



A Reflexive Re-evaluation and Return of Religion

Charles Taylor and Gianni Vattimo Re-engage Secularism

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Abstract

'Religion' is conventionally understood as something set apart and a realm of the non-ordinary, whereas, 'the secular' pertains to this world and relates to the finite. In modernity, religion is parodied as an alien force totally forbidden, forgotten, and hated. Secularism became the epithet of modernity and democratic political states especially in the West. Both 'religion' and 'secularism,' are two dichotomous terms which often come into conflict in their philosophical and practical implications. However, there are several new researches and dialogical deliberations undertaken around the globe. It is because these sharply distinguishable categories find a point of convergence and become mutually non-isolating forces in academic discourses and in the philosophy of actuality. This article is one of those attempts to bridge the belligerent positions between religion and secular with the help of Gianni Vattimo and Charles Tylor. The signatory attempt is to 'overcome' the absolute truth claims of both religion and the secular, where one does not argue for its position in society but rather one finds its truth through the other. Their discussion of 'an emergent religious and cultural sensibility' implies a post-modern, post-secular and hermeneutical reflexive re-evaluation and re-affirmation of religion.

Keywords: Religion; Enlightenment; Secularism; Hermeneutics

Introduction

The philosophical complexity and lucidity of 'secularism'; and its relevance and significance could be understood, only if the term is examined inseparable from and is shaped by its relation to religion. Secularism is a worldview, a philosophy like any other conceptual and empirical understanding. In modernity, it is one of the most discussed and powerful worldviews. The conventional definition of secularism concerns religion's relationship to the State. Yet, the meaning and the implications of secularism are more complex. Its meaning differs according to various cultural, political and religious environments. "In its own history, secularism has always included a debate about whether the process was irreversible and progressing, or indeed whether any such a

large-scale change was happening at all."¹ With the advance of the 'reconstructive hermeneutics' of philosophers such as Vattimo and Taylor, secularism is now increasingly being called into question as a potentially cherished 'article of faith' in the West. Significantly, the church-state separation of the West which is the kernel of secularism, does not command a deeper meaning within the Eastern Hindu/Muslim world.²

1 Herbert De Vriese and Gary Gabor, *Rethinking Secularization: Philosophy and the Prophecy of a Secular Age*, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. ix-x. my emphasis added.

2 The author feels that the West is more rational in its philosophical approach whereas the East is more intuitive. Evaluating from this perspective makes it impossible for the East, the Hindu-Muslim world to think of a political state where religion has no role to play (However, the citizens of any

According to Taylor, this unstable nature of secularism is due to the phenomena that ideas, institutions, arts, and formulae for production, and living, 'circulate' among societies and civilizations that are very different in their historical roots and traditional forms. He gives the examples of democracy, and non-violence.³ These do not change places just as solid blocks. They are modified, reinterpreted, and given new names in each transfer. This is evident in the case of the 'secular.' It occurs everywhere but does not mean the same in each instance. It takes the form of non-identical repetition in which there are always subtle differences in its meaning in the East and the West, and in different religious and cultural settings.⁴

Since secularism has developed in and from different contexts from various traditions around the world, it is pluralistic in outlook. This universal nature broadens the scope of secularism beyond East-West, and religion-state dichotomies. Its scope widens with "its association with "progress" and modernity, its assertions of rationality and neutrality, its claims of exclusivity about public life -as well as how this doctrinal logic unfolds in various contexts."⁵ The pluralistic nature of secularism inform its relevance beyond to environmental concerns and international policy making. Thus, it is an adaptable category. It takes its shape, content and meaning about, and in distinction from the religions with which it interacts and against which it defines itself as a culturally variable category.⁶

country is bound to the constitution of the country). State and religion are two sides of the same coin so that both religion and state are reasonably and sometimes fanatically intertwined. However, Taylor's "social imaginaries" (the economy, the public sphere and the sovereign people) have brought in a commendable transient change in these countries. Democratic - secular countries like India have an entirely different philosophy and meaning of the term 'secularism'. Therefore, secularism does not merely mean a separation of state and religion, though such a separation may be a logical arrangement to preserve society's core values of individual and corporate freedom. Charles Taylor dares to address the concept, not as rejecting or banning religion, but rather going beyond structured religion in the context of western modernity. However, it should be admitted, secularism in India face a serious threat at present due to the rise of Hindu fundamentalism which gives rise to radical Hinduism. Radical Hinduism can cause serious damage to the secular values prevalent until recently in India.

3 Taylor observes that parliamentary democracy spread outwards from England, among other countries, to India; likewise, the practice of non-violent civil disobedience spread from its origins in the struggle for Indian independence to many other places, including the USA with Martin Luther King Jr. and civil rights movement, Manila in 1983, and the Velvet and Orange Revolutions of our time. (Charles Taylor, "Western Secularity," in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds., Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 31).

4 Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, eds., New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 31.

5 Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida, "Introduction" in *Global Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age*, Eds., Michael Rectenwald, Rochelle Almeida, and George Levine. Berlin: CPI Books GmbH, Leck, 2015, p. 7.

6 Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida, "Introduction" in *Global*

Accordingly, the individual 'self' is influenced by the whole picture of secularism's plurality, contingency, and adaptability. Taylor calls this a 'grand narrative.' As the product of the Enlightenment, this 'grand narrative' involves the spread of modernisation and the historical path of Euro-American progress. This model of secular modernisation was embraced by emerging non-western countries such as India in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Jawaharlal Nehru describes secularism as one of the 'pillars of modernity.'⁷ Taylor and Vattimo advance this 'circular,' and 'travelling' nature of secularism. For them, 'secular' is both complex and ambiguous and subject to alternations and distortions as it travels from one context to another. Taylor nonetheless "argues that Western secularity should be understood as the result of a fundamental change in sensibility marked by disenchantment, or the systematic repression of the 'magical' elements of religion, as well as by a concomitant historical movement toward the association of personal commitment with 'true' religion."⁸ Vattimo envisions secularism as the result of the diffusion of Being and God, taking a 'weak form,' which is the realisation of the Biblical message itself. For Taylor, the whole breadth of the historical context for this shift is a 'great disembedding' of social and collective life and a movement towards reform within Christianity. Secularism is the consequence of this 'great disembedding' and a variant form of religion.

The hermeneutic of Taylor and Vattimo emphasise the central issue of how 'the secular' is constituted and understood with renewed understanding. For Craig Calhoun, this renewed understanding of the secular "shapes analytic perspectives in the social sciences and various practical projects in politics and international affairs."⁹ Accordingly, secularism is an 'historical presence,' and ideology, a world view, which can be neutral in its relation to an aspect of reality. Due to its emerging relevance and neutrality, there is a reigning interest among the scholars in various fields to deal in more detailed and concrete ways with the process of 'secularisation,' the practice of 'the secular,' and the political ethic of 'secularism.'¹⁰ Vattimo and Taylor, are outstanding thinkers whose counter-enlightenment hermeneutics sees secularism not as the end of Christianity, nor as a sign of

Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age, p. 8.

7 For Nehru, secularism meant two things: "social attitudes that were free of intolerance and ideas undergirding the state's just laws and egalitarian political processes that were untainted with references for one group over another." Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, pp. 7-8.

8 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 21.

9 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 4.

10 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 3.

the godless nature of the West but as the last expression of Christian religion itself.

What form does this new secularism and Christianity take? Graeme Smith observes; “secularism is Christian ethics shorn of its doctrine. It is the ongoing commitment to do good, understood in traditional Christian terms, without a concern for the technicalities of the teachings of the Church...Secularism in the West is a new manifestation of Christianity, but one that is not immediately obvious because it lacks the usual scaffolding we associate with Christian religion.”¹¹ Suggestively, the observation of Graeme Smith turns to be the hinge of my argument that secularism is the very vein of Christianity itself. Vattimo and Taylor, through their philosophical argument bring forth what was hidden or veiled until now. Before elucidating their theories of secularism, it is imperative to have a definitional, historical, and contemporary analysis of the concept of secularism.

What is Secularism?

At present, the meaning of “secularism” is or remains muddled and misconstrued. There has been a paradigmatic change in its meaning because of being subject to critique by different disciplines. According to Easter Halman, and de Moor, “secularism is the inevitable outcome of structural changes of societies in interaction with cultural changes such as the growing influence of rationalisation, individualism, and consumerism, partly produced by these structural changes, partly working as independent forces changing the moral order of society.”¹² The structural and cultural changes of the West were primarily the outcome of the Reformation and the Enlightenment. The gradual evolution of secularism functioned as a check to any sort of absolutism, religious bigotry, and fanaticism. The secular mode of thinking and living in the West gradually permeated all spheres of life. As per Gerard Dekker, the effects of secularisation are distinguishable, 1) on the individual level where there is a decline of religiosity among individuals), 2) on the societal level where there is a restriction on the range of influence of religion on society), and 3) on the institutional level where there is an adaptation of religion to society’s values).¹³ In the West, the concept of secularism becomes more narrowed to a state-religion relationship. There are three important features which characterise the West as secular; 1) the

decline of Christianity, 2) secularism of the public forum, and 3) the West is described as secular through the critical comments of religious bodies.¹⁴

Primarily considered as an analytical concept, secularism is subordinated to different categories. José Casanova and Fatih Cicek disaggregate secularism into four different constituent categories.

1) Politically, the term implies the removal of religious domination from the public sphere and political authority and the transfer of political functions and institutions from the church to that of state (de-sacralising of politics); 2) socially and entrepreneurially it suggests a this-worldly orientation and the supremacy of individual reason and science in constructing society (de-consecration of values); and 3) philosophically, the liberation of man from ‘religious and metaphysical control over his reason, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols,’¹⁵ and 4) an intellectual disenchantment from the magical image of the world through the theoretical mastery of nature with rationalization.¹⁶

The political, social, philosophical, and intellectual categories characterise secularism as contextual and multi-contextual. These categories prompt secularism to appear around the globe in different forms and pretexts and in different contexts. According to Akeel Bilgrami, secularism mainly takes three principal stances. First, it is a stance to be taken about religion. Secondly, unlike secular, and secularisation, secularism is quite specific, it is the name of a political doctrine. Finally, secularism as a stance regarding a religion that is restricted to the polity, is not a good itself.¹⁷

14 Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism*, pp. 2-6. By ‘public forum’ Smith means “the discussions and debates that often occur in the media, in schools and universities, and generally between people in the workplace and at home,” (p.4) and by ‘critical bodies,’ “Smith means not only means church authorities, but also, importantly, Muslim theologians and leaders” (pp. 5-6).

15 José Casanova and Fatih Cicek quote Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, 1965, p. 2.

16 José Casanova, and Fatih Cicek, Post-Secularism-Did Secularism and the Enlightenment Project Fail? http://www.academia.edu/10429810/_Post-secularism_Did_Secularism_and_the_Enlightenment_project_fail, accessed on 22/02/2017.

17 Akeel Bilgrami, “Secularism: Its Content and Context,” in *Boundaries of Toleration*, eds., Alfred Stephan and Charles Taylor, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 79-81. Bilgrami observes that 1) the stance taken towards religion does not say anything specific or precise- an adversarial stance since surely secularism, in some sense, defines itself against religion. 2) It is a political doctrine to the extent that it takes a stance vis-s-vis religion, it does so only in the realm of the polity. 3) It seeks what is conceived, by those who favour it, to promote certain other moral and political goods, and these are goods that are intended to counter what are conceived as harms, either actual or potential. Thus, secularism as a political doctrine arose to repair what were perceived as damages that flawed from historical harms

11 Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism*, London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008, pp.2-3.

12 Gerard Dekker, Donald A. Luidens and Rodger R. Rice, *Rethinking Secularisation: Reformed Reactions to Modernity*, London: University of America, Inc, 1997, p. 1. Halman, and de Moor is quoted by these authors here. (Ester, Halman, and de Moor, 1993, p. 39).

13 Gerard Dekker, Donald A. Luidens and Rodger R. Rice, *Rethinking Secularisation: Reformed Reactions to Modernity*, p. 2.

Accordingly, secularism is a stance towards religion, and a political doctrine which is not a good in itself. I call this as a 'primary stance.'

However, the 'primary' stance towards 'religion' and 'polity' can also take various contextual stances as termed by different thinkers from varying cultural and political contexts. The secular 'ideologies' developed on 'primary stance,' I term as a 'secondary stance.' Some of these 'secondary stances' on secularism are, 1) 'overlapping consensus' by Charles Taylor (of John Rawls), 2) 'secularism as weak thought' by Gianni Vattimo, 3) 'principled distance' by Rajeev Bhargava, 4) 'procedural and programmatic' secularism by Rowan Williams, 5) 'transcendent mediation' by Talal Asad, and 6) Radical Orthodoxy by John Milbank. These cultural bound 'secondary' stances broaden the prospect of secularism beyond the conventional understanding of a state-religion dichotomy.

The word, "secular" derives from the Latin etymological root, *saeculum*, meaning "century," "age," and "generation." The French equivalent is *siècle*, meaning 'century,' and 'age.'¹⁸ *Saeculum* first appeared as a unit of 'time' among the Etruscans (a life-span allotted to their city) and was adopted by the Romans (The thousand anniversaries of the founding of Rome) after them.¹⁹ It initially suggested a certain notion of 'time.' This means that the root notion of the term is contrasted not to religion but to 'eternity.' Later 'it' came to stand in a commonsense fashion for post-reformation practices and institutions in the West that formally separate private religious belief (or non-belief) from public life.²⁰ Accordingly, the traditional meaning of secularism is a condition of the unreligious or antireligious, but also religiously tolerant, humanist, Christian, modern, or simply Western. The political, religious, and cultural ideologies and 'ism's' devolved around this paradigmatic term 'secular' everywhere in the world especially in the West, and came to be known as 'secularism.' In the early medieval ages, the word 'secular' was used to distinguish members of the clergy: 'secular,' and 'religious.' The 'secular' clergy represented local parish clergy who provided a worldly service, which involved a calling to ministry in this world, helping people to cope with temporal existence and to maintain a religious orientation to

their lives in this secular realm.²¹ The 'religious' clergy were attached to a religious order.²² Similarly, St. Augustine offers his famous distinction of 'the City of God' from 'the City of Man.' The image of 'the City of God' is the church, the body of religious people living in secular reality, and it is contested with those who live in the same world but without the guidance of Christianity.²³

"The Sanskrit word commonly used for "secularism" is *dharmanirapekshata* which means "indifference towards religion." The usage itself denotes an understanding of secularism more as a policy of political practice than of a philosophy in itself. Another Sanskrit word used is *dharmanirapekshavada* where the suffix *vada* means "ism" and denotes the philosophical aspect of secularism."²⁴ Mike King draws a distinction between the Sanskrit terms *bhakti* (the devotional spiritual impulse) and *jnana* (non-devotional impulse) that provide for the radical analysis of the origins of the secular mind in secularism. In secularism, he suggests that "the move from a *bhakti* via the negative religion of the Middle Ages, to *jnana* via the positive religion of the Enlightenment almost succeeded, but failed in the end, resulting in a retreat of religion to a compromised position that ceased to hold the cultural imagination of the West and hence secularism arose by default."²⁵ Charles Taylor also has a similar observation to make. For Taylor, "the movement to Deism involved some exclusion of practices which were previously seen as central to the love of /devotion to God, and their condemnation as excessive, extravagant, harmful, or 'enthusiastic.'" He adds that "what had got lost was the sense that devotion to God, for its own sake, was the centre of religious life."²⁶

To further elucidate and comprehend the concept of secularism, it is significant to look at some of the commonplace definitions of secularism. First of all, "secularism" is defined as "the belief that religion and religious considerations

that were, in turn, perceived as owing, in some broad sense, to religion.

18 Lesely Brown, *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary; On the Historical Principles*, ed., vol.2, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 2753, and David Martin, *The Religion and the Secular; Studies in Secularisation*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 48.

19 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 8.

20 Wendy Brown, "Introduction," in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, eds., Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Muhamood. London: University of California, 2009, p.10.

21 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, pp. 9-10.

22 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 8, and Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism" in *Secularism and its Critics*, Rajeev Bhargava, ed., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 31.

23 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p.9.

24 Barry A. Kosmin, "Contemporary Secularity and Secularism," in *Secularism & Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives*, eds., Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (ISSC), 2007.

25 Mike King, *Postsecularism: The Challenge to Extremism*, Cambridge: James Clarke, 2009, pp. 26-27.

26 Mike King, *Postsecularism: The Challenge to Extremism*, p. 27. King quotes Charles Taylor from *A Secular Age*, p. 311, (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

should be deliberately omitted from temporal affairs and as a system of belief based on the doctrine that morality should be determined solely with regard to the wellbeing of humankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in future existence."²⁷ Secondly, it can be defined as "an ideology which advocates the abolition of religion and transfer of the ancillary social functions of religion to secular agencies."²⁸ To further clarify the meaning, I offer the following positions. John A. Coleman explains 'secularism' as "the denial that a secular order exists, the conviction that the universe is in no meaningful sense an expression or the embodiment of purpose, the belief that is unreasonable, other than anthropologically, to have toward the universe or its 'ground', a relationship mediated by communication or by any exchange of meanings - to have towards it, a relationship in any sense personal."²⁹ For Barry A Kosmin, "Secularism may assert the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, and the right to freedom from governmental imposition of religion upon the people within a state that is neutral on matters of belief. In another sense, it refers to the view that human activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be based on evidence and fact unbiased by religious influence."³⁰ Finally, Virgilius Ferm describes secularism as: "a variety of utilitarian social ethic which seeks human improvement without reference to religion and exclusively by means of human reason, science and social organization. It has developed into a positive and widely adopted outlook which aims to direct all activities and institutions by a non-religious concern for the goods of the present life and for social well-being."³¹

From the commonplace implications of the above definitions, secularism can be broadly understood as the church-state separation in the West. Any attempt to define 'secularism' further adds to the indistinctness of this concept. However, this indistinctness paves the way for new meanings further explored. Yet, one cannot claim to have a fixed definition of the word. As the socio-political-religious environments undergo transition, it is important to attribute different values to the secular. Thus, I emphasise that the meaning of secularism becomes pluralistic and is not irrevocably immobile. This historically is openness. Tellingly, secularism is open to new meaning and a wider range of elucidations. It is not only comprised of religion-

state separation but includes equality among religions, the irreligious sphere, and its spreading of the nuances beyond the West. The pluralistic and historical nature aid secularism to appeal to 'substantive values,'³² either political or cultural due to internal or external reasons.

Taylor and Vattimo become decisive thinkers in re-defining the traditional understanding of 'secularism.' Taylor in his essay "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism" states that there is a wrong model of secularism which has a continuing hold on modern minds especially regarding its relation to religion. Taylor feels that there needs to be a radical redefinition of secularism. He uses the term 'post-secular' by which he does not mean a total reversal of the present scenario, i.e., what happened in Europe for the last four centuries starting from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. It is a 'time' in which the hegemony of the mainstream master narrative of secularism is more and more challenged. Vattimo's theory of secularism opens a postmodern philosophic-religious prospect for a philosophical inquiry appropriate to the post-onto-theological journey through the philosophical and not the metaphysical possibility of secularism and thus of religious experience. His hermeneutical philosophy of 'weak thought' interpreted as a transition, weakening, overcoming, and a return. "The end of metaphysics" in Heidegger and "the death of God" in Nietzsche form the background against which Vattimo makes his postmodern interpretation of secularism and thus the return of religion plausible.

Historical Origin of Secularism

Herbert De Vriese, and Gary Gabar observe that philosophy has had a lasting connection to the history of secularism. It shaped and legitimated the concept of the 'secular' and formed recognized versions of the secularisation. They explain the historical connection between philosophy and secularism in the following way,

From the earliest Christian philosophy to the great medieval masters of high scholastic thought, reflection on the nature of time and the world helped to delineate the 'secular' as a specifically non-religious domain; this in turn has laid the intellectual foundations for the separation of church and state in the West. In further differentiating a typically modern, secular view of history from earlier religious conceptions of 'salvation' history - a project which came to full fruition during the Age of Enlightenment - philosophy has had a major influence on the development of secularisation

27 Lesely Brown, Ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary; On the Historical Principles*, vol.2, p. 2753.

28 Paul Barry Clarke and Andrew Linzey, Eds., *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 747-750.

29 John A. Coleman, "The Secular: A Sociological View", in *Theological Studies* 39, December, 1978, pp. 601-632.

30 Barry A. Kosmin, "Contemporary Secularity and Secularism".

31 Virgilius Ferm, Ed., *An Encyclopaedia of Religion*, New York: Philosophy Library, 1945, p. 234.

32 According to Akeel Bigrami, 'substantive values' are those values that some hold as values and others not (Akeel Bigrami, "Secularism: Its Content and Context," p. 81).

theory. Eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophers 'secularised' the West. Today the formal secularisation projects have come under severe scrutiny, influenced by postmodernism.³³

Accordingly, the ancient philosopher Anaxagoras, great medieval masters such as Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas were all instrumental in demarcating 'the secular.' Later, the Reform movements contributed further to delineate the 'disenchanted self' from 'the enchanted self.' The Enlightenment thinkers brought an end to the church-state separation and secularism became 'the epithet' for modernity. Notwithstanding this, counter enlightenment thinkers Heidegger and Nietzsche to Taylor and Vattimo brought under scrutiny the predictable meaning of secularism. The history of secularism can be looked at from two perspectives. Firstly, as a social history, which explains that secularism developed in connection with modern social growth. For example, urbanization, religious pluralism, and social fragmentation instigated religion's continued or seeming decline. Secondly, secularism won the battle of ideas. It meant that secularism was claimed to be intellectually superior to Christianity, especially with the emergence of the scientific discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Darwin. Despite the triumph of science and reason, religion has not subsequently disappeared from all parts of the world, especially from the USA, and the Eastern Hindu-Muslim countries.³⁴

Anaxagoras (462-432 BCE) can be named as the father of secularism. "He belonged to the scientific and rationalist tradition of Ionia and is believed to be the first who suggested the mind could be the cause of physical changes... His claim to fame in secular circles derives from what he said about the sun and moon."³⁵ Both Plato and Aristotle refer to his work. He refutes the supernatural explanation of the sun and moon and replaces them with a material natural cause. In secular history, he is known for his rejection of an otherworldly mythology.³⁶

Joseph Clair examines the early historical and genealogical background of the concept 'secular' that emerged in the interaction between Christian thought and classical culture in Augustine's *City of God*. In the first book of *The City of God*, Augustine articulates a 'refrain' that will run throughout the work: "In this world (*saeculum*), the two cities are indeed entangled (*permixtae*) and mingled (*perplexae*) with one another; and they will remain so until the last judgment shall

separate them."³⁷ The double sense of entanglement and perplexity are scripted into the Latin terms that Augustine selects to describe life in the last *saeculum*: '*permixtas*' and '*perplexas*.' *Perplexas* carries the double adjectival sense of 'entangled' and 'confused,' as does *permixtas*, with the additional meanings of 'mixed' or 'obscure.'³⁸ It would be appropriate to say that the secular, for Augustine, refers to those things which pertain to this world, (the temporal world) or, "those things that happen or exist" during the world.³⁹ When Augustine refers to the transitory age, the age when the two cities are entangled and mixed together, he denotes the 'temporal' and 'transitory' sense of the present age-world⁴⁰ by using the term: *in hoc interim saecula*.⁴¹ The Latin adverb *interim* here bears the provisional and temporal sense of 'meanwhile,' 'in the meantime,' or 'for the time being.' It is this provisional meanwhile-ness that marks Augustine's unique contribution to the concept 'secular.' It is the porosity of this spatio-temporal sense of the secular that remains open to both immanent and transcendent horizons, and the tensions of sacred and political commitments that marks Augustine's understanding of the *saeculum*.⁴²

Saeculum for Aquinas "designates a positive and legitimate sphere for temporal concerns and ends, worth being pursued in their own right, even as they are subordinated to the more general aims of Christianity."⁴³ Aquinas uses the word '*saeculum*' in two primary ways. The first is strictly as a denomination of 'time,' generally of a generation or more, so the expressions such as 'through the ages' (a *saeculis*), various centuries (*diversis saeculis*), of old (*a saeculo*), forever (*in saeculum*) or even forever and ever (*saeculum saeculi*). The second usage is much more developed and nuanced, with significations that slide between 'temporal' and 'spatial' meanings. Here *saeculum* can often be translated as either 'age' or 'world' depending on the context, and sometimes both simultaneously. As

37 Joseph Clair, "The Concept of the Secular in Augustine's City of God," in *Rethinking Secularisation: Philosophy and the Prophecy of a Secular Age*, eds., Herbert De Vriese and Gary Gabor, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. 37-38. Clair quotes here from Augustine's *City of God*, p. 48, De civ. Dei, 1, 35.

38 Joseph Clair, "The Concept of the Secular in Augustine's City of God," p. 39.

39 Joseph Clair, "The Concept of the Secular in Augustine's City of God," p. 47.

40 Joseph Clair, "The Concept of the Secular in Augustine's City of God," p. 54.

41 Joseph Clair, "The Concept of the Secular in Augustine's City of God," p. 54, Augustine, *City of God*, De civ. Dei, XI, 1.

42 Joseph Clair, "The Concept of the Secular in Augustine's City of God," pp. 54-55.

43 Gary Gabor, "Secular Medieval: The revaluation of *Saeculum* in Thomas Aquinas," in *Rethinking Secularisation: Philosophy and the Prophecy of a Secular Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, p. 60.

33 Herbert De Vriese and Gary Gabor, *Rethinking Secularization: Philosophy and the Prophecy of a Secular Age*, pp. x-xi.

34 Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism*, pp. 20-21.

35 Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism*, p. 21.

36 Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism*, pp. 21-22.

such *saeculum* signifies a certain kind of place, namely, this particular 'world bounded by time which we inhabit: the secular world.'

After Augustine and Aquinas, the factual story of secularism began later in the dark ages (or the middle ages). The renaissance and the emerging humanism set the certain platform for the growth of secularism in the West. Other major factors that contributed to the growth of secularism are 1) an increasingly prosperous middle class who were more interested in commerce than religion, 2) the rise of nationalism, 3) the Protestant Reformation that questioned the superiority of catholic theology, 4) the rise and growth of science (which was initially not a threat to religion, for instance the theories of Descartes, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton), 5) the rationalism of the Enlightenment which led to deism, fideism, and atheism, 6) the Romantic era, the Evangelical movement, and the rise of Pietism, 7) the emergent and much welcomed theory of Charles Darwin, and 8) the advent of biblical criticism.⁴⁴ Graeme Smith summarises these historical events into four elementary philosophical positions of the emergent secular culture in the West which is simultaneously characteristic of Christian culture. 1) Christianity has always been a religion with a fluid, evolving identity – it has a history of changing shape, 2) medieval Christianity functioned in ways which are very similar to contemporary Western religion- the similarities are as striking as any differences, 3) at the Enlightenment the major intellectual and cultural event was the separation of Christian ethics from Christian doctrine – and leaving in its wake is ethics practised in a Christian way, and 4) the Victorian era which was an exceptional period of religious activity, and was by no means a normal time for the church.⁴⁵ The historical and pluralistic evolution of the secular trend in the West found its point of convergence and cross-roads in Nietzsche. Nietzsche declared that God is dead and advocated the 'will to power.' However, Nietzschean 'hermeneutic nihilism' paradoxically returns to the essence of Christianity with the death of the metaphysical God. Vattimo, Taylor, and other counter-enlightenment philosophers through 'overcoming metaphysicalism' make possible the revival of religion and the return of God.

Accordingly, the study of contemporary secularism is the study of the religious and cultural identity of any society around the globe. Present-day secularism can be studied with such tools as sociological, cultural, philosophical, hermeneutical, and historical analyses. An accurate picture of the present scenario can be caricatured by combining together 'the primary and secondary stances' of secularism.

44 Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism*, pp. 23-25.

45 Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism*, p. 7.

Once again, Vattimo and Taylor offer a reconceptualisation of secularism for the new era of multiculturalism. In this, societies with major religious and cultural differences, go beyond conventional secularism in their management of how they differ their conceptualization and practice of secularism. For Taylor, it is re-defining the place of religion in the public place and keeping it firmly in this location. Secondly, he observes that every democratic "regime should manage the religious and metaphysical-philosophical diversity of views (including non- and anti-religious views) fairly and democratically."⁴⁶ As a result, "secularism is clearly a contemporary public issue in its own right."⁴⁷ France proclaims secularism (*laïcité*) as a constitutive element of its national identity. Later, *laïcité* was incorporated into Turkey with a transformed interpretation. Secularism is also part of the Indian constitution through which the country deals with religious diversity. It is part of American religious rights in its polemics against secular humanism. In each of these 'secondary stances' secularism takes its own meanings, values, and associations.⁴⁸ However, it is important to distinguish between the Western and the Eastern notion of secularism and its entirely different implications for religion and polity.

Western and Eastern Secularism

It is remarkable to note that the church-state separation of the West does not command a deeper meaning within the Eastern Hindu/Muslim world. I see two reasons for this. Firstly, the West appears to be more rational in its philosophical outlook whereas the East is more intuitive. Evaluated from this perspective, it would be impossible for the Hindu-Muslim world of the East to think of a political state wherein religion has no role to play. In most Eastern religions, state and religion are two sides of the same coin and are reasonably and often fanatically intertwined. However, Taylor's "social imaginaries"⁴⁹ such as the economy, the public sphere and the sovereign people etc. have brought commendable changes to these countries with regard to religion-state relationship. Secondly, a contrast is drawn by Rajeev Bhargava. For him, "[T]he initial motivations of the Western secularism are complex and variegated: to check absolutism, religious bigotry, and fanaticism, to ensure that the values enshrined in particular religions did not trump

46 Charles Taylor, "How to Define Secularism," in *Boundaries of Toleration*, Alfred Stephan and Charles Taylor, eds., New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 59.

47 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 9.

48 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 9.

49 The concept of 'social imaginaries' by Taylor will be explained in Chapter Three.

other values, to manage religious conflicts reasonably.”⁵⁰ Whereas, “Indian secularism did not erect a wall of separation, but instead proposed ‘a principled distance between religion and state. Moreover, by balancing the claims of individuals and religious communities, it never intended a bludgeoning privatization of religion.”⁵¹

The Eastern models in general contrast with the Western secularism. (1) It is supposed that India had a secular nationalism developed before the Christian era, with its own myths and legends. The mythology of India’s secular nationalism portrays Emperor Asoka as the tolerant king par excellence. It is claimed that Ancient India had an acclaimed secular culture, particularly during Asoka’s time (304-232 BCE). He formulated a conception of the proto-secular state.⁵² The Indian atheist school *charvaka*⁵³ also contributed to secular thought in India. “It emphasizes rationalism and the principles of knowledge through experience as opposed to adherence to and emphasis on metaphysical reasoning and categories of thought.”⁵⁴ Prof. Amartya Sen observes that the Indian secular state is based on Emperor Akbar’s radical view in religious tolerance, his line of thinking that religion must not be denied to have a secular state and that tradition must be based on reason. “Akbar laid the foundations of secularism and religious neutrality of the state in a variety of ways; the secular constitution that India adopted in 1949, after independence from British rule, has many features already championed by Akbar in the 1590’s. The shared elements include interpreting secularism as the requirement that the state be equidistant from different religions and must not treat any religion with special favour.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in reality, this is blatantly untrue of India and its deeply religious

social stratification which remains one of the last sanctioned forms of apartheid in the world.

(2) The secularist idea of the good life and human flourishing which has its Greek equivalent in *eudemonia*, also acts as a supplement to the Buddhist conception of happiness, which begins in mindfulness and ends with nirvana. Today, the prevalent topics among secular Buddhists are compassion and mindfulness. Traditional Buddhists’ focus on the dharma, and of attaining nirvana. Thus, it would appear that secular Buddhists have stripped away any religious, spiritual or sacred association with teachings to make the practices accessible to those with little or no interest in Buddhism, past or present.⁵⁶ (3) China also has a long history of secularism. It traces its root as far back as Confucius, who stressed the state of *shishu* (being in this world). Later the aggressive secularism of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party projected a more recent and ruthless manifestation of Chinese secular society. In this, Chinese social order was never intimately linked with religious institutions.⁵⁷ Peter van der Veer observes that Chinese secularism as an ideology and as a practice is oriented towards anticlericalism, scientism, and rationalism.⁵⁸ However, the secular culture in China is under threat due to a resurgence of religion and an open performance of religious practices.

The examples of Eastern secularism reveal that religion and polity have never been separated. Notwithstanding, it is observable that 1) Eastern secularisms have been part of ‘interactional history,’ whereby these grow as a result of interaction with Western projections of modernity.⁵⁹ 2) These examples show that both religion and the secular interact without destroying the other. Religion and secularism are both compatible despite the fact of attacks by atheist, secularist and religious fundamentalists. Religion becomes re-visualised and this worldly by renouncing

50 Rajeev Bhargava, *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 1.

51 Rajeev Bhargava, *The Promise of India’s Secular Democracy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 64.

52 Rajeev Bhargava, “Beyond Toleration: Civility and Principled Coexistence in Asokan Edicts,” in *Boundaries of Toleration*, eds., Alfred Stepan and Charles Taylor, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 173-174.

53 “The Charvaka school was a philosophical movement in India that rejected the traditional religious order by challenging the authority of the Vedas as well as the hegemony of the Brahman priests. Contrary to the view that India has always been an entirely religious and spiritual land, the Charvaka school is one of the most irreligious and skeptical systems of thought ever devised. This school is considered part of the heterodox systems (also referred to as heresies) of Indian philosophy, and it is also known as Lokayata, a term which in Sanskrit and Pali means “Naturalist” or “Worldly.” (Cristian Violatti, <http://www.ancient.eu/Charvaka/>, 28 April 2014. Accessed on 22/02/2017).

54 Abraham Vazhayil Thomas, *Christians in Secular India*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974, p. 42.

55 Amartya Sen, “Amartya Sen for Akbar’s Secularism” in <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-newdelhi/amartya-sen-for-akbars-secularism/article2722541.ece>, accessed on 20/02/2017.

56 Manon Welles, “Secular Buddhism vs Traditional Buddhism: Six Key Differences,” in <http://aristocratsofthesoul.com/secular-buddhism-vs-traditional-buddhism-six-key-differences/>, December 20, 2015, accessed on 12/02/2017.

57 Elizabeth Zehe, “Elizabeth Zehe on Secularism in China,” in *JAYAN Blog*, Georgetown University, February 25, 2008, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/elizabeth-zehe-on-secularism-in-china>, accessed on 12/02/2017.

58 Peter van der Veer, “Smash Temples, Burn Books: Comparing Secularist Projects in India and China,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds., Calhoun, Craig, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 270-272.

59 Peter van der Veer, “Smash Temples, Burn Books: Comparing Secularist Projects in India and China,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, pp. 170-171. Peter explains what is ‘interactional history.’ “The project of modernity, with all its evolutionary ideas of nation, equality, citizenship, democracy, and rights, is developed not only in Atlantic interactions between the United States and Europe, but also in interactions with Asian and African societies that are coming within the orbit of imperial expansion.” (pp. 170-171).

the dogmatic other worldly transcendental principles. Religion enables secularism to become more than collective selfishness by embracing principles of transcendence which can be articulated as human ideal rather than metaphysical transcendental ideals. Religion in these cases does not argue or bargain for its rights and at the same time polity does not suppress the place of religion in society.

The Secular, Secularism, and Secularisation

To reflect further on “re-thinking secularism” and the “resurgence of religion,” an analytical distinction between the concepts, ‘the secular,’ ‘secularism,’ and ‘secularisation is required.’ The ‘secular’ is a central modern epistemic and residual category.⁶⁰ ‘Secularism’ is a worldview and ideology. ‘Secularisation’ is the analytical conceptualisation of the modern world-historical process.

The word “**secular**” is understood as contrasting with the word, “sacred.” Sacred can mean the area of mystery, the incomprehensible, and supremely important. Sacred is that which pertains to ‘the other world,’ to the transcendent. In contrast, “secular” concerns areas of life in which man dwells and controls. Secular can refer to ‘this worldly’ and the immanent. “Secular” originally defined those members of the clergy who lived “in the world” rather than in monastic seclusion.⁶¹ As already seen, the initial meaning of the word *saeculum* meant an indefinite period. Later, it became one of the terms of a dyad: religious/secular. This dyadic form serves “to structure the entire spatial and temporal reality of medieval Christendom into a binary system of classification separating two worlds, the religious-spiritual-sacred world of salvation and the secular-temporal-profane world.”⁶² Gregory R. Peterson explains these two distinct but overlapping meanings. He writes; “the first merely rejects the requirement of religious allegiance as a pre-requisite for participation in the society, especially government, and the second taking the more assertive line where it bans (isolates) religion from the public sphere, both social and political.”⁶³ The “secular” stands for that which belongs to the world and its affairs as distinguished from the church and religion. Thus, one of the meanings of the word secular is ‘a person’

who is engaged in the affairs of the world as distinct from the church.⁶⁴

A more significant explanation of ‘the secular’ is presented by José Casanova along with Charles Taylor. According to Casanova, “the secular has become a central modern category (theological-philosophical, legal-political, cultural-anthropological) to construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from ‘the religious.’”⁶⁵ Therefore, ‘secular’ seeks to represent the whole of the modern reality. The secular has shifted the emphasis from religious/other worldly to this worldly reality profane day to day immanence. This is the epistemic attitude that Charles Taylor critiques as “subtraction stories.”⁶⁶ Casanova proposes a second meaning to the term. ‘The secular’ here is “self-sufficient and exclusive secularity, when people are simply ‘irreligious,’ that is, devoid of religion and closed to any form of transcendence beyond the purely secular immanent frame.”⁶⁷ The ‘secular’ here is no longer one of the units of a dyadic pair. It is constituted as a self-enclosed reality. According to Taylor, ‘the self’ at this stage is able to free it from the religious component altogether. ‘This phenomenological experience of ‘the self’ within ‘the immanent frame,’ totally devoid of the religious, constitutes the secular. It is the historical understanding of ‘the self’ to be modern. Though it is a natural outcome in the historical process, every ‘self’ undergoes an existential ‘throw-ness’ or being ‘tossed-up’ within ‘the immanent frame.’ Finally, ‘the self’s experience of being secular happens in three different ways: 1) that of mere secularity; it is self’s phenomenological experience of living in a secular age, and being religious is a viable option, 2) that of self-sufficient and exclusive secularity; it is self’s phenomenological experience of living without religion as a normal, quasi-natural, taken for granted condition, and 3) that of secularist secularity; it is self’s “phenomenological experience not only of being passively free but also actually of having been liberated from “religion” as a condition for human autonomy and human flourishing.”⁶⁸ Vattimo and Taylor’s project of ‘the secular’ further advances on from this stage. If becoming ‘secular,’ or ‘modern’ is an historical and existential ‘project,’ there is scope for furthering and continuation. Taylor’s ‘conversion’ and Vattimo’s ‘return’

60 Residual category is a taxonomy or typology that attempts to be exhaustive of the types of its subject may find that it has content that remains after all its types or classifications have been “carved out” of the overall subject.

61 Lesely Brown, p. 2753, David Martin, p. 48 and Vincent Pecora, *Secularisation and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation and Modernity*, (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 2.

62 José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularisations, Secularisms,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds., Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 56.

63 Gregory R. Peterson, “Stage two Secularity and the Future of Theology and Science”, in *Zygon*, vol.45, no.2, June 2010.

64 Lesely Brown, p. 2753

65 José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularisations, Secularisms,” p. 54.

66 The concept of ‘Subtraction stories’ Taylor means “stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerges from this process – modernity or secularity – is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along but had been impeded by what is now set aside.” (SA, 22).

67 José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularisations, Secularisms,” p. 57.

68 José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularisations, Secularisms,” p.60.

open the possibility for 'the self' to re-imagine its own future.

Secularism is defined as an ideology, a political doctrine, a generalized world view, a social movement, and as having a role as a crucial carrier of the process of secularisation.⁶⁹ It is descriptively clarified by Casanova. He explains;

secularism refers more broadly to a whole range of modern secular world views and ideologies which 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 held unreflexively or to be assumed phenomenologically as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern reality, as a modern *doxa* or an unthought.⁷⁰

If 'secularism' entails 'a whole range of modern secular world,' it rids itself of religion. However, in post-modernity, 'secularism' paradoxically presupposes new concepts of 'religion,' 'ethics,' and 'politics.' Charles Taylor observes that although secularism emerged in response to the religious and political problems of Western Christian society, it is applicable to non-Christian societies everywhere that have become modern. Thus, secularism has phenomenologically become a taken-for-granted structure of reality.⁷¹ For Taylor, secularism is a belief system or a theory that promotes and encourages the separation of religion (transcendent) from state affairs (immanent). Secularism, thus forces religion back into question. For him secularism is a 'dyad,' i.e., the term that distinguishes two dimensions of existence. He describes;

building on the clear immanent transcendent distinction, it mutates into a term in another dyad, where 'secular' refers to what pertains to a self-sufficient immanent sphere, and its contrast term (often religious) relates to the transcendental realm. This can then undergo a second mutation, via a denial of this transcendent level, into a dyad in which one term refers to the real (secular), and the other to what is merely invented (religious); or where 'secular' refers to the institutions we require to live in 'this world,' and 'religious' or 'ecclesial' to optional extras that often disturb the course of this worldly life.⁷²

In the second mutation of the dyad, the equal emphasis on transcendence and immanence is changed to what Taylor calls 'a denial of the transcendent level.' After the second mutation, the secular and religious are opposed as true-false, or necessary-superfluous.⁷³ Casanova explains this dyadic separation of secularism as 'statecraft doctrine,' and 'an ideology.'⁷⁴ However, Taylor's 'overlapping consensus' assumes that there can be no universally agreed basis for the political principles accepted in a modern, heterogeneous society; whether secular or religious.⁷⁵ Similar to 'overlapping consensus,' Talal Asad portrays secularism as 'transcendent mediation.'⁷⁶ For Taylor and Asad, secularism is not an ideology of categorical separation between religion and state as in the case of the second mutation of the dyad. Asad insists that there is something "distinctive about 'secularism' that presupposes new concepts of 'religion,' and 'politics,' and new imperatives associated with them."⁷⁷ Asad and Taylor give secularism a global relevance even in non-Christian cultures, as well as in the hermeneutic of the return of religion.

The word '**secularisation**' was first used in 1648, at the end of the Thirty Year's War in Europe in the treaty of Westphalia. It initially referred to the transfer of church properties to the exclusive control of the princes. However,

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. xx.

73 Charles Taylor, "Forward: What is Secularism," in *Secularism, Religion, and Multicultural Citizenship*, p. xx, and Charles Taylor, "Western Secularity," in *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 32.

74 José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularisations, Secularisms," p. 66. For Casanova, by 'state-craft project' means, "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 non-religious, to democratic participation." However, "secularism becomes an ideology the moment it entails a theory of what 'religion' is or does. It is this assumption that 'religion,' in that abstract, is a thing that has an essence or that produces certain particular and predictable effects that is the defining characteristic of modern secularism." (p.66).

75 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 4.

76 Asad was influenced by Taylor's notion of "social imaginary". According to Asad the constructed and evolved social imaginaries are mediators that transcend conflicting perspectives through a unifying experience. He explains his argument with the help of Taylor's idea of citizenship which becomes the principle of identity that "transcends the different identities built on class, gender, and religion, replacing conflicting perspectives by unifying experience." Asad calls this principle of transcendent mediation secularism. He contends it; "not simply an intellectual answer to a question about enduring social peace and toleration. It is an enactment by which a *political medium* (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practises of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion." Therefore, secularism for him is not just that which pertains to intellectual deliberation on socio-political-religious conflicts but is rather a medium (political) that transcends the very self of every human being. I think that this innovative definition of secularism implicitly clarifies his inclinations towards an anthropological inquiry of secularism. (Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 4.)

77 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 2.

69 José Casanova, "Reply to Talal Asad," in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*, eds., David Scot, and Charles Hirschkind, California: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 17.

70 José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularisations, Secularisms," p. 55.

71 Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism," p. 35.

72 Charles Taylor, "Forward: What is Secularism," in *Secularism, Religion, and Multicultural Citizenship*, eds., Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood,

after the French Revolution (2 November 1789), it became a value statement. It meant that all ecclesiastical goods were at the disposal of the nation. Later, as already mentioned, George Holyoke coined the term 'secularism' in 1851 and that led to a rationalist movement of protest in England. Secularisation was built into secularism as an ideology of progress, and is a historical and phenomenological 'process.' Secularisation is generally employed to refer to, in the words of Peter Berger, "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domain of religious institutions and symbols."⁷⁸ Later the word 'secularisation' was used by Max Webber in 1930, and by his associate Ernest Troeltsch in 1958. Secularisation as a 'process' generally denotes the decline of religious practice in recent centuries. It is a neutral term that can be distinguished from secularism. In contra-distinction to secularism, "secularisation is a non – evaluative term describing empirically established social trends. Secularism may, in certain respects have forwarded the process of secularisation, but there are other non – ideological forces at work which have more directly and significantly influenced its course."⁷⁹ Historically, as indicated, it is the conversion of an ecclesiastical or religious institution or its property to civil possession. It aided the paradigmatic shift from an ecclesiastical state or sovereignty to a lay one. It also meant giving a more secular or a more non-sacred character or direction to philosophy, politics, sociology, art and studies related to it. Secularisation places morality based on secular values and material values, replacing spiritual ones. "In essence, it relates to a process of transfer of property, power, activities and both manifest and latent functions from institutions with a supernatural frame of reference to (often new) institutions operating according to empirical, rational pragmatic criteria, where religion lost its presidency over other institutions."⁸⁰

Further, secularisation can be disaggregated into three different propositions; 1) as a differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, 2) as a decline of religious beliefs and practices, and 3) as a marginalisation of religion to a privatized sphere.⁸¹ The disaggregation suggests a general tendency towards a world in which religion matters less. Various forms of secular reason and secular institutions matter more. This reading of Casanova, finds more light in Taylor's *A Secular Age*. He

refers to three forms of secularism, and secularisation: political, sociological, and cultural.⁸² The political (secular differentiation), sociological (privatization of religion), and cultural (religious decline) secularisation have been historically and phenomenologically interconnected. As in the case of Western modernity, "these three processes are intrinsically interrelated components of a single general teleological process of secularisation and modernization."⁸³ Nonetheless, the inter-related process of secularisation and modernization are contingent and particular in the case of the USA, and within most Eastern traditions, including China, India, and certain Islamic countries. Here, the process of secularisation is not usually accompanied by 'the decline of religion,' nor 'the privatization of religion.' In some cases, secularisation, and democratization are accompanied by religious revival, religious-cohabitation, and religious co-existence. Secularisation is seen here more than as a general universal process, culminating in secular modernity. Together with Casanova, Taylor and Vattimo's concept of 'the secular' look beyond the West, beyond the dual historical paradox: the decline of religion, and the privatization of religion. They recognise that secularisation derives from a unique Western Christian theological category, that of *saeculum*." Tellingly, there occurs another paradox, "namely, that 'secular emerges' first as a Western Christian theological category, while its modern antonym, 'the religious' is a product of Western secular modernity."⁸⁴ If so, religion and the religious becomes a discursive reality, and a system of classification of reality. Religion is used across the world today as an undisputable global social reality. Significantly, it should be noted that 'religion' in the process of secularisation and religious transformation, functions not as an alien force but is mutually exclusive with the secular. Vattimo and Taylor advocate a similar hermeneutic of the historical and genealogical experience of the 'return of religion:' an opening out,' and a 'return' to the very message of Christianity. It bridges the dyadic hermeneutic of bridging the dyadic distinction between secular and religious. Finally, as Casanova observes, it leads to a genealogical reconstruction. In this, "the very process of secularisation as a global process should start with the reflexive observation that one of the most important trends is the globalization of the category of 'religion' itself and of the binary classification of reality, 'religious/secular,' that it entails."⁸⁵ Here a short review of Vattimo and Taylor's concept of the secular is appropriate.

78 Peter L. Berger, *The Social reality of Religion*, London: Allen Lane, 1973, p. 113, and T. N. Nadan, "Secularism in Its Place, in *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed., Rajeev Bhargava, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 297-298.

79 Paul Barry Clarke and Andrew Linzey, p. 748.

80 Bryan Wilson, "Secularisation: the Inherited Model", in *The Sacred in a Secular Age* by Philip E. Hammond, pp. 11-15

81 José Casanova, "Secularisation Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad," in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 12.

82 Richard Madson, "Secularism, Religious Change, and Social Conflict in Asia," in *Rethinking Secularism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. p. 248.

83 José Casanova, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 60.

84 José Casanova, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 61.

85 José Casanova, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 62.

Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor's Redefine Secularism

Peter Berger distinguishes three distinctive options regarding secularity. They are, 1) the reductive option to interpret tradition in terms of modern secularity, 2) the deductive option to reassert the authority of a religious tradition in the face of modern secularity, and 3) the inductive option to turn to experience as the ground of all religious affirmations—one's own experience.⁸⁶ For Vattimo and Taylor, these three options are applicable to their conception of secularity. Going beyond the traditional understanding of secularism, the gradual decline of religion, and the privatisation of religion in course of time bridge the commonplace dichotomy between secular and the religious. First, they undertake a reductive re-interpretation of tradition in terms of modern secularity. Secondly, they try a deductive reconstruction, reassert the place of religion in post-modernity. Finally, their own personal experience is used inductively as the principal tool in explaining the complex nature of secularity. Their nihilistic (Vattimo) and historical genealogical (Taylor) method is not anti-religious but rather a continuation and reconstruction of a tradition of differentiating church affairs from state those of the that had existed for centuries. They try to bring out the positive potential of 'the secular' where the dichotomy created between religion and state is postulated towards the creation of 'the self' as a better citizen and believer. Conventionally, the Enlightenment thinkers visualised secularism implying a framework of nonreligious ideas that was explicitly contrasted with religion. "To be a secularist in this sense, is to adopt a stance toward life that clearly separates a religious from a nonreligious way of being."⁸⁷ For Taylor, this is only a misleading 'subtraction story.' "His point is not just that religion has not declined as much as expected, but that it is impossible simply to remove such a central dimension of culture and leave the rest intact."⁸⁸ For Taylor, post-enlightened people live in 'a secular age,' in which most people in modern societies, including religious people, make sense of things entirely or mainly in terms of this worldly-causality. In Taylor's phrase, they think entirely within the 'immanent frame.' It is a non-metaphysical, nontranscendent, knowledge which proves itself as sufficient to grasp a world that works entirely of itself. The immanent frame is a normal, natural, tacit context for much or all of their actions. This transforms both religious belief and religious engagement

with the world.⁸⁹

Challenging the Western definition of secularism based on the separation of church from political structure, Taylor gives three definitions of secularism. The first definition is characterised by the withdrawal of God and religion from 'public space,' which he terms as 'secularity1.' Taylor explains; They (religion) have been allegedly emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality. Or taken from another side, as we function in the various spheres of activity – economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational – the norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, generally do not refer us to God or to any religious beliefs: the considerations we act on are internal to the "rationality" of each sphere – maximum gain within the economy, the greatest benefit to the greatest number in the political area, and so on (SA, 2).

In the second meaning, secularity "consists in the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church" (SA, 2). Taylor calls this meaning of secularism as 'secularity2.' The second sense of the term reveals the condition of Western Europe from the early twentieth century, although many countries still retain the use of Christian names, and refer to God. According to Taylor, a third definition of secularism is more relevant to present day Western Europe. "This is a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace" (SA, 3).⁹⁰ The third meaning is secularism is termed as 'secularity3' in *A Secular Age*. A paradigm shift has happened: where once it was virtually impossible not to believe, to one now where faith and adherence to religion has become one of the options. Taylor further develops the far-reaching consequences of secularity3, and its pertinent need to redefine not only the role of religious hierarchy but also of political regimes. Accordingly, he postulates a fourth meaning to the concept of secularism which recommends a harmonious coexistence of religion and polity. In this view religion enjoys a monopoly but the citizens of a country have the right to profess the faith of their choice. Indian secularism is a moderate example.⁹¹ Further explaining his political secularism, Taylor in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship*, observes that secularism involves a complex requirement. This is more than a virtue strived

86 Gerard Dekker, Donald A. Luidens, and Rodger R. Rice, *Rethinking Secularisation*, p. 3.

87 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 8.

88 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 9.

89 Craig Calhoun Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, p. 10.

90 Hereafter any reference to this definition will be cited as "secularity 3".

91 The Indian political secularism advocates a non-sectarian attitude towards religion, and encourages the process of dialogue and interdependence amongst faiths.

for by any one. He proposes three virtues or benefits, which group in the three principles of the French Revolutionary Trinity: liberty, equality and fraternity.⁹² He explains these three categories as follows;

First, no one must be forced in the domain of religion, or basic belief. This is what is often defined as religious liberty including, of course, the freedom not to believe. This is what is also described as the 'free exercise' of religion, in the terms of the US First Amendment. Second, there must be equality between people of different faiths or basic belief; no religious outlook or (religious or areligious) *Weltanschauung*⁹³ can enjoy a privileged status, let alone be adopted as the official view of the state. Then, thirdly, all spiritual families must be heard, included the ongoing process of determining what the society is about (its political identity), and how it is going to realise these goals (the exact regime of rights and privileges). This (stretching the point a little) is what corresponds to fraternity.⁹⁴

His paradigmatic and democratic analysis of secularism orients itself towards human benefit and growth. However, three modes of secularity do not do away with religion altogether but refer to "religion": 1) "as that which is retreating in public space, 2) as a type of belief and practice which is or is not in regression, and 3) as a certain kind of belief or commitment whose conditions in this age are being examined" (SA, 15). Taylor's 'secularity3' is a secularity for the contemporary world. In this God and religion are not totally wiped out from the present political and social scenario but remain a defining factor of human life. Modernity is secular not because religion is totally removed, but that religion occupies a different place, compatible with the sense that all social action takes place in profane time.

Vattimo has a paradoxical understanding of the concept of secularism. In the commonplace definition, secularisation is a departure from Christianity. However, Vattimo's has a counter-intuitive position regarding the secular. For him, 'the death of god' dissolves the strong reasons to be an atheist. 'The death of god,' is an announcement of the consummation of the nihilistic process, even if this process is constructed as indefinite to avoid posting a metaphysical nothing.⁹⁵ Vattimo,

here relates secularisation to the essence of Christianity, and *caritas* is the limit of secularisation. He frames his account of secularisation with the help of his 'weak thought' i.e., 'Being as weakening,' and 'God's tendency for weakening.' For Vattimo, "philosophy can call the weakening that it discovers as the characteristic feature of the history of Being as secularisation in the broadest sense." (AC, 24). Tracing the source and impetus of secularisation in Christianity, Mathew E. Harris referring to John 15:15, observes that the message of Jesus (the event of the incarnation) seems less important for Vattimo than Jesus' message, such as his message of calling humans to be God's friends, not servants.⁹⁶ Luca D'Isanto interprets Vattimo's use of kenotic Christology further as indicating that Being enters into becoming in order to be endlessly reinterpretable, grounding hermeneutics historically in this way.⁹⁷

Vattimo's re-orientation of hermeneutical philosophy is positioned on two axioms: 1) weak thought, and 2) secularisation. Based on 'weak thought,' Vattimo re-reads René Gerrat's concept of 'victim based mechanism' and 'the death of the violent natural god' that presupposes the end of a metaphysical god and prepares for the rediscovery of a Christian God realised in the mystery of the incarnation in Christ (B, 41). It weakens 'Being' and secularises the metaphysical claims of hierarchical religions. Thus, Vattimo sees the process of secularisation as the positive result of Jesus' own teaching. From this background, Vattimo understands secularisation as the continuation and the desacralising interpretation of the Biblical message. In this, Christianity in praxis, finds its truth reconstructively in a secularised form.

Emergence of Post-Secular Culture

The decline of religious belief (secularisation) for centuries constituted an inevitable feature and consequence of modernity, and modernisation. However, many scholars today, in increasing numbers, argue that religion has not, after all, lost its societal and cultural relevance as predicted. For instance, immigrant religions, charismatic movements, new religious movements, alternative spiritualities, and the Eastern religions themselves exemplify the resilience of religion as a social and cultural force. In the West, following the Counter-Enlightenment, especially thinkers like Vattimo and Taylor, John Milbank, Rowan Williams, and Richard

92 Charles Taylor, "Forward," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Relationship*, pp. xi-xii.

93 *Weltanschauung*, the German term for a 'world-view', that is, either the 'philosophy of life' adopted by a particular person or the more general outlook shared by people in a given period, <http://www.answers.com/topic/weltanschauung#ixzz1PcSP4YLS>, browsed on 22/05/2011.

94 Charles Taylor, "Forward," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Relationship*, p. xii.

95 Mathew E. Harris, *Essays of Vattimo*, p. 141.

96 Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, trans., Luca D'Isanto and David Webb, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p.55. And Mathew E. Harris, *Essays of Vattimo*, p. 145.

97 Luca D'Isanto, "Introduction," in *Belief*, trans., David Webb and Luca D'Isanto, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p. 15.

Kearney,⁹⁸ conceptualize the 'post-secular.'⁹⁹ First of all, 'post-secular' is marked by an important shift in scholarly thinking about religion and secularism. Secondly, "this notion raises several important issues concerning both the place of religion in twenty-first century society and its status as an object of study in the academy."¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, it can be argued that the renewed interest in academia and polity on 'the post-secular,' broadens the current revival of religion. It is also equally significant to discuss whether 'the post-secular' refers to an actual shift in the social world, that leads to a re-imagination of 'social imaginaries. It raises also the philosophical asepticism as to whether 'the post-secular' leads to a re-enchantment of 'the enchanted-self.' For Habermas, it is due to 'a change in consciousness,' in the West. He attributes the 'change of consciousness' to three phenomenon. They are, 1) global conflicts due to religious strife around the world, 2) religion gaining influence within national public spheres, and 3) immigration of 'guest-workers,' and refugees.¹⁰¹ The return of religion in a post-secular culture "claims a more conspicuous and public role in shaping legislation or determining social and political values, poses renewed challenges."¹⁰² One of the signatory aspects of this research is to answer the question regarding how to most appropriately understand the changing religious-political landscape around the world (especially in the West) and the emergence of a post-secular culture. This philosophical inquiry into 'the post-secular' can be focused in two directions. First, a survey of the state of religions and religiosity around the world. Second, what are the new forms and ways of looking at religion as a re-imagined and returned force. The answers to the former with the hermeneutic of Vattimo and Taylor is the core outcome of my research.

Vincent Geoghegan argues that 'post-secularism' "is a polyvalent and contested term, signifying a scepticism and /or antagonism towards secularism in recognition of the persistence or 'resurgence' of religion, (and) an attempt to

overcome the antimony of secularism/religion."¹⁰³ Similarly, Habermas coined the term post-secular to describe the continuous reassertion and nuanced manifestations of religion in the public sphere. His philosophical aim was to solve the tension between radical multiculturalism, which interprets secularism as freedom from religion, and radical secularism, which is often associated with the French model of *laïcité*.¹⁰⁴ For him, in a post-secular society, citizens, both religious and non-religious, engage in reciprocal deliberation in the public sphere as part of a "complementary learning process" and "translation proviso."¹⁰⁵ In short, for Habermas, and Geoghegan the term post-secular applies to 'secularized societies' (modern societies) in which religion emerges as a public influence and relevance, while the conventional secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground.

Accordingly, in this research, post-secular is read in line with 'the return of religion.' The "return of religion"¹⁰⁶ is often associated (or even misunderstood) with the rise of fundamentalism and with incidents of Islamist terror against non-Muslim and Western targets. Philosophically, "post-secular turn" describes both a renewed interest in religion as a social and political force, and a rejection of the postmodern "death of metaphysics." Philosophical logic proves 'the post-secular turn' as a participation in the general logic "that is often deployed as a discursive practice to mark a change of topic or theme, to announce a new programme or position."¹⁰⁷ For Taylor, this is a historically inevitable 'event' which is a departure from the past, beyond the present, and toward the future. For Vattimo, 'the post-secular turn' is experienced recursively in his own return to the religion of his childhood. It is not a sudden increase in religiosity after long years of its alienation. It is a 'new culture' being developed and grown, and a change in attitude. In its philosophical profundity, the change in attitude means, not only "an increase in the meaningfulness of religion or a renewed attention to it, but a changed attitude by the secular state or in the public domain with respect to the continued existence of religious communities and the impulses that emerge from them."¹⁰⁸

98 I have chosen these thinkers, because their philosophical deliberation on secularism and religion 1) is similar to that of Taylor and Vattimo, and 2) their philosophy contributes to a post-secular and post-modern 'return' of religion.

99 However, these thinkers do not use the term 'post-secular' directly as a commonplace usage. "Post-secular" is coined by Habermas.

100 Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Tropey and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, "The Post-secular in Question," in *The Post Secular in Question: Religion in the Contemporary Society*, p.1.

101 Jürgen Habermas, Tony Blair, and Régis Debray, "Secularism's Crisis of Faith, notes on post-secular society" in *FALL*, 2008, <http://www.staff.amu.edu.pl/~ewa/Habermas,%20Notes%20on%20Post-Secular%20Society.pdf>, accessed on 12/02/2017.

102 Justine Champion, "Why the Enlightenment Still Matters Today", p. 2. For example, the French government has struggled with debates around the implementation of the 1905 law of *laïcité* amongst new Muslim communities, so the wall of separation between church and state in the US has been subjected to repeated and ongoing legal challenge.

103 Vincent Geoghegan, "Religious Narrative, Post-secular and Utopia," in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 3.2-3 (2000): 205-224.

104 Fatih Cicek, "Post-Secularism – Did Secularism and the Enlightenment Project Fail?"

105 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008, p. 131.

106 The 'post-secular return' of religion is discussed in the Fourth Chapter.

107 Gregg Lambert, *Return Statements: The Return of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 6.

108 Hent de Vries, "Introduction: Before, Around, and Beyond the Theologico-Political," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, eds., Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, New York: Fordham

Here a transformative shift is gradually being appropriated in the states relationship to religion. It is a phenomenological shift from church-state separation to a self-understanding of the State which is reflected in the post-secular condition.

Although it is frequently called upon as a cultural response and an attitude of the secular towards religion, the terminology of “post-secular” remains confused, and its precise meaning still to be unveiled. For example, the Muslim communities (countries) and most Eastern countries, including India, always maintained a religious allegiance. Rajeev Bhargava accordingly observes that ‘we in India have been always post-secular.’¹⁰⁹ Indian political secularism has never been anti-religious, but upholds religious neutrality. However, in the French case, there is a post-secular trend. Accordingly, the term describes a new era in which secularisation has come to an end and religion is once again re-emerging. It is mostly concerned with the need for renewed religious dialogue which has been the thrust of this research. For this, I have undertaken a deconstructive critique of the secular, and a reconstructive critique of religion with the help of Vattimo and Taylor, which lead ultimately to a post-secular culture.

Significantly, this post-secular culture includes Taylor’s argument that secularity entails a new set of conditions under which both belief and unbelief occur; a new context in which all search and questioning about the moral and spiritual must proceed. Vattimo, calls for a post-secular ‘weak religion.’ It is religion drawing insights from the hermeneutics of nihilism, which avoids all absolute assertions, and that which distances itself from dogmatic structures. Post-secular culture envisioned by the hermeneutic of Taylor and Vattimo first of all, re-imagine faith for the contemporary world. Secondly, post-secular religiosity intends cultural, linguistic, and political practices of pluralism. Finally, post-secular means neither ‘secular’ nor ‘religious’ but a co-habitation of both in mutual inclusivity. Post-secular culture necessitates a climate of mediation and dialogue between religion and polity. Contemporary literature, media, arts, and universities facilitate encounters between these. The theological and philosophical implications of a shifting imagination in post-secular culture enable the individual self to choose for itself a dialogical position, rather than being a ‘fanatic, either religious or secular. The plural and harmonious nature of both religious and secular already well established in Eastern countries, would generate a climate of embracing the same by the West. At these cross-roads, looking forward to the future, the words of President Nicholas Sarkozy are of paramount significance; “rejecting a dialogue with religion

would be a cultural and intellectual error.” He called for “a positive secularism that debates, respects and includes, not a secularism that rejects.”¹¹⁰

Conclusion

I have drawn principal cues from the hermeneutic philosophy of Vattimo and Taylor. They in their post-secular critique of religion and the secular try to un-gulf this dichotomy. Taylor’s view of ‘a secular age,’ and Vattimo’s account of ‘secularisation as the outcome of Christianity, open a new area of philosophical debate based on the hermeneutical and post-onto-theological interpretation of truth and religion. Vattimo argues that secularity is the outcome of Christianity and it leads to post-onto-theological religious experience of *caritas* understood as the admittance of *Verwindung*. Taylor’s work especially ‘A Secular Age’ facilitate the true interpretation of secularism that helps to ‘break the Spell of Immanent Frame’ and accomplish ‘the Conversion and Fullness’ of religious experience. This deconstructive analysis of religion and secularism does not lead to destruction but reconstruction and rebuilding religious belief- hermeneutics, and culture-social imaginaries. Thus, it is an attempt to set in motion a new interpretation of religion taking recourse to Vattimo and Taylor, setting aside and convalescing the tradition (not abandoning) and re-think to re-think religion leading to reconstructive re-evaluation.

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109 Rajeev Bhargava, “We (In India) Have Always Been Post-Secular,” p. 109.

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