

## Book Reviews

***A Secular Age Beyond the West: Religion, Law and the State in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.* Edited by Mirjam Künkler, John Madeley, and Shylashri Shankar. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. xviii + 422 pp. \$120.00 cloth, \$34.99 paper, \$28.00 e-book.**

doi:10.1017/S1755048321000092

Gregorio Bettiza  
*University of Exeter*

Few scholars have contributed to deepening our contemporary understanding of the relationship between modernity, secularization, and religion than Charles Taylor. In his magnum opus *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2007), the Canadian philosopher invites us to radically rethink the meaning of secularization away from what he terms “subtraction stories,” whereby the rise of modernity = processes of secularization = less religion in the public and private spheres. Subtraction stories form what is commonly understood to be the core of secularization theory, which either involves the functional differentiation of religious and non-religious spheres (what Taylor terms Secularity I), or the decline of religious belief and practice (what Taylor labels Secularity II). Taylor conceptualizes secularity instead as constituting a profound epistemic and cultural break within our Western “conditions of belief.” This entails the movement 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” (Taylor, 2007, 2). This is what Taylor terms Secularity III, namely the notion that “belief in God is no longer axiomatic” (Taylor, 2007, 3). For Taylor this third dimension of secularity is largely a precondition for the first two.

From a global perspective (my own disciplinary home is that of International Relations), one of the pressing questions hovering over Taylor’s monumental book has long been whether this shift in the

conditions of belief is a uniquely Western development or can actually take—and has taken—place across other societies around the world. In other words, is the age of secularity just a Western phenomenon or also a global one? Taylor is attentive to this issue. He explicitly notes that his focus is on, what he calls, the North Atlantic world and Western Latin Christendom. He is careful not to indulge in commonplace Eurocentric tropes whether, on the one hand, suggesting that the Western experience is the *de facto* global experience or, on the other hand, arguing for Western exceptionalism as the only “civilized” region in the world to have made a shift toward the immanent frame.

Enter Künkler, Madeley, and Shankar’s important edited volume *A Secular Age Beyond the West: Religion, Law and the State in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa*. The volume’s intent—at *prima facie*—is to take us beyond where Taylor left and explore the extent to which the Canadian philosopher’s insights on secularity may apply to non-Western societies and polities. The volume is impressive, offering the reader both conceptual depth and empirical breadth. Extensive introductory and concluding chapters by the editors do an outstanding job in outlining the conceptual foundations on which the volume rests and teasing out its main themes and findings. The intellectual feast continues with an introductory framing chapter by Philip Gorski and an afterward by Charles Taylor himself. Sandwiched between all of this, are 11 excellent case studies exploring the volume’s framework on secularity in China, Japan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, and Israel.

Surprisingly, though, this edited collection—and herein lies my main critique—overwhelmingly concentrates on the first dimension of secularity (differentiation between religious and non-religious spheres) rather than Taylor’s main intellectual contribution, Secularity III (changing conditions of belief). In fairness, the volume is quite explicit about this. In the introductory chapter by Künkler and Shankar, we are alerted that whereas Taylor’s goal is to offer a “phenomenological account of Secularity III,” the volume intends to provide a “causal account of Secularity I and its applications for Secularity III” (11). Gorski’s chapter is titled, none other than, “*Secularity I: Varieties and Dilemmas* [emphasis added].” Drawing on Niklas Luhmann and Pierre Bourdieu, Gorski proposes a sophisticated typology of religion–political differentiation: consociationalism, religious nationalism, radical secularism, and liberal secularism.

The 11 country-specific chapters that follow, offer a rich exploration of how distinct institutional, political, and legal state structures affect in

multiple ways the role and place of religion in the public sphere of each country. Authors find that state-driven projects may engender particular—albeit fragile and circumscribed—shifts in the conditions of belief and non-belief, most notably among certain social milieus in Japan, China, Russia, and Turkey. Interestingly, the book draws on American jurisprudence to offer its own concept of “differential burdening,” to explain how religion is domestically regulated, suppressed, or shaped by and for the state in distinct ways across cases. As instructive as this is, a key Taylorian concept such as that of the “immanent frame” hardly receives any mention across the various chapters, nor does it have its own entry in the index.

At its core *A Secular Age Beyond the West* provides a remarkable and rich comparative study of multiple secularities and attendant state–religion arrangements across different regions and polities. Still, all this begs the question as to why not place the volume more explicitly in dialogue with similar, existing, scholarship in the social sciences rather than draw on Taylor and his phenomenological account of Secularity III to begin with? In his afterward, Taylor appears baffled by this (“I seem to be saying: ‘forget my book’,” 388). As a result, rather than substantively dialoguing with the book’s chapters, the Canadian philosopher ventures in a series of undoubtedly critical and penetrating, yet also somewhat off-topic, reflections. Whether on the virtues and pitfalls of toleration, on the unbundling of belonging and the eventual dissolution of Christendom in the West, and on the rise of (religious) identity politics under conditions of globalization.

I may be faulted for judging—so to speak—this book all too quickly by its cover. Yet, I do not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. Even if the volume does not entirely deliver what it seems to promise at first sight, it nonetheless does substantially contribute to our comparative understanding of secularity opening up avenues for further inquiry. First, collectively the volume largely shows that Secularity III may indeed be a uniquely Western, Latin Christian, development. If that is the case, more research is needed to understand why this is so. I’m not entirely convinced, however, this conclusion is correct. I wonder whether a precondition of Soviet and Chinese Communism or Kemalism in Turkey was some kind of cultural shift akin to Secularity III to begin with? The jury, in my view, is still out there and more work—also by philosophers and intellectual historians—is certainly needed.

Second, the volume powerfully shows how relations and boundaries between the secular and the religious are often contextual and highly

political. Secularity I appears far less as a neutral process of differentiation brought about by modernization, rather than a form of management and governance of the religious by state elites and apparatuses in the non-West. Quite striking is the role played by the experience of and encounter with Western imperialism in shaping state policies toward religion across Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. This fascinating insight calls for a more global—not just comparative—historical sociology, intent on excavating further the role of colonial entanglements and their secularizing effects around the world. Ultimately, the merit of this excellent volume is to leave the reader with even more questions than answers.

***Disciples of the State? Religion and State-Building in the Former Ottoman World.* By Kristin Fabbe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xxi + 291 pp. \$99.99 cloth. \$34.99 paper**

doi:10.1017/S1755048321000109

Kate Dannies  
*Miami University*

In *Disciples of the State? Religion and State-Building in the Former Ottoman World*, Kristin Fabbe gives a meticulously researched account of how religious elites, structures, and attachments were incorporated into the modernized educational and legal institutions of three formerly Ottoman states: Greece, Turkey, and Egypt. Through a comparative historical analysis based on qualitative and quantitative research, Fabbe presents a framework to explain the different power arrangements involved in the process of centralization, modernization, and secularization in each state.

Chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to a detailed explication of methodology and argument. Fabbe's framework for analyzing the distribution of power between religion and the state, in particular the state's engagement with religious elites, religious institutions, and religious attachments (6) consists of four major categories and is driven by the question of where law-giving authority resides (7, figure 1). At the far left of the spectrum