A CRITICAL REVIEW OF SECULARIZATION DEBATES: BRINGING IN THE QUESTION OF HUMAN AGENCY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT DYNAMICS

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Abstract

This paper critically and comparatively reviews the basic assumptions of two most prominent secularization theories such as the secularization theory and the rational choice theory. Not denying practical values of their conceptual tools, this paper argues that these two theories fell short of providing (1) theoretically and methodologically well-grounded articulations (definitions) of religion and secularity and (2) systematic accounts of the role of social forces (collective action) primarily including social movement dynamics in their sociological studies of secularization. In order to address such limitations in the study of secularization, this paper proposes a new framework which combines two alternative perspectives presented by Christian Smith and Charles Taylor. Consequently, this paper argues that (1)

secularization should be studied with reference to human agency and collective action, in other words, with regard to social movement dynamics and (2) that we need substantive definitions for the systematic study of secularism and religion which inquire into the philosophical dimensions of the two sides (secular and religious).

Keywords: Secularization, Secularization Theory, Rational Choice Theory, Religious Movements, Revivalism

Introduction

Two major theoretical perspectives have dominated the content and the direction of secularization debates in academic circles. The first and the most influential is the secularization theory, which, departing from Durkheimian and Weberian conceptions of religion, contended that the social standing of religion and the degree of individuals' engagement with religious beliefs and practices would gradually decline as a result of the underlying processes of modernization such as institutional differentiation, urbanization, rationalization. The second is the rational choice theory which refuted the predictions of the secularization about the fate of religion in modern societies. Proponent of this second perspective generally argued that religion offers individual psychological benefits (i.e., compensators) and thusly it can and will continue to survive and possibly thrive even in modern times.

This paper argues that the lines of arguments developed around these two theories have obscured and sidelined other theoretically and sociologically significant issues concerning the question of secularization. The first is the question of human agency and social movement dynamics behind secularization processes. The second is the ambiguities concerning the substantiation of the concept of secular and secularization vis-a-vis religion. In order to investigate and discuss such issues in further detail, this paper starts with critically revieing these two theories. In the subsequent sections, the paper offers suggestions about how to address such inadequacies in secularization studies.

The Secularization Theory: The Same Old Story or the Same Old Question?

One of the prime questions the founding fathers of sociology wanted to answer was the changing role of religion in modern societies. Durkheim (1996), through the lenses of functionalism,

looked at religion as a source of morality and social solidarity and, thusly, described it as something "eminently social". In the context of social change, Durkheim (1975) discussed if and how the gap left by the withdrawal of religion would be filled in terms of forming new bases of morality and social cohesion in modern industrial societies. For him, modern societies were experiencing a process of institutional differentiation by which other social institutions such as education, healthcare and politics became increasingly independent from religion. Thereby religion lost its social functions, which for Durkheim are the *raison d'être* of the presence of religion in the society. This, according to Durkheim, leads to the decline of religion altogether in modern industrial societies.

Functionalist descriptions of Durkheim have influenced academic studies, in a wide range of social scientific disciplines, which investigated the role or lack thereof of religion as a source of community building in traditional and modern societies. However, it was Weber's ideas which, to a much greater extent, inspired sociological approaches to religion as a meaning system. Weber (2012) presented the Protestant work ethic as the driving force behind the rise of capitalism. Unlike religious traditions which turned to sacramental magic as a road to salvation, Weber argued, Protestants saw mundane achievements as objective measures of salvation. One of the most indicative of these objective criteria was economic success through profit maximization. In this sense, the Protestants' motivation for worldly success was not to be able to have access to their worldly desires but to accumulate earnings as a sign of attaining salvation and the grace of God. Such efforts required efficient organization of means of production including formally free labor and technical utilization of scientific knowledge and thus establishing rationalized patterns of work ethic. These religious bases of worldly asceticism, for him, gave birth to capitalism and laid the foundations of the rise of rationalization as one of the most powerful processes of social change in history.

Such a theology of salvation had two major implications. The first is the practical rationalization of the organization of work and the second is the theoretical rationalization as a result of the disenchantment of the world from magic and mystical worldviews (Carroll, 2011). While the first is about the rise of modern capitalism, the latter is an account of the decline of religion as a parallel process. In Weberian terms, disenchantment meant the progressive removal of the magical and mystical elements of religious thinking

from societal structures and institutions as a result of the growth of the idea that the environment can be manipulated directly by scientific knowledge and technical means. Religion (magic) sees the nature as something under the control of a transcendental power whose concessions and permissions are needed in order to benefit from it. With the rise of disenchantment, as Weber understood it, the idea of getting the consent from a third party is removed from the relationship between the nature and human beings (Germain, 1993), hence the inevitable decline of the social significance of religion.

Although Weber's descriptions of religious thinking were based on somewhat romanticized portrayal of pre-modern societies, he indirectly acknowledged that the decline of the social standing of religion was related to the strengthening and unification of an alternative cosmology in modern times (Fenn, 1969). Nevertheless, he did not discuss if this alternative worldview was another form of enchantment or not. He saw religion as a construct of the mind or the society which creates an imaginary vision of the world. Perhaps, this was the reason why he occasionally equated religion with magic and mystery. His account of rationalization and the rise of modernity, however, was not about an alternative form of the construction of reality. It was in a way the bare reality of the world as it was. Religion weaved a veil of enchantment (mystery) over the face of the nature but the rise of rationality removed that veil to reveal the unbiased reality of the universe.

It is also interesting that Weber's conception of the decline of religion was a kind of gradual process of self-destruction. In other words, secularization was a result of the transformation and transition of the sacred into the secular and it was not about the expansion of the secular into the areas of life which were under the influence of the sacred. The Protestant work ethic institutionalized rationalization which eventually undermined the cosmology of religion as an unintended consequence. Therefore, the fall of religion was not a result of conscious mobilization of certain groups around ideologies and worldviews antithetical to religion (Weber, 1993 and 2012). In a way, the decline of religion was a natural and neutral outcome of the juxtaposition, or elective affinity, of certain historical, cultural and social forces.

Durkheimian perceptions of institutional differentiation and Weberian descriptions of disenchantment and rationalization con-

stituted two major axes of debates among the subsequent generation of social scientists regarding the role and place of religion in modern societies. Even though not all of them totally agreed with Durkheim and Weber, many later generation academicians from various social scientific disciplines shared similar visions about the fate of religion in modernizing societies. The ideas of these scholars were generally called the secularization theory which is occasionally referred to as the modernization theory. Although the assumptions of the secularization theory were challenged later on, the theory dominated scholarly discussions concerning the relationship between religion and modernity until 1980's.

The basic argument of the secularization theorists is that there are ongoing processes of decline (1) in the importance of religion for the operation of non-religious institutions including the state, education and economy (Wilson, 1969; Bruce, 2002; Dobbelaere, 1981), (2) in the social standing of religious roles and institutions (Berger, 1967) and (3) in the extent to which people engage in religious beliefs and practices parallel to the decline in the social standing of religious institutions (Bruce, 2002). Mostly inspired by Weberian descriptions of the rise of modern rational and bureaucratic societies, modernization and secularization theorists, (Wallace, 1966; Lechner, 1991) generally dated the inception of these processes back to the Reformation, they predicted a linear decline in the social standing of religion and in the degree of individuals' engagement with religious beliefs and practices along the way of transition from traditional to modern societies.

Bryan R. Wilson was one of the eminent sociologists of religion whose ideas contributed significantly to the secularization debate. Defining secularization as "a process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lost social significance," Wilson focused on two major themes including (1) the explanation of the process of secularization and (2) religious responses to it. Wilson based his arguments on the assumptions that religion was "once great influence over societal institutions" and that "religious values were the community values and religious institutions had dominance over other societal institutions such as education, military, law and economics" (1969, p. 14). However, he contended, the dominance of religion started to decline with the rise of modern national societies in the West. Asserting that the major function of religion is the institutionalization of emotional gratifications, Wilson argued parallel to Weber, that modern societies experienced a process of

demystification, which increasingly diminished the role of the religion in providing emotional attempts in responding the challenges of the nature. Thusly, religious consciousness was dethroned by a more rational and empirical worldview. Religion, in return, responded, albeit unsuccessfully, to such challenges. Ecumenism was one of these responses.

Even though he changed his position later (Berger, 2001 and 2006), Peter Berger was among the prominent supporters of the secularization theory in mid-twentieth century. In his book *Sacred Canopy,* he discussed how religion functioned as a source of legitimization to social institutions "by putting them in a sacred and cosmic frame of reference" in traditional societies (Berger, 1967, p. 33). During these times, he said, the society as a whole used to "serve as a plausibility structure for a religious world." However, with rise of modernity religion lost its monopoly over the society which started not to wholly serve as a plausibility structure for religion and traditional meaning systems. Consequently, religion fell into a "crisis of credibility," which accelerated the decline of its monopoly over other social institutions (p. 127). This resulted in a decline in the social standing of religion and therefore in a decline in the extent individuals engage in religious beliefs and practices.

The scope of the application of the secularization theory has not been limited to the sociological studies of the role of religion in contemporary Western nations. As observed by Volpi (2010) the secularization and modernization theories, heavily informed by Weberian approaches to religion blended with Orientalist perspectives, dominated social scientific studies of religion in the Muslim Word as well. While studies of the West focused on describing how secularization emerged there, studies of the Muslim World, for the most parts of the twentieth century, largely focused on understanding the factors which prevented or delayed the development of secularity and modernity.

Niyazi Berkes (1964) was one of the pioneers who applied the secularization theory's conceptual tools to the social scientific study of secularization in Turkey. For him, secularization was a self-propelled linear universal process of social change spreading around the globe including the Muslim World. Even though the diversity of the Muslim World in terms of ethnic origins, historical backgrounds and geographical locations affects the scope, intensity and velocity of the expansion of secularization, this process can be observed in all of the predominantly Muslim societies.

As an introductory note to his book *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, Berkes (1964) makes a distinction between secularization as a process of social change and secularism as an ideology (doctrine). Although he thinks that these two are interrelated, he does not attribute secularization to secularism and or the secularists. Secularization, for Berkes, is a universal process unfolding because of factors which are outside the control of individuals. However, responses to secularization are not universal as reactions to problems arising from secularization vary greatly. These points indicate that Berkes does not attribute, at least at the analytical level, secularization to human agency. Nonetheless, he sees human agency in responses (reactions) against the development of secularization. Such is a typical approach of the secularization theory to secularization and revivalist responses. Secularization develops independent of human agency but counter-movements against it are results of deliberate (re)actions trying to stop and reverse the expansion of secularization.

Another difference between the application of the secularization theory to the East and the West is the establishment of stronger associations between modernization and secularization in the Muslim World more so than it was done in the case of the West. That is to say the concepts of modernization and secularization are more often used interchangeably in Turkey.

Of course, there is an overlap between these concepts (secularization and modernization) in English and in the way they have been used in the academia. My point is that the overlap has been much broader in the way these two concepts are used in the Muslim World and especially in Turkey. Indeed, the concepts of *muasırlaşma* (in Ottoman Turkish) and its more contemporary variant çağdaşlaşma literally mean to become contemporary. These two concepts also refer both to modernization and secularization at the same time. The title of Berkes' book in English and its Turkish translation is just one example. The original title of the book which was published in 1964 was *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*. When he published his work in Turkish, he titled it as *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*. Only by looking at the title of this book an average reader would not be able to tell whether it is about modernization, secularization or a combination of both. Only recently, -to be precise, after the decline of the secularization theory-the degree of the separation between the concepts of moderniza-

tion and secularization was broadened[1] at the conceptual level in academic publications in Turkish.

Yet another distinction between the application of the secularization theory's perspectives to the studies of religion in the Muslim World and the Western World is the more adamant position of the theory in its prediction of the inevitable decline of religion in the West. For the reason that those who studied the history of modernization in the Muslim World from such perspectives were preoccupied with the reasons of the failure of fuller development of modernization, they did not predict that religion will soon lose its social significance in these societies. Furthermore, difference in the application of the secularization theory or similar perspectives to the modern history of the Muslim World as compared to the West is that scholars were interested in the reason of why modernization and secularization was not fully developed in the first while they presented reasons of why it was successful in the latter. Writing in 1968, Weiker argued that the Ottomans faced the challenge of the inevitability of modernization. However, Ottoman modernization project was not fully successful for reasons such as the lack of commitment among the modernizing bureaucrats. By the time they reach the ranks of power, they were already ingrained in the traditional and religious Ottoman values. These bureaucrats were also wary of losing their status and power which could be threatened with broad based changes of modernization movement. Similar perspectives was shared by Ma'oz (1968) who argued that powerful provincial households in the periphery of the Empire resisted change with the fear of being deprived of their privileges.

Although the assumptions of the secularization theory regarding the demise of religion in the West, particularly in the United States, were challenged by empirical findings and lost ground within the discipline of sociology especially since 1980's, several contemporary scholars (i.e., Lechner, 1991; and Bruce, 1992, 2002 and 2013) argued that the secularization theory's predictions of the decline of religion are still valid. Chaves (1994), for example, narrowed down the spectrum of the assertions of the theory by arguing that secularization does not necessarily refer to the decline of religion in

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1 *Nişanyan* etymological dictionary of Turkish language reports that the concept of secular (*seküler*) was popularized starting in 1990s. Accessed at http://www.nisanyansozluk.com on 11/30/2013.

general but to the "declining scope of religious authority." In this sense, he argued, secularization is still pervasive.

Steve Bruce took a more radical position and attempted to prove the validity of the core assumptions of the secularization theory in his books *God is Dead* (2002) and *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (2013). Bruce, like the former secularization theorists, conceptualized secularization as a universal historical linear process. According to him, the Protestant Reformation constituted the nucleus of the modern secular societies by promoting rationality which is later manifested in the form of positivist sciences and eventually in the form of modern technology. Protestant Reformation and rationalized Protestant work ethic also gave birth to capitalism which brought about economic growth as well as social and structural differentiation. This facilitated the rise of social, cultural and more importantly religious diversity and the rise of secular states and liberal democracies. Finally, religious diversity gave rise to relativism, compartmentalization and privatization of religion. Like Berger (1967) and Wilson (1969) and most of the secularization theorists, Bruce argued that the processes of privatization and compartmentalization of religion constituted one of the most important proofs of the decline of religion and its social standing.

In my understanding, articulations of the secularization theory were mostly characterized by idealism, progressivism, abstractionism, and ambiguity of conceptualizations. To start from the last, supporters of the secularization theory equated institutional differentiation with institutional autonomy. They asserted that boundaries between different societal institutions became more explicit in modern times. Education, economy, military, politics, religion and media emerged as distinct institutions with clearer definitions of their functions (Berger, 1967). Through these processes major societal institutions gained autonomy. Thence, the supporters of the theory predicted that religion will not be influential over other institutions anymore.

Such arguments could be somewhat agreeable when they imply that religion lost dominance over other societal institutions as a result of institutional differentiation within a certain period of time in history. However, secularization theorists underestimated the dominance of any other non-religious ideology and/or institution over others. For example, the ideology of secularism, has been one

of the most pervasive ideologies of modern times which by definition bears antithetical tendencies towards religion. Moreover, nation states emerged as the most powerful institutions in the modern world with their own agendas and interests especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. Most of the nation states around the world embraced secularism as one of their foundational principles. Nation States are unitarian by nature and they consist of centrally governed and regulated educational, economic, military and other institutions. That is how nation states in most cases dominated and imposed their agendas upon other institutions.

It might be argued that religion, which was previously a more powerful institution over others, lost much of its power but it still remained as a possible competitive ideological force against the secularist character of nation states. This might explain why many nation states around the world, with their secularist agendas, wanted to pushed religion to the margins and to confine it to controllable boundaries. As Koenig (2005) observed, most of the theorists of secularization overlooked the dominant role of nation states in the expansion of secularization.

Secondly, proponents of the theory attributed secularization to abstract sociological phenomena without reference to human agency, as argued by Smith (2003). For the supporters of the secularization theory, processes of the rise of capitalism, industrialization, rationalization, institutional differentiation and the rise of cultural diversity were the dynamos generating the expansion of secularization (Berger, 1967; Wilson, 1969). Steve Bruce (2002) provided a long list of factors which gave rise to secularization as an unintended consequence including structural differentiation, individualism, sociatization, economic growth, science, technology and relativism without discussing the actual tangible mechanisms by which they influence the society. In so doing, he, like the other defenders of the secularization theory, left the question of agency unaddressed in his abstractionist descriptions of secularization. He did not consider whether these processes were driven by the actions of conscious actors motivated by certain ideological positions, political and economic interests.

Talking about the rise of institutional differentiation apart from the ones whose interests and agendas have influence over the operation of these institutions disguises an important component of what needs to be included in the study of pertinent sociological

issues. Secularization of other societal institutions is no exception. Almost all the prominent supporters of the theory approached secularization from macro-sociological perspectives but by way of abstractionism they avoided the inclusion of human agency and thus social movement dynamics into their conceptualizations of secularization. In my opinion, such an inadequacy is, among other things, related to the appropriation of modern progressivist ideology. In the eyes of these theorists, religion constructed its own version of reality and imposed it on the society at large. The rise of rationalization, industrialization and institutional differentiation *ipso facto* ignited the process of emancipation from religion. In Berger's (1967) own words,

> "[S]ecularization manifests itself in the evacuation by the Christian churches of areas previously under their control and influence -as in the separation of church and state, or in the expropriation of church lands or in the emancipation of education from ecclesiastical authority" (p. 107).

When he directly addresses the question of "what socio-cultural processes and groups serve as vehicles or mediators of secularization", Berger says that it is "industrial society in itself that is secularizing" (1969, p. 109). For him, proximity to industrial production processes and its concordant lifestyle can be a determinant of secularization, too.

Niyazi Berkes (1964) applied similar perspectives to the study of secularization in the Turkey when he defined secularization "as the differentiation of social values into the areas removed from the authority of religion, by which various sectors of social life are freed from the domination of sacred rules" (p. 7). The first areas freed from the domination of religion include science, technology and economy. Similar perspectives were supported by contemporary social scientists as well. Citing Adorno and Horkheimer, Zafirovski (2010) argued that;

> [A]utonomous secular culture, notably science and education, as the constitutive value and institution of modern Western democratic societies, including America, derives, first and foremost, from the Enlightenment, in conjunction with and continuation of the Renaissance, especially with respect to the autonomy of the arts, as well as classical Greek-Roman civilization. Conversely, there had been no such thing as independent, autonomous or free secular science, education, art, philosophy, and culture in general in relation to theology, religion, and

church in the pre-Enlightenment. The pre-Enlightenment specifically incorporated the medieval Christian and other religiously overdetermined, especially Islamic, world in contrast and nihilistic opposition to its classical "pagan," especially ancient Greek, civilization. The latter was characterized with relative scientific, educational, artistic, philosophical, and other cultural and other autonomy and creativity in relation to religion and politics. (p. 108)

In this sense, secularization was about progression from a (religiously) constructed (enchanted) world towards a world characterized only by the deconstruction of the religious worldview. It was not about the construction of an alternative world. Such a discourse also implies that secularization is a transition from unfreedom to freedom and from abnormality to normality. By abnormality construction of an alternative paradigm is meant and by normality deconstruction of the abnormal is implied. In such an approach, religion is a construct but secularization is not. Perhaps, that is the reason why, Peter Berger (1967) explicitly defined secularization as the lack of religion. In a similar way, Wilson (1982) understood secularization as "the abandonment of mythical, poetic and artistic interpretation of nature and society in favor of matter-of-fact description". Shiner (1967, p. 207-220) saw secularization as "the desacralization of the world". Similarly, Loen (1967) defined secularization as the historical process of de-devinization of the world. For Collins (1998), it was the emancipation of intellectual production from the authority of the church.

However, none of these scholars defined religion as the lack of secularization or the secular. If secularization is the lack of something, it is not a construct, and if it is not a construct, there is no need to look for human agency behind it. If there is no human agency, studying secularization with regard to collective action (e.g., social movements) is irrelevant, if we were to follow the line of thought of the secularization theory.

As observed by Casanova (2011), there is another side of defining secularization as the residual category after the withdrawal of religion. Such descriptions, for him, perceive religion as the "superstructural religious addition and sees the secular as the natural objective universal substratum (p. 55-56)." When religion is an addition but secularization is not, there is no need to define what secularization is. Therefore, it is only religion which has been defined by the secularization theory but substantive definitions of

the secular has not been not elaborated. Agreeing with Casanova, I suggest that we need post-secularization theory elaborations of the religious and the secular. The secularization theory formulated its own understanding of the religious in line with its modernist and progressivist ideological position. Such perspectives were adopted and taken for granted by many other social scientists.

Another issue with the general doctrine of the secularization theory is that supporters of the theory dated the inception of secularization within the boundaries of modern times, the earliest of which is the Reformation (Weber, 2011; Wilson, 1982; Bruce, 2002). By limiting the scope of secularization to the modern times, they were able to attribute secularization solely to unprecedented factors. The rise of modernity best exemplified in the use of technology and science was something completely new and thus the roots of secularity were novel, too. It is not that secularism existed as an ideology or a (body of) movement(s) before modernity and gained momentum at a certain time in history, it rather was a byproduct (unintended consequence) of some other newly emerging sociological transformations the world, especially the west, has experienced in the last several centuries. Therefore, secularization, for the proponents of the theory like Bruce (2002), was not a result of intentional mobilization, which is an idea implicitly denying -or at least neglecting- human agency in the history of secularization.

I am aware that everything that is social has a beginning in history and that modern societies witnessed the birth of many things including various forms of social movements. The issue here is that the theory established a causal connection between secularization and the abstract notion of modernity which in and of itself has no agency. These kinds of abstractions are appropriations and constructions in our minds, which we can use to describe and transmit our observations in an efficient way, but to attribute causal power to these notions without due account of human element is ambiguous and misleading. There is no modernity without modernizing forces especially at the institutional level and there is no modernizing force without human agency behind it. It is us who are objectifying modernity in our minds; as such, modernity does not have executive powers *per se*. Therefore, it is not logical to attribute the cause of something, in this case secularization, exclusively to modernization.

An inconsistency in the articulations of the secularization theorists concerning these issues is that, on the one side, they (Weber,

2011; Wilson, 1969; Bruce, 2002) argue that modern times are characterized by rationalization which is about calculability, efficiency and planning but when it comes to the question of secularization, they disregarded intentionality, planning and therefore human agency. Thus, they in a simplistic manner attributed secularization to abstract notions. Rationalization, as the secularization and modernization theorists described it, is about increasing levels of conscious deliberations and subsequent choices on the side of human beings, individual or collective. In this respect, rationalization does not exist somewhere exclusively outside the minds of human beings although it has manifestations in the outer world. For example, rationally structured bureaucratic institutions, as we see them in the descriptions of Weber, are, among other things, materializations of the decisions made by the ones who decided to restructure or establish those institutions anew. Institutions, bureaucratic or not, might have unique characteristics compared to individuals and other social entities but they do not develop independent of human agency. Even when there is a conflict in the establishment and operation of an institution, human element is still present. Agreements, bargains, compromises as well as resistances in these conflicts must involve some form of decision making by human beings.

This is one of the reasons this paper asserts that the human element (agency) should be an important part of the discussions regarding secularization. If we are studying the human element in connection with macro social processes, we need to look at the dynamics of collective action. This is the point where sociological study of social movements become relevant. As I discuss below, I propose that studies of secularization should look at secularization in the context of social movement dynamics.

Another consequence of attributing secularization to abstract phenomena and omitting human agency is the presentation of secularization as a natural universal linear process of social change, which is a position taken by most of the supporters of the secularization theory. If secularization is not a result of human agency, as implied by this theory, then it is irreversible because human agency cannot reverse something which is natural and not socially constructed. Once the modernization processes are unfolded, it will naturally bring about secularization. At this point, it will be impossible to reverse it. Perhaps that is the reason why the proponents

of the theory were very assertive and confident about their predictions of the future of religion in modern societies.

In criticizing such aspects of the theory, I am not arguing in any way that there is no secularization or that secularization was reversed by certain groups. What I argue here is that there are significant problems in the ways the secularization theory conceptualized and historicized modernization, secularization, and the role of religion in contemporary societies and that a better understanding of these issues requires critical review of some of the concepts and notions used by the supporters of this theory. I also argue that such inadequacies were not limited to the secularization theory alone. Even those who criticized this theory's assumptions, including the supporters of the rational choice theory (RCT), fail to sufficiently address these issues.

On the one hand, the secularization theorists predicted that various aspects of modernization such as rationalization, and the rise of science and technology will diminish the demand for religion and the rise of culturally diverse modern industrial societies will strip religion from its functions and therefore religion will lose its social significance altogether. On the contrary, the supporters of the RCT, which has been the major intellectual front against the former, contended that the rise of modern society will not eliminate the demand for religion and that certain religious institutions will thrive in pluralistic environments (Warner, 1993).

The Rational Choice Theory: A Reductionist Fallacy?

Originally formulated in the discipline of Economics, the RCT sees individuals as agents making cost - benefit calculation and thus maximizing their utility. Core assumptions of the rational choice theory have been borrowed by a group of social scientists to explain social behavior (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997; Satz and Ferejohn, 1994). Central to this theory's assumptions is the idea that individuals make rational calculations of costs and benefits not only in their economic transactions but also in their social relations (Swedberg, 1990). Their participation in religion also involves costs and benefit calculations. If the benefits of being religious overweight the costs in the eyes of an individual, odds are higher that this individual will be religious.

Rodney Stark's and his colleague William Sims Bainbridge's interpretations of the theory for explaining participation in religious behavior played a significant role in the development of the rational choice theory within Sociology of Religion (Warner, 1993). According to Stark and Bainbridge (1996) "*Humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and avoid what they perceive to be costs*" and because "*some rewards are limited in supply some do not exist in the physical world*" they turn to compensators (p. 161)[2]. The difference between rewards and compensators is that rewards are the things wanted and the compensators are the proposals about gaining the rewards (in the future). Human beings always prefer rewards to compensators, but because there is the scarcity of rewards and because some rewards such as the desire for an eternal life cannot be attained here and now in this world, they will turn to compensators. Although it is not the only one, religion is a powerful source of compensators because it offers instructions of how such compensators can be obtained in the long run. Therefore, religion appeals to all, even to those who have power because everyone is deprived of an everlasting life in this world (Stark, 1997, p.7-8) which is one of the main reasons why religion survived the challenges of modern times and will survive in the future.

A number of social scientists applied the rational choice theory's understanding of supply-and-demand relationships of economic markets to non-market realms (Becker, 1976; Friedman, 1996) including religion. These scholars (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987; Finke & Iannaccone, 1993) argued that availability of different religious products would increase the overall demand for religion. In other words, they claimed that pluralism is conducive to religion because multiplicity of religious movements, denominations and sects will cater to different demands of different groups of people. Religious organizations will compete to produce the best religious products in order to attract more members in pluralist environments (Finke & Stark, 1988 and 1998; Iannaccone, 1991; Chavez & Cann, 1992; Hamberg & Peterson, 1994; Hall & Bold, 1998). Such a competition will yield higher numbers and better qualities of products available for the taste and demand of individuals (Finke, 1997, p.44-64). While religious organizations which failed to appeal to the demands of the market declined, the ones which can meet the demands in the religious marketplace and the ones which

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2 Also see Stark (1997, p. 6-7) and Bainbridge (1997, p. 9).

carve out their own market niches thrive. That is how and why, the theory claims, religion survived and will survive the challenges of modern times (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985).

In addition to trying to provide a theoretical account of why religion remained salient in contemporary societies, advocates of the rational choice theory presented statistical findings as contrary empirical evidence in order to disprove the assumptions of the secularization theory (Finke & Stark, 2002). Nevertheless, I don't think that the rational choice theory adequately identified the weaknesses of the secularization theory in greater part because this theory was also afflicted by some of the deficiencies of the secularization theory. Articulations of the rational choice perspective, like the secularization theory, remained mostly at abstract theoretical levels and as Simpson (1990) justifiably argued, the theory heavily relied on deductive thinking. The potential of religion for providing compensators is a generalist assumption which could sound plausible theoretically, but it needs to be substantiated with evidence to see if this assumption holds true in practice in different contexts.

I do not deny the rational choice theory's argument that religion can be a source of compensators but I do not think this necessitates that individuals will turn to religion for compensator at all times. The theory could explain why certain groups of individuals in a given society are more religious simply by indicating with empirical evidence that those individuals chose to be religious for the compensators offered by religion. Such evidence could be an explanation for an observed case but it does not necessitate a deterministic outcome for "the future of religion." The best the supporters of the theory like Stark and Bainbridge could say, I contend, is that the fact that religion can provide compensators which cannot be provided by other things increases the *likelihood* of the survival of religion, but it does not and cannot guarantee "the future of religion".

It is not also difficult to say that nonreligious people, too, fail to have access to the rewards they wish for. However, not all of them turn to religion for compensators. There are societies around the world especially in Western Europe where most people are not religious. This indicates that there is no such deterministic relationship between the need for compensators for the rewards missed and turning to religion. If not every individual is turning to reli-

gion for compensators, it is possible that a greater proportion and perhaps the entirety or at least the vast majority of a society could cease turning to religion in order to compensate the rewards they could not obtain otherwise. Then, it is possible that religion could dissolve and disappear from the society entirely or become insignificant. This would be the conclusion if we were to carefully follow the deductive reasoning of the rational choice theory's hypotheses, of course when we fill in some of the gaps between the deductive axioms of the theory.

In an attempt to defend the secularization theory, Steve Bruce (1999) wrote a book against the counterarguments of the rational choice theory. Arguing that it is mostly the social and cultural environment which forces individuals to adapt certain religious beliefs and practices, he denied that cost and benefit calculations can be a part of religious preferences. Although it is contestable whether rational choice is involved in religious preferences, it would be simplistic to deny that socialization and other social forces are part of the processes of the transmission and expansion of religion. Even if we assume that rational calculations of costs and benefits are part of religious behavior, we still need to address the issue of how individuals will get to know what different religions has to offer. Not every individual categorically knows what religion supplies. As the theory's arguments about the nature of pluralistic religious environments indicate, not every religion supplies the same products. There needs to be mechanisms by which individuals are introduced to and convinced about the value (truthfulness and reliability) of the "products" made available by religion(s), or as Bruce suggests, they must be socially and culturally forced to accept the teachings of religion. Therefore, contextual factors are part of the story either way.

The only macro level social factor upon which rational choice theorists agreed to be an external force with the potential of affecting the prospects of religion in a given society is the regulation of religious markets by governments (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Iannaccone, 1997, p. 25). If the government regulates the religious market, it will violate free-market dynamics and natural supply and demand relations which will subsequently inhibit the number and quality of religious goods available for potential demands. For the supporters of the theory, this is the primary reason why religion flourished in America but not in Europe (Stark, 1997, p.3-24). Monopoly of centralized religious organizations such as the Catholic

Church prevented the flourishing of religion in Europe but diversity in a deregulated religious marketplace fostered the presence and growth of certain religious movements in the United States.

I think that establishing such a causal connection needs further inquiry and substantiation. Coexistence of two things do not necessarily indicate a deterministic causal relationship between them. Briefly put, coexistence of pluralism and religious vitality in the US and the presence of regulation (as opposed to plurality) but the lack of religious vitality in Europe does not indubitably point to the deterministic role of pluralism. There are two ways such deterministic claims can be challenged. Firstly, there might be other differences between the American and European societies which could help explain differences in the levels of religiosity in these places. For example, it might be argued that socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic background of Europe especially in terms of the role religion and counter-religious forces played in these societies are significantly different from that of the United States which could explain the differences religiosity levels. A second argument could be that when the cases of only Europe and the United States is compared such an explanation might seem plausible, but we should also test similar hypotheses by increasing the number of cases compared. For example, most governments in the Muslim World have been regulating religion -in some cases with a heavy hand- with a monopolistic approach (e.g., Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey), but these societies have been considerably religious, especially in terms of the number and proportion of people who practice religion. Proponents of the rational choice theory make universalistic claims about the nature of religion. Therefore, it should and can be tested in different contexts to see whether the assumptions of the theory hold true across the border. If the theory fails to explain differences when the number of comparative cases is increased, other social factors should be investigated, which is something the proponents of theory has barely done.

Sherkat (1997), who has been a prominent supporter of the theory, admits that the rational choice perspective underestimated the role of social forces in its explanations about how individuals become religious. In order to address such shortcomings of the theory, he offers an explanation of how social factors are part of the processes through which individuals become religious. For him, individual level religious choices are embedded in social rela-

tions and market offerings which disseminate information about religious products.

According to Sherkat, there are three different ways social relations affect religious choices. The first is by sympathy and antipathy. Individuals' choices might be influenced when they think that choosing a particular thing will make those are closer to them happy. For example, a child might choose to be religious and follow their parents' tradition to please them as a result of sympathy towards his/her parents. It is also possible that some children will turn away from religion to distance themselves from their parents and from older generations out of antipathy for them. The second is example-setting motivations. Some people chose to be religious to be a role model for others whom they want to be religious. In support of these claims, Sherkat cites a long list of studies which show that having children in their formative years increases religious affiliation, membership and participation. Thirdly and most importantly, social sanctions (i.e., rewards and punishments) play a significant role in individual's engagement and participation in religion. For example, individuals might choose to be religious not because of the supernatural compensators but because of other "in process" benefits such as friendship and confirmation of social legitimacy. On the other hand, failure of participation might lead to ridicule and exclusion from the group and thus it might produce the consequence or the cost of defection (Sherkat, p. 65-85). These statements indicate that Sherkat recognizes the role of social sanctions. However, he argues that sanctions are not intrinsic to religious goods, they are only externalities. Therefore, he claims, sanctions can only affect (religious) choices and not preferences.

I see two major problems in these ideas of Sherkat. The first is that he looks at the role of social sanctions only from the religious participation side. That is, he only discusses the benefits of participation in religion and the costs of not participating but he does not look at the issue from the social costs of participation and social benefits of defection. Although it might sound as if these two are the same, they are not. In the way Sherkat describes it, everything is at the hands of religion or religious establishments as they somehow can determine the benefits of participation and the costs of defection. However, outsiders might have control over the costs of religious participation and the benefits of defection. For example, social forces antithetical to religion might establish stigmas that religion is dogmatic, unintellectual, unmodern, irrational and that

it feeds conflict and violence might very well hold back individuals from being involved in religious activities because being religious in environments where such antithetical forces are influential will not be socially desirable. This means that the costs and benefits of being religious as well as the costs and benefits of not being religious (or being secular) might be socially constructed in different ways.

The success and failure of the forces in a society or community establishing (increasing) these costs and benefits might very well determine the success and failure of religion. Talking about the issue only from the benefits of participation and the costs of defection ignores the role of social forces (groups, institutions, etc.) antithetical to religion. Such a misconception gives the impression that the fate of religion is in its own hands. If religion successfully tailors and markets the value of its products and successfully appeals to the demands of potential customers, it will survive. Such arguments of Sherkat are in line with the general perspective of the rational choice theory.

The second problem in Sherkat's arguments is that he looks at the effects of social sanctions but ignores other social factors, and therefore easily contends that talking about social sanctions is not about something intrinsic to religion. Thus, he implies that social sanctions do not alter the intrinsic qualities of "religious goods." That is why he says that sanctions can alter the choices individuals make but cannot change their preferences, which means that social sanction do not affect individuals' tendency to be religious, but they might affect their choices of whether they will engage in particular religious practices or not.

Sherkat might be right when he argues that social sanctions are not intrinsic to religion, but his arguments are questionable when he implies that (other) social forces cannot alter intrinsic qualities of religion. I do not think that Sherkat would deny that religious teachings (ideas, theologies, etc.) are intrinsic to religions. Any social force which can challenge the teachings of religions would be diminishing the value of things that are intrinsic to religion and therefore they would pose existential challenges to it. Teachings of religions might be challenged in such ways that they lose credibility in their truth claims (e.g., existence of God and resurrection after death) and thus tendencies of being religious and incentives for religious commitment might be reduced dramatically.

In distinguishing religion from magic, Stark (1997, p. 12), another prominent rational choice theory's supporter, acknowledges that unlike magic, religions involve theologies which are meaning systems offering alternative truth claims. I think that it is for this reason that those who engage in religion are called "believers" but those who engage in magic are not. This implies that "believing" (or having "faith") in the reality of certain ideas is one of the defining characteristics of religions. If the belief in the truthfulness of these ideas is seriously challenged, the capacity to which they yield religious commitment might decrease significantly.

Secularization theorists have long been arguing that the rise of science undermined the teachings of religion in modern times (Loen, 1967; Wilson, 1969; Bruce, 2002 and 2013). Indeed, Stark and Bainbridge, in their book *The Future of Religion* (1985), agree that though some of the teachings of religion can be challenged by science, science cannot provide satisfaction about the existential issues related to the purpose of existence and the issue of death. Hence, religion will prevail in the future. Apparently, they confuse two different things at this point. The idea that science cannot provide answers to these questions does not mean that ideologically laden interpretations of science (e.g., scientism, positivism, naturalism and materialism) cannot undermine the truth claims of religion and therefore weaken it. In other words, the idea that science cannot substitute religion in terms of providing compensations does not mean that scientism cannot hurt the capacity of religion to offer compensations by challenging its core teachings. No doubt some core teachings of major world religions such as the existence of an omnipotent God creating everything have been seriously challenged by the positivist, determinist, and naturalist interpretations of science in contemporary societies.

Stark and Bainbridge also contend that only intellectual elites can live without religion and that scientific rationalism will not have massive triumph over supernaturalism (religion). There are several problems with this argument. First, secularist ideologies and worldviews are not confined to the upper classes or the educated elite. Secondly, it is not only the elite who are informed about counter-religious interpretations of science. One of the characteristics of modern societies is the growth and expansion of formal education and the mass media. It wouldn't be unrealistic to say that most individuals today are informed about scientist arguments against the core teachings of religion through the formal

education they receive and through their exposure to such arguments in the mass media. Third, like the secularization theorists and other proponents of the RCT, Stark and Bainbridge overlooked social movement dynamics in the processes of secularization and thus they did not pay much attention to the collective mobilization of the relationship between religion and secularism.

Stark and Bainbridge acknowledged and to a certain extent studied social movement dynamics of religion especially when they discuss which religious groups prevail and which do not. However, they did not perceive secularism as an alternative movement against religion which might affect the prospects of religion's survival. In my opinion, this could be related to two misconceptions. The first is conceiving secularization a result of abstract processes of modernization, which, as I described above, was also done by the supporters of the secularization theory. Another reason might be that in contrast to the presence and multiplicity of religious communities, movements, denomination and sects, there are not many formally-organized and institutionalized, explicitly secularist movements, which disguises and makes it more difficult to be identified as a movement with its own agendas.

Based on the idea that the expansion and withdrawal of both religion and secularization just like any other sociological phenomena are not self-propelled processes of social change, I argue that the survival of religion is related to the success and failure of the mobilization of religious and secular(ist) movements *vis-à-vis* each other. In *The Future of Religion*, Stark and Bainbridge did not explain how they define the elites, but it seems that they underestimated the possibility that the secularists including the elite will be (or they are) mobilized (as a social movement) towards the goal of expanding secularization and marginalizing religion in the society. Therefore, I suggest, we must account for such contextual factors before putting forth generalist statements about the fate of any religion. Because these contextual factors will vary from society to society and from religion to religion, we cannot rely only on micro level theorizations and deductive axioms of why individuals chose religion and if and how religion has and will survive the challenges it has faced in modern times.

Going back to Steve Bruce's (1999) point, it is rather naive that he assumes religion being socially and culturally forced upon people, but he does not consider the possibility of secularity being socially

constructed and forced by similar forces as well. As I have discussed above, these inconsistencies are related to the ways secularization theory and secular(ist) social scientists define religion and secularity. That is why, I argue, we need broader and more substantive definitions of both secularity and religion *vis-à-vis* each other and reflexive discussions of the interactions between the two. It would be meaningless to discuss whether religion is declining without having exclusive definitions of both sides. The same is also true for understanding the interactions between the religious and the secular.

Alternative Perspectives: Human Agency and Secularization as a Socially Constructed Meaning System

Sociological perspectives regarding secularization are not limited to the rational choice and the secularization theories, though these two theories occupied a central place in the debates concerning the role and place of religion in modern times and its prospects in the future. I will not attempt to review the entire literature outside these theories here. However, I will draw attention to two perspectives presented by sociologist Christian Smith and social philosopher Charles Taylor whose sociological ideas offer insights to the issues I raised above.

Two major arguments of this paper are that (1) secularization should be studied with reference to human agency and collective action, i.e., with regard to social movement dynamics and (2) that we need substantive definitions for the systematic study of secularism and religion which inquire into the philosophical dimensions of the two sides (secular and religious). Christian Smith is offeringa novel perspective about the first of these departure points while Charles Taylor presents noteworthy ideas about the second.

Smith edited a volume titled *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (2003) in which he criticized sociological approaches which ignored human element in the expansion of secularization contending that such perspectives attributed secularization to agentless abstract notions such as modernity. To draw attention to social movement dynamics, he conceptualized the augmentation of secularization in the United States especially towards the end of the

nineteenth century and in the first several decades of the twentieth century to a social revolution led by certain groups of like-minded intellectuals, who were mobilized around the common goal of overthrowing the mainline Protestant establishment. In Smith's (2003), own words:

> [This] rebel insurgency consisted of waves of networks of activists who were largely skeptical, freethinking, agnostic, atheist, or theologically liberal; who were well educated and socially located mainly in knowledge-production occupations; and who generally espoused materialism, naturalism, positivism, and the privatization or extinction of religion. They were motivated by a complex mix of antipathy toward the Protestant establishment's exclusivity and perceived outdated-ness; by their own quasi-religious visions of secular progress, prosperity, and higher civilization; and often by the material gain that secularization promised them. (p.1)

Even though Smith's main argument above is to repudiate descriptions of secularization as a byproduct of modernization and to highlight the role of human agency (social movements) in this process, his descriptions implied the idea that secularization was about the establishment and the triumph of alternative ontological and moral philosophical worldviews against a religious one. Ontology of this worldview was shaped by materialism, naturalism and positivism, and its moral philosophy by a secularist conception of the idea of progress and development as a means for the establishment of a higher human civilization which would promise material gains to its adherents and maximize their happiness in this world.

Although descriptions about the ontological and moral philosophical sides of secularism are obscurely traceable in Smith's analysis, he did not explicitly emphasize philosophical differences between religion and secularism. Instead, he compared secularist perspectives to a quasi-religious ideology. In a way, he suggested that secularist worldview is another religious (or religion-like) perspective. However, it would be more theoretically informed if he more elaborately compared these two alternative worldviews along the lines of their philosophical differences. They might be similar in terms of their functions in that they both serve as (alternative) worldviews but in essence they should be differentiated. Otherwise, we would not be able to conceive religion and secularity as different (opposing) categories.

It might be argued that it is methodologically legitimate to omit one aspect of this topic and to focus only on the other, in this case

to the social movement dynamics of secularization. This work has the potential for reorienting studies of secularization to a direction which is more reflective in terms of understanding the human element aspects of such issues. However, when our analysis is confined only to the question of human agency and authority over institutions, our conceptions of secularization will be limited only to the study of secularization at the organizational and institutional levels. Perhaps, that is the reason why all the contributors of Smith's volume focused on the role of directly and indirectly controlling -and in some cases marginalizing- institutions such as public education (Beyerlein, 2003; Thomas, Peck, & De Haan, 2003), publication censorship (Kemeny, 2003), the legal system (Sikkink, 2003), journalism (Flory, 2003), science and medicine (Evans, 2003; Garrautte, 2003; Meador, 2003).

When Smith (2003) says that the secular elites "were well educated and socially located mainly in knowledge-production occupations" he acknowledges that secularization is, among other things, about meaning production. Institutions such as schools, as we see it in the descriptions of Smith and the other contributors of this volume, are among the commanding heights of knowledge production but, in my understanding, it is ultimately the individuals who will consciously or unconsciously interpret the knowledge produced in these institutions. Controlling public schools, the publication industry and journalism is about giving new directions to the education and information of the masses which means that institutional secularization has implications in the reorientation of individuals towards goals imagined by the secularist elite. Therefore, we need to understand if and how the self was socially constructed through the secularist ideology. Deciphering the codes of the social construction of the self (moral philosophy) of any ideology entails elucidation of the ontological foundations of this worldview. That is why we also need to understand how the secularist movement socially constructed its own understanding of reality. A thorough understanding of these two aspects of secularization requires systematic analysis of the discourse of the secularists which is missing in the work of Smith and his colleagues.

This weakness, as I contended above, is related to and concomitant with the lack of a comprehensive definition of secularity *vis-à-vis* religion. The entire volume which includes more than 150 pages written directly by Smith hardly includes any discussion regarding the question of what Smith and the other contributors

understand from secularization. The only place where Smith addresses these issues is when he briefly mentions that he conceptualized secularization, following Chavez's (1994) and Dobbelaere's (1981 and 2002) descriptions, as declining authority of religion over other societal institutions.

When sociologists who did not adhere to the presuppositions of the secularization theory in the West, especially those who studied the case of the United States, saw that church attendance and membership rates in religious organizations were not declining, some of them completely denied secularization (i.e., gradual withdrawal or trivialization of religion) (Martin, 1965; Hadden, 1987; Hout & Greeley, 1987; Finke, 1992; Stark & Iannaconne, 1992; Stark, 1999); others partially accepted it (Chavez, 1994; Dobbelaere, 1981; Lechner, 1991). The latter mostly favored the idea that religion lost its power over the operation of other social institutions but it was not reflected in the secularization of the self. Smith (2003) joined the second group and focused solely on the secularization of institutions.

I argue that persistent membership and attendance rates and even higher levels of direct religious participation do not necessarily negate the existence of secularization at the individual level. It is conceivable that individuals can knowingly or unknowingly appropriate certain secularist ideals while continuing to be religiously active. For example, an individual might follow a religious ontology to make sense of his/her existence and that of the universe but at the same time accord to a secularist moral philosophy. It would not be easy to contest whether this individual is secularist or religious. Perhaps, we might need a theoretically guided multidimensional understanding of individual level religiosity and secularity to better address these issues. Therefore, it is not an easy task to focus only on institutional secularization -as it is done by Smith (2003)- and neglect the dynamics of social construction of the self simply because numbers indicate that religious participation is not declining.

Another critical approach two secularization was offered by social-philosopher Charles Taylor who has written extensively about the philosophical underpinnings of the rise of modern societies. Providing a critique of the widespread approaches to secularization in social sciences, he articulated a meticulously detailed ac-

count of what he understood from the emergence and succession of secularity in modern times.

Taylor identifies two main approaches to secularization. The first sees secularization as a result of the withdrawal of religion from the public space to private realms which is what the secularization theorists called 'the privatization of religion'. The second type understood secularization as the decline of belief in God and a consequential downturn in the degrees to which individuals engage in religious practices. Taylor suggests a third way which, for him, better encapsulates the conditions of secularity in contemporary societies. He summarized his approach in the beginning of his book *A Secular Age* (2007).

> […] The change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith (at least not in God, or the transcendent). Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one's faith. There will be people who feel bound to give it up, even though they mourn its loss. This has been a recognizable experience in our societies, at least since the mid-nineteenth century. There will be many others to whom faith never even seems an eligible possibility. There are certainly millions today of whom this is true. (p. 3)

In this approach, Taylor does not see secularization as the withdrawal or the decline or religion. He rather sees it as the conditions in which religion is an alternative option among others. In traditional societies, belief in God was not challenged and it was unproblematic. In modern societies, however, religion does not enjoy such levels of comfort as there are other alternatives. The real challenge of such conditions, for Taylor, is not about other alternatives directly undermining (challenging) religious belief, but it is the mere presence of these alternative options which makes it more difficult to sustain a particular faith.

That is why, he suggested, the focus of studies of secularization should be shifted to the conditions of belief, experience, and search. In so doing, he criticized approaches which see secularization as a result of science weakening religion and forcing it to

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abandon spheres of life and by revealing the unbiased, objective, rational and realistic reading of life as it is and as it has been. Taylor (2003) called such approaches "subtraction [theories]" and argued that they failed to provide equitable accounts of secularization.

> I'm not satisfied with this explanation of secularism 2: science refutes and hence crowds out religious belief. I'm dissatisfied on two, related levels. First, I don't see the cogency of the supposed arguments from, say, the findings of Darwin to the alleged refutations of religion. And secondly, partly for this reason, I don't see this as an adequate explanation for why in fact people abandoned their faith, even when they themselves articulate what happened in such terms as "Darwin refuted the Bible", as allegedly said by a Harrow schoolboy in the 1890s. Of course bad arguments can figure as crucial in perfectly good psychological or historical explanations. But bad arguments like this, which leave out so many viable possibilities between fundamentalism and atheism, cry out for some account why these other roads were not travelled. (p. 4)

It seems that Taylor's dismissal of the possibility of science being able to challenge religious faith is only based on his own opinions and convictions. The fact that he does not think certain scientific arguments cannot refute religion does not necessarily indicate that the same thing holds true in the eyes of others. As a philosopher, such arguments might not convince Taylor but others might be easily convinced or at least perplexed. Personal rejections of examples of individuals -such as the extreme Harrow schoolboy example he mentions- thinking that science refutes religion does not offer a realistic contribution to the social scientific studies of these issues. It would be more meaningful to systematically study how these things play out in the society. We can only make inferences about our own lives based on our own philosophical perspectives.

Another reason why Taylor dismisses conceptualizations of secularization as a consequence of the decline in religious belief due to the challenges from science is that he does not think that the definition of religion should go beyond belief in the transcendent and that it should primarily involve conceptions of human good. He argues that,

> Every person, and every society, lives with or by some conception(s) of what human flourishing is: What constitutes a fulfilled life? What makes life really worth living? What would we most admire people for? (Taylor, 2007, p. 16)

Taylor says that answers given to these questions are traceable in philosophical theories, moral codes and in religious and non-

religious practices. These codes and practices are nourished in the society, and they offer individuals a moral map of how they should lead their lives. It is about the contents and the direction of these moral maps that distinguishes religion from secularity. Human flourishing, Taylor (2007) contends, is the ultimate goal (human *good*) for non-religious (secular) worldviews but for the world religions, such as Christianity and Buddhism, the ultimate goal for the actions of human beings goes beyond human flourishing. Even though there are doctrinal differences between these religions, they are similar in the sense that they call the believers to "break with the goals of flourishing in their own case" (p. 17). He cautions that religions see human flourishing as "good," too, but they don't see it as the ultimate goal.

For the first time in history, he says, a "purely self-sufficient humanist" conception of human *good* which does not go beyond human flourishing became a widely available option in modern societies which was not the case in ancient societies. Only a small minority (elite) followed this exclusive humanism in pre-modern times. However, the emergence of the modern paradigm is not about the dominance of the exclusive humanism, but about the condition in which there is conflict between a religious moral philosophy which sees human fullness "outside of or beyond human life" and a wide variety of exclusively humanist moral philosophy which places human fullness "within human life" (Taylor, 2007, p. 15).

In this account, the secular age is characterized by the conflict of alternative (religious vs exclusive humanist) moral philosophies. In the two major books (A Secular Age and Sources of the Self) he wrote, Taylor intricately outlined various aspects of the non-religious moral philosophy of modern times. Nonetheless, he did not investigate the responses of the other (religious) side of the conflict. Moreover, his discussions fell short of articulating the role of science and scientism in the expansion of secularization although Taylor offered a meticulous analysis of the moral philosophical backgrounds of secularization. He built a connection between "the ontology of human beings" and "moral philosophy" and thus he was able to easily leave the relevance of what he called "science beats religion" arguments out of the debates. When a connection is built only between the ontology of human beings and moral reaction, the issue is presented in a way that science, with all of its ideological derivatives such as positivism, materialism and determin-

ism, is excluded from the equation. It sounds like the underlying assumption of Taylor is that ontology of human beings seems to be more open to subjective articulation and not so much to systematic (scientific) investigation. Therefore, the ontology of human beings is not within the reach of scientific discourse.

However, things look different when an additional and broader form of ontology is added to the equation which is the ontology of the cosmos. I argue that the ontology of human beings drives from or at least are related to the ontology of the cosmos and everything therein. Science might seem to be irrelevant when a connection is built only between the ontology of human beings and moral reaction. However, when the ontology of the cosmos is added to the equation as a preceding and overarching determinant, science with all its ideological uses and implications becomes situated at the heart of the matter, because science is a form of investigating the principles observed in the cosmos.

Simply put, a line of connection can be drawn from the ontology of cosmos to the ontology of human beings and a subsequent line of relationship can be established from the ontology of human beings to the moral philosophy. If ideologically laden interpretations of science can confront a particular ontology of the cosmos, it bears the potential to challenge the ontology of human beings which drives out of this broader ontological position as well. It is not difficult to say that religion and science, as they are generally practiced and presented in modern societies, are not coming from the same ontology of the cosmos. Then, it is possible that challenges posed by scientific (positivist, determinist) ontological contentions to religious ontology might have implications at the moral philosophical level, too.

The issue here is also about the question of whether construction of the self is related to the construction of reality. Ontology of the cosmos deals with the construction of reality but the ontology of human beings is mostly about the construction of the self. Taylor puts it at the center of his analysis of the rise of modern societies. That is why his first major, dedicated to the investigation of the philosophical underpinnings of secularization, was titled "Sources of the Self."

I argue that the investigation of the philosophical roots and the sociological implications of the construction of reality is of equal importance, not only for a theoretically informed understanding of other philosophical aspects of secularization but also for the

systematic study of religious responses to it. Even when the philo-sophical question of whether there is a relationship between the ontology of the cosmos (construction of reality) and the ontology of human beings (construction of the self) and how science/sci-entism plays role in this relationship is contested, the sociological question of if and how secularist and religious movements pro-duce discourses based on their perception of science remains a legitimate sociological question for further inquiry. Such a ques-tion should constitute one of the core lines of investigation into the dynamics of secularization.

Being aware of the shortcomings of the two perspectives I pre-sented above, I think that a combination of approaches presented by Taylor (1992 and 2007) and Smith (2003) might constitute the framework of how we can conceptualize secularization especially for doing sociological research on the subject. Smith, unlike other secularization theorists, emphasized the role of human agency and collective action in the growth and expansion of seculariza-tion. The focal point of Smith's analysis was the exploration of how the secularist movement was mobilized towards controlling social institutions of critical value for the production and distribution of knowledge in the American society. Broadening and following the approach of Taylor in addition to the perspective suggested by Smith, sociological studies might also inquire into the philo-sophical aspects of secularization. Therefore, such studies would simultaneously focus on the social movement dynamics and phil-osophical aspects of secularist and religious groups. In so doing, these studies can explore the question of how the secularist and religious movements imagined and were mobilized around their respective ideas and methodologies for the construction of reality and the self, and the society. Thereby, they could investigate onto-logical, moral philosophical and political philosophical aspects of secularity *vis-à-vis* religion.

Smith used a macro level approach which probes into the poli-tics of the encounters between the secularist and religious move-ments. Taylor, however, offered a micro level perspective for the study of the fundamentals of secularity. Given the disciplines these two scholars are coming from, it is not surprising that Smith's ap-proach is more sociological, and Taylor's is more philosophical. Therefore, I argue that academic studies can blend a combination of micro and macro level approaches as wells an amalgamation of sociological and philosophical perspectives in the study of the de-velopment of secularization.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I argued that the secularization theory and the rational choice theory fell short of providing (1) theoretically and methodologically well-grounded articulations (definitions) of religion and secularity and (2) systematic accounts of the role of social forces (collective action) primarily including social movement dynamics in their sociological studies of secularization. However, I still think that these two theories' theoretical tools could still be used to study religion and secularization in contemporary societies in addition to other necessary conceptual and theoretical tools. Researchers can utilize the conceptual tools of the secularization theory especially when they explore macro level dynamics of the development of secularization and the conceptual tools of the rational choice theory especially in their analyses of the discourses of the religious groups and movements. For example, the discourse and the rhetoric of the religious movements and religious establishments could be analyzed to see if they are trying to convince their audience for choosing religion over secularity by appealing their mental rational choice mechanisms in the sense that the rational choice theory articulated it.

Departing from Charles Taylors criticisms of secularization theory, I have also tried to make the case for the sociological reconsideration of the conceptualizations of secularization and religiosity. In so doing, I do not imply that sociologists should formulate their understanding of religion and secularity independent of how religious and secular groups perceive their respective positions. I rather argue that it would be constructive to explore how religious groups define religion as opposed to secularity and (in comparison to) how the secularists describe secularity as opposed to religion. Much of what has been put forward as definitions of religion and secularity in the context of these debates came from the secularization theory perspective which in general adopted the secularist modernist worldview. Although proponents of the rational choice theory refuted the assumptions of the secularization theory, they have not contributed significantly to the sociological conceptualizations of religion and secularity. In this regard, I agree with Talal Asad (2003) when he contends that "any social scientific discipline which aims to understand religion must also try to understand its other (secular) (p. 22)". I argue that the opposite is true as well. Un-

derstanding of the secular is contingent on the understanding of its other, religion. As Chaves (2004) suggested, the way religion is perceived determines the way secularization is studied. Casanova (2011), too, has argued that religion and secularity are always mutually constructed. Understanding of one requires the study of the other at the same time. He also contended that such reflexive approaches have not been adequately developed yet.

One of the weaknesses of studies of religion in social scientific disciplines is the lack of comprehensive studies of how religious groups define religion and secularity as their other, as opposed to secularist groups' definitions. In general sociologist, like other social scientists, relies heavily on their own inferences of what religion and secularization are in greater part because not many religious and secularist groups provide explicit and articulate definitions and comparisons of religion and secularity. As I briefly discussed above, such conceptions were inadequate in terms of systematically conceptualizing and analyzing philosophical foundations of how these two alternative worldviews imagined and (if they did so) tried to construct reality, the self, and the society.

One of the ways of abridging such inadequacies is directly studying religion and secularization in the context of movement-counter-movement relations and by systematically analyzing their perceptions of themselves and their others in order to better understand their conceptions of religion and secularity. As I discussed in detail above, Christian Smith emphasized the idea of studying the social movement dynamics of secularization. However, I think that we should also add counter-movement dynamics into academic studies of processes of secularization. Studying revivalist movements would be a good starting point for such an endeavor. By definition, revivalist movements are movements against challenges faced by religion. Especially in the contemporary context, the concept of revivalist movements refers to religious movements formed and mobilized around different ideas of responding to the challenges posed by modernization and secularization. Doing so requires the existence of implicit or explicit understanding of what religion is and what modernization and secularization are on the side of the revivalist movements. In the absence of explicit references, discourses, practices and mobilization strategies of revivalist movements can and should be analyzed for a better understanding of the dialectical relationships between religiosity and secularism.

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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF SECULARIZATION DEBATES: BRINGING IN THE QUESTION OF HUMAN AGENCY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT DYNAMICS

ÖZ

Bu makale, sekülerleşme teorisi ve rasyonel seçim teorisi gibi önde gelen iki sekülerleşme teorisinin temel varsayımlarını eleştirel ve karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Her iki teorinin de kavramsal araçlarının pratik değerlerini inkâr etmeyen bu çalışma, bu teorilerin (1) dinin ve sekülerliğin teorik ve metodolojik olarak sağlam temellendirilmiş artikülasyonlarını (tanımlarını) sunmakta ve (2) toplumsal aktörlerin özellikle sosyal hareketlerin sekülerleşme süreçlerindeki rollerini sistematik olarak açıklamakta yetersiz kaldığını savunuyor. Sekülerleşme çalışmasında bu tür sınırlılıkları aşmak için bu çalışma, Christian Smith ve Charles Taylor tarafından sunulan iki alternatif bakış açısını birleştiren yeni bir çerçeve önermektedir. Sonuç olarak, bu makale, (1) sekülerleşmenin insan failliği ve kolektif eylem dinamiklerini (sosyal hareketleri) göz önünde bulundurarak incelenmesi gerektiğini ve (2) sekülerizm ve dinin sistematik olarak incelenmesi için hem sekülerliğin hem de dinin felsefi yani anlamlandırma odaklı tanımlarına ihtiyacımız olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sekülerleşme, Sekülerleşme Teorisi, Rasyonel Seçim Teorisi, Dini hareketler, İhyacılık