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The Secular and Secularisms

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN, FIRST, BY INTRODUCING A BASIC ANALYTICAL distinction between "the secular" as a central modern epistemic category, "secularization" as an analytical conceptualization of modern world-historical processes, and "secularism" as a worldview. Then, in the remainder of the paper I would like to elaborate on the distinction between secularism as a modern statecraft principle and secularism as an ideology.

THE SECULAR, SECULARIZATIONS, SECULARISMS

All three concepts—"the secular," "secularization," and "secularism"— are obviously related but are used very differently in various academic-disciplinary and sociopolitical and cultural contexts. One may differentiate between the three concepts simply as a way of distinguishing analytically in an exploratory manner between three different phenomena without any attempt to reify them as separate realities.

The secular has become a central modern category—theologico-philosophical, legal-political, and cultural-anthropological—to construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from "the religious." Here one could recapitulate all the debates over the "legitimacy" and "autonomy" of this modern reality, from the Karl Loewith (1949)/Hans Blumenberg (1983) debate to more contemporary debates between Charles Taylor (2008), Talal Asad (2003), and John Milbank (1993). Phenomenologically, one can explore the different types of "secularities" as they are codified, institutionalized, and

experienced in various modern contexts and the parallel and correlated transformations of modern "religiosities" and "spiritualities." But this is an area that has been well addressed by many other presentations in this issue.

Secularization, by contrast, usually refers to actual or alleged empirical-historical patterns of transformation and differentiation of the institutional spheres of "the religious" (ecclesiastical institutions and churches) and "the secular" (state, economy, science, art, entertainment, health and welfare, etc.) from early modern to contemporary societies. Within the social sciences, and particularly within sociology, a general theory of secularization was developed that conceptualized these modern European historical transformations, which later became increasingly globalized as part and parcel of a general teleological and progressive human and societal development from the primitive "sacred" to the modern "secular." The thesis of "the decline" and "the privatization" of religion in the modern world became central components of the theory of secularization. Both the decline and the privatization theses have undergone numerous critiques and revisions in the last 15 years. But the core of the theory—the understanding of secularization as a single process of differentiation of the various institutional spheres or subsystems of modern societies, understood as the paradigmatic and defining characteristic of processes of modernization—remains relatively uncontested in the social sciences, particularly within European sociology.

It is important to open the debate to explore and recognize the particular Christian historicity of Western European developments as well as the multiple and very different historical patterns of secularization and differentiation within European and Western societies, particularly across the Atlantic. This recognition in turn will make possible a less Eurocentric comparative analysis of patterns of differentiation and secularization in other civilizations and world religions; more important, it facilitates the additional recognition that with the world-historical process of globalization initiated by the European colonial

expansion, all these processes everywhere are dynamically interrelated and mutually constituted. But secularization is a field I have treated extensively elsewhere (Casanova 1994, 2003, 2006). The focus of my paper is instead on secularism.

Secularism refers more broadly to a whole range of modern secular worldviews and ideologies that may be consciously held and explicitly elaborated into philosophies of history and normative-ideological state projects, into projects of modernity and cultural programs. Or, alternatively, it may be viewed as an epistemic knowledge regime that may be unreflexively held and phenomenologically assumed as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern reality, as a modern *doxa* or as an "unthought." Moreover, modern secularism also comes in multiple historical forms, in terms of different normative models of legal-constitutional separation of the secular state and religion, or in terms of the different types of cognitive differentiation between science, philosophy, and theology, or in terms of the different models of practical differentiation between law, morality, and religion.

SECULARISMS

It is to this broad area of secularism that this paper wants to make a contribution by exploring the distinction between secularism as ideology and secularism as statecraft principle. By secularism as statecraft principle, I understand simply some principle of separation between religious and political authority, either for the sake of the neutrality of the state vis-à-vis each and all religions, or for the sake of protecting the freedom of conscience of each individual, or for the sake of facilitating the equal access of all citizens, religious as well as nonreligious, to democratic participation. Such a statecraft doctrine neither presupposes nor needs to entail any substantive "theory," positive or negative, of "religion." Indeed, the moment the state holds a particular view of "religion" one enters the realm of ideology. Secularism becomes an ideology the moment it entails a theory of what "religion" is or does. It is this assumption that "religion," in the abstract,

is a thing that has an essence or that produces certain particular and predictable effects that is the defining characteristic of modern secularism (Asad 1993).

One can distinguish two basic types of secularist ideologies. The first type are secularist theories of religion grounded in some progressive stadial philosophies of history that relegate religion to a superseded stage. The second type are secularist political theories that presuppose that religion is either an irrational force or a nonrational form of discourse that should be banished from the democratic public sphere. They can be called respectively "philosophico-historical" and "political" secularisms. I am not interested here in tracing a history of ideas of the origins of both forms of secularism in early modern Europe and how they come together in Enlightenment critiques of religion and become separated again in the different trajectories of positivism, materialist atheism, atheist humanism, republican laicism, liberalism, etc. I am also not interested here in examining the secularist "philosophico-historical" assumptions permeating most theories of secular modernity, as in Juergen Habermas's theory (1984, 1987) of "rationalization of the life-world" or "linguistification of the sacred," or the "political" secularist assumptions permeating prominent liberal democratic political theories such as those of John Rawls (1971), Bruce Ackerman (1980), or Habermas (1989).

PHENOMENOLOGICAL SECULARISM

As a sociologist, I am interested in examining the extent to which such secularist assumptions permeate the taken for granted assumptions and thus the phenomenological experience of ordinary people. Crucial is the moment when the phenomenological experience of being "secular" is not tied anymore to one of the units of a dyadic pair, "religious/secular," but is constituted as a self-enclosed reality. Secular then stands for self-sufficient and exclusive secularity, when people are not simply religiously "unmusical," but closed to any form of transcendence beyond the purely secular immanent frame.

In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor (2007) has reconstructed the process through which the phenomenological experience of what he calls "the immanent frame" becomes constituted as an interlocking constellation of the modern differentiated cosmic, social, and moral orders. All three orders—the cosmic, the social, and the moral—are understood as purely immanent secular orders, devoid of transcendence, and thus functioning *etsi Deus non daretur*: "as if God would not exist." It is this phenomenological experience that, according to Taylor, constitutes our age paradigmatically as a secular one, irrespective of the extent to which people living in this age may still hold religious or theistic beliefs. Indeed, in a secular age, belief in God becomes increasingly problematic, so that even those who adopt an "engaged" standpoint as believers tend to experience reflexively their own belief as an option among many others—one, moreover, requiring a explicit justification. Secularity, being without religion, by contrast tends to become increasingly the default option, which can be naively experienced as natural and, thus, no longer in need of justification.

This naturalization of "unbelief" or "nonreligion" as the normal human condition in modern societies corresponds to the assumptions of the dominant theories of secularization, which have postulated a progressive decline of religious beliefs and practices with increasing modernization, so that the more modern a society the more secular; that is, the less "religious" it is supposed to become. But the fact that there are some modern non-European societies, such as the United States or South Korea, that are fully secular in the sense that they function within the same immanent frame and yet their populations are also at the same time conspicuously religious, or the fact that the modernization of so many non-Western societies is accompanied by processes of religious revival, should put into question the premise that the decline of religious beliefs and practices is a quasi-natural consequence of processes of modernization.

If modernization per se does not produce necessarily the progressive decline of religious beliefs and practices, then we need a better

explanation for the radical and widespread secularity one finds among the population of Western European societies. Secularization, in this second meaning of the term secular, that of being "devoid of religion," does not happen automatically as a result of processes of modernization, but it needs to be mediated phenomenologically by some other particular historical experience. Self-sufficient secularity (that is, the absence of religion) has a better chance of becoming the normal taken-for-granted position if it is experienced not as an unreflexively naïve condition, as just a fact, but actually as the meaningful result of a quasi natural process of development. As Taylor (2007: 269) has pointed out, modern unbelief is not simply a condition of absence of belief, nor merely indifference. It is a historical condition that requires the perfect tense, "a condition of 'having overcome' the irrationality of belief." Intrinsic to this phenomenological experience is a modern "stadial consciousness," inherited from the Enlightenment, which understands this anthropocentric change in the conditions of belief as a process of maturation and growth, as a "coming of age" and as progressive emancipation. For Taylor, this stadial phenomenological experience serves in turn to ground the phenomenological experience of exclusive humanism as the positive self-sufficient and self-limiting affirmation of human flourishing and as the critical rejection of transcendence beyond human flourishing as self-denial and self-defeating.

In this respect the historical self-understanding of secularism has the function of confirming the superiority of our present modern secular outlook over other supposedly earlier and therefore more primitive religious forms of understanding. To be secular means to be modern, and therefore by implication to be religious means to be somehow not yet fully modern. This is the ratchet effect of a modern historical stadial consciousness, which turns the very idea of going back to a surpassed condition into an unthinkable intellectual regression. The function of secularism as a philosophy of history, and thus as ideology, is to turn the particular Western Christian historical process of secularization into a universal teleological process of human development from belief

to unbelief, from primitive irrational religion to modern rational secu-
lar consciousness. Even when the particular role of internal Christian
developments in the general process of secularization is acknowledged,
it is in order to stress the universal uniqueness of Christianity as, in
Marcel Gauchet's (1997) expressive formulation, "the religion to exit
from religion."

I would like to propose that this secularist stadial consciousness
is a crucial factor in the widespread secularization that has accompa-
nied the modernization of Western European societies. Europeans tend
to experience their own secularization, that is, the widespread decline
of religious beliefs and practices among their midst, as a natural conse-
quence of their modernization. To be secular is not experienced as
an existential choice modern individuals or modern societies make,
but rather as a natural outcome of becoming modern. In this respect,
the theory of secularization mediated through this historical stadial
consciousness tends to function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is, in
my view, the presence or absence of this secularist historical stadial
consciousness that explains when and where processes of moderniza-
tion are accompanied by radical secularization. In places where such
secularist historical stadial consciousness is absent, as in the United
States or in most non-Western postcolonial societies, processes of
modernization are unlikely to be accompanied by processes of religious
decline. On the contrary, they may be accompanied by processes of reli-
gious revival.

The different ways in which European and American publics
respond to public opinion polls trying to measure their religiosity—
namely, how strongly they believe in God, how frequently they pray,
how frequently they go to church, how religious they are—may serve
as a confirming illustration of my thesis. We know that both Americans
and Europeans lie to pollsters. But they tend to lie in opposite direc-
tions. Americans exaggerate their religiosity, claiming to go to church
and to pray more frequently that they actually do. We know this for
a fact because sociologists of religion, trying to prove that modern

secularization is also at work in the United States, have shown that Americans are less religious than they claim to be and that one should not trust their self-reporting religiosity (Hadaway 1993). But the interesting sociological question is why would Americans tend to exaggerate their religiosity, claiming that they are more religious than they actually are, unless they somehow believe that to be modern and to be American, which for most Americans means exactly the same thing, also entails being religious.

Europeans, by contrast, if and when they lie to pollsters, tend to do so in the opposite direction, namely, they tend to undercut their own persistent religiosity. I cannot offer general evidence for all of Europe, but there is clear evidence for this tendency in the case of Spain. The 2008 Bertelmann *Religion Monitor* (Casanova 2009) offers overwhelming confirmation of the drastic secularization of Spanish society in the last 40 years. There is a persistent and consistent decline in self-reported religiosity across all categories of religious belief, church attendance, private prayer, and importance of religion in one's life. But I find most interesting the even lower figures in religious self-image. The proportion of Spaniards who view themselves as "quite religious" (21 percent) is much smaller than the proportion of those who express a "strong" belief in God (51 percent), significantly smaller than those who attend religious services at least monthly (34 percent), and much smaller than those who claim to pray at least weekly (44 percent). I am inclined to interpret the discrepancy between self-reported religiosity and religious self-image as an indication that Spaniards would prefer to think of themselves as less religious than they actually are and that being religious is not considered to be a positive trait in a predominantly secular culture.

The natural response of Europeans to the question whether they are "religious" would seem to be: "Of course, I am not religious. What do you think? I am a modern, liberal, secular, enlightened European." It is this taken for granted identification of being modern and being secular that distinguishes most of Western Europe from the United States.

To be secular in this sense means to leave religion behind, to emancipate oneself from religion, overcoming the nonrational forms of being, thinking, and feeling associated with religion. It also means growing up, becoming mature, becoming autonomous, thinking and acting on one's own. It is precisely this assumption that secular people think and act on their own and are rational autonomous free agents, while religious people somehow are unfree, heteronomous, nonrational agents, that constitutes the foundational premise of secularist ideology. It entails in this respect, both "subtraction" and "stadial" theories of secularity.

Taylor characterizes as "subtraction" theories those accounts of secular modernity that view the secular as the natural substratum that is left behind and revealed when this anthropologically superfluous and superstructural thing called "religion" is somehow taken away. The secular is precisely the basic anthropological substratum that remains when one gets rid of religion. Stadial theories add genealogical or functionalist accounts of how and why this superstructural thing, religion, emerged in the first place (usually in the primitive history of humanity), but has now become superfluous for modern secular individuals and for modern societies.

POLITICAL SECULARISMS

Political secularism per se does not need to share the same negative assumptions about religion, nor assume any progressive historical development that will make religion increasingly irrelevant. It is actually compatible with a positive view of religion as a moral good, or as an ethical communitarian reservoir of human solidarity and republican virtue. But political secularism would like to contain religion within its own differentiated "religious" sphere and would like to maintain a secular public democratic sphere free from religion. This is the basic premise behind any form of secularism as statecraft doctrine, the need to maintain some kind of separation between "church" and "state," or between "religious" and "political" authorities, or between "the reli-

gious" and "the political." But the fundamental question is: How are the boundaries drawn and by whom? Political secularism falls easily into secularist ideology when the political arrogates for itself absolute, sovereign, quasi-sacred, quasi-transcendent character or when the secular arrogates for itself the mantle of rationality and universality, while claiming that "religion" is essentially nonrational, particularistic, and intolerant (or illiberal) and as such dangerous and a threat to democratic politics once it enters the public sphere. It is the essentializing of "the religious," but also of "the secular" or "the political," based on problematic assumptions of what "religion" is or does, which is in my view the fundamental problem of secularism as ideology.

POLITICAL SECULARISM AS IDEOLOGY

The focus of this paper is not modern political theory, so I am not going to analyze here the "secularist" prejudices built into some of the dominant contemporary democratic political theories, such as those of Rawls and Habermas, nor am I interested in reconstructing how in later formulations of their own theories they have tried to revise, indeed to question their most explicit secularism. In any case, it is interesting to notice that, as Alfred Stepan (2001) has pointed out, neither secularism nor separation of church and state enters, either as a condition or as constitutive characteristic of democracy, into any of the prominent empirically based comparative political theories of "really existing" democracies, such as those of Robert Dahl, Juan Linz, or Arendt Lijphart. My interest lies in examining the secularist prejudices built into ordinary public opinion in the more secularized societies of Western Europe.

It is indeed astounding to observe how widespread is the view throughout Europe that religion is "intolerant" and "creates conflict." According to the 1998 International Social Survey Program (ISSP) public opinion survey, the overwhelming majority of Europeans, practically over two-thirds of the population in every Western European country, held the view that religion is "intolerant" (Greeley 2003: 78). This

was a widespread view, moreover, already before September 11. Since people are unlikely to expressly recognize their own intolerance, one can assume that in expressing such an opinion Europeans are thinking of somebody else's "religion" or, alternatively, present a selective retrospective memory of their own past religion, which, fortunately, they consider to have outgrown. It is even more telling that a majority of the population in every Western European country, with the significant exception of Norway and Sweden, shares the view that "religion creates conflict."

It should seem obvious that such a widespread negative view of "religion" as being "intolerant" and conducive to conflict can hardly be grounded empirically in the collective historical experience of European societies in the twentieth century or in the actual personal experience of most contemporary Europeans. It can plausibly be explained, however, as a secular construct that has the function of positively differentiating modern secular Europeans from "the religious other," either from premodern religious Europeans or from contemporary non-European religious people, particularly from Muslims.

So when they think of religion as "intolerant," obviously Europeans are not thinking of themselves, even when many of them may still be religious, but rather they must be thinking either of the religion they have left behind or of the religion of "the other" within their midst, which happens to be Islam. Insofar as they identify religion with intolerance, they seem to imply that they have happily left their own intolerance behind by getting rid of religion. The argument for tolerance becomes in this sense a justification for secularity as the source of tolerance.

Most striking is the view of "religion" in the abstract as the source of violent conflict, given the actual historical experience of most European societies in the twentieth century. "The European short century," from 1914 to 1989, using Eric Hobsbawm's (1996) apt characterization, was indeed one of the most violent, bloody, and genocidal centuries in the history of humanity. But none of the horrible massa-

cres—neither the senseless slaughter of millions of young Europeans in the trenches of World War I; nor the countless millions of victims of Bolshevik and communist terror through the Russian Revolution, Civil War, collectivizations campaigns, the Great Famine in Ukraine, the repeated cycles of Stalinist terror and the Gulag; nor the most unfathomable of all, the Nazi Holocaust and the global conflagration of World War II, culminating in the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—none of those terrible conflicts can be said to have been caused by religious fanaticism and intolerance. All of them were rather the product of modern secular ideologies.

Yet contemporary Europeans obviously prefer to selectively forget the more inconvenient recent memories of secular ideological conflict and retrieve instead the long forgotten memories of the religious wars of early modern Europe to make sense of the religious conflicts they see today proliferating around the world and increasingly threatening them. Rather than seeing the common structural contexts of modern state formation, interstate geopolitical conflicts, modern nationalism, and the political mobilization of ethnocultural and religious identities— processes central to modern European history that became globalized through the European colonial expansion—Europeans prefer seemingly to attribute those conflicts to "religion," that is, to religious fundamentalism and to the fanaticism and intolerance supposedly intrinsic to "premodern" religion, an atavistic residue modern secular enlightened Europeans have fortunately left behind (Casanova 2008, 2009b). One may suspect that the function of such a selective historical memory is to safeguard the perception of the progressive achievements of Western secular modernity, offering a self-validating justification of the secular separation of religion and politics as the condition for modern liberal democratic politics, for global peace, and for the protection of individual privatized religious freedom.

Yet really existing European democracies are not as secular as secularist theories of democracy seem to imply. European societies may be highly secular, but European states are far from being secular or

neutral. One only needs to point our that every branch of Christianity, with the exception of the Catholic Church, has privileged establishment, and not only a symbolic one, in some European democracy: the Anglican Church in England, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, the Lutheran Church in all Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Finland, with the exception of Sweden), and the Orthodox Church in Greece. Even in laicist France, 80 percent of the budget of private Catholic schools is covered by state funds. Indeed, between the two extremes of French *laïcité* and Nordic Lutheran establishment, all across Europe there is a whole range of very diverse patterns of church-state relations, in education, media, health and social services, that constitute very "unsecular" entanglements, such as the consociational formula of pillarization in the Netherlands, or the corporatist official state recognition of the Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany (as well as of the Jewish community in some *Länder*).[1]

SECULARISM AS STATECRAFT DOCTRINE

One should focus less on secularism as an allegedly prescriptive democratic norm or as a functionalist requirement of modern differentiated societies and more on the critical comparative historical analysis of the different types of secularism that have emerged in the process of modern state formation. As a statecraft doctrine, every form of secularism entails two principles, which are well captured by the dual principle of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, namely the principle of separation (that is, "no establishment") and the principle of state regulation of religion in society (that is, "free exercise"). It is the relationship between the two principles that determines the particular form of secularism and its affinity with democracy.

On the first principle there are all kinds of degrees of separation between the two extremes of "hostile" and "friendly" separation. Indeed, in places in which there was no ecclesiastical institution with monopolistic claims, such as the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council, nor compulsory confessional state churches, such

as the ones that became institutionalized through the Westphalian system of European states under the principle *cuius regio eius religio,* one does not need, properly speaking, a process of disestablishment, and one may have a process of friendly separation, as was the case in the United States.

As Ahmet Kuru (2009) has shown, the type of separation at the formative period of the modern state will be very much determined by the particular configuration of relations between religious and political authorities during the ancien régime. Postcolonial states are likely to have their own particular dynamics. In colonial America, for example, there was no national church across the 13 colonies from which the new federal state needed to separate itself. But as Noah Feldman has pointed out in this issue, the separation was friendly not only because there was no need to have a hostile separation from a nonexistent established church, but, more importantly, because the separation was constituted in order to protect the free exercise of religion—that is, in order to construct the conditions of possibility for religious pluralism in society.

Ultimately, the question is whether secularism is an end in itself, an ultimate value, or rather a means to some other end, be it democracy and equal citizenship or religious (that is, normative) pluralism. If the secularist principle of separation is not an end in itself, then it ought to be constructed in such a way that it maximizes the equal participation of all citizens in democratic politics and the free exercise of religion in society. Taking the two clauses together, one can construct general gradual typologies of hostile/friendly separation, on the one hand, and models of free/unfree state regulation of religion in society on the other.

One could advance the proposition that it is the "free exercise" of religion clause, rather than "no establishment" clause, that appears to be a necessary condition for democracy. One cannot have democracy without freedom of religion. Indeed, free exercise stands out as a normative democratic principle in itself. Since on the other hand there

are many historical examples of secular states that were nondemo-cratic—the Soviet-type regimes, Kemalist Turkey, or post-Revolution-ary Mexico being obvious cases—one can therefore conclude that the strict secular separation of church and state is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for democracy. The "no-establishment" principle appears defensible and necessary primarily as a means to free exercise and to equal rights. Disestablishment becomes a necessary condition for democracy whenever an established religion claims monopoly over a state territory, impedes the free exercise of religion, and undermines equal rights or equal access of all citizens.

Given the focus of the conference on the U.S. case, it is under-standable that we have been having an internal Western Christian-secular debate about patterns of Christian Western secularization. As Noah Feldman has pointed out in this issue, this is basically a debate as to how we got from Saint Augustine to where we are today. But we should be cautious in trying to elevate this particular and contin-gent historical process to some general universal historical model. Indeed, we should remind ourselves that "the secular" emerged first as a particular Western Christian theological category, a category that not only served to organize the particular social formation of Western Christendom, but structured thereafter the very dynamics of how to transform or free oneself from such a system. Eventually, however, as a result of this particular historical process of secularization, "the secular" has become the dominant category that serves to structure and delimit, legally, philosophically, scientifically, and politically, the nature and the boundaries of "religion."

Moreover, this particular dynamic of secularization became globalized through the process of Western colonial expansion enter-ing into dynamic tension with the many different ways in which other civilizations had drawn boundaries between "sacred" and "profane," "transcendent" and "immanent," "religious" and "secular." We should not think of these dyadic pairs of terms as being synonymous. The sacred tends to be immanent in pre-axial cultures; the transcendent is

not necessarily "religious" in some axial civilizations. The secular is by no means profane in our secular age. One only needs to think of such sacralized secular phenomena as nation, citizenship, and human rights. Indeed, we would need to enter into a much more open analysis of non-Western civilizational dynamics and be more critical of our Western Christian secular categories in order to expand our understandings of the secular and secularisms.

NOTES

1. John Madeley (2007) has developed a tripartite measure of church-state relation, which he calls the TAO of European management and regulation of religion-state relations by the use of Treasure (T: for financial and property connections), Authority (A: for the exercise of states' powers of command), and Organization (O: for the effective intervention of state bodies in the religious sphere). According to his measurement, all European states score positively on at least one of these scales, most states score positively on two of them, and over one-third (16 out of 45 states) score positively on all three.

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