of cultural foothold in the modern imaginary. It is out of a celebratory reading and ongoing, cautious amendment of this cultural inheritance that the Judeo-Christian secularist narrative emerged and continues to shape modern dispositions toward the secular and the place of religion within it. The tradition of Judeo-Christian secularism developed beginning in the mid-20th century is the cultural heir of this de facto Protestant establishment. A narrative of Protestant hegemony has been transformed in the American imaginary into a slightly more liberalized pluralism, but still draws sustenance from a long tradition in which particular religious traditions (first Protestant Christianity, then Christianity more broadly, then Judaism) are linked to the possibility of civilization and cited as the source of first principles for governing institutions.

Tocqueville described this famously in reference to the United States:

In the United States it is not only mores that are controlled by religion, but its sway extends over reason... So Christianity reigns without obstacles by universal consent... Thus while the law allows the American people to do everything; there are things which religion prevents them from imagining and forbids them to become... Religion, which never intervenes directly in the government of American society should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions.¹¹⁶

Following in Tocqueville’s footsteps, scholars of religion such as Bellah,

Connolly, Juergensmeyer, Taylor, van der Veer, Morone and Pizzorno have chronicled

¹¹⁵ Peter Van der Veer, “The Moral State: Religion, Nation, and Empire in Victorian Britain and British India,” in *Nation and Religion*, p. 28.

¹¹⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, (trans. George Lawrence) *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 292.

how assumptions about and practices linked to religion resonate in and through modern varieties of liberalism and secularism.¹¹⁷ Morone, for example, paints a lively portrait of American history in which the nation develops “not from religious to secular but from revival to revival.”¹¹⁸ Connolly points to a tendency in canonical liberal thinkers, such as J.S. Mill, to extol Judeo-Christian tradition as the moral basis of civilizational unity and identity. Mill for instance contributed to the cultural and political imaginary that I identify as Judeo-Christian secularism because for Mill, as Connolly suggests, it is “through Jewish and Christian culture above all that a territorial people acquires the civilizational conditions of possibility for representative government.”¹¹⁹ Van der Veer identifies a long tradition of combining liberalism and evangelical moralism in Anglo-American political thought; describing British Liberal leader Gladstone’s (1809-98) writings as invoking a “liberal view of progress...but added to this is the notion that progress is the Christian improvement of society and that in such progress we see the hand of God.”¹²⁰ Charles Taylor describes a “common ground” mode of secularism, in which members of a political community agree upon an ethic of peaceful coexistence and political order based on doctrines common to all Christian sects, or even to all theists.¹²¹ Historically, he suggests that this represented a successful compromise in Europe for warring sects because “political injunctions that flowed from this common core trumped the demands of a particular confessional allegiance.”¹²² The objective was not to expel

¹¹⁷ See Robert Bellah’s concept of American civil religion in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) and Juergensmeyer’s argument that American nationalism blends secular nationalism and the symbols of Christianity into a form of “civil religion” in *The New Cold War?*, p. 28.

¹¹⁸ James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 78.

¹²⁰ Van der Veer, “The Moral State,” p. 24.

¹²¹ Taylor, “Modes of Secularism.”

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 33. Taylor cites Pufendorf and Locke as examples.

religion from politics in the name of an independent ethic, as in laicism, but to prevent the state from backing one (Christian) confession over another by appealing to that which all held in common. This even-handedness between religious traditions was according to Taylor the basis of the original American separation of church and state,¹²³ and points again to the role that particular varieties of secularism have played as strategies for the management of religious diversity and religious pluralism in particular contexts. As Pizzorno suggests, the “fundamental, long-term function of the church in the formation of Western civilization” was to offer “a set of symbols of common identity, which made it possible to establish who belonged and who was excluded.”¹²⁴

Judeo-Christian secularism differs from laicism in that it does not aspire or claim to exclude religion (understood as Christianity or Judaism) from modern spheres of power and authority. It diverges from laicism with regard to the role of religious tradition in the establishment and maintenance of the secularist “separation” of church and state. While laicism works on the assumption that religion has receded out of modern spheres of authority and into the private realm or perhaps diminished altogether, Judeo-Christian secularism is a variant of what Jelen calls religious “accommodationism” insofar as it maintains that, “religion (singular) is ultimately good for democratic politics, because a *shared* adherence to a common religious tradition provides a set of publicly accessible assumptions within which democratic politics can be conducted.”¹²⁵ In the Judeo-Christian secularist imaginary, the separation of church and state is a unique Western achievement that grew out of a shared adherence to a common set of European religious

¹²³ Ibid., p. 35.

¹²⁴ Pizzorno, “Politics Unbound,” p. 39.

¹²⁵ Jelen, *To Serve God and Mammon*, p. 90.

and political traditions. Christianity, as van Leeuwan argued for example, led into modern secularism.

In international relations Judeo-Christian secularist assumptions help to shape arguments in which religious traditions are portrayed as the source of particular styles and institutions of governance, forms of civilizational identity, and entrenched and violent clashes between so-called civilizations. Christianity, in many versions of this narrative, Judeo-Christianity in others, has culminated in and contributes to the unique Western achievement of the separation of church and state and the development of liberal democracy.¹²⁶ As Samuel Huntington argues, “Western Christianity, first Catholicism and then Protestantism, is historically the single most important characteristic of Western civilization.”¹²⁷ This prevailing dualism between “God and Caesar, church and state, spiritual and temporal authority... contributed immeasurably to the development of freedom in the West” and forms part of “the factors which enabled the West to take the lead in modernizing itself and the world.”¹²⁸ Religion is the bedrock of this cultural inheritance, responsible for differentiating between civilizations and between individuals: “in the modern world, religion is a central, perhaps *the* central, force that motivates and mobilizes people.”¹²⁹ Religion and culture are dictated not by “political ideology or economic interest,” but “faith and family, blood and belief.”¹³⁰ There is solidarity in civilizational consciousness, and religious diversity threatens this solidarity. If the United States becomes “de-Westernized,” and “Americans cease to adhere to their liberal

¹²⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, “Religious Persecution and Religious Relevance in Today’s World,” in Elliot Abrams (Ed.), *The Influence of Faith: Religious Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), p. 60.

¹²⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York & London: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 70.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 72.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

democratic and European-rooted political ideology, the United States as we have known it will cease to exist and will follow the other ideologically defined superpower onto the ash heap of history.”¹³¹

Huntington’s framework divides the world into two hierarchical categories, those who share the Christian or Judeo-Christian common ground and those who do not. It is strikingly similar to the divisions proposed in the 14th-century by Italian jurist Bartolus de Sassoferato, who divided the world into five classes: the “populus Romanus” or “almost all those who obey the Holy Mother Church,” and four classes of “populus extranei:” the Turks, the Jews, the Greeks and the Saracens.¹³² Bartolus’s scheme parallels Huntington’s seven or eight major civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and “possibly African.” Anthony Pagden describes the effects of these divisions:

The effect of Bartolus’s ethnic division is once again to limit “the world” to a distinct cultural, political, and in this case religious, community. And again it places boundaries between what may be counted as the domain of the fully human world, and those others—which because of their rejection of the hegemony of the Western Church now also included the Greeks—who have no place within the *civitas*, and so no certain claim upon the moral considerations of those who do.¹³³

Building on Pagden’s insight, the assumption that a Christian or Judeo-Christian secular “common ground” ends abruptly at the edge of Western civilization leads to calls to defend this ground against internal and external enemies, resulting in what Connolly

¹³¹ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993), p. 62.

¹³² Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 28. Saracen is a Greek word, synonymous with Arab in pre-Islamic times, referring to Arabic-speaking Muslims of indeterminate race in medieval times. After the twelfth century it became synonymous with Muslim, along with the terms Turk and Moor. Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), Chapter 2, note 5, p. 181.

¹³³ Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, p. 28.

has described as “civilizational wars of aggressive defense of Western uniqueness.”¹³⁴

These wars of defense can become aggressive as the common ground is challenged and reconfigured under the stress of a pluralistic West made up of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, and Deleuzeans among others. As Taylor observes, “with the widening band of religious and metaphysical commitments in society, the ground originally defined as common becomes that of one party among others.”¹³⁵ At this critical juncture either this mythical common ground is renegotiated, as it has been repeatedly in the past, or an aggressive defense of it is set in motion, as has occurred at other times. Neuhaus opts for the latter, arguing that the godless are incapable of a “morally convincing account” of the nation and concluding that, “those who believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus turn out to be the best citizens.”¹³⁶

This kind of religio-secular triumphalism finds expression in international relations in the idea that Western powers have a monopoly over the proper relationship between religion and politics. As Keane argues,

The principle of secularism, which “represents a realisation of crucial motifs of Christianity itself” (Bonhoffer), is arguably founded upon a sublimated version of the Christian belief that Christianity is “the religion of religions” (Schleiermacher), and that Christianity is entitled to decided for non-Christian others what they can think or say—or even whether they are capable of thinking and saying anything at all.¹³⁷

This line of reasoning normalizes particular religions and religious actors and marginalizes most non-Western and non-Judeo-Christian perspectives on religion and politics. If the dualism between spiritual and temporary authority is accepted as uniquely

¹³⁴ William E. Connolly, “The New Cult of Civilizational Superiority,” *Theory and Event* 2, no. 4 (1999), p. 4.

¹³⁵ Taylor, “Modes of Secularism,” p. 33.

¹³⁶ Neuhaus, cited in Linker, “Without a Doubt.”

¹³⁷ John Keane, “Secularism?” in David Marquand and Ronald L. Nettler (eds.), *Religion and Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 14.

Western and Christian or Judeo-Christian, then non-Westerners who want to democratize have no alternative but to adopt Western forms of secularism. This view was expressed recently by Bernard Lewis, an adviser to the Bush administration in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq:

Separation of church and state was derided in the past by Muslims when they said this is a Christian remedy for a Christian disease. It doesn't apply to us or to our world. Lately, I think some of them are beginning to reconsider that, and to concede that perhaps they may have caught a Christian disease and would therefore be well advised to try a Christian remedy.¹³⁸

In this scenario, non-Westerners who do not advocate for Western (Christian) forms of secularism are portrayed as children who refuse to acknowledge that they are sick and need to stay in. On the other hand, those who do advocate for separationism are subject to the charge that they are advancing pale imitations of a robust Western secular ideal, thereby departing from (and potentially betraying) indigenous tradition. This binary has the effect of de-legitimizing indigenous trajectories of secularization because they are associated with selling out to Western power and betraying local tradition rather than as legitimate local negotiations of the secular-religious binary. The oppositional relationship that has developed between Euro-American secular politics and forms of political Islam, for example, such that the any variation of the latter is assumed categorically to be a threat to any variation of the former, is a direct consequence of this worldview.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Bernard Lewis, "Islam and the West: A Conversation with Bernard Lewis," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Luis Lugo, Moderator, Washington, D.C.: April 27, 2006, <http://pewforum.org/events/index.php?EventID=107> (accessed 5/25/06).

¹³⁹ See Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Political Islam and foreign policy in Europe and the United States," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3, no. 4 (October 2007): 345-367.

Understanding the influence of secularist traditions in international relations calls into question the assumptions upon which the clash of civilizations narrative rests. Approaching secularism in the plural as sets of discursive traditions that construct the secular and the religious differently makes it possible to see that any definition of religion as a fixed source of unity and identity with a particular relationship to politics is a contentious and contestable political claim. Any attempt to fix the meaning of religion and define its relationship either in or out of politics—any attempt to displace the politics of secularism—is inherently political.

V. Conclusion

Political theorist Bonnie Honig describes two conflicting political impulses: the desire to decide undecidabilities, and the will to contest established institutions and identities.¹⁴⁰ She criticizes theorists who limit their definition of politics to the “juridical, administrative or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities.”¹⁴¹ Rather than theorizing politics, she argues, they displace it.¹⁴²

Like their counterparts in political theory, scholars of international relations yearn for closure and consensus, at least regarding the relation between religion and politics. As Michael Barnett points out, “actors struggle over the power and the right to impose a legitimate vision of the world because doing so helps to construct social reality as much as it expresses it.”¹⁴³ For most political scientists this is a secular vision of the world and

¹⁴⁰ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 201.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴³ Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 250, citing Michael Williams, “Hobbes and International Relations: A

a secular social reality. Most of us, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps less so, think, work, struggle against and live within variations of the two traditions of secularism described in this essay. These secular laws, institutions, and sensibilities do not merely reflect social reality; they construct it, providing “a set of parameters, focal points, or even points of contention around which political discourse revolves.”¹⁴⁴ They are forms of discipline that facilitate closure and agreement around received cultural, political and legal settlements of the relation between religion and politics. Secularism, it turns out, is a powerful “pattern of political rule.”¹⁴⁵ It normalizes certain religions and religious actors and creates inclusionary and exclusionary group boundaries with implications for international politics.

These settlements are maintained through a constellation of collective secularist narratives and projects driven by assumptions rarely analyzed by political scientists: secularization as the most recent step in the worldly realization of Christian or Judeo-Christian morality, secularization as the natural evolution toward a universal morality that has transcended the need for metaphysical moorings, secularization as a commendable side-effect of democratization and economic and political modernization, secularization as the triumphant globalization of a modern state system in which religion has been privatized once and for all, among others. Though often jostling with each other for supremacy, and sometimes colliding head-on, these powerful secularist narratives and projects serve to manage religious diversity, imbue state interest and identity with meaning, secure an image of contemporary international order as modern, secular and democratic, and normalize particular religions and religious actors as either fit or unfit for

Reconsideration,” *International Organization* 50, no. 2 (Spring 1996), pp. 213-37.

¹⁴⁴ Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁵ Asad, “Responses,” in *Powers of the Secular Modern*, p. 219.

participation in democratic politics. The entanglements between these secularist formations and various religious traditions, real or imagined, and real because they are imagined, confirm Michael Barnett's observation in this volume that secular and religious elements in international order are not as cleanly segregated as many IR theorists have assumed.

Recent papers in Postsecularism and International Relations. Papers. People. The model of secularism as the overarching framework for managing the relationship between religion and politics has come under increasing scrutiny in recent International Relations (IR) scholarship, particularly in the wake of the more. The model of secularism as the overarching framework for managing the relationship between religion and politics has come under increasing scrutiny in recent International Relations (IR) scholarship, particularly in the wake of the so-called "postsecular turn." This article draws from Habermasian post-secular theory to broaden the scope of Constructivist research on norm dynamics beyond its current Western-centric focus. Secularism in international relations is central to substantively different arguments about international relations—realist power politics, liberal cosmopolitanism, and Marxist class struggle. All three view religious conflicts as relics of a bygone era, a sideshow to the struggle over primacy, the coordination of conflicting objectives, and the dynamics of class conflict. There is something appealing and implausible about this view. International-relations scholarship in the United States has pivoted around the traditional divide between liberalism and realism. These two schools of thought were reformulated numerous times in the twentieth century to adjust to changing currents in world politics and new fashions in academia.