

Religion and the liberal State
Liberal Neutrality in the Post-Secular age

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Abstract:

Religion has traditionally been an important consideration in political philosophy. The most recent milestone in political theory and practice, with regards to religion, was achieved during the 17th century i.e. secularism. However, after the recent religious resurgence in public and political affairs throughout the world, the issue of regulating religion has reemerged as a challenge to contemporary liberal democracies. Therefore, the puzzle that liberalism's basic architecture and secularism as a basic pillar of achieving religious toleration were specifically solutions to specific provincial (European) issues, increases the salience of religion today and demands a reevaluation of the basic tenets of this debate. This thesis argues, that due to certain blind spots in Liberal Political Thought's (LPT) understanding of religion, LPT's secularism promises to uphold liberal neutrality (neutrality of the state towards ethical conceptions) universally, however, secularism, due to its Christian-inflicted history and origins, requires a reconceptualization in order to uphold the ideal of liberal neutrality.

Keywords: Liberal Political Thought (LPT), political liberalism, religious experience, pragmatism, belief, public reason liberalism, comprehensive liberalism, public justification, overlapping consensus, justice, freedom, constitutionalism, pluralism, disaggregation, religion, secularism, belief.

Acknowledgements and dedication

It seems as if it was long ago, but it was only less than a couple of years ago, when I started this program and consulted my future supervisor for potential thesis supervision. It has, since then, been a roller coaster ride. I am grateful to the Central European University, specifically the Political Science Department, for providing me the resources, supervision, warmth and an intellectually stimulating environment to produce this project. I especially thank Dr. Zoltan Miklosi, my primary supervisor, for his consistent support and constructive feedback. This project would not have taken the insightful directions it eventually took without his analysis, and his perseverance. Secondly, my supervisor at the Center for Religious Studies (CRS), Dr. Carsten Wilke, has been a source of inspiration for me throughout this project and the degree. I learnt how to understand religion as an infrastructure with its unique social and immense historical might. Another major influence, specifically in the study of religion and the completion of this project, was Dr. Vald Naumescu, from the Sociology department. His analysis of the multiple rationalities that exist today enabled me to question my ideas and fully realize my potential as an aspiring social theorist. Last but not the least, Ute Falasche, consistently challenged my personal and theoretical biases within the project, eventually enabling me to have more conversations with myself on the project.

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Introduction:

Religion has traditionally been an important consideration in political philosophy. However, since the turn of the 20th century, the salience of religion has increased because of the contemporary religious resurgence throughout the world. The most recent milestone in political theory and practice, with regards to religion, was achieved during the 17th century i.e. secularism. Secularism was the route taken to uphold basic ideals of liberalism (equality, pluralism, individual autonomy, religious toleration), also formulated during the 17th century by French and American political philosophers. Broadly, the question of the initial debates concerning religion was related to two important issues. First, whether political authority should be founded on secular or religious deliberations. Second, whether religious and political institutions should be insulated from one another or whether the establishment of one religion over others is the ideal solution. This problem was initially solved by the so-called separation of religion and state (secularism) after the famous religious wars of Europe. The solution dictated separating the religious and the political realms to guarantee liberal ideals universally. As far as the treatment of religion was concerned, the two clauses of the first amendment in the American constitution guaranteed i) non-establishment and ii) freedom of religion.

However, after the recent religious resurgence in public and political affairs throughout the world, the issue of religion in a secular state has emerged again as a challenge to contemporary liberal democracies. In addition to that, the debates regarding religion and its role in political life have evolved after the realization that secularism, in order to achieve and uphold the basic liberal ideals of equality, pluralism, freedom of conscience, toleration, individual autonomy, was put

forward as a response specifically to the religious wars of Europe. Therefore, the puzzle that liberalism's structure and secularism as a basic pillar of achieving religious toleration were specifically solutions to European-centric issues, increases the salience of religion today and demands a reevaluation of the basic tenets of this debate which this project aims to accomplish. The main hypothesis of this project is as follows: due to certain blind spots in Liberal Political Thought's (LPT) understanding of religion, LPT's secularism promises to uphold liberal neutrality (neutrality of the state towards ethical conceptions) universally, however, secularism, due to its Christian-inflicted history and origins, requires a reevaluation in order to uphold the basic ideals of liberalism.

The 20th century witnessed decolonization throughout almost all of the developing and formerly colonized world. Many decolonial movements relied on, among other ideals and ideologies, religion, as a source of mobilization against colonial powers. In addition to that, the rise of evangelical Christianity and fundamentalist movements in North America represented a resurfacing of religious claims to political power even in the advanced and highly secularized spaces in the world. Many argue that the model of secularism in liberal democracies of Europe and North America represented a temporary arrangement of power distribution between the 'secular' and 'religious' dimensions of experience to dominate the political sphere and that it has been challenged from multiple horizons especially the rise of fundamentalist movements.

This project argues that the conceptualization of the 'theologico-political' problem, as framed by Leo Strauss, is based on an incomplete conception of the phenomenon of religion, and that the presumptions regarding foundations of political authority and non-establishment spring from this philosophically incorrect understanding of religion. Therefore, the propositions regarding religion and politics in contemporary liberal political thought envision religion as

something distinct from politics, culture and other spheres of human life which is empirically incorrect. After a thorough critique of the understanding of religion in liberal political thought (LPT), this paper will attempt to put forward a proposal for the appropriate treatment of the phenomenon of religion and situate it back in the contemporary debates in political philosophy. In the next step, this project aims to address the direct theoretical implications of the modification of the concept of religion on the understanding of secularism as an ideal while contemporary nation states strive for neutrality, the principle of non-establishment of religion and derive their political authority on non-religious (secular) grounds.

In other words, this paper clearly argues that liberal democratic states should aspire towards the principle of state neutrality, but it does not necessarily mean that secularism, as a historicized ideal and secularization as a historical process, produces the state neutrality envisioned by contemporary LPT universally. The current literature in LPT discusses the conception of religion as an ahistorical phenomenon, considers it as just another ethical philosophy or a conception of the 'good' by neglecting its diverse and interpretive dimensions, applies a Christianity-centered approach, therefore, producing a simplified account of secularism where secularism means just a simple separation of religion and the state. This account of secularism somewhat neglects its Christian-inflicted history, abstracting the church to represent religion, therefore, overlooking the complex structures of religious authority in other major religions, and their historical relationships to their respective polities, geographical and cultural environments and the nuanced processes of modern state building they experienced.

Methodology:

A note on methodology is important here. This is an ongoing in debate regarding the place and conception of religion within liberal political philosophy and a liberal state. It is informed by theoretical contributions on secularism from other disciplines such as sociology, history, anthropology and religious studies. The contribution of this project is inherently methodological in the sense that it aims to disentangle the relationship between secularism and liberalism while working with the conception of religion specifically in non-western societies. If secularism has been questioned to a significant extent and only minimal secularism is seen as the workable solution to religious diversity in traditionally secular societies of North America and Western Europe, then non-western, specifically Arab post-colonial societies who have had an even intense relationship with secularism, would need further questioning of secularism. Since liberal democracy and its ideals of equality, liberty and justice trump everything else, is the disaggregation of religion enough to ensure protection of religious groups and paying heed to religious arguments while taking into account individual freedoms despite the inherent connection between liberalism and secularism (minimal)? What is religion? What is secularism? Does it mean the separation of church and state or religion and state? How and why is religion different from church? What if the connection of race and nationalism is not the only component of identity?

Theoretical relevance of the project:

The discourse on secularism and religion within contemporary liberal political philosophy has been broadened after critical reviews from other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, religious studies and history. Contemporary debates about religion and secularism have evolved to a significant extent and have started to appreciate the theoretical blind spots of the secularization hypothesis during the second half of the 20th century. The secularization theory and the founding fathers of the discipline of sociology argued that as societies prosper through economic development, education levels would improve and technology would continue to advance, religion would end up like a “doomed commodity like pounce pots or butter churns” (Starrett 627). Broadly, almost all founding fathers and prominent scholars of sociology including Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Peter Berger, to name a few, agreed that religion would become a private affair and automatically be excluded from public and political life. However, as rightly pointed out by Jean L. Cohen (2016), “ours is paradoxically an age characterized both by a remarkable transnational religious revival by the numerical increase of people who do not identify with any religion” (Cohen 1). In other words, the demands of a political and public role of religion have tremendously increased during the 20th century while at the same time, some liberal democracies have been able to work quite well with the implementation of the traditional secular ideals, providing freedom of conscience and the freedom to practice religion simultaneously. However, this makes our job more as normative theorists more complex. Questions of what caused this religious resurgence in the political sphere have been partially answered but simultaneously raised new ones. This paper deals more with the theoretical consequences of this resurgence rather than the causes. Nevertheless, some assumptions regarding

the consequences will directly inform the normative arguments this paper puts forward in its last two sections.

The first part of this project will do a brief survey of the understanding of religion in contemporary liberal political thought (LPT) because it directly translates into the theorization of the ideal of state neutrality in a liberal constitutional democracy. It will identify the existing strands in LPT and their divergence on the justificatory powers of the liberal state. The next part of the paper will bring in recent literature from critical political theorists that appreciates the interpretive dimensions of religion to expand its definition and scope within liberal political thought. Recently, liberal theorists in political philosophy have attempted to expand the definition of religion to include a broader range of practices, beliefs and ideas on organizing public life. However, these new approaches do not question the ahistorical conception of secularism that is inherently ingrained in liberalism. The third part of the paper will identify the direct theoretical implications of the mischaracterization of religion on the conception of secularism and explain it through recent work on empirical examples of secularism in multi-religious and multi ethnic societies such as Israel and post-colonial states such as Egypt and India. Secularism, just like religion, exists in various forms from symbolic to institutional secularism. In the final part, this paper will make a case for a possible arrangement that incorporates evolved conceptions of secularism and religion within liberal and democratic theory. The final part of the paper will illustrate, after setting the ground for a disaggregation of the conception of religion, that secularism might not be the most neutral prescription in a liberal democracy. Therefore, liberal ideals trump secularism and secularism should only be defended under one condition I.e. it does not undermine the fundamental ideals of liberalism.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background:

1. **Secularization hypothesis:** Major proponents include Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, August Comte, Peter Berger (initial phases of his thought), C. Wright Mills, Talcott Parsons. Secularization hypothesis criticized by Peter Berger (secularism in retreat), Talal Asad, Jose Casanova and strong proponents include Pippa Norris, Bryan Wilson, Steve Bruce.

2. **Major strands in Liberal Political Thought** – this section includes an analysis and commentary on the dominant strands within liberal political thought. It includes an exposition of the conceptions of public reason and political liberalism, comprehensive liberalism and liberal perfectionism. The major works include John Rawls' (Public reason revisited), Ronald Dworkin, Gerald Gaus, Joseph Raz, Jonathan Quong and others.

3. **Religion** – what is religion – here are the broader theories and ways of understanding religion – functional, structuralist, cultural, social, political, cognitive, psychological etc. Durkheim, Weber, Geertz, Talal, Casanova, Saba Mehmood, finally – Cecile Laborde –

4. **The section on Secularism** contains Charles Taylor, Jose Casanova and Talal Asad in conversation. This conversation tries to rearticulate secularism after the most recent developments in other disciplines and empirical critiques of several models of secularism. Mostly based on critical analysis of the theory of secularism and secularization, it historicizes secularism both in the West and the non-West. This is then followed by further critical appreciations of Rajeev Bhargava (models of secularism, Is European secularism secular enough?), Hussein Ali Agrama, Gregory Staretz, who try to argue for different definitions of

secularism following empirical analysis of applications of secularism, mostly in the non-Western world.

5. **Liberal Neutrality and conclusion** – This section eventually identifies the different versions and debates surrounding liberal neutrality. It uses the seminal texts and arguments of John Rawls’ *A theory of justice*, Gaus’ *the moral foundations of liberal neutrality*, Alan Patten *Liberal neutrality: a reinterpretation and defense*, Chiara Cordelli’s *the neutrality of what*.

6. **John Rawls: the Idea of Public Reason Revisited:** this paper will be discussed in detail in the initial part of this paper. John Rawls’ exposition of overlapping consensus and public reason will be used to understand how to conceptualize a state with pluralism while introducing the broader debate.

7. **Jonathan Quong: Liberalism without Perfection:** this text is integral for this project as it explains the varieties of liberalism and puts them to scrutiny as they debate over the limits of the coercive power of the state.

8. **Provincializing Europe (Dipesh Chakrabarty):** this text does not hold a very strong value in terms of political philosophy but it will bring nuance in terms of decolonality of thought to some extent and the contextualization of liberalism to a greater extent.

9. **Kevin Vallier and Gerald Gaus: Public Justification Liberalism:** the authors of this paper clearly argue that a commitment to public justification provides a clear grounding to the discussion of religious reasons in the political sphere.

10. **David Little’s** critique of the exclusion of religious warrants as a basis for justifying human rights: David Little explores interrelationships between religion, rights and public reason. It argues that it is problematic to exclude religious reasons while justifying human rights in the Universal declaration of human rights.

11. **Donald J Moon's analysis of Rawls and Habermas' Political Liberalism:** Moon argues that even though the trajectories of Rawls and Habermas were different, they converged on some points and their accounts of public reason were not significantly different from each other. This paper will just expose Rawls' theory and draw similarities from Habermas as his contentions have also been influential in this debate.
12. **Rescuing Public Justification from Public Reason Liberalism, Fabian Wendt:** Wendt explains the debate between public reason liberals and comprehensive liberals. He establishes that public justification can be extracted from public reason liberalism and incorporated into a comprehensive liberalism that can be defended. To conclude, he argues that "on a more abstract level, arguing that public justification could be incorporated in all kinds of comprehensive liberalism" (Wendt 1).
13. **John Rawls' A theory of justice:** the basic building block of the debate and the introduction to political liberalism and public reason.
14. **Gerald Gaus Public Reason liberalism and public justification:** This will also serve as a basic introductory text to inform the basics of the debate. Gaus clarifies certain misunderstandings about public reason and discusses the importance of public justification.
15. **Talal Asad:** "The Construction of Religion as an anthropological category".
16. **Cecile Laborde, Liberalism's Religion.** This work is integral to this project as it presents the disaggregation hypothesis in detail. This text aims to incorporate the recent critiques of the conception of religion in political philosophy and tries to bridge the literature gap by responding to them adequately. The disaggregation hypothesis calls for a disaggregation

of religion into its different dimensions to see which of them should be contained or protected by the liberal state instead of treating religion altogether as special.

17. **Cecile Laborde and Aurelia Bardon**, Religion in liberal political philosophy. This work contains papers by different political and legal philosophers to address the issues of contemporary secularism, diversity and multiculturalism in a liberal state.
18. **Rajeev Bhargava** -Is European secularism secular enough?
19. **Aqeel Bilgrami** - Liberalism and Identity
20. **Charles Taylor** – Can Secularism Travel?
21. **Jean L. Cohen** - Religion and Constitutional democracy

1. On secularization:

C. Wright Mills argues that "once the world was filled with the sacred - in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm" (Swatos and Christiano 219).

As this project primarily drew its motivation from and started out by discussing the theoretical misgivings of the secularization hypothesis of the 1960s, it's crucial to discuss the secularization hypothesis itself, and the empirical experiences that identified its shortcomings. Why is this discussion important before we come to the major focal points of our analysis? It is because the term secularization, introduced to us by Max Weber (1930), became a dogma in itself during subsequent decades up until the 1970s before it was eventually questioned. Instead of being used as a value-neutral term, it began to be used as a term based on a clear but undefined set of assumptions and presuppositions. At the same time, this discussion does not imply that the term secularization does not denote anything organic or substantial in human history, however, it only serves the purpose of reminding us, social and political theorists, that the usage of this term requires some caution while we discuss universally applicable ideals. Secularization refers to interrelated propositions but when it began to be used within academia and the public, it also carried some value based and dogmatic considerations in addition to its analytical status. The fact that it became a dogmatic term, primarily in relation to religion, is important to note because it denoted the European experience of Christianity, which was elaborated within the context of the corruption of the Church, its political claims on power and the wars of religion in Europe. During the 20th century, it was mostly used by European sociologists and later on, by American social theorists in

the 1970s. It denoted some assumptions and an ideological stance with respect to, or sometimes in opposition to, a religious way of life. For instance, when Max Weber was discussing secularization, he identified it with demystification (disenchantment) and rationalization. Weber's argument, in precise terms, was that religion's importance has declined in the modern world, and that after its marginalization, it has transformed from a rational to an irrational or anti-rational force. In addition to that, Weber pointed out that since the 16th century onwards, the world was going through a process of rationalization where answers to natural and physical phenomena were looked for in this-worldly tools of inquiry and all mysteries were supposed to be resolved through scientific and logical inquiry. Also, he did not argue that people have stopped believing, while he argued that those beliefs in transcendental beings have stopped shaping people's behavior and life. Now Weber's argument carries underlying assumptions regarding secularization and the decline of religion, but specifically based on the experience of Western European Christianity. It does not mean that secularization is a sectarian concept and should not be treated as an analytical category. On the contrary, it means that secularization's abstraction as an analytical concept and as a universal process, needs some caution, because of its specific historical roots.

Secularization, the term, comes from the Latin "saeculum, which could be taken to mean both an age (or era) but also, at least by the fourth and fifth centuries, "the world," probably as an extension of the idea of a "spirit of an age." It could be used to mean something like the world "out there" (for example, monastic priests, who were 'enclosed' and under a formal 'rule of life', were distinguished from 'secular' clergy, meaning the parish clergy who served the people 'out in the world'), but it was also used to mean a life or life-style that is at odds with God (thus people would enter monastic life to flee 'the world' (Swatos and Christiano 211).

During early 19th century, the British thinker, founded the Secular Society to expound the use of reason and this worldly experiences, as opposed to transcendental answers, to understand and strive for a just world. Therefore, we see underlying assumptions associated with the usage of this term defined within some sort of a relation to the term religion.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the terms secular, secularization and secularity represent the institutional forms that implemented the following two ideals: people are capable of making their life choices by themselves and they should not be required to derive their inspiration from any particular religion. Secondly, people should be free to choose to practice any religion they prefer without their basic human rights being infringed upon by the state or fellow citizens. However, if this was the only main argument of secularization theory, it would have been completely reasonable to evaluate states on the extent and degree of their secularization. For instance, we could easily evaluate the degree of secularization of any state or organization by looking at two important markets i.e. the role religion plays in political institutions and the justification of its political authority. However, secularization theory argued that “in the face of scientific rationality, religion's influence on all aspects of life - from personal habits to social institutions – is in dramatic decline” and as secularization proceeds further, religion will eventually only be a matter of purely personal choice (Swatos and Christiano 215).

Therefore, this then becomes a matter of empirical, rather than a purely theoretical concern. However, depending on the definition of religion, theorists have proved both the growing importance of religion and the reducing role of religion in public life. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the noise and social ammunition used by religious resurgent forces, especially during the latter of the 20th century, clearly demonstrates the growing need to re-evaluate the secularization hypothesis. There are two major reasons of this aforementioned re-evaluation of

secularization, secularity and secularism: First, new religious movements have surfaced, throughout the world, to provide answers to the perennial and existential questions concerning life on earth. Secondly, movements within existing religions have reemerged (Islamist – Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami, Hindu fundamentalist-RSS, Shiv Sena, Jewish- Hasidism, Evangelical Christian movements, to name a few strong ones) with their claims to regulate human behavior and in some cases, even claim political power (Muslim brotherhood, Shiv Sena), and have reinforced their answers to the basic issues surrounding human life even harder. Therefore, we can clearly see a change in the behavior of religions and religious movements after attempts of removing religion from the public sphere. In the end, discussing conceptions of secularism and religion overtake measurements of fluctuations in religiosity in importance.

To conclude this chapter, it is important to recognize how it is difficult to think of secularization only as an analytical category that is value-neutral. It carries some values and proposals about the current state and future trajectory of a modern bureaucratic state. As secularization theory lost its appeal during the latter half of the 20th century and many theorists, including Peter Berger, Jose Casanova, Talal Asad, began to describe the process in alternative ways. Jose Casanova, in his seminal text on secularization and secularism, argued that the three key arguments regarding secularization include that religion has declined, it has been relegated to the private sphere and ecclesiastical institutions have been separated from political institutions. His main argument regarding secularization is that the first two have been criticized i.e. religion has not become a purely private affair and it is not in decline. However, the third one, which argues that secularization as a process means the differentiation of political and religious institutions, holds true, specifically in the European context.

2. Religion in Liberal Political Thought:

Intro – 2.1.1

We begin by outlining the major positions or strands in contemporary liberal political philosophy i.e. Rawlsian public reason/political liberalism, Gaus' public justification liberalism, Laborde's disaggregation thesis and so forth. Even though these positions converge on broader issues, they diverge on very specific issues. Gaus asserts that historically, public reason liberalism culminated on the conviction that citizens will give up their religious and personal approaches in favor of shared interests. Moreover, Rawlsian *Theory of Justice* was the most articulate and influential argument of public reason liberalism. However, according to Gaus, public reason liberalism will cease to argue for reasonable and unreasonable arguments while it will begin to investigate how to accommodate the diversity of opinions and include them into shared enforceable rules. On the other hand, there is another divergence inside liberalism i.e. comprehensive liberalism. Comprehensive liberalism justifies the rights of the people who believe in higher, transcendental or even secular doctrines while they debate morality, justice and freedom in the public and political sphere. It is on the contrary to public reason liberalism as it restricts people from appealing to already established traditional, religious and/or modern, secular doctrines. The normative motivation for a political sound theory that accounts for pluralism, in a democratic polity, is thus our major concern. Therefore, this part of the paper will summarize a view expounded by John Rawls followed by Joseph Raz's exposition of a combination of liberal perfectionism and comprehensive liberalism.

Public reason liberalism also known as political liberalism, is one of the most influential accounts of justice in contemporary political theory and especially liberal political theory. There are multiple versions of political liberalism as well, but this paper will expound the position of

John Rawls which is famously known as public reason liberalism. Other mainstream views inside liberal political thought including comprehensive liberalism and liberal perfectionism, among others, that will be dealt in the second half of this section of this project. Broadly speaking, the question being addressed by the debate inside liberal political theory is precisely the following: “the modern liberal state has at its disposal a tremendous amount of power; to what ends should that power be used?” (Quong 1). This question will help us to at least identify the normative motivation and practical worth of this debate by arriving at mutually dependent conceptions of the state, a worth-living life and regulatory power granted to the state.

Rawls 2.1.2

The most important questions related to this debate then can be answered using an internally consistent framework of the organization of the state while keeping in mind the considerations and demands of diversity of opinion among the polity. It then becomes important to identify and explain the broader requirements of such a political theory. First, such a theory should define the problem as it is i.e. how to harmonize the immense diversity of individual conceptions of a just society. Second, any such theory needs to justify the normative motivation for accommodating the diversity of viewpoints in its framework. Third, it should have a clear view of the way it will institutionalize this diversity of opinion to make it practically effective. Fourth, and equally important, it should be internally consistent in combining its justifications, exposition of issues surrounding a diverse polity, and explanation of its integral values for instance justice and personal autonomy and the functioning of the institutions which will uphold these values. John Rawls provided a consistent and theoretically sound solution to this problem. John Rawls exposed us to his first account in his book, *Political Liberalism*, followed by his paper, *the idea of public reason revisited*. Rawls introduced us to the concept of “public reason”. Since societies are

composed of individuals who diverge from each other on the conceptions of justice and freedom, and many of them appeal to already established doctrines of an ideal society at their perusal, they tend to disagree with each other even if they realize that the respect for personal autonomy, peace and fairness are attractive ideals in a democratic society (Rawls 785). In other words, citizens who recognize the importance of peace, justice and fairness in a society, might not be willing to compromise on their particular conceptions of these ideals and might dispute each other, therefore risking peace and justice eventually. That is why, it is essential to provide a common ground where citizens can actually agree with each other for the sake of effective governance and dispensing justice. For instance, let's assume all citizens in a democratic society agree that they need to uphold basic values of freedom, justice and peace while avoiding all potential encroachments on individual autonomy. It is still possible that these citizens have different conceptions of justice altogether. Let's go one step further and suppose that they agree on the conceptions of these basic values. It still is possible that their understanding of the enforcement of these values using institutions differs significantly. Or the comprehensive doctrines they adhere to, for instance religious ideals, prescribe different approaches towards the actual realization of ideals of peace, justice and freedom. What is to be done in that case? Since there is a possibility that even though they are reasonable and want to live peacefully, they might not be willing to give up on the prescriptive approaches of their broader ideals. Therefore, it is essential to point out certain broader principles that are applicable and are mutually agreed upon by all citizens. Such principles need to be articulated with precision and agreed upon by all citizens including ethnic, religious and other minorities. However, this is easier said than done. This is the main normative motivation for the Rawlsian ideal of public reason.

Rawls argues that citizens should “appeal to public reason, which (roughly speaking) is a fund of shared principles about justice and the common good that is constructed from the shared political culture of liberal democracy- principles that concern, for example, the equality of citizens before the law and their right to a fair system of cooperation” (Religion and Political Theory 35). Additionally, one of the major issues that are automatically tackled in Rawls’ public reason is that Rawls places an equal value on religious and non-religious or secular doctrines, for instance Sharia or utilitarianism respectively. In other words, secular and religious or non-religious and non-secular doctrines are considered equally legitimate in public reason. However, they have limited appeal altogether as they wouldn’t necessarily agree with each other on basic conceptions of a valuable life. For instance, prescriptions coming from Muslim personal law would be alien to those who adhere to utilitarianism as the basic foundation of political institutions.

Rawls’ articulation of “overlapping consensus” and “public reason” is important in this debate. Rawls argues that if the people have overlapping consensus over the principles that serve as the foundation of coercive laws, they are justified. On the other hand, if the public agrees over some reasonable principles, they possess the authority to be implemented. But there are certain conditions that he places upon their implementation. First, citizens must not articulate their reasons for those principles from any already established comprehensive doctrine. Therefore, since citizens disagree on doctrines that they adhere to, there won’t be doctrinal differences and basic public reason will be used to deliberate outcomes. Second, for Rawls and for public reason liberalism in general, those laws must be publicly justified in order to be considered legitimate. Therefore, public justification, or a publicly reasoned justification must be put forward before the state passes any law that directly affects its citizens and influences their lives. Liberal perfectionism and comprehensive liberalism diverge from political liberalism when it comes to

public justification. The ideas of liberal perfectionism and comprehensive liberalism will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Rawls developed this idea in his works *Political Liberalism* and *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*. As discussed earlier, there are multiple versions of political liberalism, including public justification liberalism. Before discussing the Rawlsian idea in detail, it is essential to briefly discuss another view of political liberalism i.e. public justification liberalism. Before delving into this, it is essential to bear in mind that we are still dealing with one broader approach within liberal political theory which consistently upholds the same ideal of public reason. To explain further, this approach maintains that coercive laws can only be justified if they are publicly justified by the state by appealing to publicly reasonable accounts of the conception of justice and basic constitutional essentials. This is not to say that public reason and public justification liberalism don't disagree with each other. But it means that public justification and public reason liberalism are broadly upholding the same ideals with only a few minor differences which are not relevant for this project. Therefore, they can be treated under the same category as far as this project is concerned. Just to explain their view clearly again, both public reason and public justification liberalism argue that the state can enforce coercive laws only under one given condition i.e. they are publicly justified. It is assumed that citizens are reasonable, and they differ on conceptions of justice, that is why the state has to be built on principles that are publicly agreed upon and their coercive implementation is only legitimate once they are justified in the presence of those reasonable citizens.

Gaus 2.1.3

Gerald Gaus, one of the main proponents of the public justification ideal, argues that public reason liberalism is not an exclusive creation of John Rawls. Gaus, who also adheres to political and public justification liberalism, argues that this conception of public reason was provided way before Rawls by the social contract theorists (Gaus 59). The overall premise informing the thoughts of the social contract theorists was the task of articulating a public reason that is universally agreed-upon by people to overcome the conflict that would result if everybody was following their own private judgements. He argues that both liberalism and public reason emerged roughly at the same point in time and were responses to the creation of a well-functioning social order comprised of citizens who disagreed on issues of justice, morality and religion. However, Gaus endorses the Rawlsian conception of “overlapping consensus” and argues that it provides a resolution to this issue because it converges diverse views of people in liberal views of justice and freedom.

Under the Rawlsian framework, a democratic and pluralistic society is assumed in which citizen’s hold diverse views on the moral and social structure of the society. The first important step Rawls took in this debate was the politicization of the concept of justice. It is crucial, for Rawls, for the conception of justice to be debated with a political undertone. The second requirement of the debate is that citizens must provide ‘reasonably acceptable’ viewpoints to their fellow citizens. The third requirement is the background definition and understanding of reasonableness. According to Rawls, justice, political equality and rule of law comprise the basic values of a democratic regime and all citizens are assumed to be debating about their approach towards these ideals. Therefore, any idea that does not guarantee these basic values is in direct disagreement with public reason. In other words, free citizens, who are politically equal, debate

about their different approaches towards the political conception of justice in a democratic society are bound to disagree because all of them, due to different life experiences, appeal to different viewpoints and offer diverse trajectories to arrive at a similar endpoint. Moreover, citizens can be considered reasonable when all of them, regardless of their disagreements over conceptions of justice, agree that they must be fair towards each other and reciprocate. Rawls argues that eventually, citizens will agree upon liberal rules, institutions and procedures as they have been derived through a fair process of argumentation and voicing their concerns for the establishment of political and social order i.e. democracy. Additionally, Rawls argues for the reasons provided by citizens to be independent from already established comprehensive doctrines. Citizens can only appeal to comprehensive doctrines if they provide publicly articulated and acceptable reasons for them.

One complication that usually arises in pluralistic societies is that of the existence of multiple comprehensive doctrines upheld by people, especially religious doctrines. Pluralism demands that, in a diverse society dominated by a clearly demarcated ethnic or religious majority, minorities should not be forced to follow the conceptions of justice and fairness expounded by the majority. Therefore, there needs to be a system which allows the freedom for minorities to follow their own lifestyles in accordance to their personal or group-specific beliefs. That is why, the Rawlsian conception of public reason establishes the need to separate the ideals of citizens from already established comprehensive doctrines. This does not mean that public reason is an attack on any doctrine, for instance Aristotelianism or for that matter, even Hinduism. Alternatively, a central component of “the idea of public reason is that it neither criticizes nor attacks any comprehensive doctrine, religious or nonreligious, except insofar as that doctrine is incompatible with the essentials of public reason and a democratic polity” (Rawls 766). On the other hand, there

are disagreements between comprehensive liberalism and political liberalism when it comes to the imposition of objectively correct principles of justice. If we assume that there are certain objectively correct principles of justice, and that they can ensure the well-being of individuals, the question then becomes whether their implementation by the state is justified or not? In other words, is it the business of the state to implement the so-called objectively correct principles which enable individuals to live worth-living, valuable life? “Must liberal philosophy be based in some particular ideal of what constitutes a valuable or a worthwhile human life, or other metaphysical beliefs? Is it permissible for a liberal state to promote or discourage some activities, ideals, or ways of life on grounds relating to their inherent or intrinsic value, or on the basis of other metaphysical claims?” (Quong 12). Or does the implementation of those principles constrain individual autonomy even though the state thinks that it can ensure individual autonomy and justice by dictating citizens how to live a life that is worth-living?

2.2.1 other strands in LPT

Liberalism: Comprehensive, Perfectionist or the Razian position?

The aforementioned questions are a decent introduction to other variants of liberalism that will be discussed in this paper i.e. comprehensive liberalism and liberal perfectionism. The ideals

of neutrality, autonomy and debate are central to this debate. Instead of dedicating most space to both variants, this paper will comment on the philosophy of Joseph Raz, whose work is a combination of both variants inside liberal political thought. Joseph Raz argues that “political action should be guided towards helping individuals lead good lives and discouraging individuals from leading bad or worthless lives” (Quong 3). Liberal perfectionists agree with Raz and endorse this claim and argue that state action that guides citizens towards a particular lifestyle is justified. However, Raz provides a slightly different view from the liberal perfectionist position that will be explained later in this section. In other words, “the liberal perfectionist position is distinguished from political liberalism by the claim that perfectionist state action can be made compatible with liberalism’s main political principles (basic human rights, religious toleration etc.).” Therefore, a perfectionist state aims to allow citizens to live a life that it objectively considers worth living according to values that it deems worth upholding. Liberal perfectionism clearly rejects the need for public justification for the state to enforce coercive laws or use its power to ensure that citizens live according to an objectively desirable view of life. In short, “they reject the view that liberal political philosophy is fundamentally about the public justification of political power, and they reject the view that the state may not permissibly act for reasons grounded in some particular view of the good life” (Quong 3). In other words, perfectionism relegates the idea of state neutrality to autonomy. For perfectionists, autonomy is the first and foremost right of citizens and the state institutions ought to be designed to protect that ideal. Therefore, the distinction between Rawlsian political liberalism, Gaussian public justification liberalism and, on the other side, liberal perfectionism is that of public justification and the limits of the coercive power of the state. Liberal perfectionism clearly argues that by not imposing or promoting a certain value-laden conception of a good life, the state is committing injustice instead of ensuring justice. It grants the state with

the moral grounding required for it to act to ensure a certain conception of justice i.e. an objectively correct understanding of the basic principles of justice. On the other hand, Rawlsian political liberalism “presents liberal rights and institutions as something that can appeal to everyone who is willing to cooperate on fair terms, regardless of one’s views as to what constitutes a virtuous or flourishing life” (Quong 4). That is why, liberalism is not an already established doctrine and does not impose its own understanding of a worth-living life.

There, however, are certain convictions about the precise nature of justice that are mutually agreed upon by all liberals. For instance, all liberals agree on the fact that all abstract citizens are equal, free and have certain basic rights that cannot be challenged e.g. life, liberty, property, political participation, personal autonomy etc.). Comprehensive liberalism is a variant of liberalism that provides intrinsic value to the ideal of individual autonomy and argues that a state ought to ensure the integrity of this ideal. Therefore, comprehensive liberalism does not deny “that many other things have intrinsic or inherent value, but they will insist that personal autonomy is a central or essential element in leading a worthwhile life. Comprehensive liberals argue that liberal rights and principles are mostly justified because they provide conditions which help make an autonomous life possible” (Quong 16). It is interesting to note that Raz’s account of liberalism is one which can be quoted as one of the best expositions of the perfectionist account as well as the comprehensive account of liberalism. Raz’s exposition includes personal autonomy as a central component of liberalism. “Comprehensive liberals claim that there is a particular conception of the good life, usually one based on an ideal of personal autonomy, and that this ideal can justify fundamental liberal principles or practices” (Quong 22).

Political liberalism, on the other hand, does not make such a strong claim that liberal principles can only be justified through an inherently liberal conception of the good human life.

Whereas comprehensive liberalism clearly argues that it is the only way liberal principles can be justified. For comprehensive liberals, liberalism is a worldview, a doctrine of ethics and morality guiding every sphere of life. Whereas for public justification liberals, liberalism is a political doctrine guiding the structure of political institutions to protect autonomy and to guarantee state neutrality. At the same time, comprehensive liberalism and liberal perfectionism are distinct because the former provides an account of liberalism as a worldview and an ethical system but does not prescribe a state which upholds and supports one particular form of life, while perfectionism supports a state that supports the ideal of autonomy by justifying it through the basic principles of liberalism. When it comes to the ideal of neutrality, comprehensive liberalism is tilted more towards neutrality while perfectionism is not.

Perfectionism maintains that the state can enable citizens to live their lives according to a worthwhile value system. This automatically means that perfectionism has to define and justify the fact that some ways of life are valuable, and others aren't. Additionally, perfectionism must identify how, or it is possible for the state to ensure this. In other words, perfectionism wants the state to intervene in some of the most personal matters of individuals and encourage certain activities while discouraging others. Therefore, intruding into personal lives of its citizens and encroaching upon their liberties that the liberal state initially promised to protect. The liberal perfectionist thesis then becomes as follows: "it is at least sometimes legitimated for a liberal state to promote or discourage particular activities, ideals, or ways of life on grounds relating to their inherent or intrinsic value, or on the basis of other metaphysical claims" (Quong 46).

Joseph Raz, known as a perfectionist, but also as an upholder of the comprehensive position, provides in his book *"The morality of freedom"* the "most sophisticated and influential

contemporary work combining comprehensive liberalism and the liberal perfectionist thesis” (Quong 46). Raz uses the harm principle and provides a very simple argument that the state’s coercive power can only be permissible if it prevents harm towards its citizens. This position is clearly consistent with the perfectionist position which argues for the state to act in favor of what it deems as good values while prohibit those that it considers the opposite. At the same time, it is also consistent with the comprehensive position which provides a specific understanding of the good life and encourages the state to endorse it, therefore giving it an intrinsic value. To conclude, it is essential to bear in mind that these debates remain unresolved and they will be put under critical scrutiny during the next part of the paper. Rawlsian political liberalism is understood to be the most convincing position as per this project as it provides the citizen with the ability to agree on reasonable grounds about the validity of the principles of justice instead of proposing personal convictions of justice or appealing to other doctrines. Additionally, it doesn’t provide extra coercive power to the liberal state as it continues to protect individual autonomy and ensure justice and fairness.

2.2.2 Liberal neutrality and religion as a conception of the good:

Ronald Dworkin (2011), another proponent of the Rawlsian definition of religion argues that religion can be equated to any other ethical system that aims to govern human behavior and organize political institutions, and social relations. In his text, ‘Religion without God’, Dworkin uses the same argument as Rawls’ position i.e. neutrality of the state towards religion. Both approaches, in essence, practically mean the same thing i.e. the state should not draw from religion or any other conceptions of the good. Hence, the state should be neutral towards all conceptions of the good and/or already established doctrines that compete for influence in the public. Broadly this idea seems novel as it treats both religious and non-religious convictions equally (Dworkin

25). However, it overlooks the special nature of religious convictions that differentiate them from other convictions of the good.

Another important presumption behind this approach is that all beliefs, secular or religious, are similar and generate similar implications therefore, they are to be treated equally. How secular and religious beliefs are different is a detailed discussion which cannot be pursued without the help of psychology and cognitive science literature. However, we can demonstrate that secular and religious beliefs manifest themselves differently or have different implications for policy. For instance, the case of the Danish cartoons shows how there is no room for debate in such matters throughout the Muslim world. The fact that secular beliefs can be debated or discussed while the fact that a cartoon making fun of Muhammad is not tolerated throughout the world shows the peculiar nature of religious beliefs. However, this does not mean that religious justifications as opposed to secular ones have more chances of being accepted despite the fact that they defy equality. This contention only means that religion has a strong epistemology, ontology and cosmology accompanied by a thoroughly defined history tightly intertwined with stories, prophets, prophecies, narratives and interpretations, eventually solidified by a number of rituals bringing the whole story together in a unique way. This of course can also be produced in an equally sophisticated and intense manner but they do not produce the same moods and motivations, expressed mostly through communal manners and held strongly despite resistance. In other words, liberal neutrality presupposes an arrangement of some kind of a differentiation between religion and state, and identifies religions as conceptions of the good and singles them out to be treated by the state on an equal basis with non-religious conceptions.

As we will discuss later on, this theory can backfire on both sides. It can also produce certain occasions where religion will demand protection and won't be protected while it may also

end up encroaching liberal ideals where it requires containment. Dworkin's radical definition of religion put freedom of religion under the category of general rights instead of special rights. This project broadly agrees with the treatment of religion. However, it does not agree with the justification of the treatment of religion as a conception of the good. This does not mean that religion is a conception of the non-good. It means that religion can potentially produce far more complex and nuanced demands from and restrictions on individual liberty where it becomes difficult for justificatory purposes. In short, Dworkin identified that both religious and non-religious arguments can be problematic when it comes to justification, therefore, it is better for religion not to be singled out. However, this project aims to take one step further and argues that the line drawn between religious and non-religious arguments is not as clear as Dworkin presupposes, therefore, it is better not to treat any argument as a religious argument, but to 'secularize' the argument and view it purely in terms of its justificatory potential regarding individual/community rights, private/public considerations, negative/positive rights and so forth. But this can only be done after a reconceptualization of religion, and as a result, secularism, the discussion on whom will follow later.

3. Religion: conception and treatment?

3.1.1 What is Religion?

We are gradually transitioning to the second part of the thesis which aims to complicate the simple understanding of religion, and secularism, to make room for a historically informed understanding of both phenomena. There are certain considerations that have to be established before that. First, theorists of politics and religion have debated religion and secularism from the lens of Christianity when they referred to religion. It is essential to point out that other religions are not institutionalized in the same way as Christianity is. Therefore, secularism cannot be imitated and applied easily in non-Christian societies as it was primarily a solution to the Christianity-politics problem. Second, the premises that Public Reason is based as a concept on, need, re-evaluation when they are applied to those areas where most people understand religion not as something that can be separated from their worldly experience. For instance, in the Indian subcontinent, people do not conceptualize Islam and Hinduism as separate spheres of culture. On the contrary, they are worldviews which provide the broader covering to the social fabric of society. Therefore, staying in or outside them is not the choice or question. The question, on the contrary, is how to follow them. Now, one may say that this defies neutrality.

However, at the same time, some practices of all religions in the subcontinent cannot be protected without the state being involved. For instance, if Muslims want to slaughter cows in public, Hindus cannot allow that because the cow is a sacred animal in Hinduism. Therefore, the state cannot stay neutral by saying that every citizen is free to practice their own religion without encroaching on anyone else's liberties. The state has to get involved in one way or another to provide a means for Muslims to practice their rituals while ensuring that Hindu segments of the

population are not hurt. Now why is this kind of neutrality or involvement different from secularism?

It is different because secularism assumes one institution to represent religion I.e. the church whereas it is almost impossible to find a similar connection, for example, in the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, due to lack of a church or clerical council representing either Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs, the state will be the sole guarantor of their rights but not by distancing itself from religious institutions, but by providing a liberal mechanism that guarantees rights through specific judgments. Does this violate state neutrality? If the laws are justified based on liberal ideals, it does not violate state neutrality. Why does not the conception of European secularism work here? This is because it assumed religion to become a private affair and the church to answer to those private individuals who wanted to practice. Whereas in this case, religion pretty much stays a communal affair because cow slaughtering is a communal festival (Eid-al-Azha) and the Hindu community collectively regards cow as a sacred animal. Therefore, there is a crucial difference between secularism and state neutrality which we see playing an important role here.

3.1.2 What treatment does religion deserve?

Liberal Political theory and liberal democracies have conventionally treated religion as unique under the law, requiring both special protection (as in guarantees of free worship) and special containment (to keep religion and the state separate). But recently this idea that religion requires a legal exception has come under fire from those who argue that religion is no different from any other conception of the good, and the state should treat all such conceptions according to principles of neutrality and equal liberty. A simple analogy between the good and religion misrepresents the complex relationships among religion, law, and the state. Religion serves as more than a statement of belief about what is true, or a code of moral and ethical conduct. It also refers to comprehensive ways of life, political theories of justice, modes of voluntary association, and vulnerable collective identities. This section of the project will focus on the term ‘religion’. The central question this section aims to tackle is the concept or conception of religion. Religion, as opposed to theology, and as an infrastructure, has been well-researched since the past three centuries. Beginning from Protestant circles in Western Europe, the concept ‘religion’ was distinguished from theology and studied as a distinct sphere of human life. Later on, this term was abstracted and carried on from religious studies and sociology to other disciplines for instance anthropology, history, philosophy and political science. The most important point regarding religion this section of this paper aims to make is the following: religion, as a concept, has been misunderstood in academia and the fact that it was built on a historically specific understanding of public life during post-reformation Europe, is overlooked while it is investigated. Therefore, the accounts of moral and political philosophy which stem from such an understanding lead to conclusions that overlook the complex variations, thoughts, moods and motivations it produces that eventually become important analytical categories for our theoretical discussions.

What is religion? Even though it is difficult to reduce a phenomenon that possesses a broad range of practices, encompasses diverse regions and different ethnicities to a definition, it is still useful to define religion to establish a clear line of inquiry that helps us relate it to the political. Since political science literature has not attempted to define or redefine religion properly, it is more fruitful to consult sociological accounts of religion since the epistemology of political science broadly agrees with the way religion has been defined by the founding fathers of sociology. Approaches to religion in sociology have managed to make their way towards other academic disciplines, the mass media and the popular conscience. These approaches have been abstracted towards a universal narrative of religion and used in other disciplines for instance political science. These approaches provide us with a framework to theorize on and about religion but one limitation of using them is that they emerge from the modernization and secularization theses based on Eurocentric approaches towards religion. Therefore, political science literature does not attempt to question the provincialism to the modern approach towards religion. That is why Dipesh Chakrabarty's thesis is included in the literature review since it informs the basic premises of this critique and expounds that European centric approaches towards the histories of other regions have produced inadequate conclusions and context-specific approaches are required.

3.2 Approaches in the Sociology of Religion

This section provides a brief survey of the approaches towards religion. A survey of approaches towards religion is required to make a simple argument about the theorization of religion: that religion has been understood in the modern academy as something that is distinct from culture, politics and other spheres and belief has been viewed with certain presupposition that were inherently centered on the European worldview of looking at the world. Instead of perceiving modernity and the values it brought such as secularism as being recent and unique, religion is seen as an anomaly that wasn't supposed to exist after the emergence of modern life. Therefore, when religion is seen as an active part of the public or political sphere, it is questioned because its disappearance was assumed to be an inevitable consequence of modernity and secularization. As a consequence of a different understanding of religion, the significance of religion in the public sphere will also change leading to a renewed understanding of the arguments used by contemporary liberal political thought. So what is religion? Is it an infrastructure? Is it a concept? Is it a system of beliefs? Is religion a worldview or a universal doctrine to make sense of the world around us? How should political theorists understand religion? Should we understand religion according to its function? Or as an alternative worldview to modern life? A short survey of the understanding of religion is important to discuss further.

Beginning from Emile Durkheim, religion is understood according to the function it serves in society. Durkheim argues that religion helps people separate the sacred from the profane or the mundane and helps establish order in society. This is known as the functionalist understanding of religion. This approach believes that the public sphere is a space where certain ideas compete for authority and in religious communities, religious beliefs dominate the public sphere and help establish order. Another popular approach towards religion stems from the idea of power

relationships. These approaches are based on Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge and authority and Marxist dialectic of power, ideas and class struggles. These approaches view religion as a dominant force in society that shapes ideas and is used as a tool to construct power relationships. According to these approaches, just like other ideas constructed by humans, religion is the dominant idea that ensures subordination of one class of people over another class. In this sense, religion in the public sphere is used as a mechanism to maintain authority over the ruled by the ruling classes. An even broader approach towards religion is the cognitive approach. The cognitive approaches towards religion argue that religion provides an answer to the world around people and people construct religious ideals to help them make sense of society around us. This approach is related to the rationalist school which provides an account of the rationalization of the world around us. It argues that people have this tendency to rationalize the world around them and they carry traditional ideals with them while they continue to interpret them according to the changing nature of the world around them. One sub-school under the cognitive approach is known as the anthropomorphist approach. One of the main contemporary voices in this school is Stewart Guthrie. Guthrie argues that "religion is a form of anthropomorphism" (Guthrie 1996). Guthrie argues that "facing an uncertain world, we interpret ambiguous phenomena as what concerns us most. That usually is living things, especially humans. Thus we see the world as more humanlike than it is. Religions are systems of thought and action building in large measure upon this powerful, pervasive, and involuntary tendency" (Guthrie 1996). This approach also centres itself on cognition and psychology while maintaining a broader constructivist position eventually claiming that religious ideas are constructed to make sense of the world around us.

Another approach towards understanding religion is the symbolic approach. Clifford Geertz, a prominent sociologist of religion, approaches the concept through the symbolic approach.

Geertz defines religion “as a cultural system. According to Geertz, Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz 90). This approach is known as the symbolic approach towards religion. This approach is important since it attempts to provide us with a definition of religion, which is quite a courageous and overwhelming task. It is imperative to keep in mind that this definition has been critiqued even in sociology and is not considered as the most authoritative account anymore, but this project is using it since it still is a precise definition and it represents the problematic presuppositions behind the idea of religion as it is used throughout political science as well.

3.3.1 Talal Asad's Secularism and its critique:

The broader critique of the aforementioned approaches can be situated in another anthropologist of religion i.e. Talal Asad. His approach is a critique of the symbolic, cognitive, psychological and functionalist approaches towards religion. Talal Asad's approach is known as the historical approach towards religion which is expounded in his book chapter titled 'the construction of religion as an anthropological category'. Even though the chapter deals with the definition of religion in the discipline of anthropology, it can be carried straightforwardly into political science or for that matter any other discipline since these evolutionary ideas were borrowed from anthropology and sociology and used in other disciplines without proper scrutiny. All other approaches discussed in this paper also recognize that religions appear in specific historical circumstances and an analysis of those specific circumstances is integral to inquiry, but Asad situates the develop of a particular Eurocentric understanding of religion in the historical circumstances in which it emerged and relates it to the emergence of secularism. Asad, in his chapter, "the construction of religion as an anthropological category", argues that during the 19th century, anthropologists thought that religion is the primitive form of the refined approaches towards law, science, politics and art as we see them today and that they exist in front of us in their purest form after their detachment from religion. He further argues that during the 20th century, those evolutionary ideas were rejected that considered religion as an "outmoded form of thinking as opposed to scientific disciplines" (Asad 115). In fact, 20th century anthropology began to think of religion as a "distinctive space of human practices and belief which cannot be reduced to any other. From this it seems to follow that the essence of religion is not to be confused with the essence of politics, although in many societies, the two may overlap and be intertwined" (Asad 115). This understanding, Asad argues, has led to an understanding of religion which separates the essence

of religion from the essence of other spheres of culture. Therefore, this approach understands religion as a “transhistorical and transcultural It may be a happy accident that this effort of defining religion converges with the liberal demand of our time that it be kept quite separate from politics, law, and science - spaces in which varieties of power and reason articulate our distinctively modern life” (Asad 116). This argument has been discussed in detail and responded to, by other sociologists in detail, but the reason it is being used here is that it is offering an alternative way to understand the phenomenon of religion. This conception of religion will inform political philosophy since it theorizes religion by accounting for its historical development and it locates how one particular circle of post-reformation Christianity defined the phenomenon and it got carried forward without a critical analysis. Asad argues that “this separation of religion from power is a modern western norm, the product of a unique post-reformation history” (Asad 117). This argument suggests that religion and politics are not two different spheres which ought to be kept apart from each other.

That is why, a lot of approaches towards Islamism or political Islam see religious fundamentalists trying to capture state power using religion as a tool. Such an understanding of religious movements comes from this conception of the separation of religion and politics that was developed in a particular part of the world during a particular stage in history i.e. post reformation Europe. The repetition of this historical trajectory of secularism and the definition of religion is important here since it identifies that what we call religion was being practiced in many parts of the world but in a similar way as it is now, but after the introduction of this definition and conception of religion springing from post-reformation protestant circles, it began to be conceived in a radically different way where its presence in public life became a marker of backwardness, irrationality and belief. This approach restricted the phenomenon of religion to the private sphere

and argued that it has nothing to do with the public sphere. It was further argued that even if this phenomenon exists in public life, it will gradually disappear as societies modernize. In other words, nothing changed in actual practical terms while the conception of this phenomenon changed and somehow it began to be treated as something that can be easily separated from public life and understood. For instance, after the popularization of this conception of religion, the Sikhness or the Muslimness of a Sikh or a Muslim could be easily differentiated from their cultural/political/secular modes of behavior. On the other hand, in reality, religious or traditional societies continued to operate the same way: the people mobilizing under the name of Islam or Hinduism in pre-colonial India did not perceive of religion as something that they actively chose and decided to agree on, for them, these aspects of their identity were as important as their cultural/communal/personal ideals. It's imperative to note here, is that this same conception has not been questioned in popular discourse and even inside circles of political thought. That is exactly why, religion becomes a doctrine, a set of doctrines, or a belief system that offers an alternative view of reality. This paper is meant to create the space for an understanding which does not define religion as something separable from all other spheres and therefore, people are free to choose for or against it.

Asad further argues that “socially identifiable forms, preconditions, and effects of what was regarded as religion in the medieval Christian epoch were quite different from those so considered in modern society. What we call religious power was differently distributed and had a different thrust. There were different ways in which it created and worked through legal institutions, different selves that it shaped and responded to, and different categories of knowledge which it authorized and made available. The entire phenomenon is to be seen in large measure in the context of Christian attempts to achieve a coherence in doctrines and practices,

rules and regulations, even if that was a state never fully attained. Therefore, from the aforementioned analysis, it seems to follow that 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” (Asad 116). In other words, religion, as it is defined today, does not help us arrive at any meaningful conclusion since it is considered as a distinct phenomenon easily distinguishable from other spheres of human life.

3.3.2 Religion as an analytical category:

The main argument about religion is simple: religion is not religion. Religion is a term, a concept that represented a unique and wide range of practices, interpretations and beliefs while European anthropologists and sociologists tried to understand non-European societies during their first encounters. Religion is not a separate set of beliefs, institutions, rituals, rites, symbols, entities and so forth. Religion, the term and the conception, inside academic circles, the mass media and popular discourse, is a characterization of a phenomenon that was difficult to understand and differentiate from the European experience, expressed by a group of intellectuals who experienced and witnessed transformative ruptures in a specific historical setting (protestant reformation, secularism, separation of spheres of culture into political, religious etc). Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that the semantic definition of religion has particular historical roots and is prone to be questioned as a historical construct. However, it does not mean that the understanding of religion is completely pointless, this chapter only aims to say that there are certain subtle differences between the way communities imagine the public sphere in the non-Western, primarily the Muslim world and South Asia. This chapters and the discussion on religion in this project, aims to provide one concrete argument i.e. the definition of religion is mischaracterized, however, it can always be expanded and reconstructed, but what's important for us is to imagine a situation where we neither identify religion with culture, politics nor separate it from them. This would help us identify the practices and interpretations that help a liberal state uphold its ideals while not misrepresenting religions or religious arguments as threats to individual autonomy, equality and toleration.

The next phase of this chapter will bring back the debate in circles of contemporary liberal political thought regarding the place of religion and religion related doctrines in public and/or

political life. In addition to that, the next important phenomenon to be discussed in this project is that of colonialism and postcolonial societies. Colonialism and colonial legacies will be discussed since they transformed processes of identity construction for most of the world including the Middle East, South Asia, most of Africa and Latin America. Therefore, post-colonial societies produced a distinct form of religiosity which has overlooked in political philosophy. For instance, comprehensive liberalism, as a universal doctrine, becomes impossible to be implemented in post-colonial societies that still derive their basic inspiration from religion. On the other hand, Rawlsian political liberalism, despite its limitations mentioned in the first chapter, reappears and seems to be an appealing alternative since it justifies liberal principles on the basis of their importance in the resolution of disagreements in a multicultural society.

3.4 Laborde's disaggregation hypothesis:

Recently, these accounts of political liberalism have been challenged by critical political theorists. These theorists include Cecile Laborde, Aurelia Bardon, Jean L. Cohen, and Tariq Modood, among others. Cecile Laborde, in her work, *Liberalism's Religion*, thoroughly presents an appreciation of the recent critiques of the understanding of religion in political philosophy. She outlines the major critiques coming from sociology, history, gender studies and religious studies and demonstrates her understanding of these issues. She has argued for a unique understanding of religion where it is not understood as a unique and special phenomenon altogether, since that would undermine equality if it is treated specially.

Cecile Laborde has questioned the conception of religion in LPT. According to Laborde, “the strategy of analogizing religion with a conception of the good is too vague and too limited to capture the different dimensions of religion in relation to which the liberal state has construed itself” (Laborde 266). The solution provided by Laborde, in her text ‘liberalism's religion’ is to

disaggregate the conception of religion into its “politically and normatively specific” features (Laborde 266). In other words, Laborde is trying to promote a special secularism where religion’s disaggregated features will be evaluated according to liberalism’s ideals of equality and liberty in the first step. The next step would entail the protection of religion where special religious groups deserve it to preserve equal treatment and the containment of religion when it disturbs the ideals of liberalism. Laborde is definitely more empathetic towards the category of religion and has tried to understand it on its own terms. Disaggregating religion into its various dimensions, as Laborde does, has two clear advantages. First, it shows greater respect for ethical and social pluralism by ensuring that whatever treatment religion receives from the law, it receives because of features that it shares with nonreligious beliefs, conceptions, and identities. Second, it “dispenses with the Western, Christian-inflected conception of religion that liberal political theory relies on, especially in dealing with the issue of separation between religion and state” (Laborde 4). However, she has still tried to defend the most simple and homogenous conception of secularism. In Laborde’s thesis, religion receives special treatment while secularism is assumed to be a clearly defined concept that has not been questioned. She doesn’t appreciate the different strands and varieties of secularism that exist in practice throughout the globe and she doesn’t take into account the fact that they are far from the theoretical models of secularism. Broadly, the disaggregation of religion is not enough because secularism is still assumed simply to be the separation of church and state. The section will discuss the recent literature on secularism and LPT’s secularism needs to be unpacked and questioned.

Questions such as why haven’t Muslim majority states or post-colonial Arab or South Asian states secularized? Is it because of inequalities in education or lack of technological advancements? Such questions have at least stopped emerging in recent literature since there has

been an appreciation of, in Charles Taylor's words, the 'ethnocentricity' of secularism. After the intervention of Talal Asad, the historicized conceptions of religion and secularism have been taken into account by sociologists, anthropologists and later on, by political theorists. In addition to that, modern ideals of freedom of thought, freedom of religion, feminism, individual choice under religious belief systems and so forth have been critically assessed in Saba Mahmood's work on Egyptian piety movements. The question of secularism and its applicability in non-western contexts was always answered using a certain west-centric lens, thereby producing inadequate accounts of the relationship between religion and the public/political sphere. However, recent scholarship on religion and secularism has begun to identify the blind spots that were previously overlooked. In Talal Asad's words, liberalism applies a "transhistorical and transcultural" definition of religion to theorize on multicultural and specifically non-western societies.

In simple words, this project will be an attempt to see whether the recent developments i.e. the inclusion of the interpretive dimensions of religion, in the methodology of political philosophy are enough to make secularism as an ideal normatively applicable universally to non-western societies. By the disaggregation thesis being enough, I mean to say whether it is enough to unpack only the definition of definition and not the conception of secularism, even if it is assumed to be minimal? Some may argue that the question of universal applicability of the secularism as it emerged in Europe has been answered and it has been established that there are certain contextual and historical concerns differentiating the 'western' and 'non-western' experiences. And that this model can be adjusted according to the South Asian, Middle Eastern or North African context. However, this conception has certain normative blind spots and LPT has found it difficult to appreciate the theoretical problems this conception might encounter in parts of the world who are not as ethnically homogenous, dominated by followers of two sects of one religion, consisting

of a single institution representing religion and claiming political power (the church) as 17th century Western, northern European states. In addition to that, liberal democracies in the region that produced and at least in principle, successfully implemented the ideal of state neutrality through secularism were never colonized, therefore, they had their identities intact and shaped by their internal experiences, while post-colonial states produced fractured identities which were sometimes supported strong communal and religious components to fill the vacuum created by complex processes of ideological subjugation by the colonizing powers.

4. Lessons from non-Western secularisms:

Tala Asad's intervention has been important, however, he overlooks the institutional differentiation that has taken place and contributed to the achievement of liberal ideals in Europe and North America. According to Asad, secularism is ethnocentric and a specific historical product of 16th century Church-state relations, scientific progress as a result of the renaissance and the religious wars of Europe. However, Asad's critique has been rehearsed repeatedly to avoid the question of a normative solution for the peaceful coexistence of doctrinal diversity in modern multicultural democracies. The broader question still remains the same in political, constitutional and legal theory: what is the best way to organize societies that have multiple religious and cultural identities while preserving liberal ideals? The broader answer to this broad question still seems to be a preservation of liberal ideals but only after a reassessment of secularism itself. One unique definition of secularism and its relationship to religion has been provided by Starrett. Gregory Starrett has attempted to define secularism in a radically different way. After the critiques of Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood and Hirschkind, Gregory has provided with a different lens to see secularism and its evolution. According to Starrett, religion and secularism do not necessarily represent "two players in a zero-sum game, but players whose moves not only counter, but often actively advance the interests and successes of the other" (Starrett 643).

Rajeev Bhargava, in his paper, "is European secularism secular enough", argues that European secularism is not secular enough because it was meant for "single religion societies and it has to make a conceptual shift towards a secularism that is far more sensitive and finely tuned to deep religious diversity" (Bhargava 158). His diagnosis about the conceptual issue facing European secularism is sound, but it is accompanied by certain assumptions that are methodologically integral to this discussion. First, he believes secularism to be an essential tool

for the regulation of religion. Second, he assumes that there is a clearly definable solution to the problem of religious diversity in a liberal state. And he further goes on to say that the conceptual issue in European secularism is that it hasn't moved from being a secularism designed for single-religion societies one that incorporate deep religious diversity, the likes of which we find mostly in the non-western world. He argues that with deep religious diversity, there is a continued feeling of otherness, both within and outside the religious tradition one believes in. This is as profound in some cases that "doctrinal differences are cast in a way that undermines basic trust in one another and the other is viewed and felt as an existential threat" (Bhargava 169). However, if we look at the Indian case, it is entirely different as compared to the European experience. Multiple faiths (Zoroastrians, Syrian Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus) coexisted with each other through a system of mutual trust where the other did not represent an existential threat. However, with the advent of colonial modernity, these boundaries were shattered and the mutual trust was undermined due to several historical reasons that are not relevant here. But what's relevant is that when Indian secularism was conceived of, or implemented, it already contained deep doctrinal diversity. That is exactly why, this model of secularism brings some components that are new to the field. For instance, this kind of secularism, due to its deep and natural ties to religious diversity, does not only uphold basic values of liberalism "pertaining to individuals but it is interpreted broadly also to cover the relative autonomy of religious communities, and in limited and specific domains, their equality of status in society" (Bhargava 171).

Indian secularism provides us with another interesting lesson. That of preserving community rights not through an emancipatory liberal agenda but by through provision of certain rights directly to communities for instance in education. The Indian state guarantees the rights of religious communities to organize educational institutions to preserve their unique traditions.

However, this is not done under an individual rights guaranteeing framework, but in a communal framework where the state maintains its relationship to each religious community. In the case of European secularism, this would be difficult to achieve because it managed to incidentally guarantee individual rights to their religious minorities e.g. Jews in France. However, it is important to remember that they were not given rights through a public recognition of Jews as a community, but as emancipated individuals who were allowed to organize themselves. This does not mean that the French case is qualitatively inferior to the Indian case. It only means that if India was to apply the French model of guaranteeing freedom to practice through individual rights, the Hindu majority would naturally dominate educational institutions, one of the most important means of preserving communal traditions.

Hussein Ali Agrama points towards another understanding of the function and properties of secularism. Agrama argues that “secularism involves less a separation of religion and politics than the fashioning of religion as an object of continual management and intervention, and the shaping of religious life and sensibility to fit the presuppositions and ongoing requirements of liberal governance” (Agrama 499). Agrama argues that secularism is “an expression of the state’s sovereign power and as a feature of the modern state’s regulatory capacity, is fraught with an indeterminacy” (Agrama 500). This is a special argument since it places focus on the state and its regulatory regime which makes it its business to control all those elements of culture that can threaten its monopoly.

Is secularism, as an ideal, after the historical critiques of the concept, still a valid political solution to the problem of incorporating diversity in non-Western contexts? This question does not have a simple answer because of the way it is related to religion. Secularism and religion do not necessarily have a complementary relationship because secularism was elaborated to resolve the

conflicts produced by doctrinal or religious diversity by relegating it to the private sphere. Secondly, religion, as imagined initially by modern disciplines, was Western catholic Christianity which operated differently as compared to other major religions of the world. Therefore, before answering or while answering this question, it is important to discuss whether secularism itself is what it means i.e. a value-free ideal which can be tweaked and applied to contexts other than the context it originated in. Is secularism still applicable the way it was envisioned when it has started to succumb to religious diversity even in those societies where it was originally conceived? The definition of secularism as a normative ideal in liberal political thought is still not questioned properly. Just like religion is not only another conception of the good, secularism too is not the separation of religion and state. The category of church in this statement cannot simply be replaced with the category of religion and applied to non-western contexts because of differences in the structure of religious institutions, understanding of community, historical trajectories of decolonization and nation building, and so forth. These will be elaborated in the upcoming section and conclusion.

Jean L. Cohen argues that even the new conception of secularism i.e. ‘minimal secularism’ which grants more rights to religion justified by demands of fair treatment, can lead to certain situations where gender equality and other hard won and fragile norms might be violated. Cohen is pointing out the areas where religious convictions might clash with democratic ideals of gender equality, LGBTQ rights and so forth. Cohen argues that “differentiation between the institutions of religion and the state, and the comprehensiveness of the latter’s jurisdiction and its supremacy over the former, are features of political secularism that are indispensable for liberal democracies” (Cohen 3). Her analysis seems to point out the fundamental value conflicts between religion and liberalism. Therefore, even minimal secularism within liberal democratic theory, has to keep

religion at bay and maintain some sort of a hierarchical relationship between religious and liberal convictions.

Just like religion, secularism has manifested itself in a diverse range of practices, institutional arrangements and conceptual tools. According to Charles Taylor, the requirement of secularism is theoretically simple but practically complex. Secularism requires that owing to diversity, a modern state should practice neutrality towards religion. In other words, “the state can’t be officially linked to some religious confession, except in a vestigial and largely symbolic sense, as in England or Scandinavia” (Taylor 1). However, he argues that the requirements practically become complex. He unpacks liberalism’s ideals i.e. liberty, equality, fraternity. Liberty demands that belief should not be imposed on anyone i.e. freedom of religion. Equality demands that all religions should be treated equally; it is easier said than done. Fraternity requires “all spiritual families must be heard, included in the ongoing process of determining what the society is about (its political identity) and how it is going to realize these goals (the exact regime of rights and privileges)” (Taylor 1). This schema is the simplest definition of secularism which serves as the beginning point for our discussion. However, as we can see in European societies, secularism has evolved and taken many different shapes. The French ban on headscarves, the collection of taxes on behalf of the church by the German government, state support for religious schools and seminaries by the French government, the Swiss controversy with minarets, are just a few examples of how secularism has violated equality and fraternity by privileging one religion over the other. However, in the end, for Taylor, secularism is still an ideal, regardless of the restrictions on its mobility, which should and can be pursued for the peaceful coexistence of diverse beliefs and belief systems in a society.

To conclude the chapter, answers to the questions concerning the relationship of religion and secularism are muddled even further after a closer look at contemporary literature. The broader question of the applicability of western theories of secularism is far from answered. However, there are certain takeaways from this debate. First, religion is more than just another conception of the good. Second, secularism in application is far from the idealized French or American models that preserve equality, fraternity and liberty through exclusion and walls of separation. In an age of increasing religious diversity in European, specifically western European societies, secularism has proved to be insufficient since it was meant for homogenous people sharing certain provincial values. Third, it is not easy to disassociate secularism and religion by looking at any example from modern states throughout the world. Therefore, both of them do not necessarily work against or towards the annihilation of each other from the public sphere. Fourth, liberal principles can be still be strived for through a special arrangement, institutional, symbolic or multi-dimensional, with religion and religious convictions. Cohen's minimal secularism, or political secularism in Laborde's words, under liberalism as a political doctrine according to Rawls, are the broader positions this project defends.

5. Does secularism undermine neutrality?

The last section of the thesis will attempt to conclude by putting the analyses discussed above into conversation. If secularism is a historically and contextually specific phenomenon and liberalism's religion is ahistorical and transcultural, does secularism lose its universal applicability? If secularism, as a doctrine, aim to implement a model of state neutrality that emerged in a historically and geographically specific environment, does it then, undermine neutrality? After this discussion on the historicization of the concepts of secularism and religion, we ought to discuss its ramifications for neutrality. Broadly, an argument can be made for both sides i.e. a review of secularism makes us realize how the way secularism is envisioned does not directly promise state neutrality and how after a thorough historical understanding of secularism makes us appreciate the ideal even more. This is not to say that secularism as a normative ideal is not desirable because it does not help us protect the ideals of equality, liberty and universal suffrage. However, secularism, if viewed only as a political doctrine, and not as a social, ethical (humanist) doctrine, can be defended to arrive at state neutrality. It is only possible after a reconceptualization of the definition of religion and its disaggregation in to practices, interpretations and variants in different contexts.

Secularism still stays a normative ideal to be achieved because it produced stability while promising equal treatment to multicultural and multiethnic societies in Europe and North America. However, the universal applicability of secularism requires more than just an appreciation of the ideals it achieved in Western Europe and North America. This is because as the historical development of secularism showed us that secularism did not emerge out of circumstances that could be universally replicated and then applied to other, non-Western contexts. Orthodox Christian, Confucian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist societies did not envision the tension between

religion and state or religion and culture in a similar way as Western European protestant societies did. Secularism as a political arrangement meant more a separation of the church and state rather than that of a religion and state since such a clear separation can't possibly be imagined in non-Western societies because religion does not revolve around a clearly defined institution i.e. the church.

Secularism, too is not simply the separation of church and state. In fact, it is more the management of religion by the state. While putting forward her disaggregation hypothesis, Cecile Laborde overestimates the space that secularism or liberalism provides. This means that there are certain inherent clashes between the way liberal democracies are envisioned and institutions built and some religious norms, beliefs and convictions. The best a liberal state governing a multicultural and multiethnic society can do is to manage religion not by distancing itself from it, because of reasons mentioned above, but by identifying its diverse practices and dimensions and position them according to ideals of liberalism. This is because a clear separation between the theological clergy and political apparatus is difficult to envision in a traditionally Hindu or Muslim society because of the history of the convergence of religion, culture and politics in these societies. For example, religion prescribes diverse practices and rituals. The first step is the identification of rituals that do not undermine peace, stability, human rights and protect them while contain those practices and rituals that undermine liberal ideals. The last section of the thesis will continue to discuss the ideal of secularism under the broader structure of a liberal state.

The question that arises after the above discussion is whether secularism is the ideal non-western societies should aspire to while they aim for a neutral state? Or as Laborde puts it, “separation between church and state historically went hand in hand with the emergence of the Western modern, and later liberal, state. But does this mean that such separation is a structural

requirement of liberal democracy?” (Laborde 425). Overall, the broader normative ideal this project prescribes is that of state neutrality in a liberal democracy. However, whether the western, historically and geographically specific conception of secularism is the ideal solution to manage and regulate religion is the question we are primarily concerned with in this project. As we proceed closer towards the conclusion, it is crucial to highlight why the ideal of secularism might complicate the ideal of state neutrality in a clearly specified manner. To begin with, a liberal state does and should not premise political authority based on any one religion or any other already established doctrine. The liberal state, in traditional and contemporary liberal political thought, should only derive its legitimacy from ethically neutral sources, not necessarily secular, because secularism represents a historical phenomenon abstracted to be aligned with state neutrality, which is not necessarily accurate, as discussed in the previous sections. Now the usage of the term and concept ‘secular’ here is problematic, while the principle behind this term is not. The principle represented by the term secular is that of the non-establishment of religion and state’s neutral approach towards all religious, ethical, and other philosophical doctrines that exist in any given state. However, secularism, from the French *laïcité* to the Turkish Kemalist version, has the potential to undermine neutrality because of its authoritarian tendencies. Secondly, secularism’s conception is inflicted with its Christian past and history. Third, secularism emerged in regions with homogenous populations practicing only one religion instead of ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse cultures that prevailed in non-western and specifically South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African societies. Fourth, issues of identity and history have been excluded from the normative assumptions in LPT so far. Postcolonial movements throughout South Asia and MENA produced fractured and complex identities which could not help but rely sometimes on

religious symbols and ideas for independence from colonialism, state building and constitution making processes.

The first issue to be addressed here is that secularism theoretically follows the liberal principle of state neutrality and can be defended in that light. Eventually, in order to regulate and control religion, the kemalist version of secularism established a strong ministry of religion that encroached on individual liberties by restricting people from wearing hats (the Hatlaw of 1925) and banned men from wearing traditional clothing that represented their religious tendencies (law relating to prohibition of garments 1934). In this case, we see that Turkish secularism, which does not necessarily represent an ideal type for the Muslim world, but it still does represent the enforcement of secular norms on a traditionally Muslim populace, promised state neutrality, removed religious justifications from politics and guaranteed minority rights for its Greek Orthodox and Armenian minorities, but also encroached upon the individual rights of the Muslim majority. Therefore, the main argument here is that secularism can only be defended as long as it fulfills the requirements of state neutrality and liberalism. In the Turkish case, it tended to be authoritarian and encroached upon individual liberties.

Secondly, the notion of secularism is inflicted with its Christian heritage. While theorizing the principle of state neutrality, LPT literature has not yet addressed the differences between church and religion and inferred logically that the separation of church and state can be abstracted to mean the separation of religion and state. However, the structure of religious authority and institutions is not the same in non-Christian religions, be it Abrahamic or non-Abrahamic. In the Islamic case, despite Islamic history being dominated by a tendency to separate religious orthodoxy from all forms of politics, the modern world has seen an Islamist turn in contemporary Muslim states. Since Islam does not have a clearly defined institution which represents the whole

Muslim community under its banner like the church in Christianity, the enforcement of the western model of secularism becomes an unachievable task. This is because Islam has traditionally provided the broader cover for state and civil society while simultaneously the caliph would exercise political authority premised on their family or dynasty and restrict the power of the orthodoxy to a merely symbolic nature. The second part of this argument has to do with the legal aspect in Muslim and Jewish societies. Judaism and Islam have more in common with each other than what either of them have with Christianity because both have a religio-legal angle rather than merely a political one. In traditional Muslim societies, the religious orthodoxy or the clergy would not lay political claims while the church in Christianity has had a history of competing with the sovereign Kings for political power. This is where the context of the French revolution, the religious wars of Europe and the Lutheran theological evolution becomes an important point in the history of European secularism.

Third, the issue of conflicted and fractured identities is another important angle to consider when thinking of post-colonial states and other states based on religious identities. One of the strongest empirical cases for this argument is the state of Israel and the complicated facets of Israeli identity including the religious and cultural role Judaism has played in it. Israel, specifically owing to its ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ divide, is an interesting case study for observatory and analytical purposes in this chapter. This is because Israel, since its inception as a sovereign state, and due to historical reasons, has had a rich diversity of ideas regarding what being Jewish and democratic means. Israel’s origins were clearly defined by the connection of land (Palestine) and people (Jews). Hence, we clearly see that the primary source of identity of the inhabitants of Israel was the religious part which connected them and their history to a common geographical entity I.e. Palestine. The legacy of Israel’s foundation as a state contained a serious dichotomy, that being a

liberal democratic state but since it was for Jews, it had to have a Jewish flavor to it in terms of justification of political authority and legitimacy and later on, legislation, due to the inherently Jewish nature of Israeli identity. Nevertheless, Jewish identity also went through a transformation where the secular Zionists emphasized the cultural and linguistic angle and gave it a more nationalist tone. However, it remains important for our discussion for two reasons. First, secularism's intimacy with Christianity does not allow it to work neither with the Jewish nor with a Muslim population. Second, it provides us with the theoretical space to discuss other religions and regions as well. Israel is the beginning point because the state of Israel and the people who migrated to settle down were staunchly secular, except for some groups from Eastern Europe, while the leadership sought to establish a liberal democratic state. However, they could not succeed purely and religion in politics remains a major issue in Israeli public and parliamentary debates.

As mentioned above, the Christian connection of secularism makes it problematic for the rest of the non-Abrahamic traditions, Islam and Judaism. This is because of its reliance on the church as an institution which has claims on political power and represents the whole polity. In addition to that, Christian civilization historically had the tradition of Roman law besides it while it the New Testament did not account for civil or communal law to dictate the lives of the people. On the other hand, Islam and Judaism “both place great emphasis on the law. Both religious systems conceive of a comprehensive religio-legal system covering all aspects of the individual's relations to others and of the individual's relation to God. Everything is taken into account and set out in detail – times of prayer, foods that may be eaten and manner of ritual slaughter of animals, almsgiving, inheritance, and even such minor details as the use of a toothpick” (Brown 24, 2000). While Christianity does not directly guide or dictate individual believers everyday life in a similar way. In addition to that Judaism and Islam do not have similar structures of religious authority that

can be compared to the church in Christianity. In Islam, there are several schools of law in addition to the major sects of Sunni and Shia Islam while those schools of law (Maliki, Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafi, Jafari) also have several strands of thought depending on indigenous cultures and geographical considerations. If a cleric from Pennsylvania issues a fatwa (ruling) from his/her website, it is not directly applicable to Muslims living in Egypt. This would happen despite the cleric claiming to be a spokesperson for Islam and Muslims. However, in Christianity, papal authority is considered to be the final arbiter of what Christianity stands for. On the other hand, in Judaism, there are orthodox, ultra-orthodox, secularized practicing and non-practicing Jewish groups who have different political positions on but they still consider those positions to be inherently representing Judaism.

Initial compromises in the state of Israel serve as strong examples for the argument emanating from identity. In Israel's case, Ben Gurion, a staunch supporter of state neutrality, freedom of religion and minority rights, had to give in to the demands of Agudat Israel, the orthodox Jewish group who wanted the Halakha to play a central role in the constitution building, legislation and public policy of Israel. What's important here is not the context which created such conditions, in fact it's on the contrary, and it's the rigid structure of secularism that did not have the flexibility to accommodate a non-Christian religion. In other words, as Zalman Abramov (1976), an Israeli MP and scholar of Judaism, articulated it, Israel suffers from a "perpetual dilemma" in terms of the state-religion relationship. It is a dilemma because it represents a confrontation between those forces who want Judaism, through the Halakha, to play a role in politics and those who envision Israel to be a purely secular state with a clear separation of religion and the state. In Abramov's words "the problem of religion and state in Israel should be viewed as an aspect of the confrontation between tradition and change, between preservation and innovation,

in the unfolding panorama of Jewish history, which has escalated in the State of Israel as a result of the attainment of Jewish sovereignty. . . the tension between these elements constitutes the perpetual dilemma that has always accompanied Jewish people and has exercised a fructifying effect on its thought and action” (Abramov 1976, 18).

Secondly, the Israeli case opens new avenues to explore the state-religion relationship, and these avenues, will definitely aid in understanding other partially theocratic-partially republican/democratic states such as the Islamic republic of Iran, the Islamic republic of Pakistan, and India, after the recent Hinduization process. Secularism emerged in single-religion societies with homogenous populations. They spoke one language, practiced one religion and fought over it, therefore, state neutrality towards any conception of the good emerged out of there. Whereas, religions, specifically Judaism and Islam do not necessarily classify as conceptions of the good. They contain diverse practices, dimensions, world views, with their own cosmology, epistemology and ontology practiced with a clear set of rituals with strong traditions of characters and histories which do not function well with the slightly rigid structure of secularism.

The last factor to emphasize more on identity construction in the non-western contexts is colonialism. Colonialism proved to be a divisive factor in politics using religious lines that were too easily provoked and solidified with decolonial movements. Before the British arrived in the diverse Indian subcontinent, religious or communal components were not the most important in the identities of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and other religions. However, religious identities serves to be the easiest to ignite divisions among people when a more organized entity arrived and positioned itself as a culturally superior civilization. In reaction to that, and due to a host of other factors, the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs began to define themselves in opposition to each other. For purposes of this analysis, the causes of such developments and their histories are

not as crucial as the consequence of these developments. In short, these communal groups realized that they were distinct from each other on religious line. These differences were at their peak at the time of decolonization and independence from the British in 1947. Therefore, just like the Israeli case, Pakistan as a state emerged so that Muslims could practice their religion in a separate state. This does not mean that colonialism removed the potential for a neutral state or the fact that Muslims migrated to Pakistan to practice their religion makes Islam the only justificatory factor for political authority. In fact, this argument only emphasized the importance of history in the institutionalization of ideals. In other words, secularism as an ideal had a unique history with a clearly defined enemy. On the other hand, Islam served to be the uniting and mobilizing factor for Muslims of the subcontinent against colonialism. Therefore, this intimate relationship of people with land based on religion, and the highly specified aspects of Muslim Personal Law throughout Islamic history, does not justify the implementation of western styled secularism.

Conclusion: A final note on Neutrality

The conception of religion and its mischaracterization in contemporary liberal political thought creates certain blind spots in its theoretical understanding of secularism. Therefore, this creates tension between secularism and state neutrality. This tension, which is not obvious, manifests itself repeatedly. The tension is that of initially treating religion to be just another conception of the good without claims to political power, while simultaneously justifying the promotion or endorsement of other cultural, ethically neutral practices excluding religion, when it claims political power. This paper pointed out empirical issues with the application of secularism, a theoretical issue at the heart of the secularization debate arguing that religion has not privatized the way it was initially envisioned, and eventually, argued that the differentiation of political and ecclesiastical institutions is an integral component of secularism, and has the justificatory potential under a liberal state. However, in order for that to happen, liberalism's conception of religion needs to be unpacked, disaggregated into practices, interpretations and rulings to regulate separately.

After a thorough analysis of the secularization paradigm, major strands in liberal political thought, theories of religion and approaches towards secularism, this project concluded with a short final note on neutrality. This project defends a position that is of mostly of a political nature with regards to secularism. In other words, just like Rawlsian political liberalism, if secularism is conceived of only as a political doctrine, and secularization, Casanova's interpretation, as an analytical category is assumed to be a process of differentiations between ecclesiastical and political institutions, it can be defended and applied universally to uphold the basic ideals of liberalism including including liberty, equality, personal autonomy, religious toleration and so forth.

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