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Two Concepts of Secularism

Looking back over the century just ended, it is not easy to assess the status and prospects of secularism and the secular ideal in the United States. As is so often the case in American history, when one sets out in search of the simple and obvious, one soon comes face to face with a crowd of paradoxes. The psychologist Erik Erikson once observed that Americans have a talent for sustaining opposites, and he could hardly have been more right. Such Janus-faced doubleness, or multiplicity, is virtually the American *specialité de la maison.*[1]

Consider a few examples. The American Revolution was, as Samuel Johnson delighted in pointing out, led by valiant freedom fighters—who were also the owners of slaves.[2] It would be hard to imagine a nation whose self-conception has been more firmly wedded to moralistic idealism—or to unabashed materialism.[3] The same nation that worships a high-octane, near-anarchic style of individualism is also a nation that in practice puts a stiflingly high premium on social conformity—even if the standard being conformed to is one tailor-made to look fashionably anarchic, like a pair of hand-faded, designer-torn blue jeans, purchased off the rack.[4]

More to our present purpose, consider another American paradox: that the vanguard nation of technological innovation, the world's principal exemplar of capitalism's powerful and inexorable "creative destruction," is also the developed world's principal bastion of religious faith and practice—a nation that continues to sustain remarkably high levels of traditional religious belief and affiliation, even as it careens merrily down the whitewater rapids of modernity.[5]

This last paradox is doubly perplexing, because it simply was not supposed to be possible. Sociologists from Max Weber to Peter Berger were convinced that secularization was merely one inevitable facet of that great

JOURNAL OF POLICY HISTORY, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2001.
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https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2001.0026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and powerful monolith called "modernization," and hence they trusted that secularization would come along bundled with a comprehensive package: urbanization, rationalization, professionalization, functional differentiation, bureaucratization, and all the rest.[6] If by secularism we mean a perspective that dismisses the very possibility of a transcendent realm of being, or regards the existence or nonexistence of such a realm as entirely irrelevant to the concerns of the visible, material world, then, according to the social scientists, we should have expected religious belief and practices to wither away by now, as the forces of modernization gathered strength. The taboos and superstitions of the great world religions may have transmitted a useful kernel of moral teaching. But their supernaturalism and irrationality were vestiges of the human race's childhood, properly doomed to the ashheap of history. Our growing mastery of the terms of human existence would seem to make it more and more inevitable that this world can, and should, be understood entirely on its own terms, through the exercise of human rationality. Secularity in all its fullness would arrive as naturally as adulthood.

Needless to say, these expectations have not been realized. The world we contemplate at the dawning of the twentieth-first century remains vibrantly, energetically, even at times maniacally religious, in ways large and small, good and bad, superficial and profound, now as much as ever. If the "secularization theory" long promoted by social-scientific students of religion has been fatally undermined, as many believe it now has been, the unanticipated resiliency of religious faith in twentieth-century America could certainly be regarded as Exhibit A, the single most arresting demonstration of the theory's inadequacy.[7]

And yet, one should not admit this claim too quickly. Perhaps, one might argue, it is still too early to call the secularization thesis a complete failure in describing the United States. Perhaps the religious efflorescence we see at present is merely defensive and compensatory, an anxious and fleeting reaction against modernization's incursions, or an atavistic reflex that will fade, atrophy, and eventually die. Indeed, in many respects, one could say that the United States at century's end has never been more thoroughly under the command of secular, and even militantly secular, ideas. The nation's elite culture, particularly as one sees it mirrored in the mass media and academe, is now almost entirely committed to a standard of antiseptically secular discourse, as denatured and delocalized as a midwestern radio announcer's voice, in which the rational and value-neutral language of science and therapy has displaced the value-laden language of religion.[8] In addition, a steady stream of Supreme Court decisions since the 1940s have had the cumulative effect of severely circumscribing the opportunity

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for any public manifestation of traditional religious symbols and sentiments, thereby helping to create what has been called "the naked public square."[9]

Perhaps, to continue in this vein, the United States has lagged far behind Western Europe in completing the historically inevitable movement toward a purer form of secularity—but it is getting there just the same. True, it still is home to organized religious groups of surprising size and strength, and conflicts over the treatment of religious issues by, for example, the public schools seem as endemic as ever. But the influence of these conditions has been more than balanced by the affirmation of a "godless" Constitution and a growing structure of laws that effectively contains religion's influence upon public life. Religious expression has not been stamped out, and there is no need to do so. Instead, it has been pushed to the margins, confined to a sort of cultural red-light district, along with all the other unfortunate frailties and vices to which we are liable. Religion is tolerated as a form of irrationality to which fragile human beings, in this transitional stage of human history, are still unfortunately prone.[10] People are left free to believe what they wish, and even to act in private on those beliefs, so long as they do not trouble the rest of us with them, or bestir the proverbial horses. The point is to confine those beliefs entirely to the private realm, and deny them exposure and leverage in public affairs. Some who hold to this view offer themselves as friends of religion. Others are skeptics, or even avowed enemies. But both are united in the belief that a "naked public square" is the price we must pay for the nonestablishment and liberty embodied in the First Amendment.

That, as I say, is where the secularizing view of recent history would take us. But there is another way of seeing matters, one that is perhaps more plausible. In this latter view, secularism's seeming hold over the moment is illusory, unpopular, elitist, and doomed to fail. In this view, the claim that religious liberty can be advanced only by the federal imposition of a naked public square has come to seem as absurd as the Vietnam-era tactic of destroying villages in order to save them. On the contrary, in this view, religion has responded to the challenge of secularism with a vigorous defense of its appropriate role as an essential player in public life, one that, whatever one thinks of it, shows no sign of going away quietly.

Indeed, there is a growing sense that, in a postmodern world dominated by immense bureaucratic governments and sprawling transnational business corporations which are neither effectively accountable to national law nor answerable to any well-established code of behavior, religion is an indispensable counterweight and resource for the upholding of human dignity and moral order, for "speaking truth to power." Modernity, argues sociologist José Casanova, runs the risk of being "devoured by the inflex-

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ible, inhuman logic of its own creations," unless it restores a "creative dialogue" with the very religious traditions it has eviscerated and abandoned.[11] Perhaps no event in the past quarter-century has given more credibility to this view than the profound influence of the Roman Catholic Church in engineering the downfall of Communism in parts of the former Soviet empire; and no modern religious leader has been more keenly alert to the public uses of his faith than the current pope.[12] But even on strictly American grounds, there is plentiful evidence that publicly vigorous religious beliefs and practices have survived all efforts to suppress or supersede them, and are now in the ascendant.

One can gauge the extent of this not only by recourse to Gallup, Roper, and Barna polls but by examining shifts in public discourse. Ever since the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976, the taboo on public expression of religious sentiments by American political leaders seems to have been steadily eroding, to the extent that in the 2000 presidential campaign candidates have been publicly invoking God and Jesus Christ at a pace not seen since the days of William Jennings Bryan.[13] Perhaps even more indicative of change is the fact that all the candidates, Republican and Democratic alike, as well as President Bill Clinton himself, have warmly endorsed the efforts of what are called "faith-based" organizations for the provision of social-welfare services.[14] Indeed, Clinton himself, although remaining an object of inexhaustible scorn for religious conservatives, has repeatedly and successfully invoked biblical and quasi-biblical language in his administration, not the least of those times being in his own self-defense.[15] Cynics may chuckle at such manipulations, or at the candidates' professions of faith; others may object strenuously to them, as inappropriate to public settings. But such rhetorical gestures are a form of recognition. One cannot successfully appeal to a standard, even if one does it entirely ritualistically, if that standard is not widely acknowledged as legitimate.

The signs are amply reflected, too, in a long list of developments in the realms of law and governance. President Clinton enthusiastically signed into law the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a 1993 bill buttressing the "free exercise" clause of the First Amendment, and commanding support from a collection of constituency groups so universal as to be almost surreal, ranging from Concerned Women for America and the Christian Coalition to the National Council of Churches and the American Civil Liberties Union.[16] When the Supreme Court struck down RFRA, the outcry against them came from right and left alike. The 1996 federal welfare-reform legislation included an option for "charitable choice," which opens up the system to the provision of public social-welfare services by openly religious organizations, operating on a contract basis but supported directly by the taxpayers' monies.

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As always, a significant number of flashpoints have clustered around issues relating to public schooling. Perhaps the most notable of these was the Kansas Board of Education's decision in August 1999 to omit details relating to evolutionary theory from its optional teaching standards and standardized tests, a move that ignited a frenzy of accusation and ridicule, somewhat out of proportion to what the Board had actually done.[17] But that controversy was, in a sense, a sideshow, when compared to the more significant incremental changes under way. The growing popularity of school-choice initiatives, a form of experimentation against which the public-education lobby has fought with Alamo-like ferocity, promises to produce a leveling of the playing field as regards the competition between religious and nonreligious schools.[18] The Supreme Court's *Agostini* decision eased the country away from the strict taboo against public support for parochial and other sectarian schools, and its *Rosenberger* decision put college-campus religious organizations on the same footing as nonreligious organizations, with the same access to student activity fees.[19] Public schools and federal judges are asserting the importance of posting the Ten Commandments in their respective venues, while school districts in Texas and Alabama fight for the right to have student-led prayers at graduations and football games.[20] Not all these measure will succeed, and not all of them ought to. But the trend toward a reassertion of religious expression in education seems clear.

More generally, there seems to have been a rededication to the notion that America's religious life occupies a place of central importance in the nation's makeup. Even scholarly and popular writing on American history and politics has in recent years vigorously reasserted the centrality of religion in American public life, and specifically in the American Founding.[21] And the specter of religious persecution in the rest of the world, especially (though not exclusively) the persecution of Christians, has become a central galvanizing proposition for a growing number of American evangelicals and Roman Catholics, whose religious convictions lead them to put pressure upon policymakers who must deal with such prominent offenders as China and Indonesia.[22]

And some things have never changed, even with secularism's impressive victories in the courts and halls of government and academe. Prayers are still uttered at the commencement of congressional sessions. God's name appears on our currency and in the oaths we take in court. Chaplains are still employed by the Congress and the armed services. The tax-exempt status of religious institutions remains intact and unassailable. Belief in God remains astonishingly pervasive, and church and synagogue attendance rates remain high, at least relative to other Western countries.[23] The president of the United States freely invokes his God and his faith,

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and carries his Bible around on a regular basis, without eliciting complaints from the ACLU. Whatever one makes of these phenomena, the point is that this is still not an entirely secular country, one sanitized of any form of public sanction for religion.

One could continue in this vein for some time. Yet the partisans of the secularizing view will likely not be persuaded. They may well respond that the majority's professed belief in God is thinner than skim milk. Such evidence simply illustrates Karl Marx's gibe about how revolutions tend to get mired down in the language of the *ancien régime*—but that no one should be thereby fooled into thinking that the secularizing revolution has ground to a halt.[24] The now-dominant secularism might seem to be conceding a good deal of ground to religion. But this actually serves to consolidate its rule, by seeming to show flexibility and give on relatively small points of language and symbolism. Such flexibility can actually serve to sugar-coat more consequential social changes, which, once they have taken root, will eventually empty the old moral and theological language of all meaning. As the drama of President Clinton's impeachment amply demonstrated, the stern moralism once associated with American Protestantism is likely a thing of the distant past. It costs nothing, and means less, for an American politician these days to genuflect in the direction of "religion," particularly if that "religion" is increasingly vague, nonspecific, diluted, and morally undemanding. Such gestures, in the secularizing view, are merely the verbal tics of a civilization in transition. A robust and entrenched secularism has nothing to fear from them.

Such a view has some truth in it. But it underestimates the importance of words and gestures as markers of legitimacy. And the very fact of such genuflection, even if that is all that it is, may nevertheless indicate how precarious and shallowly rooted are all the secularist advances. No one builds pedestals to the God of scientific rationality or the Comtean Religion of Humanity, although there is a booming trade in crystals, pyramids, horoscopes, and psychics. Indeed, even the public prestige of science has receded somewhat in our own day, as a consequence of science's growing politicization, its blizzard of inflated and conflicting claims about matters such as health and diet, and the public's fears, both founded and unfounded, that scientific and technological innovation has become a frighteningly impersonal and unconstrained juggernaut, which lacks any sense of moral proportionality or ultimate ends.

The fact of the matter is that secularism in our day can claim no energizing vision and no revolutionary elan, not as in the past. Instead it sits passive and inert, heavily dependent upon the missteps and excesses of the Religious Right or some similar foe to make its case, stir up its fading

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enthusiasm, and rally its remaining troops. Secularism sits uneasy upon its throne, a monarch that dares not speak in its proper name, and dares not openly propound its agenda, if indeed it still has one. For all its gains, it seems peculiarly on the defense, old and quaint, a tenured radical who has ascended to the endowed chair of culture only to spend its days shoring up the principle of *stare decisis.* Its victory, if that is what it has enjoyed, has not come without cost. For better or worse, the *elan vital* has gravitated elsewhere. These days it is rather more fashionable to be "spiritual" than to be secular.

There is no more powerful if indirect indication of secularism's rule—and the precariousness of that rule—than the challenge to it being mounted by a growing, intellectually sophisticated, and increasingly ecumenical conservative religious counterculture.[25] First drawn together in reaction to the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* and the subsequent liberalization of abortion laws, this counterculture, although including in its membership a number of unaffiliated "fellow travelers," is mainly made up of theological and moral conservatives drawn from the full range of organized denominations: mainline and evangelical Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. Such an entity, particularly as embodied in Richard John Neuhaus's influential journal, *First Things,* would have been inconceivable at any time in the past, that is, before there was the perception of a powerful and entrenched secularist enemy to hold such a coalition together. In the past, it would have been precisely the most conservative Protestants, Catholics, and Jews who would have been the *least* likely to seek out common ground, and bracket their many differences, large and small, for the sake of presenting a unified front. That they are now willing to do so, with growing enthusiasm and commitment, is a tribute not only to their sophistication but also to the overriding effects of the secularist agenda.[26] It was once the case that to be ecumenical one had to be a liberal; but that is no longer true. There is now perceived to be something much larger than the historical differentia of the respective faiths at stake in the current struggles. That "something" is what we have come to call "the culture wars."

The dynamics of culture war should not, however, conceal the fact that the reaction against secularism in recent years is by no means restricted to political or cultural conservatives. Prominent liberals such as the journalist E. J. Dionne, the law professor Stephen Carter, the theologian Harvey Cox, the psychologist Robert Coles, and the political theorist William Connolly all have written against the inadequacies of a purely secular view of the world.[27] They may offer the most powerful evidence of all for the decoupling of secularism from modernization, since they take the position, which is a less and less uncommon one on the political and cultural left, that a progressive or modernizing agenda need not be a secularizing one.[28]

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At the same time, we should take note of a different but increasingly influential critique emerging from the perspectives of academic postmodernism and postcolonialism, where Western secularism's claims to universal truth and impersonal rationality are increasingly held suspect, even condemned, as a form of cognitive imperialism. As a result, the claims of religion, especially "indigenous" religion, are no longer so easily bracketed as private and subjective. Indeed, in the postmodern dispensation, where knowledge is to be understood as something always rooted in, and inseparable from, the discourse of particular communities, religious assertions have as good a claim as anything else, and a better one than most, to the mantle of "truth."[29]

To be sure, such postmodernists tend to leave Christianity out of their formulations, considering it too much a part of the Western universalist hegemony. But nevertheless one can see a fascinating convergence of what might very loosely be called "fundamentalist" and "postmodern" perspectives, each very hostile to secularism, in the emergence of "postliberal" Christian theologies.[30] Such approaches to theology draw heavily upon recent literary theory and communitarian social thought, and seek to reaffirm the authority of sacred texts. In that sense they strongly resemble American-style Protestant fundamentalism or evangelicalism. But they deal with the question of the sacred text's factual truth, an issue central to fundamentalists and modernists alike, by choosing to bracket it or set it aside, stressing instead the text's deep embeddedness in the life of the sacred community. In other words, they assert the primacy of the "narrative" dimension of a sacred religious text—the fact that, to a believer, this sacred text embodies "our story," the story that has constituted "us" and in which "we" believe. Embrace of that story is a precondition of discourse itself. Hence one looks to the sacred text's narrative power, rather than its character as an inerrant textbook, as the source of its authority.

Although such an outlook may seem to concede a great deal of territory to the secular worldview, in fact it takes a stand that is potentially just as radical and challenging as that of fundamentalism. For Christian "narrative theologians," the Bible, and not the world, is *the* primary reality through whose filter everything else has to be seen in order to be properly understood. They reason that, because the sacred narrative has in effect created the very discursive environment within which we operate, it has about it a primacy that cannot be subjected to anterior acts of rational examination and debunking. It is, for the believer, the functional equivalent of *cogito ergo sum.* "We" cannot get outside of it, for to do so would be, as C. S. Lewis once neatly put it, as absurd as the scent trying to critique the rose. It is not that there was or wasn't a literal Garden of Eden; such a question is beside the point. It is that "we" are constrained to see the world *through that story*

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of the Fall of Man. The only alternative to doing so is the adoption of some *other* story—Buddhist, Darwinist, animist, whatever—as primary, because there is literally no world without a story, no Archimedean reality upon which one can stand outside of such stories. Even the option of choice is not really open, since it implies—falsely—that there is some extralinguistic phone booth one can duck into, however briefly, in order to make the change. The prisonhouse of language and the structures of religious plausibility turn out to be one and the same thing.

Where this kind of thinking will take us in years to come is uncertain. As is so often the case in postmodernist efforts, one has the sense that the arguments are more forensically clever than profound, and may prove to have little staying power outside the hothouse of the academy. But that remains to be seen. And their appearance certainly supports the fundamental point here being made. They indicate a restlessness with the regime of secularism, in this case expressed from a position that cannot be called conservative in any traditional sense of the word—a position that has absorbed the insights of the Enlightenment and then gone far, far beyond them.

So let me again stress that not everything we see in the challenges to secularism can be made to take the shape of a culture war, particularly as seen and construed by the respective combatants. It is well to keep that in mind. But a great deal of it does fit the culture-war pattern, and it is well to keep that in mind too. Defenders of religion see an aggressive, arrogant, and all-but-triumphant secularism, which controls academe, media, and the federal courts, and thereby largely controls public discourse. Secularists and their allies see in their opponents an incipient religious reaction, a dangerous cultural regression, a "return of the repressed" that would obliterate scientific inquiry and demolish individual liberty, and take us back to the Middle Ages. There is nothing imaginary about these conflicts. But there is nothing inevitable about their being couched in such extreme terms.

As the twenty-first century dawns, we want to find a way of construing our cultural conflict that faces the facts of social division without becoming self-fulfilling prophecy of war.[31] The obstacles to this are formidable. There are, as sociologist James Davison Hunter has pointed out, structural considerations built into the institutional frameworks in which these national debates are now conducted, which tend to polarize the debates, harden lines of division, and accentuate the most extreme positions of either camp in order to mobilize both donors and troops.[32] The way we do public policy these days does not tend to make such dialogue very productive. For one thing, as I have already pointed out, it makes it difficult to reckon with the fact that there are "liberal" believers and "conservative"

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secularists, and that such positions have legitimacy and integrity, rather than merely serving as forms of intellectual draft-dodging, or ways of hiding out from the sterner alternatives on offer.

So the conception of "culture wars" may well further the very things it describes. But the most recent usage of the term, traceable back to Hunter's 1991 book of that name, has also had conceptual benefits. By granting the dignity of a rough parity to both sides, the term has helped us to see that the struggle between modernization and its discontents is not merely the battle of light against darkness, progress against backwardness, but does indeed have many of the qualities of a confessional struggle, pitting genuine and deeply held worldviews against one another—a struggle in which there is plenty of light and darkness, virtue and vice, to go around. Moreover, the culture-war model suggests that the conflicts described are not mere illusions or anxieties to be soothed away by therapy, or differences that can be finessed or co-opted by a generous Madisonian pluralism.

To describe the conflict as a "culture war" is to insist that we are experiencing genuine conflicts over genuine things, and that the effort to simply split the differences among the American population, by counseling a nonspecific moderation and prudential wisdom, and by following the utilitarian principle that one should give the least possible displeasure to the largest possible number, may have the effect of denying the moral urgency of what is at stake for the "hard" minorities on either both side.[33] Majorities can be wrong. And in this particular conflict, the stakes are high. The battle is being fought over nothing less than who will get to occupy the commanding heights of American life, and thereby define the nature and limits of the culture.

To speak of "commanding heights" is to raise the question of whether the United States is, or should be, an officially secular nation. In a sense, therefore, it is also to raise the question of whether there is a *de facto* religious establishment in America. This has always been a tangled and complex subject. Officially, of course, there never has been an American religious establishment. There are, as everyone knows, two clauses expressing the First Amendment's view of religion: a free-exercise clause, and a nonestablishment clause. The two clauses are part of a single vision, because they compliment and mutually support one another, nonestablishment being a necessary precondition for free exercise, and free exercise being the surest way of ensuring the perpetuation of nonestablishment.[34]

But of the two, nonestablishment is surely the harder provision to observe and perpetuate. It is not hard to understand why this should be so. Just as Nature abhors a vacuum, so the polity naturally seeks to have some unifying and binding principles to serve as a basis for its fundamental cohesion. There has to be a "final say" in a durable political order, and it

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is hard to keep a "final say" potent and vigorous with nothing more than an avowedly neutral proceduralism.[35] On the contrary: everything we know about the functioning of a healthy political entity suggests to us the need for governing assumptions, legitimating myths, and foundational narratives to support it.

This is so partly because the neutrality of any procedure tends always to become suspect unless it can periodically be squared with, and refreshed by, reference to broader constitutional and moral principles. We need a *reason* to stay a "we." In the unpredictable and often chaotic flow of events, we need to have an ideal pattern or founding vision to look back to as a point of reference. Even neutrality relies upon certain prior axiomatic commitments, which are not themselves subject to procedural review. Otherwise we are, in Robert Frost's useful image, playing tennis without a net. No rules, no game.

In this respect, the radical and conservative critics of pluralism are right to point out that pluralism is not nearly as neutral or wide open as it pretends to be, since in practice it alters every available position to conform to its own image, thereby creating an unacknowledged criterion of public acceptability to which all other truth claims are discreetly subordinated.[36] When one begins to replace talk about competing principles or worldviews with talk about how certain positions deserve a "place at the table," eventually every religious position will be evaluated less for its truth than for its good manners. Such a concession is especially unsatisfying when one is speaking of questions of ultimate meaning and ultimate value, the questions that form the traditional subject matter of religion. The more reflective among us, contemplating this scene, will begin to ask: Is it not more revealing, and more important, to ask who sets the table, selects the guest list, and prepares and serves the food? Is secularism the real host of every such party? And the keeper of the pantry?

Beneath such interesting questions, however, is a deeper one. The historian George Marsden has argued that we in the American academy have over the past hundred years merely exchanged one orthodoxy for another, granting today the same kind of commanding status to a strictly secular understanding of human existence that yesterday we granted to the Protestant Christian orthodoxy that secularism overthrew.[37] This would be remarkable, if true. Is there now a regnant secularist orthodoxy, which, while it usually rules genially and tolerantly, as in its dinner-party mode, is ultimately intolerant of threatening deviations from its norms, as one can see in the academy's suppression of explicit religious discourse and religious perspectives in scholarly discourse, not to mention hiring and promotion; or in its ferocious antagonism to the mere presentation of religious perspectives regarding human origins?

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And, to phrase the question a little differently—more theoretically than empirically—is this the inevitable tendency of secularism, to become over time just as domineering and triumphalist and comprehensive and crusading as the religious faiths it once opposed? Is it accurate to speak of secularism as a kind of substitute religion, a reservoir of ultimate beliefs about ultimate things that stands, in that sense, in a continuum with, and in competition with, conventional orthodox religious faiths? Or is secularism more rightly understood as something quite distinct from, and more modest than, a religion? Have we, caught as we are in a culture-war dynamic of secularism versus desecularization, perhaps lost sight of this distinctive quality of secularism, when it is rightly understood?

It gives an entirely different cast to this question if one looks for a moment beyond the Western world—the West being, as Peter Berger has repeatedly pointed out, the only part of the world where the juggernaut of secularization has been triumphant—and considers a place where the connotations of the word "secularism" are rather different, though sharply reminiscent of a situation the West has not really faced since the days of its own wars of religion. Consider the following *New York Times* news story, dated 6 December 1999, dispatched from India. On that day, the *Times* reported, police arrested dozens of activists who had gathered in the northern Indian temple town of Ayodhya to protest against, and mark the memory of, the demolition of a sixteenth-century Muslim mosque by Hindu zealots seven years before. That earlier event had sparked massive riots all over the country, leaving three thousand people dead, and has remained a simmering issue ever since, a fresh contribution to the long, poisonous history of Hindu-Muslim relations in the Indian subcontinent. Both Hindu and Islamic organizations put on demonstrations for the occasion, even though the Indian government had by law prohibited the assembly of more than four people on the anniversary day of the mosque's destruction. Ever since the mosque's destruction, militant Hindu groups, which refer to 6 December as "Victory Day," have been pushing to have a temple built on the Ganges valley site, which they believe to be the birthplace of the god-king Rama. Muslims, on the other hand, have vowed to rebuild the mosque, carrying signs that read, "The *jihad* will go on." Meanwhile, miles away in Delhi, three hundred activists from an organization called "Citizens for Secularism" marked 6 December with a march protesting the mosque's demolition.

I invoke this confused, tragic, alarming situation not in order to draw us into the labyrinth of religious antagonisms on the Indian subcontinent, a subject far from our purposes, and far from my competence to explore. Other examples could as easily be adduced. One could as easily have invoked the complex challenges involved in establishing and maintaining a sturdy and equitable peace in the holy city of Jerusalem. But this particular

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story neatly illustrates a simple point. What's meant by "secularism" will depend upon the cultural and historical context in which one is using the word.[38] In the context of contemporary American society, it means one thing: the demystified and disenchanted worldview of a postreligious society. But in the title of the Indian protesters' organization, Citizens for Secularism, it means something else. Not an antireligious worldview imposed by the state, but instead, an antitheocratic understanding of a *secular* state that is fully compatible with the practice of religion—a hard-won achievement that is now so axiomatic in the West as to be virtually taken for granted even by the strongest proponents of religious revivalism.

This is not what we would normally call "secularism" in the West. But that is precisely why I have found it valuable to insist upon using the word "secularism" in as broad a sense as possible in what follows, even if doing so has the effect of rendering equivocal and problematic a word that seems, at first blush, to be pretty clear in its meaning. For in preserving certain possibilities in words, one can also preserve their possibility in practice—among which is the possibility that there is such a thing as "secularism rightly understood." Indeed, the Indian protesters' understanding of secularism is regarded favorably by most thoughtful religionists in the West, as a vital instrument to refine and restrain the expression of religious commitments, and to protect religious devotees from their own all-too-human tendencies toward fanaticism and blindness—traits that their own faiths themselves predict will reliably manifest themselves. To be antitheocratic is then by no means to oppose religion. On the contrary, one can argue—as did Tocqueville, the godfather of all "rightly understood" words—that the American tradition of antitheocracy has by and large proven to be a very great boon to religion, practically and morally, and essential to the maintenance of healthy religious commitments.[39]

How, then, are we to find the right balance in these matters, preserving what is good in secularism without ceding to it more than is its due? Recognizing that there is more than one way of dividing a pie, and many more than two ways of understanding the word "secularism," let me attempt to distinguish between two broadly distinct ways of understanding the concept, only one of which is an enemy of religion. There is, on the one hand, a way of understanding the secular idea as an opponent of established belief—including a *nonreligious* establishment—and a protector of the rights of free exercise and free association. On the other hand, one can understand the secular ideal as a proponent of established *unbelief* and a protector of strictly individual expressive rights, a category that includes rights of religious expression.

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The former view is a fairly minimal, even "negative" understanding of secularism, as a freedom "from" establishmentarian imposition. For it, the idiom of secularism is merely a provisional *lingua franca* that serves to facilitate communication and commerce among different kinds of belief, rather than some new "absolute" language, an Esperanto of postreligious truth. The latter view, on the other hand, is the more robust, more assertive, more "positive" understanding of secularism with which I began this essay—the one that affirms secularism as an ultimate and alternative faith that rightfully supersedes the tragic blindnesses and destructive irrationalities of the historical religions, at least insofar as activity in the public realm is concerned. By understanding religious liberty as a subcategory of individual expressive liberty, it confines religion to a strictly private sphere, where it can do little public harm and little public good.

The first of these two concepts of secularism, "negative" secularism, sounds almost identical to the language of the First Amendment. This fact in turn suggests that it is at least theoretically possible for there to be such a thing as a nonestablished secular order, one that is equally respectful of religionists and nonreligionists alike. Such an order preserves a core insistence upon the freedom of the uncoerced individual conscience. But it has a capacious understanding of the religious needs of humanity, and therefore does not presume that the religious impulse should be understood as a merely individual matter—as if religion were nothing more than the private and individual way that each of us speaks to ourselves about "the mystery of human life."[40] On the contrary, it would insist that religion is also a social institution, for whose flourishing the rights of free association—by which we mean the right of co-religionists to form moral communities, which can congregate and include or exclude others from their ranks precisely as they please—are just as important as the rights of individual expression. It insists that pluralism is a necessary concomitant of liberalism, precisely because we are social creatures, whose social existence is a prior condition of all else that we value.

It might also be pointed out that the distinction between "negative" and "positive" understandings of secularism can be found neatly paralleled by competing understandings of the scope and meaning of the secular activity we call "science." There has been a powerful tendency since the advent of modern science to see its claims as competitive with, and ultimately triumphant over, those of traditional religion. Such a tendency may have been just as bad for science as it was for religion, tending to inflate the claims of science into a reductive "scientism," replete with the declaration of metaphysical and cosmological certitudes that science, as such, has difficulty sustaining on its own terms. A more modest, "negative" understanding of science sees it as an inherently tentative and provisional

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form of knowledge, defined by strict adherence to certain procedural norms involving the formulation of hypotheses, and the careful conduct of observable and replicable experiments to test those hypotheses. Such an activity is unable by its very nature to affirm or deny untestable claims about the nature of ultimate reality. To the extent that science appears to presume naturalism or atheism or the like, it may indeed be required to presume them methodologically—but not ontologically. It is not the business of science, for example, to confirm or deny the possibility of supernatural miracles. Such a carefully limited understanding gives the magnificent achievements of Western science their full measure of respect, without obliging us to construe science as a form of metaphysics, and a sworn enemy of religion.

Such subtle distinctions have generally been lost on the more militant secularists, which we will call the establishmentarian or "positive" secularists. Marx knew precisely what he was doing in attacking religion, but it is not so clear in the minds of today's positive secularists. In many cases they honestly cannot imagine that they are imposing anything on anyone, which is why they consistently style themselves as heroic defenders of civil liberties—or, more modestly, just People for the American Way. Indeed, that organizational name, whose breathtakingly self-aggrandizing qualities surely match any parallel offenses committed by the late and unlamented Moral Majority, perfectly expresses the unstated presumptions of our informal secular establishment. Their efforts have been aimed at creating and enforcing the naked public square. Such a regime seeks, under the guise of separating church and state, to exclude religious thought and discourse from any serious participation in public life, and to confine religious belief and practice, as much as possible, to the realm of private predilection and individual taste.

So we return to a key question: Is secularism itself a kind of faith, our new established religion? Or is it rightly understood as something very different from religion, something cognitively distinct from religion, in just the way that science as a mode of inquiry and understanding is distinct from religion? Is there therefore a way we can enjoy the fruits of secularity without making it into a substitute orthodoxy, a new establishment that has the distinction of being an establishment, not of a religion, but of irreligion?

Use of the modifiers "negative" and "positive" here will no doubt remind some readers of Isaiah Berlin's essay "Two Concepts of Liberty," to whose title I have shamelessly alluded in my own.[41] But I have not done so merely for literary effect. I believe there is value in exploring further the dichotomy that Berlin devised for our consideration, and seeking out any parallels or analogies his essay may suggest to us, by way of clarifying the concepts of "secularism." Such parallels in fact arise almost immediately. Berlin set out in his great essay to explore "the permissible limits of coercion" in

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political life.[42] Our concern here is not at all dissimilar, since it deals with the appropriate limits of what I have called "establishment," which is itself a kind of moral and intellectual boundary constraint. But the essay's suggestiveness does not stop there. It can be traced to the very heart of the essay, and Berlin's distinction between *negative liberty,* which designates a freedom from external interference, a freedom to be left alone, and *positive liberty,* which means a freedom to be self-governing and self-directed, to be "one's own master."

Stated thus—as freedom from meddling versus freedom to be one's own boss—the two concepts of liberty may not seem very different. But as Berlin brilliantly demonstrated, each concept of liberty had implications buried within it that would ultimately cause the two to diverge sharply, and arrive at very different destinations, with very different consequences. Negative liberty is freedom *from;* it involves the warding off of potential hindrances and the guarding of privacy, in the interest of creating the maximum "free area for action." It embodies the classical-liberal understanding of liberty, which seeks, to the fullest extent possible within the requirements of civil society, to preserve an essential zone of inviolable personal freedom, comprising those freedoms "which a man cannot give up without offending against the essence of his human nature."[43] Berlin acknowledged that negative liberty would likely tend to lead over time to various kinds of inequality, and that it did not necessarily promote or mesh with conceptions of democracy or self-government. But he nevertheless chose to affirm negative liberty in the strongest terms, echoing the vision of John Stuart Mill: "To threaten a man with persecution . . . to block before him every door but one, no matter how noble the prospect upon which it opens, or how benevolent the motives of those who arrange this, is to sin against the truth that he is a man, a being with a life of his own to live."[44]

Positive liberty had aims that were higher and nobler. It sought more than merely getting government off one's back and other people out of one's way. Instead, it sought to free human beings to fulfill the most exalted elements of their nature. But it also was far more dangerous than negative liberty in Berlin's eyes, because its pursuit could so easily lead to authoritarian or totalitarian political arrangements. The logic by which Berlin arrived at this conclusion is especially relevant to our present purposes. He emphasized that, for human beings to become masters of themselves, they had to be self-overcoming, and resolve to subdue the elements of recalcitrance or false consciousness or sloth or appetite in their makeup, bringing them under the control of their rational faculties and "better selves."

This meant the practice of relentless self-coercion, in the name of a "higher freedom," precisely the sort of activity we would call "self-discipline." But what starts out as self-coercion may in time become hard to

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distinguish from external coercion, since, as Berlin observed, "we recognize that it is . . . at times justifiable to coerce men in the name of some goal (let us say, justice or public health) which they would, if they were more enlightened, themselves pursue, but do not, because they are blind or ignorant or corrupt." Such coercion is, of course, part and parcel of the rearing of children and the protection of dependents. But for adults too, there are times when we may have to be compelled by others to see the light, and even, to echo Rousseau's chilling phrase, be forced to be free.[45]

By means of precisely such arguments, however, the door is opened for all manner of coercion in the name of honoring the "true self" and freeing it from illusion, from being "ruled by myths," and from various forms of "heteronomy," which meant for Berlin (as for Mill) "being dominated by outside factors in a direction not necessarily willed by the agent." Positive liberty seeks the maximum measure of rational self-direction and self-control; it seeks to say, "I can do what I will with my own."[46] Its ultimate goal is, to repeat, much more than a mere freedom from interference. It aspires to nothing short of a godlike state of autonomy and self-mastery. In so doing, it relies upon the demystifying power of modern science, both natural science and social science, to expose and dissolve the fears and illusions that support human irrationality. It thereby serves to illuminate the world with brilliant rays of absolute rational clarity. The greatest thinkers of the nineteenth century, men such as Comte and Marx, were partisans of various forms of "positive liberty." They believed that "to understand the world is to be freed," but that most people are "enslaved by despots—institutions or beliefs or neuroses—which can be removed only by being analysed and understood." Most of us live our lives "imprisoned by evil spirits which we have ourselves . . . created, and can exorcize them only by becoming conscious and acting appropriately."[47] Ye shall know the truth—and it is a scientific, secular, and naturalistic truth, to be sure—and that truth shall make you free.

But the very beliefs that enable one to penetrate the fog of irrationalist obfuscation that surrounds us can also tempt one "to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their 'real' selves, in the secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of man . . . must be identical with his freedom—the free choice of his 'true', albeit often submerged and inarticulate, self."[48] In the end, the ideal of positive liberty seemed to Berlin too dangerous—too arrogant and presumptuous, too prone to monism and "final solutions," too controlling and depersonalizing—to be endorsed. Hence Berlin's preference for negative liberty, and the pluralism it engenders, as "a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great, disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of 'positive' self-mastery."[49]

Pluralism was, of course, the central political and social idea of Berlin's

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entire career. There are many goods in the world, he constantly asserted, and they are not necessarily in harmony with one another, or compatible with one another; indeed, they may even be mutually exclusive, without thereby ceasing to be good. Liberty, for example, exists in palpable tension with other goods such as equality, justice, happiness, security, and order. Therefore a political order that grants the greatest possible scope to the full variety of human goods is far preferable to an order that insists narrowly, tyrannically, upon only one. The consecrated life may represent a beautiful and noble ambition, perhaps the highest goal to which we can aspire as human beings. But not unless we feel inwardly called to it. And it makes a very bad, very pernicious, basis for political philosophy. If there is any place where the case for separating spheres, and the need to articulate secular principles, would seem to be airtight, it is here.

"Two Concepts" remains, even after nearly half a century, a rich and suggestive analysis, whose implications and ramifications extend far beyond the range of what Berlin himself could possibly have envisioned. Indeed, one is surprised to discover how adequately, if entirely unintentionally, its structure seems to describe the beleaguered state of religion today, as it struggles to evade the grip of a militant secularism. It is safe to say that Berlin, a secular Jew writing in 1958, can have had no such thing in mind. And yet his way of dividing up the concept of liberty also proves to be remarkably congruent with the different strains of secularism. "Negative" secularism, the secularism of nonestablishment, has many of the same virtues as negative liberty—an openness to diverse perspectives, whether religious or nonreligious, a commitment to free inquiry, free expression, and free association, and a "freedom from" the coerciveness of any "official" perspective, including that of militant secularism.

By the same token, "positive" secularism, the secularism of established unbelief, proves to have many of the same pitfalls as positive liberty. In affirming the secular ideal as an ultimate and alternative comprehensive faith, "positive" secularism also in effect embraces the dangerous ideal of self-mastery—an ideal that is *quintessentially* secular. In so doing, it also embraces an obligation to dispel the damaging misconceptions that prey on the minds of others, and to liberate them from the spell of priests, televangelists, and other purveyors of illusion. This will help them to discover their "true selves," of whose existence they had hitherto perhaps been ignorant, and help them along in the direction of greater and greater "autonomy." Whether or not this takes the form of coercion, the fact remains that "positive" secularism has all the sinister features of a crusading ideal—the very sort of ideal that Berlin warned against.

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Standing athwart such transforming zeal, Berlin offered the following observation in the penultimate paragraph of his essay—words that form the culminating stroke in his defense of pluralism, but which well express the irreducible role and inescapable importance of religious faith in human existence: "In the end, men choose between ultimate values; they choose as they do, because their life and thought are determined by fundamental moral categories and concepts that are, at any rate over large stretches of time and space, a part of their being and thought and sense of their own identity; part of what makes them human."[50]

And, one might add, whether or not Berlin had the persistence of religion in mind in writing these words, he could hardly have offered a more apt description of the reasons why a vibrantly pluralistic religious life in America is the only one compatible with the fullest possible respect for the dignity of the human person. For what is religion if not the most powerful of all expressions of ultimate values—values that, if truth be told, choose us as much as we choose them? What the "positive" secularizers have been pleased to regard with fear and contempt, or an immense burden from which our "better selves" need liberation, the "negative" secularizer regards as an essential (and inviolable) element in the warp and woof of our humanity.

This understanding of two secularisms may help explain the paradoxical situation with which I began this essay, in which secularism seems at one and the same time both victor and vanquished. Because, in a sense, both assertions are true. Americans have by and large accepted the concept of negative secularism, and the fundamental respect for the human person that undergirds it, as an essential basis for peaceful coexistence in a religiously pluralistic society. To a large extent, any large-scale religious revivalism or enthusiasm the United States is likely to see in the years to come will have accepted the prior restraint that negative secularism imposes, and done so as a precondition of its very existence. Indeed, the articulation of some well-considered theological basis for understanding and respecting the "others" who lie outside one's own tradition will be an essential element in the makeup of precisely those religions that hope to have the strongest public presence.[51] The signs are that religious activity and expression *will* continue to grow in strength and numbers in the years to come—but will do so largely *within* the container of a negative-secularist understanding of the world. The return of religious faith is not likely to be a fearsome "return of the repressed," at least not in the United States. For this, we can thank the very liberal tradition whose inadequacies religion has returned to correct.[52]

It follows, then, that religious faiths must undergo some degree of adaptation in accommodating themselves to negative secularism. They must, as it were, learn their table manners, and learn how to behave around strang-

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ers. But there is more to it than that. The key question that adherents of those faiths must ask is whether such an adaptation represents a compromise of their faith, or a deepening and clarifying of it. And the answer may be a surprising one to those who think only in terms of the "war of science and religion" and the triumph of positive secularism, or who assume that all adaptation is mere trimming or acculturation. True, the problem may pose insuperable obstacles to the most intransigent religious outlooks and traditions, if they have a rigid and poorly developed understanding of "the world," and of its relationship to the ultimate. They will, for that very reason, be all the more resistant to an adaptation that would, in their eyes, concede authority to "the world" over against their own traditions and sacred texts.

But that need not be universally the case. If one may speak for a moment only of the Christian faith, the effects of such adaptation would seem to be largely positive, and an important "development of doctrine."[53] The principal effect is to remind Christians of something that they sometimes have lost sight of: that their faith affirms the world. Not as an absolute good, sufficient unto itself; and not as an exclusive focus for one's energies. And not without the qualifier that all Christians are obliged to renounce "the world" as the ultimate audience before which the drama of their lives is played.[54] But "the world" is a very great good nonetheless, and one whose goodness and order are inherent, since it is a world endowed by a Creator God with harmony, beauty, intelligibility, and commodity that have not been entirely erased by the effects of human sin. The human inhabitants of that world, even the most thoroughly unregenerate among them, still bear the *imago Dei*, and all are the common beneficiaries of what is called "common grace," which means that they remain fully capable of the finest acts of nobility, justice, love, and wisdom. Because of this inherent dignity that is to be found in "the world," the activities of non-Christians have a full share in that dignity, and warrant Christians' respect and admiration, even when those activities proceed from non-Christian premises. It is not only an observable fact but a theologically sustainable truth that admirable qualities of mind and soul are not the exclusive property of one's co-religionists, and are not withheld from the nonbelieving artist, thinker, or politician. Nor should the religiously inspired thinker imagine that his only audience is among his own kind, and that devotion to God requires that one forswear a secular idiom that will be accessible to all. That is what the logic of a fuller understanding of "the world" entails and makes possible.

Therefore the quality of mind we call "humanism" should not be seen as the sinister offspring of positive secularism, but the lively child of a negative secularism, one that takes a soberly affirmative view of the natural

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potential inherent in human reason and imagination. "It is vital," writes cultural critic Ken Myers, that Christians "not regard art or science or the humanities to be evangelism carried out by other means." Nor, one might add, should complete withdrawal into gnostic otherworldliness, or any other form of extreme renunciation, be a collective goal either, although they frequently have been resorted to throughout the history of Christianity. (Indeed, as Isaiah Berlin has pointed out, they represent the ascetic form of "positive" liberty.)[55] Instead, argues Myers, the purpose of these human pursuits, like the purpose of government and politics, is "simply to maintain fallen yet rich human life on the planet."[56] Even the famous biblical command to "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" represents a real commitment by the Christian to the legitimate scope of even the most unbelieving political rulers, and therefore the intrinsic worthiness and dignity, from the Christian perspective, of the worldly task of political governance.[57] It may be that Christianity is uniquely equipped for this task, and for sustaining an affirmation of the world that nevertheless asserts the priority of what lies beyond the world, precisely because it is so intrinsically ambivalent about the relationship between the immanent and the transcendent. But the task of adapting to a negative-secular order faces all of the world's religions, if they are to bring any of their resources to bear effectively on the task of living in the next century.

Yet from this follows a final observation, which I fear may run the risk of restoring the very knotty complexity I have tried to unravel, but which I must at least touch upon. Given negative secularism's implicit respect for the world on its own terms, is it not necessary that we be prepared to endorse some set of normative standards inherent in nature—inherent limits and boundaries from which negative secularism derives its sense of the world's orderliness, regularities, and moral economy? And, to go to the heart of the matter, how much longer can it be meaningful to speak of the liberty of the individual person, when we are rapidly approaching the point where that liberty is taken to include the sovereign right to do whatever one wants with the human body, including the comprehensive genetic or pharmacological refashioning of it? Is the very concept of individual liberty even intelligible under such circumstances, unless we can presume some measure of fixity and givenness in the agent-person? Does the very concept of liberty evaporate when its triumph is too complete, just as an economic competitor becomes transformed into something different when it becomes a monopoly? Is there any reason powerful enough to persuade us not to tinker with that fixity, and thereby risk making ourselves into the first posthuman creatures—any reason, that is, other than the Judeo-Christian understanding of the human person as a *created* being whose dignity

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and fundamental characteristics are a divine *endowment* from that Creator? Where, in the traditions of *either* form of secularism, does one find an adequate defense against such temptation?

Such questions not only take us even further away from positive secularism. They also may force us to reconsider the necessity of something resembling a religious establishment. They suggest the possibility that secularism cannot ever exist entirely as a nonestablished order—that is, without the assumption of an orderly and *given* world undergirding it. This is not just a matter of the need for some kind of social and political axioms and norms. It is also a matter of having the right axioms. For without something like the Judeo-Christian conception of the created order superintending the works of secular society, and the notion that the individual person has an inviolable dignity simply because he or she is created by God, there may be no effective way of containing the powerful impulses that would work to fatally undermine that order. We see the first inklings of this possibility in the ease with which unexceptionable interventions, such as cosmetic surgery or the use of drugs to treat severe psychological disorders, blur into more questionable ones, such as gender alteration and the pharmacological remaking of the self, with nary a bright line in sight to be drawn, except arbitrarily.[58] Whether it knows it or not, the world-affirming work of secularism has always tacitly depended upon the social existence of its opposite number—a belief in the givenness and rightness of an orderly nature, whose scope and majesty are too great to be overcome by the human will. Paradoxically, belief in the existence of considerations beyond the reach of "the world" have served to give the world its solidity, undergird the possibility of human dignity, and discipline the will of man. Our dignity is in overcoming—and in not overcoming. What can take their place in an era of plasticity?

Berlin seemed to recognize something like this later in his life, that is, that both positive and negative liberty must somehow be confined within a certain radius.[59] He of course believed those confinements could be arrived at by entirely conventional means, and he continued to the end to reject emphatically any notion of universally valid norms. To have believed otherwise, he thought, would have violated his understanding of pluralism, a principle to which he was, so to speak, monistically committed. But it may not be so easy for us. The weakest and most disappointing points in his work reliably come at those moments when he is forced to appeal to a vague traditional standard of "those principles that most people have accepted for a very long time," rather than commit the unpardonable sin of proclaiming an absolute. He perhaps could not see the extent to which this rather English reliance upon the residuum of Western cultural practice as a counterweight to liberty—and by extension, to secularism—made presumptions that we can no longer presume, and no longer rely upon.

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Berlin resisted monism, the one truth. But at the end of the twentieth century, it now seems that even negative secularism needs to presume something stronger than mere convention, if it is to survive and thrive.

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Notes

1. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, 1950), 285; and Michael G. Kammen, *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (New York, 1972).

2. "How is it," asked Samuel Johnson in his 1775 anti-American tract *Taxation No Tyranny,* "that we hear the loudest *yelps* for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" For a more systematic investigation of his insight, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975).

3. James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism* (New York, 1999); John Harmon McElroy, *American Beliefs: What Keeps a Big Country and a Diverse People United* (Chicago, 1999).

4. Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, 1994); and "The Hipster and the Organization Man," *First Things,* no. 43 (May 1994): 23–30.

5. For a useful compendium of polling data regarding Americans' religious beliefs and practices, see D. Michael Lindsay and George Gallup, Jr., *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs* (Atlanta, 2000). Up-to-the-moment polling data of a similar character are also readily available at the internet website of the Gallup Organization, whose address is http://www.gallup.com. See, for example, the survey press release for 6 May 1999, which states that nine in ten of Americans pray to God, and three of four do so on a daily basis. "Creative destruction" is the coinage of the Austrian-American economist Joseph Schumpter, in his *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York, 1950), 81–86.

6. See, for example, Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* trans. Claud Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), and Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* trans. Karen Fields (New York, 1995). An especially important formulation of the secularization theory is Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, 1967).

7. A succinct but useful recent examination of the perdurability of religious faith, a book that represents a reversal of the position that the author put forward in his earlier work, cited above, is Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1999). See also Theodore Caplow et al., *All Faithful People: Change and Continuity in Middletown's Religion* (Minneapolis, 1983); Andrew Greeley, *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion* (New York, 1972); and David Martin, *The Religious and the Secular: Studies in Secularization* (London, 1969).

8. Stephen L. Carter has been especially effective in bringing this condition into relief, in such works as *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York, 1994), and his 1995 Massey Lectures at Harvard, *The Dissent of the Governed: A Meditation on Law, Religion, and Loyalty* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

9. A useful guide to the relevant Supreme Court decisions, with excerpts and commentary beginning with *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940) and carrying the story up to and including *Lee v. Weisman* (1992), is Terry Eastland, ed., *Religious Liberty in the Supreme Court: The Cases That Define the Debate over Church and State* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1993). See also Marvin E. Frankel and Eric Foner, *Faith and Freedom: Religious Liberty in America* (New York, 1995). Required reading is Richard John Neuhaus's highly influential *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America,* 2d ed., (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1986).

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10. A perspective reflected in, among others, Wendy Kaminer, *Sleeping with Extra-Terrestrials: The Rise of Irrationalism and Perils of Piety* (New York, 1999); Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness* (New York, 1996); and Frederick Clarkson, *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy* (Monroe, Me., 1997).

11. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, 1994), 234.

12. On the influence of Roman Catholicism in Eastern and Central Europe, see especially the work of George Weigel, including *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York, 1992), and his biography of John Paul II, *Witness to Hope* (New York, 1999).

13. Jeffrey Rosen, "Is Nothing Secular?" *New York Times Magazine,* 20 January 2000, 40–45. For some historical perspective on the provenance of such professions, see Michael Novak, "Faith in Search of Votes," *New York Times,* 19 December 1999, A25.

14. An excellent overview of these matters can be found in Charles Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* (Princeton, 2000). See also Stanley W. Carlson-Thies and James W. Skillen, eds., *Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1996). An exemplary work by a prominent advocate of faith-based charities is Amy L. Sherman, *Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-Based Ministries That Work* (New York, 1997).

15. An interesting and ideologically diverse examination of Clinton's use of religious language arises out of the essays in Gabriel Fackre, ed., *Judgment Day at the White House: A Critical Declaration Exploring Moral Issues and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1999). See also J. Philip Wogaman, *From the Eye of the Storm: A Pastor to the President Speaks Out* (Louisville, 1998).

16. For a skeptical view of the meaning of RFRA, see Wilfred M. McClay, "The Worst Decision Since Dred Scott?" *Commentary, Vol.* 104, no. 4 (October 1997): 52–54.

17. See Robert E. Hemenway, "The Evolution of a Controversy in Kansas Shows Why Scientists Must Defend the Search for Truth," *Chronicle of Higher Education,* 29 October 1999, B7–8, for a response from the Chancellor of the University of Kansas.

18. See Charles Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace,* and, from a different perspective, Jennifer S. Braden and Thomas L. Good, *The Great School Debate: Choice, Vouchers, and Charters* (Mahwah, N.J., 2000).

19. In *Agostini v. Felton* (1997), the Court allowed public school teachers to tutor private school students in their private schools, even if the schools were primarily religious in nature. In *Rosenberger v. University of Virginia* (1995), the Court ruled that a public university that pays printing costs for a number of student publications through the use of student activity fees cannot deny that benefit to a student-run religious publication.

20. Roy S. Moore, "Putting God Back in the Public Square," *Imprimis* 28, no. 8 (August 1999); and Linda Greenhouse, "Cases Give Court Chances to Define Church and State," *New York Times,* 19 September 1999, A1.

21. See the works of Stephen L. Carter, in note 8 above, and Warren Nord, *Religion and American Education: Rethinking a National Dilemma* (Chapel Hill, 1995); James H. Hutson et al., *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (Washington, D.C., 1998); Ellis Sandoz, *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion, and the American Founding* (Baton Rouge, 1991); Gary L. Gregg II, ed., *Vital Remnants: America's Founding and the Western Tradition* (ISI Books, 1999); John Witte, *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment: Essential Rights and Liberties* (Boulder, 1999); and John Noonan, *The Lustre of Our Nation: The American Experience of Religious Freedom* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998).

22. Paul Marshall, *Their Blood Cries Out: The Untold Story of Persecution Against Christians in the Modern World* (Dallas, 1997); Nina Shea, *In the Lion's Den: Persecuted Christians and What the Western Church Can Do About It* (Nashville, 1997).

23. Church attendance, too, may understate the extent to which religious belief persists. See Hanna Rosin, "Believers in God, if Not Church," *Washington Post,* 18 January 2000, A1.

24. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader,* 2d ed. (New York, 1978), 594–96: "And just when they seem engaged

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in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language. . . . the beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue."

25. Gertrude Himmelfarb's book *One Nation, Two Cultures* (New York, 1999) argues not only that contemporary American culture is deeply divided, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, though plausibly, that it is the advocates of traditional values, morality, gender roles, and the like who comprise the "counterculture" in our time.

26. A good brief description of this coalescing outlook is provided in Robert P. George, "What Can We Reasonably Hope For?" in *First Things,* no. 99 (January 2000): 22–24. More detailed, more adventurous, and more controversial is Peter Kreeft, *Ecumenical Jihad: Ecumenism and the Culture War* (New York, 1996).

27. His religious commitments, and a general sympathy for religion, frequently surface in the work of *Washington Post* journalist E. J. Dionne Jr.; see, for example, "A Shift Looms," *Washington Post,* 3 October 1999, B1; and (with John J. DiLulio) *What's God Got to Do with the American Experiment? Essays on Religion and Politics* (Washington, D.C., 2000). Stephen Carter's work on this subject has already been mentioned (see note 8). Robert Coles has written biographical studies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothy Day, and Walker Percy and has recently published *The Secular Mind* (Princeton, 1999), calling into question the adequacy of the secular outlook of modernity. William E. Connolly's *Why I am Not a Secularist* vigorously advances a new model of public life that more adequately addresses the deeper needs of human beings.

28. Also implicit in Eugene McCarraher, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* (Ithaca, 2000).

29. One can learn a great deal from observing the tenor of two major academic conferences planned for the year 2000. First, one held 11–14 May at the University of Minnesota's Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change, entitled "After Secularism/Religion: Interpretation, History, and Politics." This decidedly postmodernist undertaking, underwritten by the MacArthur Foundation, seeks "to problematize the history by which religion and secularism are presented as polar oppositions," and, by "engaging with the assumptions about progress, pragmatism, and rationality that underpin the genealogy of secularism," to "generate new languages of interpretation that reveal both the partialities of secularism and the worldliness of religious belief." The second, a somewhat more mainstream undertaking supported by the Lilly Endowment, is entitled "Congress 2000: The Future of the Study of Religion," and was held 11–15 September at Boston University and Harvard University. Yet there too, the conference announcement proclaims "the collapse of foundationalism," and the "frailty of the old secularization thesis," questions "the Enlightenment relegation of religion to the 'private' realm," doubts the possibility of "objective historical and ethnographic study"—and, for that matter, of any "normative and interpretative claims" at all.

30. See George A. Lindbeck, ed., *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Post-Liberals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, 1996), and *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, 1984); Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, 1980); Stanley Hauerwas, ed., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Eugene, Ore., 1997); John Milbank et al., eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York, 1999).

31. A view well expressed in Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (New York, 1995).

32. James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture Wars* (New York, 1994), esp. 45–82; and the earlier *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York, 1991).

33. Some of the dangers of overemphasizing the middle ground can be seen in Alan Wolfe, *One Nation After All: What Americans Really Think About God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, The Right, The Left and Each Other* (New York, 1998).

34. Mary Ann Glendon, "Religious Freedom and Common Sense," *New York Times,* 30 June 1997; and Glendon and Raul F. Yanes, "Structural Free Exercise," *Michigan Law Review* 90 (December 1991): 477–92.

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35. See Michael Sandel, "The Political Theory of the Procedural Republic," in Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1989), 19–32.

36. Stanley Fish, *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); John Murray Cuddihy, *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste* (New York, 1978).

37. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (New York, 1994).

38. It is perhaps for this very reason that some of the most interesting work on the concept of secularism is coming out of the Indian subcontinent. See, for example, Rajeev Bhargava, *Secularism and Its Critics* (New York, 1998).

39. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* trans. Phillips Bradley (New York, 2000), esp. 1:303–14; Wilfred M. McClay, "The Judeo-Christian Tradition and the Liberal Tradition in the American Republic," in Gary Quinlivan, ed., *Public Morality, Civic Virtue, and the Problem of Modern Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2000).

40. This language comes from the Supreme Court's decision in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey,* 505 U.S. 833 (1992): "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

41. I did so completely unaware that the same title had already been used in a thoughtful essay by Leon Wieseltier, contained in Edna and Avishai Margalit, *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration* (Chicago, 1991), on which I stumbled in the process of revising this essay for publication. I commend the essay to the reader's attention, although Wieseltier's distinction between "hard" and "soft" secularism is very different from my own distinction between "negative" and "positive" secularism.

42. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York, 1969), 121.

43. Ibid., 127

44. Ibid.

45. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract,* Book One, Chapter Seven.

46. Berlin, "Two Concepts," 142–43.

47. Ibid., 143.

48. Ibid., 133.

49. Ibid., 171.

50. Ibid., 171–72.

51. This is one of the central assertions put forward in Casanova, *Public Religions.*

52. See McClay, "The Judeo-Christian Tradition."

53. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, 1990).

54. Even this qualifier is itself qualified, however, by Christ's assurance (Matthew 6:33) that those who "seek first" God's kingdom will also have their worldly needs recognized and cared for.

55. Berlin, "Two Concepts," 135–41.

56. Ken Myers, *Christianity, Culture, and Common Grace* (Charlottesville, 1994), 62–63.

57. See the thoughtful essays in Michael Cromartie, ed., *Caesar's Coin Revisited: Christians and the Limits of Government* (Washington, D.C., 1996). See especially this remark of Fr. James V. Schall: "The most revolutionary aspect of the Caesar's coin passage [in the Bible] is not the "render unto God" part but the "render to Caesar" part. Here we have the revelational tradition maintaining that there are indeed things of Caesar. And where do we aquire an understanding of those things? Not primarily from revelation. . . . The New Testament argues that if we want to find out what things belong to Caesar, we should go to those authors or experience wherein this matter can be directly and properly discussed. Revelation is not designed primarily to teach us what we can usually find out by ourselves, and this moderation on the part of revelation is part of its own claim to be true."

58. Peter D. Kramer, *Listening to Prozac* (New York, 1993); and Walter Truett Anderson, *The Future of the Self: Inventing the Postmodern Person* (New York, 1997).

59. See Isaiah Berlin and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (New York, 1991), 40–46.

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