

Secularism: Meaning, Kinds and Characteristics

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Abstract: Secularism is an ideology that advocates complete division and separation of this world and the world to come. It is defined as an elimination of man from religion and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language. It invites people to separate between religion and politics, it also calls people to separate faith from routine activities or complete elimination of metaphysical realities from daily affairs, on the ground that metaphysical world or religious affairs can create obstacles and barriers to human development and progress. As such, the physical world and its fascination should be the first priority and main target of rational being. Based on this fact, this paper by applying analytical and comparative methods aims to explore the true etymology of secularism and investigates its various definitions.

Next, the paper will further explore the kinds and characteristics of secularism as an ideology that attempts to separate religion from daily activities. Lastly, the article will also compare this ideology to Islamic worldview, i.e we will investigate whether secularism is compatible with the right teaching of Islam and that will be followed by comprehensive concluding remarks.

Keywords: Secularism, Islam, naturalism. Religion, Qur'an , Christianity

I. BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Secularism is a belief system that rejects religion, or the belief that religion should not be part of the affairs of the state or part of public education. The principle of separation of church and state, and the idea of keeping religion out of the public school system is examples of secularism. Down the centuries, secularism often associated with the age of enlightenment in Europe which was also coincided with la renaissance and which played a major role in Western society. The principles, but not necessarily practices of separation of church and state in the United States and Laicite in France draw heavily on secularism. For instance, Laicite is a French secularity, which is the absence of religious involvement in government affairs, especially the prohibition of religious influence in the determination of state policies and its routine activities. Hence, the policy decision pertaining to topics like abortion, contraception, sex education and etc., must purely be secularized. Based on this fact, this article aims to investigate secularism as an ideology that tends to separate the worldly affairs from metaphysical world. Yet, In order to achieve the objectives of this paper , we will apply analytical and comparative methods, by analyzing the meaning of secularism, its kinds and characteristics, then, comparing secularism with the Islamic worldview. Lastly, comprehensive concluding remarks of secularism will be provided.

Definition

There's no doubt that definition is the fundamental aspect in studying ideologies. Because, through definitions this ideology (secularism) can be well understood by academicians and researchers. So, what is secularism?

According to American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

(2000: Houghton Mifflin)

Secularism is defined as religious skepticism or indifference or the view that religious considerations should be excluded from civil affairs or from public education. Whereas, Cox(1973) reiterates the secularism definition of Dutch theologian C.V. Van Peursen: who stated that secularism is deliverance of man, first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language. It implies that man's language and his reason must be completely free from the control of religions and metaphysics regardless of unethical consequences.

Meanwhile, Jacob Holyoake (1871) stated that "Secularism is an ethical system founded on the principle of natural morality and independent from any revealed religions or supernaturalism, but derived solely from human intellects and experiences". In his another *book A Confession of belief (1896)*; he defined secularism as a form of opinion which only concerns on questions and issues that only can be experienced and sensed by the humans' senses themselves. That means secularism is a system that fully adhered to ethics and morality and does not have any relations with any religion or metaphysical world, but emerges from human logical rezoning based on what the human sensed and experienced.

However, Jacob's definition needs some analysis, on the ground that if secularism is fully adhered to ethics and morality, the ideology should not oppose any religion nor object any revelation, because religion and revelation are the sources of ethics and moralities. As such, there's no ethics without religion and no morality without revelation of God. As a matter of fact, Secularism can be classified under agnosticism. Because both ideologies only believe in existence based on five senses only, and other metaphysical aspects or *ghaibiyat* (such as God angels , paradise, hell etc..) are all considered as deviated, because metaphysical matters can not be sensed by human senses. In short secularism is dealing with worldly affairs and excludes religious affairs or any invisible world from daily life.

This is in line with the view of H.M Rasjidi, (1997) who argued that secularism is an ethical system together with philosophy that tries to interpret and give meanings to the

humans' life without believes in God scriptures and the life of hereafter. From his definition we can conclude that secularism is non-religious worldview, it is also an atheistic ideology that only concerns with physical world.

Meanwhile, Harvey Cox (1985) defines Secularism as: "The liberation of Man from religious and metaphysical tutelage (guidance), the turning of his attention away from other worlds and towards this one," that is the worldly one.

This means, Cox has no belief in another world other than this physical world and natural phenomenon. This will raise another question and query of who is the originator of this physical world? Or who is the sole creator of this transitory existence? Surely, the answer to this question and query is God the only Originator of this physical world and the sole creator of everything from nothing. So, if God is metaphysical, it does not mean He does not exist..

In brief, the English word secular derives from the Latin word saeculum which is referred to a generation or an age. "Secular" came to mean "belonging to this age, or worldly aspect of life. In general terms, secularism involves an affirmation of immanent, this-worldly realities, along with a denial or exclusion of transcendent and other-worldly realities. It is a worldview and life style oriented to the profane rather than the sacred, the natural rather than the supernatural. Secularism is a nonreligious approach to individual and social life.

II. TYPES OF SECULARISM

Based on above definitions, secularism may be classified into two categories which are hard and soft. In addition, there are two types of secularism namely; radical and moderate. It is crucial to note that moderate secularism may be seen as soft, liberal or passive secularism. While radical secularism may be related to hard, extremist or assertive secularism. A person who practices moderate secularism can tolerate other religious people, multiculturalism and liberalism. These people also have neutral views on all religions as well as coexisting peacefully. Indeed, there are few famous names that can be categorized under this type such as John Locke, Adam Smith, and Thomas Jefferson, and Gandhi. On the other hand, hard secularists have different perspectives on religions. They view religions as an illusion and hurdle in facilitating modernization and seeking knowledge. Hence, there are three main components and characteristics of secularism which are (1) disenchantment of nature (2) de-sacralization of politics (3) 'de- consecration of values' .

1. *Disenchantment of Nature*

According to Al- Attas (1996), disenchantment of nature means freeing of nature from its religious overtones. Nature is not a divine entity. This is also in line with ideology of naturalism.

According to Oxford English Dictionary (2016), naturalism is defined as a philosophy which believes that all living things and events in the universe are

natural and exist by itself. In other words, nobody causes the existence of nature. Naturalism actually derives from the word nature, which means self-sufficient or self-explanatory. Self-sufficiency can be defined as the ability to stand on one's own without the assistance of others. Meanwhile, self-explanatory implies that there is no need for explanation and there is nothing else to consider or ponder. From the definition itself, we can say that naturalism is non-religious and not a good worldview. This is because the term "self-sufficient" can only be assigned to God not others, as He is the only one who can stand on His own.

Likewise, adopting scientific method, this ideology claims that anything detectable by sense it exists, whereas, things that cannot be detected by sense or any phenomenon that can not be proven scientifically do not exist. Consequently, this ideology negates the existence of God and other metaphysics.

Furthermore, naturalism adopts an atheistic theory where it neglected the existence of God. Nature exists and emerges by itself. (2011)¹There is no creator of nature. Naturalists denied not only Allah but all the existence of supernatural beings and metaphysics. Naturalism is parallel to scientism in the sense that they promote denial to things that cannot be seen, heard or touched by humans such as angels, Jannah and Hellfire. When the thing is in physical form, they will believe it, but beyond that, they will neglect it. At the same time, the secularists that adapt this ideology, do not respect nature either, they tend to destroy it, eliminate the nature as they believe they out power nature.

This provides an absolute condition for the development of natural science, and highly developed the culture of observation, experiment, experience, hypothesis and scientific methods .Hence; secularism believes that no real scientific breakthrough is possible until man can face the natural world unafraid. It means, secularism holds that nature does not have any relationship or connection with God. Therefore, people can freely use or do anything to nature according to their desires and needs.

Based on this fact, there's no doubt that this component (disenchantment of nature) is totally against universal ethics and it also opposes the Islamic worldview. According to the Islamic worldview, nature is one of creation of Allah for the service of mankind and for his betterment. As such, this nature deserves a strong care and deep respect by

¹ Reece, J. B., Urry, L. A., Cain, M. L., Wasserman, S. A., Minorsky, P. V., and Jackson, R. B. (2011). Figure 1.18. Natural selection. In Campbell biology (10th ed., p. 14). San Francisco, CA: Pearson.

human being. This is known as *Taskhir* (subservience) in Quranic worldview. *Taskhir* originated from the Arabic word "*sakhkhara*,"² which means putting something into service, pressuring something to be of service to something else, and to make something subservient and obedient. In the dictionary of *Mukhtar al-Sihah*, "*sakhkharahu taskhiran*" is explained as "*kallafahu 'amalan bi la ujah*," that means "to charge someone else with duty without remuneration and compensation". In the Qur'an, *Taskhir* refers to the easily observable fact that existence, in both its cosmic and biospheric aspects, has been constrained by Allah to provide service and profit to mankind. Allah compelling the heavens and the earth to serve mankind so that they can consciously acknowledge His many blessings upon them, and therefore grateful to Him as has stated in Surah Al- Jathiyah

"He has also subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and anything is on earth and all by His grace. There are signs in this for the people who reflect". Qur'an, 45:13

In modern cosmological terms, the *taskhir* refers to the high degree of fine-tuning of the universe's design parameters to sustain life on earth, and eventually, conscious and intelligent human life. In other words, the *taskhir* is *Sunahullah* (God's customary law in the universe) in any form, and without it, the universe will be over. Therefore, Man is well-equipped to interact with the universe in a way that actualizes the duties of being *Khalifah* (vicegerence) on earth and he is responsible for creating harmony and taking into consideration the overall benefit of the ecosystem today and in the future.

2. De-Sacralization of politics

. The second characteristic of secularism is no one rules by divine right. This is what Attas called De-sacralization of politics

(Attas: 1978) This means that secularism is calling for the denial of political power based on religious law. It means any state should avoid a theocratic system, because significant political and social change is almost impossible in societies in which the ruling regime is directly legitimated by religious symbols. Element shows that every culture and system including religion and worldview will always change. Therefore, they believe the future is open for changes and humans are free to make a change and become part of the evolutionary process. Nowadays, we can see the shape of this ideology in the political field, knowledge and also in terms of religious understanding.

² Qamus Al- Muhit (1986) Daarul Fikr, Beirut

According to the secular nation, the modern country is when there is a separation of religion and state affairs. Thus, political secularization is a process where the structure in politics or government will undergo radical changes and result in the separation of religion and state. Besides, western thinkers are trying to increase the distance between knowledge and religion, and they resist anything that is related to spiritual nature. This attitude in turn calls for the separation of knowledge or science from religion and stand that the ideal way for the basis of knowledge is based on the human mind that relies on senses that humans possess. Other than that, starting from the time where the power of religion (Christian) had faded, people claim that religion is the reason for the lack of development in science or knowledge. Due to that, the separation between human activities and religion becomes significant. The battle between the church and science in 17th century was such an example.

Conversely, in Islamic worldview, there's no way to separate the state from religion, because religion is part of Muslim life and the holy Qur'an the seal of revelation is the holy scripture of Islam that deals with human affairs from cradle to death, and it includes political affairs in its some chapters. As such Islam is a comprehensive way of life. Therefore, In Islamic worldview, Islam totally rejects the ideology of secularism or anything related to it. There's no success in finding the similarity point between Islam and secularism even though scholars have struggled for it. Al-Quran has asserted that Islam is the way of life and it is perfect for human, this is true because we can see that there is no dependence on evolutionary theory in Islam and no room for continuous conflict between religion and the state. In fact, history has proven that Christianity initially opposed secularization; however, they lost throughout the fight against secularization and its forts.

(3) De- consecration of values'

De- consecration of values means the disappearance of securely grounded values. It also indicates that there is no longer the direct expression of the Divine Will. (Attas:1996)

Indeed, de-consecration (relativization) of values implies making any and every value system temporary or impermanent and relative, including faith and world views that have ultimate and definite importance for one's existence. Man's future, in this sense, is open to change and evolution. In other words, man is free which the clear manifestation of the divine will is no longer present to make the transformation and immerse himself in the so- called evolutionary process, For example, nowadays, some Western marriage institution, don't allow the same gender to be married, whereas, some countries that have been practiced and allowed the same gender to be married; simply because value is being de-consecration which changes from time to time.

Similarly, the consecration of values also means human freedom to change his attitude, behavior and personality without making any reference to revelation or considering the importance of religion and ethical values. As such, de-consecration of values is leading to total destruction of human value; because human being without ethical values and religion is like a body without soul.

Concluding Remarks

As have been discussed earlier, secularism involves an affirmation of immanent, this-worldly realities, along with a denial or exclusion of transcendent and other-worldly realities. It is a worldview and life style oriented to the profane rather than the sacred, the natural rather than the supernatural, it is in fact a nonreligious approach to individual and social life.

Furthermore, as far as separation of religions and daily affairs is concerned, secularism and secularists in no way can fit for Muslim life; this is because in Islam, spiritual affairs cannot be separated from worldly affairs.

Next, it is undeniable fact that secularism attempts to bring the downfall of the religious institution so that can lead the secularists to attain happiness and success in worldly life only.

Meanwhile, Secularism can give negative impact on some aspects of man's life, including social, cultural, educational, political, and moral aspects.

Firstly, the effect of secularism on social and cultural aspects can be seen from the role of mass media such as television and social media which become the central attention in this contemporary living, and these media are controlled by those who are not sensitive to religion, they introduced various values such as Western fashions and life-styles, immoral values which are completely wrong to the teachings of Islam and Christianity. With the mindset of separating religion from worldly life, secularism gives a negative impact on the morality of humans and turns them to the state of ignorance. For instance, programs shown on television contain a lot of violence and unethical entertainments which clearly affect the minds of youngsters to ignore spiritual aspects of life. This will also promote the idea to engage in immoral activities, such as adultery, homosexuality and others. Undeniably, immoral acts keep growing day by days under the influence of secularism since it excludes God's guidance almost completely in the daily chores.

Cultural aspects also can be affected. Some quarters that have been acclimatized with secularism in certain culture will feel that their cultural value is old fashioned and outdated. Consequently, they are more prone to forget their own values, norms, and culture in order to attain the standard of the so-called 'modern community'.

Then, educationally, education is one of the most crucial foundations in society. From an Islamic perspective, seeking knowledge is an act of 'ibadah (worship) and it is an obligation for all the Muslims. It should be done for the sake

of obtaining blessings from Allah and used for a better life in this world as well as in the hereafter. In Islam, knowledge has been classified into two categories, which are acquired knowledge and revealed knowledge. Acquired knowledge focuses on all natural and

social sciences, whereas, revealed knowledge includes divine injunctions, knowledge about belief and others. However, education in the secular system only focuses on acquired knowledge. It

only concentrates on this world. As a result, people no longer concern themselves with what is the purpose of our existence, who is God and the list goes on. As such, secularism produces professionals who lack religious foundation. Thus, the impact of secularism on educational systems is very obvious, serious and dangerous. It eliminates God almost completely from education except for strictly private concern.

In political aspects, secularism separates religion from state. This ideology promotes the idea that religion should not be integrated into public affairs of a society. It gives detrimental effects in political aspects as laws based on scripture from Allah is replaced by civil law.

This in turn reduces the ties between a government and a state religion. Consequently, all the decisions making will be solely based on secular reasons. They also promote some secular slogans to deceive the society. For example, 'religion is for God and the state is for the people',

'no religion in politics and no politics in religion', 'personal freedom', and many others to portray particularly the rigidity of Islam. As a result, a part of society will view Islam as a religion that needs to be practiced in a ritual worship only and deny it as way of life.

Secularism also advocates that religion should have no control over human behavior. As a result of the removal of divine guidance, people will always be in a state of hesitation and an unstable system of morality. According to the Islamic point of view, man has limitations and weaknesses, especially in terms of knowledge and experience. Hence, he needs the code of conduct which is provided by Allah Who knows the best for all mankind..

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