Mirjam KÜNKLER, John MADELEY and Shylashri SHANKAR, ed.,
A Secular Age beyond the West. Religion, Law and the State in Asia,
the Middle East and North Africa,
(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018)

The philosopher Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) has elicited a vast number of edited books dealing with his ideas. Taylor had limited his discussion to Western Christendom and one set of responses seeks to take his theory beyond this. The book under review is a particularly wide-ranging attempt to assess the validity of Taylor's theory in China, Japan, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Israel, Turkey, Russia, Egypt, and Morocco. The case studies are all written by experts on these regions, and a measure of coherence is provided by the fact that these authors are mainly sociologists and political scientists. The introduction and a chapter by Philip Gorski focus specifically on attempts to model varieties of secularity and develop Taylor's own systematization of secularity. In his Afterword, Taylor himself seems quite perplexed by this faithful application of his theory to a non-Western context, but it is undeniable that his own appetite for generalization has provided an incentive to develop typologies and models.

In his book, Taylor distinguished between *Secularity I* which is a classic differentiation theory; *Secularity II* which refers to decline of belief and practice; and *Secularity III* which refers to "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unprob-lematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others". Philip Gorski, whose contribution is of a theoretical nature, draws on the system theory of Niklas Luhmann and the field theory of Pierre Bourdieu to develop Taylor's three secularities into a fourfold typology of secular settlements. He has not succeeded in convincing this reader that his typological refinements help us to understand secularity better. What such sociological typologies typically do is describe the characteristics of a certain social configuration in abstract terms, thereby losing crucial aspects of the phenomenon that one wants to understand. For example, Gorski's brief analysis of religious nationalism is singularly unhelpful in helping us to understand Hindu nationalism better.

463

Peter van der Veer, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen [vanderveer@mmg.mpg.de]

The descriptive case studies in this volume are to be preferred to these attempts to create models for the understanding of the entire world. It is not for nothing that students of Asian societies have generally found the Western debate about secularity of little use in understanding these societies. Asian histories have their own problematics that should be explored in their own terms, but with careful attention to their (imperial and post-imperial) connections to the West. The ubiquity of religious ideas and practices in the public sphere in contemporary Asia is striking. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the importance of the secularist separation of modern institutions from religion, also in contemporary Asia. The discussion in Asian studies has thus mostly focused on legal arrangements regarding religious institutions and communal rights. The case studies in this volume also focus on this problematic. It is the modernizing efforts of nationalist elites (political and intellectual) that produce not so much secularity but secularism. Helen Hardacre's chapter on Japan provides excellent examples of secularism as an elite project. Zhe Ji's chapter on China very clearly shows the centrality of the secularist project rather than that of the secularizing process. His focus on public education is especially pertinent, since it hardly figures in Taylor's study. In her chapter on India, Shylashri Shankar spends much time on the elusive definition of Hinduism but gets to the point when examining the interpretation of Hinduism by the judiciary. In his chapter on Pakistan, Christophe Jaffrelot argues that Muslim nationalism is a route towards secularity. This assertion results from his focus on secularist leaders of the Pakistan movement, like Jinnah, but secularity of any form seems an inadequate description of Pakistani society, to say the least. The study of South Asian societies has tended to focus on the majority religion, but the crucial question remains how minorities are treated in these societies. The fear that Muslims would not be treated well in Hindu-majority India was one of the reasons why Muslim elites found the Pakistan option attractive. In hindsight, the creation of Pakistan may seem justified by the Hindu nationalist treatment of Muslims in India today, but the demographic change effected by the Partition may have produced this as a self-fulling prophecy. It seems to me that the treatment of minorities is one of the most important and urgent issues to be discussed in a book on secularism. However, even the treatment of the Chinese minority and the use of the Pancasila ideology to persecute and kill Communists receives only fleeting attention in Mirjam Künkler's chapter, which otherwise provides an excellent overview of developments in

464

Indonesia. If violence and the confessionalization of states were such important steps towards the secular state in Europe why are they not being examined in Asia?

There is a huge amount of wonderful information in all the chapters, but the use of Taylor's theory appears to have been more of a burden than of an eye-opener. One of the reasons that Taylor's book is important is that it offers so much more than the model of three secularities. In that regard, his work resembles that of Max Weber. It is possible to make a Parsonian systematization of his ideas, but in fact they are more productive (although not necessarily correct) without that. Major elements of Taylor's discussion of the nature of the (buffered) self, the conditions of belief, and especially the designation of parts of religious traditions as magical and anti-modern fall by the wayside in this volume. They might have been productive for a discussion of the "non-Western world". In conclusion, the volume is to be recommended to sociologists and political scientists, and especially to those who still believe in the secularization thesis. It attests to the incredible richness of social imaginaries in a very large part of the world.

PETER VAN DER VEER