INTRODUCTION

times like these

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This volume began its life as a special issue of the journal *Social Text* in the year 2000 entitled "World Secularisms at the Millennium."1 The timing was no accident. The year 2000 is anno Domini, the second millennium after the birth of Christ. Thus, at a time when the entire world was supposedly focused on the turn in the calendar from 1999 to 2000, we wondered how a particular way of telling time had become so unremarkably universal. What, we asked, were the implications of the fact that the world secular calendar—the calendar of global finance and world politics—was also specifically Christian time? Wasn't secularism supposed to be a discourse of universal influence precisely because it was free of the particularities of religion? How did it come to pass that secularism as a "world" discourse was also intertwined with one particular religion? This opening paradox became the occasion for a far-reaching set of inquiries into the way the religious and the secular have been constituted in relation to each other in modernity and, indeed, *as* modernity. It was not our intention to tell the one supposedly true narrative of secularism. Rather, by questioning what is meant by *secular* and what is meant by *religious*, we had hoped to disturb the academic order of things, a disturbance that might lead to new support for secularism and, perhaps, to new secularism*s*, but could also lead to new relations to religion.

This hope remains, but it also seems to us that the stakes of such a disturbance have been ratcheted up by more recent historical events. Al- though the Y2K bug that was feared to endanger computer transactions with the turn from '99 to '00 never materialized, the beginning of the new millennium brought new fears with the attacks of September 11, 2001. Along with these fears came a new interest in secularism. While the level of violence that these attacks represented was not new for people in many areas of the world, the attacks did represent a major change for the United States. Destroying the World Trade Center and damaging the Pentagon, the attacks of that day were directed against the economic and military power of the United States, the sole superpower in the world. Because the response of the country was to establish an ongoing "war on terrorism," the attacks also initiated a major shift in geopolitics, one that has led to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and to major shifts in domestic policy in the United States and Europe in the name of "security." Moreover, because the attacks were often understood to be motivated by a politicized form of Islam, the question of secularism took on a new intensity.

If religion is taken to be one of the primary roots of "terrorism"—and religion is written about much more frequently than economics, racism, or the aftereffects of colonialism as an explanation for terrorist violence— is secularism the answer to the problem? The idea that religion, and spe- cifically politicized Islam, is responsible for the problem of violence in today's world is deeply indebted to the fact that what is called the "secularization thesis" in academic parlance is accepted as common sense well beyond the boundaries of the academy. Secularism, with its promise of universal reason, is widely hailed by both the right and the left as the most powerful protection from the dangers of fundamentalism.2

Specifically, secularism is central to the Enlightenment narrative in which reason progressively frees itself from the bonds of religion and in so doing liberates humanity. This narrative poses religion as a regressive force in the world, one that in its dogmatism is not amenable to change, dialogue, or nonviolent conflict resolution. This Enlightenment narrative separates secularism from

religion and through this separation claims that secularism, like reason, is universal (in contrast to the particularism of religion). However, this narrative also places secularism in a particular historical tradition, one that is located in Europe and grows out of Christianity.

The most famous argument for this connection between the development of what came to be called secularism and a specifically Christian culture is probably that of Max Weber in his now classic text, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. As Weber observes, secularism's freedom from religion was also freedom for the market. This market freedom was not fully secular but was, in fact, tied to a specific form of religious activity—reformed Protestantism—and the practice of what Weber terms "worldly asceticism."3 *Worldly asceticism* means those processes of bodily

regulation or bodily disciplines (to shift to Michel Foucault's terms) that emerged in modernity.4 Worldly asceticism in its market form was only indirectly related to the religious; one practiced it not to gain salvation but merely to demonstrate an already achieved salvation promised in Calvinist predestination. Thus it could form a practice at once secular and religious. Secularism and religion are in this sense co-implicated. Recognizing the co-origination of secularism and market-reformed Protestantism un- masks the national and religious particularities that have come to pass as a universal secular. This secularism was linked at its origins to a particular religion and a particular location, and it was maintained through a particular set of practices.

Our argument is not that this secularism is really (essentially) religion in disguise, but rather that in its dominant, market-based incarnation it constitutes a specifically Protestant form of secularism.5 The claim of the secularization narrative is that the secularism that develops from these European and Christian origins is, in fact, universal and fully separate from Christianity. As a number of critics have now argued, however, and as we shall see below, there are reasons to doubt this claim.6 Secularism remains tied to a particular religion, just as the secular calendar remains tied to Christianity. This volume thus sets out to critique the concept of secularism in this specifically Protestant form. We focus on Protestantism not to the exclusion of other possibilities, but because this dominant narrative forms the collective imagination of what the supposedly universal secularism is, thereby constraining imagination of what other possibilities might be.

If what gives secularism its moral import is its promise of universality and reasonableness as distinct from the narrowness and fanaticism of religion, what does it mean that this universalism and the rationality that it embodies are actually particular (to European history) and religious (Protestant) in form? If secularism is a "world" discourse, what kind of world does it imagine, and what kind of universalism does it put in place? Does secularism protect against conflict? Or, if secularism is not, in fact, universal, is it one of the terms through which the conflicts of today's world are enacted? In light of the implication of the religious in the secular, and vice versa, has there ever been anything that could accurately be called *secularism*? And is secularism only one thing? *Secularisms* explores these questions. In so doing, we hope to open up new ways of thinking about the challenges of our contemporary moment.

THE TRADITIONAL SECULARIZATION NARRATIVE

We begin this project by briefly outlining the key elements in the dominant narrative of secularization. We do so because this narrative is part of the *doxa* of everyday life in the United States. It is adhered to "religiously" in popular culture, and although there has been a veritable explosion of work on this topic since we published "World Secularisms at the Millennium," the secularization narrative still forms the presumed context in many fields of study. Even in fields like anthropology, in which the narrative has been actively questioned, the problem of how to disentangle the set of associations that make up the idea of the secular is far from resolved.7

The secularization thesis makes for a narrative that connects a number of elements—most notably, modernity, reason, and universalism—into a network that has strong moral as well as descriptive implications. The broad historical narrative generally associated with secularization develops these moral implications by describing change over time. The story is usually located in Europe; it often begins with the Renaissance, when the "rebirth of reason" challenged the traditional authority of the church.8 These challenges were extended with the Protestant Reformation, a great upheaval that broke the hegemonic status of the church. The Reformation was not a uniform development and incited a number of sectarian wars (known as "wars of religion") as different factions fought over which religious framework would be enforced through state authority. These wars could ultimately be resolved only when reason replaced religion as the basis for political power, so that multiple religious communities could co- exist in a single society. Religion could remain a force of personal commitment, but reason was needed to create political and legal authority. These moves away from religion and toward the secular reached full flower in the European Enlightenment and in the formation of modern nation-states. Implicit within the narrative is the idea that each step forward in time also marks a moral advance: a move away from religious authority and toward greater intellectual freedom and more knowledge, leading eventually to governance by reasoned debate and ultimately to democracy and peace.9

This narrative presents various elements as coming together to produce the process known as secularization. Different versions and traditions focus on different elements; here we delineate those that contribute to the moral and political force of the overall narrative:10

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(1) *Rationalization*: Secularization occurs as social systems, including religious systems, become more rational over time. Specifically, rationalization implies a movement away from religious dogma and toward the free operation of reasoned inquiry.

(2) *Enlightenment*: The free pursuit of reason produces the possibility of enlightenment, the production of knowledge that is not bound by the constraints of religious dogma.

(3) *Social-Structural Differentiation*: With the evolution of knowledge comes the possibility of differentiating specific tasks into different sections of society, so that, for example, the functions of the church can be separated from those of the state. Such a differentiation can, in the words of Robert Bellah's classic secularization thesis, make a society "more autonomous" in relation to the environment.

(4) *Freedom*: As a descriptive term, autonomy implies transcendence over the constraints of any given environment, but it is also a moral term. Rationalization is thus tied to the idea of freedom—in particular, freedom from religious authority—as well as to broader concepts of emancipation and liberation.

(5) *Privatization*: This freedom must operate in the public sphere so as to produce the possibility of democracy and of the rule of law (rather than dogma). In the modern, secular, and enlightened world, religion is contained in the private sphere of personal belief, and in the strongest version of the narrative, religion will eventually fade away in importance as secular reason becomes a universal discourse.

(6) *Universalism*: The European Enlightenment produces a form of rea- son that transcends religion and is universally valid. Although many religions make universal claims, these claims are themselves particular to the adherents of that religion, whereas reason, shared by all human beings, transcends such cultural particularities. This form of reason, liberated from the constraints of religious dogma, opens the door to the settlement of disagreement through reasoned debate rather than through enforced belief.

(7) *Modernization and Progress*: All of these elements together produce the modern era, which is marked by progress over the past. Secularization implies movement forward in time, which is what allows for the strange common sense that some societies are "stuck in time" or "caught in a different century" despite the fact that they exist contemporaneously with societies understood to be more modern.11

The conjunction between changes in social formation and the meaning ascribed to the passage of time is what provides the moral framework for secularization. If over time secularization allows societies to increase in autonomy, then secularization implies progress, whereas the continuation (or, still worse, the reassertion) of religion maintains constraint and implies stasis or even regression. This temporal division implies a simultaneous moral division. Those societies that are "ahead" are also understood to be "better"—more rational and freer, for example—than those that are "behind."

The power of this narrative comes from the network of binary oppositions established by its central terms. Each term stands in contradistinction to its opposite, and these distinctions are linked together in a mutually reinforcing manner. A secular society is one not bound by religion. Thus a network of associations is established between the religious-secular opposition and that between bondage and freedom. Similarly, the division between universalism and particularity ties secularism to the universal and religion to the particular. Universalism as a marker of modernization and progress then situates religion as opposed to progress. As Catherine Bell has persuasively demonstrated, such networks of oppositions form "a loosely integrated whole in which each element 'defers' to another in an endlessly circular chain of reference."12 Because of the circular nature of the network, the normative value ascribed to any one element as its opposite also accrues to the other elements. The secularization thesis remains a site of manifold academic and political investments precisely because of this set of associations. To give up on the idea of secularization is to raise the specter of abandoning the concepts of freedom, universalism, mod-ernization, and progress.

These are high stakes. And this is why the empirical question of secularization per se is not the focus of our project. Secularization can be defined in a number of ways—as the progressive shift of theological concepts into nonreligious forms and contexts (such as the idea of the sovereign God moving into the idea of the sovereign state) or simply as the decline of religion, that is, the progressive retreat of religion from social significance. There are extensive sociological debates, and interventions that attempt to mediate those debates, over whether secularization is or is not happening

(or perhaps both is *and* is not happening).13 We are interested instead in the question of *secularism*. Specifically, we are concerned with secularism as a discourse that invokes powerful moral claims and evinces manifold political effects. We hope to intervene in the sets of binaries that give secularism as a discourse its moral force and that legitimate the political power deployed in its name.

Secularism in this regard can thus be thought of as a political project that deploys the concept of the secular, and it may do so regardless of the empirical state of secularization. Another way to put this is that we take secularism as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense: a set of material and linguistic practices that work across multiple institutions. Thus, although the state and the law are central to the discourse of secularism, secularism is not reducible to doctrines like that of the separation of church and state. Rather, secularism works across other institutional sites like that of the mainstream media, civil life and ceremony, and the market.14

The very fact that secularization is not empirically verifiable or complete can establish secularism as a moral and political goal, one that can be used to enforce the projects of those who desire secularism against the moral claims and political projects of those who do not match this standard. Secularism is itself part of a larger political project, one that aims to establish modernity as a hegemonic "political goal," to use the terms of Talal Asad.15 Asad argues that "the secular" is a concept "which emerged historically in a particular way and was assigned specific practical tasks" within the political project of modernity.16 This volume, with its stress on plural secularism*s*, investigates the way in which these particular tasks have worked themselves out in a variety of specific contexts in relation to the overarching narrative that gives them both political authority and affective power.

Because it works through oppositions, the traditional secularization narrative does not just establish the meaning of secularism; it also by implication makes claims about the meaning of religion. As recent critiques of the category of religion have shown, and as Robert Baird's essay in this book makes clear, the idea of religion as a universal category of human experience does not precede the Enlightenment, but is, instead, an Enlightenment project.17 In other words, the production of the category of religion as we know it today was also part of the production of secular- ism. In a close reading of David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion*, Baird shows that Hume elaborated the category of religion as part of the universal experience that marked the unity of human beings.

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This universality of religion could only be seen from a point of view that was outside of any particular religion, from a perspective that was secular. Conceptualizing religion as universal gave Hume a means of solving the problem of cultural differences presented by eighteenth-century explorers' reports of cultural variation. All of this variation "just" represented particular in- stances of the universal category.

This meant, however, that practices across cultures had to be assimilated to the category of religion. The problems of assimilation are acute. Hume modeled the category of religion on Protestant Christianity. As a result, practices and commitments that may not even involve reference to a god are nonetheless drawn into and through a Protestant understanding of religion, with belief and faith at the conceptual center. This way of recognizing other religions produces conceptual and practical distortions. Buddhism, for instance, is nontheistic and yet is widely regarded as one of the major "world religions." The use of this Protestant heuristic can be seen today in U.S. public discourse where the most common way of speaking of multiple religious groups is to refer to "faiths" (as in the "Jewish faith," despite the fact that most forms of Judaism prioritize practice over faith).

The assimilation of such a wide variety of practices to a single cate- gory did not just produce conceptual distortions; it also justified colonial violence. Working from Protestantism as the generic model of religion entails that other particular religions must either conform to this model or suffer for the comparison. This is because the category of universal religion can simultaneously allow that all humans are alike in their propensity toward religion *and* serve to differentiate among humans on the basis of their different religions. For example, David Chidester has shown that at different stages in the colonial project, the peoples of southern Africa were treated as if they had no religion at all, had a religion similar to the ancient roots of Christianity, or exhibited a fundamentally different species of the genus religion. In this last stage, when colonial rule was consolidated, southern Africans were seen as essentially like European Chris- tians in that they "had" a religion, but also as essentially different in their particular religion. In this, the religion of Europeans is understood to be both reasonable and on the path of civilization's progress toward secularism. The religious difference of the southern Africans did not so much set them outside this progress narrative as place them "behind" and in need of Europe's civilizing mission. The positing of religious difference thus formed a crucial component in legitimating unequal treatment for

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southern Africans—and all in the name of progress and emancipation, a freedom that is supposed to be extended in the shift from religion to secularism.18

According to conventional ways of telling the story, secularism does not just promise the progress brought about by emancipation. It also promises peace, or at least a more peaceful resolution to conflicts. Because secularism is based on a rationality shared by all human beings, it provides a universal discourse, whereas religions are held to be the expressions of particular cultures. Conflicts that arise between particular cultures seem irresolvable except through violence because there are no shared terms on which to base a resolution. By contrast, the universality of rationality implies that conflicts can be resolved, as Jürgen Habermas posits, "by the force of the better argument."19 Such reasoned debate paves the way for modern democratic government, allowing political debate to take the place of religious authority in the formulation of state policy. If secular- ism represents rationality, universality, modernity, freedom, democracy, and peace, then religion (unless thoroughly privatized) can only present a danger to those who cherish these values. So the story goes, but how adequate is it in either historical or ethico-political terms?

SECULAR CHALLENGES

The main points of the traditional secularization narrative—that secularization is central to modernity, that it enables progress toward universalism, and that it represents development or emancipation—remained strong in Western social theory during much of the twentieth century. Even major theological centers in the United States through the 1960s espoused the view that secularization was the inevitable denouement of religion, symbolized by Thomas Altizer's "death of God" theology.20 However, there also emerged numerous pressures on the feasibility of this narrative. Enlightenment narratives were subject to intense questioning in the latter part of the twentieth century, both from postcolonial critics and from critics in Europe influenced by the changing intellectual climates that resulted in the upheavals of 1968. Moreover, a worldwide recession in the 1970s put the developmental aspect of the narrative into deep question. Were post- colonial nations "developing" through the adoption of modern capital- ism?21 Certainly, for many people in many parts of the world this narrative did not accurately describe their realities.

It was the Iranian revolution in 1979, however, that ultimately upended whatever complacent consensus had existed about secularization.22 A successful revolution undertaken in the name of religion was not part of this narratively constructed modern or even postmodern world. There were, of course, attempts to incorporate the revolution into the narrative as an anomaly or the exception that proves the rule, but overall, particularly with the persistence of the revolutionary government, the secularization narrative came under increasing pressure. As time passed, it became clear that the Iranian revolution represented one of a number of powerful con- temporary social movements in many parts of the world that were organized in the name of religion. These events required a major reevaluation of the secularization narrative.

One of the early and most powerful reevaluations was José Casanova's 1994 historical sociology of Spanish, Polish, Brazilian, and American Ca- tholicism.23 It is perhaps not an accident that Casanova's study focuses on Catholicism, which stands in complex relation to the Protestant genealogy of dominant secularism. Not only does Catholicism remain connected to the state in some areas of the world, but Catholicism's public and communal aspects, even where it is not established as a state religion, do not track easily with the public-private split that marks Protestant secularism. Casanova points to the seemingly obvious, but all too often overlooked, fact that not every expression of religion in public is conservative. In addition to the Iranian revolution, the other major set of revolutionary movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Marxist revolutions in Central America, were sometimes influenced by a radical Catholicism organized around base communities. In fact, Casanova concentrates on the distinction between a state-based religion and public religion, arguing that while secularization may divide religion from the state, this division does not necessarily entail removal from the public.

Our major concern in *Secularisms* is to question not just the specific aspects of the secularization narrative but to undo the religion-secularism binary itself, so as to open new configurations in the political debates structured by these terms. Take the debate in the United States over the role of Islam in geopolitics. Although there appears to be an opposition between a religious right—which holds that the religious values of Christianity advance civilization, while a "politicized Islam" constitutes the great enemy of civilization—and a secular left—which militantly advocates for a secular public sphere—these two "sides" actually come together around the idea that civilization can be found in Europe and the United States, while Islam, particularly when not contained in the private sphere,

threatens this civilization and leads to violence. This consensus between left and right produces a rhetorical structure with only a limited number of positions. Liberal advocates of religion, for example, are left with the choice of either siding with secularists, who deny the import of religion to public life, or with conservative Christians, who admit religion to public life but deny the import of liberal values to religion. Similarly, those who would oppose both the colonial thinking that posits Europe and North America as the sites of modern civilization as opposed to the supposedly medieval Middle East, as well as the various forms of violence promoted in the name of radical Islam, find few openings for articulating this double position.24

Interrupting this binary rhetoric and challenging the ways in which the secularization narrative is told are thus more than academic exercises in terminological precision. The ways in which the terms *secularism* and *religion* frame contemporary debates mean that possibilities for moving out of these impasses are obscured. The critique generated by *Secularisms* implies that the very idea that politics can be simply divided between a religious right and a secular left is mistaken.25 More broadly, the choice between secularism and religion represents a false dichotomy. This is so because religious and secular formations are profoundly intertwined with each other. As a result, the easy presumption that secularism is necessarily more rational, more modern, freer, and less dangerous than religion is not sustainable.

This claim does not mean that *Secularisms* advocates simply shifting allegiances from the secular to the religious. In fact, some of the essays, particularly those by Ranu Samantrai and by Taha Parla and Andrew Da- vison, strongly argue for the importance of supporting and extending secular discourses. Nevertheless, even these two essays, which advocate secular discourses, do not simply accept a binary division between religion and secularism. Ultimately, in providing new ways of thinking about the relation between religion and secularism, this volume seeks to pro- vide new ways of thinking about social and political possibilities including new secular configurations. Such openings are urgently needed, but to find them we must question received understandings.

SECULARISMS: FROM SINGULAR TO PLURAL

We argue that the secularization thesis misrepresents our world and the role of both religion and secularism in that world. We make our intervention at the level of the secularization story itself to show that the problem is not simply one of historical events moving away from narrative prediction. The narrative itself is also fundamentally incoherent. And yet, despite this incoherence and despite the factual swerve, the narrative continues to exert great political force. Thus it is to the narrative that we turn our attention.

The contributors to *Secularisms* confront the secularization narrative at its main points. To take just a few examples, the essays gathered here include challenges to the claims that secularism provides a coherent rationality (Baird and Subramaniam); that secularism provides freedom from the constraints of religion (Najmabadi and Samantrai); that secularization entails the privatization of religion (Parla and Davison); and that secular progress produces gender and racial equality

(Fessenden). Perhaps most important, the essays cumulatively challenge the idea that secularism rep- resents universalism in contrast to the particularity of religion. As a number of our contributions show, forms of secularism tend to vary with the religious formation in relation to which they develop. In other words, the secularism that has developed in India in relation to a dominant Hindu- ism (see Patel, Subramaniam, and Sunder Rajan) is not the same as either the secularism that relates to Islam in Turkey (see Parla and Davison) or the Christian secularism that predominates in the United States (see Levitt, Fessenden, Roberts, and Sands).

Again, this is not to say that secularism is somehow religion in disguise; it is a separate social formation. But it is a formation that develops in relation to religion. This is not a matter of previous and somehow completed historical processes. For example, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's essay argues that contemporary secularisms continue to develop in relation to religion. She makes this argument in relation to the uniform civil code proposed to replace religious personal laws in India. Sunder Rajan shows how the secular code would still remain entwined with the dominant Hinduism of Indian politics.

Not only does secularism develop in relation to religion but it also has an impact on the development of religious formations. Religious trans- formations such as the development of a politicized Hindu nationalism in India may push new secular formations like the possible uniform civil code. And secular discourses may prompt religious change as well. In his important 2003 study *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Talal Asad has argued that in nineteenth-century Egypt, secularism and religion remade each other. Asad is critical of the narrative

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that secularism is simply "a particular cultural import from the West," arguing that secularism and religion interacted to produce mutual transformations in the colonial situation. As Asad argues vis-à-vis the Egyptian case, religious transformation may be "both the precondition and the con- sequences of secular processes of power." Thus one alternative means of thinking about the contemporary relation of religion and secularism is to consider not just how secularism remains intertwined with religion, but also how religion is being remade in relation to secular phenomena.26

If secularism is constituted in relation to religious formations, then secularism is not the universal discourse emanating from the European Enlightenment, but is in fact multiple, as are religions. We might then more aptly speak in terms of secularism*s*. Thinking of secularisms as plural in this way challenges the dominant narrative of secular universalism, but we still cannot think of secularisms as simply free from this narrative. Particular secularisms are not just autonomous units grounded in their national contexts, or in relation to particular religious formations; precisely by being called "secularisms," they are also articulated in relation to the dominating discourse of universal secularism, which is tied to the Protestant secularism of the market. This does not mean, however, that individual secularisms are merely particular instances of a singular overarching phenomenon called secularism. Neither does a relation to the dominant discourse of secularism mean that all secularisms are always and only Christian.

The essays in *Secularisms* chart a path between the presumption that because the concept of the secular originates in a European and Christian-dominated context this origin *determines* the shape of secular- isms throughout the world and the presumption that particular secular- isms can be

constituted independently of this dominant discourse and its originary context. Rather, if religious and secular formations are mutually constitutive in particular historical moments, we can think of this relation as inflected by a variety of power relations, including those of European colonialism. As we have learned from Foucault, these power relations may be dominating, but they are not determining.27 Power relations are productive: productive of resistance, of reverse discourses, and of new combinations. These productions are driven by a variety of conflicting social groups and interests that may take up dominating discourses or resistances to those discourses to varying effects. So, for example, Banu Subramaniam's essay on Hindu science shows how Hindu nationalists took up the discourse of science (rather than religion) neither simply to align

themselves with the West and its scientific heritage nor to differentiate themselves fully from the West. Rather, they did so, she argues, in order simultaneously to make such an alliance with and distinguish themselves from the West. Subramaniam calls this alternative formation "archaic modernity." Ranu Samantrai argues, alternatively, that advocates who claim to represent the "Muslim community" in response to the British state have used the language of religious community to continue certain colonial paradigms, including a colonial patriarchy, rather than to differentiate themselves from the colonial heritage. In other words, we cannot read the influence of the discourse of European secularism, no matter how dominant, as simply unidirectional.

RISKING GENEALOGY

Secularisms is interested in how attention to the multiplicity of secular- isms can break open the discourses, particularly the political ones, that are organized by the presumptions of the secularization thesis. To do this we use a genealogical method, a method that offers the opportunity to interrogate the discourse of secularism at the level of its assumptions—at the level, that is, of the binary categories religion and secularism.28 Genealogy allows for an investigation into the power relations established by naming phenomena in a particular way. The step that the genealogical method takes is to reveal that the discourse of universal secularism—based on transhistorical reason—is not just a factual error; the discourse of secularism constitutes a way of framing data so as to align with a particular set of assumptions.

Genealogy offers several advantages over a strictly comparative approach. It helps us ask not just how particular religions or secularisms compare to each other, for example, but how the categories of religion and secularism were developed and how specific cases come to be under- stood as particular instances of these general categories—religion and secularism—in the first place. In addition, genealogy puts pressure on the assumption that whenever people, in any part of the world, take up secularism, they must be taking up a singular phenomenon with universal resonance. In contrast, although comparisons can sometimes break open dominant discourses, the very discovery of difference from the normative narrative can also simply reinforce the centrality of that narrative. This held true in European encounters with southern Africa documented by

Chidester, and as some of our contributors show, the containment of difference within a particular narrative frame can be as much of a problem for the secular as for the religious.29 If this problem is not addressed, then other possibilities, alternative ways for "doing" secularism or religion, are rendered invisible because we are looking for a particular type of difference. Rather than merely comparing differences *within* the framework of the secularization narrative, the essays in this volume move to question the framework itself. We want to know what becomes possible by shifting the focus of our inquiry.30

To be sure, the genealogical approach has its own dangers. If focused only on the construction of large categories like the secular and the religious, it can tend toward its own form of totalization in which all instances of the category are understood along a particular genealogical path. So, for example, genealogical investigations into the power relations that have produced the present moment can tend to focus only on the path of colonial and postcolonial history. As Afsaneh Najmabadi has elsewhere pointed out, to focus only on colonialism can leave a place like Iran— never directly colonized—at an "unavailable intersection," out of space and time.31 While the formative power of the context of colonial history on the secularization narrative cannot be denied, it would be a mistake to take it as determinative. To do so risks conceptualizing all secularisms only as extensions of European colonialism.32

If, however, genealogy focuses on particular instances of secularism, it can devolve into a form of pluralism in which the very diversity of forms and histories elides the dominating power relations in which this diversity is formed.33 A focus, for example, on diversities within Europe or between Europe and the United States, diversities no doubt powerful and extensive, can shift the spotlight away from the power of the Euro-American imagination in which many Europeans and Americans see themselves as secular and others as religious (despite the fact that to others in Europe or the United States it can appear, as Fatima Mernissi has written of her experiences as a Moroccan Muslim visiting Europe, that European culture is saturated with religion).34

Secularisms is cognizant of such tensions and risks. By placing multiple secularisms in relation to the dominant narrative of secularization, *Secularisms* charts a course that acknowledges the power and influence of colonialism and the European conceptualization of secularism without succumbing to the idea that secularism is, as Asad says, only "a cultural

import from the West." Rather, it is precisely the interactions of various religious formations with various cultural imports that make for the com- plex secularisms that mark today's world.

Our essays make visible cross-cultural variation even as we seek to mark the limits of comparative study. We are interested not in covering "the world" (as if it were possible to produce a fully comprehensive compendium of world secularisms), but in questioning the narrative that gives the category of secularism "world" import, and the essays were chosen accordingly. In criticizing this dominant discourse we hope to make visible alternative ways of inhabiting and embodying both the secular and the religious, ways that are simply blocked from view within the usual frame- work.

In short, we advocate multiple shifts in perspective. The first is to ac- knowledge that secularism is inflected by religions (and vice versa), thus fundamentally undoing the binary opposition between

(secular) universalism and (religious) particularism. Such a move entails a shift from a singular, universal idea of the secular to the idea of multiple and varied secularisms. In making this shift, we must incorporate the fact that the recognition of cross-cultural variation is not enough because the recognition of variation alone does not in itself dislodge the idea of a single unifying discourse within which this variation occurs. Acknowledging the lack of such a singular discourse also implies that there is no single moral framework for conflict resolution and ethical judgment. Dispensing with such a framework involves a turn to the question of relations among differences, a question that cannot be resolved simply or through a single method.

There are strong political and analytical implications to such changes in thought. If there is no universally shared secular discourse that excludes the particularities of religion, but rather many particular forms of secular- ism that are intertwined with different religions, then the question of how to resolve conflict is brought to the fore. Indeed, this problem is one of the most pressing in the world today.35 There are no easy solutions here, and it should, of course, be noted that the idea of secularism as the source of conflict resolution has always been more of a promise than a reality. One need only look at the world today to realize that modernity has not produced the end of either wars of religion or wars of secularism.36 Despite the difficulties of providing any single answer to the problem of conflict resolution in a world of multiple secularisms, a number of the essays in the volume (Roberts, Samantrai, Sands, and Sunder Rajan) take up the

challenge of how to imagine just social relations in what Tyler Roberts terms a "postsecular" world. We cannot even begin to take up this creative challenge as long as we remain tied to either the descriptive or moral components of the standard secularization thesis.

Most of the essays in *Secularisms* explore various means for thinking our way into a world in which the binary between religion and secularism does not frame social and political possibilities. Some of these essays also offer alternatives that might allow for means of thinking our way through the openings created by these critiques. These alternative narratives point not just to different ways of thinking about secularism but also to different ways of living out, of embodying, secular possibilities currently hidden by the reiteration of an opposition between religion and secularism.