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Elizabeth Shakman Hurd: The Politics of Secularism in International Relations

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Introduction

RELIGION IS A PROBLEM in the field of international relations at two distinct levels. First, in recent years religious fundamentalism and religious difference have emerged as crucial factors in international conflict, national security, and foreign policy. This development has come as a surprise to many scholars and practitioners. Much contemporary foreign policy, especially in the United States, is being quickly rewritten to account for this change. Second, the power of this religious resurgence in world politics does not fit into existing categories of thought in academic international relations. Conventional understandings of international relations, focused on material capabilities and strategic interaction, exclude from the start the possibility that religion could be a fundamental organizing force in the international system.

This book argues that these two problems are facets of a single underlying phenomenon: the unquestioned acceptance of the secularist division between religion and politics. Standard privatization and differentiation accounts of religion and politics need to be reexamined. Secularism needs to be analyzed as a form of political authority in its own right, and its consequences evaluated for international relations. This is the objective of this book. My central motivating question is how, why, and in what ways does secular political authority form part of the foundation of contemporary international relations theory and practice, and what are the political consequences of this authority in international relations? I argue, first, that the secularist division between religion and politics is not fixed but rather socially and historically constructed; second, that the failure to recognize this explains why students of international relations have been unable to properly recognize the power of religion in world politics; and, finally, that overcoming this problem allows a better understanding of crucial empirical puzzles in international relations, including the conflict between the United States and Iran, controversy over the enlargement of the European Union to include Turkey, the rise of political Islam, and the broader religious resurgence both in the United States and elsewhere.

This argument makes four contributions to international relations theory. First, secularism is an example of what Barnett and Duvall describe as “productive power” in international relations, defined as “the socially diffuse production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification.”¹ Secularism is a form of productive power that “inheres in structures and discourses that are not possessed or controlled by any single actor.”² The issue, then, is not

the attitude of individual social scientists toward religion and politics (though this is also an interesting subject) but the “ideological conditions that give point and force to the theoretical apparatuses employed to describe and objectify” the secular and the religious.³ These theoretical apparatuses are identified in this book as laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism. These traditions of secularism are collective dispositions that shape modern sensibilities, habits, and beliefs regarding the secular and the religious. Secular theory and practice are given equal footing here in accordance with MacIntyre’s argument that “there ought not to be two histories, one of political and moral action and one of political and moral theorizing, because there were not two pasts, one populated only by actions, the other only by theories. Every action is the bearer and expression of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorizing and every expression of belief is a political and moral action.”⁴

Second, this book examines the connections between secularist tradition and contemporary forms of nationalism. As Anthony Marx has argued, “despite denials and formal commitments to liberal secularism, the glue of religious exclusion as a basis for domestic national unity has still not been fully abandoned.”⁵ Taking Marx’s argument about religious exclusion and national unity as a starting point, I shift the focus from religion and toward the ways in which modern forms of secularism have been consolidated both through and against religion as bases of unity and identity in ways that are often exclusionary. Like Asad, I am interested in “how certain practices, concepts, and sensibilities have helped to organize, in different places and different times, political arrangements called secularism”⁶ and how these arrangements inflect modern forms of national identification.

Third, this book challenges the separation of the domestic and international spheres by illustrating how individual states and suprastate actors construct their interests and identities. As Wæver suggests, “it seems that constructivism has for contingent reasons started out working mostly at the systemic level,” and there is a need to consider the “benefits of the opposite direction.”⁷ In his critique of Wendt’s exclusive focus on systemic-level factors, Ringmar argues that “a theory of the construction of identities and interests is radically incomplete as long as it views individuals and collective entities only from the perspective of the system.”⁸ Referring to the work of Lynch and Barnett, Saide-man describes “the power of constructivist theorizing when domestic politics is made a central part of the story.”⁹ This focus on the domestic angle counters a tendency in international relations theory, identified by Hall in his study of the systemic consequences of national collective identity, to “relegate domestic-societal interaction, sources of conflict, or societal cohesiveness (such as ethnic, religious, or other domestic sources) to the status of epiphenomena.”¹⁰ Situated at the interface of domestic and international politics, this book contributes to the attempt to redress this structural and systemic bias in international relations theory by demonstrating how shared interests, identities, and

understandings involving religion and politics developed at the domestic and regional levels become influential at the systemic level.¹¹ To paraphrase Hall, my objective is to “uncover the consequences of [secularist] collective identity . . . in the modern era within a framework that results in a useful correction to an existing body of theoretical literature.”¹² In the process, I explore the cultural and normative foundations of modern international relations.

Fourth, this book presents an alternative to the assumption that religion is a private affair. This assumption is common in realist, liberal, and most constructivist international relations theory. Conventional wisdom has it that between 1517 and the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 religion mattered in European politics. Since Westphalia, however, religion has been largely privatized. The idea behind this “Westphalian presumption” is that religion had to be marginalized, privatized, or overcome by a cosmopolitan ethic to secure international order.¹³ One result of this presumption is that in most accounts of international relations “religion is thus essentially peripheral, and reflection on international politics is pursued as if it concerned an autonomous space that is not fundamentally disturbed by its presence.”¹⁴ I argue that authoritative forms of secularism that dominate modern politics are themselves contingent social constructions influenced by both so-called secular and religious assumptions about ethics, metaphysics, and politics. From this perspective, not only is religion on its way back into international relations—it never really departed. The conventional understanding that religion was fully privatized in 1648 appears as another dimension of what Teschke has described as the “myth of 1648.”¹⁵ As Taylor argues, “the origin point of modern Western secularism was the Wars of Religion; or rather, the search in battle-fatigue and horror for a way out of them. The need was felt for a ground of coexistence for *Christians* of different confessional persuasions.”¹⁶ If Westphalia signaled *both* a dramatic break from the past *and* “a consolidation and codification of a new conception of political authority”¹⁷ that was secular and also deeply Christian, then perhaps contemporary international relations is witnessing the gradual emergence of a series of post-Westphalian, postsecular conceptions of religiopolitical authority. These developments, combined with the Christian dimensions of the original Westphalian settlement, make it difficult to subsume international relations into realist and liberal frameworks that operate on the assumption that religion is irrelevant to state behavior.¹⁸ In some ways, we are back to Europe in 1517. In other ways, we never left.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The politics of secularism has gone virtually unacknowledged in political science. The consensus surrounding secularism in the social sciences has been “such that not only did the theory remain uncontested but apparently it was

not even necessary to test it, since everybody took it for granted.”¹⁹ As Keddie suggests, “questions of control and of power . . . all too rarely enter the discussions of secularism.”²⁰ In international relations and foreign policy, the politics of secularism have been sidelined, as Brooks observes:

Our foreign policy elites . . . go for months ignoring the force of religion; then, when confronted with something inescapably religious, such as the Iranian revolution or the Taliban, they begin talking of religious zealotry and fanaticism, which suddenly explains everything. After a few days of shaking their heads over the fanatics, they revert to their usual secular analyses. We do not yet have, and sorely need, a mode of analysis that attempts to merge the spiritual and the material.²¹

To approach secularism as a discursive tradition and form of political authority is neither to justify it nor to argue for what Mahmood describes as “some irreducible essentialism or cultural relativism.”²² It is instead “to take a necessary step toward explaining the force that a discourse commands.”²³ As Chatterjee argues, “the task is to trace in their mutually conditioned historicities the specific forms that have appeared, on the one hand, in the domain defined by the hegemonic project of [secular] modernity, and on the other, in the numerous fragmented resistances to that normalizing project.”²⁴ This also involves an attempt to forge “the link between collective identities and the institutional forms of collective action derived from those identities.”²⁵

This book is structured around three sets of arguments that develop and illustrate my overarching claim that the traditions of secularism described here are an important source of political authority in international relations. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the constitution of these forms of secularist authority and their relationship to religion. While on the one hand secularism emerged out of and remains indebted to both the Enlightenment critique of religion and Judeo-Christian tradition (chapter 2), on the other hand it has been constituted and reproduced through opposition to particular representations of Islam (chapter 3). Chapter 4 introduces domestic Turkish and Iranian renegotiations of the secular. Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate how secularism contributes to political outcomes in international relations between the West and the Middle East. Understanding relations between Europe, the United States, and the countries of the Middle East and North Africa requires accounting not only for the geopolitical and material circumstances of the states involved but also for the social and cultural context within which international politics unfolds. This context is shaped by the politics of secularism. Chapters 7 and 8 describe the implications of my argument for attempts to theorize political Islam and religious resurgence.

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the history and politics of the secularist traditions described in this book, their relationship to religion, and their implications for international relations theory and practice. Chapter 2 describes the history of secularism and its relation to both the Enlightenment critique of

religion and Judeo-Christian tradition. I argue that two trajectories of secularism, or two strategies for managing the relationship between religion and politics, are influential in international relations: laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism. The former refers to a separationist narrative in which religion is expelled from politics, and the latter to a more accommodationist narrative in which Judeo-Christian tradition is the unique basis of secular democracy. These forms of secularism are discursive traditions.²⁶ They each defend some form of the separation of church and state but in different ways and with different justifications and different political effects. Both aspire to what Casanova refers to as the “core and central thesis of the theory of secularization”: the functional differentiation of the secular and the religious spheres.²⁷ Laicism, however, also adopts two corollaries to this differentiation argument, advocating the privatization and, in some cases, the decline or elimination of religious belief and practice altogether.²⁸ These two varieties of secularism take us some distance toward understanding the assumptions about religion and politics that underlie theory and practice in international relations. They help to explain the practices and lived traditions that are associated with contemporary forms of secularism. As LeVine and Salvatore argue, “the most dynamic core of a tradition resides . . . not in codified procedures or established institutions, but rather in the anthropologically and sociologically more complex level of the ‘living tradition,’ which overlaps more institutionally grounded levels yet is nurtured by social practice.”²⁹

With its origins in the French term *laïcité*,³⁰ the objective of laicism is to create a neutral public space in which religious belief, practices, and institutions have lost their political significance, fallen below the threshold of political contestation, or been pushed into the private sphere. The mixing of religion and politics is regarded as irrational and dangerous. For modernization to take hold, religion must be separated from politics.³¹ In order to democratize, it is essential to secularize. Either a country is prodemocracy, pro-Western, and secular, or it is religious, tribal, and theocratic. Laicism adopts and expresses a pretense of neutrality regarding the assumption that a fixed and final separation between religion and politics is both possible and desirable. This makes it difficult for those who have been shaped by and draw upon this tradition to see the limitations of their own conceptions of religion and politics. In other words, laicism presents itself as having risen above the messy debate over religion and politics, standing over and outside the melee in a neutral space of its own creation. The politics of laicism is more complex than is suggested by this alleged resolution.

The second tradition of secularism that is influential in the international relations literature emphasizes the role of Christianity, and more recently Judeo-Christianity, as the foundation for secular public order and democratic political institutions. Unlike laicism, what I call Judeo-Christian secularism does not attempt to expel religion, or at least Judeo-Christianity, from public

life. It does not present the religious-secular divide as a clean, essentialized, and bifurcated relationship, as in laicism. This form of secularism therefore seems counterintuitive, at least at first. It corresponds only in part with Berger's authoritative definition of secularization as "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."³² For in this second trajectory of secularism, Euro-American secular public life is securely grounded in a larger Christian, and later Judeo-Christian, civilization. This is a Tocquevillian approach to secularism in which "Christianity does not need to be invoked that often because it is already inscribed in the prediscursive dispositions and cultural instincts of the civilization."³³ Judeo-Christian dispositions and cultural instincts are perceived to have culminated in and contributed to the unique Western achievement of the separation of church and state. In this tradition, "separation of church and state functions to soften sectarian divisions between Christian sects while retaining the civilizational hegemony of Christianity in a larger sense."³⁴ Although sectors of Western society and culture have been partially removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols à la Berger, political order in the West remains firmly grounded in a common set of core values with their roots in Latin Christendom.

Secularism, in its Judeo-Christian trajectory, is one of these core values. It is part of a Christian, later Judeo-Christian, theopolitical inheritance that constitutes the "common ground" upon which Western democracy rests. The West, Samuel Huntington argues, displays a unique dualism between God and Caesar, church and state that is essential for democracy to flourish. Secular government must be firmly embedded in the Judeo-Christian faith for democracy to survive. The West's religious heritage bolsters democracy by offering a set of common assumptions within which politics can be conducted. Religious tradition is a source of political cohesion and moral sustenance; citizens who share religious sensibilities and enter into democratic deliberation will produce something approaching a moral consensus.³⁵ The "West" is defined by its secular *and* Judeo-Christian political culture and tradition. They go together. This is Judeo-Christian secularism.

The tradition of Judeo-Christian secularism is mobilized in many contexts, but perhaps its most significant effect in international relations is to fuel the conviction that non-Western civilizations and in particular Islamic civilization lack the tools to differentiate between religion and politics. In this view secularism is seen as a unique Western achievement. In international relations, the presumption that secular order is uniquely suited to a particular geographical region (the West) and a particular set of people (Europeans and their descendants) reinforces religious divisions and encourages their adoption as the basis of exclusive forms of political community.

Chapter 3 continues the analysis of the history and politics of secularism but shifts the focus to the relation between secularism and representations

of Islam. If the traditions of secularism identified in chapter 2 are deeply intertwined with both Enlightenment values and Judeo-Christianity, they have a different yet equally important relationship to Islam. More than any other single religious or political tradition, Islam represents the “nonsecular” in European and American political discourse. This is because secularist traditions, and the European and American national identities and practices with which they are affiliated and in which they are embedded, have been constructed through opposition to Islam. A laicist and Judeo-Christian secular West has been consolidated in part through opposition to representations of an antimodern, anti-Christian, and theocratic Islamic Middle East. Opposition to the concept of Islam is built into secular political authority and embedded within the national identities with which it is associated and through which it is expressed. This means that negative associations of Islam not only run deep in the Euro-American secular traditions described in this book but help to constitute them. By bringing together the literature on the construction of laicism in nineteenth-century France and early American representations of Islam, I clarify how these representations of Islam contributed to the consolidation of Euro-American forms of secularism and the identification of French and American national identities as laicist and Judeo-Christian secularist, respectively.

Chapter 4 bridges the conceptual and historical arguments of chapters 2 and 3 with the more applied arguments of chapters 5 and 6. Its primary objective is to introduce domestic Turkish and Iranian renegotiations of the secular. Woven into these historical accounts are examples of how the epistemological and evaluative stances described in the preceding chapters as laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism operate in practice to condition Western responses to religiopolitical developments in Turkey and Iran. Developments in these countries do not fall easily into categories available to Western observers for understanding religion and politics. I argue that the attempt to remake the public realm in Turkey and Iran is not a threat to the foundation of modern politics but a modern contestation of authoritative practices of secularism authorized and regulated by state authorities since the founding of the modern Turkish Republic by Atatürk in 1923 and the rise of Reza Shah in Iran in 1925. It is modern politics.

The historiographical accounts presented in chapter 4 are also part of a broader historical and political context that is referred to but not described in chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 4 therefore also serves as an important preface to these chapters, which focus on the political consequences of secularist authority in European and American representations of and relations with Turkey and Iran. I argue that a comprehensive understanding of relations between the West and the Middle East requires an understanding not only of material forces, hard-wired state interests, and structural constraints but also the politics of secularism. Attempts to explain relations between Europe, the United

States, and the Islamic Middle East and North Africa through recourse to fixed and objectively given state interests, the characteristics of individual leaders, bureaucratic politics, the international system, or other traditional explanatory variables are important but insufficient. I reformulate the questions brought to the analysis of these international relationships by arguing that secularist authority is a productive part of the cultural sensibilities and normative foundation of contemporary international relations that contributes in crucial ways to political outcomes in relations between states and between states and suprastate entities such as the European Union (EU).

The cases developed in chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate how the analytics developed in this book “travel,” to use Price and Reus-Smit’s terminology.³⁶ As Bukovansky suggests, “the interpretive method does not lend itself to a formal, systematic demonstration of the causal impact of culture.”³⁷ These two chapters are what she would describe as “plausibility probes” that suggest “the way in which ideas about [secularism] shaped the political positions taken by strategic actors.”³⁸ Chapter 5 argues that prevailing explanations of European resistance to Turkish accession that rely upon the assumption that opposition is based exclusively upon support for a “Christian Europe” miss a crucial part of the story concerning the cultural and religious basis of this resistance. Cultural and religious opposition to Turkey’s accession is not only about defending the idea of a Christian Europe; the prospect of Turkish accession has stirred up a more fundamental controversy about European identity and the politics of religion within Europe itself. Turkey has turned toward a different trajectory of secularism that conforms to neither Kemalism (a Turkish version of laicism) nor the two prevailing trajectories of secularism described in this book: laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism. This new tradition of secularism threatens not only the Kemalist establishment in Turkey but European secularists as well. As a result, Turkey’s potential accession to the EU has propelled the controversial ontological questions of what it means to be secular and European into the public spotlight. There is a sense of urgency in Europe that the religion-and-politics question and its relationship to an ever-evolving European identity be resolved before Turkey is admitted to the EU. The Turkish case is therefore controversial in cultural and religious terms not only because it involves the potential accession of a Muslim-majority country to an arguably, at least historically, Christian Europe, though this is important, but also and more fundamentally because it brings up long-dormant dilemmas *internal* to Europe regarding how religion and politics relate to each other. Turkey’s candidacy destabilizes the European secular social imaginary.³⁹ It involves unfinished business in the social fabric of the core EU members, including what it means to be secular (both in Europe and in Turkey) and how religion, including but not limited to Islam, should relate to European public life.

This cultural sticking point is what the debate over Turkish accession is really about, and it is for this reason that it is culturally—in addition to economically and politically—so contentious. Even if economic and political obstacles to Turkish accession are lifted, even if Turkey is deemed to be in unambiguous conformity with the so-called Copenhagen criteria, this argument suggests that European opposition to Turkish membership will persist. This is due to nagging discord within Europe concerning how religion relates to European identity and institutions, and whether alternative trajectories of secularism such as the current Turkish one that moves *away* from European-inspired Kemalism toward a different variety of secularism can ever be considered fully European. This story is more complex than the assertion that European cultural and religiously based opposition to Turkey is due to the defense of the concept of a Christian Europe. It also explains why many European secularists have expressed misgivings about and, in some cases, opposition to Turkish accession despite their discomfort with the idea of a Christian Europe.

Chapter 6 also illustrates how collective traditions regarding religion and politics developed primarily at the domestic level become influential at the systemic level. A comprehensive understanding of American-Iranian relations requires considering not only fixed and pregiven strategic and material interests but also the cultural, historical, and social traditions and relations through which these interests take shape and are expressed. Laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism provide the conceptual apparatus and cultural backdrop through which American opposition to Iran has been consolidated and legitimized. They form the cultural and religious foundation of modern American relations with Iran. Laicism has been the prevailing secularist narrative in American discourse on Iran since the revolution of 1978–79. On the one hand, and according to this account, the revolution was unacceptable because it imported religion into public life, compromising the most basic tenet of laicism. On the other hand, and following Judeo-Christian secularist assumptions, distinctions between religious and political authority are not only historically absent from Iran, but unthinkable due to the nature of Islam itself. According to this second account, the revolution confirmed the existence of “natural” linkages between Islam and theocracy in contrast to alleged natural linkages between Christianity and democracy.

These two varieties of secularist tradition worked together to fuel powerful American condemnations of the revolution and the representation of revolutionary Iran as a threat not only to American national interests but also to the foundations of American national identity itself. From 1979 onward, to stand for a secular (laicist, Judeo-Christian, or both) and democratic United States was to oppose an Islamic (theocratic, tyrannical) Iran. The process of representing Islam specifically (the power of which is illustrated in chapter 3) and Iranians more generally as a threat helped to solidify American notions of secular democracy, freedom, and righteousness in opposition to Iranian theo-

cracy, tyranny, and falsehood. This opposition helps to explain the fervor with which the American government and many citizens have opposed postrevolutionary Iran. This opposition is a function not only of powerful American geopolitical interests in the Middle East; it is part of an attempt to define and instantiate American national identity and American collective subjectivity as secular, Judeo-Christian, and democratic.

The third and final section of the book is about the implications of my argument for international relations theory. Many attempts to theorize religion in international relations add a concern for religious beliefs, actors, and institutions into the already existing literature on sovereignty, security, global governance, conflict resolution, human rights, intercivilizational dialogue, and the role of transnational actors. I take a different approach. I investigate the extent to which secularist traditions concerning what religion is and how it relates to politics determine the kinds of questions deemed worth asking about religion and international politics and the kinds of answers one expects to find.⁴⁰ Secularism is part of the cultural and normative basis of international relations theory. The traditions of secularism described in this book are part of the ontological and epistemological foundation of the discipline. Chapters 2 and 3 identify and critique these secularist habits, tropes, and discursive regularities. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 illustrate their effects upon the historiography of the Middle East and relations between the United States, Europe, Turkey, and Iran. Chapters 7 and 8 use that critique to identify new political possibilities that are obfuscated by secularist practice, habit, and scientific pretension.⁴¹ By failing to conform to the categories available to international relations theorists for understanding religion and politics, both political Islam and religious resurgence offer an opportunity to revisit the epistemological foundations of the discipline and to begin to articulate these possibilities.

The relationship between secularist representations of political Islam and international relations is the subject of chapter 7. There are two principal secularist evaluative stances on political Islam in the international relations field, corresponding to the two trajectories of secularism described in chapter 2. Laicism represents political Islam as an unnatural infringement of religion upon would-be secular public life in Muslim societies. It is conceived as a threat to democratic laicist public order, and support for any public role for Islam is seen as a throwback to premodern times. Judeo-Christian secularism represents political Islam as a normal commingling of religion and politics that stands in sharp distinction to the uniquely Western separation of religion and state. Political Islam is thus a natural consequence of fixed differences between incommensurable civilizations. Building on Euben's account of the effects of Western rationalism upon the study of Islamic fundamentalism, I argue that secularist accounts of political Islam "conceal their 'mechanisms of production' within claims of objectivity resulting in images which say less about what [political Islam] 'really is' than about the ways in which [secularist]

assumptions derived from Western history and experiences . . . produce our understandings of [it].⁴²

Both traditions of secularism described in this book lead to understandings of political Islam as the refusal to acknowledge the privileged status of the private sphere and the transgression of Western secular categories of public and private. The result is that in contemporary international relations theory and practice political Islam appears almost exclusively in a transgressive or regressive capacity. It is perceived as a threat to the privileged status of the private sphere and the first step on the road to theocracy. This transgression is often linked rhetorically to the alleged Muslim proclivity for terrorism and totalitarianism, both of which also refuse to honor the privileged status of the private sphere.⁴³ The result is that Muslim negotiations of public and private, sacred and secular, often appear as unnatural or even nonexistent. This also explains why political Christianity and political Judaism, which also present significant challenges to the secularist public-private distinction, are generally received more warmly and less fearfully than political Islam. This is because the forms of secularism that predominate today in Europe and the United States emerged out of Latin Christendom and remain indebted to European religious traditions. Islamic traditions, on the other hand, have a different history of negotiating this divide. Several of these diverse Islamic traditions are described in chapter 6.

To make this argument is not to deny that there are forms of Islam, such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, which are transgressive and even regressive by almost any standard of judgment. The point is that not *all* forms of what is categorized by secularist authority as political Islam pose a threat that can be met with either the imposition of secularization from outside or the exclusion of particular nonsecular Islamic-majority states from international society. Accompanying secularist representations of political Islam is the insistence that secular democratic states work to ensure that Muslim-majority states either follow a laicist trajectory, in which secular modernization and those who support it are favored over rivals who support some kind of public role for Islam, or face increasing isolation from the international community as religious backwaters. Political Islam is seen as a failed attempt at modernization or a reversion to premodern social order, and thus as poorly equipped to contribute to the public life of Muslim-majority societies. In a laicist framework, these shortcomings are not irremediable but can be alleviated through the importation of Western-style democracy and the secularization of society. This leads to development and foreign assistance programs that seek to privatize religion in order to promote democratization. In a Judeo-Christian secularist framework, the Islamic refusal to acknowledge the special status of the private sphere confirms the difference of Islamic civilization. Incommensurable worldviews and incompatible social and political practices lead to an insurmountable divide between civilizations. Political options are limited to tense coexistence, war, or (perhaps) conversion.

Chapter 8 examines the notion of religious resurgence. Neither a passing aberration on the road to modernization nor a confirmation of insurmountable cultural and religious difference in world politics, as most conventional accounts have it, religious resurgence occurs whenever authoritative secularist settlements of the relationship between religion and politics are challenged. The resurgence is a manifestation of the attempt to refashion the secular, in which the terms of the debate involving religion and politics, presumed to have been resolved long ago, are disputed once again. Religious resurgence is evidence of a controversy over how metaphysics and politics relate to each other and to the state that calls into question fundamental received definitions of the secular. Secularist epistemological commitments stand in the way of effectively theorizing the breadth, diversity, and significance of this resurgence and thwart effective political responses to it. If what is identified as religious resurgence is a political contestation of the fundamental contours and content of the secular, then this contest signals the disruption of preexisting standards of what religion is and how it relates to politics. The resurgence of religion is evidence of a live and ongoing controversy over the relationship between the sacred, the profane, and the political that cuts through and calls into question the definition of and boundaries between mundane and metaphysical, secular and sacred. Religious resurgence therefore must be understood not through Western categories of the sacred and secular, but as a process through which these basic ontologies of political and religious order are being renegotiated and ultimately refashioned.⁴⁴

International relations theory has struggled with religion because it has failed to consider the politics involved in the designation and enforcement of particular conceptualizations of the secular. It has not come to terms with secularism as a contested social construct. Confusion results from the fact that the religious and the political, the sacred and the secular, are presumed to be stable categories aligned with familiar modern liberal divisions between public and private. This assumption about the stability and normativity of these categories is unsustainable given the varieties of secularism that exist in the world today and the evidence of ongoing change and contestation surrounding the secular. Secularist authority plays a constitutive role within modern politics, including modern international politics.

The argument developed in this book is premised upon an understanding of secularism and its history and politics, as well as a set of methods and assumptions about the study of world politics. The remainder of this introductory chapter provides background to the concept of secularism and an account of my sources and methods.

BACKGROUND TO A CONCEPT

Secularism refers to a public settlement of the relationship between politics and religion. The secular refers to the epistemic space carved out by the ideas

and practices associated with such settlements. Secularization is the historical process through which these settlements become authoritative, legitimated, and embedded in and through individuals, the law, state institutions, and other social relationships.

The notion of the *saeculum* emerged in the thirteenth century in reference to a binary opposition within Christianity. Priests who withdrew from the world (*saeculum*) formed the religious clergy, while those who lived in the world formed the secular clergy.⁴⁵ The term “secular” was used in English, often with negative connotations, to distinguish clergy living in the wider world from those in monastic seclusion. In a second transformation, and by the sixteenth century, the term began to shed its affiliation with Godlessness and the profane; Keane notes that in this era “the word ‘secular’ was flung into motion and used to describe a world thought to be in motion. In this case, to ‘secularise’ meant to make someone or something secular—converting from ecclesiastical to civil use or possession.”⁴⁶ By the end of the Thirty Years’ War, secularization referred to the transfer of church properties to the exclusive control of the princes.⁴⁷ Casanova describes this as the “passage, transfer, or relocation of persons, things, function, meanings, and so forth, from their traditional location in the religious sphere to the secular spheres.”⁴⁸ This meaning of secularization predominated at the 1648 Peace of Westphalia and onward; on November 2, 1789, Talleyrand announced to the French National Assembly that all ecclesiastical goods were at the disposal of the French nation.⁴⁹

In a third transformation and from the nineteenth century onward, secularism began to take on the meaning recognized in the vernacular today. It described a movement that was “expressly intended to provide a certain theory of life and conduct without reference to a deity or a future life.”⁵⁰ Coined officially by George Jacob Holyoake in 1851, who led a rationalist movement of protest in England, the term secularism was at this time “built into the ideology of progress.”⁵¹ As Madan concludes, “secularization, though nowhere more than a fragmentary and incomplete process, has ever since retained a positive connotation.”⁵² Secularists were those who believed that the “Church and the world are caught up in an historical struggle in which slowly, irreversibly worldliness is getting the upper hand.”⁵³ By the nineteenth century, the *seculere* had “emerged historically within North American and European Christian culture as a subordinate space in which the mundane and the material could be given due attention.”⁵⁴

The idea of the separation of church and state remains the most influential popular narrative of secularism in contemporary Europe and the United States. As Mahmood argues, however, “secular liberalism cannot be addressed simply as a doctrine of the state, or as a set of juridical conventions: in its vast implications, it defines, in effect, something like a way of life.”⁵⁵ Secularism identifies something called religion and posits its differentiation from the domains of the state, the economy, and science.⁵⁶ The secular is associated with the worldly or temporal; it carries no overt references to transcendent order

or divine being. The secularist separation between religion and politics makes it possible to speak of religion as privatized on the level of the individual, the community, the state, and the international system. Secularism is therefore part of what Taylor describes as a “modern social imaginary.”⁵⁷ It is a *lingua franca* in which influential narratives of modernity, development, and progress have been constructed.⁵⁸ Secularism also is part of what Hunt refers to as “the intellectual underpinnings of foreign policy.”⁵⁹ It is an ideological formation, defined as “an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality.”⁶⁰

Secularism helps constitute the political culture of international relations, described by Bukovansky as “that set of implicit or explicit propositions, shared by the major actors in the system, about the nature of legitimate political authority, state identity, and political power, and the rules and norms derived from these propositions that pertain to interstate relations within the system.”⁶¹ Secularism is a normative formation that is widely perceived as legitimate.⁶² It is what Halliday describes as “informal ideology,” part of the broader underlying political culture and context in which decisions are made.⁶³ Like Bukovansky, this book is concerned with “how the terms of legitimate authority are constructed and contested,” both domestically and internationally.⁶⁴

In international relations secularism helps to generate and organize collective belief systems, defined by Page as “sets of attitudes, beliefs, and orientations concerning world affairs that are linked both logically and empirically with support for particular policy alternatives.”⁶⁵ These basic values affect perceptions of international threats and problems, lead people to embrace particular foreign policy goals, and influence specific foreign policy preferences.⁶⁶ As Page argues, “Americans tend to organize their foreign policy attitudes into *purposive belief systems*, in which their policy preferences reflect logically related goals for foreign policy, perceptions of international threats, feelings about foreign countries and foreign leaders, and predispositions toward international activity or isolationism.”⁶⁷ The forms of secularism described in this book are part of the basic values and fundamental beliefs that “feed into a set of *political predispositions*.”⁶⁸ Secularism is part of the “climates of opinion” and the “context of public opinion” described by Cohen and Key. Cohen refers to the foreign policy decision-making “environment and cultural milieu” that shapes thinking and behavior.⁶⁹ Key suggests that the context that conditions the substance, form, and manner of actions “consists of opinion irregularly distributed among the people and of varying intensity, of attitudes of differing convertibility into votes, and of sentiments not always readily capable of appraisal.”⁷⁰

Key implies that the study of social phenomenon like secularism is a complex undertaking. To adapt Calhoun’s observation about nationalism, secularism “is not the solution to the puzzle [of politics and religion] but the discourse within which struggles to settle the question are most commonly

waged.”⁷¹ Secularism is what Shotter describes as a “tradition of argumentation.”⁷² It is a resource for collective mobilization and legitimization, forming what Özkırmılı has described as “the mould within which all kinds of political claims have been cast.”⁷³ Secularism is a historically articulated site of moral and political judgment.⁷⁴ Like nationalism and democracy, it is a language in which moral and political questions are defined, contested, settled, and legitimated. As an important site of moral and political authority, secularism inhabits and extends beyond the jurisdiction of the state. It sustains complex relations to global capitalism and other more heavily theorized sites of power in both domestic and international politics. As Chakrabarty suggests, “the phenomenon of ‘political modernity’—namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy and capitalist enterprise—is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe.”⁷⁵ Secularism is a foundational category of political modernity.

Finally, and critically for the argument of this book, secularism is a global discourse insofar as “new groups of people could take it up, could participate in it, and could in varying degrees innovate with it.”⁷⁶ Many varieties and forms of secularization have set in motion different historical processes in predominantly Catholic countries as opposed to in Protestant countries, for example, and have taken on yet another set of connotations in the Eastern Orthodox context, particularly under communism. India has no wall of separation between church and state because, as Madan notes, “there is no church to wall off, but only the notion of neutrality or equidistance between the state and the religious identity of the people.”⁷⁷ In the postcolonial Middle East, secularization has been associated with the attempt to consolidate state power, reflecting “the desire of these states to reduce, or break, the power of an alternative centre of power, the *ulema* in the Arab world, the *mullahs* in Iran, the *hocas* in Turkey, who had hitherto exercised such influence.”⁷⁸ Since the term entered the lexicon in the Arab world in the mid-nineteenth century, the debate over secularism has been cast in terms of the opposition between *din* (religion) and *‘aql* (reason), *asalah* (nobility) and *mu’asarah* (modernity), *din* and *dawlah* (state), and *din* and *‘ilm* (science or knowledge). The term secularism or laicism has been translated as *‘ilmaniyah* (from *‘ilm*, or science) or as *‘alamaniyah* (from *‘alam*, or world). Others translate it as *dunyawiyah*, or that which is worldly, mundane, and temporal.⁷⁹ Secularism in this region and elsewhere has come to be associated with universalist pretensions and claims to superiority over nonsecular alternatives. “Secular nationalism,” according to Juergensmeyer, “was thought to be not only natural but also universally applicable and morally right.”⁸⁰ As Casanova notes, “the theory of secularization may be the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences.”⁸¹

Despite its authoritative status, however, secularist boundaries between politics and religion exist not as a result of teleology or God's hand or chance, but as a result of historical and political processes that create distinctions and then lean upon these distinctions to maintain power. A secularist frame of reference has become, to borrow Wittgenstein's formulation, the invisible "scaffolding of our thoughts."⁸² It responds to what Hunt describes as a "vaguely felt need for continuity or stability."⁸³ Yet secularism remains an exercise of power. It is an authoritative discourse.⁸⁴ As Calhoun suggests, "what gives tradition (or culture generally) its force is not its antiquity but its immediacy and givenness."⁸⁵ Secularism is taken as a given. Secularist ideological formations are notable for the absence of self-consciousness surrounding them.⁸⁶ The secularist construction of religion is generally accepted as immediate and natural.⁸⁷ Like Said's *Orientalism*, secularism is "a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political, power intellectual, power cultural, power moral."⁸⁸ Secularism produces authoritative settlements of religion and politics, while simultaneously claiming to be exempt from this process of production.⁸⁹ This is a formidable exercise of power.⁹⁰ As Hunt concludes, "the case could be made that ideologies assume formal, explicit, systematic form precisely because there is resistance to them within the culture, whereas an ideology left implicit rests on a consensus and therefore exercises a greater (if more subtle) power."⁹¹

The question, then, is not "What is religion and how does it relate to politics?" For, according to Asad, "there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes."⁹² Rather, the question is, *How* do processes, institutions, and states come to be understood as religious versus political, or religious versus secular, and how might we ascertain the political effects of such demarcation? To define the boundaries of the secular and the religious is itself a political decision.⁹³ Theories of international relations that depend upon stable and universal conceptions of the secular or the religious displace the politics involved in these authoritative designations.⁹⁴

METHODS AND ASSUMPTIONS

As Connolly wrote of William James, "one attraction of James is that he fesses up to the motives that underlie his philosophical reflection."⁹⁵ This final section "fesses up" to my motives, explaining my approach to the metaphysical and ontological assumptions that animate this book and describing my methodology and sources. There are many epistemological and ontological traps

in the study of secularism. By describing my assumptions up front, I hope to avoid them.

The principle substantive objective of this book is to deconstruct the secular-theological oppositional binary and open the way for religiopolitical possibilities that are structured less antagonistically, softening the rigid oppositions that often characterize the assumptions brought to the study and practice of both secularism and religion.⁹⁶ I do the same methodologically, such that my philosophy of inquiry mirrors what I am doing substantively in the book. First, I do not assume that I have access to criteria of knowledge that leave ontological questions behind, nor do I assume that my own epistemology provides neutral procedures through which I can pose and resolve ontological questions.⁹⁷ I agree with Wendt's observation that "ontology gets controversial when it invokes unobservables."⁹⁸ In response, I adopt a "bicameral" approach both to the metaphysical assumptions of this study and those of the secular, Christian, Judeo-Christian, and Islamic traditions that form my objects of analysis.⁹⁹ I argue on the one hand in favor of the view that people and institutions are social constructions in a pervasive sense of the term, while on the other hand acknowledging that this assumption of the constructed character of being is itself profoundly contestable.¹⁰⁰ My approach to social construction gives priority "not to a disengaged subject in its relation to independent objects, but to historically specific discursive practices within which people are engaged prior to achieving a capacity to reflect upon them."¹⁰¹ Humans engage with each other and with the world within previously established contexts that help to constitute us and the objects represented to and by us.¹⁰² As Barnett and Duvall argue, "constitutive relations cannot be reduced to the attributes, actions, or interactions of pre-given actors. Power, accordingly, is irreducibly social."¹⁰³

My approach to social construction is influenced by what White describes as "weak ontology."¹⁰⁴ Weak ontologists assume that an ethical orientation to life does not "depend upon the demand to lock all reverence for life into some universal theistic faith, rational consensus, secular contract, transcendental argument, or interior attunement to a deep identity."¹⁰⁵ The task of the analyst is to interpret "actively, specifically, and comparatively, without praying for the day (or deferring until the time) when the indispensability of interpretation is matched by the solidity of its grounds."¹⁰⁶ This approach to social construction is the operative "faith" that animates this study, with the latter defined as "a creed or philosophy plus the sensibility mixed into it."¹⁰⁷ This approach shares lines of connection with Gramsci's recognition in his later writings that "all commitments pose an element of belief—that is, an active conviction and commitment—that one could interpret as religious."¹⁰⁸ It shares different lines of connection with Buddhist thought. As King writes, "in ancient Buddhist thought there has been no postulation of an all-powerful deity nor of an immortal soul constituting our real and essential identity. The spat between the

Church and the secular humanists simply did not occur. In contrast, Buddhist philosophy and practice is grounded upon a realization of the impermanent and fluctuating nature of the self and a deeply empathetic realization of the interconnectedness of all sentient beings as impermanent, multifaceted and ‘relational’ processes.”¹⁰⁹

Those who place the soul at the very center of being may find this approach to social construction challenging or even unacceptable. To mediate between these views I acknowledge that at its deepest level my own assumptions are contestable.¹¹⁰ As Epicurus observed, “one must not be so much in love with the explanation by a single way as wrongly to reject all the others from ignorance of what can, and what cannot, be within human knowledge, and consequent longing to discover the undiscoverable.”¹¹¹

This book seeks to engage those who do not share my assumptions. Readers who come to this book who are believers in a traditional sense, for example, will find many points on which we agree. Take, for example, the ways in which my bicameral commitment to my metaphysics and its contingency resonates with the approach to religious liberty taken at the Second Vatican Council as described by religious historian Jaroslav Pelikan. As Pelikan recounts, “at the Second Vatican Council the declaration on religious liberty, largely written by my late friend Father John Courtney Murray of the Society of Jesus, declared the right of religious liberty not on the basis of saying, ‘Well, it doesn’t matter much what you believe.’ Quite the opposite. Because you believe in the Christian tradition, which affirms creation of the human race in the image of God — the title of the declaration is ‘Dignitatis Humanae,’ ‘Human Dignity.’ Because of that, because therefore, religious faith is so important rather than because it’s so trivial, therefore, you must not constrain others because faith can only be given freely.”¹¹²

My position, like the one articulated by Pelikan, seeks to avoid bracketing what Berger describes as “metahuman” experiences, thereby slipping into what Porpora criticizes as “methodological atheism.”¹¹³ In methodological atheism, “the reality of any supernatural object of religious experience is forever debarred from consideration within sociology as a possible—even if partial—explanation of the experience.”¹¹⁴ Instead, my approach comes closer to what Porpora describes as “methodological agnosticism,” but with a slightly different approach to social construction.

Social constructivists are often criticized for asserting or assuming that religion is no more than a human projection. This accusation, however, presumes that the human realm is an accessible, mundane, and sensible domain populated with autonomous human agents who are engaged in the social construction of religion, among other things. It also presumes that this human realm is distinct and separate from the true realm of religion, which is conceptualized variously as the domain of God,¹¹⁵ the supermundane,¹¹⁶ the transcendent, the nonsocially constructed or what Porpora refers to as the “extra-social.”¹¹⁷ I do

not adopt these distinctions. Instead, I operate on the assumption that these two realms are configured differently on an ontological level, reflecting neither a philosophy of transcendence nor a philosophy of radical atheism but a “Deleuzian metaphysic”:

The Deleuzian metaphysic reconfigures the standing and shape of the Kantian transcendental field without eliminating it altogether. It is transcendental in residing above or below appearance, but not in being unquestionable or in authorizing a morality of command. This, then, is metaphysics without the claim to apodictic authority or epistemic certainty, a combination that eludes the Habermasian division between metaphysical and postmetaphysical thought.¹¹⁸

I do not (and cannot) authoritatively and “illegitimately liquidate transcendental phenomena from within,” as Porpora accuses Berger of attempting to do in his sociological writings.¹¹⁹ This is because, in this view, the transcendent is immanent.¹²⁰ This transcendental empiricism resembles Spinoza’s metaphysical monism, “in which ‘God or Nature’ is conceived as *immanent* in the movement of things rather than forming a commanding, juridical order above them.”¹²¹ This tradition, reflected in the work of Stuart Hampshire and neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, is described by Connolly as a “minor tradition” of the Enlightenment that can be traced from Epicurus and Lucretius through Spinoza’s nonsecular and nonecclesiastical monism of substance to Deleuze’s mobile or “pure” immanence.¹²² In this tradition the transcendent is both immanent and emergent, residing both above and below appearance.¹²³ It is neither directly accessible to experience nor outside experience, but immanent to it.¹²⁴ A philosophy of radical atheism, like other philosophies, depends upon a particular series of metaphysical assumptions. Radical atheism is itself a form of faith. As Asad has written, “the idea that there is a single clear ‘logic of atheism’ is itself the product of a modern binary—belief or unbelief in a supernatural being.”¹²⁵ This has important implications for the politics of secularism.

Porpora wrestles with and ultimately gestures toward these possibilities at the end of his essay when he concludes that if we were to “integrate putatively super-mundane objects of experience with the rest of the causal order . . . the objects certainly would not cease being what they are, but we might cease regarding them as super-mundane. Instead, our conception of the mundane might just expand. We might, for example, come to regard a certain depth or sacred dimension as one of the natural features of our universe.”¹²⁶ On this view, which I share, the original problem posed by a rigid divide between mundane and metaphysical realms, as well as the accusation that political scientists fail to engage the extrasocial because they merely construct religion as a social projection, appears in a different light. The conception of the mundane has now been reworked to accommodate a non-Kantian transcendental field in which what Kantians designate as the “supersensible” is re-

placed by an “infrasensible” transcendental field.¹²⁷ The infrasensible is real but not actual. Its elements cannot be fully captured, projected, or represented by the analyst.

This lends itself to a particular approach to the aspirations and limitations of social inquiry more broadly and social construction specifically. It allows for the elaboration of a constructivism that, as Price and Reus-Smit argue, rejects the search for timeless laws in favor of historically, culturally, and ontologically contingent generalizations.¹²⁸ However, it also takes a step beyond their critique of positivism by insisting that the broader context, systems of knowledge, operations of power, and discursive practices within which social actors are produced cannot be fully captured or represented by the analyst. Thus, on the one hand a focus on structural power that assumes that “the social relational capacities, subjectivities, and interests of actors are directly shaped by the social positions that they occupy”¹²⁹ is insufficient because it neglects the role of “agency,” construed here to include elements emanating from both the sensible and the infrasensible, in the production and transformation of structure. On the other hand, the combination of individualism and materialism that underlies both neorealism and neoliberalism in international relations, which assumes that the structure constraining state behavior derives from the aggregation of properties of the actors such as the distribution of power, technology, and geography,¹³⁰ is also problematic. It disregards the social constitution of subjectivity by assuming that social actors are preconstituted and downplays or ignores the social processes through which material factors gain meaning for actors.¹³¹ My approach therefore comes closest to, while slightly modifying, Barnett and Duvall’s concept of “productive power,” insofar as it emphasizes the elusive yet significant context within which the social production of subjectivity takes place. In their insistence that productive power constitutes “*all* social subjects with various social powers through systems of knowledge and discursive practices of broad and general social scope,”¹³² Barnett and Duvall, like Berger in his sociological writings, teeter on the precipice of methodological atheism.

This study operates on the assumption that people and institutions are socially constructed along the distinctive lines and within the (weak) ontological parameters described previously. At the same time, like James and Connolly, I think it “unlikely that any specific combination of evidence and argument will suffice to reduce the number of defensible philosophical faiths to one.”¹³³ I seek to open lines of connection and communication with other approaches, to pursue commonalities that may have been foreclosed in the past by the rigid secular-theological binaries problematized in the substantive chapters of this book. These connections are pursued through a style of theorizing described by Bennett as “includ[ing] a set of claims about human being and the fundamental character of the world, even as these claims are presented as essentially contestable.”¹³⁴

Finally, I want to describe my sources and methodology. At the end of the day, secularism is intangible. Like nationalism, it is most powerful when experienced as natural and given. Unlike economic indicators or election results, it is extraordinarily difficult to measure or quantify. To deal with the inevitable empirical challenges of studying forms of political authority that are felt but not seen, I draw on multiple sources and use multiple methodologies. My theoretical orientation is given depth and breadth through the course of the study. Building on Çinar's definition, I approach secularism as a series of interlinked political projects that continually seek to "transform and reinstitute a sociopolitical order on the basis of a set of constitutive norms and principles."¹³⁵ Any particular instantiation of the secular involves the reproduction and transformation of a particular series of norms and principles. It also invokes, creates, and expresses particular sensibilities, habits, and practices. As Asad argues, according to Scott and Hirschkind, the secular must be approached "not simply in terms of the doctrinal separation of religious and political authority but as a concept that has brought together sensibilities, knowledges, and behaviors in new and distinct ways."¹³⁶ The two trajectories of secularism developed in this book attempt to capture the histories, sensibilities, and habits that are carried and transformed by and through collective secularist norms, identities, and institutions.

To investigate the political consequences of these forms of secularism in international relations, this study draws in the first instance upon analyses of public discourse in the United States and Europe, such as government policy statements, pundit commentaries, international agreements, presidential speeches, print media, radio talk shows, opinion polls, court decisions, and conference proceedings from research institutions and universities. Additional evidence and historical background used to support my empirical arguments are drawn from secondary sources in political science, history, anthropology, and Middle East studies on relations between the West and the Middle East. I am indebted in particular to several excellent historical accounts on relations between France and North Africa, the European Union and Turkey, and the United States and Iran. The collection and analysis of these various sources, historical and contemporary, academic and nonacademic, allowed me to piece together evidence attesting to the presence and power of the cultural and political sensibilities, the collective dispositions and tendencies, identified as laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism. This study takes the collective cultural, religious, and political pulse of the United States and Europe vis-à-vis secularism, Islam, and Judeo-Christianity from a position that strives to achieve critical distance from the collective cultural formations and authoritative traditions under study.

The relationship between metaphysics, ethics, and politics is complex and fluid. As McClay argues, "it is futile to imagine that the proper boundaries between religion and politics can be fixed once and for all, in all times and

cultures, separated by an abstract fiat. Instead, their relationship evolves out of a process of constant negotiation and renegotiation.”¹³⁷ The evolving and ever-elusive idea and practice of religion is interwoven with political authority in ways that align only fleetingly, if ever, with state boundaries, secularist assumption, Christian doctrine, Islamic law, or Deleuzean metaphysics. International relations theorists and practitioners need to reconsider the ontological and epistemological foundations of the discipline that govern what counts as politics in international politics. They need to rethink the assumptions about religion and politics embedded in the hypotheses and empirical tests of international relations scholarship. This book contributes to that effort.