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Article Title: **A post-secular approach to understanding religion and global security**

Abstract: This paper argues that religious terrorism poses little genuine threat to the Western way of life. Yet, this paper maintains that a sense of global insecurity itself is well founded because of the pending failures of the West's foundational structures of power, belief and praxis. Further, given that secularism is integral to modern Western culture, the theological assumptions of secularism can be seen as key drivers of global insecurity. This paper argues that if the West is to play a positive role in the meta-transitions necessary to divert us from looming global catastrophe, it will need to become more aware of its own theological assumptions and less committed to a dogmatic secularism which leaves nothing uncommodified and privileges instrumental pragmatism over any substantive moral and religious criteria for collective action. This paper seeks to link global security issues with recent critiques of modern Western secularism by theologians like John Milbank.

Keywords: global security, religion, post-secularism, theology

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A post-secular approach to understanding religion and global security

Introduction

This paper is written in two parts. Part one looks at the big drivers of global insecurity – energy, environment and economics – so that we can put religious terrorism in its correct place as a symptom, not a cause, of global insecurity. Part two seeks to uncover Western secularism’s theological roots so that we can better understand the religious drivers embedded in the power and belief structures of the modern Western way of life. The conclusion of this paper will then briefly link Western secularism with the real drivers of global insecurity and argue that the fostering of international peace and the transformation of the basic structures of Western power and belief – two things necessary to avert pending global cataclysm – would be advanced by the adoption of a post-secular approach to global security by the West.

Part one: the causes of global insecurity

John Howard and George W Bush¹ insist that the central threat to Western freedom and safety arises from foreign religious extremists who are evil, cannot be negotiated with, and who are Hell bent on the destruction of the West. These terrorists particularly hate the noble values of the West – freedom, the rule of law, enterprise, respect for innocent life, etc – values that are self evidently good and which are increasingly upheld around the globe. So these terrorist assaults are not directed just against the West, but seek to erode the values and opportunities of the increasingly Westernised globe. Given that these terrorist kill innocent people merely as pawns in their religio-ideological anti-Western warfare, it is crucial that Westerners do not entertain any doubts about the rightness of their way of life.²

Thus the American and Australian ‘war on terror’ rests on two foundational assumptions: firstly, that any essential threat to our way of life is an external threat; secondly, that we must not doubt our Western values, for our way of life is inherently good.

Both of the above assumptions – basic drivers of the Bush/Howard approach to international relations post 9/11 – are dangerously delusional. For the reality is, the biggest threats to the West’s current wealth and global dominance are integral to that wealth and dominance. Further, the reason why ‘conservative’ and ‘core’ Western values have been so unqualifiedly endorsed by John Howard and George W Bush is that traditional collective values and beliefs are in serious crisis and are on the point of collapse in the West. In this context, religious terrorists are god-sent scapegoats

¹ These two national leaders are used here as generic political icons of the ‘religious terrorism as a threat to Western security’ approach to procuring national and global security. That is, these politicians are not considered as important theorists of this stance. However, as prominent riders (more so than drivers) of the prevailing cultural and socio-economic conditions that have thus far made this stance politically viable in Australia and the USA, Howard and Bush usefully distil the slogans and assumptions of this outlook.

² See John Howard, ‘Sharing our Common Values’, Irving Kristol Lecture, delivered at the Gala Dinner for the American Enterprise Institute, in Washington DC, 5 March, 2008, www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23328945-5014047,00.html ; Peter Singer, *The President of Good & Evil* (Melbourne, Text, 2004).

that our leaders eagerly latch onto, for the ‘war on terror’ serves the purpose of propping up increasingly threatened delusions integral to the prevailing status quo on which our leaders depend.

Yet, the global status quo may well crash in the near future. Some of the big drivers of fundamental change are linked to energy, the environment, and unsustainably high levels of systemic inequality and exploitation in the global economy. Religious terrorism against Western targets are relatively minor stress fractures that arise because of the inherently unsustainable dynamics that uphold the present world order.

1.1 Fossil fuel energy dependence and depletion

The conservative International Energy Agency predicts a supply crunch in the global oil market in 2012.³ That is, it seems clear that the IEA understands the rise in the global export price of oil from US\$20 a barrel to US\$140 a barrel in the past 6 years, not as an aberration that will soon settle down, but as the beginning of a sustained export price increase in oil, and this price increase will ramp up radically in the near future. We may indeed have already reached global peak oil production,⁴ yet this will not slow the accelerating global consumption of oil immediately – at least, not in oil producing nations that subsidise their domestic markets – but it will radically increase the export price of oil in the near future.⁵ This will mean that the oil that goes onto the export market will become increasingly expensive and harder to get. This will have substantial economic flow on effects for Western powers like the USA whose domestic economies are heavily dependent on cheap energy and very large oil imports. Further, very little is being done in the Anglo-American world to transition our energy supply away from oil and towards renewable energy. Nothing is being done to ween our food production process off an ever higher dependence on oil for production and transport.⁶ We are rapidly advancing towards an affordability crisis in energy with profound economic implications, and those economic implications are only the beginning of our problems.

Dale Pfeiffer points out that in the 1950s and 1960s we saw a global revolution in the industrialisation of food production. Essentially, by this time, all the planet’s land suitable for agriculture was being used. Yet, the heavy industrialization of farming, the development of new strains of plants, dependence on irrigation intensive farming methods, dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and dependence on massive international transportation networks dramatically increased the world’s grain supply and pushed many of the globes traditional subsistence farmers out of work and into the urban mega-slums of the third world. Rich or poor, we are now globally

³ International Energy Agency Medium-Term Oil Market Report, July 2007, online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/iea20070707.pdf

⁴ Colin Campbell, *Oil Crisis* (UK, Multi-Science Publishing Co. Ltd., 2005)

Kenneth Deffeyes, *Beyond Oil: the View from Hubbert’s Peak* (USA, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005)

⁵ Michael Lardelli, “The Australia 2020 Summit – more hallucination than clear vision”, Perspective, ABC Radio National, 11 March 2008. www.abc.net.au/rn/perspective/stories/2008/2186644.htm

⁶ Richard Manning, “The oil we eat: Following the food chain back to Iraq”, *Harpers Magazine*, New York, February, 2004, pp. 4-7.

Dale Pfeifer, “Eating Fossil Fuels”, *From The Wilderness Publications*, 2004

www.fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/100303_eating_oil.html

David Pimentel, Marcia Pimentel, eds., *Food, Energy and Society* (University of Colorado Press, 1996)

dependent on oil to eat. Oil now powers our global way of farming, and the world's population has more than doubled since 1960. So what is going to happen to our global food production as population increases if we run out of affordable oil? Even if one ignores that question, what is the post 1960s farming revolution doing to the planet? Our current methods of global food production are aggressively depleting the globe's artesian water reserves, global soil qualities are being degraded, and we are chewing up the non-renewable fuel supplies on which our farming depends. And all the while, the first world is having the lion's share of the world's energy consumption. Speaking as an American, Pfeiffer comments:

The United States consumes 40% more energy annually than the total amount of solar energy captured yearly by all US plant biomass. Per capita use of fossil energy in North America is five times the world average. Our prosperity is built on the principle of exhausting the world's resources as quickly as possible, without any thought to our neighbours, all the other life on this planet, or our children.⁷

The world as we know it cannot remain on an ever upward, oil fuelled, economic growth trajectory. But what politician can seriously advocate the end of the current paradigm of non-renewable energy powered economic growth? We seem locked in on a collision course with global economic recession and a global food shortage because, it seems, we will not make serious moves towards energy source transitions until the crunch actually hits. Historically, large scale recessions and food shortages have nearly always stimulated political turbulence and war.

1.2 Environmental stress

Environmentally, the globe is groaning under the weight of first world consumption habits and resultant global resource extraction, exploitation and industry. This is no longer a matter of serious contestation. Our way of life is radically depleting the biodiversity and fecundity of the natural environment – on which human life depends – and the stresses of this are now becoming clearly observable at a time in history when the world bears a human population far greater than at any other time. The future will not allow this way of life to continue. Yet, it is now likely that Western individualism has eroded the type of collective moral framework we need to adequately address a cumulative problem of this nature and magnitude.⁸ As China, India and Asia modernize, the environmental damage to the globe can only accelerate as nature is exploited by ever greater numbers of non-Western people who are also seeking to enjoy and adopt a Western consumer lifestyle. The globe is now aspiring to the West's habits of natural exploitation and consumption at a time when the globe itself is indicating it has had as much exploitation as it can take. If we persist in this trajectory, it is possible that nature will simply give out, and pay us back with terrible global consequences and catastrophic human suffering.⁹

⁷ Dale Pfeiffer, "Eating Fossil Fuels", *From The Wilderness Publications*, 2004, see Pfeiffer's subheading "US Consumption". www.fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/100303_eating_oil.html

⁸ Michael Northcott, *A Moral Climate: the Ethics of Global Warming* (UK, Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007)

⁹ James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity* (NY, Basic Books, 2006)

1.3 Systemic economic injustice

The global economy as it now functions is not a fair system. Joseph Stiglitz and George Monbiot point this out in a manner that cannot be seriously contested.¹⁰ The Bretton Woods Institutions and the United Nations were set up after World War Two to produce a unified global system of economic, political and military power, over which the US treasury and the Whitehouse have a uniquely powerful governing influence. Whilst post-war re-construction in Japan and Europe owes a great deal to the USA, and whilst equity is now profoundly globally mobile, the end result of post-war history has been that the USA pursues its national self interest via the global structures of power it has a unique governing power over. This makes our global system of power inherently biased towards American national interests, and inherently biased away from the interests of everyone who is not strategically aligned with the economic, political and military interests of the USA. That is, it is not a fair system, and the lack of fairness makes its long term durability unsustainable. Should the USA collapse economically, our global system will rest, very briefly, on an enormous power vacuum, which will most likely be replaced by a serious international scramble for global power, and the system we now know will change radically, or collapse completely. Further, the USA looks very economically unstable at present. Stiglitz recent book, *The three trillion dollar war*, points out the extraordinary costs of the Iraq war – all funded by the USA’s astronomical national deficit – and notes the remarkable stresses this puts on the US economy.¹¹ Throw in a sub-prime mortgage crisis and ongoing financial turmoil, add in a looming supply crunch in the global price of oil, and the mighty may well fall, and fall hard, in the near future.

Then there is the human misery of the global poor – a factor profoundly integral to the present world order. The global economy is not only unfair, it is inherently exploitative and inhumane. Back in the late 1980s, Susan George documented the complex relationship between the Regan administration’s massive expansion of the US army and armaments production, and the terrible debt traps of many African nations ruled by very well equipped military dictators.¹² By now, the huge ramping up of African national debts from the 1980s has made it impossible to build, let alone sustain, basic public health infrastructure in many African nations. In 2002 Michael Fleshman’s article in the United Nation’s publication *Africa Recovery* points out that the under-five mortality rate for sub-Saharan Africa is 30 times higher than of the developed world. Every third child in Africa suffers from malnutrition. 300 million African children and their parents live in absolute poverty, on the very margin of survival.¹³ Fleshman’s article was written at the end of an era that sought to generate global concern from the West for Africa, and at that time, some debt relief was forced out of the G8 and the IMF by the Jubilee campaign for some of the incredibly odious debt in the worst African nations. Yet, post 9/11, Africa is, apparently, no longer much of a blight on the West’s global conscience, so the horrendous trends in Africa seen in the 1990s continue apace in our decade. In this global environment of

¹⁰ Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (UK, Allen Lane, 2002)
George Monbiot, *Age of Consent* (London, Flamingo, 2003)

¹¹ Joseph Stiglitz, Linda Bilmes, *The three trillion dollar war* (UK, Allen Lane, 2008)

¹² Susan George, *A Fate Worse than Debt* (London, Penguin Books, 1989), 21-29.

¹³ Michael Fleshman, “A troubled decade for Africa’s children” *Africa Recovery*, Vol.16#1, April 2002, www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol16no1/161child.htm

entrenched under-development and deep poverty, Stiglitz agonizingly points out how the IMF typically exerts its power in a manner that means the world's poor suffer so that speculative money markets and the interests of powerful multi-national corporations can be protected.¹⁴ For sure, African politics is a mire of violence and corruption, yet the IMF ensures that savagely in debt African nations with desperately poor people service debts produced by previous military dictators rather than providing basic health care and sanitation to their own people. This kind of entrenched human suffering is very much a part of our global economic system. Further, as Arundhati Roy points out, the USA has a sustained track record of supporting military dictators and opposing democratic grassroots movements in the 3rd world.¹⁵ Paul Harrison also points out that whilst the South is producing its own expanding middle class, this actually increases the overall inequality of the globe, where the absolute majority of the world's population is very poor.¹⁶

Inescapable debt traps, unemployment, grinding poverty, basic failures in health care and education, violence and systemic exploitation for the world's poor, has never been worse. This is the dark moral underbelly of our present global world order, and this order is morally, environmentally and economically unsustainable.¹⁷ And when it crashes, the fall will be great for those who have benefited most from the present state of global reality, but for the world's very poor, things are already catastrophic.

In brief outline, then, the above are the real physical, financial and human drivers of the pending collapse of the post-war global world order. Those drivers of pending collapse have actually nothing to do with Osama bin Laden. Though, bin Laden's outlook and mission, is, indeed, produced by a seething inchoate global sense of grievance against the West for its exploitative and unfair dominance of global wealth. And it is not untrue – as Marx saw – that all things sacred are being systematically violated by the enormous cultural inroads the Western consumer lifestyle is making on the globe.¹⁸ Bin Laden is a stress fracture of the pending failure of the system, but he is not causing the failure of the system.

Now we shall briefly examine “Western values” in order to see if these are under external threat from fascist religious terrorist, or are also simply imploding under the influence of their own inherent weaknesses.

1.4 Western values

Many of the real values of modern consumerism are what our Western ancestors understood to be vices. Greed, lust, avarice, gluttony, sloth, impiety, luxury, pride,

¹⁴ Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (UK, Allen Lane, 2002)

¹⁵ Arundhati Roy, “The Algebra of Infinite Justice”, *The Guardian*, Saturday Review, September 29, 2001, www.guardian.co.uk/saturday_review/story/0,3605,559756,00.html

¹⁶ Paul Harrison, *Inside the Third World* (London, Penguin Books, 1993)

¹⁷ Ann Pettifor, ed., *Real World Economic Outlook – The Legacy of Globalization: Debt and Deflation* (UK, Palgrave, 2003)

¹⁸ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, Penguin books 1988), p83: “Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is sacred is profaned...”

profanity, competitive self-interest etc – these are in many ways the operational values of our consumer economy and its symbiotic entertainment industry.¹⁹ Self focused indulgent values that encourage a winner takes all attitude, and that rescind on responsibilities and obligations to others and nature, and have no conception of piety or the sacred, are either simply assumed or are strongly endorsed by the main stream of our advertising and entertainment industries. Distinctly religious and moral institutional authorities that stand over and restrain individual freedom are now almost entirely eroded in the West. From infancy we are cultivated in the social norms – manufactured by our thriving popular culture industry²⁰ – of ignoring all responsibility and obligation to the past and the future in favour of our right to have what we want now. On credit. The value system of our consumer lifestyle is atomistic, market driven liberalism that shamelessly manipulates any and all our instinctive drives, for profit.

Western consumerism is a morally corrupting global influence that actively corrodes the traditions of obligation, restraint, authority and sacredness in all cultures of the world. Via satellite, global bill-boarding, unspeakably large marketing budgets,²¹ and via the Western secular academic vision of pure nature and instrumental reason, the West tirelessly erodes all traditional belief and value systems the tiny world over (including its own traditional values). The idea that the West is under cultural threat from external invasion is the most remarkable inversion of the realities of culture in the current global environment. Mr Howard’s belief that religious terrorists want us to abandon our good values of human decency, freedom, family, the rule of law, respect for life etc – uniquely Western values, apparently – is remarkable. It does not seem to occur to Mr Howard that our shameless depravity, our gratuitous violence, our voyeurism, and our self interested and hubristic exploitative dominance of global power, culture and nature are also prominent Western values. It is these Western values, and their seemingly unstoppable power to dissolve the very foundations of traditional non-Western cultures, that people with a strong commitment to non-Western belief systems find so invasive and corrosive. It is the very notion of the sacred and of any obligation to what stands above the individual that globalized Western consumer culture – with its political and economic ‘life forms’ – seems to hunt down and destroy.

1.5 The militant West and global insecurity

International relations pursued under Mr Howard’s convictions maintain that if we ramp up home land security and believe unswervingly in the goodness of Western values, then the world as we know it will not be moved, and things will just keep improving for everyone in the globe. This is delusional, hubristic and dangerous.

¹⁹ Clive Hamilton, Richard Denniss, *Affluenza: when too much is never enough* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2005); Vance Packard, *Hidden Persuaders* (Ringwood, Penguin, 1986); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (London, Norton, 1991); Anthony Campolo, *Seven Deadly Sins* (USA, SP Publications, 1987)

²⁰ Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, “The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (NY, Continuum, 1993), 120–167. Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: selected essays on mass culture* (London, Routledge, 1991)

²¹ Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London, Flamingo, 2000), p8: “The advertising industry’s astronomical rate of growth is neatly reflected in year-to-year figures measuring total ad spending in the U.S., which have gone up so steadily that by 1998 the figure was set to reach \$196.5 billion, while global ad spending is estimated at \$435 billion.”

Our world order is likely to change, soon and dramatically, and no amount of homeland security and cultural self confidence is going to alter this fact. The focus on external threat takes our attention away from the inherent weaknesses within our present world order, and allows us to ignore these pressing concerns that will be our demise if we simply keep pretending they are not there. Further, the focus on security promotes an environment of suspicion, inconvenience and unaccountable state power, fostering a neo-fascist politics of xenophobia and curtailment of civil liberties towards culturally non-conformist minorities. Should our prosperity take a serious dive, then a political culture used to suspicion, xenophobia and externally focused aggression could very easily produce an explosive martial era. Further, a merely militaristic approach to monitoring and apprehending terror cells, totally ignores the *Western* drivers of religious terrorism, and easily tars all religious adherents from other cultural backgrounds as extremists if they do not fully endorse the secularism and degenerate market values of the West. This is arrogant and alienating – never a very helpful place from which to construct mutually beneficial cross-cultural international relationships.

Yet Mr Howard's 'tough on terror' strategy to combat global insecurity was politically effective for the duration of his office in the Australian domestic political context. One reason for this success is likely to be that Australians, in general, like Mr Howard, do not understand the theological roots of their own secularism. Nor do Australians seem to understand the non-secular global context, because they see it through cultural lenses that assume that Western secularism is taken as normative and desirable by all decent people in the globe. This ignorance, combined with defensive xenophobia powered by an inchoate cultural sense of looming disaster, makes it very politically easy for religious terrorism to become an enormously inflated distraction from the real causes of our insecurity. Terrorists, of course, being willing partners in such inflated demonization, embrace this war of mutual terror with open arms. However, this symbiotic dynamic between Western political elites and obscure militant extremists then promotes ignorance and fear driven antagonism between the collective zeitgeists in Islamic cultures and Western cultures in an era when we do not need any more tension points than we have already got. Global security is only possible if we first have an intelligent awareness of the real causes of global conflict and an understanding of the real culturo-religious nature of the global context, including the Western context. In order to do this we must be able to identify, understand and critique what it is that culturally blinds Westerners to such an understanding – the assumptions and attitudes of modern secularism.

Part two: A genealogy of the rise and fall of Western secularism

2.1 What is Western Secularism?

The revolutionary theological idea that the supernatural can be discretely separated out from the natural is the foundation belief of modern Western secularism. This belief is given its first distinctly modern Western articulation in the Franciscan

theology of William of Ockham in the 14th century.²² Ockham's importance in the birth of Western modernity is not well appreciated, and yet his thought, radical as it was, does not arise from nowhere. The theological, cosmological and epistemological revolution of Ockham's invention of the notion of *natura pura*, where 'pure nature' is a self contained ontological realm functionally independent of the 'supernatural', is embedded in the nominalist and rationalist theological trajectory which traces its roots back to Abelard in the 12th century.²³ So the foundational belief of secularism is now very deeply historically entrenched in Western culture, though it is by no means a self evident notion to non-Western cultures, nor was it seriously entertained in the assumptions of the West's own Classical and high Medieval culture. To Plato and Aristotle, the cosmos was enchanted – Ockham's *natura pura* cuts across the very grain of the divinity of reason in both Plato and Aristotle, and is profoundly at odds with the reality priority of the metaphysical over the physical in Plato. Equally to Augustine and Aquinas, nature's very ground of being is God. Nature is shot through with, and entirely dependent on supernature, in the neoplatonist world view that dominated Western high culture, and the West's common religious beliefs, from the 3rd century to the 14th century.

The nominalist outlook and Ockham's accompanying notions of separate spheres of authority relevant to church and state are taken up, to varying degrees by the Reformers, and a period of great political turbulence ensued as the old unifications of Medieval Christendom were torn apart at the seams. The protracted religiously tangled violence that accompanied the Reformation era finally resolved itself along nascent secularist lines in the peace of Westphalia in the mid 17th century, and modern European state craft was born. From this time on, so the Enlightenment telling of the story goes, Western culture increasingly benefited from the peaceable and tolerant political realism of the modern secular age.²⁴

Yet, by the 17th century, Ockham's secularism is not only shaping the political and theological culture of early modern Europe, it is making profound inroads into knowledge, for Ockham makes Descartes, and modern science as we know it, possible.

Descartes' attempt to ground indubitable knowledge in the personal consciousness of his own discrete, autonomous mind, arises from Ockham's nominalist theology. Very

²² Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*, (Yale University Press, 1993).

²³ Peter King, "The Metaphysics of Peter Abelard", in Jeffrey Brower, & Kevin Guilfooy, (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 65–125. King describes Abelard's *via moderna* in these familiar terms: "[Abelard] preferred reductive, atomist, and material explanations when he could get them..." (p65.)

²⁴ William T Cavanaugh (*Theopolitical Imagination*, London, T & T Clark, 2002) takes a close look at this Enlightenment story and finds that the mythology of pre-Westphalian violence as inherently religious is open to serious questioning. Rather, the move towards univocal political power from the high middle ages to the modern age – the rise of the early modern state – is intimately linked with the growing power of the merchant class and the need for the aristocracy to ramp up its control. The voluntarist vision of a single head of state – political absolutism – as an incontestable repository of centralized violent power is thus taken up by Hobbes. 'Rational' and 'realist' 17th century political theory is an ideology of absolute state power which centralises violence in order, apparently, to contain it. A functional stasis, then, between states, is always one of a pragmatic balance of competing forces aspiring to absolute power. Whatever the Westphalian revolution is, it is not the triumph of peaceable reason and toleration over religious and irrational violence.

briefly, nominalism rejects the ancient notion of ontological participation. Ontological participation holds that the physical existence of any individual thing is a derived (though transitory) particular manifestation of deeper, transcendent, archetypal metaphysical reality. In this way God, or the Platonic equivalent – the divine form of the Good – is the final, eternal and glorious reality upon which all transitory physical manifestations of being depend. The notion of ‘participation’ holds that concrete existing individuals are entirely dependent for their existence upon transcendent powers of being. Ockham’s razor famously severs the transcendent and universal from the immanent and particular. Ockham maintains that all apparent individual things should be treated as if they are, in fact, genuinely individual and fully real things. That is, individual things do not have their being in any transcendent power of being.²⁵ Hence, God is now an existing individual whose power of being resides in His own existence, just as I am an individual being whose power of being resides within my own existence – we no longer participate in God, each other and creation ontologically.²⁶ Descartes’ own individual consciousness is a self-contained immediate reality to Descartes, and this reality is the *only* reality he really participates in. Further, the warrants and rules of scientific proof that Descartes constructed out of his indubitable autonomous proof, and Descartes’ interest in understanding discretely natural reality, assumes the validity of Ockham’s *natura pura*.

By the 17th century the separation of the natural from the supernatural and the search for discretely natural and logical causes in all observable phenomena is bedding down in the foundations of modern science. But by now, many other characteristically modern separations – foreign to Classical Western culture and high Medieval Christendom – were also beginning to gain a broad cultural currency. From the Enlightenment on, the separation of nature from supernature seeks to place all things supernatural in the discrete realm of faith and the church, and this is now distinct from the natural realm, which is the world of science, politics and commerce. So the church must butt out of science, philosophy, politics and money – or else it must pursue these endeavours in discretely ‘natural’ and ‘realistic’ ways, and without any special claims to supernatural knowledge or authority. As secularism developed, the now discrete realm of religious and moral belief became increasingly privatised and, by our time, religion and morality was finally separated from the realm of public legality and social norms (this is, by the way, a unique accomplishment in the history of human culture). As this process matures, Western culture has increasingly conceptually and politically separated facts from values, quality from quantity, belief from action, political reality from moral truth and economics from pre-modern notions of a just price and a fair wage. In all of these separations, instrumental rationality becomes separated from wisdom. In Classical parlance, *scientia* – ‘know how’, the technological, quantitative and scientific knowledge of manipulative means – is uncoupled from the governance of *sapientia* – ‘know why’, the qualitative and transcendent knowledge of universal, true, good and beautiful ends.

However, at the early stages of modernity, few Europeans envisioned that secularism would lead to the demise of the Christian religion as the main stay of Western culture.

²⁵ Anthony Flew, ed., *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (London, Pan Books, 1979), 253. Flew gives this succinct definition for his entry on Ockham’s razor: “The principle of ontological economy, usually formulated as ‘Entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity.’”

²⁶ Paul Tillich, “The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion”, in *Theology of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 10–29.

The view that secularism involves the receding of religious consciousness itself is largely a 19th century belief. From the 19th century on secularism was increasingly conflated – by ‘progressives’ – with a belief in the inevitable cultural triumph of materialistic atheism. For once the realm of the supernatural is fully separated from the natural real world, one has – as Laplace famously put it – no need for the hypothesis of God. Given Ockham’s view of natural reality, for all practical, scientific and public purposes, God no longer exists.

In the 19th century, highly influential social theorists believed that religion itself had no future in modern Western culture. In the light of Feuerbach’s critique of religion, Marx embraced the coming end of faith with joy, and saw wonderful possibilities for a new society that was free from the tyranny, superstition and falsehood of religion.²⁷ Durkheim, however, whilst seeing the end of religion as embedded in the process of modernisation, was not as optimistic as Marx about what the end of faith might entail. Durkheim associated the social role of the sacred with the preservation of the collective conditions of civilisation, and these conditions he saw as being inherently eroded by the new personal freedoms opened up to bourgeois society after the industrial revolution.²⁸ Weber too, saw the demise of religion as inherent in the process of modernisation, even though he understood religion as an important driver of the process of modernisation. Weber saw Calvinism as underpinning the development of modern capitalism,²⁹ and traced the origins of modern instrumental reason to Aquinas.³⁰ Christian theology and Christian practises were seen by Weber as intimately formative of the modern secular world. Yet, as this world became more deeply entrenched in instrumental rationality, the strangulation of the human spirit by bureaucratic efficiency seemed inescapable. Weber liked the modern world, was agnostic about God, and saw Christian Europe as forever gone, and yet he had profound fears for modernity’s spiritual future.³¹

Aided by the powerful influence of the classical sociologists, by the triumph Darwinian science and 19th century naturalistic cosmology,³² and by Freud’s popularisation of Feuerbach’s psychological understanding of religion,³³ the twentieth century saw the broad acceptance of an inherently atheistic secularization thesis in Western academies. This thesis holds that as societies modernise, they discard religious superstitions altogether, recognising religion as a delusion, and religion itself fades away.³⁴ Political ideology, scientific progress and economic development

²⁷ Karl Marx, “Introduction to a contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” www.marxist.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm

Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York, Harper & Row, 1957)

²⁸ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York, The Free Press, 1965)

²⁹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1987)

³⁰ Ludger Honnefelder, “Rationalization and Natural Law: Max Weber’s and Ernst Troeltsch’s interpretation of the medieval doctrine of natural law”, *Review of Metaphysics*, 49 (December 1995): 275–94.

³¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1987), 180–183.

³² Herbert Spencer, *Essays: Scientific, Political and Speculative* (London, Williams & Nogate, 1890)

³³ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of a Delusion* (London, from Vol. 21., The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 1968)

www.adolphus.nl/xcrpts/xcfreudill.html

Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Religion* (London, The Pelican Freud Library Volume 13, Penguin Books, 1985)

³⁴ Robert Van Krieken, et al, *Sociology*, 2nd edition (Sydney, Longman, 2000), 493–499.

become the only factors of real importance as the world modernizes. But even political ideology can cause conflict, so by the end of the 20th century – after the collapse of communism in the USSR – it is only economic and technological advancement that progress human happiness. Thus neoliberalism tacitly maintains that we Westerners are happy and content pragmatists, who have outgrown the violence of political ideology just as surely as we have outgrown the superstitious passions of pre-scientific religion. With calm, mature realism, modern people are tolerant and moderate,³⁵ and have learned to live without the false hopes of salvation after death or any belief in a transcendent basis for morality.

But what about the non-Western peoples of the world in the current global context?³⁶

2.2 Globalization and secularism

In the post-war era a new economic internationalism began to emerge, undergirded by the Bretton Woods Institutions, and often supported financially by the USA.³⁷ The USA – as a champion of secular demarcations between religion, and business and politics, and the champion of democracy and capitalism – was the global non-communist leader of the post-war era. The cold war saw the USSR and the USA struggle for global dominance with each other, and this was typically understood as a struggle between two modern secular powers with different economic and political ideologies. By 1989, it was evident that the USSR had lost this battle for global dominance with the USA. With this American victory, modern capitalistic secular freedom – of a very American tinge, guaranteed by US military might and economic dynamism – now seemed to hold an uncontested global dominance.³⁸ To those caught up in this spirit of American global triumph, globalization was now seen as an inherently good process furthering the freedom and prosperity of the entire globe. This triumphalism assumed that globalization would lift economically and technologically backward people into democracy, freedom, pragmatic contentment and moderate secular toleration. Globalization would hoist the world's peoples out of the poverty – and thus out of the superstitions, ignorance and violence – of pre-modern cultural contexts.

Yet, this expansive and self confident global triumphalism became dramatically defensive after the 11th of September in 2001. The idea that now that communism was defeated, not everyone in the globe wanted an unequivocally pro-American, free enterprise and secular global world order, was simply shocking to the pragmatic neocons running the Whitehouse in 2001. The idea that there might be just reasons why American global power was even hated, could simply not be entertained. And

³⁵ Nick Greiner, *Australian Liberalism in a Post-ideological Age* (Melbourne, The Alfred Deakin Lecture Trust, 1990).

³⁶ The extent to which Western culture is now a global culture should not be under-estimated; see Paul Harrison (*Inside the Third World*, London, Penguin, 1993). However, neither should the extent to which the West is now the globe's true culture be over-estimated; see Peter L Berger, ed., *The Descularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, (USA, Eerdmans, 1999); Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2006) – for particularly amongst the poor of the world, the absence of the wealth that gives access to Western ways of living excludes them functionally from Western culture, even if they are far from un-influenced by the West.

³⁷ See Joseph Stiglitz and George Monbiot, as previously cited, on the control of the Bretton Woods Institutions by US treasury.

³⁸ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History* (USA, Free Press, 1992)

now that the people of America were victims of terrorism, the moral high ground for the defence of the American way of life, at any cost, was quickly commandeered. At this point, it becomes clear how profoundly unprepared for any serious analysis of the religious context of the post 1989 global world order the Whitehouse was. This, in many ways, can be put down to the assumption not only of the progressive “secularisation thesis” that equates development with the demise of religion, but with the liberal assumption that secularisation is an inherently good thing desired by all the people of the globe. As long as we cannot examine and question these assumptions, the real religious dynamics of the globe, and of our own secularism, will always escape us, and foreign policy premised on illusions will result.

Secularism is an integral part of the Western capitalist, scientific, liberal, pragmatic and democratic ideological vision of a good state of human fulfilment. Post-war Western money and power created and sustains our present global world order, and so the structures and rules of globalization are largely a product of Western power, but most of the people of the globe do not have a deep and long Western cultural heritage. Though modern non-Western people can be as techno savvy and as interested in personal freedoms as any Westerner, yet, looking a bit below the cultural surface, it is obvious that the non-Western world does not share the West’s long, violent and complex developmental history of secularism and Ockhamean naturalism. Hence, the assumptions of how one should demarcate different authority spheres natural to a modern Western person, and the assumed cosmological and metaphysical belief frames of Western naturalism, cannot be taken to be as unquestionably self evident to the non-Western people of the globe – however modern and Western they may look. In fact, this outlook can no longer be taken as self evident in the West.³⁹ In this context, the assumption that contemporary non-Western people are deeply committed to the ‘official’ Western secularist way of approaching economics, power and religion, is an erroneous assumption. It is also an assumption that is an easy cause of offence to non-Western people and misunderstanding by Western people. Western international relations agendas that pre-suppose this assumption, can, then, easily exacerbate inter-cultural misunderstanding and tension.

Western international relations policy, then, could really do with a better understanding of the West’s secularism, and an appreciation of the depth of non-

³⁹ In the late 1970s Peter Berger – in *Facing Up To Modernity* (UK, Penguin Books, 1977), p. 247 – noted that ‘Transcendence has been, shall we say, declared ‘inoperative’ by the major agencies that ‘officially’ define [Western] reality – the universities, the school system, the medical system, the communications media...’ That is, what Berger calls the ‘reality police’ of the modern scientific world view strongly promoted and defended materialistic naturalism in the 1970s. Even so, the West’s cultural feel on this matter seems to have shifted somewhat. Writer like David Tacey – see *Re-Enchantment, The New Australian Spirituality* (Sydney, HarperCollins, 2000) – are noticing that the reductively materialistic scientific world view is now breaking down as a cultural reality outlook for many Western people. Whilst this does not speak of the recovery of a Christian religious cultural outlook, yet it must also be noted that that Western Christian thinkers who have not capitulated to the reality boundaries of a secularized knowledge discourse have never found naturalism credible, and have often located many of the intractable problems of Western culture and power in the reductive reality outlook of secular scientific materialism. See, for example, Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (USA, Eerdmans, 2008) for a careful philosophical critique of naturalism, and Joseph Ratzinger’s 2005 Subianco Address, in Tracey Rowland’s *Ratzinger’s Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 156–165, for a credible argument linking the exacerbation of global tensions to the dogged materialism of the dominant Western approach to power and liberty.

secularist reality outlooks in non-Western people.⁴⁰ We could also do with a carefully differentiated understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of our own secularism. Yet, this seldom happens because belief in the unequivocal strength and validity of our secularism is, effectively, a foundational article of faith to people like Mr Howard. However, Western culture does have a strong history of critiquing its own cultural assumptions, and part of that history looks very directly at secularism. It is to this fascinating trajectory of cultural critique that we now turn.

2.3 What is Post-Secularism?

In the 1990s, the eminent twentieth century sociologists of religion – Peter Berger – come around to a total rejection of the atheistic secularisation thesis.⁴¹ It was now evident to Berger that whilst Western religion had been radically transformed in the twentieth century, and (generally) declined profoundly as a public socio-cultural feature of our modern Western ‘life form’ – yet it had not just gone away, and was transforming itself in unexpected ways. The turn of the century saw a whole new genre of literature emerge on spirituality in the West.⁴² And then, if one looked outside Western culture, religion was anything but declining.⁴³ In fact, the weight of contemporary sociological thinking has rejected an undifferentiated ‘progressive’ view of secularisation, and many sociologists now maintain that globalisation is fuelling religious dynamism in both the Western and developing worlds.⁴⁴

In 1990, John Milbank published *Theology and Social Theory*.⁴⁵ Here secularism, and secular social theory, is seriously historically examined, and critiqued at a foundational level. Tracing the origins of secularism to the nominalist theology of the 14th century, Milbank argues that secularism itself is a religious outlook, and what is more, it is a Christian heresy. The ‘methodological atheism’ of modern social theory and the privatisation of religious belief to the realm of personal belief upheld as ‘religious freedom’ in liberal Western societies, is premised not on demonstrable and objective truths, but on the assumptions and lifestyle patterns of a particular, and theologically premised, belief outlook. As it is our belief outlook, we do not even notice it as an outlook – it is, in Berger’s terms, simply the reality in which we live.⁴⁶ Yet, this reality has been under stress in the West since at least the beginning of the 19th century.

Kant’s critiques – which are the high watermark of Enlightenment philosophical achievement – are driven by Humean scepticism to try and overcome the

⁴⁰ See Max Quanchi, “Indigenous epistemology, wisdom and tradition: changing and challenging dominant paradigms in Oceania.” A paper presented to the “Social Change in the 21st Century” Conference, Queensland University of Technology, 29 October 2004.
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/archive/00000630/01/quanchi-max.pdf>

⁴¹ Peter L Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (USA, Eerdmans, 1999).

⁴² For example, David Tacey, *Re-Enchantment* (Sydney, HarperCollins, 2000).

⁴³ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christianity: The coming of global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London, Routledge, 1992); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991); David Martin, “The secularisation issue: prospect and retrospect” *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 3., 1991, 465–73.

⁴⁵ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1990)

⁴⁶ Peter L Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (UK, Penguin, 1971)

epistemological, religious, moral and metaphysical difficulties of the modern outlook, grounded as it is in Cartesian epistemology. Yet, Kant's monumental efforts did not allow the 19th century to re-gain its metaphysical or epistemological confidence, and the whole framework of belief about what is transcendentally meaningful and inherently good in the West's high culture started spiralling inexorably towards collapse.⁴⁷ Hegel's idealism reacts against Kant's rejection of any substantive knowledge of noumenal reality and thus the early part of the 19th century is characterised by the turmoil of the Kantian epistemological revolution and its complex philosophical responses. As the 19th century matured, two families of responses solidified – both shaped profoundly by adaptations and reactions to Kant and Hegel. In general terms, those who grappled with these profound theoretical problems of belief and action, and who ended up convinced of the existence of a deep unresolved belief crisis in Western culture, can be called counter-enlightenment figures. On the other hand, those who either ignored these problems, or thought they had overcome them by recourse to romantic intuition, or by replacing theory with practise, or by a pragmatic commitment to naïve positivism, can be called progressive figures. In general, Continental thinkers were more attune to the philosophical difficulties of modernism than were the more pragmatic and empirically minded Anglo-Americans. And so a direct line from the counter-enlightenment thinkers of the nineteenth century to the European crisis thinkers of the early 20th century – such as Heidegger – and on to the French post-structuralists of the second half of the 20th century, and then the European “postmodernists” of today, can be seen. This counter-enlightenment trajectory has ruthlessly explored the theoretical underpinnings of modern Western belief and practise, and, typically within a naturalist perspective, has conquered the high intellectual ground over the progressives concerning the inherently unstable nature of knowledge and meaning in a purely natural cosmos. Come the late 20th century, and the intellectual defeat of progressive confidence finally filters into the Anglo-American thought world, and its influence is now becoming increasingly evident in English speaking academies.

Backing up a bit, and locking in on religion and secularism, the beginnings of a post-secular intellectual revolt against modernity can be found in two very different 19th century counter-enlightenment figures: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Kierkegaard probed the truth beliefs of his time – as grounded in Kantian morality, objective scientific knowledge and Hegelian idealistic reason – and found them all to raise more questions than they answered.⁴⁸ What is more, in a line of thought indirectly reflected by Bruno Latour,⁴⁹ Kierkegaard found modern belief structures to be irrelevant to the life that we actually live, and hence irrelevant to the most important questions of our existence.⁵⁰ To Kierkegaard, the inter-personal, both in terms of the individual's relationship to God, and the relationships between people, is the sole site of our most interested concerns. It is in these most important contexts that we need truth, and in these contexts the self contained logical perfections of the Kantian mind, all questions framed discretely in the categories of natural science, and all abstracted and pure ideals, are irrelevant. Kierkegaard finds faith and sin –

⁴⁷ Paul R Harrison, *The Disenchantment of Reason* (State University of New York Press, 1995)

⁴⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Post-script to the Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton University Press, 1992)

⁴⁹ Bruno Latour, *We have never been modern* (Harvard University Press, 1993)

⁵⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (Princeton University Press, 1980)

inherently inter-personal and religious concepts – to be the primary epistemological categories appropriate to our actual existence. Hence, if our beliefs and actions are to be meaningful and true, we must seek knowledge that is relational and spiritually connective with God and all creation through God, rather than knowledge which is merely objectively propositional or merely manipulatively useful. This is a profound rejection of the Western secularist heritage, from Abelard to Hegel,⁵¹ and Kierkegaard greatly influenced the counter-enlightenment existentialism of the late 19th century and 20th century. To Kierkegaard, rational or scientific or ideal knowledge discretely cut off from our mode of being (i.e., relational becoming), is fatuous knowledge, and the demarcations of Western culture that have produced our modern secular way of life uphold an inherently disingenuous belief and practise frame of existence which is characteristically conceptually dis-integrated. Kierkegaard seeks to re-discover faith, truth and real life integration in an era that had scant conceptions of the very notion of integrative existential truth. Kierkegaard is thus a major turning point in an attempt to withdraw from the Ockham formed fundamental assumptions of modernity. Kierkegaard seeks to re-create a Christian and non-secular understanding of knowledge, morality, truth and lived integrity.

In Nietzsche, however, we have a virulently anti-Christian rejection of secularism. Nietzsche sees clearly that in actual practise, God is dead to the West, and finds this a profoundly disturbing but also potentially liberating situation. It opens up a window for the re-paganisation of Europe, for Nietzsche grasps that there is no more basic social reality than the inescapable mytho-ritualistic grounds of human language, custom, belief and existence. Discarding the slave morality of Christianity, Nietzsche seeks to re-vitalise the Classical agonistic morality of elitist glory. As all believed realities are constructed by our own imagination, let us then imagine realities that at least offer the prospect of greatness and glory to those few souls who can climb above the despicable masses and create their own glorious humanity.⁵² If God is dead, we cannot settle into a complacent materialist pragmatism – at least human greatness cannot accept this grovelling slavery to mere satiation – but we must strive to generate our own meaning out of nothing, and we must form our myths and practises of worship to fill the yawning vacuum that the death of God has placed at the very heart of Western culture.⁵³ This outlook of total constructivism rejects any attempt at the knowledge of objective factual truth or a discretely non mytho-ritualistic public space, and so erodes all the demarcations of modern secularism entirely. This outlook rejects the idea that a comfortable materialistic pragmatism is a release from superstitious pre-scientific ignorance, and is a balanced, noble and dependable cultural backdrop from which to create a good society. For Nietzsche – as followed by Freud and others – is very aware of the seething inner forces in the soul of humanity, and he sees struggle as basic to the human condition, and not something than any reasonable pragmatism can cover over, let alone sustainedly contain or harness. Pragmatic, rational, soft atheism is not going to make everyone happy in the world. Rather, this inherent small mindedness will produce an entirely degenerate culture which will be the easy foil for those few elite souls, driven by the will to power, to control and craft for their own glorification.

⁵¹ For an excellent study on the profound rupture with the Western tradition that Kierkegaard initiates here see Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1964).

⁵² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge University Press, 1994)

⁵³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York, Random House, 1974)

Nietzsche's recognition of the ritual-mythic nature of all human existence, and his understanding of the intimate connection between these primal a-rational poetic belief frames and all practises of power, is a total rejection of secularism, and has proved a very fruitful framework for cultural analysis. Paul Ricoeur's fascinating analysis of the rituo-mythical construction of ancient Babylonian power – *The Symbolism of Evil*⁵⁴ – is interesting precisely because of what it tells us about our own politics in modern Western contexts, today.⁵⁵ The dark vision of Freud too, gives credence to the notion that the rational ego is but a thin delusional veneer, vainly seeking to contain and control the restless and uncontainable destructive and creative powers of the id and the super ego.⁵⁶ This type of socio-cultural analysis makes the progressive vision of rational secular modern man, and his peaceful control of technology and global society, look terribly naïve. More to the point, it is not naïve, it is wilfully delusional. For creative, destructive and self aggrandising forces are inherent in all human power. To believe that we Western secularists are good and rational, and religious terrorists are evil and irrational is to shut one's eyes wilfully to the scope and power of Western creative and destructive influence the small world over. For on a global scale, the impact of a few religious terrorists hardly registers at all when compared with Western power. And this Western cultural, political, economic and military global power is profoundly morally ambivalent, and deeply irrational. The notion that modern Western civilisation is the paragon of Enlightened rational man is a wilful delusion that only hides the violent and exploitative will to power of the present global world order from the ordinary Western citizen. Looking at this order from outside the perspective of the dominant cultural power, this delusion is not even remotely believable.

The Nietzschean/Freudian appreciation of the mytho-ritualistic and irrational foundations of the human condition leads easily to a very dark understanding of all human power. Fictions about the enlightened, inherent rationality and universal goodness of modern Western secular power structures and our socio-political mores cannot be convincingly believed.

Yet, as penetrating and insightful as Nietzschean post-secularism is, it has a fundamental flaw. If it is true that human reality is inherently agonistic, inherently irrational, and the play thing of instinctive and social forces that it can only just functionally contain, then the very notion of critique becomes meaningless. Famously, Heidegger's refusal to denounce Nazism as evil is implied by his radical constructivist outlook on meaning and morality, strongly shaped, as it was, by Nietzsche. Further, what can be wrong about the violent military pursuit of glory via conquest if this is an inherently natural human desire? What is wrong with slavery and economic exploitation? These types of relationships are all very natural. As Nietzsche points out, the moral values of Christian Europe have a particular genealogy and are constructed out of a particular cultural milieu. Nietzsche argues that as products of human culture, Christian values are not universal moral truths, in fact, Christian morality denies the reality of the human condition in relation to the high creative,

⁵⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969)

⁵⁵ See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992), 13-31. Here Wink takes up Ricoeur's analysis and looks at the role of the myth of redemptive violence in popular American culture.

⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London, Penguin Books, 2002)

sexual and destructive powers that truly and gloriously animate human civilisation. Christian morals are weak and degenerate morals to Nietzsche.

As an important aside, the Hobbesean vision of the necessity of a total control of violence by the state, and Cardinal Richelieu's *realpolitik* is typically assumed by the same people who espouse the goodness and rationality of modern secular global economics. Figures like John Howard want to have their cake and eat it too. They want to be enlightened, tolerant and reasonable pragmatists benefiting all mankind, at the same time as they exploit the globe and its people and apply absolute violence to all who oppose them. This apparent contradiction arises because the roots of political liberalism are grounded in the Hobbesean vision of the human condition and the reliance on overwhelming state force to uphold the structures of society that make liberal economic reality workable. The amazing erosion of civil liberties in the West after the commencement of George W Bush's 'war on terror', the flagrant use of torture,⁵⁷ state endorsed xenophobia, and the determined shift towards unaccountable violent state power and pre-emptive military intervention, as seen in Iraq, Guantanamo Bay, Australia's boarder protection antics, and the Dr Haneef case, are neo-fascist trends, natural to our Hobbesean political heritage.

But back to the fundamental flaw of Nietzschean post-secularism. This stance is not really post-secular because it still assumes the truth of Ockham's naturalism. The mytho-ritual is inherently natural in Nietzsche's outlook, as in Freud, so there is no transcendent frame of inherent value or eternal truth from which to qualitatively distinguish one culturo-moral life form from another, and there is no possibility of redemption from the inherently destructive, violent, exploitative and irrational powers inescapably embedded in the human condition. Critique is meaningless and the naturalism of its view of reality makes all human life forms mere management strategies for the meaningless and irrational bio/psycho/social forces that create and destroy human culture. As Heidegger noted, our natural life is one of being towards death, and this stark reality casts its pall over all the pretensions of meaning, achievement and purpose that we might construct. This outlook – as penetrating as it is in many regards – becomes an irrational and despairing outlook. The great figures of European postmodernism, such as Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida, cast a plague on all houses when they are being critical, and revel in despair, in the brokenness and dysfunctionality of the human condition, when they are being constructive. A profound distrust of rationality underpins their thought, and this makes their thought often contorted and difficult to follow. At times, serious postmodern thought is designedly self contradictory and a-rational. Ultimately, this approach does not provide us with a meaningful alternative to the modern secular self confidence it so crushingly critiques. But there is an alternative form of post-secularism.

Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus all believed that unless you assume the divinity of reason – that is that truth is an authentic revelation from a Good, True and Beautiful transcendent reality, and somehow the human mind has the capacity to receive this revelation – and that unless you assume the priority of the eternal over the temporal, no act of reasoning or observation could deliver truth. In this sense, Classical philosophy is premised on faith, for, as Aristotle – the most naturalistic of the big

⁵⁷ Michael Otterman, *American Torture: From the Cold War to Abu Ghraib and Beyond* (Melbourne University Press, 2007)

three – notes, one cannot prove the grounds of rational certainty and scientific observation themselves.⁵⁸ In this sense, the philosophical heritage of Western culture, Western reason itself, is grounded in the enchanted and inherently divinely animated cosmos rejected by Ockham. The Classical view is one where reality is more primary than appearance, and where appearance is always grounded in the transcendent, and it is an outlook embedded in Platonist theology.⁵⁹ Ockham rejects this outlook. The real is now the merely materially apparent, and metaphysical participation is a fiction of our linguistic conceptualisation. The Classical heritage of reason which birthed modern science is now subject to patricide. The new outlook kills off Classical reason and the rationality of Christian belief. Yet, it is quite possible to argue that it doesn't just kill Classical reason and Christian belief, it kills the very idea of rational truth and the very idea of meaningful belief. The incoherent pluralism of the sophisticated intellectual dead ends of postmodernism seems to support this diagnosis. Western reason and belief is in a profound crisis. We now have unprecedented technological power, but no divine wisdom to guide that power towards a truth that, as the psalmist David notes, "is higher than I".⁶⁰ The Good is now out of our reach, and all we have is blind irrational, violent, self interested, "all too human" power – and then we die.

What if Kierkegaard is right? What if the above outlook of agonistic, meaningless despair is not scientific fact, and what if modernity's rational realism is rather an existentially unbelievable denial of the most immediate experiences of human meaning in which we are actually embedded?⁶¹ Indeed, following through on this 'what if' is the pathway of the 'theological turn' in French phenomenology,⁶² that can easily move towards post-secularism as pursued by contemporary thinkers like John Milbank. Yet, so entrenched is 19th century materialistic 'progressivism' in Western academia – even though we no longer overtly believe in the doctrine of cultural progress – that the very idea that some sort of return to a classical metaphysical outlook is possible strikes the secular intellectual ear like either a fairy tale or a regression to irrational and oppressive superstition.

Liberalism fears any threat to secularism, not because liberalism is opposed to violence – look at Hobbes; liberalism is grounded in a commitment to violent state control. Rather, the voluntarism and functional materialism of secular political liberalism upholds the exclusive legislative authority of the state, and the exclusive right of the state to control and exercise violence, and so it is essentially committed to defending its authority and power from any extra-state transcendentally referenced

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 72b: "Now some think that because one must understand the primitives there is no understanding at all; others that there is, but that there are demonstrations of everything. Neither of these views is either true or necessary." As translated by Jonathan Barnes, in volume 1 of *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1995), p117.

⁵⁹ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Harvard University Press, 1985), Chapter 7, "Philosophical Religion", pp305–338. Burkert notes the enormous theological inventiveness of Plato and the profound impact that had on subsequent Platonist and later Neoplatonist thinking in the Classical world.

⁶⁰ Psalm 61:2, Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible

⁶¹ See Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism* (UK, Routledge, 2002) for a close examination of the inherent difficulties of believing nihilism, i.e., the inherently contradictory construction of the belief in nothing as something which is genealogy of modern nihilism. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937) for a powerful existential exposition of the mystery and transcendent framing of ordinary life as we actually experience it.

⁶² Dominique Janicaud, et al., *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2000)

authority – like the church. Liberalism’s model of private liberty guaranteed by the monopolization of violence by the state is deeply opposed to any liturgical and sacramental view of human society, and is, premised on Ockham’s theology, nothing short of religiously committed to a de-sacralized nominalist ideology of social and cosmic atomism. And so any critique of secularism which is not of an irrationalist, agonistic, and ultimately despairing nature is inherently feared as a return to the theocratic political model of medieval Christendom, and as an essential loss of modern individual liberty. Nietzschean naturalistic postmodern irrealism is uncomfortably compatible with hypermodern political pragmatism – both views being committed to atomistic agonism and fundamental ontological relativism – but metaphysically searching post-secularism of a Kierkegaardian hue, upsets the whole post-Ockham Western reality frame.

However, the type of ‘Kierkegaardian’ post-secularism explored by John Milbank and Philip Blond is not an attempt to return us to the pre-secular political structures of Medieval Christendom. Theological post-secularism is an attempt to re-open the transcendent frame of belief to Western reason, and it is an attempt to re-integrate the dis-integrated spheres of human life that modern secularism has isolated. Such post-secularism seeks to re-ground philosophy, existence and politics in the primal human realities of a theologically metaphysical mind, the practise of worship grounded in an enchanted cosmos, and community understood as sacrament and liturgy.⁶³

Apart from its potential to redeem Western meaning, transcendentally referenced post-secularism has a clear advantage over both naturalistic secularism and naturalistic post-secularism when it comes to understanding what is happening on the global scene in relation to politics, religion and power. These advantages flow from simply not assuming that the non-Western world is committed to secularism in any deep and basic manner, and in understanding that Western secularism is itself a profoundly problematic set of conceptual and political assumptions. Yet, unlike Nietzschean post-secularism, this sort of post-secularism does not believing one has to give up on transcendentally framed meaning and reason itself, and this enables it to believe in the validity of reason in distinction to the innate a-rationality of naturalistic postmodernism. And to the extent that Nietzsche does not escape the assumptions of naturalism, he does not genuinely escape the influence of Ockham, and is no real post-secularist.

The basic insight of a genuinely post-secular outlook is to simply not assume that Ockham’s notion of pure nature is self evidently true.⁶⁴ Václav Havel’s “Politics and

⁶³ Phillip Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy* (London, Routledge, 1998); Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 2nd ed., (USA, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997); Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (UK, Blackwell, 1998)

⁶⁴ Interestingly, and somewhat along Durkheim’s lines, even if one assumes that religion is a ‘natural’ feature of human society (and what else could it be if one is a modern materialist?), then one can see what an important ‘natural’ role it plays in restraining power and upholding common values. Perhaps it is just a good scientific observation to hold that we exclude religion from public life, social morality and natural exploitation at our peril. Durkheim was correct to see that secular modernity creates a serious problem for modern Man. Comte was derided for his attempt to construct a modern positivist religion – and there are good reasons to be derisive of any attempt to ‘create’ the sacred when one has no belief in transcendence – and yet his stance is more anthropologically rational than the ‘progressive’ assumption that being rid of religion will open up a bold new world of freedom, rationality and human

Conscience” is a powerful illustration of this type of post-secular outlook in action.⁶⁵ Indeed Havel demonstrates that once one takes transcendence and sacredness seriously, it is, finally, possible to see how our Western conception of purely natural reality has got our knowledge, our technology, our politics, our economics, our religion and our morality into serious difficulty. For where there is no piety restraining natural exploitation and no transcendent grounds giving meaning to morality beyond its purely human construction, then mere socio-instinctive psychological necessity is the only final grounds of behaviour and motivation, and mere calculations of brute power are the only final grounds of ‘rationality’.⁶⁶ In this ‘realist’ modern vision, it is human dignity that is missing. This ‘realism’ puts us profoundly at the mercy of the irrational and violent demons of our own inner natures. Unless we can radically re-sacralise our view of the world and human dignity, ancient themes of hubris, impiety and apocalyptic judgement may become all too relevant to us in the near future.

Conclusion

Our Western way of life is under profound stress from the forces Western wealth, power and knowledge have unleashed on the globe, and from the deep internal difficulties for substantive public moral values embedded in secular Western culture. The threat of religious terrorism to the integrity and durability of our Western way of life is so small in comparison with the problems that the Western way of life itself has generated, that religious terrorism is essentially a non-issue. Yet, in an environment of pressing global insecurity, religious terrorism is a wonderfully politically exploitable non-issue that feeds all of our secular prejudices about the progressiveness and goodness of our modern Western way of life.

President Bush’s aggressive scapegoating of religious terrorism exemplifies an approach to international relations that stimulates mutual mistrust between the delicately transitional, partially-secular Islamic world and the West, and which at the same time produces a smoke screen that allows President Bush to ignore the unjust and potentially catastrophic trajectory of the world order favoured and sustained by Western culture and power. This is a very unhelpful conceptual paradigm out of which to construct peaceable and visionary international relations. This framework, to the contrary, constructs an aggressive, reactionary and belligerently destructive environment of global insecurity.

An interesting feature of the theological history of the West is the linkage between voluntarism and nominalism in the late medieval era. That is, whilst God is withdrawn from nature by nominalism, and placed in the discrete realm of the supernatural, God is also increasingly seen as an absolute (though now distant) sovereign by virtue of Him possessing unlimited power and a totally sovereign will. Thus Calvin’s focus on sovereignty as the first attribute of divinity comes to replace Augustine’s focus on

happiness. In many ways James Lovelock is a contemporary Comte, seeking to harness a materialistic understanding of ‘the sacred’ for rational political purposes.

⁶⁵ Václav Havel, “Politics and Conscience” (1984), in *Open Letters* (New York, Vintage Books, 1992), 249–271.

⁶⁶ Sophocles’ play *Antigone* (Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, UK, Penguin Classics, 2000) shows just how far back the tension between human pragmatic realism and divine authority runs in Western culture. But never has human pragmatism had such a complete upper hand as in the West now.

love as the first attribute of divinity. Given that anthropology was defined by theology in the culturally Christian West until very recently (i.e., people were understood to be created in the image of God) the exercise of will, and the religious mandate to conquer the earth as an expression of Man's sovereignty over nature,⁶⁷ and the push for singular political sovereignty by monarchs and then states, becomes entwined in the thought and politics of the West from late medieval times to the present. So, the atomism and individualism of nominalism, the quarantining of personal beliefs and values from public legality, and the 'realistic' notion of power as unrestrained will, has shaped the development of the political and economic life forms of the West for at least the past 500 years. Even though the discretely supernatural sphere was more or less intellectually killed off by the natural sphere in the nineteenth century – as signalled by Nietzsche's famous 'death of God' – the purely natural sphere is still a theological construct that is intimately implicated in Western instrumental rationality and political pragmatism. So, the exploitative voluntarism that refuses any intrinsic restraint on our pragmatic approach to fossil fuel consumption, the instrumental imperatives of conquest and exploitation over sacredness and preservation in our approach to disenchanting nature, the self-focused naturalistic anthropology of consumerism and the moral blindness of the logic of economic necessity in the global context are all profoundly rooted in the religious heritage of the West. Thus Western theology, as carried forward in the cultural life form of modern secularism, is driving us towards global cataclysm. So, not only does the blindness of Western secularism towards the beliefs and cultural situations of non-Western religious communities of the globe promote global insecurity, but the theology of Western secularism actually defines the power and belief norms that frame the political, economic, knowledge and military structures of the currently dominant global culture.

The future outlook for global security requires some basic shifts in the operational patterns of power and belief if the energy, environmental and economic structures of the present global order are to change radically enough to avert catastrophe. In order to even see the frameworks of belief that uphold the current reality assumptions of the modern secular world view, we must start to understand our own Western theological traditions.

Underpinning President Bush's approach to the national security of the USA is his unconscious captivity to the nominalist and voluntarist theological innovations of William of Ockham. Australian politics, certainly under Mr Howard, has been equally captive to the theological assumptions of Ockham's secularism. Further, in the heyday of economic rationalism and pragmatic materialism in Australian public life – from the Hawke government to the Howard government – theological illiteracy was effectively required of our political leaders.⁶⁸ However, the dynamism of religion in

⁶⁷ See Chapter 5 – "The new meaning of freedom" – of Louis Dupré's *Passage to Modernity* (Yale University Press, 1993, pp 120–144) for a clear exposition of Ockham's voluntarist theology. The manner in which voluntarism forcefully promotes a theological justification for the conquest of nature, and the manner in which this theological outlook is embedded in modern science and technology is again clearly explained by Dupré in his examination of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (ibid, pp 70–73). The conceptual dependence of early modern science on the theological assumptions of nominalist voluntarism is very deep.

⁶⁸ This is not to say that religion was not played as an important vehicle for public manipulation by the politicians of this era. See Maddox, M., *God Under Howard* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2005). However, religion was typically played in a pragmatic manner in this era, characterised by flagrant theological crudity and conceptual incoherence, and always within the secularist frame. I recall former

the global south, and the refusal of religion to simply disappear in the West, coupled with the recent hunger for spirituality in the West, and the growing consciousness that our way of life is damaging the very biosphere, makes it possible for a new generation of political leaders to take religion, theology and cultural self criticism far more seriously. Australia's current Prime Minister, Mr Kevin Rudd, is theologically literate, inter-culturally capable and prepared to seriously address the Australian polity on theological matters.⁶⁹ Further, it seems that Evangelical Christianity in America, now that the religious right has de-secularised it, is beginning to fracturing as a merely conservative political block.⁷⁰ So something of a post-secular critical understanding of Western culture, and a greater sensitivity to the a-secularism of many non-Western global communities, may now be politically possible for Western leaders.

Ironically enough, genuine global security can only come if we embrace the profound insecurity of opening ourselves to fundamental cultural and behavioural change in the West. The refusal to even recognise the necessity for such change has thus far characterised the populist political approach to ameliorating the West's inchoate sense of global insecurity. The politics of fear and ignorance is the politics of preserving the drivers of our real insecurity. Such politics will only exacerbate global catastrophe in the near future. Recognising, with John Milbank, that the foundations of our modern Western way of life are embedded in secular rationality, and are inherently theological, we need political leaders who can analyse our situation from a stance which is critically aware of the role Western secularism plays in the trajectory towards global chaos which we are currently on. Now, it seems, is the time when we need great statesmen and stateswomen of faith, like Wilberforce, Ghandi, King, Havel and Aung San Suu Kyi, who have deep religious sensitivity, moral power and spiritual fortitude, and who can clearly see the theological landscapes that both their culture and the international environment inevitably inhabits.

Australian Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, explaining on the news a few years back that migrants could come to Australia and practise any religion they liked, provided they put their new country first. As someone who went to a Methodist Sunday School, and someone of the era who no doubt had enjoyed the Charlton Heston movies, it is reasonable to assume that somewhere in his formative years, Mr Howard heard about the ten commandments. The first of these commandments makes it clear that nothing is to come before devotion to God for adherents of the Abrahamic religions – more than half the population of the globe. So in the above immigration policy information bite, Mr Howard's secularism is obviously of a 'progressive' type which assumes the erosion and disappearance of the most basic articles of religious belief and practise under the conditions of the modern state. And yet, Mr Howard is also a strong conservative advocate of 'Western values' and 'family values', and he encouraged the role of churches in upholding those values and in providing thrifty and compassionate social services to the Australian community. So a 'liberal' approach to religious freedom is neatly stuck on top of a socio-cultural 'conservative' advocacy of Christian values, whilst all the time, Mr Howard is assuming a fundamentally 'progressive' understanding of religion itself. Further, as Mr Howard's deft dismissal of the first Abrahamic commandment raised no public stir in the Australian community, it is reasonable to assume that Mr Howard's conceptual incoherence and theological ignorance is widespread in the cultural and religious assumptions of Australian society as well.

⁶⁹ Kevin Rudd, "Faith in Politics", *The Monthly*, October 2006, no. 17,

www.themonthly.com.au/tm/?q=node/300

⁷⁰ The American Jim Wallis is an 'Evangelical Radical' and his *God's Politics: why the American Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (UK, Lion, 2005) has been a best seller in the US since it was released, indicating at least a fracturing of the religious right, and potentially something of a radicalization of the Evangelical vote in the USA in the later half of this decade.

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