

III. Rethinking Secular and Sacred

8. Strength and Openness in Secularity

Introduction

In the previous part of this thesis, I explored secularity both in history and through analyzing various ideal types. I established that it is, indeed, an identifiable worldview with a past and pattern, and differentiated between the types on the axes of strength and weakness, openness and closedness. Of course, as I often reiterated, given that they are ideal types one can not find these forms as such “in nature.” Rather, actors will have characteristics represented by various points along the two axes, and thus express various combinations of attitudes and positions here discretely identified with the types. Moreover, these will change with time and circumstance. However, it is this very flexibility that makes this chapter and the next, the concluding part of this thesis, possible. That one can never find these ideal types “in nature” shows that, while they are useful analytical tools, people are not constrained by them. If people can move along the continua represented by the two axes, then they can progress towards a strong-open position. I identified that this was possible for religion in the first chapter and speculated on its secular expression in the second. Moreover, that people can move along the continua means that one should not reject any of the ideal types outright and specify yet another discrete position that people ought to take. Rather, one should identify where strength and openness can be found in each version of secularity and show how these can form the basis of a strong-open perspective.

In the third chapter, I touched on the concept of the paradigm, and noted that in this thesis I did not intend to introduce a new paradigm of secularity. Rather, I seek to open partially useful paradigms to the insights available in others. As noted in the third chapter, paradigms are both theoretical constructs that shape how one approaches a topic and also contain practical exemplars of actions to take given the theoretical model. Thus, the title of this chapter, and of this thesis, is twofold. First, rethinking secular and

sacred is a theoretical task, entailing a reassessment of the ways in which secular thought responds to religion on a conceptual level. Second, it is a practical matter – rethinking secular approaches to the role of religion in conflict will change the role of secularity by identifying constructive actions secular peacemakers may take.

The last part of the thesis will follow this breakdown. This chapter will reassess secularity and present a strong-open vision of it, and the final chapter will speculate on how that vision would work in practice. That chapter will also indicate some possibilities for future research, both philosophically and practically. First, though, I will analyze strength and openness in secularity, and then introduce the work of some thinkers who have begun to fashion a strong-open secularity, if not in those terms.

Strong, Open Secularity

Strength and Secularity

Strength, as I discussed in the third chapter, can be thought of as being both integral (from integral theory) and realist (from critical realism). There, I defined being integral as combining different perspectives and new knowledge into a more cohesive whole. Thus, it is more a process than a position – there are always alternative theories and new data to take into account, so one can never reach a definitive conclusion, particularly concerning complex issues. This is enhanced by the ontological realism of the critical realist approach. Ontological realism holds that there is a “real world” that is independent of the theories one holds about it. One’s theory may not be definitive, but it is not entirely imaginary. The theory must accord with evidence gathered from experiment. Thus, the key to finding the strength in secularity is to decide which views are convincing, in accordance with the critical realist principle of judgmental rationalism. One can judge whether theories are internally consistent, which is the result of the intellectual work necessary to properly integrate alternatives. One can also judge whether they are externally consistent, which is found when theories accord well with evidence.

Many seculars pride themselves on being well-argued – although whether such is always the case is a different matter. Nonetheless, because a significant part of the history of secularity is a struggle between dogmatism and doctrinaire thinking on the one hand and free thought on the other, many seculars hold reason, logic, and evidence in high regard. This struggle is symbolized by the historical conflict between Christian institutions and early scientists or Enlightenment *philosophes*. This is especially the case in liberal secularity, as discussed in the sixth chapter. Stephen Jay Gould’s nonoverlapping magisteria and Francis Fukuyama’s view of history as an unfolding of better ways to handle human *thymos* are nothing if not well-argued. Both attempt to integrate religion into their system, either as parallel mode of knowing (as with Gould) or historical precursor to liberalism (in Fukuyama’s view). Moreover, both tend to rely on arguments based on externally verifiable evidence rather than *a priori* conclusions. Thus, they are integral and realist as I have defined them. Whether their conclusions are entirely accurate is another matter, but what matters here is the approach they take.

Logic and reason were also held in high esteem by secularists like the Marxist-Leninists, who saw in their scientific atheism a worldview that could displace religion in the Soviet Union. Here, however, they were closer to what I have identified as a weak position rather than a strong one. The key aspect that defines a weak position, concerning the comparison of one worldview to another, is essentialism, the belief that there are essential qualities to belief systems. When taken to an extreme, essentialist thinking assumes that the views people hold are fixed. In secularism, as discussed in the fifth chapter, essentialism is akin to Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger’s primordialism, the belief that religions and secularity are inherently mutually conflictual. For the Marxist-Leninists, secularity had to replace religion to resolve this conflict. For Samuel Huntington, with his *Clash of Civilizations*, conflict was again unavoidable. Although Huntington believed that a healthy respect for other worldviews could ameliorate such conflict, in his view there would always be a gap, perhaps

unbridgeable, between people. Huntington's prescriptions for ameliorating tension between religion and secularity failed to have much purchase because, after a highly essentialist presentation of their division, there was little room to open a dialog.

Somewhat more open is what I identified as the limited understanding of Hasenclever and Rittberger's constructivist position, as found in the postmodern secular perspective. This comes with the misapplication of relativism to hold that all worldviews are incommensurable and that there can be no communication between people who held different views. Even when avoiding the mistakes of simple relativism, the best that one can hope for here is some sort of mutual benign incomprehension. Moreover, a weak but open secularity is unable to extend the benefits of the secular worldview to others. I discussed this in relating the debate between scientific and indigenous knowledge and with Haideh Moghissi's concerns about the utility of postmodernism in answering vital, practical questions, both presented in the seventh chapter.

However, Huntington's work may also indicate the way out of this trap. Similar to R. Scott Appleby's emphasis on literacy as the key to strength in religion, from the first chapter, Huntington enjoins Westerners to strengthen their self-understanding in the face of civilizational clash. We can extrapolate from his civilizational argument to a more specific one counseling that seculars do this. For Huntington, this would bolster their self-identity, a necessary base from which to constructively engage in conflict. Even from a peacemaker's point of view, one can not constructively engage if one is unsure of one's own position. Moreover, as Appleby noted for religious literacy, those who truly know their own background are less likely be swayed by arguments that prevail upon a single element of that background as a justification for violence. If, for example, seculars understood their intellectual history as not only being one of conflict with religion but also one with deep roots in both medieval Western and Arabic intellectual traditions, they would be less likely to essentialize religious and secular

worldviews as being mutually incompatible. They could begin to develop a stronger view of the role of secularity in conflict, as with Fred Halliday's understanding the particular utility of secular knowledge in addressing political and economic concerns. Such a view would necessarily be wary of religious modes of expression. Because of this, strong secularity must be tempered by an openness to treat religion as an equal, if different, partner in dialog. It is to the place of openness in secularity that we now turn.

Openness and Secularity

Following a similar format to the discussion of strength, we first look at openness in terms of the integral and critical realist theories. From the former, openness is *aperspectival* – any theory that the integral imperative produces, no matter how cohesive or explanatory, is not perceived as the final perspective against which all others are measured. Again, this is because integral theory as a whole is more a process than a position – because one knows that there will always be more data as well as competing theories, one never absolutizes the current working theory one has. This is essentially the epistemological relativism of the “critical” side of critical realism. Although all knowledge may be *about* a real, externally existent world, that knowledge is never *equivalent to* that real world. It may be wrong. And, even when it is internally and externally consistent, alternate interpretations and new evidence will arise. Given this, one must always keep an open mind and be critical of claims to knowledge – even, or especially, one's own.

Such an open mind can successfully entertain the complex relativism of the postmodern secular view, exemplified, in part, by Stanley Fish in seventh chapter. Fish's antifoundationalism is nearly the definition of *aperspectivism*. First, he argues that there is no foundation for knowledge, be it an authority or an experiment, that is inherently obvious to all – if only because not everyone is familiar with the authority or has performed the experiment. Then, because of the certainty of new interpretations and information, he contends that one can not privilege any given perspective as immutable

truth. This gives Fish a powerful tool with which to be critical of claims of knowledge. Unfortunately, like many postmodernists, he goes beyond this to become critical of the *possibility* of knowledge regardless of whether it has any external consistency, thereby removing the ground on which a strong secularity is based. Here, J. Wentzel van Huyssteen's *post*-foundationalism can provide a better approach.¹ Van Huyssteen acknowledges that there is no one, absolute form of truth available to all, but recognizes that people will always find new and creative approaches to knowledge. This creates the possibility of shared understandings. And, while any such an approach may be called postmodern in the general parlance, which implies that it supersedes modernity, I have noted its deep roots in secular thought. These reach at least to the Romantic movement and its response to the Enlightenment. Thus, there is ample precedent for an open side to secularity.

The opposite of complex relativism is universalism, the belief that a perspective on truth – usually one's own – is universally valid. In many ways this is similar to Hasenclever and Rittberger's primordialism, mentioned above. A universalist primordialism would hold that not only are religion and secularity inherently opposed, but secularity is the correct view and religion is simply wrong. This is a secularist position, especially as represented by Marxist-Leninist thought. In Marxism-Leninism, an extreme view of Marx's metaphor of religion as the opium of the people, coupled with Engels' scientific atheism, promote Lenin's program that opposes religion for ideological reasons.

A more subtle universalism leads to what Hasenclever and Rittberger call instrumentalism, which I find in liberal secularity. Liberal seculars may tolerate religion, provided it keeps to its proper role – the realm of morality or the private sphere, depending on the particular philosophy. Such circumscribed religion is a component of the universalist understanding in which secularity defines public life.

1 van Huyssteen, J. Wentzel, 1997, "Should We Be Trying so Hard to Be Postmodern? A Reply to Drees, Haught, and Yeager," *Zygon* 32(4): 567-584.

Any extension of religion into politics or public life – and thus any intervention in politics or social conflict – is a violation of that understanding. As such, it can not be a true expression of religion as understood by liberal seculars. Thus, it must be an instrument in the service of those who would use sacred language for worldly ends. This is Halliday's position, who sees secular language as the best way to understand the social or economic aspects of conflict, and religion expression as "confused," an argument I covered in the sixth chapter.

Universalism denies even the possibility of a positive role for religion in exploring, let alone expanding, those aspects of religion that promote peaceful resolutions to conflict. This is despite the evidence of scholars like Douglas Johnston, Cynthia Sampson, R. Scott Appleby, and Marc Gopin to the contrary, as introduced in the first chapter. One of the primary dangers of universalism is that if one does not engage with religion one likely disempowers moderate voices and bolsters equally closed extremists. This was found in the antifundamentalist assumption of both secularism and liberal secularity. When seculars assume that all political religion is reactionary, fundamentalist, and such, they attempt to keep it out of the public sphere. This, however, only hardens the positions of the religiously violent.

For secularity to overcome such a closed universalism, openness to other understandings of issues of religion and belief is required. Here, again, one can even find the seeds for this in secularism. For instance, a more nuanced understanding of Marx shows that, for him, religion was the opium of the people because they used it to overcome suffering created by the class structure. Thus, religion, although not in his view the best expression, was at least an alternative way of expressing class struggle. One could thus easily argue that Marxists must at least pay attention to what religion could illuminate about that struggle, let alone methods they may have to pursue it. More generally, any such approach could begin to open secularity up to the positive potential of religion in conflict situations. Such an approach would require another understanding

of literacy, like that favored by Phil Lewis. As I related in the first chapter, literacy requires that people be literate in the religious traditions of others. This does not necessitate sliding into weakness, as with the misapplication of relativism. For the religious, openness does not mean softness – either Johann Galtung’s positive version, as discussed in the first chapter, or mere weakness. As Gopin highlights, relatively hard, institutionalized structures can still make a point of formalizing openness in ritual and tradition. Likewise, for seculars, as Gilles Kepel noted, studying other views “does not ... make us into either their advocates or their fellow-travellers.”² It can, however, enlighten one as to their views and lay the groundwork for communication.

Strong-Open Secularity

A theme of the third chapter, on theory and methodology, was one of balance, and I found this in both integral theory and critical realism. I described the element of balance in integral theory as being between a breadth of knowledge that seeks to understand new information and a recognition that any understanding is only one of many possible interpretations. Similarly, critical realism is a balance between knowledge that there is an independently existing world to study and the realization that no theory can perfectly describe that world. The critical realist tool of judgmental rationalism is helpful in achieving balance, as it allows one to judge between competing theories, according to their internal and external consistency, without privileging any theory unduly. Moreover, one can also judge judgmental rationalism, to keep from privileging it as the way to define a correct view and thus discount, *a priori*, views that do not hold rationalism in such high regard. Of course, this leads one back to the necessity, and difficulty, of balance. Indeed, balance is the most novel feature of both integral theory and critical realism. Neither attempts to be an entirely new theoretical system. The various perspectives that make up the integral framework, as well as critical epistemology and realist ontology, are fairly well-established philosophical

2 Kepel, Gilles, 1994, Braley, Alan, trans., *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity), p. 11.

ideas. What is new is the way that they are brought together. Without their partners, integralism and aperspectivism as well as criticism and realism are incomplete.

Likewise, strength and openness, when combined in a strong-open secularity, can not truly be separated. It is not enough to merely associate them as “strong and open secularity.” Rather, what one needs is an appreciation of strong-open secularity – secularity with a strong sort of openness and an open sort of strength. The strong secularity that I have been seeking, one that is both integral and realist, must also be open enough to admit that it is not the only possible perspective. It must recognize that there are truths to be gained from other worldviews, although these may need to be translated into secular language. In particular, strong secularity must recognize that religion is not its subordinate – that it is not necessarily a private concern or simply a historical precedent of modernity. Otherwise, strength becomes closed universalism. At the same time, for open secularity to be aperspectival and critical, to truly entertain the complex relativism that understands all approaches to truth as incomplete, it must also be strong. It must be able to assess both its own arguments and those of others, lest it fall into uncritical, weak essentialism.

The many pitfalls of eschewing either strength or openness, let alone both, have been evident throughout the I cases presented while discussing the various approaches to secularity. Weak, closed secularism nearly guarantees conflict, partly by assuming that it will happen, but also because it seems to encourage weak, closed religion. Two examples of this are the way the Yugoslav communist regime tended to promote only nominal shells of religious institutions, which did not have the inner resources to shape a peaceful response to nationalism, and the heavy-handed crackdown on Islam in Algeria that marginalized potential moderates. Strong, closed liberal secularity, on the other hand, probably tends to promote its opposite in religion. The sort of religion encouraged by liberal secularity is one that accepts that it is a private matter. This hampers the ability of the religious to publicly oppose violent interpretations of religion.

For instance, presuming that all public manifestations of religion are negative in Northern Ireland means one will not support strong religious peacemakers who could effectively counter the intransigence of an Ian Paisley. Likewise, weak, open postmodernist secularity encourages strong, closed religions. In India, “openness” to all forms of knowledge solely because of their supposed indigenaity enabled hard-line Hindu factions to push their agenda.

As I discussed in the third chapter, Huntington was correct to state that one needs a good overarching paradigm or map that, while it may necessarily simplify complex issues, enables one to avoid the more obvious pitfalls. Although I do not believe the strong-open idea to be a paradigm in the fullest sense, it does do this. By balancing strength and openness, eschewing neither, strong-open secularity can avoid the more obvious dangers of intellectual essentialism and universalism. However, as I also noted in the third chapter, when dealing with religion (or any subject involving people) one can never say that a theory is “mapping a territory,” as is more metaphorically possible in the sciences. In social interaction, people will respond to the manner in which they are addressed. It is here that the advantages of a strong-open approach are best found. Beyond the theoretical dangers of essentialism and universalism, the various dangers mentioned above are shaped by the human element. Weakness and closedness invite not just intellectual problems but interpersonal ones. Thus, it is not so much as paradigm but as guidelines for interaction that the strong-open approach best serves. As such, it is less a new theory than it is a metatheory – while current approaches are useful enough, it is necessary to address the overall way in which one uses them.

When considering the best approach to a situation of conflict, Hasenclever and Rittberger recommend their constructivist approach to religion, the best version of which I associate with strong-open religion in the first chapter. This is a strategy of dialog that focuses on delegitimizing the use of force in conflict.³ Any proper dialog

3 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, p. 665.

will also entail behavioral and structural change as conflicting parties come to a peaceful resolution, but the focus is on mutual understanding and communication, not on material needs. This is because the salient problem in conflict across worldviews is miscommunication about needs, not the needs themselves. I refine this emphasis on dialog by understanding a truly strong-open dialog as one of critical engagement. Like my discussion of strong-open itself, the two components of critical engagement should not be dissociated. “Critical” is not just self-applied relativism that leads to openness because one never assumes one’s absolute rightness, it is also strong in that it bespeaks critical knowledge of the other. Literacy, in both Appleby’s and Lewis’s senses, is necessary here. Likewise, “engagement” is not merely open acceptance, it is a willingness to debate with the other. Thus, as with the full meaning of strong-open, critical engagement is one concept – a critical sort of engagement and an engaged sort of criticism.

Strong-open secularity as enacted through critical engagement fulfills the normative commitment of peace studies, as discussed in the second chapter. From Adam Curle’s presentation, that commitment entails seeking nonviolent means to move from unpeaceful situations, which disadvantage some or all of those involved, to peaceful ones, which are beneficial to all. One of the strengths of secularity, particularly liberal secularity, is that it champions reason as a way to identify which problems most contribute to unpeaceful situations and to implement change. This was Halliday’s argument, presented in the sixth chapter. However, one can not forget the importance of beliefs on shaping what people understand to be important. As Fish argued, related in the seventh chapter, there is no statement of truth that is inherently obvious to all. Imposing a resolution to a conflict, no matter how well-meant, is a subtle form of violence because it disempowers those who have had their conflict “resolved.” The strong-open approach balances these two needs for promoting peace and doing so nonviolently. It does this by emphasizing both the strength of secularity, as with the

liberal focus on correcting ills through economic and political development, and its potential for openness as found in properly applied postmodern relativism.

As with integral theory, critical engagement is a process, not a position. The purpose of this thesis has not been to give a final pronouncement on how all “religious conflicts” can be resolved, but rather to outline the sort of general approach that would best address the religious elements of any given conflict. However, by the discussion of paradigms in the third chapter, it is not enough to solely outline an overarching view. A paradigm also gives practical exemplars that demonstrate its utility. The same is true in this case, as I contend that this “meta-paradigm” will have practical benefit. Whereas the previous section drew on the analytical chapters of this thesis and thus worked with points already presented, this next section will draw more from the works of various authors that illustrate ways to apply aspects of a strong-open thinking. These will, however, remain relatively abstract points – each case is different, so to take on too much initial detail, even as hypothetical arguments, would limit the applicability of the example. Such a hypothetical approach has its uses, and will follow in the next chapter. First, though, we look at examples of strong-open secularity as expressed in theory. The first ideas we shall discuss are those pertaining to the role of strength in secularity, although, as I noted, these are incomplete without an appreciation of open ideas and their integration, which follow.

Strong-Open Secularity in Practice

Strong Ideas

The root of strength is its dedication to seek the truth through well-argued, reasonable inquiry. A good example of how this works in practice is “Basinger’s Rule,” summarized by David Basinger in an article entitled “Religious Diversity: Where Exclusivists Often Go Wrong.”⁴ While his article addresses religious believers, the rule – that any claim to knowledge must be backed up with a reasonable attempt to resolve

4 Basinger, David, 2000, “Religious Diversity: Where Exclusivists Often Go Wrong,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 47(1): 43–55.

epistemic differences with those who disagree – is equally applicable to seculars. This is not, however, an absolute position. Basinger notes that it applies only when one believes that those with whom one disagrees are well-meaning and well-informed. One can still hold one’s beliefs to be sufficiently strong without defending them against arguments born of ill-will or misinformation. However, to avoid discounting valid arguments, the one must prove whether or not one’s opponents are true peers.

Basinger addresses a challenge made by Jerome Gellman, who argues that people hold “rock-bottom beliefs.” Because these beliefs function as the *starting point* for assessment, they are not themselves assessable. Thus, they can not be subject to Basinger’s rule.⁵ Gellman’s argument is similar to Fish’s antifoundationalism – there is no rock-bottom belief that all people share, so eventually even well-meaning disagreement will boil down to an opposition between contrary rock-bottom beliefs. There the argument will reach an impasse. Basinger counters that, while people may hold rock-bottom beliefs at any given time, these change. Moreover, he has found that such beliefs tend to change not because others have definitively proven them wrong but because the presence of honest disagreement can lead people to reassess their own beliefs.⁶ Thus, Basinger’s rule would subject even rock-bottom beliefs to analysis in the event of well-meant epistemological differences. This combines the imperative to find strength through debate with enough openness to avoid deeming certain topics off limits. Moreover, it does so while avoiding the essentialism of Gellman’s or Fish’s view – Basinger does not assume that views are eternally unchanging. Thus, it is the open sort of strength we are looking for.

Another, more practical concept that indicates an open sort of strength is Ashutosh Varshney’s work, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*.⁷

Varshney investigated the way in which intercommunal civil society – non-state public

5 Ibid., pp. 48-53 passim.

6 Ibid., pp. 51-52.

7 Varshney, Ashutosh, 2002, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

life – can ameliorate intercommunal tensions. He found that formal groupings such as business associations and trade unions were effective at resisting intercommunal tensions, particularly by countering unscrupulous politicians who would try to capitalize on divisions. Informal associations were more likely to fracture under the stress of communal tension. To Varshney, who is an economist and based very much in the realist socioeconomic worldview, one of the key features of his research was that it focused on why certain cities in India stayed peaceful, instead of solely on why some are riot-prone.⁸ Although not technically what I mean by “open,” that Varshney studied peaceful interactions between communities is a step in the right direction, in that by doing so he does not assume inherent opposition between groups. Thus, he avoided the essentialist trap. Moreover, such research helps demonstrate how relatively strong, formal social structures can institutionalize openness, as Gopin argued.

However, Varshney’s research does not consider *intra*-communal interactions. This is not a failing of Varshney’s work, as he indicates from the beginning that his research is solely intercommunal. Yet it is the internal discourses of a given community that will justify amongst its members why they should formally associate with others. It is for this very reason that Appleby counsels the development of strong belief systems. Varshney does indicate some directions for research that would highlight this aspect. Notable among these is an article by James Fearon and David Laitin on “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation.”⁹ Using game theory, Fearon and Laitin investigate how “in-group policing,” intracommunal punishment of those who harm members of another community, works to quell intercommunal tension. Self-policing demonstrates to the other community that one’s community believes that such violations by its members are unacceptable. While their work is theoretical and thus needs more empirical

8 I contend that this perspective is not as novel as he thinks it is – researching peace is the *raison d’être* of peace studies – but that it is not common knowledge indicates a failure on the part of peace studies to publicize well.

9 Fearon, James D., and Laitin, David D., 1996, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation,” *American Political Science Review* 90(4): 715-735.

investigation, it makes a cogent argument for why it is in the best interest of groups to prevent members of their own communities from attacking members of another, and why it is important that this be overt and demonstrable. Thus, combining Varshney's work with research such as Fearon's and Laitin's, one can make two practical suggestions. The first is to institute formal dialog over issues of mutual concern, which one should couple with mutual guarantees that belief (and difference in belief) is not in itself at issue, let alone justification for attack.

Issues that bridge the secular-religious divide are a concern of Karen Armstrong, who makes recommendations for how seculars can interact with fundamentalists in *The Battle for God*.¹⁰ She specifically eschews suppression and coercion, as well as simply exploiting religious belief systems to achieve secular ends. The former I have identified as secularist methods, and the latter would require a liberal secular, instrumentalist understanding of religion. Rather, she notes that fundamentalisms are not archaic forms of belief but are as much a response to modern conditions as is secularity. Thus, they will share modern concerns, such as the role of private ethical and moral beliefs in public life or the increasing power of technology. If seculars can understand how contemporary religious movements address these issues and why they appeal to believers, seculars can put forward alternatives in a more nuanced way. This does not necessitate that seculars deny what they believe to be true. For instance, Armstrong argued that "fundamentalists have turned the *mythos* [belief systems] of their religion into *logos* [practical knowledge], either by insisting that their dogmas are scientifically true, or by transforming their complex mythology into a streamlined ideology."¹¹ Seculars would tend to oppose these moves, but should still seek to understand what appeal such beliefs have so that they can better address areas of shared concern.

I presented an effective way to pursue such an understanding in the third chapter, with Michael Agar's strip/schema approach to ethnography. Agar's method is to

10 Armstrong, Karen, 2000, *The Battle for God* (New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf), pp. 368-370.

11 Ibid., p. 366.

identify the actions or apparent beliefs of others as “strips.” These strips may not make sense in one’s own worldview, but in the language of that worldview one can construct a “schema” that explains the strip – “if they feel X or do Y in this situation, they must believe Z to be true.” One then compares this schema to other strips to see if it still holds, and if it does not one modifies it until it does. In this way, a secular can construct a schema that addresses religious belief systems while maintaining a fundamentally secular language. Indeed, this is done quite often, as people attempt to explain the behaviors of others in terms they understand. Unfortunately, bias can often lead to a prejudiced selection of strips, as seculars can do when they acknowledge only those strips that support a schema in which religious people are inherently conflictual or irrational. True strip/schema analysis must include an appreciation of all the known behaviors of the other, both negative and positive, and generate a suitably complex schema to account for them. With such a methods, one can come to understand the nuances of religious belief. This will allow one to develop schema that help explain the ways in which areas of mutual concern are perceived by the religious. One can then begin to craft a secular response that can also appeal to the religious.

Open Ideas

This strong impulse within secularity (and within any worldview), to extend its truths and their benefits to others, leads one to the necessity for a balancing openness. With Armstrong’s recommendations for responding to fundamentalism and Agar’s strip/schema method, one is moving from merely responding *to* the existence of other views to interacting *with* them. In some ways, this recalls the topic of discourse and intercultural communication that I introduced in the third chapter. When trying to communicate “cross-schema,” there is a great potential for miscommunication merely because statements and events are parsed differently. Thus, the first idea for practicing openness may be to attempt to translate as well as possible. This applies in both directions – just as one should avoid a prejudiced selection of strips, which produces an

oversimplified schema, one also ought to be wary of the ways in which statements that make sense in one's own worldview can be misunderstood in another. Simply avoiding miscommunication may resolve a number of potential difficulties even before they arise.

However, not all difficulties in communication are the result of misunderstanding. Here, one runs headlong into Basinger's rule, that if there are well-meant epistemological differences, one must attempt to resolve such differences before one can claim to have the strongest possible view. While this is a rule that encourages strength, as it encourages beliefs that have the most robust intellectual backing, it also lends itself to openness. Given that it recommends self-analysis when engaging with others with whom one disagrees, one must be open to both engaging in the first place and then to refashioning positions one holds by considering the views of others. However, there is still the issue of rock-bottom beliefs, which pose particular difficulties when the disagreement is across worldviews. Disagreements between seculars and the religious often involve issues like the nature and sources of "truth." Here, the conversation on the nature of scientific truth I introduced in the sixth chapter is helpful. That conversation was between Kurt Gödel and Rudolf Carnap, as assessed by Alfred Gierer, on the role of theological concepts as potential scientific hypotheses.¹² Gödel contended that, belief in their final implications aside, if theological concepts have observable consequences, they are amenable to scientific investigation. More generally, although a secular may not accept the totality of a religious worldview, he or she ought to consider points made from such a perspective for what insights they may bring to the secular understanding. This is, in effect, moving from using strips to create a schema that represent the views of the other to actually entertaining the views of the other.

It is worth reiterating here that Basinger's rule explicitly only considers epistemological differences that occur in an atmosphere of goodwill. The rule only applies if one wants to claim one has the most well-thought-out position in an

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

evenhanded debate. Basinger does not believe that one need reassess the beliefs one holds when confronted with an intransigent person unwilling to do the same. By extension, one is certainly not obliged to do so when suffering the threat of violence, a threat that unfortunately marks many conflicts where belief is a factor. However, even in such a conflict, there is often ample cause for openness on the part of seculars. One must consider, as I demonstrated in the first chapter, that religions are internally plural. Although some people may justify intransigence or even violence according to their beliefs, others will explicitly reject doing so by a different reading of the same traditions. To refrain from engaging with all members of a religion because of the actions of a few means excluding such people, and it is they, not seculars, who are best placed to argue the relevant theological or doctrinal points with their fellow believers. As such, even in difficult conflicts it is worth remaining open.

Douglas Johnston and Brian Cox present a simple method for doing so when they encourage secular policymakers to include, in the institutional structure of diplomacy and conflict resolution, those with a mandate to understand and represent religious interests. Religious attachés in policy development and diplomacy could act much as cultural or labor attachés currently do in their fields, by presenting information about religious concerns that are relevant to decision-makers. Military chaplains, who in many Western militaries already give such advice in addition to their traditional role as spiritual counselors to troops, could expand their role.¹³ Here we have Lewis's idea of religious literacy, that people be well-informed of the complexity of belief systems other than their own, put in a concrete form usable by largely secular policy and military institutions. If such openness is institutionalized (and those with a preexisting role are better utilized), institutions could avoid falling into a closed universalism in which everything is understood according to the collective worldview. However, as noted in

13 Johnston, Douglas, and Cox, Brian, 2003, "Faith-Based Diplomacy and Preventive Engagement," in: Johnston, ed., *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), pp. 24-26.

the seventh chapter, Johnston and Cox's recommendations stop at including religious specialists in formal structures and do not extend into addressing the way secular people think about religion and belief.

Gerd Baumann addresses this topic, among others, in *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*. Baumann contends that the most common understanding of multiculturalism is the "diversity parade," in which as many groups as possible are included in the organized representation of difference.¹⁴ While this may help promote a superficial understanding of the *fact* of difference, it does not address the perspectives of the groups represented. In our terms, it weakly essentializes the various groups by presenting them as reified entities, not as internally plural groups. Baumann's perspective is that multiculturalism would be better served by attending to identifications, not identity. Identities are unchanging, whereas identifications are temporary. Baumann contends that although in some circumstances people reify a given identification – as a religious or secular person, say – in other situations they see it as relative to a whole host of further identifications. Baumann focuses on interrelationship of nationality and race or ethnicity, which tend to have great impact on intercommunal interactions. However, he notes that one could also include class, gender, sexuality, age, and other factors that may impinge on interpersonal relations. Thus, a proper multiculturalist understanding must include the potential interplay of any number of factors in people's self-identification. Of course, people and groups can reify religious identity, as is often the case in a conflict with a religious element, so the sort of openness that focuses *on* difference is important. The institutional recommendations cited above do this. However, without a broader understanding of the way religious identities mix with other identifications, seculars run the risk of overemphasizing that one aspect and thus becoming trapped by it.

14 Baumann, Gerd, 1999, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*, "Zones of Religion" series (New York, NY: Routledge), p. 122.

Applying Strength and Openness

As a common refrain of this thesis has been balance, it should be obvious that I intend the above practical points to be used together and not that one approach or the other is most important. Basinger's injunction to resolve epistemic differences and Gödel's approach to doing so through adopting religious concepts as testable hypotheses, where possible, is one possible example. Likewise, Varshney's and Johnston's and Cox's institutional recommendations can work in parallel. Indeed, specialists such as those Johnston and Cox propose can help enable people to better understand the internal dynamics of other communities so that they may better respond to them. Truly, as I indicated in the previous section, strength and openness can not be separated from one another. The strength of Basinger's rule, say, is predicated on being open enough to admit that one may be wrong and that truth may be found outside of one's own theories. Likewise, Gödel's openness requires the strength to properly analyze such hypotheses as may be provided by religious thought.

However, at times the dictates of strength and openness may seem to contradict one another. In applying Hasenclever and Rittberger's dialog strategy aimed at delegitimizing the use of violence, as mentioned above, when does maintaining openness toward and dialog with a religious group become acceptance of, or at least tolerance of, real or potential violence? Religions as a whole may be very internally diverse and thus potentially contain peace-minded believers. However, individual representatives of a faith may hew to a much more limited interpretation of their faith. Moreover, people in leadership positions must speak for, and to an extent answer to, a wide range of followers. At times those followers will include the violent, and so individual leaders are often circumscribed in what interpretations of tradition they may make. In such a case, although one can seek more peace-minded members of that community to help act as go-betweens, directly dealing with an intransigent individual will always be difficult.

Yet even here it should be possible to maintain some observance of the imperatives of both strength and openness. Raymond Helmick counsels that one ought to explore the various forms a religion takes while remaining skeptical of its institutions.¹⁵ This could be done by maintaining contact with an array of members of a faith community, both official and unofficial, who adhere to different positions. Doing so would allow one to stay abreast of developments within a religious community while avoiding equating it with any particular institutional manifestation. While this runs the risk of alienating those who claim to speak for the entire body of believers, as the internal discourse develops one is then better-placed to interact with emerging leaders and also to represent secular concerns to the community at large. It is possible that one can truly find no members of a faith community with whom to talk – although this would likely only happen in an exceedingly small group. In that case, strength, as per Basinger’s rule, does not require that one sacrifice one’s beliefs. However, openness requires that the secular acknowledge *that* there is a difference of belief and also that future interaction is always possible.

Such a complete gap between secular and religious people, particularly between communities of any great size, is highly unlikely. More often the problem for seculars will be judging how to respond to developments within a religious community. If, following Armstrong’s suggestion, one is able to communicate a secular answer to a mutual question in a way that engages the religious, one must then consider how best to convey methods that enact that answer. Or, if one seeks to observe the play of identifications as per Baumann’s multiculturalism, one must consider what to expect where issues of belief are concerned. Here, one must differentiate between adoption and adaptation. Closed secular approaches hold that if the religious understand secular concepts they should adopt, without change, secular forms, as with Hasenclever’s and

15 Helmick, Raymond G. (SJ), 2001, “Does Religion Fuel or Heal in Conflicts?” in: Helmick and Petersen, Rodney L., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press): 81-95, p. 93.

Rittberger's strategies of democratization and development. Weak secular approaches maintain that, because of essential differences in belief, this is impossible. Overlooked, often, is the possibility of adaptation, that secular concepts may be parsed according to the traditions of the religious and then expressed in ways that, although novel, are also consonant with the core teachings of the religion. Indeed, as many commentators have pointed out, even supposedly "traditionalist" fundamentalisms often include such novel interpretations of tradition as a response to contemporary needs. Contrariwise, attempts at secularization that have failed, as in many Arab nations, have done so in part because they demanded adoption of secular forms without any real possibility of reinterpretation.

More important than any of these points, though, I would echo Peter Berger's caution in his introduction to *The Desecularization of the World*: nothing can replace a case-by-case understanding of the interaction of religious and secular groups and the issues that pertain.¹⁶ Such an approach is key to what I have called critical engagement. It is only with a nuanced understanding that one can properly respond to a situation and judge which elements of a strong-open secularity apply. As I mentioned above, strong-open critical engagement is not a position to take, but a process – not so much what to do, but how to do it. Any practical points made are thus illustrative and not definitive.

Finally, the strength and openness in secularity must be reflexive. That is, they apply equally to secular belief as to religious. Rather than merely being a useful tool for understanding religion, strong-open secularity is an approach to worldview more generally. In the second chapter, I defined both religion and secularity as worldviews. This does not equate the two. They are in too many ways different to say, as some do, that secularity (or science, or liberalism) is a form of religion. However, in as much as religion and secularity are ways of looking at the world that shape how people act, a strong-open approach towards both is vital to promoting peacemaking where belief of

16 Berger, Peter L., 1999, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in: Berger, ed., 1999, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans): 1-18, p. 18.

any sort is a factor in conflict. For one, doing so is beneficial in and of itself for secular thought. Moreover, whereas weak and closed forms of secularity easily feed into cycles that produce weak and closed forms of religion, strong-open secularity does not. Thus, should secular peacemakers seek to encourage strength and openness in religion, as described in the first chapter, the place to start is within secularity itself.

Conclusion

With that, I conclude this analysis of strength and openness in secularity. To reiterate, strength is a measure of the robustness of a worldview. It is founded in Appleby's understanding of literacy, that members of a group know their own beliefs. In the case of secularity, this places particular attention on the role of reason in approaching the world and the conflicts that arise within it. Weakness, on the other hand, is rooted in essentialism, the belief that worldviews, secular or religious, have some sort of essential character that prevents true communication. Real openness is the recognition that one's own view is not necessarily shared by all, but that engagement is still possible. Here, Lewis's concept of literacy, that it entails knowledge of what others believe, is equally valuable. This is in contrast with closedness, which is a universalist perspective that holds that one's view is right for all people. Strength, taken too far, feeds into closed universalist assumptions. Likewise, openness, taken too far, can turn into a weak essentialism that holds that groups are inherently separate. Whereas the best expressions of both strength and openness rest on each other in a strong-open balance, losing either brings the danger of sliding into a weak-closed perspective. One needs to open strong secularity and strengthen weak secularity to create a strong-open perspective without falling into either essentialism or universalism. It is a delicate balance.

That such a delicate balance is possible I have demonstrated. However, the examples of strong-open secularity in action I presented here were still somewhat abstract. This was because, as I cautioned, what is needed in providing practical solutions is a

nuanced, case-by-case understanding of the issues at hand in any given conflict. While the conclusions presented here are adequate given that caution, I understand the utility of more richly detailed, case-based examples in illustrating principles. To clearly differentiate how I would apply these conclusions to specific contexts, I have saved such examples for the next chapter. As that chapter will conclude this thesis, I will also indicate directions for future research, particularly ones that lie outside the limits I have chosen for this study.