6. Liberal Secularity As Value-Neutral

Introduction

I will now turn toward the second form of secularity outlined in the second chapter – areligious secularity. This approach discounts religion as an important factor in conflict. Thinkers who take this approach either fail to consider religion at all, not even to dispense with it, or see it as a secondary feature of conflict – as a social or political tool used to whip up passions in the service of other, more "real," aspects of a conflict. Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger identified this as the instrumentalist position. Although such instrumentalism denotes a negative assessment of the role of religion in the public sphere, it is not the same as the secularist belief in a fundamental violence-promoting effect of religion. Here, religion may be used by unscrupulous leaders to further their ends in a conflict, but the religion itself is merely one of a number of ideological tools so used. Nor, in this perspective, can religion be a substantive promoter of peace. To seek peacemaking resources in religion may be mildly beneficial, but there is greater utility in identifying and addressing the real causes of a conflict.

I call the form of secularity underlying this approach "liberal secularity." It is a way of understanding the world directly linked to the broader liberalism – an approach to politics, industry, the sciences, among other things – that marked the nineteenth century, which I outlined in the fourth chapter. This understanding has two key tenets. The first is that people ought to have freedom of belief in the private sphere, but that the public sphere should be subject to rational philosophical and scientific thought. The other basic belief is that secularization was an inevitable historical process. By this notion, as per secularization theory, as societies modernize, so must they secularize. Although a liberal secular may allow some leeway for cultural expression, the basic path of secularization is, in this view, already well understood. This set of beliefs lends itself to

the universalist understanding of religion in conflict briefly outlined above – that, regardless of private belief, the real factors of any conflict are nonreligious.

To echo a caveat I made in the previous chapter concerning terminology, there are some liberal seculars who use the term "secularism" to describe their stance. This is understandable, given the common liberal secular belief that secularization is inevitable – "secularism" would then be a belief in the inevitable. However, it is much more descriptive to reserve "secularism" to describe the active project of promoting secularity described previously. I must also reiterate that all of these forms of secularity are ideal types, and that in choosing certain works to represent liberal secularity I do not mean to argue that that is the only view their authors hold. In that sense, we have seen that as an ideal type secularism is a weak and closed variant of secularity. What is liberal secularity, then? To answer that, I will follow much the same basic pattern as the previous chapter. First, I outline a theoretical liberal secularity as expressed in scientific and political philosophy, then apply this in short case studies, and finally critically analyze it in terms of strength and openness.

Liberal Secularity and Modernity

Secularity, Modernity, and the Place of Religion

Underlying liberal secularity are a few fundamental beliefs about both the nature of the world and the relation of religious to nonreligious knowledge. One of the most important is the idea that religious and nonreligious truths can *be* differentiated, that each may have a separate place. Thus, the relation of scientific and religious ways of knowing is a fundamental issue for liberal secularity. Of the many works that have addressed this issue, Stephen Jay Gould's *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* presents perhaps the most truly liberal secular view. Gould argues that science and religion are two "rocks," two fundamentally different ways of knowing the world. Each has a distinct "magesterium" or teaching authority. Gould opposes both the idea that one or the other magesterium can be comprehensive and that they must

battle until one is supreme – the secularist view – or that they can be understood in some unified way, a "whole ball of wax."[1] Rather, he believes that they are NOMA, or non-overlapping magesteria – fully separate modes of inquiry that are nonetheless both required to complete "the rich and full view of life traditionally designated as wisdom."[2]

It is not Gould's view of science that interests us here, but his view of religion and the manner in which both are encompassed in a perspective of wisdom. For Gould, the debate is not on the relation of science to religion but of science to morality more generally. Religion is a traditional moral arbiter, but it is not the only one – there can be nonreligious moral doctrines.[3] This set of definitions, with religion as a moral arbiter and science as a mode of material or empirical knowledge, is what makes this view a fundamentally liberal form of secularity. It can comfortably allow a space for both, provided that neither interferes with the other. The key point here is that Gould defines religion solely in terms of moral teaching, of which it is one of many systems. This means that religion and other magesteria – here, the sciences, but there are others – can be independent of one another. Indeed, this is a standard liberal secular view, that different modes of knowing ought to be clearly defined so that they may pursue their own truths without interference from one another.

However, in defining religion as solely a form of moral knowledge, Gould is ignoring those forms of religion that encompass more than this. Apart from being morally normative, religions may define entire worldviews, including material aspects of knowledge. Such a broad religious belief system would not be amenable to the limitations of Gould's idea of wisdom. His liberal secular wisdom is only derived by first defining religion in such a way that it can fit into a larger framework, whereas many religions view themselves *as* that larger framework, not as merely an element in a higher truth. This liberal secular approach to such a meeting may dampen the possibilities of

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1 Gould, Stephen Jay, 1999, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (London, UK: Jonathan Cape, 2001), p. 51.
2 Ibid., pp. 58-59.
3 Ibid., pp. 57-58.

any true dialog between religion and secular. Any such engagement would, of course, entail some very profound debates, which I acknowledge. Although the purpose of this thesis is not to explore these, as an example I would agree with Gould that a scientific-empirical approach to material knowledge reveals more than many traditionally religious ones. However, not all religious people would agree, and with a definition of religion as solely moralistic being a prerequisite to his argument on how it may fit with science, Gould is not going to sway them. Although this does not guarantee the failure of dialog, Gould's approach shuts many doors from the beginning.

What Gould does in debates on religion and science, Fukuyama does in debates on religion, politics, and social thought. Drawing on Georg Hegel's dialectic approach for his *The End of History and the Last Man* – or, indeed, as Stanley Kurtz points out, drawing on Alexandre Kojéve's take on Hegel[4] – Fukuyama views history as a process not just of material change but of change in consciousness, in people's views of the world. While Fukuyama's arguments about material developments as a basis for the power of modern liberal societies are interesting, it is the nonmaterial half of his approach that most concerns us here. To Fukuyama, the greatest nonmaterial force behind people's behavior is *thymos*, or the desire for recognition. This desire has been addressed by many ideologies throughout history, of which religion is one.[5] He believes conflicts about *thymotic* needs – beliefs and values – are often more potent than conflicts about material goods.[6] While Fukuyama explicitly states that he does not mean to merely reduce passion for religion to the desire for recognition, he does see religion as rooted in that desire. However, the desire to have one set of beliefs or practices recognized above all others is, to Fukuyama, irrational, and it is thus only through the development of a rational, liberal ideal of universal recognition that everyone's need is satisfied and that history can come to an end.

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4 Kurtz, Stanley, 2002, "The Future of "History"," *Policy Review* (113),
    <www.policyreview.org/jun02/kurtz.html> (as on 27 Jan. 2005), n. 2.
5 Fukuyama, Francis, 1992, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London, UK: Penguin), p. 62.
6 Ibid., p. 214.

For Fukuyama, religion is not inherently opposed to liberalism – it can, in fact, encourage liberal qualities. However, for religion to work with liberal values it must be privatized. He finds that mainstream Protestantism, Buddhism, and Shinto work in liberal societies because they are generally limited to familial rites. Hinduism and Confucianism, on the other hand, have mixed records, and Orthodox Judaism and Islamic fundamentalism can not be liberal because they seek to define public as well as private spaces.[7] Again, this approach shows a hallmark of liberal secularity – Fukuyama defines the parameters of the debate before addressing religion, rather than first taking into account religious perspectives. Here, the parameters focus on recognition, and all belief systems are rated in terms of their relation to it. To his credit, Fukuyama realizes that something may be lacking in his analysis, because he notes that forms of associating other than a purely logical universal recognition bind people together, even in liberal states – for example, where irrational forms of recognition in local communities shape society. However, this consideration does not seem to result in much change in his overall view. He does not appear to regard the liberal approach as a method, one of many, of answering an important human question – again one of many. By defining *thymos* as *the* question, liberalism is *the* answer.

In the second chapter, I touched on the relation of secularity to globalization. Fukuyama has a clearly liberal secular take on this matter – he recognizes that, although liberalism is the "end of history," it still remains for it to spread throughout the world, essentially a globalizing process. Necessarily, liberal secularity will go with it. By this understanding, modernization brings secularity (traditional secularization theory), and globalization is the completion of that process. Such thinking is not limited to proponents of the world-system. Thinkers more critical of globalization still tend to absolutize the process while critiquing the specifics thereof. For example, Immanuel Wallerstein (who, though Marxist, is not Marxist-Leninist and so thus can fit into this

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7 Ibid., p. 216-217.

discussion) and John Meyer, who between them analyze power relations in terms of a world-political-economy,[8] do not so much challenge the politico-economic terms of globalization as challenge the particular inequalities that have resulted.

From a liberal secular perspective, modernity and secularity are parts of the same global process, one into which religion can fit, but only as a subordinate part. This, then, is what differentiates liberal secularity from secularism – while both view secular reason as superior to religious belief, the latter attempts to eliminate religion while the former can incorporate religion into its own worldview. However, this is done by predefining religion, giving it a role to play within liberal secularity. To Gould, it is a moral system; to Fukuyama, one of the irrational approaches to answering life's questions, particularly *thymotic* ones. Such religion as is allowed to remain must fit within this system – it must content itself with moral questions but not material ones, or it must remain in the private sphere and not interfere in rationalized public discourse. In this way, religion is, in terms of the role it may play in conflict, essentially invisible. Should it seek to play a part in that public sphere, to liberal secular eyes it appears distinctly out of place. While it has been somewhat necessary to abstract these points from the work of Gould and Fukuyama, who did not write about religion and conflict per se, such beliefs are quite clear in Fred Halliday's work, to which we now turn.

Religion Invisible, Religion Out of Place

Having defined religion, and defined it away, many liberal secular thinkers do not pay religion any more attention – given that it is a private matter, public policy need not be overly concerned with it. As was mentioned in the first chapter, this is the attitude exemplified by Bruce Russett, John Oneal, and Michaelene Cox when they attempt to refute Huntington's civilizational argument. Their evidence is largely statistical, demonstrating that patterns of conflict in the 1990s do not necessarily support his view. While their arguments have much merit, they did not address Huntington's underlying

8 Beyer, Peter, 1994, *Religion and Globalization* (London, UK; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE), pp. 24-25.

argument about intangibles like culture, values, or religion.[9]

Fred Halliday's work, on the other hand, is often directly concerned with religion, and takes a classically liberal secular view of it. Two of his works specifically concerned with, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* and *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* deserve special mention,[10] but religion also features in Halliday's more general political science theory. Although Halliday's writings specifically on religion are concerned with Islam and its role in Middle Eastern politics, his language, when concerned with theory, is much more general.

As the first title quoted above makes clear, Halliday regards conflict between Islam and the West as a myth, and, by extension, so too is any conflict between religion and modernity. This is rooted in his beliefs about normative aspects of political theory, in that "on matters of primary normative and political concern there is a measure of international consensus around a set of values that[,] on grounds quite independent of their origin, can be based on reason and which bear ... some relationship to economic prosperity and peace."[11] However, when discussing religion he extrapolates from a "measure of international consensus" on norms that "bear some relationship to prosperity and peace" to argue that largely liberal norms play a definitive role in politics and that religious viewpoints are essentially competing ideologies. To Halliday, political actors may use such ideologies in conflict over interests that could be better understood in liberal secular terms.

For Halliday, the true causes of conflict are material, rather than about values as such. In particular, religious arguments do not have meanings according to their own

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9 Russett, Bruce M.; Oneal, John R.; and Cox, Michaelene, 2000, "Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà Vu? Some Evidence," *Journal of Peace Research* 37(5): 583-608. See also Huntington's response and a reply by Oneal and Russet that follow in the same issue.
10 Halliday, Fred, 1996, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London, UK: Tauris). Halliday, Fred, 2000, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* (London, UK: Saqi).
11 Halliday, Fred, 1994, *Rethinking International Relations* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan), p. 241.

tradition, nor are they attempts to prescribe action based on religious values, but are rather they are political statements constructed at the time. "No religion ... is a set menu of moral, political, and social behaviour; it offers, within some varying limits, an à la carte selection, varying within sect, time, and context, if not from individual to individual." Moreover, "anterior answers to [sociopolitical] questions determine the interpretation derived from the texts."[12] In short, political realities determine the way in which religion is used in the public sphere. This is eminently what Hasenclever and Rittberger identified as the instrumental understanding of religion.[13] Indeed, Halliday uses just this language speaking about both religion and nationalism: "What is today presented as the "true" representation of a past tradition is in fact a contemporary, modern creation, designed to meet contemporary needs, not least the interests of those defining the tradition. Ideology is in this sense instrumental, for those in power ... and for those challenging power."[14] Note the subtle shift from "past tradition" to modern "ideology."

Likewise, Halliday clearly demonstrates Hasenclever and Rittberger's assertion that, for someone who sees religious language as an instrumental response to political needs in a conflict, a response of development and democratization would address those needs. In such a case, Halliday recommends "a policy [that] would have to be underpinned by a concept of universalism, which would include secularism, plus development ... understood as both growth in the economic field and democratization in the political."[15] Again, this passage specifically addressed the Muslim Middle East, but given Halliday's general beliefs it is safe to assume that this would be a model for a more general recommendation.

It is worth noting, after these last two points, that Halliday's perspective is self-

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12 Both quotes from Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, p. 114.
13 Hasenclever, Andreas, and Rittberger, Volker, 2000, "Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict," *Millennium* 29(3): 641-674, pp. 645-646.
14 Halliday, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East*, p. 7.
15 Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, p. 128.

critical in a way that that of a secularist would not be. He recognizes that ideology can serve either side of a power-argument, those that hold it or those that challenge it. Moreover, another part of his policy toward the Muslim world is that Western nations admit the ways in which prejudice against Islam has tainted European history and politics.[16] However, although this may entail taking on board some social criticism, this is not the same as engaging with religious people. Halliday does not allow much room for such engagement.

This has to do with Halliday's secularism, part of his "universalist" policy – secularism here meaning what I have termed secularization. Halliday never opposes religion directly (which would have been my secularism), but rather encourages the development of a universal political view. For Halliday, secularism "involves not only the exclusion of religion [from public life], but a climate of tolerance of debate, and the application of reason to social and legal life."[17] For Halliday, religion hinders debate because it entails an authoritarian approach incompatible with free thought or expression on topics such as human rights. Thus, "the central issue is not, therefore, one of finding some more liberal, or compatible, interpretation of Islamic thinking, but of removing the discussion of rights from the claims of religion itself."[18] It is not so clear whether this is his belief about religion in general or about Islam in particular, so I will not go so far as to assume that is a general statement. Nonetheless, one can still view this passage as an example of a liberal secular perspective on one religion. While it may be possible to find Muslims willing to adapt to liberal secularity, which Halliday subsequently suggests, the primary aim of anyone confronted with religion in a situation of conflict is to remove the religious language. As he puts it elsewhere, they should "separate the real, material, specific and secular difficulties ... from their confused religious expression; then address these difficulties themselves."[19]

16 Ibid., pp. 131-132.
17 Ibid., pp. 157.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 128.

Taking this as a standard liberal secular viewpoint, some passages cited in the first chapter become clearer. For both James Kurth and Jeffrey Seul, the power of religion as a form of identity lies behind contemporary religious activism, not its normative role. In response to such activism, Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin could only propose that liberal seculars try to "ride it out" and hope that greater historical factors would improve the conditions driving conflicts that had become intermixed with religion.[20] Nowhere is religion taken seriously as a source of viable social or political norms – liberal secular, generally material explanations for events prevail.

Finally, it is also worth noting the concept of antifundamentalism brought up in the previous chapter. While antifundamentalism as ardently antireligious policy tends to be a secularist position, it is not difficult for liberal seculars to slip into it when other perspectives on the role of religion in a given situation fail. If the only roles for religion readily conceptualized in liberal secular thought are in the private sphere, there are few other ways to view public religion than as fundamentalist, inherently intolerant because it is illiberal. The liberal secular, then, may fall victim to the rest of Mark Juergensmeyer's "antifundamentalism syllogism," and conclude that, because fundamentalists will always seek political power to spread their message, it is necessary to oppose them howsoever possible.[21] This explains why the United States foreign policy apparatus, generally liberal secular, would accept the repressive, antifundamentalist response to a religious party coming to power in Algeria, as was detailed in the last chapter. Likewise, the response of the United States government to the Iranian revolution of 1979 generally followed an antifundamentalist course. However, the manner in which the United States government failed to predict that

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20 Kurth, James, 2001, "Religion and Ethnic Conflict – In Theory," *Orbis* 45(2): 281-294. Seul, Jeffrey R., 1999, ""Ours is the Way of God": Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 36(5): 553-569. Simon, Steven, and Benjamin, Daniel, 2000, "America and the New Terrorism," *Survival* 42(1): 59-75.
21 Juergensmeyer, Mark, 1995, "Antifundamentalism," in: Marty, Martin E., and Appleby, R. Scott, eds., *The Fundamentalism Project*, v. 5, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press): 353-366, p. 361.

revolution is a clear example of the effect of liberal securarity can have on policy. Here, the danger was the liberal tendency to ignore religion as a serious force. To that example, among others, we now turn.

Liberal Secularity in Practice

The Western Response to the Iranian Revolution

Before the 1979 Islamic revolution, under the regime of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, Iran was an ally of the United States. In analyst James Bill's view, a combination of interests and ideology in US foreign policy circles fostered this in spite of evidence that the Pahlavi regime was not generally supported by the Iranian people. The interests were those of different bureaucratic structures vying to keep their policies, and their positions, in Washington, as well as various economic and political groups with a direct interest in Iran. The ideology focused on the primacy of the Cold War in world politics, and generally ignored Iranian domestic politics. For Bill, interests and ideology kept people from asking serious questions, which in turn led to "a climate of ignorance that gave rise to the Pahlavi premise," that the Shah was a stable United States ally well-loved by his people.[22] For this thesis, the details of the interests at work and the Cold War aspect of the ideology are of less concern than those parts of the ideology that conditioned foreign-policymakers to overlook domestic politics, and in particular religion, in gauging Iranian affairs.

The general ideology of United States foreign policy of the late 1970s was what William Beeman calls the "US Foreign Policy myth" – that "[t]he normal conduct of foreign policy ... consists of the elite leaders of nation states meeting in seclusion and discussing matters of power and economics." It is a classically realist position, in which states and state interests govern international affairs, states are represented by elites, and economic and military power are the basis for policymaking. Thus non-elite domestic

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22 Bill, James A., 1988, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), p. 440.

processes as well as nonmaterial cultural factors do not matter.[23] This focus on the state

has a long history in secular thinking, and the emphasis on material interests instead of

belief (religious or secular) marks this as a particularly liberal secular view. It also helps

explain why the Iranian revolution, which for much of the population was expressed in

religious terms, went unheeded by Washington.

In many ways, the Iranian revolution is represented in the person of its spiritual, and

later temporal, leader, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini was 77 when he

came into power, and, as a follower of the apolitical Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad

Hussein Burujirdi, had not even engaged in politics until he was 60. In the early 1960s,

he opposed the Shah's White Revolution, a modernization plan opposed by

traditionalists as a palliative for continued autocracy. He also opposed the United

States' presence in Iran. In particular, he saw the Status of Forces Agreement, which

gave all United States service personnel and their families diplomatic immunity, as an

example of unwarranted US power. Khomeini was exiled in 1964, and led anti-Shah

resistance from Najaf, Iraq. He continued to argue that the Shah was a United States

puppet who brought "corruption, immorality, and oppression" in the form of his United

States-sponsored modernization plans.[24] More importantly, he put these arguments in

common language and religious idiom, which appealed to the mass of Iranians.

Though Khomeini's work is evidence of long-term Iranian antipathy toward the

Shah, the Iranian revolution was relatively quick. For Bill, 1977 was a crucial year, in

which the signs of impending collapse of the regime could be seen in a weak economy,

an ineffective polity, and a growing religious revival that represented both "a force of

liberation and a refuge from the oppressive secular politics of Pahlavi rule."[25] Early in

1978, after an editorial in the state's *Ittili'at* newspaper that attacked Khomeini, active

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23 Beeman, William O., 1990, "Double Demons: Cultural Impedance in US-Iranian Understanding," in: Rezun, Miron, ed., *Iran at the Crossroads: Global Relations in a Turbulent Decade*, "Westview Special Studies on the Middle East" series (Boulder, CO: Westview): 165-179, pp. 166-168, quote p. 168.
24 Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, p. 239.
25 Ibid., p. 218.

unrest began. Riots, demonstrations, and strikes occurred with increasing frequency throughout 1978 – at first monthly, by the autumn weekly in most major cities, and then more or less continuously throughout the winter. Although the Shah's forces did try to keep what order remained, the Shah saw that a full-scale crackdown was untenable both internally and internationally, and fled in early 1979. Khomeini returned on the first of February as the new leader of Iran.

Certainly, nonreligious factors played decisive roles in the revolution. The Iranian economy was very weak, various retrenchment policies only exacerbated problems this caused, and the Shah's regime was oppressive – the SAVAK security service was particularly loathed. That United States diplomats would overlook these things is evidence of a greater mistake than simply religious ignorance. However, such ignorance compounded other errors. Religious opposition to the Shah's regime violated key aspects of Beeman's "myth," particularly in that Islamic opposition presented a vision of Iran not determined solely by economic and military factors familiar to American diplomats.[26] Coupled with the tendency to ignore non-elite social processes, even broad-spectrum opposition to the Shah's regime, when put in religious language, was factored out of United States foreign-policymaking.

Some liberal seculars, such as Halliday, acknowledge these points but still argue that religion was unimportant in explaining the Iranian revolution because revolutionary ideology did not come directly from Islam.[27] Certainly, aspects of Khomeini's ideology, such as putting clerics in positions of temporal power, were novel. However, that does not mean that they were completely un-Islamic or that it was a purely instrumental use of religious language. For many Iranians, religion as alternate value system had real import. This is one of the "twelve foreign policy lessons" Bill draws from the Iranian experience.[28] He argued that diplomats should pay more attention to religion as a new

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26 Beeman,"Double Demons," pp. 171.
27 Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, pp. 42-47.
28 Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, pp. 440-446 for all twelve.

response to social ills that does not focus exclusively on the sorts of material concerns

central to liberal beliefs (or communist ones, that being the chief competing ideology at

the time).

A Liberal Secular Understanding of Northern Ireland

The Troubles in Northern Ireland are another case in which the importance of

religion may be overlooked in a liberal secular analysis. Like Iran – and, for that matter,

any major conflict – there are a number of factors that have contributed to the conflict.

The question becomes, which is the most important? In Northern Ireland, religion is a

prime suspect. The two sides are delineated by the religious labels "Catholic" and

"Protestant." Moreover, church attendance rates are significantly higher in Northern

Ireland than anywhere else in Western Europe (save the Republic of Ireland itself). The

influence of religion is particularly apparent on the Protestant side, where a number of

clergymen – most visibly Ian Paisley, Martin Smyth, and William McCrea – carry the

titles of both Reverend and MP. For analysts John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary,

"[s]uch evidence produces an understandable but superficial reaction: the conflict must

be religious if the groups engaged in electoral competition and paramilitary struggle are

religiously defined."[29] They hold that that reaction is, indeed, superficial – the conflict

in Northern Ireland is not primarily about religion. Moreover, for them the notion that it

is a religious conflict leads to ineffective methods of resolving the conflict.

McGarry's and O'Leary's evidence is, indeed, compelling. They show that highly

religious areas – such as Ballymena, the center of Ian Paisley's support – have very little

political violence, whereas the cities, which tend to be the least religious, are the most

violent. In the most conflict-prone areas of Belfast, such as the Shankill, church

attendance rates are 33% and 15% for Catholics and Protestants, respectively,

significantly lower than in rural areas. Moreover, for McGarry and O'Leary, "[t]he

Reverend Martin Smyth's pious observation that Shankill working-class Protestants "are

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29 McGarry, John, and O'Leary, Brendan, 1995, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell), p. 175.

Bible-lovers if not Bible-readers" is scarcely compelling evidence of religious consciousness."[30] Indeed, most political activists, barring extreme Unionists, do no use religious labels or language. Religious symbols – both institutions and people – have been spared the majority of the violence of the Troubles. All of this indicates that religion is not at the heart of the matter. McGarry and O'Leary repeatedly argue that the conflict is an ethnonationalist one, in which two nations contest whose state shall have sovereignty over the territory of Northern Ireland. It just happens that religion "is a key marker" of this difference, because of which "its importance is exaggerated. It is an analytical mistake to endow the boundary-marker with more significance than the fact that there is a boundary."[31] To make this mistake, they contend, may lead people to propose peacemaking methods centered on religion, whether by encouraging secularization or supporting interfaith initiatives, whereas the proper approach lies in addressing the ethnonational issues.

If the example of United States policy blindness to the Iranian revolution was an example of a liberal secular focus on material factors at the expense of others, McGarry and O'Leary's view of Northern Ireland highlights Fukuyama's emphasis on *thymos* – identity and recognition. In particular, they feel that this aspect alone, understood and dealt with in liberal terms of rationalized mutual respect, is key to resolving the conflict. Part of this may be an analytical mistake unrelated to liberal secularity as such – the failure to recognize multiple causality. At one point, McGarry and O'Leary cite a study that showed that only roughly 10% of Northern Irish on either side felt that religion was a significant factor, and they used this as evidence that religion was not central to the concerns of the people involved.[32] While this may generally be so, it also shows that religion did, indeed, matter to some people. Moreover, the same study showed that religion was a secondary but still important factor to many more people. It is better to

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30 Ibid., pp. 189-190, quote p. 190; their quote from Bruce, Steve, 1986, *God Save Ulster! The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 263.
31 Ibid., p. 212.
32 Ibid., p. 195-196.

look at the situation as being one in which lack of crosscutting cleavages means that the two competing sides are equally polarized in a number of dimensions – divisions according to religion, politics, and economics are mutually reinforcing. While ethnonational politics may be primary – and McGarry and O'Leary present a good case for this – the 10% who think differently are a minority worth keeping in mind, as are those for whom religion is of secondary importance. For example, Ian Paisley has long been a spoiler on conflict resolution precisely because he is able to motivate enough people to destabilize politics.

Another mistake McGarry and O'Leary make, however, is directly related to ideas found in liberal secularity. Having disproved that religious doctrine in itself is a cause of the conflict, which they do well, McGarry and O'Leary then dismiss it altogether as a motivating force. This, however, misses the role a weak religion, as Appleby defined it, in promoting conflict. While McGarry and O'Leary are right to dismiss the idea that Smyth's ill-read "Bible-lovers" are motivated by fine doctrinal points of which they are ignorant, it may be precisely this ignorance that allows them to call themselves Protestant while engaging in paramilitary action. Although religion may well be largely a boundary marker between ethnonational camps, it is a boundary marker with cognitive and ethical content of its own, which are quite independent of whatever other roles it may play. Engagement with the broader stream of modern Christian thought, much of which is antiviolence, will decrease the ability of people to use that thought as a rationalization for violence. While this may not "solve" the conflict if other issues are unresolved, it should not be overlooked because, as noted above, even a small number of believers can have a dramatic impact.

Modernizing Republicans and the Hijab in France

We now return to the example of France and the ongoing debate between Jeremy Jennings' traditionalist, modernizing, and multiculturalist Republicans[33] concerning the

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33 Jennings, Jeremy, 2000, "Citizenship, Republicanism, and Multiculturalism in Contemporary France," *British Journal of Political Science* 30(4): 575–598.

1989 iteration of *l'affaire du foulard Islamique,* the affair of the Islamic veil. As I argued in the previous chapter, Jennings' traditionalists took a secularist view, equating the Republic's model of *laïcité*, or secularity, with rationality as such. Those holding this view tended to regard any acceptance of the appearance of veiled Muslim girls in the public schools as a victory for an amorphous Islamic fundamentalist threat. In this chapter, I look at modernizing Republicans who present a more liberal conception of secularity and who, at the time, were able to implement their policies in government. Again, I will not extend this analysis to the more recent iteration of *l'affaire*, as the international political context has changed greatly since 1989. However, one must note that the French government recently implemented a controversial law banning conspicuous religious symbols from the schools.

Although the Republic is defined prominently as *laïque*, or secular, in Article I of the *La Constitution du 4 Octobre 1958*, in law this has generally manifested as the liberal secular ideal of freedom of religion so long as it does not intrude on public space. The Law of 1905 guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, restricted only in the name of public order. W.A.R. Shahid and P.S. van Koningsveld go so far as to classify France is a country of "separation" with "sympathizing tolerance," as opposed to one of state religion or recognition on the one hand and indifference or hostile separation on the other.[34] In 1989, the government referred the veil issue to the Council of State, the highest body of arbitration, which returned a decision in keeping with the law – schools could not ban veils, unless they amounted to proselytization or resulted disruption of the schools. This decision also mirrored the will of moderate groups, such as the Fédération des Conseils de Parents d'Elèves (Federation of Students' Parents Councils) which said, "We must tread the narrow path between rejection, the easy solution, and abdication, the pernicious."[35]

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34 Shahid, W.A.R., and van Koningsveld, P.S., 1995, *Religious Freedom and the Position of Islam in Western Europe: Opportunities and Obstacles in the Acquisition of Equal Rights* (Kampen, NL: Kok Pharos), p. 21.
35 Statement of 24 Oct. 1989, quoted in Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, 1998, "The Past in the Present:

Jennings cites Dominique Schnapper as a chief intellectual proponent of the

modernizing Republican position. Schnapper holds that the nation (which, in Anglo-

American political science would probably be better translated as "the state") is a

community that supersedes ethnicity. Cultural homogeneity is thus not necessary for

national identity. "In return, it is a necessary condition for the existence of the nation

that its citizens accept the idea that there exists a political domain independent of their

particular interests and that they must respect the rules governing its operation."[36] In

holding this view, for moderates French society is not *the* expression of *laïcité* or the

Enlightenment, as traditionalists might hold. Rather, it is a community open to alternate

worldviews, provided everyone adhere to a certain understanding of the political

domain. Schnapper admits that this republicanism is a normative universal ideal never

reached in fact. For her, it is always a goal, and the mistake of traditional republicans is

to identify any given historical particulars with it.[37]

Schnapper recognizes an important caveat to this position – if acceptance by

minorities of the political domain is merely formal and they do not have a role in

shaping it, then less-powerful people would feel that they are simply condoning the

dominance of the powerful.[38] Unfortunately, this may not have been a sentiment felt by

many of the modernizing Republicans. Sarah Wayland contends that most modernizers

would tolerate the veil as a way to get Muslim children to school. There, "given proper

education and "Frenchification", girls would no longer need or want to wear the

headscarves."[39] Such a position still maintains an underlying bias toward the French

way, and advocates tolerance only in as much as it will, in the end, help shape others to

that way. This is certainly not a truly respectful position, and may lead to

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Redefining *Laïcité* in Multicultural France," in: Berger, Peter L., ed., *The Limits of Social Cohesion: Conflict and Mediation in Pluralist Societies* (Boulder, CO: Westview): 38-83, p. 66.

36 Jennings,"Citizenship, Republicanism, and Multiculturalism in Contemporary France," pp. 589-590, qt. p. 590 from Schnapper, Dominique, 1994, *La Communauté des Citoyens: Sur l'Idée Moderne de Nation* (Paris, FR: Gallimard), p. 44.

37 Ibid., p. 591.

38 Ibid., p. 590.

39 Wayland, Sarah V., 1997, "Religious Expression in Public Schools: *Kirpans* in Canada, *Hijab* in France," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20(3): 545-561, p. 552.

disempowerment as Schnapper noted. If this was the motivation for the Fédération des Conseils de Parents d'Elèves, then their narrow path between rejection of Muslims and abdication of *laïcité* would merely be a plan for the gradual rather than immediate secularization of Muslims, not a place for a creative meeting of Islam and the West. Unfortunately, at a national policy level the issue effectively remained undecided in 1989 – while the Council of State promoted the modernizing position, it left it to local authorities to decide on a case by case basis whether Muslim students could wear the veil. That a national consensus was never reached is evidenced by the persistence of *l'affaire* through the 1990s to today.

Analysis

Strength and Weakness

Having both analyzed some examples of liberal secular theory and seen how it can function in practice, we will now explore liberal secularity in the terms established in this thesis, that of strength versus weakness and openness versus closedness. Beginning with the former criteria, liberal secularity is relatively strong, compared to the sort of dogmatism that can be found in both certain forms of religion and in secularism. A key to this is that liberal secularity is well argued; that is, it relies much more on argument and evidence than do many other approaches to knowledge. This is not to say that religious or secularist thought are strictly irrational or poorly argued. However, these other forms of knowledge can have an unreasoned reliance on argument rooted in preordained, often text-based belief, whereas reasoned argument first establishes the nature of the evidence before proceeding. In the terms established in the third chapter, both reasoned and dogmatic arguments may be internally consistent – the various arguments put forward in any given debate are consistent with the previously established core beliefs. However, reasoned arguments also strive for externally consistency – they accord with evidence external to the belief system.

For instance, in differentiating between empirical and moral knowledge, Gould

asserts that each must be free to pursue its own course. While he notes the benefits of this to both, his main concern throughout *Rocks of Ages* is preventing moral beliefs from hindering empirical exploration. The classic example is the refusal of the medieval Catholic Church to accept Galileo's new theories on religious grounds, despite the evidence. Although this example of the tension between early science and established religion is somewhat simplistic, it illustrates the point – despite other political and social factors, the crux of the case against Galileo was that his ideas violated certain metaphysical beliefs. In particular, his observations of the planets and their moons, and his conclusions drawn from such evidence for Copernican theory, did not accord with Church teachings that put the Earth at the center of the universe. In this case, the Church was relying on internal consistency to keep its worldview together, whereas a new theory was required to achieve external consistency.

Fukuyama takes this strong form of argumentation and applies it to the moral realm, and here one can recall Gould's assertion that religion is one among many modes of moral knowledge. His argument begins with observation, here of the centrality of *thymos* to social organization, and explores the utility of liberal ways of equitably meeting that drive in a society. Fukuyama does not take a form of society as a historical or moral given and begin arguing from there. Whether or not one agrees with his observations or conclusions, his method, at least, is generally well reasoned. In particular, taking the drive for recognition as the underlying motivating factor in human affairs, then a system that depends on the mutual recognition of equals, as does Fukuyama's liberalism, is more apt to solve such conflicts as may arise.

Halliday's application of liberal ideas to international politics has the strength of treating everyone critically. Indeed, the potential for a critical attitude was one of the potential positives of secularism. Halliday applies such an attitude to both religion and secularity. He is not arguing "for" any one side. Rather, he is equally critical of those whom he feels use religious dogma to further their own ends and those who those who

accuse religion of being *inherently* anything – antimodern, conflict prone, intolerant, or other things. Half of his "myth of confrontation" is that generated by those nonreligious people who oppose religion outright. Likewise, McGarry and O'Leary spend far more time disproving seculars who accuse the religious elements in Northern Ireland of causing the conflict than they do criticizing the religious. Here, we see that liberal secularity can drop the essentialism that marked secularism. For example, Schnapper's definition of the state did not require that the French link their identity with *laïcité*, provided everyone consented to the organization of the state.

From this well-argued liberal secular perspective, the causes of conflict are identifiable, solvable ones, whether economic or political. Laying the blame on some nonmaterial "other" is a distraction, not a way towards a solution. Halliday's analysis tends toward economic issues, and Fukuyama and McGarry's and O'Leary's towards those of identity, but any of arguments are more apt to lead toward practical solutions than would demonization of religion as such. Even when considering mistakes of the United States' foreign policy community towards Iran, it must be noted that they did not all stem from failure to properly understand the role of religion. That failure merely compounded more serious mistakes that would have benefited from this sort of strength of analysis.

Openness and Closedness

Despite its strength, liberal secularity is not an open belief system. In many ways, that strength was honed by centuries of conflict with religious beliefs in Europe, as was covered in the fourth chapter. However, this history may well work against fostering openness in secular views, as early European experience seemed to show that religion was generally irrational, intolerant, and other such ills. And, to not belie the strength of liberal secularity, it could be. However, closed secular views of religion tend to assume that this would always be the case, and so many seculars start from a presumption of guilt. In secularism, this stance becomes outright opposition to the perceived essential

nature of religion. Liberal secularity, on the other hand, has a place for religion in the private sphere. However, it still maintains a closed perspective that limits proper engagement with the religious. Two key element of this closedness are liberal secularity's universalism, the belief that its perspective is absolute and that everything can be understood in its terms, and its tendency toward instrumentalism.

Gould's NOMA idea is a clear example of universalism. It works by first defining religion in secular terms, in this case that as one of many moral systems. From there, the rest of the argument unfolds logically, but it rests on a universalist presumption that religion can be defined in secular terms. Fukuyama's presentation of liberalism is equally, if not more, universalist. Taking *thymos*, the desire for recognition, as the key problem that social systems try to resolve, Fukuyama contends that liberalism is the best public-sphere resolution for it, although religions have their place in the private sphere. Here, there is a presumption that *thymotic* concerns are definitive. While there is much to be said for both Gould's and Fukuyama's views, such universalism predefines religion and any presentation of religion that does not begin secular its terms can not be comprehended by liberal secularity. In some cases, this can lead to outright ignorance of religion. As noted above, this happened during Iranian revolution – because religion had no place in the United States' foreign policy "myth," few paid any attention to its role in Iranian society. Even where religion is considered in public discourse, liberal seculars may lack the terms to truly engage with it. Thus, in the French case, many modernizing republicans still saw acceptance of religion as primarily a route to "Frenchification" and secularization.

For analysts who do pay attention to religion, a universalist understanding of liberal secularity necessitates that they view religion instrumentally. Concluding that religion is devoid of content of its own, cognitive or otherwise, for liberal seculars religion becomes a tool for actors whose means and ends can be better expressed in secular terms. This is Halliday's approach to religion. Rather than being open to the possibility

that religious language speaks to needs other than the economic and political, Halliday sees only its use in social conflict. For Halliday, religion is a form of ideology concerned with factors better represented in secular, material terms. Similarly, for McGarry and O'Leary, religion in Ireland is a boundary marker between ethnonational groups whose true needs can best be assessed in secular sociopolitical terms. While they are all correct to deny that religion *causes* conflict and that somehow getting rid of religion would be any sort of solution, these analyses are closed to alternative understandings of public religion. Religion is, at best, a distraction, or, at worst, an ideological instrument in the service of nefarious ends.

Liberal secularity shares this closedness, with its tendency towards universalism, with secularism. This makes easy the slip into antifundamentalism. With a purely instrumentalist view, it is possible that one could see an equally valid role for religion to be used as an ideological tool in the service of peace. However, the universalist position that holds that secular explanations are the best for all questions negates that. For example, Halliday, though admitting that there may be some place for a more liberal-minded Islam in the Middle East, sees such a project as fundamentally a distraction from promoting liberal secular views. It then becomes easy to see all manifestations of public religion as contrary to such promotion, and the slide towards a secularist antifundamentalism has begun.

Liberal Secularity: Strong but Closed

From this analysis of liberal secularity in strong-open terms, we see that it is strong but closed. Its strength is found in the insistence on argument from evidence and reason rather than from dogma, but it is closed in as much as those arguments do not usually consider alternative worldviews – here, religious ones. While liberal secularity has a place for religion, it is as a subordinate part within a broader framework of liberal secular thought. For instance, it is not Gould's conception of science as empirical but his definition of religion as solely moral that qualifies it as liberal secular. While his

NOMA approach may be a good way to relate empirical and nonempirical thought within secularity, it does not make space for similar developments in religious perspectives.[40] This does not accord with Appleby's understanding of religion from the first chapter, that religions (and all worldviews) are dynamic – and that, in this case, they could come to their own viable understanding of the relation between moral and empirical knowledge.

This is disadvantageous to seculars because it hampers that same development within secularity itself. By consigning religion to a solely moralizing role within a broader secular understanding, seculars may miss critiques made of other secular concepts when they are presented in religious terms. Criticism, especially self-criticism, is one of the strengths of liberal secularity – note Halliday's stance toward any form of domination, be it secular or religious – whereas closed secularisms like Marxism-Leninism are far more rigid. Alfred Gierer illustrates this in presenting a discussion between Kurt Gödel and Rudolph Carnap from 1940.[41] The former argues that not all modern scientific knowledge can be demonstrated empirically (for instance, in quantum mechanics) even if consequences of that knowledge can be. Thus, one should also admit postulates normally considered theological for which one would then empirical consequences. Carnap disagrees, believing that all theology can be explained psychologically – closing the door to further exploration.

While the above debate may be somewhat scientifically abstract for this thesis, the same case can be made in the fields of philosophy and ethics. For example, Jean Bethke Elshtain presents Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology as a modernization of Christianity that both accepts *and* rejects aspects of modernity.[42] A liberal secular who believed in

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40 Whether and how differentiation of empirical and moral (among other categories) slips into dissociation is a prime concern of Ken Wilber and is worth noting, although it does not fall within the scope of this thesis.

41 Gierer, Alfred, 1997, "Gödel Meets Carnap: A Prototypical Discourse on Science and Religion," *Zygon* 32(2): 207-217.

42 Elshtain, Jean Bethke, 2001, "Bonhoeffer on Modernity: *Sic et Non*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29 (3): 345-366.

NOMA might accept many of Bonhoeffer's moral arguments, provided they fit into that grander secular schema. However, he or she might stop before recognizing deeper problems that Bonhoeffer finds are rooted in excessive separation of empirical from moral knowledge – this would be stepping outside the moral magesterium of religion.

Liberal secularity presents an even greater problem in a situation in which religion and secularity are involved in social conflict, which is that religious people may not agree with the liberal secular understanding of religion. That is, they may not see it as being solely moral, as in Gould's view, or as private, as in Fukuyama's. Christopher Eberle outlines such a problem by demonstrating theological difficulties with the idea that, in a secular society, religious believers must find secular corroboration for any religious principle they wish to see enshrined in law.[43] Liberal seculars would rightly oppose any attempt to have the morality of one group imposed on a whole society. However, they may end up opposing any religion that attempted to operate more positively in the public sphere. Thus, a liberal secular approach precludes many relationships between seculars and the religious, other than opposition. There may be communitarian religious approaches to public policy consonant with secular ideals, for instance. Moreover, a climate of opposition would also tend to hinder the development of equivalent views in religious circles.

The closedness of liberal secularity, then, undermines its strengths. One should certainly not forget those strengths. The differentiation of empirical and moral knowledge that Gould identifies frees science to advance on its own terms. What Fukuyama sees as reciprocal recognition that opposes domination by the strong underpins many of the social achievements of secular societies. Science unconstrained (or, at least, less constrained) by doctrine has certainly made great advances over the last several centuries, and societies based on the recognition of individuals have advanced the ideal of human rights for all. However, this has, at times, been at the cost of keeping

43 Eberle, Christopher J., 1999, "Why Restraint Is Religiously Unacceptable," *Religious Studies* 35(3): 247-276.

religions in a circumscribed place that they may not truly believe to be theirs. Moreover, many societies are not secular, and to begin with the presumption that they can easily become so may do more harm than good. Further, liberal seculars may fail to acknowledge ethical developments, for example in human rights, or cogent critiques of material development because they originate in a religious framework. Its closedness thus limits the prospects of liberal secularity in peacemaking.

Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter an analysis of liberal secularity presented in comparison to the strong-open language established in part one of this thesis. Where secularism, the first form of secularity covered, was weak and closed, liberal secularity gains a measure of strength, but is still closed. That failure to be fully open to religious worldviews as worldviews, rather than as constituent parts of a secular worldview, effectively undermines liberal secularity in peacemaking. Its strengths are only good for so much if it is not also open to dialog with religion. Lack of dialog inhibits vital self-criticism on the part of liberal seculars, and it ignores those in religious communities that may seek to modernize but not secularize. In a case of social conflict, the avenues toward peaceful settlement are thus lessened.

That closedness can also result in the promotion of violence by liberal seculars. With no understanding of religion "out of place" other than that it is fundamentalist (or some other pejorative), it is easy to slip into the antifundamentalist belief that any – even illiberal and violent – responses are a necessary given the presence of religion in a conflict. Because it already closed, should liberal secularity betray its strengths in this way it is not a long journey before it arrives among the more closed forms of secularism like Marxism-Leninism. Here, secularity is seen as the only way societies can develop, and illiberal actions can be justified by that end.

Obviously, the strength of liberal secularity needs to be balanced by openness. However, before we discuss possibilities for a properly strong-open secularity, it is

necessary to look at the third common form, postmodern secularity. Seeing the dangers

with the closedness of liberal secularity that we have here identified, and seeing the

relation between closed liberalism and secularism, postmodern seculars stress openness

toward other belief systems. However, some take this too far and deny the strong

aspects of liberal secularity. Thus, they create a secularity that is open but also weak.

How this happens we shall see in the next chapter.