

Rethinking Secularism

Craig Calhoun

Secularism is often treated as a sort of absence. It's what is left if religion fades. It's the exclusion of religion from the public sphere but somehow in itself neutral. This is misleading. We need to see secularism as a presence, as something, and therefore in need of elaboration and understanding. Whether we see it as an ideology, a worldview, a stance toward religion, a constitutional approach, or simply an aspect of some other project—of science or a philosophical system—secularism is something we need to think through, rather than merely the absence of religion.

Secularism is not simply a creature of treaties to end religious wars, the rise of science, or the Enlightenment. It is informed by a long history of engagements with the temporal world and purposes that imply no transcendence of immanent conditions. It needs direct attention in contemporary discussions of religion and public life. Moreover, I shall contend that working within a sharp binary of secularism versus religion is problematic. Not least, it obscures (a) the important ways in which religious people engage this-worldly, temporal life; (b) the important senses in which religion is established as a category not so much from within as from “secular” perspectives like that of the state; and (c) the ways in which there may be a secular orientation to the sacred or transcendent.

The Immanent Frame

Secularism is clearly a contemporary public issue. France proclaims secularism—*laïcité*—not simply as a policy choice but as part of its national identity. It is, however, a “*Catholaïcité*” shaped, like French identity, not just by general Christian history but by Catholic culture, its struggle against and ascendancy over Protestantism, and then the

Craig Calhoun is President of the Social Science Research Council and University Professor of the Social Sciences at New York University. His most recent books include *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream* and *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (edited with Jonathan VanAntwerpen and Michael Warner).



© Andrew Ward/Life File.

The Pantheon in Paris.

challenge brought by revolutionary and republican assertions of the primacy of citizenship over devotion. There remains a cross atop the Pantheon, a sign of its history as a church before it became a monument to the heroes of the secular state but also of the compromises between religion and *laïcité* that shape France today. These are informed by a specific history of anti-clericalism, itself shaped not just by a long history of priestly involvement in politics, education, and other dimensions of social life but also by a strong reactionary effort to intensify that involvement during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus secularism shapes the French response to Islamic immigrants, but hardly as a neutral category unrelated to its own religious history.

A version of French *laïcité* was incorporated into the design of Atatürk's Turkey, and not surprisingly also changed by the context. It is packaged into Atatürkism as an essential sign of modernity and a demarcation not only from domestic Islamist politics but also from the Arab and Persian countries in which Islam plays a greater public role; yet in some important senses Turkey's secularism is Muslim. A different model of secularism is a central part of the constitutional and policy formation in which India deals with religious diversity. In this case, secularism is identified not with distance from religion but with equity towards religions, including equitable state subsidies for Hindus, Muslims, and others. Still another secularism is embodied in the U.S. Constitution, which in prohibiting established churches protected religious difference and helped to create a sort of marketplace of religions in which faith and active participation flourished. The reformulation of constitutional doctrine as separation of church and state later created its own controversies. And a broader secularism is attacked by parts of the American religious Right as part of the notorious "secular humanism." In each of these contexts, secularism takes on its own meanings, values, and associations; it is not simply a neutral antidote to religious conflicts.

Within these states, there has been an enormous expansion in the construction of secular institutions for worldly purposes. These are often demarcated from spiritual engagements, sometimes with restrictions on explicit religious practices. They not only pursue goals other than promoting religion, they operate outside the control of specifically religious actors. Much of social life is organized by systems or "steering mechanisms" that are held to operate independently of religious belief, ritual practice, or divine guidance. Markets are a pre-eminent example. Participants may have religious motivations; they may pray for success; they may form alliances with co-religionists. But despite this, economists, financiers, investors, and traders understand markets mainly as products of buying and selling. It may take a certain amount of faith to believe in all the new financial instruments they create, but this is not in any strict sense religious faith. For most, it is not faith in divine intervention but rather faith in the honesty and competence of human actors, in the accuracy of information, the wisdom of one's own investment decisions, and the efficacy of the legal and technological systems underpinning market exchange. In short, it is a secular faith. Or put another way, people understand what markets are by means of a social imaginary in which the relevant explanations of their operations are all this-worldly.

Not only markets but also a variety of other institutions have been created to organize and advance projects in this world. Schools, welfare agencies, armies, hospitals,

*The root notion of the secular
is a contrast not to religion
but to eternity.*

and water purification systems all operate within the terms of a secular imaginary. Of course some people's actions may be shaped by religious motives, and religious bodies may organize such institutions in ways that serve their own purposes. But even for those who orient their lives in large part to religious or spiritual purposes, activities in relation to such institutions are widely structured by a secular imaginary. Cause and effect relationships are understood in this-worldly terms as matters of nature, technology, human intention, or even mere accident. This is part of what Charles Taylor means by describing modernity as a "secular age."¹ It is an age in which lots of people, including religious people, make sense of lots of things entirely or mainly in terms of this-worldly cause and effect. In Taylor's phrase, they think within "the immanent frame." They see nonmetaphysical, nontranscendent knowledge as sufficient to grasp a world that works entirely of itself. One of the themes of Taylor's *A Secular Age* is to work out how people come to see this immanent frame as the normal, natural, tacit context for much or all of their action, and how this changes both religious belief and religious engagement in the world.

From Saeculum to the Secular

The root notion of the secular is a contrast not to religion but to eternity. It is derived from *saeculum*, a unit of time reckoning important to Etruscans and adapted by Romans after them. For example, the lives of children born in the first year of a city's existence were held to constitute its first *saeculum*. The succession of *saecula* was marked with ritual. While some ancient texts held this should be celebrated every 30 years, making the *saeculum* roughly equivalent to the notion of generation, more said every 100 or 110 years, reflecting the longest normal duration for a human life. The latter usage dominated as calendars were standardized, and the *saeculum* became roughly a century.

It is worth noting that already in this ancient usage there is reference both to the natural conditions of life and to the civil institution of ritual and a calendar. Each of these dimensions informed the contrast drawn by early Christian thinkers between earthly existence and eternal life with God. For many, this was something that would come not simply after death but with the return of Christ after a thousand years, a millenium, ten *saecula*. The succession of *saecula* counted the time until Christ's return and the end of history. In a very important sense, this was not what later came to be called secular time. It was temporary, a time of waiting, not simply years stretching infinitely into the future.

Likewise, when Saint Augustine offered his famous and influential distinction of the City of God from the City of Man, he did not mean to banish religion from "secular" affairs. On the contrary, his image of the City of God is the Church, religious people living in secular reality, and the contrast is to those who live in the same world but without the guidance of Christianity. Augustine wrote shortly after

the sack of Rome in 410 CE, an event that (not unlike the attacks of September 11, 2001) underscored the vulnerability of even a strong state. He urged readers to look inward to find God, emphasizing the importance of this connection to the eternal for their ability to cope with the travails of the temporal world. They—even a Christian emperor—needed to resist the temptation to focus on material gains or worldly pleasures. Augustine distinguished a spiritual orientation from an orientation to worldly things.

Augustine criticized pagan religion for its expectation that gods could be mobilized to protect or advance the worldly projects of their mortal followers. Christians, he wrote, look to God for a connection to what lies beyond such “secular” affairs. God shapes human affairs according to a plan, but this includes human suffering, tests that challenge and deepen faith, and demands for sacrifice. Knowing this helps Christians escape from the tendency to desire worldly rather than spiritual gains. We need, wrote Augustine, to put this world in the perspective of a higher good.

Augustine’s discussion, along with others of the early Christian era, was informed by fear of an entanglement in worldly, sensual affairs. This theme dates back at least to Plato, a reflection of the prominence of ascetic and hermetic traditions in early Christianity, and an anticipation of the prominence of monastic life in the Middle Ages. Caught up in the material world, we lose sight of the ideal and run the risk of corruption. This anxiety comes to inform ideas of the secular. It is not merely the world of human temporality in which we all must live until the Second Coming; it is the world of temptation and illusion.

The contrast of sensuous and corrupt to ideal and pure is mapped onto that of secular to eternal. For one thread of the ensuing conceptual history, the secular is associated more with the fallen than simply with the created. Asceticism, retreat from worldly engagements, and monastic disciplines are all attempts to minimize the pull of worldly ends and maximize focus on ultimate ends. In this context, Christianity has long had special issues about sex and bodily pleasures. These run from early Christian debates about marriage and celibacy, reflected in Paul’s instructions to the Christians of Corinth, through the tradition of priestly celibacy, to nineteenth-century utopian communities like the Shakers. The issue remains powerful in the current context where the fault lines of politically contested debates over religion and the secular turn impressively often on issues of sexuality and of bodies: abortion, homosexuality, sex education, and promiscuity have all been presented as reflections of a corrupt secular society in need of religious improvement.

Yet this very idea of subjecting the secular world to religious action is different from simply keeping it at a distance. The two notions have subsisted side-by-side through Church history. Both parish ministry and monastic discipline have been important. There are “religious” priests in orders that call for specific liturgical practices and “secular” priests who have not taken vows specific to any of these orders

Yet this very idea of subjecting the secular world to religious action is different from simply keeping it at a distance.

and who live “in the world.” But religious priests may also serve parishes or go out into the world as missionaries. Historically, secular priests were important to a growing sense of positive value to engagement with the world. Overlapping the era of Protestant Reformation, this included figures like Bartholomew Holzhauser whose communitarian—perhaps even communist—Apostolic Union of Secular Priests was formed in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War to lead a renewal of religious life among lay people.

This development coincided with what Taylor has called a new value on “ordinary happiness.” A variety of this-worldly virtues received new levels of praise; new moral value was attached, for example, to family life.² Priests were called to minister to the

...many Evangelical mega-churches...are also organized, in very large part, to deliver secular services in the world.

affairs in this world and the moral conditions of this world, not only the connections of people to the transcendent. In no sense uniquely Catholic, this trend runs from the seventeenth century through issues like the extent to which many Evangelical mega-churches today are organized, in large part, as service-delivery institutions. That is, they may espouse Biblically literalist, or fundamentalist, or enthusiastically celebrationist theologies and reli-

gious practices, but they are also organized, in very large part, to deliver secular services in the world: marriage counseling, psychotherapy, job placement, education, help for relocating immigrants. They are, in that sense, secular-while-religious. All the more so are those religious mobilizations that seek not just to serve people in their worldly lives but also to change the world itself, not least through politics.³

There is also a long and overlapping history around humanism and indeed humanitarianism. This appears in theological debates over the significance of the humanity of Christ, in late medieval and early modern humanism, and in questions about the spiritual status of New World peoples. The Valladolid controversy famously pitted Bartolomé de las Casas against Juan Ginés de Sepulveda and made clear that answers to religious questions had secular consequences: “Do the natives have souls?” “Should we think about them as needing to be saved?” “Are they somehow like animals, and thus to be treated as mere labor?” Versions of these debates were intertwined with missionary activity throughout the era of European colonialism. They influenced also the idea of humanitarianism as a kind of value and a virtue linked to progress in this world. Informed by the idea of imitating Christ, by the nineteenth century to be a good humanitarian was to be somebody who helps humanity in general and advances progress in society. This was an ultimately secular project, though for many participants it might have had religious motivation. And this remains important in humanitarian action today: emergency relief in situations of natural disaster or war and refugee displacement is an important project for religious people and organizations (as well as others), but it is organized very much in terms of ministering to the needs of people in the secular world.

Some of the same ideas can inform ethics—and spiritual engagements—that do not privilege the human. Seeing environmentalism as stewardship of God’s creation is

a religiously organized engagement with (quite literally) the world. The Deep Ecology movement even introduces new metaphysical ideas, new notions of immanence. Others approach environmental issues with equal dedication but entirely within the immanent frame.

The Separation of Religion from Politics

The Western Path

In Western Christendom, a key question was how the Church—and after successive splits, the various churches—would relate to states and politics. The issue goes back to the first century of the Christian Era. It forms the context for *The Book of Revelations*, written in the aftermath of the Jewish Wars. It shapes centuries of struggle over papal and monarchical power, and ultimately issues with Marsilius of Padua in the doctrine of the Two Swords. Of course this notion of distinct powers in different spheres was honored more in doctrine than ever in reality. Which is to say that the Pope and the monarchs of Europe, who represented a kind of secular counterpart to church power, didn't live up to the notion of separate-but-equal for very long.

The Protestant Reformation brought an intensification of the relationship of religion to politics. This produced considerable violence within states as religious minorities were persecuted, sometimes on a large scale as in France's St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572. It also shaped a hundred and fifty years of interstate war. Of course, the "religious wars" that wracked Europe through the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were also wars of state-building. In other words they expanded secular power even when fought in the name of religion. Indeed, the conclusion of these wars in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia is often cited as the beginning of a secular state system in Europe. It is claimed as the beginning of modern international relations, understood as a matter of secular relations among sovereign states.

This is profoundly misleading. The Peace of Westphalia did not make states secular. It established the principle of *cuius regio eius religio*—who rules, his religion. What followed was a mixture of migration, forced conversion, and legal sanctions against religious minorities. European states after the Peace of Westphalia were primarily confessional states with established churches. Members of some minorities moved to European colonies abroad—including English settlers who fled religious persecution only to set up state churches of their own in American colonies they dominated. Colonial-era governments (which often had established churches) further developed the category of religion—that is, reference to a set of bodies of partially analogous cultural practice and belief—to take account of the religions of people they governed.

There is much more to this story, of course, including different formations and transformations of nationalism. Sometimes closely related to religion, this was increasingly a secular narrative establishing the nation as the always already identified and proper people of a state and thereby a secular basis for legitimacy. It became harder for monarchs to claim divine right and more important for them to claim to serve the

interests of the people. Where the power of absolutist states was closely tied up with religious claims to authority (and the daily domination of religious authorities)—as in France—revolution took up the mantle of secularism.

The European path to relatively strong secularism—and in some countries eventually irreligion—was not a direct one from the Peace of Westphalia. It was, rather, shaped by struggles against the enforced religious conformity that followed the 1648 treaties. The strong French doctrine of *laïcité* was the product of un-churching struggles, struggles against priestly authority—that continued through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. These gave a more militant form to secularism, and positioned it as a dimension of social struggle and liberation. More generally, such secularizing struggles did not simply confront ancient state churches, but new church-state partnerships forged in the wake of 1648. Struggles against clerical domination were intensified partly because leaders of established churches tied religion closely to conservative political projects. The struggle against this, as José Casanova has argued

*The Peace of Westphalia did not
make states secular.*

as clearly as anyone, is central to what has made Europe particularly secular.⁴ It contrasts with situations where there is more of an open marketplace for religion. This is one reason why, perhaps ironically, the American separation of church and state

has been conducive to high levels of religious belief and participation.

The un-churching struggles produced a strident, militant *laïcité*. We see echoes of this today in European panics over Islam. These often strike a chord among populists and intellectuals alike that is not well-recognized. On the one hand, there are frequent contrasts of Enlightenment reason to unenlightened versions of faith. And many are indeed committed to an idea of comprehensive rationality, the supremacy not just of logic and empirical research but also of systematic, thorough, and exclusive reliance on them. This European history and concept-formation also informs the *laïcité* of other countries where anxiety over religious-political rule is strong—not least Turkey—though transposing it into a new context changes at least some of its meaning.

Europe's trajectory was state churches followed by militant *laïcité*; the United States, India, and a number of other postcolonial states produced much stronger practices of religious pluralism. In fact, postcolonial societies around the world have given rise to most of the regimes of religious pluralism and religious tolerance. These are much less directly products of the European Enlightenment than is sometimes thought. They are shaped by particular contexts and usually more by the pursuit of equitable and nonviolent co-existence among religions than by a notion of unbelief versus belief. They are institutionalized in very different models of state neutrality: if separation of church and state is the rule in the U.S., the Indian state subsidizes religion but seeks to do so without bias for or against any. And there is attempted neutrality that need not be secularism in the attempts of some self-declared Islamic republics to resist taking the side of either Shi'a or Sunni against the other.



The Sultan Ahmet Mosque (Blue Mosque) in Istanbul with a Turkish flag in the foreground.

© Bernd Weisbrod/dpa/Corbis.

The Loss of Religion

It is often remarked that the root of “religion” is Latin for “binding.” But it is not the experience of being bound together with others or with God that gives us the category so much as the recognition of multiple different ways of being bound and organizing the ritual practices, moral understandings, and beliefs that follow from this. This was evident already in Rome, where the category reflected recognition that other peoples had practices and beliefs not commensurate with that of Roman custom.⁵ This was echoed in the Mughal, Ottoman, and other empires. The category of religion groups together objects—religions—understood as cultural phenomena. It thus includes those considered false religion—errors—not only the true and correct. It is a reference to phenomena in the secular world, even when articulated by someone who is religious as well as by someone who believes all religions to be erroneous.

Awareness of “other religions” was thus an awareness of systems of belief and practice partially analogous to one’s own or prevalent in one’s own society. It co-existed with other notions, like that of the Infidel—one who lacked faith or at least the proper Faith or, as importantly, failed to adhere faithfully to the proper practices. Faced with new divisions among Christians in the era of the Reformation, the idea of religion as a category gained importance, not least in pleas for religious tolerance but also in the attempt to separate religion from politics, especially inter-state politics and war.

This informed the Peace of Westphalia and with it the founding myth of modern international relations. This is grounded in the view that both religions and states

exist as objects in the secular world. Each state is sovereign, without reference to any encompassing doctrine such as divine right. Carl Schmitt sees this as the transfer of an idea of the absolute from theology proper to political theology, rendering each state in a sense an exception but also beyond the reach of any discourse of comparative legitimacy. The Peace of Westphalia produced a division of the international from the domestic modeled on that between the public and the private—and it urged treating religion as a domestic matter. Both diplomatic practice and eventually the academic discipline of international relations would come to treat states as externally secular. That is, they attempted to banish religion from relations between states.

So thoroughly did the academic field of international relations absorb the idea that interstate relations were essentially secular that it became all but blind to religious influences on international affairs.⁶ As Robert Keohane explains, “the attacks of September 11 reveal that all mainstream theories of world politics are relentlessly secular with respect to motivation. They ignore the impact of religion, despite the fact that world-shaking political movements have so often been fueled by religious fervor.”⁷ After all, it is not as though religion was not a force in international politics between 1648 and 2001, and only somehow erupted out of the domestic sphere to shape international politics in this era of Al Qaeda and other non-state movements. And, of course, it is

not only Muslims who bring religion into international politics, as though they were simply confused about the proper modern separation. Consider, to the contrary, recent U.S. legislation mandating an international defense of religious freedom. As Saba Mahmood has indicated, the ostensible secularism or at least neutrality of the legislation obscures the fact that it is strongly informed by specific religious understandings.⁸ Much the same goes for the demonization of Islam in the name of a secular national security.

But if the field of international relations is extreme, it is not alone. In general, social science is a deeply secular project, secular almost by its very definition. Particularly in the North American context, the group of fields called the social sciences became a separate faculty within the arts and sciences partly on the basis of a late-nineteenth century determination to separate themselves from religion and moral philosophy.⁹ More generally, in their very pursuit of scientific objectivity (and status), the social sciences (some more than others) have tended to approach religion less than one might have expected based on its prominence in social life and often only in ostensibly value-free external terms, leaving more hermeneutic inquiries more often to other fields. They also subscribed to the secularization narrative longer than dispassionate weighing of the evidence might have suggested.

Social science discussion of secularism centers largely on the role of religion in politics. What should be the role of religion in politics, if any? How autonomous should the state be from religion? How autonomous should religion be from the

So thoroughly did the academic field of international relations absorb the idea that interstate relations were essentially secular that it became all but blind to religious influences on international affairs.

state? Certainly some social scientists join the so-called New Atheism of a variety of scientific authors in calling for a more stringent secularism in reaction to religious movements. But this is more a matter of personal ideology than of research and scholarly argumentation.

Situated in the context of a dominant interest in the relationship of religion to politics, secularism is easily backgrounded. It is in this context that it is commonly treated as an absence more than a presence. But there is growing recognition that constructions of the secular and governmental arrangements to promote secularism both vary a good deal. Constitutional regimes approach the secular in very different ways: as a look at the U.S., India, and either France or Turkey quickly suggests. Questions of freedom of religion, of the neutrality of the state toward religion, of the extent to which religious laws should be acknowledged by secular states, all put the varied structures of secularism on the research agenda. Likewise, there is growing recognition that secularism is not simply a universal or a constant in comparative research. On the contrary, secularism takes different shape in relation to different religions and different political and cultural milieus. I have discussed mainly the development of European secularism in a history dominated by Christianity, but distinct issues arise around secularism among Jews and in Israel, among Muslims in different regions, among Buddhists, among Hindus, and in countries where more than one of these or other religions are important.

Secularism in the Public Sphere

Ideas of the secular concern not only the separation of religion from politics, but also the separation—or relation—between religion and other dimensions of culture and ethnicity. To what extent is “a” religion unitary and to what extent do different national or other cultures shape versions of such an ostensibly unified religion? Do all Catholics in the world believe the same things? The Umma Islam, ostensibly a unit of common belief, is divided not just between Shi’a and Sunni, but also on national lines. What is distinctive in Indonesia, or in Pakistan, or in Yemen? And what about when religious identities are claimed as secular markers by people who don’t practice the religion in any active way or by people who explicitly declare themselves unbelievers?

The separation of religion from politics has become all but defining of the modern for some. It is for this reason that questions are recurrently raised as to whether Islam can be separated from politics. Debates about this, however, are shaped by previous debates over the question of the division of religion and politics in Christendom. Aspects of European history are now projected onto and reworked in Islam. This isn’t only a question about alleged theocracy, or about clerical rule of one kind or another. It is also a question that shapes the whole idea of what counts as modern.

Ironically, there are also concerns that this very separation has gone too far. This was the theme twenty-five years ago of Richard John Neuhaus’s *The Naked Public Square*. It has emerged to greater surprise in recent writings of Jürgen Habermas.¹⁰ These are producing discussions of “post-secularism.” The stakes of the discussion are whether the democratic public sphere (a) loses capacity to integrate public opinion

if it can't include religious voices, and (b) is deprived of possible creative resources, insights, and ethical orientations if it isn't informed by ideas with roots in religion.

Both John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas have reconsidered their previous arguments that the public sphere has to be completely secular in order to be neutrally accessible to all. They argue that constitutional arrangements and normative presuppositions for democracy should focus on achieving just procedures rather than pursuing a particular substantive definition of the good.¹¹ Rawls initially excluded religious reasons from public debates; late in his life he reconsidered and argued that they should be included so long as they could be translated into secular terms.¹² Habermas has gone further, worrying that the demand for "translation" imposes an asymmetrical burden; he is also concerned not to lose religious insights that may still have liberatory potential.¹³ Habermas seeks to defend a less narrow liberalism, one that admits religion more fully into public discourse but seeks to maintain a secular conception of the state. He understands this as requiring impartiality in state relations to religion, including to unbelief, but not as requiring the stronger *laïc* prohibition on state action affecting religion even if impartially. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that the liberal state and its advocates are not merely enjoined to religious tolerance but—at least potentially—cognizant of a functional interest in public expressions of religion. But, Habermas insists, it remains the case that a direct appeal to the absolute, a transcendent notion of ultimate truth, is a step outside the bounds of reasoned public discourse. Needless to say, the question of how "secular" the public sphere can and should be remains contested.

Conclusion

Distinctions between the religious and the secular are embedded in a modern era that also imposes a range of other differentiations, notably that of public and private. Many of these are closely linked to states and their administrative practices—indeed, both in colonial and in domestic administration, states helped to create the very category of religion as one that would subsume a whole class of ostensibly analogous phenomena. But the differentiation of states from market economies, sometimes understood to be self-moving, is also powerful. These differentiations shape modern social imaginaries. That is, by distinguishing politics from religion or the economy from both, we inform our material practices and the way we build institutions in the world. The distinctions take on a certain material reality, but they can also be obstacles to a better intellectual analysis. The distinction between the secular and the religious is a case in point. It obscures both ways in which religious people engage the temporal world and ways in which states and other this-world institutional structures inform the idea of religion itself.

More generally, Max Weber famously argued that the differentiation of value spheres—religious, economic, political, social, aesthetic—was basic to modernity. The notion of value spheres is informative, but we should also be clear that the differentiations reflect (and reproduce) tensions among projects not just values. The

making of the world is pursued by both religious and nonreligious projects. Part of the advance of what we call “the secular” stems from creating new domains of this-worldly efficacy and action. Science is important in this way, not just as a clashing value system or ideology. Medicine is not just another domain of knowledge but now meddles with the very nature of life through genetic engineering. The economy, the state, and social movements all involve world-making projects. These may contend with each other as well as with specifically religious projects. But the expansion of reliance on this-worldly institutions and practices is an expansion of the secular even when it is compatible with or carried out by religious people.

Finally, we should recognize the prominence of a secularist ideology that goes beyond affirming the virtues of the ostensibly neutral. The demarcation between religion and the secular is made not just found. The secular is claimed by many not just as one way of organizing life, not just as useful in order to ensure peace and harmony among different religions, but as a kind of maturation. It is held to be a kind of developmental achievement. Some people feel they are “better” because they have overcome illusion and reached the point of secularism. That ideological self-understanding is itself powerful in a variety of contexts. It shapes even the way in which many think of global cosmopolitanism as a kind of escape from culture, nation, and religion, into a realm of apparently pure reason, universal rights, and global connections. We might, by contrast, think of cosmopolitanism as something to be achieved through the connections among all the people who come from, are rooted in, and belong to different traditions, different social structures, different countries, different faiths. There is a profound difference between an ideology of escape and the idea of interconnected *ecumena*.

In any case, secularism is not simply the project of some smart people reflecting on the problems of religion. It is a phenomenon in its own right that demands reflexive scholarship, critique, and open-minded exploration.

Endnotes

- ¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). See also Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, eds., *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
- ² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- ³ See James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Hunter argues that such engagement with the world rightly follows from Christian commitments, but that it is often distorted by a model of producing secular change by combat over belief and moral conviction, and by seeking secular power, rather than by a commitment to “faithful presence” honoring the Creator of all.
- ⁴ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
- ⁵ Somewhat similarly, the Roman idea of “nation” was shaped not by self-reflection but by reference to the distinctive cultures of others including conquered peoples and enemies. These were nations partly

- because inclusion was reckoned in terms of descent rather than citizenship. See Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- ⁶ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- ⁷ Robert Keohane, “The Globalization of Informal Violence, Theories of World Politics, and “The Liberalism of Fear,”” *Understanding September 11*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Paul Price, and Ashley Timmer (New York: New, 2002) 72.
- ⁸ Saba Mahmood, “Politics of Religious Freedom: Minority Rights, Sovereignty, and Gender,” speech at the American Academy of Religion, Montreal (9 November 2009).
- ⁹ See Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- ¹⁰ Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).
- ¹¹ Compare Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) and *After Virtue* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
- ¹² John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64.3 (Summer 1997): 765–807.
- ¹³ See Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002) and “Religion in the Public Sphere” in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*.