A Mortal God:

Towards a Hermeneutics of Secularism

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Abstract: "Secularism" has long been held as a litmus test for political authority in Western scholarship. This is due largely to both the mistrust of religious institutions as a means of   ensuring political stability, and to the fear of state-sponsored religion. The binary opposition between the religious and political in democratic theory, however, hides the extent to which the demand for secularism curtails the democratic endeavor. This paper will trace the lines of reasoning of secularism to illustrate its centrality to the idea of the political in Western society, and how it becomes a mode for placing other political cultures in a hierarchical relationship. To fulfill this purpose it will explore the need for the separation of the political and religious in modern discourse. Further, it will explore the ways in which secularism has created a "mortal god", to use Hobbesian terminology, through its insistence on secular political authority. Finally it will explore secularism as an outward looking ideology, as it approaches the problem of Islamic terror, in the work of Jean Bethke Elshtain.

Introduction

Secularism in Liberal theory exists as an insistence on the primacy of political authority over all other forms authority within the modern state. Theorists, Such as John Rawls and Max Weber seek to remove the religious to a subordinate sphere of human existence in order to secure democratic justice. Secular political authority, they argue, developed from the rational agreement of its members is able to   secure stability of a democratic society, while religious political societies are only able to maintain stability through the use of force. For Hobbes, the need for a unitary source of political authority requires two things. First, it required the erection and recognition of a sovereign presence as the unitary source of political power. Secondly, It requires that all other concerns and commitments within the common wealth are secondary to sovereign authority. This allows for the interaction of competing religious and moral doctrines within a society without the fear of violence from any one faction seeking enforcing its will on others (Hobbes, pp. 22-23; Rawls 2007, pp. 33-34). Secularism, however, while born of the desire in liberal theory to create a space of mutuality by relegating all religious concerns to the sphere of the apolitical, has in fact become an ideology. It operates by demarcating what is and is not a democracy by placing limits on how democracy should develop, and how citizens within democratic societies should order their commitments.

    This insistence on secularity, further, has become the site of cultural hegemony whereby proscriptions are placed on certain parties and governments based on the

religious character of their make up. In doing so, Secularism creates what Boaventura de Sousa Santos refers to as an "abyssal line" whereby on this side of the line there is civility, seen as secular democracy, and on that side there is only barbarism, such as religiously "motivated" terrorism (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 1-3). Consider the disbanding of Shi'ite clerical parties by L. Paul Brenner, during the first Iraqi elections, or the concern over the Muslim Brotherhood being allowed to run for election in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak. The secular commitment acts to define not only what constitutes a democracy, but who is allowed to participate as well.

Secularism, acts to order and regulate our understanding of "the political". It does so by creating the binary that Santos defines above between the political and the religious. This dividing line acts to secure an understanding that the political and the religious are separate spheres, which are dangerous if merged. Secularism exists as a demand for the total absence of of religious motivations in political matters. Secularism, acts to create difference. It creates a dividing line between "us" in the civilized West, and "them" who not only are not democratic, but are a threat to us as well.

It is for these reasons that secularism should be read as an ideology rather than a mere nicety of democratic theory. In order to understand how secularism acts as an ideological framework for political understandings, this article will adopt a hermeneutic approach to the subject as John Roberge defines the term. As Roberge points out Hermeneutics exists as a critical relationship to ideology. It performs three important tasks for our understanding of ideology. First, it opens an ideology by exploring the reasoning of its arguments and their logical conclusions. Secondly, hermeneutics allows for the effects of representation of within an ideology to be analyzed and understood. Finally, it takes

ideology to be a cultural text. In this sense, ideologies are taken to be a set of local preferences that are expanded to universal prescriptions. In doing so, hermeneutics allows for an opportunity to analyze the limitations and omissions of this cultural text as it is played out on the international stage (Roberge, pp. 3-6).

Pursuant to these tasks this article will approach secularism in the following manner. In the first section, I will attempt to reconstruct the development of secular political authority first through Hobbes' idea of the sovereign as a "mortal god" or sole political authority within a commonwealth. I will trace the develop of secular authority through the works of Rawls both through *Justice as Fairness*, and though his reading of Hobbes in *Lectures in the History of Political Philosophy*. Finally I will utilize Max Weber's *Politics as a Vocation* as a means to understand why the bifurcation of the political and the religious is necessary in political life. In the second section, I will utilize the works of Talal Asad, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and Michel Foucault to understand the ideological operations of secularism in modern discourse, and how this schema creates an "other" who is the subject of the political but deemed unfit as an agent. In the final section I will read the cultural text of secularism as it is applied in foreign affairs. I will utilize Jean Bethke Elshtain's work on the "War on Terror" in order to understand how secularism as a political ideology operates to create a dichotomous relationship between "us" and "them".

I. The Secular in Modern Political Theory

As noted above, hermeneutics, for Roberge, must accomplish three essential tasks in relation to the ideology it seeks to critique. First, It must open that ideology up, or be able to show how an ideology allows for a group to represent itself to itself within the

theoretical framework it provides. Second, It must be able to show how this representative framework simultaneously disenfranchises "others" who are not represented as part of the group "inside" the theoretical field. Finally, It must speak to the limits of ideology in apprehending the "other" in a political context (Roberge 2011, pp. 7-8). Pursuant to these three tasks, I will begin with a brief reading of the idea of secular democracy as found in the works of Hobbes, Rawls and Weber. In this section I will attempt only an understanding of the need for the coupling of the idea of the secular and political authority, which I argue is the hallmark of the ideology of secularism.

The argument for secularity in political matters begins with the works of Thomas Hobbes. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues for the necessity of a strong, centralized edifice of power that exists as "a Mortal God" in relation to the commonwealth (Hobbes 1992, pg. 120). For Hobbes, the presences of a unitary sovereign is necessary because men, living in the state of nature have a multitude of doctrines that govern the idea and pursuit of the good in social life (Hobbes 1992, pp. 17-19). In such a state of disarray, where each is left to pursue competing notions of the good, without recourse to a stronger power to keep these pursuits bound, the natural state of man becomes one of conflict (Hobbes 1992, pp. 15-16). Multiple notions of the good are conflictual, he argues, because each person is the sole arbiter of justice in reference to their ends. As such, in the state of nature, only violence is capable of enforcing and protecting competing ideas of the good (Hobbes, 1992, pp. 15-17).

In order to secure a stabile society, Hobbes argues, it is necessary for men to erect a sovereign that both exist outside of the normal fray of disputing notions of the good, and has sufficient strength to mediate these disputes (Hobbes 1992, pp. 119-120). The

sovereign must be a common power, which is erected for the defense of the citizenry

from both external and internal threats to the whole. Whereas each member has an

individualistic claim on the good, the role of the sovereign, once erected, is the collective

good. The plurality of the wills that form the commonwealth must be unified into one

man or assembly that exists, as the common will. The individual wills of members must

conform to the will of the sovereign, in order to ensure that he is imbued with sufficient

strength to maintain stability (Hobbes1992, 1pp. 19-121).

      The need for a unitary source of authority in the commonwealth is due, for

Hobbes, to the nature of men and their notions of the good. Men are continually

competing for honor and dignity among themselves. Further, due to ego will always think

that they can govern better than the sovereign. These two essential natures, of man will

lead to the destabilization of the commonwealth, as men turn to violence to achieve their

ends, unless there is a sufficiently strong sovereign that is capable of ending intrastate

violence (Hobbes 1992, pg. 119). Due to the nature of man, and his limited understanding

of the good, the sovereign must be removed from the commonwealth and govern it from

outside. This allows for the role of government to be one of protecting the

commonwealth from the violence, whether it arises from the disputes within the

commonwealth or external threat. The sovereign must always exist outside the

commonwealth, Hobbes argues, as it allows him to work on systemic threats to the whole

as opposed to individual pursuits (Hobbes 1992, pp. 118-121).

      In order to secure these ends, Hobbes argues, the sovereign must be erected

without recourse to religious doctrine. Religion, Hobbes argues, deals with matters that

are both divine and supernatural. While these forces exist beyond the realm of human

endeavor they represent a competing power structure, for Hobbes, because they cannot exist without human interpretation. Religious understanding is subject to the authority of the churches and cults that develop around them (Hobbes 1992, pp. 80-82). Further, he argues, they are subject to divine revelation from prophets and givers of divine law. Paganism, he argues, is a perfect example of why the sovereign must not be connected to the religious edifices of a society. The king and queen of Peru, upon attaining power had themselves declared the son and daughter of the gods, and demand worship from their subjects (Hobbes 1992, pp. 82-83). Further, the coupling of religion and politics is dangerous for Hobbes, as it represents the particularities of beliefs about the good becoming the sole focus of the sovereign endeavor.

Theocracy will automatically lead to instability, Hobbes finds, as members of the commonwealth have varying beliefs and will therefore try to vie for control of the community based on these beliefs. The sovereign, therefore, must be erected by through the use of common reason, and for the protection of the commonwealth, rather than through a particular religious orthodoxy. The sovereign must be a "Mortal God", or one who derives its authority purely from the reason of man, rather than divine decree. This creates political authority, or the capacity to judge political matters, because it links members of the community to sovereign power through their rational consent. Rational consent to be governed, Hobbes finds, creates a stable commonwealth, because it is a commonwealth that members agree to abide by without recourse to divine decrees (Hobbes 1992, pp. 80-84; 118-121). The subject of secularity in Hobbes' liberal system is further taken up in the lectures of John Rawls. For Rawls, Hobbes argues for a secular rationality and morality in order to ensure that authority in the commonwealth was

derived from the need to protect the common interest (Rawls 2007, pp. 77-78).

As Rawls points out, secularity is an important adjunct to sovereignty, because it speaks to how political authority is derived by the sovereign. Hobbes' sovereign power is not derived from claims of divine right, but rather is based on the rational consensus of his subjects (Rawls 2007, pp. 77-78). Hobbesian social contractarianism is intimately connected to his ideas on secular moralism. Rational agents in the Hobbesian state of war contract with each other for mutual protection based on common needs. In doing so, Rawls argues, they lay the foundation for their connection to the society that rises up out of Hobbes' theory. Members of the commonwealth exist in a space of mutual cooperation, for Rawls, not because of religious ties, but rather out of the immediate need for protection and commerce (Rawls 2007, pp. 23-24).

Secularity, for Rawls, serves the additional function of unifying the commonwealth as a space of mutual cooperation. The sovereign therefore must be derived from principles that are readily accessible to all members of the commonwealth, in order to further mutuality. The need for political unity means that the sovereign must be created and maintained by the idea of natural law and right (Rawls 2007, pg. 27). Diverse members of a commonwealth will adhere to secular political authority because the laws are based in political reasons rather than religious. Political reasons, he argues are those reasons that speak to the good of the whole, rather than a particular group. Religious reasoning, however, will inadvertently favor members of a particular faith (Rawls 2007, 27-29). While theological assumptions can and do exist in the background of Hobbes' theory of sovereignty, they only exist as part of the background culture of the commonwealth, not as a constructive legal formulation (Rawls 2007, pg. 28).

The sovereign, in other words, must be sufficiently neutral in regards to religion, so as to ensure that all adhere to legal dictates. Religious law, Rawls finds, fractures the political community along sectarian lines, and undoes both the unification and stabilizing functions that Hobbes' sovereign was erected to ensure. Sovereignty must act devoid of specific moral formulations, and seek only political objectives that are equally binding on all (Rawls 2007, pp. 28-29). The importance of moral neutrality is furthered in Rawls' own work on Justice as Fairness. As he points out, conceptions of justice also must be based on political conceptions rather than moral conceptions of the good, if society is to remain a stable field of cooperation (Rawls 2001, pp. 14-15).

For Rawls, political conceptions of justice must be arrived at solely by the use of reason and rationality, rather than recourse to religious doctrines, which are lumped into his categorization of "comprehensive doctrines of the good" (Rawls 2001, pp. 32-33). Justice must be arrived at from the substance of something other that religious moral or philosophical doctrines, because it must be able to be adhered to by all of these doctrines. Comprehensive doctrines represent totalizing claims on the good. Comprehensive doctrines speak to both what the good is, and how this good should be pursued. They are incapable, therefore, of compromising their positions with any other comprehensive doctrine (Rawls 2001, pp. 34-35). Comprehensive doctrines, when they are placed in positions of authority, will seek to maintain that authority through violence and oppression. Political justice must come from a different source that competing moral or religious claims, because justice is the product of rational consensus (Rawls 2001, pg. 34).

Rational consensus, Rawls argues, comes from taking the capacities of members

seriously. Doing so, he finds, allows them to agree on the basic principles that will organize society (Rawls 2001, pp. 35-36). Political justice, then, must be sufficiently neutral and speak only to how society will be organized, so that these competing doctrines can agree to it. Rational agreement allows comprehensive doctrines to link themselves to the principles of justice that govern, rather than undoing the stability of the society by vying for control over it. Political authority, when it is based in a sufficient idea of justice, acts in such a way that opposing comprehensive doctrines can find points of commonality between themselves and the principles of justice, a process he refers to as "overlapping consensus" (Rawls 2001, pp. 33-36).

Through overlapping consensus, a society is created that is not only stable, but just as well. Political justice furthers stability by ensuring that competing claims on the good agree to the limitations placed on them by political justice through their commonly held commitments to human dignity. As such, when these principles are acted on over time, political justice comes to form part of the comprehensive doctrines themselves, mediating the need for violence and oppression (Rawls 2001, pp. 195-197). A well-ordered society becomes a field of mutual cooperation, because overarching ideas of political justice provide stability and allow for cooperation amongst its members by securing the background institutions of a society into a comprehensive whole (Rawls 2001, pp. 196-197). The destabilizing element of violence is tempered, Rawls argues, by linking comprehensive doctrines to political conceptions of justice that further, rather than hamper their operations in a society (Rawls 2001, pp.194-195).

Violence, however, as Max Weber points out, also has a useful adjunct within the operations of the state. Rather than needing to curtail violence in order to provide

stability, Weber finds, a state must command it, something that also requires the

separation of the religious and the political within the bureaucratic operations of the state

(Weber 1949, 1-2). Weber takes the state as the basic political association. States mark

the professional level of the political arena. All states, he argues are founded on force.

This means that the state is reliant on force for its emergence as the management

structure of human affairs. For Weber, the link between violence and the state is an

intimate one. The state is the sole entity in the human community that can successfully

claim a monopoly on legitimate violence (Weber 1949, pg. 1).

The state derives its political authority from the fact that only its institutions, such

as military or police bureaucracies, can legitimately use violence to pursue its ends. The

state, unlike Hobbes' sovereign or Rawls' political justice, is the professional

organization of institutions, which manage collective life in the human community.

Political authority, in Weber's arguments, is derived from the capacity to dominate a

citizenry through the use of legitimate violence (Weber 1949, 3-4). Legitimate violence,

he finds, is violence applied by professional political officials for the furtherance of state

ends. Domination through legitimate violence is necessary because it secures the stability

of the state (Weber 1949, 2-4).

Political authority, for Weber, is the function of both the monopoly on legitimate

violence, and it disposal by a professionally trained political class. This class of

"professional politicians" is marked by Weber, as being a group of people who "live off"

politics, they make their living, in other words by administering the state (Weber 1949,

5). This requires that they both operate within a hierarchical division of labor, and that

they be trained to execute specific tasks germane to their position in the hierarchy (Weber

1949, 5-7). The task of the professional politician, he argues is the maintenance of the state, as the organization of collective authority. The professional politician must be trained to use the force at its disposal for the furtherance of state ends, rather than any particular moral or personal gains.

Secularity becomes an adjunct to Weber's theory of state in two important ways. First, it speaks to limits placed on what ends violence and domination can be used to secure. As Weber points out, the primacy of the state as the stable political order is the only reason for the use of legitimate violence (Weber 1949, 20-21). The professional politician must overcome all personal drives that come with the natural vanity of power in order to execute political tasks objectively (Weber 1949, 21). The professional politician must put personal matters such as "ultimate ethical ends" to the side in order to act for the security of the state (Weber 1949, 23-24). The security of the state is, for the professional politician, and ethical end unto itself. If the state is the basic political organization, it alone is capable of providing security. To let the state fall into chaos due to ultimate ethical concerns would be to undo society itself (Weber 1949, 24-25). Professional politicians are bound to an ethics of responsibility to secure the state, rather than to an ethic of ultimate ends. For Weber, similar to Rawls and Hobbes, the task of the professional politician is to act to ensure that the state remains a stable field of social organization, as this stability provides the necessary arena for ultimate ethical ends to be debated and pursued (Weber 1949, pp. 23-25).

Secondly, secularity speaks to when violence is legitimate and illegitimate. The pursuit of state ends necessarily entails force. Ultimate ethical concerns muddy the use of force in two ways. First, The pursuit of ultimate ethical ends such as those found in

religion may clash with the ethic of responsibility by pursing an ethic of peace when

violence is necessary for the protection of the state (Weber 1949, pg. 26). Politics, he

argues is not the subject of peace, but of violence, and to pursue peace in favor of an

otherworldly kingdom is to fail in one's responsibility to maintain the state (Weber 1949,

pp. 26-27). Further, he argues, violence has a life all its own, that can become chaotic

when applied to seek ultimate ends rather than state responsibility (Weber 1949, pp. 24-

25). As the history of the Crusades, Calvinism, and Islam all speak violence in the pursuit

of ultimate ends is highly problematic (Weber 1949, pp. 25-26). Ultimate ends pursued

by such means runs the risk being sullied by the worst sort of ethical problems of politics:

sectarian violence, desires for spoils, and revenge due to the fact that violence, even in

pursuit of ultimate ends, must rely on "the human machine" to accomplish its tasks

(Weber 1949, pg. 26). Violence in favor of ultimate ends, he argues becomes most

dangerous because it is a political struggle without the professionalism of the state. It

produces a perennial struggle for ultimate good rather than a limited engagement for the

protection of the state (Weber 1949, pp. 26-27). For Weber, as with Hobbes and Rawls,

secular justifications play an important role in the theory of state. For Weber, it manifests

itself as a dividing line between the legitimate and the illegitimate both in terms of state

functions and reasoning.

  The secular, a highlighted above, can be seen as merely an adjunct of political

authority by adding the necessary element of free consent devoid of any divine or

ultimate justifications. The secular in modern discourse, however, also acts to bifurcate

the political world into two opposing fields, along the axis of secular political authority.

The separation of the world into camps is based on the Western preference for distinct

epistemological fields denoting what is political and what is religious. The secular

becomes an ideology at the point when it creates a hierarchical relationship between itself

and the "other" based on its own world vision. It fulfills the functions of ideology as

Roberge argues for it, as will be seen through the works of Michel Foucault, Talal Assad,

and Boaventura De Sousa Santos by providing a textual relationship to an idea that

requires interpretation of the political world through it, by centering political meaning on

justifications for authority, and finally it operates as a representative schema that

bifurcates the political world between civilization and backwardness.

II. Secularism as a Discourse

As noted above, there is a stark difference in arguing for a secular state, and

secularism as an ideology. This section, therefore will utilize Roberge's three functions of

ideology in order to understand how the insistence on the primacy of political authority,

as seen in the works of Hobbes, Rawls, and Weber creates an ideological field (Roberge

2011, pp. 7-8). It does so, I argue by creating a bifurcated worldview between democracy

and barbarity. In doing so, secularism creates an understanding of Western democratic

forms as the only possibility of democracy, through the idea of the professional state.

Pursuant to this task, the work of Talal Asad will be utilized to understand the "text" of

secularism, or how it creates political understandings by placing itself in a historical

relationship to the political based on the idea of "progress". Michel Foucault's

understanding of political order will be used to understand how secularism provides

"meaning" to the political context by ordering relationships of force into a cohesive

whole. Finally, the "representative schema" of secularism will be read through the works

of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in order to understand how secularism creates an 'abyssal line' or a binary relationship between secular democracy and theocratic despotism.

For Asad, secularism, presupposes ideas about religion and its effects on political life (Asad 2003, pp. 1-2). Secularism as a political doctrine finds its roots in the tumultuous history of sectarian violence in the West (Asad 2003, 2-3). The history of European religious conflict, which is read as political, in that it involved the multitude of inter and intrastate conflicts of the pre-enlightenment period, is seen as indicative of the destabilizing nature of religion (Asad 2003, pp. 1-4). In Asad's reading of modern theory, religious investiture of authority is seen as part of the history of political relationships. Religion, for modern theorists, is understood as a unifying element that held communities together in the middle ages. As these religious ties began to devolve into sectarian violence, theorists began to argue that the nation alone was capable of holding communities together through the idea of the social contract (Asad 2003, pp. 3-4).

The emergence of contractarian language in enlightenment philosophy was seen as a way of binding members of a nation together absent a divine edict. A sense of progress began to develop in enlightenment thought, whereby the politics of the past marked by religiously homogenous communities held together by divine decree, was seen as giving way to the politics of the present/ future, marked by heterogeneous nations of coequals held together by common consent of the governed (Asad 2003, pp. 4-5). In traditional religious communities there was a vertical access of power, whereby religiously vested authorities demanded adherence to the law based on divine right. Secular nationhood, however, is based on the idea that a horizontal mutuality is only possible based on the consent to be governed by a political authority (Asad 2003, pp. 5-

6). Progress, for secularist theorists comes to be defined as a move away from top down domination and towards a horizontal consent based on the social contract. Horizontal contractarianism allows for multiple background reasons to play a part in the process of consent, without giving primacy to any particular one as was done in medieval theory (Asad 2003, pp. 5-6).

For Asad, secularism informs political understandings in two ways based on the idea of progress. First it creates a binary divide between sources of meaning. On the one side of the divide there are religious sources of meaning, on the other the political (Asad 2003, pp. 8-10). As has already been shown this divide is separated by an idea of progress whereby societies move from top down control through religious dogma, towards horizontal mutualism through a contract among equals. Further, this divide is maintained by the concept that religious doctrine is a destabilizing political element. Thus, the idea of progress emerges as a move from the destabilized theocracy towards a stable secular democracy (Asad 2003, pp. 2-3; 8-10). Secondly, contractarian language relegates religious belief to secondary status in the formation of a nation. Religious beliefs may form the background justifications *for* consent, but they are always private justifications for political agreements. Citizens can agree for various reasons, and each of these reasons is safeguarded because they are seen as private rather than public reasoning, and are apolitical. Consent, rather than the reasoning behind consent, is seen as the public act in enlightenment thought (Asad 2003, pp. 4-5; 8-10).

The idea of public reasoning, touched on by Asad, also refers to an overarching justificatory principle for acts of government as well. It refers to the manner and method of state management as well as the constitutive idea of participation in the modern state

(Asad 2003, pp. 4-5; 8-10). The idea of public, or state reasoning, brings us to the second function of ideology, as Roberge understands it. Ideology acts as an ordering principle for both cultural and political life. As Michel Foucault finds, modern theory does so by inverting the relationship of the state to the culture, whereby the state becomes the source of power operations precisely because it both informs and protects the culture it operates on. For Foucault, modernity is typified by top down control by state agencies, which is furthered by the ascendency of the political as a separate sphere of influence over the cultural (Foucault 2007, pp. 92-93).

For Foucault, the ascendancy of the idea of the political over all other concerns is a function of the need to normalize power relationships in political thought. As he finds, in the early modern period there was increasing concern with "the art of governing" as the primary relationship between a state and its subjects (Foucault 2007, pp. 91-93). Whereas in texts such as Machiavelli's *The Prince* sovereignty was viewed as an external force that operated on a principality from outside and beyond the law, early modern texts, beginning with Hobbes, became concerned with the idea of immanence or power that was developed through the political community and thus bore a direct relationship to the community it operated on (Foucault 2007, pp. 94-95). The change in force relations based on power sources that are immanent to a society requires a change in political understandings based on the primacy of the relationship of the governed to the state.

For Foucault, consent becomes the focal point of state based power not because, as in Hobbes and Rawls, it marks the beginning of political authority based on the rules of reason, but because it marks the agreement to be dominated (Foucault 2003, pp. 98-100). State power, he argues, exists and operates with the threat of the state of nature as

its backdrop. Members of a community agree to the primacy of the state, because they

fear a return of the "war of all against all" (Foucault 2003, pp. 98-99). For Foucault, the

founding moment of the commonwealth is not a moment of rational agents agreeing on a

neutral arbitrator, but rather the moment in which members agree to erect a state that will

dominate and direct their interactions out of fear of a return to intrastate conflict

(Foucault 2003, pg. 98). Consent, for Foucault, marks the right of conquest. It does so, as

Weber argues, because it marks the recognition of the state as the only legitimate agent of

violence (Foucault 2003, pp. 99-100; Weber 1949, pp. 1-2).

Consent to be governed, on Foucault's reading marks the agreement to the

primacy of political relationships over all others. The consent to the conquest of the state,

read as the understanding that the state is the sole legitimate source of violence means

two things: first that all power relationships are based on dominance, and that the

relationship of the subject to the state is the primary concern of political order (Foucault

2003, pp. 98-100; 2007, pp. 94-95). Apolitical commitments are removed from the scope

of political thought, he argues, because they interrupt the continuity of power operations

by injecting multiple, varying and overlapping sources of authority into political life

(Foucault 2007, pp. 95-96). Modern political thought centers itself on political

relationships, as the primary relationships of individuals in society, in order to centralize

sovereign operations. In doing so, modern theory creates a top down continuity from the

power sources of the state to the citizenry (Foucault 2007, pp. 95-96). Modernity creates

both the need for the state as the center of political life, and the need for technocratic

operations to govern it such as statistics, population studies, and professional training for

political functionaries (Foucault 2007, pp. 98-99). The rearrangement of the idea of the

political to a state centric idea becomes the hallmark of modernity because it focuses

power operation on the management of forces within the state (Foucault 2007, pp. 98-

101).

We have seen this trajectory of thought at play in our theorists understanding of

Secularism in their work. For Hobbes, Rawls, And Weber, secularity provides an

important justificatory framework for political power. It does so, they each argue, by

pointing to the authority of the modern state based on the consent of those who are

governed In Hobbes it is the members of the commonwealth who erect the sovereign

based on the rules of natural law and their rationality (Hobbes 1992, pp. 119-120). In

Rawls, it is the rational/reasonable capacities of representative who choose the principles

of justice that operate on the well-ordered society (Rawls 2001, pp. 195-197). For Weber

finally, it is marked by the recognition of the state as having a monopoly on legitimate

violence (Weber 1949, pp. 1-2).

Further, we have seen that the continuity of power is upheld by secularist

arguments as well. Hobbes argues that the sovereign must be the primary source of

authority in a commonwealth, lest the stability of the commonwealth is undone and

society returns to the war of all against all (Hobbes 1992 pp. 188-120; Rawls 2007, pp.

27-29). For Rawls, the commitment to the principles of justice is an a priori commitment

that requires overlapping consensus from all comprehensive doctrines within the well-

ordered society (Rawls 2001, pp. 195-197). For Weber, the primacy of political authority

is marked by two interconnected impulses. First, it is manifested by the demand that state

functionaries see securing the state as their sole moral purpose (Weber 1949, pp. 25-27).

Further, it requires that the state be ran by professionally trained individuals in order to

ensure that its resources are properly managed (Weber 1949, pp. 3-6).

The continuity of political power, as Foucault argues for it, brings into play the last function of ideology. Representation of the political as the both the primary relationship in a society, and the need for the professional management of society, creates a bifurcated view of the political world. On the one side there are secular democracies typified by the theorists cited here, on the other there is the impossibility of politics due to the lack of professional political authority. This either/or understanding of the political world creates what Boaventura de Sousa Santos refers to as an "abyssal line" or a line of demarcation that separates the world into civilization on this side of the line, and backwardness and barbarity on the other (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 1-2). For de Sousa Santos, modernity creates schemes of representation by separating the world into distinct spheres based on abyssal lines. The world becomes divided into the side of civilization (this side of the line) where democracy, law, and reason are developed and maintained, and the abyss (that side of the line) where these things are not merely underdeveloped, but completely impossible (de Sousa Santos 2007, 1-2). Secularism, he argues, forms one of the most distinct abyssal lines in modern thinking, because it creates a monopoly of understanding in the areas of truth and law (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 2-3).

For de Sousa Santos the truth line is an abyssal line. It manifests itself as the distinction between what can be known and how, and mere superstitious belief (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 2-3). On this side of the line is "truth" arrived at by rational discourse and verified by empirical evidence, on that side of the line there is emotive beliefs that are unverifiable by established methodology. They represent raw data to be turned into knowledge, but not knowledge in and of itself, because they speak to disfavored

approaches to the truth such as religious practice (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 2-3).

Religious truth, de Sousa Santos argues, can become the subject of discursive knowledge,

in that it can be studied and have its effects and affects registered by knowledge

production, but it cannot produce knowledge in and of itself because it exists outside the

line of prescribed methods (de Sousa Santos 2007, 2-3).

      Law operates on a binary line regarding legality (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 3-4).

For de Sousa Santos, legality crates a dichotomy by bisecting the world into the realm of

law (this side of the line) whereby codes of conduct are weighed by the law itself to

determine social fitness, and lawlessness (that side of the line) where other discarded

codes of conduct, such as tribal loyalty, moral theory, and religious sentiment weigh the

social fitness of an action (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 5-6). The line of legality, for de

Sousa Santos represents the dividing line between professional government, and the

absence of government due to the absence of law. Again, the codes of conduct found on

that side of the line can become the subject of law: the regulation of tribal conflict, the

limitation of religious influence on government, etc.… but cannot become the source of

law because it lacks the public, professional character of true law (de Sousa Santos 2007,

pp. 5-6). The law, if it is to be called such, is based on objective political concerns. It

cannot utilize moral, tribal, or religious sources in and of themselves as sources of law

lest it cross the abyssal line. Just as with Rawls arguments about public authority, these

values may well exist as a background to law, but cannot excerpt direct influence on law

without stripping the law of its objective character (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 5-6).

      Abyssal lines, then, serve two functions for de Sousa Santos. First, they create

zones of exclusions based on the preferences of Western epistemology (de Sousa Santos

2007, pp. 1-2). Abyssal thinking, he finds, is colonial thinking. It separates people into human and sub human categories, and separates the world into the binary of civilization and barbarity (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 4-6). Further, abyssal lines are expansionist in the sense that they carry both a prescription and an onus for action in order to move the line to encompass more and more epistemological space (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 6-7). Expansionism, he argues acts to ensure that "barbarity" is eradicated by making that side of the line look like this side of the line, while also homogenizing this side of the line through disfavoring extant form of knowing that do not meet the truth standard on this side of the line. What emerges, he argues, is not only a representative schema that creates an other, but a prescriptive program that seeks to eradicate said other through bringing other ways of knowing or acting in the world under the rubric of the truth and law lines that mark modern civilization (de Sousa Santos 2007, 7-8). Abyssal lines, he argues, are lines of representation, because the bifurcate the world into distinct groups, and then define these groups based on preferred approaches to knowledge and law. (de Sousa Santos 2007, pp. 7-8).

What emerges from Asad, Foucault, and de Sousa Santos, is an image of secular as it operates to create, maintain, and propagate a Western idea of political authority as the sole source of legitimate public government. Liberal theory, as typified by Hobbes, Rawls, and Weber is marked by an insistence on the primacy of the political over all other concerns within a society. This is necessary, they argue, in order to ensure stability through the centralization of of political authority. Political authority is only able to maintain a society to the extent that its law is based on public reason. The idea of public reason, to varying degrees in each, is manifested by the agreement to the governing role

in society, and the agreement to be directed by it. Liberal theory is propagated through this rational agreement, they argue because it allows for the stability of a state over time. As political operations take hold in a community each theorists argues, they become self evident as members act on them over time.

As Asad, Foucault, and de Sousa Santos point out, however, secularism becomes an ideology when it purports to be the sole means of ensuring the stability of a political democracy in modern thought. Secularism, as has been argued, fits the mold of an ideology precisely because it creates a textuality based on the ide of progress from disfavored modes of knowing to "truth". Further, it is a closed system of meaning, because it operates in such a way as to create a specific idea of the political, as an a priori consent to be governed by a state, and proceeds to organize political culture in reference to it. It propagates itself not through the benign operative principle of creating a "reasonable political psychology", whereby people act on political principles of justice because they see them operating to produce a stable society, but rather through creating binary oppositions that can only be mediated by the dominance of one idea over the other (Rawls 2001, pp. 196-197; de Sousa Santos pp. 4-6). Secularism operates as an ideology, in other words, when it moves beyond arguments about the proper role of politics in social life, and becomes an insistence on what politics should look like, and how political authority should be organized in the modern world.

Secularism is an outward looking body of thought. It creates a hierarchical relationship between itself and other political cultures based on the idea that we have progressed past the need for religious justifications for political authority. By doing so, it divides the world into two mutually oppositional camps based on competing identities

within political life. In order to understand how these oppositional identities are created

and maintained by secularism it is important to look at contemporary "Clash of Cultures"

discourse, as typified by Jean Bethke Elshtain.

III. Identity and Representation in Secularist Theory

Jean Bethke Elshtain, in her assessment of the justifications for the "War on

Terror", provides an opportunity to see how secularism not only creates a homogenous

understanding of "us" politically, but also defines the "other" as well along the axis of

secular political authority. In her assessment, Elshtain offers us an understanding of both

of the operative principles of secularism in reference to international politics. For

Elshtain, the commitment to secularism manifests itself as a respect for the moral equality

of all individuals. This means, for Elshtain, that all forms of religion are welcomed by

liberal democracy because of its secular governing form. Our commitment to tolerance,

she argues, is due to our history of demarcating the religious and the political (Elshtain,

2003, pp. 28-29).

The demarcation of the religious is an important political advancement, because it

allows us to separate the concepts of crime and sin (Elshtain 2003, pp. 32-33). For

Elshtain, Western society has recognized separate spheres of influence in individual life.

On the one hand there is the idea of sacred authority, which is the seat of a church's

ability to direct the moral engagements of believers. On the other hand there is political

authority, which governess the legal interactions of individuals in within the liberal state

(Elshtain 2003, pp. 32-33). These two authorities, she argues have developed as separate

spheres of influence, whereby one effects the relationship of the individual to the divine,

and the other effecting one's relationship to the state through law. Further, this distinction

recognizes the fact that when these two spheres are united the only result is a tyrannical

form of government where one's relationship to the divine and one's relationship to the

state are the same through the idea of state sponsored religion (Elshtain 2003, pp. 32-33).

Separate spheres of influence is the hallmark of Western political society, she

argues, because it demarcates the line between the state as an entity concerned only with

the law, and religion, which is concerned with the otherworldly. This distinction, she

argues offers the Western tradition the idea of freedom, because it demarcates certain

spheres of life as public, and certain others as private (Elshtain 2003, pp. 36-38). This

idea of the privacy of conscience is the hallmark of American democracy. It allows for

one to follow ones own conscience without violating the law (Elshtain 2003, pp. 36-38).

The fundamental distinction between crime and sin, she argues, deeply informs the idea

of the person in liberal political thought, because it draws the line between public law and

the rights of a private citizen (Elshtain 2003, pp. 37-38). Secularism, for Elshtain,

becomes a way of not only seeing ourselves as politically free, but also, a way of drawing

a line between "us" and a "them" who do not recognize this distinction, and who as a

result do not recognize the limits of violence in respect to a person.

It is precisely because of the respect for the person manifested in the Western

tradition, Elshtain finds, that limitations are placed on political violence. The Just War

tradition, she argues, sees state violence, as objective violence: it acts to secure specific

political ends rather than otherworldly ends (Elshtain 2003, pp. 62-63). Political violence

seeks to end hostilities as soon as feasible, with minimal civilian casualties, in order to

restore peaceful relations between warring states. Just War strictly forbids civilian

targets, because of the tradition's insistence on the value of individual life (Elshtain 2007, pp. 66-68). Western militaries are trained to avoid civilian targets at all costs lest conflict devolve into violence for its own sake (Elshtain 2003, pp. 67-68). Western Culture, because of its commitment to the worth of the individual, as seen in its separation of the idea of the sin and the crime and its limiting of legitimate targets of political violence, is seen by Elshtain in sharp contrast to Muslim culture, which makes no such distinction, and thus does not value individual life.

Muslim societies, Elshtain argues, have a different starting point than Western civilization. Sharia, the source of Muslim law, makes no distinction between sin and crime (Elshtain 2003, pp. 141-142). Sins, she finds, are offenses against the state in Sharia law. As such, criminalized sins are dealt with harshly as they concern the moral well being of the entire society (Elshtain 2003, pp.141-142). The failure to make the distinction between individual and public concerns, she argues, effectively creates a political system in which all concerns are universal moral concerns. Sin in Islamic jurisprudence is a crime, because the state is charged with the moral well being of the entire religious community (Elshtain 2003, pp. 142-143). The state, in such a system, concerns itself with the universal good of the religious community by enforcing religious orthodoxy (Elshtain 2003, pp. 141-142).

The concern with protecting universal moral principles, Elshtain finds, also leads to differing justifications for war (Elshtain 2003, pp. 130-131). For Muslim theorists, she argues, jihad in Islam is justified both as an attempt to protect the state, as in the Just War tradition, but more importantly as a means to propagate Islam (Elshtain 2003, pp. 131-132). The distinction between just and unjust wars found in the West is absent in Islam.

It is the duty of the Islamic state to not only protect itself but also spread the religion through the sword. In doing so, Islam recognizes no constraints on political violence. Civilian targets are perfectly justified, she finds, as the Islamic state sees itself in a perennial battle between good and evil (Elshtain 2003, pp. 133-134). Force is justified because the ultimate end of Islam is hegemonic expansion of the faith, not conflict resolution (Elshtain 2003, pp. 134-135).

The absolute justification of violence for the propagation of the faith creates, for Elstain, a "culture of death" in contrast to the "culture of life" manifest in the West (Elshtain 2003, pp. 102-103). For Elshtain, Western values create a cultural environment that both respects and seeks to preserve life, as seen in its insistence on limited military engagements. Islam, however, manifests a culture of death, as it is not concerned with this world, but with the otherworldly goals of its religion. Such an orientation, she argues, justifies the use of civilian implements and civilian targets to further the war aim (Elshtain 2003, pp. 102-103). Whereas the West seeks limited military engagements that minimalize casualties, Muslim warriors seek maximum casualties, and even their own deaths in battle, as it furthers the religious aims of the Islamic state. For Elshtain, the merger of the sacred and the political authority manifest in political Islam creates the justifications for total war against a perennial enemy, and the use of illegitimate violence to further these aims (Elshtain 2003, pp. 100-102). It does so by adding an eternal vision to political engagements both by framing political questions in absolute terms, and by focusing the attention of its adherents on the next life rather than this one (Elshtain 2003, pp. 102-103). In doing so, she argues, political Islam justifies a total war of destruction against the West as its perennial enemy, because of its values and commitments (Elshtain

2003, pp. 102-103).

What emerges from Elshtain's analysis is a glimpse of the three functions of ideology in framing the question of the "War on Terror". First, Elshtain separates the West and Islam on the historical axis of progress. For Elshtain, Western commitments to the value of life are a direct result of our separation of secular and sacred authority. This separation is the hallmark of Western identity in the face of Islamic terror, because it colors our political objectives in this conflict (Elshtain 2003, pp. 103-104). Western forces act, she argues, to secure our right to exist, rather than to destroy an evil enemy. Further, secularism, read by Elshtain as the separation of the concepts of sin and crime in Western thought, becomes a source of identity for both the West and the definition of the "Muslim world".

Elshtain's arguments create a bifurcated world based on these identities. On the one side there is liberal democracy, typified by the commitment to secularism in government. On the other side, there is a brutal "other" that is fully justified in committing unspeakable atrocities due to their commitment to universal rather than political ends. The West, for Elshtain, is the preeminent source of political democracy, while the Islamic world is read as incapable of reaching democratic solutions to political problems because these problems are seen in perennial terms. Doing so allows for an understanding of the political that speaks only to the relation of the individual to the law, rather than any other deeper moral concern. Elshtain's creates an an impasse between secular and not secular political outlooks that can only be solved through violence, as violence is the only language that "they" understand (Elshtain 2003, pp. 1-3)

What Elshtain misses, however, is her own reductionist reading of Islamic

civilization. As Asad points out, her reading is a typical of those found in "Clash of Cultures" model, which posits two mutually exclusive identity groups locked in a struggle for dominance. This argument falls short of understanding Islamic political culture, by ignoring key developments in Islamic jurisprudence, in order to rewrite Islamic culture based on the extremist elements, which promote violence (Asad 2007, pp. 9-10). Clash of Cultures model becomes problematic for understanding Islamic culture for two reasons.

First, Asad points out, Clash of Cultures model ignores the rich history of peaceful relationships between Islam and the West that are the hallmark of Islamic jurisprudence. Sharia, Asad finds, separates the world into three distinct areas. First there is the area where Islamic culture was predominant, known as *dar-al Islam.* Second, there was the area of the world seen as inhabited only by violent pagans with who only war was possible, know as *dar-al-harb.* Finally Islamic jurisprudence added a third category, inhabited by people with whom they could make treaties, enjoy trade, and have peaceful relationships known as *dar-al-'ahd.* These distinctions, for Asad, marked the understanding, that peaceful relationships with non-Muslim countries were possible and necessary, a trend that continues in the Middle East today (Asad 2007, pp. 11-12).

Secondly, Elshtain's understanding of the Islamic world as inherently violent due to its cultural commitments falls short of the mark as well. Islam places severe limits on warfare in order to ensure that peace remains a possibility after conflict (Asad 2007, 9-10). The term holy is never applied to warfare in Islamic thought. Warfare, Asad argues, is seen by Islamic jurisprudence as a means to bring a state under Islamic government, but not under the religion itself (Asad 2007, 11-12). For Asad, the purpose of warfare, in

Islam was never the propagation of the religion, which was a matter of choice, but only the governing institutions of the Islamic empire. As such, limitations are placed on violent conflict, both in the Quran and the Sharia, to ensure that peaceful relations between the empire and the warring state could be maintained after the cessation of hostilities (Asad 2007, 12-13).

Clash of Cultures model, he argues, operates by elevating supposed differences to a cataclysmic scale. Secularism, as Elshtain find it, is marked by a difference between "us" and "Islam" that makes them want to kill us as hoc. The understanding in secularism is that unless politics is a separate field of human endeavor, the only outcome is religious violence. What is missing from this account is the extent to which it is possible for other, marginalized sources of meaning to come to bear on political concerns. Politics, it seems, has a twofold definition in political thought. On the one hand it denotes the interaction of various professional entities to develop, maintain and enforce the law. On the other hand it speaks to the relationships of people within a shared space. Secularism, while speaking volumes for ensuring the stable workings of political institutions, does so at the expense of the very political relationships it purports to maintain.

A more complete understanding of the political is needed. Understanding the political in terms of both definitions, it seems, would ameliorate the concern over political stability at the heart of each of these theorists' arguments, by brining the plurality of meanings that exist in the realm of private reason to bear on public debate. Doing so allows these motivations to be mediated in the public space rather than fomenting violence in private. If Islamist terror has anything to teach us as a political culture, it is that religious concerns are not as neatly divorced form politics as we like to

make them. Marginalizing these commitments leads to the irrational violence of terror.

Unless our political culture can find ways to enfranchise religiously based political

commitments, terrorist atrocities will always loom on the horizon, because terrorist

violence finds its roots in voicelessness and marginalization, not in religious culture.

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