Beyond Separation: Applying Trilokī Nātha Madan and Ashis
Nandy's Criticisms of Secularism to Rajeev Bhargava's Support of
this Philosophy in Particular

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Summary

This paper applies itself to Bhikhu Parekh's observation with regards to the poor state of the Indian intellectual discourse about secularism. We reason that Parekh primarily considers the state of this very discourse poor, because (i) the Indian works and articles brought out about secularism remain relatively isolated from each other and do not add up to a coherent and comprehensive body of philosophical literature, and because (ii) the Indian works and articles published about secularism still not have received the necessary, critical examination from above. This paper decides to combine these very two interpretations of Parekh's viewpoint and, therefore, on the one hand, brings into conversation with each other Indian advocates and critics of secularism, and, on the other hand, reflects on their works about this very philosophy from above. We do this in particular reference to the support of secularism presented by Rajeev Bhargava (chapter I) and to the criticisms of secularism offered by Trilokī Nātha Madan and Ashis Nandy (chapter II). First, this paper demonstrates that Bhargava, Madan, and Nandy's positions can each be situated and understood in the context of broader debates about secularism, both in and outside the Indian context. Second, we establish that Madan and Nandy's general criticisms of secularism can also be applied to many parts and premises of Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular. This means that this paper also most importantly aims to think and move beyond separation.

Introduction

'Post-independence India has failed to throw up either a major political theorist or significant theoretical works on such subjects as social justice, the specificity of the Indian state, secularism, legitimacy, political obligation, the nature and structure of political argument, the nature of citizenship in a multi-cultural state, the nature and limits of the law, the ideal polity, and the best way to understand and theorize the Indian political reality. There is little attempt even to test the major ideas and categories of Western political theory against the Indian political experience, and to show their ethnocentric biases and limitations. Although some work is beginning to be done in some of these areas, it remains isolated and patchy. Indian political theorists often do not take each other's work seriously enough to comment on it, and the questions raised and the concepts developed by one are not generally taken up by the others. As a result there is no cooperative engagement in a shared form of inquiry; and as yet no sign of the development of an Indian tradition of political theory' (Parekh, 1992, p. 545).

These are the words once expressed by the Indian political thinker Bhikhu Parekh. And with today's knowledge, it is safe to say that they have become crucially important, because soon after they were published, many Indian thinkers did, indeed, begin to bring out works and articles about political theory (see on this point, for instance, Singh and Mohapatra, 2010). Even so, in 2006, Parekh saw the need to repeat and republish his criticism of Indian political theory, and argued that many political concepts continue to require 'rigorous theoretical investigation' (Parekh, 2006, p. 545). What, if anything, does this have to mean, if at least a part of Parekh's initial problem, namely the part that concerns the scarcity of Indian publications, was already being solved between 1992 and 2006? In view of Parekh's own words, this can, on the one hand, mean that, even if more and more works were, indeed, being brought out about Indian political theory, these works remain relatively isolated from each other and do not add up to a coherent and comprehensive body of philosophical literature (Parekh, 1992, p. 545; see also Singh and Mohapatra, 2010; Nath, 2022). On the other hand, it can mean that, even if there were, indeed, being published more and more works on the topic of Indian political theory, these works still not have received the necessary, critical examination from above (Parekh, 1992, p. 545). Now, of course, this second possible meaning is entirely consistent with the first, which implies that a third possible meaning of Parekh's repetition of his criticism of Indian political theory in 2006 also precisely combines these two interpretations.

If we apply ourselves to this third possible meaning, our task at hand is to bring Indian political theorists into conversation with each other and reflect on their works from above. This paper precisely takes up this task and makes it more tangible by directing particular attention to the Indian intellectual discourse about the political concept of 'secularism'. There are at least two reasons for this. The first is that Parekh is almost the clearest about the poor state of this very discourse, even if it is, of course, the philosophy of secularism that continues to play a crucially important role in the Indian context (Parekh, 1992, pp. 540-2). The second reason is that the political concept of secularism has received both many supports and criticisms from Indian thinkers after the publication of Parekh's essay in 1992, and, therefore, paves the perfect way for creating conversation and critical reflection (Iqtidar and Sarkar, 2018). It is impossible, however, to engage with every Indian support and criticism of secularism, which means that we have to make choices. This paper has done this by directing the most of its attention to the support of secularism presented by Rajeev Bhargava (chapter I) and to the criticisms of secularism offered by Trilokī Nātha Madan and Ashis Nandy (chapter II). The reason for this is that both Bhargava's support and Madan and Nandy's criticisms of secularism are the most explicit contributions to the Indian discourse about this political concept. However, it is not as if we do not attend to other supports and criticisms of secularism in this paper's two chapters. By contrast, a great part of how this paper applies itself to the task that Parekh has presented us, precisely consists in demonstrating that Bhargava's support of secularism as well as Madan and Nandy's criticisms of this philosophy do not stand on their own, but can be situated and understood in view of broader debates about secularism, both in and outside the Indian context. The other part of how we aim to tackle Parekh's problem with regards to the quality of Indian political theory, consists in presenting how Madan and Nandy's general criticisms of secularism can also be applied to Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular, because this is not something that Madan and Nandy have done for themselves. This, of course, confirms Parekh's observation with regards to the poor state of the Indian intellectual discourse about secularism, proves the urgency of a critical engagement with Indian supports and criticisms of this political concept, and demonstrates the relevance that this paper has.

I.   Rajeev Bhargava's Philosophy of Secularism

In this paper's first chapter, I characterise Rajeev Bhargava's support of secularism and situate this support in the context of broader, philosophical debates about secularism, both in and outside the Indian context. I develop my characterisation of Bhargava's support of secularism primarily on the basis of his work *Giving Secularism Its Due* (1994), which can be regarded the first and foremost work that Bhargava has brought forward to defend secularism. However, I also make use of and draw reference from Bhargava's other works that he has presented to support secularism, even if I do not discuss everything from these works. I only discuss the parts and premises that are relevant to and relatively easy to include within my portrayal of Bhargava's work *Giving Secularism Its Due*.

So then, in this work *Giving Secularism Its Due*, Bhargava primarily aims 'to save secularism from its critics and give what is due to it' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1784). And, his second purpose is to outline a theory of secularism and offer arguments in its favour. Of course, these two purposes actually come together: If we want to save secularism from its critics and give what is due to it, we have to have some idea of what secularism is and how it can be supported. In turn, if we have some idea of what secularism is and how it can be supported, we can perhaps also save it from its critics and give what is due to it. However, we can do this if and only if secularism encounters critics. Bhargava is clear that it does and that these critics commonly raise three objections in particular. The first is that secularism is incompatible with non-Western worldviews and ways of life. The second is that secularism is insensitive to religion, because it forces people to think of their religion as a personal and private preference. This disentangles religion from community and deprives people of their sense of identity. And, finally, the third criticism is that secularism is not neutral, but partial and biased (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1784).

In *Giving Secularism Its Due*, Bhargava does not explicitly associate these three objections with one or more names of critics of secularism. However, in his postscript to this first and foremost work about secularism, called *What is Secularism For?*, Bhargava (1998) does, in fact, do this, namely with the Indian thinkers Trilokī Nātha Madan and Ashis Nandy. We can infer from this that

Bhargava also most importantly aims to save secularism from the objections that Madan and Nandy have raised to this philosophy. At first glance, this, indeed, appears to disprove Parekh's opinion that Indian political theorists still have not entered into fruitful conversation with each other. And, seen from Bhargava's side, this may, in fact, also be true. However, from Madan and Nandy's side, we continue to require an understanding and critical examination, therefore, of how their general criticisms of secularism can also be applied to Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular.[1] This is because this is not something that Madan and Nandy have done for themselves. It follows that, even if Parekh's criticism of Indian political theory is perhaps mistaken when it comes to Bhargava's works and articles about secularism, it is, in fact, persuasive when it comes to Madan and Nandy's contributions to the Indian discourse about this political concept.

To return to the content of *Giving Secularism Its Due*, Bhargava is able to save secularism from the objections raised by Madan and Nandy to this philosophy if and only if he first develops some idea of what secularism is and how it can be supported. To this end, Bhargava figures that his theory of secularism must answer at least three questions. The first is whether it is possible to separate religion and politics. The second is what justifies the separation of religion and politics. And, the third is how, after separation, religion and politics must relate to each other (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1784).

As for the first question, Bhargava agrees that secularism advocates the separation of religion and politics and that this, indeed, assumes that we can separate religion and politics. However, critics can directly object to this that it is not, in fact, possible to separate religion and politics. This 'objection of impossibility' can mean two things. First, it can mean that it is impossible to offer a non-religious description of an act or event, because the idea of 'the non-religious' does not exist. Second, it can mean that for every non-religious description that we offer of an act or event, we also always invoke a religious one. Therefore, even if we attempt to separate religious and non-religious descriptions, we fail to keep these apart (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1784-5).

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[1] And, as I have already explained, we take up this very task in this paper's second chapter.

In reply, however, Bhargava argues that secularism is incompatible with the first above meaning of the objection of impossibility. Therefore, we also have to reject this interpretation if we, indeed, want to save secularism from its critics and give what is due to it. Bhargava does not believe that this is difficult or illegitimate to do, for it is implausible to think that every act or event has a religious significance. That said, the second meaning of the hereabove objection of impossibility does not have to be rejected. On the contrary, Bhargava confirms that the primary problem with which secularism is concerned, precisely presupposes the truth of this second meaning (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785).

In spite of this, Bhargava ascertains that secularism's acceptance of this second meaning of the objection of impossibility remains compatible with three different claims. The first is that we must not separate religion and politics. This position clearly works against secularism and must, therefore, be rejected. The second claim argues that, given the truth of a part of the second meaning of the objection of impossibility, which is that religion and politics can be separated, we must always keep them apart. And, finally, the third claim states that, given the truth of the second meaning of the objection of impossibility and the impossibility of always keeping religion and politics apart, we are at least required to disconnect them within institutions (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785).

Bhargava himself asserts that, given the difficulty expressed by the second meaning of the objection of impossibility, we have to accept the third claim (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785). This means that secularism must, indeed, at least aim to separate religion and politics within institutions and ascribe to non-religious institutions the duty to organise themselves 'with an eye to fulfil a well-delineated purpose and with the help of more or less explicitly formulated rules, the violation of which almost invariably invites recrimination or punishment' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785). In due course, we come to make an estimate of the values and principles from which these rules most importantly appear to follow for Bhargava.

Turning to the second question of what justifies the separation of religion and politics, Bhargava expresses that we can offer many different arguments in this regard. The first pertains to the ideal of autonomy and claims that religion and politics must be separated because both are powerful institutions that 'command

people's unqualified allegiance' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785). This means that, if religious and political institutions are identical or overlap, their intermixture thwarts more than when they are separated. The second argument relates to the ideal of equality and argues that we must avoid that people's membership in one institution guarantees their membership in another. The third argument applies to the ideal of democracy and maintains that a democracy requires that we prevent the concentration of power in any one institution or in any one group of people. This is because, if people with power and authority in regards to religious affairs can also exercise power and authority in regards to political affairs or the other way around, 'this inevitably undermines democratic values' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785).

In light of the Western liberal tradition of political thought, these democratic values at least include the two moral-political values of justice and liberty. As for the value of justice, on the one hand, many Western liberals argue that the secular state must remain neutral towards religion, because it is unfair if a democratic government, which, of course, must intend to represent every citizen in an equal measure, discriminates against or favours a group of citizens in their pursuit of the good life as they understand it, religious or non-religious. Therefore, many Western liberals argue that it must also be avoided that the secular state with power and authority in regards to politics can equally exercise power and authority in regards to religious affairs or the other way around (see for instance Rawls, 1971; Audi, 2000). On the other hand, when it comes to the value of liberty, many Western liberals claim that the intermixture of religion and politics easily curtails people's personal liberty and deprives them of their choice to be religious or non-religious. Furthermore, Western liberals often assert that the fusion of religion and politics moves the secular state closer to interferences in religion that are unjust and galvanise religious people to seek more political power to oppress other religious traditions. And, finally, Western liberals often express the worry that, from the perspective of many religious people themselves, a political role for their religion distorts how they experience their religion and also want it to function in society (e.g. Audi, 2000).

To turn back to the arguments that Bhargava offers in favour of secularism, his fourth reason refers to the ideal of a completely transparent life and argues that it is worthwhile to live a life free of illusions. However, 'religion is a store house of

superstition and falsehood' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785). Therefore, a life free of illusions is a life without religion. If this is generally true, it must also be true of politics, which means that politics must also be arranged by self-evident principles and be separated from religion (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785).

However, in response to this fourth argument, the Indian thinker Nivedita Menon (2024) expresses the often heard criticism from both Western and Indian scholars that it is unrepresentative of reality and, therefore, wrong that secularism's adherents, including Bhargava, assume that religion is, indeed, 'a store house of superstition and falsehood' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785). This is not only because religion also often carries valuable lessons that non-religious people and institutions can learn from. It is also because it is not as if secular people and institutions are, in fact, always right and rational in regards to how they think and operate in society. By contrast, the foremost reasons and arguments on the basis of Bhargava and other advocates of secularism typically criticise religion, also often count against secular beliefs and practices. Therefore, we have to conclude that Bhargava's fourth 'argument of a completely transparent life' is unconvincing and must be discarded as a means to justify the separation of religion and politics (Menon, 2024; see also Ahdar, 2013). In this paper's second chapter, we come to observe that this argument also closely connects with certain parts and premises of Madan and Nandy's criticisms of secularism.

After having offered the four above arguments to justify the separation of religion and politics, Bhargava makes clear that we can also offer two other arguments, which are different in kind from the first three. The first of these two other arguments is 'the argument from instrumental rationality', which argues that religious disputes cannot be settled and people's religious beliefs cannot be changed by the state's exercise of political power. This is because 'religion is a matter of deep conviction' [and] '[m]atters that lie at this level depth cannot be altered by force' (Bhargava, 1994, 1784). Therefore, it is irrational to mix religion with politics.

It is interesting to note that this fist other argument closely resembles an argument in favour of secularism that originates from the Western liberal tradition of political thought. This is the argument offered by both the two thinkers John

Locke and Pierre Bayle, who also, indeed, together maintain that people's religious beliefs cannot be coerced or changed by the state's exercise of political power, because beliefs are not subject to people's individual control. Therefore, Locke and Bayle likewise conclude that it is irrational to mix religion with politics (Locke, 1689/2010; Bayle, 1686/1987).

The second other argument in kind pertains to the ideal of ordinary existence. On this view, ultimate ideals involve qualitative distinctions of worth, which require a contrast between what is and what is not valuable. Therefore, ultimate ideals that challenge each other involve incompatible ideals of what is and what is not worthy. Furthermore, a conflict between these ideals can deprive people of their opportunity to lead an ordinary existence. In spite of this, in *Religious and Secular Identities*, Bhargava (1995) argues that secularism holds on to the conviction that people's pursuit of ordinary existence is as important as their struggle to acquire otherworldly privileges. Therefore, to protect people's ordinary existence, 'the argument from ordinary existence' concludes that ultimate ideals have to be expunged from politics, 'the principal end of which must be to maintain some procedures of interpersonal conduct so that everyone is able to at least live an ordinary existence' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785). Ultimate ideals are also constitutive of people's religious beliefs and practices. Therefore, religion must likewise be separated from politics (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785).

What lies beneath this train of thought, is the assumption that different religious perspectives and the incompatible, ultimate ideals that these viewpoints entail, are likely to bring about conflict in society. This is because people attach a significant value to the ultimate ideals of their different religious perspectives and are not, therefore, willing to compromise between their own and other people's stance towards the world, at least, that is the idea. And, again, this idea, which Bhargava also appears to uphold, can be understood as an argument in favour of the separation of religion and politics that many other thinkers from Western parts of the world have likewise defended. These thinkers include, but are not limited to the names of Thomas Hobbes, John Rawls, and Robert Audi (Hobbes, 1651/2005; Rawls, 1993; 1997; Audi, 2000). At the same time, however, the above assumption that these thinkers can, indeed, together be said retain for themselves, also often receives the criticism that it seriously overestimates the dangers that apparently

come with people's different religious perspectives and the incompatible, ultimate ideals that these viewpoints entail (see for instance Wolterstorff, 1997; Eberle, 2002).

To return to the content of *Giving Secularism Its Due*, Bhargava explains that the first three arguments from autonomy, equality and democracy in favour of secularism are different in kind from the final two, because the first three arguments are grounded in the view of perfectionism, whereas the final two are not. This means that, for each of the first three arguments, religion and politics have to be separated because of a better life, where 'better' is whatever serves an ultimate ideal, whether this is autonomy, equality, or, indeed, democracy. By contrast, the final two arguments only require the secular state to adopt a policy of restraint and toleration (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1786; see also Nath, 2022).

If this distinction between perfectionism and antiperfectionism is valid, Bhargava reasons, we can broadly distinguish between two categories of secularism. The first is ethical secularism and seeks the separation of religion and politics by virtue of the contribution that this separation makes to the realisation of an ultimate ideal, whether this is autonomy, equality, or democracy. The second category of secularism is political secularism and argues that the separation of religion from politics does not, in fact, have to contribute to the realisation of an ultimate ideal, but must only bring about a better exercise of politics and a more liveable polity (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1786).

After having established this categorisation, Bhargava explains that it is time to dwell a little more on secularism's nature. To this end, he raises the question what kind of separation we are precisely looking for between religion and politics. Bhargava himself distinguishes between two possible answers to this question, both of which can also be regarded answers to the question how, after separation, religion and politics must relate to each other. The first answer identifies separation with exclusion and the second considers separation to denote distance. In turn, as for the first answer, the exclusion of religion from politics can be either robust or mild. When robust, it generates mutual hostility. In this instance, the secular state must be anti-religious. This anti-religiosity can be either interventionist or non-interventionist. In its interventionist form, the secular state actively discourages

people to be religious. In its non-interventionist form, it typifies, what Bhargava calls, 'a hysterical Brahminical attitude', which entails that religion is untouchable and any contact with it contaminates secularism's purity. It is clear that, in this situation, religion becomes a doctrine of political taboo and secularism prohibits any contact with it. By contrast, the mild exclusion of religion from politics entails that religious and political institutions have to operate entirely apart from one another and cannot, therefore, maintain any curiosity towards each other (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1786).

In regards to the second view of separation, Bhargava argues that this perspective does not, in fact, require the total exclusion of religion from politics, but only expects the secular state to take, what he himself calls, 'a principled distance' from religion. In *Political Secularism*, Bhargava (2009) explains that this principled distance most importantly includes a flexible approach in regards to the inclusion or exclusion of religion into politics and the engagement or disengagement of the secular state with religion. Bhargava illustrates that both this inclusion or exclusion, and this engagement or disengagement, are to depend on the context, nature, or current state of the religions in society to which the secular state most importantly relates. Furthermore, Bhargava makes clear that both this inclusion or exclusion, and this engagement or disengagement, are to be organised on the basis of principles that together form the foundation of secularism and flow from its commitment to certain substantive values (Bhargava, 2009, pp. 649-50; see also 2014, p. 54).

Before we spell out these certain substantive values, it is interesting to indicate that it is precisely this part and premise of Bhargava's support of secularism that has exerted a great influence on the development and establishment of other philosophical supports of secularism. One of these other supports is Charles Taylor's philosophy of secularism as presented in his work *Why We Need A Radical Redefinition of Secularism* (2011). This is because, in this work, Taylor explicitly refers to the works of Bhargava to argue that secularism does not, in fact, require a separation of religion and politics, but, indeed, calls for a principled distance of the secular state from religion (Taylor, 2011, p. 34). Of course, Taylor provides a different substance to his overall support of secularism than Bhargava does, but it

is and remains valuable to observe that Taylor as well as other philosophers have taken over certain parts and premises of Bhargava's philosophical support of secularism (for this point, see also Nath, 2022).

To turn back to the certain substantive values to which secularism is committed, in *Is Secularism a Value in Itself?*, Bhargava (2000) makes clear that the first of these substantive values is that secularism aims to prevent that people's incompatible ultimate ideals bring about conflict in society (Bhargava, 2000, p. 104). And, as we have already observed, secularism most importantly does this in its more fundamental effort to protect people's opportunity to lead an ordinary existence (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785; 1995, pp. 340-1). The second substantive value is secularism's commitment to people's religious liberty, which has two dimensions. The first is the individual liberty of every member of a religious community. Secularism provides people this religious liberty primarily because, in respects to most religions, only one or two interpretations of core beliefs and practices dominate. In view of this dominance, it is crucial that every citizen is imparted the right to criticise, revise, or challenge their religion's dominant interpretations, and, at the very extreme, 'to reject the religion into which one is born and further, given ideal conditions of deliberation, to freely embrace another religion' (Bhargava, 2000, p. 104). In turn, the second dimension of people's religious liberty is that secularism aims to assure that every religious person is granted the very same measure of rights, irrespective of whether they maintain a dominant or non-dominant religion in society. Indeed, '[i]n any multi-religious society, liberties granted to one group must also be available in equal measure to others' (Bhargava, 2000, p. 104). Of course, many other thinkers than Bhargava have also, both in the present and in the past, placed emphasis on the importance of ascertaining that everyone in society is provided the liberty to arrange their religious beliefs and practices as they want, as long as, of course, this arrangement does not interfere with how other people want to live their life. However, Bhargava's support of people's religious liberty, and particularly his elaboration on this substantive value's first dimension, appears to come uniquely close to William James' defence. This is because, in his work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James (1902/2020) also argues that people's religious experiences are diverse and not subject to a definitive interpretation, which, indeed, means that people's religious

commitments or their 'will to believe', as James calls it, is up to each individual to decide for themselves. If we, therefore, properly understand the nature of people's religious beliefs, we have to respect the religious liberty of others and learn to tolerate our differences. I assume that is redundant to explain how close this train of thought comes to Bhargava's support of people's religious liberty.

Finally, therefore, Bhargava also argues that secularism is committed to the substantive value of people's equality of citizenship, and, again, this value has two dimensions. The first is passive and entails that every citizen must be ascertained physical security, a threshold of material well-being, and a private sphere in which others cannot interfere. The second dimension is active and entails that every citizen must be allowed to participate in a society's public sphere and, more particularly, be entitled to partake in democratic dialogue 'that is open to the expression of a wide range of competing views and carried out under conditions where these views can be responsibly assessed' (Bhargava, 2000, p. 106).

Bhargava argues that it is, indeed, only on the basis of the three above, substantive values that secularism allows for the inclusion or exclusion of religion into politics and for the engagement or disengagement of the state with religion. By virtue of the theory of principled distance, therefore, secularism maintains that the state can intervene in religion if and only if this intervention creates and maintains order in society, protects people's religious liberty, and operates on the basis of their equality of citizenship (Bhargava, 2009, pp. 649-50; see also 2014, p. 54). This means that the secular state can neither completely exclude religious considerations from politics nor maintain a strict neutrality towards them. Indeed, it cannot in advance decide that it always refrains from religion or that it interferes in different religions in an equal manner. Neither can the secular state ascertain that it always relates to every religion in exactly the same way or intervenes in each religion to precisely the same extent or in the same manner. The most that secularism can and also must, in fact, ensure, is that the relationship between the state and religion is guided by the three above substantive values and that the state relates to religion on the basis of whether these substantive values are promoted or undermined (Bhargava, 2014, pp. 51-4).

At the start of this paper's first chapter, I assured that, in due course, we would come to make an estimate of the values and principles from which the more or less explicitly formulated rules on the basis of which non-religious institutions have to organise themselves, most importantly appear to follow for Bhargava. And now that we have, indeed, gained an understanding of the primary values and principles that Bhargava associates with secularism, it appears safe to say that these more or less explicitly formulated rules most importantly have to develop from secularism's three objectives to create and maintain order in society, to protect people's individual liberty, and to operate on the basis of their equality of citizenship.

Furthermore, Bhargava himself affirms that his explanation of the theory of principled distance completes the outline of his theory of secularism and allows him to distinguish between four more particular versions of secularism. The first is the ethical secularism that excludes religion from politics. The second is the ethical secularism that requires the state to keep a principled distance from religion. The third is the political secularism that excludes ultimate ideals from politics. And, finally, the fourth is the political secularism that demands the state to take on a principled distance from people's ultimate ideals (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1786). What this categorisation most importantly demonstrates, is that Bhargava attaches much importance to the difference between the two notions of exclusion and distance for how we think that secularism ought to be defined and function in society.

After having placed emphasis on this difference, therefore, Bhargava turns to the criticism that secularism is insensitive to religion, because it forces people to think of their religion as a personal and private preference. This disentangles religion from community and deprives people of their sense of identity. In *Political Secularism*, Bhargava elaborates on this criticism and specifies that it most importantly revolves around the objection that it is a mistake of secularism to assume that only religious people bring into politics controversial passions and sentiments. This is because the consequence of this assumption is that secularism only demands from religious people that they refrain, if not exclude from politics and the public sphere, their personal viewpoints, even if this means that secularism, accordingly, fails to respect religious people's moral agency and violates its principle of equal human respect. Furthermore, it means that religious citizens are

forced to form their own public sphere in society, in which resentment and prejudice easily flourish and become difficult to rebut (Bhargava, 2009, pp. 644-5).

In response to this 'criticism of insensitivity', Bhargava accepts that ethical secularism can, indeed, be said to offend people who primarily consider themselves religious and desire their religion to occupy and dominate the public sphere. What is more, this offence exacerbates when ethical secularism also, on top, aims to exclude religion from politics. Therefore, Bhargava concludes that, if secularism is identified with the theory's first of four versions, religious and non-religious people can, indeed, 'hardly ever live together' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1786).

In spite of this, Bhargava emphasises that we do not necessarily have to equate secularism with ethical secularism. It can also mean political secularism, which does, in fact, stand 'a good chance of gaining the allegiance of believers' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787). This is because political secularism only helps, hinders, or excludes a religion from politics and the public sphere of society on the same grounds as it perhaps does with regards to other religious and non-religious viewpoints. Furthermore, in contrast to ethical secularism, political secularism does not require religious people to give up everything of significance, but only asks them to give up a little bit of what is of exclusive importance, which it does in an effort 'to sustain that which is generally valuable' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787). And, finally, political secularism does not expect that the state improves the quality of people's existence, which means that religious people can also approve of it. Indeed, 'even believers can accept the separation of religion from politics, even they can be secular' (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1786-7).

Bhargava considers this response sufficient to address the criticism of insensitivity and, therefore, moves on to discussing the criticism that secularism is incompatible with non-Western worldviews and ways of life. In response to this objection, Bhargava argues that it must not be forgotten that secularism originally developed in response to situations of interreligious conflict and, more exactly, to the situation of interreligious conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Western and Northern Europe. In these circumstances, the only way to exclude people's blind pursuit of ultimate ideals, to expel from public life the irrationality that this pursuit can generate, and to preserve people's opportunity to lead an ordinary

existence, was, is, and remains to accept political secularism. Bhargava argues that this argument does, therefore, not only apply to Western circumstances, but also to non-Western circumstances. This means that the development of political secularism is not, in fact, peculiar to the history of Western countries, but 'part of the family of views that arises in response to a fundamental human predicament' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787).

There are at least two interesting dimensions to this conclusion, and, in fact, to Bhargava's engagement with 'the criticism of incompatibility' more generally. The first is that Bhargava's reply to this objection completely falls in with the argument in favour of secularism offered by another Indian thinker, Rochana Bajpai. This is because, in *Reframing Secularism: Religion, Nation, and Minorities in India,* Bajpai (2014) also establishes the conclusion that secularism is a universally understandable and applicable system of ideas, even if the separation of the state and religion assumes many different forms across the globe (Bajpai, 2014).

However, the flip side of this conclusion is that Bhargava does, in fact, appear to differ from the Indian thinker Akeel Bilgrami when it comes to their philosophical supports of secularism.[2] This is because the conclusion that secularism arises in response to a fundamental human predicament appears to mean that secularism does not really require people's deliberative exchange of reasons and arguments to successfully install itself in society, whereas Bilgrami is of the philosophical opinion that secularism does actually require negotiation amongst people's different religious and non-religious perspectives to establish itself. Indeed, in his work *Secularism, Nationalism, and Modernity*, Bilgrami (1998) makes clear that secularism 'must emerge from bottom up with the moderate political voices and assumptions of different communities being brought into negotiating both procedure and substance' (Bilgrami, 1998, p. 399; see also Losonczi and Van Herck, 2015, pp. 9-11). However, we can offer at least three reasons for why Bhargava and Bilgrami's philosophies of secularism do not, in fact, really differ from each other in this respect. The first is that Bhargava's choice of the word 'arise' in the hereabove cited conclusion leaves open the possibility that

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[2] This also, of course, appears to mean that Bajpai and Bilgrami appear to differ from each other with respects to their philosophical support of secularism.

he still actually follows Bilgrami in regards to the right way in which secularism must install itself in society. The second reason is that Bilgrami argues that, even if secularism requires the deliberative exchange of reasons and arguments amongst religious and non-religious people, the outcome of this exchange is and remains that, '*after* climbing up the ladder of dialectical engagement with religious politics, via a dialogue with acknowledged substantive religious commitments in politics, this emergent secularism might be in a position to kick that ladder of religious politics away' (Bilgrami, 1998, p. 401, emphasis in original). This means that, even if Bilgrami thinks that secularism can only emerge from a process of argumentative negotiation between religious and non-religious citizens, he still appears to follow Bhargava in regards to the opinion that secularism, indeed, arises in response to a fundamental human predicament, irrespective of time, context, and the arrangement of the alternative, religious exercise of politics. And, finally, the third reason for why Bhargava and Bilgrami's philosophies of secularism do not, in fact, really differ from each other in regards to the origins and causes of secularism is that, in the end, Bhargava arrives at a philosophical support of secularism that closely resembles how Bilgrami characterises and defends secularism. We return to this philosophical support of secularism offered by Bhargava at the end of this paper's first chapter.

To again take up Bhargava's engagement with the criticism of incompatibility, Bhargava makes clear that he is aware that critics can continue to argue that, even if political secularism is said to have an anti-perfectionist character, it still actually includes a perfectionist bias of its own. This is the bias that the right is more important than and prior to the good, which is an unworkable standpoint, because it is either impossible to draw a distinction between the right and the good, or the right presupposes its own constitutive good. This means that the good is actually more important than and prior to the right, and that political secularism is grounded in its own conception of the good life, its own comprehensive set of ultimate ideals' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787).

Before we see how Bhargava responds to this criticism of incompatibility, it is interesting to observe that its main message cannot only be connected with the criticisms of secularism offered by Madan and Nandy, as Bhargava already does in 1998, but also be embedded in a longer history of Western philosophical

discussions of religion and politics. Thus, for instance, in *After Virtue*, the British philosopher Alasdair MacIntryre (1985) argues that any political morality, including the philosophy of secularism, therefore, is necessarily based on interpretations of concepts that neither are nor can become universally valid. This is because the most important concepts on which secularism aims to ground itself, including the two concepts of justice and equality, are always and everywhere employed in many different ways by people with many different, moral-political perspectives. Therefore, MacIntyre concludes that secularism must not, in fact, be regarded a neutral political morality, but rather as one more, comprehensive doctrine in a series of deep moral-political disagreements (MacIntyre, 1985).

In spite of this criticism, Bhargava argues that it can persuasively be refuted. To do this, he first draws a distinction between a strong and weak form of exclusion. On the one hand, strong exclusion requires that any ideal is excluded from politics. On the other hand, weak exclusion only requires that *ultimate* ideals are excluded from politics and, therefore, has enough space for ideals 'that lie at the intersection of incompatible ultimate ideals' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787). Furthermore, political secularism requires the exclusion of ultimate ideals from politics to protect people's opportunity to lead an everyday existence. This means that political secularism is not necessarily hostile to ultimate ideals, but only proposes that we put them into their proper place. And, finally, even if political secularism pursues to exclude people's ultimate ideals from politics, it does not have to do this indiscriminately. Indeed, what political secularism requires, is the exclusion of *controversial* ultimate ideals from the public sphere, which are the ideals that are incompatible with secularism's substantive values, do not allow for productive debate, and cannot be scrutinised by the use of public reason (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1787-8).

Bhargava argues that 'this reintroduction of ultimate ideals into secularism', as he calls it, also clarifies the relationship between the right and the good. It is clear that the right derives its point from the good. However, this does not mean that any particular good has priority over the right, irrespective of context. Instead, we require the right to realise the good. In other words, we require the right because people's pursuit of the good life is unstable, and perhaps even impossible, without it. Therefore, whenever people's ultimate ideals are incompatible and are in conflict

with each other, the right has priority over the good. However, this does not mean that the right is more important than or prior to people's ultimate ideals. Instead, the entire point of the right is to serve small, and perhaps even some uncontroversial, high ideals. The right is not more important than or prior to these ideals, which means that secularism does not, in fact, include a perfectionist bias of its own (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1788).

To move on, therefore, the third criticism Bhargava engages with holds that secularism is not neutral, but partial and biased, because it favours the ideals of non-religious people and disadvantages religious citizens (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1788). Notice that, at first sight, this criticism appears the same as the already discussed objection that secularism is not neutral, but has a perfectionist bias of its own and is also grounded, therefore, in its own conception of the good life. However, the important difference between these two criticisms is the reason for why secularism is not considered neutral. As for the first criticism, secularism is not considered neutral because it is only one more political morality amongst others, as MacIntyre frames it, for instance. However, as for the second criticism, secularism is not actually considered neutral because it favours the ideals of non-religious people and thwarts the purposes of religious citizens. Even so, what both criticisms do actually have in common, is that they can, again, not only both be connected with the criticisms of secularism offered by Madan and Nandy, but also, on top, be situated in Western philosophical discussions of secularism (for this second point, see for example Laborde and Bardon, 2017).

This being said, Bhargava formulates his response to the second criticism that secularism is not neutral, but partial and biased by first exploring how advocates of this criticism, including, therefore, Madan and Nandy, precisely understand political neutrality. He thinks that this understanding most importantly revolves around the idea that the state must always, in both beginning and end, in both intention and outcome, and irrespective of context, help or hinder the good of everyone in an equal degree. Bhargava refers to this view of political neutrality as 'the strict objectivist perspective' and considers it a view from a place that does not actually exist in this world. Therefore, he also labels it 'a god's eye view of political neutrality' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1788).

As expected, the criticism that Bhargava offers of this strict objectivist view of political neutrality is that it does not really matter what a god's eye view requires in regards to the state's exercise of politics. Politics is created and organised by humans, which means that it is also much more interesting to dwell on what we ourselves think functions as a proper account of political neutrality. Bhargava posits that this is the view that argues that, even if it is, of course, good to aim to achieve identity of outcome where possible, it is enough if the secular state *intends* to help or hinder people in an equal degree to be considered politically neutral, irrespective of whether the state's intentions are, in fact, really met. And, in turn, the secular state intends to help or hinder people in an equal manner if it only positions itself in relation to people's beliefs and practices in view of considerations and standards that bear on the relevant, specified context at hand (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1788-9).

Bhargava articulates that this idea of appropriate considerations and standards implies that certain goods must enter and others must exit the picture of his view of political neutrality. Indeed, Bhargava emphasises that the secular state always only aims to maintain political neutrality with respects to certain goods in order to secure that certain other goods are, in fact, realised, which are considered more significant in the relevant and specified context at hand. Therefore, political neutrality is always for something, 'it has a point, a purpose' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1789). Furthermore, it is never brought into play with respects to everything and everyone. And, even if, outcome neutrality of the god's eye view of political neutrality is occasionally possible, it is never guaranteed. Therefore, in most contexts, Bhargava concludes that it is more reasonable to only hope for intention neutrality, which, as we have already established, argues that '[a]lways, at the beginning, with respect to some good in a specified context, the state must intend to help or hinder all relevant individuals and groups in an equal degree' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1789).

Bhargava makes clear that this specified context of intention neutrality refers to the context in which most secular states of today have to operate, which is the context of ineradicable, religious and non-religious diversity (hereafter simply 'the context of diversity'). In this context, secularism's commitment to people's opportunity to lead an ordinary existence overrides the theory's attachment to

people's ultimate ideals. This entails that secularism guarantees every citizen the opportunity to live an ordinary life, 'crucial to which is the availability of material goods and self-esteem' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1789). Bhargava affirms that 'this much partiality is already a constitutive feature of a politically secular state' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1789). In fact, he even agrees with critics of secularism that it means that secularism is not neutral, but, indeed, partial and biased. In spite of this, he does not share the reason for why critics of secularism arrive at this conclusion. This is because Bhargava does not think that secularism is partial and biased because it apparently favours the ideals of non-religious people and disadvantages religious citizens, but because secularism is only meant to be neutral to people who are likewise committed to the different small ideals enumerated hereabove. In other words, secularism is only meant to be neutral to people who also avoid and object bringing into the public sphere controversial ultimate ideals to impose on others their personal preferences, irrespective of how people's controversial ultimate ideals affect others or what suffering their personal preferences cause. In conclusion, therefore, Bhargava argues that the secular state is politically neutral, if, in the context of diversity, and in virtue of people's opportunity to lead an ordinary existence, 'its policies intend to help or hinder in an equal degree all those sensitive to this context and committed to these goods' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1789).

Against the second criticism that secularism is not neutral, but partial and biased, Bhargava ascertains that it, accordingly, follows that people, including religious citizens, who also conform themselves to norms without which it becomes impossible to lead an ordinary existence, can, in fact, legitimately expect their secular state to offer them the same amount of help as it does to other people. Furthermore, both religious and non-religious citizens can, in fact, legitimately expect that their secular state is and remains neutral when disputes about their different viewpoints arise, even if, of course, secularism is, again, only meant to be neutral to people who display the same commitment as the theory itself does to certain small ideals (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1789). Therefore, Bhargava concludes that the real crux of the matter is that, if we are forced to choose between a god's eye view of political neutrality or secularism's forward partiality, 'sensible realism dictates that we select the latter' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1789).

There are at least two interesting aspects to this discussion that Bhargava develops with the second criticism that secularism is not neutral, but partial and biased. The first is that his support of intention neutrality in favour of outcome neutrality is practically identical to Charles Larmore's support of neutrality in terms of procedure in preference to neutrality in terms of effect. Larmore presents this practically identical support in his work *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (1987) and as his two above terms already suggest, this support precisely corresponds to how Bhargava arrives at the conclusion that it is more reasonable to hope for intention neutrality than for outcome neutrality. Indeed, on the basis of the very similar distinction between neutrality in terms of procedure and neutrality in terms of effect, Larmore also reaches the conclusion that, even if it is, of course, good to aim to achieve identity outcome where possible, it is enough if the secular state intends to help or hinder people in an equal degree to be considered politically neutral (Larmore, 1987). Bhargava himself does not yet recognise this similarity between his own and Larmore's philosophy in *Giving Secularism Its Due*, but does make it explicit in his postscript *What is Secularism For?* (Bhargava, 1998, p. 512).

The second interesting dimension to Bhargava's engagement with the above criticism that secularism is not neutral, but partial and biased is that his support of intention neutrality in favour of outcome neutrality leads him to endorse a view of political neutrality that we can safely call 'Kantian'. The reason is that Bhargava's characterisation of what intention neutrality precisely means on the scale of the secular state, closely resembles the normative prominence that Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy gives to a person's individual intentions in respects to other individuals (Rawling, 2023).

Before Bhargava ends his discussion of political neutrality, he also, in passing, reflects on the philosophical debate about the distinction drawn between intention neutrality and neutrality of procedure. According to neutrality of procedure, state policies must be justified without the appeal to the presumed intrinsic superiority of whatever given conception of the good life. However, can and should state policies actually be neutral in this sense? Bhargava answers that, in certain circumstances, they can and should. This is because, to gain political legitimacy, the secular state must either rely on justifications framed without reference to any religion or also commit itself to reasons given by other religious

and non-religious traditions. This, of course, invites the criticism that, for people to give up their religious reasons for the secular state, is to give up an important part of their identity. However, in response, Bhargava argues that the cost of not giving up people's religious reasons for the secular state, is much greater. Furthermore, in spite of our differences, we have to live together. And, finally, the purpose of providing reasons for the existence of secular state, is not only to convince ourselves, but also others. Therefore, Bhargava concludes that religious people must realise that, in certain contexts, to supply only religious reasons for the secular state, is unjustified and counterproductive (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1789-90).

Bhargava acknowledges that it can still be argued that, although procedural neutrality is desirable, it is far too stringent to expect from people to forget about their religious identity, even if it is only for a certain time and in certain contexts. Indeed, this is perhaps relatively easy for people who see their religion as a private and personal preference, but it is almost impossible for people whose identity is primarily religious. However, Bhargava's response is that 'it is hardly anyone's claim that religious identity has to be forgotten, only that in some specified contexts it need not be publicly exhibited' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1790). Furthermore, religious people do not have to furnish justifications for the secular state even when these justifications contradict the basic tenets of their religion. Indeed, they must not only be compatible, but also be extractable from people's religious perspective. However, they must likewise, at the same time, be derivable from other religious worldviews, and by reason of political legitimacy, be formulated in a language that is understandable to every citizen, irrespective of whether they are religious or not. Bhargava does not think that this is a particularly severe requirement to meet, especially when the alternative is that people face each other as opponents in open and continuous discord (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1790).

Again, there are different interesting dimensions to this engagement that Bhargava develops with the philosophical debate about the distinction drawn between intention neutrality and neutrality of procedure. The first is that his argument that, to gain political legitimacy, the secular state must either rely on justifications framed without reference to any religion or also commit itself to reasons given by other religious and non-religious perspectives, resembles many

Western philosophical supports of secularism, including the philosophies of secularism by the early Rawls, Audi, Larmore, and Jürgen Habermas. Of course, each of these thinkers formulates their support of secularism on the grounds of different purposes, reasons and arguments. Thus, for instance, the early Rawls argues that, if citizens intend to effectively deliberate about constitutional essentials of moral-political justice, they together have 'the duty of civility' to only appeal to public reason to advocate their standpoint. This because essential matters of moral-political justice concern the arrangement of everyone's everyday existence, regardless of whether people are religious or not (Rawls, 1993). Meanwhile, Larmore, for instance, argues that the exercise of politics must be justified without reference to any religious or non-religious perspective, because every citizen deserves to be respected as a person or as an end-in-themselves. This means that the exercise of politics must be justified to every person with whom this exercise is concerned, again, irrespective of whether people are religious or not (Larmore, 1996). In spite of this, it is clear that this argument still closely resembles Rawls' above argument, which means that it is and remains generally credible to bring together these Western supports of secularism and draw the conclusion that Bhargava's argument that, to gain political legitimacy, the secular state must either rely on justifications framed without reference to any religion or also commit itself to reasons given by other religious and non-religious perspectives, does, indeed, echo Western philosophical supports of secularism.

The second interesting aspect to Bhargava's engagement with the philosophical debate about intention neutrality and neutrality of procedure is that the main criticism that he discusses of the second variant of political neutrality can, on the one hand, also be connected with the criticisms of secularism offered by Madan and Nandy, and, on the other hand, be associated with Western criticisms of supports of neutrality of procedure. We return to Madan and Nandy's criticisms of secularism in this paper's second chapter and, therefore, only, at this juncture, attend to what Western critics of secularism have to say about philosophical supports of neutrality of procedure as the early Rawls, Audi, Larmore, Habermas, and Bhargava himself present them.

The first Western criticism of these different supports comes from the two philosophers Nicholas Wolterstorff and Christopher Eberle, who both argue that, by asking citizens to put aside their religious identity to justify a secular arrangement of politics, advocates of neutrality of procedure seriously underestimate the importance that religion has for how people live their lives and for the means that they consider themselves to possess to support their moral-political perspective (Wolterstorff, 1997; Eberle, 2002).

A second Western criticism of philosophical supports of neutrality of procedure stems from the philosopher Jeffrey Stout, who in his work *Democracy and Tradition* (2009), brings forward the standpoint that people's abidance by Habermas, Larmore, and also, for instance, Bhargava's principle that the exercise of politics must be justified without reference to only one or certain religious and non-religious perspectives, hereafter simply 'Bhargava principle of political justification', does not really eradicate the frustration that the alternative, religious exercise of politics engenders according to advocates of secularism. This is because many religious people presume that their abidance by Bhargava's principle of political justification necessarily compromises their loyalty to the core beliefs and practices of their religion. After all, if religious people are prohibited to support the exercise of political power on the basis of strong, but exclusively religious reasons, they also, in consequence, consider themselves prohibited to follow the core beliefs and practices of their religion. However, for many religious citizens, this is, of course, really worrisome, since they often consider themselves to have more important, moral and theological obligations to do, in fact, adhere to the core beliefs and practices of their religion. What is more, Stout makes clear that a great number of secular citizens will also, in fact, be frustrated by the burden that Bhargava's principle of political justification places on the shoulders of religious citizens. This is because, according to these secular citizens, every other citizen than they themselves must also possess the right to make political decisions as their personal conscience dictates, which means that the exercise of this individual right necessarily forces religious citizens to violate Bhargava's principle of political justification, albeit for really good reasons. Therefore, Stout concludes that Bhargava's principle of political justification is unconvincing and must be

discarded, even if he does not, of course, relate this conclusion to Bhargava's philosophical support of secularism in particular (Stout, 2009).

To end, a third interesting dimension to Bhargava's engagement with the philosophical debate about the distinction drawn between intention neutrality and neutrality of procedure is that his support of the second variant of political neutrality again appears to mean that Bhargava presents a different philosophical support of secularism than Bilgrami does. I say 'again', because remember that, at an earlier stage of this paper, I also claimed that, even if Bhargava's argument that the development of political secularism is part of the family of views that arises in response to a fundamental human predicament appears to indicate that Bhargava does, indeed, present a different philosophical support of secularism than Bilgrami does, we can offer at least three, different reasons for why Bhargava and Bilgrami's philosophies of secularism do not, in fact, really differ from each other in this respect. And, indeed, it again holds true that, even if, at first glance, Bhargava's elaboration on the principle of political justification appears to mean that he actually denies that secularism requires negotiation amongst people's different religious and non-religious perspectives to successfully install itself in society, we are, as before, provided solid ground to argue against this first appearance. In this case, this is because Bhargava's elaboration on what his support of neutrality of procedure precisely means in moral-political practice, includes as one of two options Bhargava's normative proposal that the secular state must rely on more than one or certain religious and non-religious perspectives to establish itself in society. And, indeed, this option, again, appears perfectly compatible with Bilgrami's argument that secularism can only emerge from a process of argumentative negotiation between religious and non-religious citizens (Bilgrami, 1994; 1998).

Therefore, to move on to a final criticism that Bhargava discusses of secularism, certain critics are said to argue that secularism does not have a conception of togetherness, even if it does, in fact, purport to provide a way to live together. It is not entirely clear whether and if so, how, this criticism precisely connects with the criticisms of secularism offered by Madan and Nandy. In spite of this, it can, in fact, be identified with criticisms of secularism offered by certain Western scholars, including the two thinkers Roger Scruton and the already named, Michael J. Sandel. As for the first thinker, in *The Meaning of Conservatism*, Scruton

(1984) argues that secularism and modernity are unable to secure the social cohesion that is necessary for present-day democracies to ensure that citizens consider themselves sufficiently connected to each other, and to confirm that people have at their disposal a common frame of reference to make coherent, collective decisions (Scruton, 1984). As for Sandel, in turn, in his work *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1998), he argues that, in order to ascertain that citizens can experience social cohesion, contemporary democracies must in some way privilege one or more, religious institutions. This is primarily because one of the most important purposes of a democratic society must be to guarantee that every citizen possesses the necessary resources to live a meaningful life, and one such resource precisely comprises the sense of belonging to a common culture that is rooted in religious traditions, as opposed to a sense of rootlessness and social fragmentation (Sandel, 1998).

Bhargava addresses this criticism of secularism by first situating it in a broader philosophical debate between liberals and communitarians, which he thinks most importantly revolves around a distinction between the politics of living together and the politics of living together well. Bhargava illustrates that these two types of politics involve different degrees of community: To live together live together well requires a high degree of community, whereas only living together is possible with a relatively low level of community. Furthermore, on the one hand, the politics of living together is standardly attributed to liberals, who are committed to a low level of community. By contrast, the politics of living together well is typically ascribed to communitarians, who are committed to a high level of community. Bhargava confirms that this view of liberals and communitarians is not entirely inaccurate. Indeed, no-nonsense liberals believe that living together well is either impossible or unacceptable, whereas no-nonsense communitarians presume that one either lives together well or does not live together at all. For both, therefore, it is an all or nothing game. Communitarians believe in the constitutive importance of communities, that such communities must be dense and finally, and that such dense and final communities must be political. Liberals believe that such dense and final political communities are chimerical, but share with communitarians the view that only such communities make possible living together well. Therefore, 'they give up altogether the notion of living together well' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1790).

To return to the criticism that secularism does not have a conception of togetherness, Bhargava agrees that this argument holds true for political secularism. Indeed, political secularism 'has an extremely weak conception of community, if at all' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1790). This is because people's respect for minimal conditions of human interaction, for which political secularism most importantly advocates, does not entail that every citizen who we minimally respect also is or, therefore, becomes a member of our own community. True, we owe minimal respect to every member of our community, but from this it does not follow that everyone to whom we owe minimal respect can be considered a member of our own community. Clearly, therefore, 'political secularism fails to furnish a criterion of community, of citizenship' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1790). Indeed, it does tell us what, if we decide to live together, we must minimally do with respects to each other, but it does not actually say with whom we must live together or how can live together well (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1790).

In spite of this, Bhargava does not think that we must completely give up the notion of living together well. And, fortunately, neither do we actually have to do this. This is because we do not only have at our disposal a political variant of secularism, but also an ethical version. This version separates religion from politics by reason of an ultimate ideal and entails that we must consider religion and politics separate, self-limiting spheres in and of society. Bhargava articulates that this separation is linked to a distinct conception of toleration and what it means to live together in a context of diversity. This is the understanding that, in a society in which we, indeed, uphold many different beliefs and practices for ourselves, we tolerate each other not despite our disagreements, but on the basis of the shared understanding that our incompatible ideals cannot always be realised at the same time and in the same place. As a result, toleration and pluralism become two of the very high ideals that require the separation of religion and politics. Bhargava concludes that this, in turn, presents us a version of secularism that has barely found a mention in the hereabove discussion, but does, in fact, allow for a conception of togetherness (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1790).

In his postscript to *Giving Secularism Its Due*, called *What is Secularism For?,* Bhargava works out this possibility in more detail. He does this by making a difference between hyper-substantive and ultra-procedural secularism, both of

which Bhargava, accordingly, distinguishes from contextual secularism. On the one hand, hyper-substantive secularism rejects rules and procedures and intends to separate religion and politics purely on the basis of ultimate ideals. On the other hand, ultra-procedural secularism is sceptical of ultimate ideals and intends to separate religion and politics purely on the basis of rules and procedures (Bhargava, 1998, pp. 513-4).

In contrast to hyper-substantive and ultra-procedural secularism, contextual secularism intends to separate religion and politics by bringing together ultimate ideals and procedures. This means that, different from ultra-procedural secularism, contextual secularism embraces ultimate ideals and accepts that people bring them into the public sphere (Bhargava, 1998, p. 515). However, when an incompatibility between people's ultimate ideals generates conflict in society and compromises their opportunity to lead an ordinary existence, contextual secularism also relies on a certain set of rules and procedures to control and sometimes even exclude from a society's public sphere, people's controversial ultimate ideals. These rules and procedures are most importantly guided by principles that emanate from secularism's commitment to the values of liberty and equality.[3] Bhargava points out that this sensitivity to rules and procedures, in turn, is what makes contextual secularism sets apart from hyper-substantive secularism (Bhargava, 1998, pp. 515, 536-7).

Bhargava makes clear that he himself supports contextual secularism and explains that the primary purposes of this version of secularism are to secure people's intrinsic and equal human dignity, to prevent discrimination on the grounds of their religious or non-religious perspectives, and to manage conflict between the different ultimate ideals that people nowadays maintain for themselves. Furthermore, different from both hyper-substantive and ultra-procedural secularism, which both require the exclusion of religion from politics, contextual secularism adopts a principled distance from religion and, therefore, permits the

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[3] This confirms our interpretation that the more or less explicitly formulated rules on the basis of which non-religious institutions have to organise themselves according to Bhargava, do, indeed, most importantly have to emerge from and develop on secularism's three objectives to create and maintain order in society, to protect people's individual liberty, and to operate on the basis of people's equality of citizenship.

inclusion of religion into politics and the engagement of the state with religion, as long as this, of course, helps to realise secularism's substantive values in practice. However, if any form of coalescence defeats this aim, contextual secularism also directly and decisively restricts the intermixture of religion and politics. Bhargava recapitulates that, if this is, indeed, called for, the most that secularism can and also must ensure, is that the relationship between the state and religion is guided by certain substantive values and that the state relates to religion on the basis of whether these substantive values are promoted or undermined (Bhargava, 1998, pp. 515-6; 2014, pp. 51-4).

Not the less, Bhargava realises that this does not determine precisely how the secular state must, in fact, relate to religion if its mixture with politics, indeed, undermines secularism's substantive values. Even so, neither does Bhargava think that this is actually desirable. First, this is because every society is different from another and also, therefore, likely to include many different perspectives in regards to how to arrange the relationship between religion and politics. Second, secularism is a multi-value doctrine, which means that it endorses more than one substantive value and recognises that, in practice, these different substantive values may conflict with each other and cannot, therefore, be managed at the hand of one general, a priori rule of procedure. Instead, Bhargava argues that whether one of secularism's substantive values outweighs or overrides another substantive value, is entirely to be decided by the particular sociocultural context in which secularism finds itself. In practice, this often means that secularism requires a trade-off or compromise between its different substantive values, which itself, in turn, forever calls for new interpretations, contextual judgements, and attempts at reconciliation and compromise. Indeed, Bhargava concludes that this is precisely what makes contextual secularism contextual (Bhargava, 1998, p. 516; 2009, pp. 649-51; 2010, pp. 111-2; see also Black, Hyman, and Smith, 2014).

Speaking of contexts, Bhargava argues that, in the context of diversity, it is difficult, if not actually impossible for secularism, to foster a politics of the common good. This is the politics that intends to generate amongst citizens democratic dialogue and deliberation in the effort to allow people to formulate 'a substantive common good capable of providing a solid basis for their social and political order (…) and solidarity' (Bhargava, 1998, p. 537). As this primary aim clearly shows,

the first and foremost advantage of the politics of the common good is that it explicitly works with an understanding of togetherness that, as we have seen, political secularism misses according to Bhargava. Indeed, this means that the politics of the common good also precisely appears to represent the version of secularism that Bhargava was looking for in his earlier work *Giving Secularism Its Due*, even if he does not make this sufficiently explicit in his postscript *What is Secularism For?*[4]

However, as we have already highlighted, Bhargava argues that it is and remains really difficult, if not actually impossible for secularism, to foster a politics of the common good. This is because this politics expects from citizens that they are similar enough to be able and prepared to formulate one substantive common good amongst each other. However, in the context that people do, indeed, endorse many different ultimate ideals from each other, the issue is that citizens are perhaps not, in fact, similar enough to establish consensus or agreement about sociopolitical subject matters. This means that, even if the politics of the common good allows for a conception of togetherness that secularism can work with, it is and remains rather difficult for secularism to really do this. Therefore, Bhargava concludes that secular states are often required to fall back on the alternative politics of right (Bhargava, 1998, pp. 537-9).

Bhargava makes clear that this alternative form of politics is usually considered an expression of ultra-procedural secularism, because 'a commitment to rights entails an obligation to comply with procedures' (Bhargava, 1998, p. 539). However, 'the notion of right depends on and cannot be made sense of independent of the notion of the good' (Bhargava, 1998, p. 538). Instead, the right is integrally attached to protect the many different goods of citizens against the many different, other goods that exist in society (Bhargava, 1998, p. 539). Furthermore, these different goods vary from context to context, which Bhargava takes to mean that the politics of right can, therefore, also better be regarded a form of contextual secularism than of ultra-procedural secularism. In addition, Bhargava argues that

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[4] Furthermore, it precisely comprises the version of secularism that brings Bhargava's philosophy closer to Bilgrami's philosophical support of secularism than we first thought at an earlier stage of this paper's first chapter.

his claim that the right is most importantly attached to protect the many different goods of citizens, serves his opinion that the politics of right more adequately functions in the context of diversity than the politics of the common good does. This is because this claim entails that the politics of right, on the one hand, protects a society against incompatible ultimate ideals that are likely to bring about conflict, but also, at the same time, guarantees that every citizen is free and equal to still accept and bring into the public sphere whatever, uncontroversial ultimate ideals they maintain for themselves, irrespective of whether these ideals are or are not in favour of the general public (Bhargava, 1998, pp. 538-41). This, in turn, means that, even if the politics of the common good puts secularism into the position to work with a conception of togetherness, the problems and challenges that come with this politics in the present-day context of diversity require us to opt for the politics of right.

In spite of this, Bhargava brings his postscript to a close by emphasising that this does not mean that the politics of right falls completely short of a conception of togetherness. By contrast, Bhargava argues that the contemporary discourse and framework of human rights demonstrates that many people are, in fact, already committed to the conduct of democratic dialogue and deliberation to formulate a substantive common good. This becomes particularly clear when we look at the already established agreement amongst the most of us humans that it is in everyone's interest to provide each other the very same measure of moral-political respect. Bhargava concludes that this offers us more than enough grounds to hope that, for every secular state that accepts and exercises a politics of right, '[t]here is a bigger, imagined community lurking in the horizon' (Bhargava, 1998, p. 542). Therefore, even if it is really difficult, if not actually impossible for secularism, to install and exercise a politics of the common good in the context of diversity, sensible realism again teaches us that secularism's alternative application of the politics of right will perhaps likewise do.

II.   Applying Trilokī Nātha Madan and Ashis Nandy's Criticisms

In this paper's first chapter, I have characterised Rajeev Bhargava's support of secularism and situated this support in broader debates about secularism, both in and outside the Indian context. In this paper's second chapter, I do the same for Trilokī Nātha Madan and Ashis Nandy's criticisms of secularism, but I also apply their criticisms of secularism to Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular. The primary purpose of this application is to introduce precisely the kind of conversation Bhikhu Parekh has called for between Indian political theorists. However, to apply Madan and Nandy's criticisms of secularism, we first have to develop an understanding of what they most importantly entail. Therefore, for both these criticisms, this paper's second chapter first elaborates on their central parts and premises, and only hereafter examines how they can be applied to Bhargava's support of secularism in particular. In addition, this second chapter examines whether and if so, precisely how, Bhargava's interpretation of Madan and Nandy's criticisms of secularism relates to the understanding that we ourselves develop of the central parts and premises of these two criticisms. This is an important question to ask ourselves, because, if it turns out that our understanding of Madan and Nandy's criticisms of secularism really differs from Bhargava's, then Bhargava is perhaps not, in fact, one of the few Indian political theorists who has already entered into fruitful conversation with other Indian scholars. By contrast, in that instance, Bhargava's philosophy of secularism simply likewise continues to require our critical reflection from above, which, in his case and for this paper's purposes, would most importantly be guided by the question whether and if so, how, Bhargava's philosophy of secularism can still be brought into the kind of conversation with Madan and Nandy that is, in fact, truthful and representative of the positions that these two interlocutors of Bhargava really take. Therefore, to return to and lend even more weight to the final words of this paper's introduction, if this critical reflection is, indeed, what is called for, it gives surety to Parekh's observation with regards to the poor state of the Indian intellectual discourse about secularism, sets the seal on the urgency of a critical engagement with Indian supports and criticisms of this political concept, and nails down the relevance that this paper has.

So then, to start off with Madan's criticism of secularism, this criticism most importantly issues from his work *Secularism in Its Place* (1998). In this work, Madan raises three objections to secularism, which each applies to the Indian context in particular. The first is that secularism is impossible as a generally shared credo, because the great majority of India's population is religious. The second objection is that secularism is impracticable as a basis for state action, either because Buddhism and Islam are protected by the Indian state, or because it is really difficult to maintain religious neutrality, since religious minorities do not generally share the majority's view of what neutrality precisely means. And, finally, the third objection is that secularism is impotent as a blueprint for the foreseeable future of India, because, by its very nature, 'it is incapable of countering religious fundamentalism and fanaticism' (Madan, 1998, p. 298; see also Pantham, 1997; Nath, 2022).

Before we consider whether and if so, how, these three objections can also be applied to Bhargava's support of secularism in particular, it is interesting to observe that the second and third criticism generally stand on their own. However, the first objection can, in fact, be situated and understood in view of a broader criticism of secularism, which is also precisely one of the three criticisms that Bhargava discusses, namely the criticism of incompatibility. The reason why Madan's first objection from hereabove can most importantly be embedded and comprehended in the context of this very criticism is that Madan is able to argue that it is one of secularism's problems that the majority of India's population is religious if and only if he also, at the same time, assumes that this religiosity is really difficult, if not actually altogether impossible, to unify with secularism. This assumption renders Madan's first objection from hereabove a perfect example of the criticism of incompatibility more generally, and, therefore, entails that, in this instance, Bhargava's understanding of Madan's criticism of secularism generally correlates with how we ourselves interpret this criticism.

When we now apply Madan's criticism of secularism to Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular, Madan's first objection that secularism is impossible as a credo of life can also be directed against Bhargava's three claims that:

(i)   Political secularism does not require religious people to give up everything of significance, but only asks them to give up a little bit of what is of exclusive importance, which it does in an effort 'to sustain that which is generally valuable' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(ii)   Religious people can also approve of political secularism, 'even they can be secular' (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1786-7);

(iii)   And that, to provide the secular state political legitimacy, religious people must not only be able and willing to offer their own religious reasons, but also rely on other, both religious and non-religious reasons, because the cost of not giving up people's own religious reasons is much greater than giving up a part of people's personal identity (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1789-90).

Of course, Madan's first criticism that secularism is impossible as a credo of life perhaps also works against other parts and premises of Bhargava's support of secularism that I have elaborated on in this paper's first section. Thus, for instance, we can make the case that it also discredits Bhargava's argument that political secularism is not necessarily hostile to ultimate ideals, but only proposes that we put them into their proper place (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1787-8). This is most importantly because this argument as well as, in fact, Bhargava's three other claims from hereabove, each hinges on the assumption that, once religious people attend to the reasons and arguments in favour of secularism, they will not find any difficulty in abstaining from their religion at certain times. However, one clear and obvious understanding of Madan's interpretation of the criticism of incompatibility entails that this assumption seriously underestimates what religion precisely means for Indian citizens.

Madan's second criticism that secularism is impracticable as a basis for state action is not an objection Bhargava discusses. This does not directly mean, however, that his understanding of Madan's engagement with secularism is in conflict with how we ourselves interpret this engagement. This is because it can also be the case that Bhargava does not really find Madan's second criticism relevant 'to save secularism from its critics and give what is due to it' (Bhargava,

1994, p. 1784).[5] Even so, Madan's criticism that secularism is impracticable as a basis for state action can still be directed against certain parts and premises of Bhargava's philosophy of secularism, which, in this instance, most importantly pertains to his account of political neutrality. To reiterate, this account argues that '[a]lways, at the beginning, with respect to some good in a specified context, the state must intend to help or hinder all relevant individuals and groups in an equal degree' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1789). The reason why Madan's second criticism that secularism is impracticable as a basis for state can also be applied to this account of political neutrality in particular, is that Bhargava requires the secular state to really work with this interpretation, whereas Madan argues that religious minorities do not generally share the majority's view of what neutrality precisely means. This means that, even if Bhargava ascribes the secular state the moral-political responsibility to install and exercise his Kantian account of intention neutrality, Madan demonstrates that it is really difficult, if not actually impossible, to do, in fact, engage in this responsibility.

In contrast to Madan's first and second criticism, I argue that his third objection to secularism cannot effectively be applied to Bhargava's philosophy in particular. This is primarily because it does not really involve a philosophical problem, which perhaps also explains why Bhargava neither actually addresses it. Therefore, it is also more productive to return to Madan's engagement with secularism, because, on the basis his three above objections, he proceeds with the claim that secularism is the dream of a minority that wishes to shape the majority of India's people in its own image, 'that wishes to impose its will upon history but lacks the power to do so under a democratically organized polity' (Madan, 1998, p. 298). The primary reason for this is that, in a democratic context, the state

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[5] Irregardless, it is and remains rather remarkable, however, that Bhargava does not actually discuss this objection himself, because, as we have showcased, Bhargava does, in fact, dwell plenty of time on the account of political neutrality that he thinks Madan's criticism of secularism assumes. And the primary reason for Madan's criticism that secularism is impracticable as a basis for state action precisely has to do with how different groups of people in society understand neutrality. This makes it more than natural that Bhargava would also have directed a certain time and attention to Bhargava's second criticism that secularism is impracticable as a basis for state action. Interestingly, however, he does not do this.

necessarily reflects the character of the society in which it operates. Therefore, secularism is a social myth that draws a cover over its failure to separate religion and politics in the country of India. In fact, from the point of view of the majority of Indian people, 'secularism' is a vacuous word, a phantom concept, because this majority of citizens do not know whether it is preferable to privatise religion, and, if it is, how this can be done, expect if they are Protestant Christians, but not if they are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs. Therefore, it also pertains to moral arrogance and, worse, to political insanity, for the minority of people who do accept secularism, to preach it to the majority of Indian people. Indeed, this means that this minority of people completely fail to recognise 'the immense importance of religion in the lives of the peoples of South Asia' (Madan, 1998, p. 299; see also Pantham, 1997; Nath, 2022).

This last sentence and, in fact, Madan's hereabove extension of his criticism of secularism more generally, demonstrates that this extension, on the one hand, intends to give more substance to Madan's already discussed objection that secularism is impossible as a credo of life, but, on the other hand, brings forward a different objection to secularism. This is the objection that 'secularism' is a vacuous word, a phantom concept, because the majority of Indian people do not know whether it is preferable to privatise religion, except if they are Protestant Christians. First, this objection can be situated and understood in the context of a broader criticism of secularism, which argues that people from other religious traditions than Protestant Christianity are not always able to take over and personify the distinction that this religious tradition and secularism together draw between people's private beliefs and public acts. This is primarily because the beliefs and practices of other religious traditions than Protestant Christianity are often significantly more intermingled with each other, which means that these traditions are also difficult, if not impossible, to really privatise (Berlinerblau, 2024).

Second, Madan's objection that 'secularism' is a vacuous word is not precisely the same as the criticism of insensitivity that Bhargava also ascribes to Madan's engagement with secularism, but they do generally share the same form and content. This means that Bhargava's understanding of Madan's criticism also still generally conforms to how we ourselves interpret this criticism.

And, to end, one of the primary purposes of this paper's second chapter is to apply Madan's criticism of secularism to Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular, which means that we also have to sort out to which parts and premises Madan's objection that 'secularism' is a vacuous word most importantly applies. However, Madan's continuation of his criticism of secularism can, to a certain extent, be read as an extension of this very objection, which means that it is also more effective to return to Madan's criticism of secularism.

Madan's continues his criticism of secularism by bringing forward the argument that secularism fails to provide guidance for viable political action, because it is not a grounded, comprehensive, and contemplated worldview, but only a political strategy to privatise religion on the basis of the distinction drawn between 'the sacred' and 'the secular'. This distinction finds its origins in, and is, therefore, a gift presented by, late Christianity, which is itself, in turn, built into broader Western paradigms of modernisation. These paradigms are considered to have universal pertinence, and their elements have 'come to be presented as the requirements of modernization elsewhere' (Madan, 1998, p. 308). However, Madan argues that this is precisely what we have to bring into critical question, because Western paradigms of modernisation commonly prescribe the transfer of secularism to non-Western parts of the world 'without regard for the character of their religious traditions or for the gifts that these might have to offer' (Madan, 1998, p. 308). And in traditional societies, this can only effectuate the conversion and loss of people's culture (Madan, 1998, pp. 307-8).

Madan argues that what is, called for, therefore, is translation: '[M]ere transfer will not do' (Madan, 1998, p. 308). However, translations are neither easily achieved, because, behind every transfer of a word or idea, there exists a culture and history that cannot be translated. This is particularly true when the culture and history behind a word or idea do not exist amongst the people who receive the transfer of this word or idea. And, in *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India*, Madan (2010) affirms that the culture and history behind the word or idea of 'secularism' do, indeed, not exist amongst the majority of Indian citizens. This is because this majority of people are not generally acquainted with the distinction that late Christianity draws between the sacred and the secular. Therefore, Madan also concludes that secularism presently operates in the country

of India without the support of a grounded, comprehensive, and contemplated worldview that people from this non-Western part of the world can, in fact, take up and make use of (Madan, 1998, pp. 307-8; 2010, p. 361).

This continuance of Madan's criticism of secularism contains many different elements. Even so, each of them can be connected with the three criticisms of secularism Bhargava also ascribes to Madan and Nandy (hereafter simply 'Bhargava's three criticisms'). To establish this connection, however, we first have to make explicit the many different elements of Madan's advancement of his criticism of secularism. The first two elements pertain to Madan's objection that secularism is merely a political strategy that requires people to privatise their religion on the basis of a distinction between the sacred and the secular that people from the country of India are not generally acquainted with (Madan, 1998, pp. 301, 319). In turn, the second two elements refer to Madan's criticism that secularism, and, more particularly, the theory's distinction between the sacred and the secular, is itself built into broader Western paradigms of modernisation that commonly prescribe the transfer of secularism to non-Western parts of the world 'without regard for the character of their religious traditions or for the gifts that these might have to offer' (Madan, 1998, p. 308). And, finally, the third set of elements of Madan's extension of his criticism of secularism has to do with his objection that secularism presently operates in the country of India without the support of a worldview that people from this non-Western part of the world can take up and make use of, because the transfer and translation of secularism is difficult, if not actually impossible, to achieve in a context that is not generally familiar with the culture and history behind the word or idea of 'secularism' (Madan, 1998, pp. 307-8; 2010, p. 361).

Now, the two reasons why each of these three sets of elements of Madan's criticism of secularism can also be connected with Bhargava's three criticisms are that (i) Madan's argument that Indian citizens are not generally acquainted with the distinction between the sacred and the secular means that secularism is incompatible with non-Western worldviews and ways of life, and because (ii) the requirement that secularism still expects Indian citizens to privatise their religion on the basis of this distinction entails that secularism is insensitive to religion and,

therefore, a partial and biased philosophy. In turn, this connection between Madan's furtherance of his criticism of secularism and Bhargava's three criticisms demonstrates that Bhargava's understanding of Madan's criticism of secularism continues to be and remain in accordance with how we ourselves have interpreted this criticism up to this point.

Our next two tasks, therefore, are (i) to examine whether and if so, how, the different elements of Madan's continuance of his criticism of secularism (hereafter simply 'the elements of Madan's criticism') can be situated and understood in the context of broader criticisms of secularism, and (ii) to establish to which parts and premises of Bhargava's support of secularism these different elements can most effectively be applied. As for the first task, Madan's first and third set of elements from hereabove can, indeed, be read as an extension of Madan's already discussed objection that 'secularism' is a vacuous word, a phantom concept (Madan, 1998, p. 299). This both corroborates our decision to have postponed our third and final application of Madan's criticism of secularism to Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular, and ascertains that the first and third set of elements of Madan's criticism of secularism can similarly be connected with the broader criticism of secularism that we have already discussed with regards to Madan's objection that 'secularism' is a vacuous word, a phantom concept. To reiterate, this is the broader criticism of secularism that argues that people from other religious traditions than Protestant Christianity are not always able to take over and personify the distinction that this religious tradition and secularism together draw between people's private beliefs and public acts (Berlinerblau, 2024).

In turn, the second set of elements of Madan's criticism of secularism can most importantly be situated and understood in the context of the broader criticism that confirms Madan's standpoint and argues, therefore, that secularism must, indeed, be regarded part of a more expansive paradigm of modernisation through which the West sees itself as the champion of enlightened rationality and marches forward, therefore, to emancipate the world from religion and its interference in politics, irrespective of whether religion perhaps also carries certain advantages (see on this criticism of secularism, for instance, Medovoi and Bentley, 2021).

When we now apply the different elements of Madan's criticism of secularism to Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular, the first and final set of elements can also be directed against Bhargava's two claims that:

(i)   Political secularism does not require religious people to give up everything of significance, but only asks them to give up a little bit of what is of exclusive importance, which it does in an effort 'to sustain that which is generally valuable' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(ii)   And that the development of political secularism is not, in fact, peculiar to the history of Western countries, but 'part of the family of views that arises in response to a fundamental human predicament' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787).

The primary reason why the first and final set of elements of Madan's criticism of secularism can also be applied to Bhargava's first claim from hereabove is that this argument assumes that it is not really much to ask religious citizens to leave behind their religion at certain moments, whereas Madan's criticism of secularism argues that this is, in fact, a significant demand to place on religious citizens, particularly when we know, according to Madan, that the majority of Indian people are not acquainted with the distinction that late Christianity draws between the sacred and the secular. In turn, this explanation also directly provides us the most important reason for why the first and final set of elements of Madan's criticism of secularism can likewise be applied to Bhargava's second claim from hereabove. This is because, if people from the country of India are, indeed, not generally acquainted with the culture and history behind the word or idea of 'secularism', this philosophy is perhaps neither, in fact, 'part of the family of views that arises in response to a fundamental human predicament' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787).[6]

In turn, I argue that the second set of elements of Madan's criticism of secularism can most importantly be applied to Bhargava's three statements that:

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[6] And, finally, this does itself bring into question whether (i) political secularism does, indeed, stand 'a good chance of gaining the allegiance of believers' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787), and whether (ii) 'even believers can accept the separation of religion from politics, even they can be secular' (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1786-7).

(i)   Religion is a store house of superstition and falsehood, which means that a life and politics free of illusions is a life and politics without religion (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785);

(ii)   Political secularism does not require religious people to give up everything of significance, but only asks them to give up a little bit of what is of exclusive importance, which it does in an effort 'to sustain that which is generally valuable' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(iii)   And that the development of political secularism is not, in fact, peculiar to the history of Western countries, but 'part of the family of views that arises in response to a fundamental human predicament' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787).

First, the primary reason why Madan's second set of elements can also be applied to Bhargava's first statement from hereabove is that this argument supports the instalment of secularism in the Indian context in view of a particularly hostile picture of religion. This means that Bhargava's philosophy of secularism can similarly be regarded part of the broader sorts of Western paradigms Madan speaks about, and neither, therefore, really involves itself in the character of India's religious traditions or 'the gifts that these might have to offer' (Madan, 1998, p. 308). Second, the foremost reason why Madan's second set of elements can also be applied to Bhargava's second claim from hereabove is that this assertion suggests that secularism knows what is generally valuable to sustain and, therefore, good for people to do. However, this means that Bhargava is, again, in favour of the establishment of secularism in the country of India without regard for what India's religious traditions perhaps themselves have to say about these questions (Madan, 1998, pp. 307-8). And, finally, the most important reason why Madan's second set of elements can also be directed against Bhargava's third statement from hereabove is that this claim demonstrates that Bhargava similarly considers secularism to have universal pertinence, to which Madan's criticism of secularism replies, however, that, if this universal pertinence is accompanied by a neglect of the character of the religious traditions of the non-Western context in question, the transfer of secularism to this context can only effectuate the conversion and loss of people's culture. And, since we have, in fact, shown that there are, indeed, a number of reasons to think that Bhargava's philosophy of secularism perhaps similarly

neglects the character of India's religious traditions, there are also a number of reasons to believe that this philosophy, indeed, effectuates the conversion and loss of people's culture if it is brought into actual, moral-political practice.

To complete our characterisation of Madan's criticism of secularism, it must be emphasised that, even if Madan is a clear critic of secularism in general and can also, at the hand of this, be shown to be a critic of Bhargava's philosophy of secularism in particular, he makes explicit that the conclusion of his criticism is not that secularism ought to be discarded or, more absurdly, that every person from the country of India has to become a Protestant Christian. Instead, Madan concludes that people from the country of India must aim to give secularism a clear definition, work out its relation to their non-Western culture and history, and make it possible that secularism does, in fact, become a grounded, comprehensive, and contemplated worldview in the Indian context. In other words, people from the country of India must themselves render their experience of secularism meaningful. Others cannot do this for them. Even so, once a definition of a phenomenon or of a relationship is formulated, other formulations can only be re-definitions, because traditions posit memory (Madan, 1998, pp. 308-9). Therefore, the transfer of secularism to the Indian context 'is beset with many difficulties and should not be taken for granted' (Madan, 1998, p. 309). By contrast, secularism must be put in its place, which, as we have, by now, established, is not a question of rejecting it, but of finding the right means for its expression (Madan, 1998, pp. 309, 319).

In the course of our discussion of Madan's criticism of secularism, we have recurrently indicated that Bhargava's understanding of this criticism is and remains commensurate with how we ourselves have interpreted Madan's point of view. However, there is still a chance that we actually have to moderate this statement. This is because we have not yet touched upon the question whether the account of political neutrality that Bhargava also ascribes to Madan's criticism of secularism is equally representative of what we ourselves consider Madan to say.

Recall that the view of political neutrality that Bhargava also ascribes to Madan's criticism of secularism argues that the state must always, in both beginning and end, in both intention and outcome, and irrespective of context, help or hinder the good of everyone in an equal degree (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1788). It is clear that

Madan neither makes explicit that he actually defends this account of political neutrality, nor that he maintains a different understanding of what political neutrality precisely entails. This means that Bhargava's understanding of Madan's criticism of secularism also exactly here becomes difficult to follow, and challenges us, therefore, to ascertain for ourselves whether Madan can still, indeed, be said to sustain a certain perspective of political neutrality.[7]

To engage in this exploration, there is only part and premise of Madan's criticism of secularism that appears to express that this criticism, indeed, assumes the strict objectivist perspective or the god's eye view of political neutrality that Bhargava ascribes to it. This is the part and premise that pertains to Madan's objection that secularism is impracticable as a basis for state action. This is because this objection primarily criticises secularism on the grounds of the claim that it is really difficult for the state to maintain religious neutrality, since religious minorities do not generally share the majority's view of what neutrality precisely means. This appears to imply that Madan himself, indeed, sustains the standpoint that the state also really exercises neutrality if and only if it satisfies everyone's wishes and desires, and, in this instance, somehow takes into moral-political consideration, every view of political neutrality that people perhaps maintain for themselves.

Of course, it can be argued that Madan speaks of religious neutrality, whereas Bhargava talks about political neutrality, which means that, even in this single instance, it is implausible to ascribe to Madan's criticism of secularism the view of political neutrality that Bhargava does, in fact, relate to it. In response, however, I argue that, although Madan and Bhargava do, indeed, make use of different terms, Madan still believes that it is the state that is most importantly responsible for creating and preserving religious neutrality. This makes this responsibility inherently political and brings the notion of religious neutrality, therefore, also much closer to political neutrality than we first perhaps thought.

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[7] In addition, it confirms this paper's importance and relevance to still make possible the kind of conversation that Parekh has called for between Indian advocates and critics of secularism.

In spite of this, for the rest of Madan's criticism of secularism, I argue that it actually is and remains altogether implausible to ascribe to its central parts and premises a certain view of political neutrality.[8] To bring it briefly, this is most importantly because these parts and premises mainly revolve around Madan's criticism that the social, cultural, and historical context of the country of India seriously complicates secularism's successful installation in this context. And, as we can straight away observe, this objection has very little to do with political neutrality or the understanding that Madan perhaps maintains of this concept. This means that we, indeed, have to nuance our earlier statement that Bhargava develops an understanding of Madan's criticism that is and remains commensurate with how we ourselves interpret this criticism. This nuance entails that, even if Bhargava generally succeeds in his effort to enter into fruitful conversation with Madan's criticism of secularism, he does not fulfil this effort when it comes to his understanding of political neutrality and the interpretation of this concept that he ascribes to Madan's criticism of secularism. In this paper's conclusion, we briefly explore the implications of this argument.

For now, we move on to Nandy's criticism of secularism, which he most importantly develops in his work *The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance* (1998). This article's primary argument is that secularism has nothing to say about cultures and has no idea about how religions are able to link up different faiths or ways of life according to their own constitutive principles of toleration. This is because secularism considers religion an ideology that works

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[8] However, it can be suggested that, in addition to Madan's objection that secularism is impracticable as a basis for state action, our connection of Madan's criticism of secularism with the objection that secularism is a partial and biased philosophy perhaps similarly uncovers a certain understanding of what political neutrality precisely entails. This is because something can only be partial and biased relative to what is considered neutral. In response, however, the primary reason why I have argued that Madan can also be said to bring forward the objection that secularism is a partial and biased philosophy is that he actually thinks that secularism disadvantages India's citizens by imposing on them a distinction between the sacred and the secular that they are not generally familiar with. And, as we can directly observe, this reason has very little to do with how Madan perhaps understands political neutrality, and is actually much more concerned with the problems that apparently come with secularism's successful installation in the Indian context. The same goes for the other parts and premises of Madan's criticism of secularism, to which we, therefore, now also return ourselves.

against the ideology of secularism's modern statecraft and, therefore, requires constant containment (Nandy, 1998, p. 324).

To understand this argument, we must first attend to the distinction that Nandy draws between religion as faith and religion as ideology. On the one hand, religion as faith refers to religion as a way of life, which, in effect, usually turns into more than one way of life linked by a common faith with theological space for heterogeneity. On the other hand, religion as ideology refers to religion as an identifier by means of which people contest for or protect non-religious interests, which are typically political or socio-economic. Indeed, one way to explain the difference between religion as faith and religion as ideology is to conceive of religion as ideology as something that, for individuals and people who believe in it, requires constant protection, and to conceive of religion as faith as something that religious people usually expect to protect them. This is most importantly because religion as faith always includes a theory of transcendence and sanctions the experience of transcendence, whereas religion as ideology tends to bypass or even fear theories and experiences of transcendence, 'except when they could be used for secular purposes' (Nandy, 1998, p. 322).

On the basis of this distinction between religion as faith and religion as ideology, Nandy argues that the secular state always prefers to deal with religion as ideology. In truth, the secular state is suspicious of both religion as faith and religion as ideology, but it finds religion as faith even more inchoate and difficult to manage. This is because religion as faith claims to have its own principles of toleration, which deny the secular state 'the right to be the ultimate reservoir of sanity and the ultimate arbiter among different religions and communities' (Nandy, 1998, p. 324).

Nandy's criticism that secularism considers religion an ideology that requires constant containment is not new or unusual. Instead, it has a long history, both in and outside the Indian context. This history is most importantly embodied by the anthropologist Talal Asad, who in his works *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (1993) and *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (2003), brings forward the Foucauldian argument that secularism is a form of modern governance that is primarily attended to define, delineate, and, thus, to control religion. In turn, in *The*

Crisis of Secularism in India, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Anduradha Dingwaney Needham (2007) apply this argument to the Indian context and articulate that Indian secularism is, indeed, likewise characterised by a fierce use of techniques to contain how we can and must precisely see religion. Of course, Nandy's position suggests that religion as faith actually goes free from this political management by secularism. However, when it comes to religion as ideology, Nandy still shares the standpoint that Asad, Needham and Rajan, as well as, in fact, many other critics of secularism maintain (see also for instance Hurd, 2015).

Recall that the three criticisms of secularism that Bhargava also ascribes to Nandy's engagement with secularism are that (i) secularism is incompatible with non-Western worldviews and ways of life, (ii) secularism is insensitive to religion, because it forces people to think of their religion as a personal and private preference, and the criticism that (iii) secularism is not neutral, but partial and biased (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1784). When we now try to relate these three criticisms to the first set of parts and premises of Nandy's criticism of secularism from hereabove, we must conclude that we are still not provided enough information to really answer the question whether Bhargava's understanding of Nandy's criticism of secularism corresponds to how we ourselves interpret this criticism. This is because we do not yet know how Nandy precisely characterises secularism's ideology of modern statecraft and the way in which secularism aims to contain religion on the basis of this ideology.

Therefore, to return to Nandy's work, Nandy proceeds with the explication that he considers himself an 'anti-secularist', because the ideology and politics of secularism 'have more or less exhausted their possibilities' (Nandy, 1998, p. 326). This means that we have to work with an altogether different, theoretical framework to chart the relationship between religion and politics, a framework to which we return at the end of this paper's second chapter. For now, Nandy explains that, when he expresses that he is an anti-secularist, he primarily has in mind the meaning of secularism used in the Western world, which 'chalks out an area in public life where religion is not admitted' (Nandy, 1998, p. 326). Indeed, this secularism argues that people can practise their religion in the private sphere, but when they enter the public sphere, they are expected to leave it behind. Furthermore, this secularism

implicitly relies on the belief that the management of the public realm is a universal science and that religion, to the extent that it is opposed to science, 'is an open or potential threat to any modern polity' (Nandy, 1998, pp. 326-7). This is because advocates of Western secularism fear the diversity of beliefs and practices that religious traditions bring into the public sphere, and, therefore, see religion as an impediment to nation-building and 'as a danger to the technology of statecraft and political management' (Nandy, 1998, p. 341).

This extension of Nandy's criticism of secularism now, indeed, precisely appears to provide us the information that we still, in fact, required a moment ago. The first part of this information is that Nandy argues that secularism's ideology of modern statecraft most importantly originates in the correlated dichotomies between the private and public sphere and between science and religion. In turn, the second part of this information is that Nandy articulates that Western secularism also primarily aims to contain religion on the basis of these correlated dichotomies, which means that Western secularism expects from people that they leave behind their religion when they enter the public sphere, because religion is considered an impediment to secularism's modern statecraft.

When we now bring this information together with Bhargava's three criticisms of secularism that he also ascribes to Nandy's perspective, we must conclude that these three criticisms are and remain consistent with how we ourselves have interpreted Nandy's criticism of secularism up to this point. This particularly applies to Bhargava's second and third criticism, because, on the basis of the hereabove provided information, Nandy can similarly be said to argue that (i) secularism requires people to think of their religion as a personal and private preference, and that (ii) secularism is, therefore, a partial and biased philosophy.

In the main, the primary reasons that Nandy can be said to present for the first of these two criticisms of secularism can most importantly be situated and understood in context of the broader criticism that argues that secularism is premised on ideas and assumptions about the nature of religion as a socio-political category that 'produce a conceptual structure whereby that which is deemed religious is subordinated to that which is render secular' (Draaisma and Wilson, 2023, p. 23). And, indeed, these ideas and assumptions also include the thought that

Nandy ascribes to secularism and maintains that religion is apparently particular and irrational, whereas secularism is itself objective and scientific, which means that religion must also, therefore, 'be kept out of the public sphere and relegated to the private to preserve order and peace' (Draaisma and Wilson, 2023, p. 30). After all, 'religion is what people disagree about more frequently and violently than anything else (…); thus religion is the fundamental cause of violence, intolerance and chaos' (Draaisma and Wilson, 2023, p. 30).

In turn, as for the primary reasons that Nandy can be said to provide for the criticism that secularism is a partial and biased philosophy, these reasons can most importantly be embedded and interpreted in view of the broader criticism of secularism that we have also already related to Nandy's criticism that secularism considers religion an ideology that requires constant containment. To reiterate, this is the more general criticism that argues that secularism is, indeed, a form of modern governance that is primarily attended to control and contain religion.

To move on, there are at least three parts and premises of Bhargava's philosophy of secularism to which we can effectively apply the hereabove provided information with regards to Nandy's criticism of secularism:

(i)   Religion is a store house of superstition and falsehood, which means that a life and politics free of illusions is a life and politics without religion (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785);

(ii)   Political secularism does not require religious people to give up everything of significance, but only asks them to give up a little bit of what is of exclusive importance, which it does in an effort 'to sustain that which is generally valuable' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(iii)   The development of political secularism is not, in fact, peculiar to the history of Western countries, but 'part of the family of views that arises in response to a fundamental human predicament' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787).

First, the primary reason why the earlier provided information with regards to Nandy's criticism of secularism can also be applied to the first part and premise of Bhargava's support of secularism from hereabove is that this claim precisely uncloaks and, therefore, also confirms the view, that secularism is, indeed, premised

on the important idea and assumption that religion is irrational and must, therefore, be excluded from the public sphere. In turn, the foremost reason why the first elements of Nandy's criticism of secularism can also be directed against the second part and premise of Bhargava's philosophy of secularism from hereabove is that these elements together raise many doubts about whether 'that which is generally valuable' is, indeed, generally valuable or only valuable, in fact, with regards to secularism's maintenance and implementation of the theory's own ideology of modern statecraft. And, finally, this scepticism also directly explains us why Nandy's criticism of secularism can equally be used against Bhargava's third and final claim from hereabove that secularism is 'part of the family of views that arises in response to a fundamental human predicament' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787).

To take up again the content of Nandy's own work, he contrasts the Western, scientific, and rational meaning of secularism with a non-standard, local meaning, which he himself considers typically and distinctively Indian by nature. He terms this meaning 'the accommodative meaning' of secularism and argues that this conception most importantly revolves around the idea of equal respect for every religion. Furthermore, the accommodative meaning of secularism maintains that, while the public sphere may or may not be kept free from religion, 'it must have a space for a continuous dialogue among religious traditions and between the religious and the secular' (Nandy, 1998, p. 327). In addition, it claims that secularism is required to recognise that every religion as faith in the Indian context includes within itself an inner version of other faiths, both as an internal criticism and as a reminder of the diversity of theories of transcendence. And, finally, the non-standard, local, and accommodative meaning of secularism is more compatible with the meaning that the majority of people from India have given to secularism than the Western, scientific, and rational meaning is (Nandy, 1998, pp. 327-8).

In *An Anti-Secularist Manifesto*, Nandy (1995) adds to this characterisation of the accommodative meaning of secularism that it also provides us the means to recognise that, even if the secular state tolerates religion, this does not necessarily lead to religious toleration on a societal level. This is because the secular state's toleration of religion cannot guarantee a society's toleration. True, a state's toleration of religion can, in the short run, ensure that a political community survives. However, in the long run, this political community must think and move

beyond this short-term assurance. And, in this respect, Nandy argues that the accommodative meaning of secularism recognises what many people from the country of India now also begin to find out, which is that the secular, public sphere 'is an insufficient basis for the long-term survival of a political community' (Nandy, 1995, p. 36).

In *The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance,* again, Nandy explains that this is most importantly because the rational, scientific, and Western meaning of secularism comes with a hidden political hierarchy. This hierarchy makes a fourfold classification of political actors across the Indian context. At the top of this hierarchy are the people who are religious neither in public nor in private. These are the people who are supposed to be scientific and rational, and 'they are expected to ultimately not only rule this society but also dominate its political culture' (Nandy, 1998, p. 328). On the second rung of the ladder are the people who decide not to be religious in public, but who are, in fact, religious in private. In turn, on the third rung are the people who are religious in public, but do not practise a religion in private. Nandy acknowledges that, at first glance, this appears to be a rather strange category of political actors, but the people who belong to this category most importantly regard religion as a political tool that they can use to underplay, marginalise, or even delegitimise the different ways of life that are associated with people's religion as faith. Indeed, the primary purpose of these political actors is 'to homogenize their co-believers into proper political formations and, for that reason, to eliminate those parts of religion that smack of folkways and threaten to legitimize diversities, interfaith dialogue, and theological polycentrism' (Nandy, 1998, pp. 329-30). And, finally, at the bottom of the hidden political hierarchy that comes with the Western, scientific, and rational meaning of secularism, we find the people who are religious in both private and public (Nandy, 1998, p. 330).

Nandy makes clear that these four categories of political actors across the Indian context are not resolute, and, in reality, they rarely come in their pure form. Indeed, '[o]ften the same person can move from one to the other' (Nandy, 1998, p. 330). Nandy decides not to go into more detail about this issue, however, and, instead, brings forward the argument that Indian people have always been embarrassed by Western secularism's classification of political actors. Even so, this

embarrassment has luckily been resolved by the fact that the Western categorisation of political agents does not work in the Indian context, because 'it has led neither to the elimination of religion and ethnicity from politics nor to greater religious and ethnic tolerance' (Nandy, 1998, p. 331).

In addition, in his work *The Twilight of Certitudes: Secularism, Hindu Nationalism, and Other Masks of Deculturation*, Nandy (1997) argues that the modern classification of political actors neither actually works in the country of India because it assumes 'a relatively clear, well-bounded self-definition compatible with the post-seventeenth-century ideal of the individual, comfortable in an impersonal, contractual-relations-dominated society' (Nandy 1997, p. 169). That is, the Western categorisation of political agents neither actually works in the Indian context because it presupposes that people define their religion in accordance with the correspondent classification of what is considered 'religious', and do not, therefore, confuse their religion with the other parts and pieces of their personal identity, including their sect, caste, family traditions, rituals, culture, or local customs, for instance. However, in reply to this Western understanding of how people purportedly define themselves, Nandy argues that the majority of people from the country of India perform a completely different process of self-definition, which does, in fact, fuse people's religion together with their 'other' beliefs and practices. Nandy concludes that this provides us a second reason why the modern classification of political actors does not work in the Indian context (Nandy 1997, p. 169).

It is particularly this second reason that demonstrates that Bhargava's understanding of Nandy's criticism of secularism is still consistent with how we ourselves have interpreted this criticism up until now. This is because it appears that this second reason can only be brought forward if Nandy also, indeed, holds onto each of Bhargava's three criticisms of secularism. In turn, the most important reason for this is that the difference that Nandy identifies between the Western and Indian process of self-definition entails that the Western meaning of secularism, is, indeed, incompatible with non-Western worldviews and ways of life, insensitive to religion, and a partial and biased philosophy, therefore.

On this account, we can move forward and address ourselves to the question whether and if so, how, the above parts and premises with which Nandy complements his criticism of secularism can also be embedded and comprehended in view of broader criticisms of secularism, both in and outside the Indian context. In this regard, I maintain that Nandy's argument that the Western meaning of secularism comes with a hidden political hierarchy as well as his assertion that this modern classification of political actors assumes a process of self-definition that people from the country of India are not generally acquainted with can both be situated and understood in the context of two post-colonial, Foucauldian criticisms of secularism. The first is the broader criticism that we have also already discussed in consideration of Madan's criticism of secularism and argues that people from other religious traditions than Protestant Christianity are not always able to take over and personify the distinction that this religious tradition and secularism together draw between people's private beliefs and public acts. because the beliefs and practices of these other religious traditions than Protestant Christianity are often significantly more intermingled with each other (Berlinerblau, 2024). The primary reason why this broader criticism of secularism can similarly be related to Nandy's 'argument of secularism's hidden political hierarchy' as well as to his 'argument of the Western process of self-definition' is that both these claims are likewise dependent on secularism's more formative distinction between the two categories of 'the private' and 'the public'. In turn, the second criticism in the context of which we can situate and understand both Nandy's argument of secularism's hidden political hierarchy and his argument of the Western process of self-definition asserts that secularism most importantly revolves around the principle to classify and categorise religious people's everyday experiences only by means of the terms and conditions that secularism itself establishes and, accordingly, imposes on people (Berlinerblau, 2024). The foremost reason why this broader criticism can similarly be said to speak to Nandy's two arguments from hereabove is that, on the one hand, Nandy also maintains that Western secularism expects from Indian people that they employ and climb the ladder from the religious private sphere to the secular public sphere, and, on the other hand, similarly argues that Western secularism directs Indian people to define their religion in accordance with the correspondent classification of what Western secularism determines to be religious and not.

There are at least six parts and premises of Bhargava's philosophy of secularism to which we can apply Nandy's argument of secularism's hidden political hierarchy as well as his assertion that this modern classification of political actors assumes a process of self-definition that people from the country of India are not generally acquainted with:

(i)   In contrast to ethical secularism, political secularism does stand 'a good chance of gaining the allegiance of believers' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(ii)   Political secularism does not require religious people to give up everything of significance, but only asks them to give up a little bit of what is of exclusive importance, which it does in an effort 'to sustain that which is generally valuable' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(iii)   Religious people can also approve of political secularism, 'even they can be secular' (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1786-7);

(iv)   The development of political secularism is not, in fact, peculiar to the history of Western countries, but 'part of the family of views that arises in response to a fundamental human predicament' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(v)   Political secularism is not necessarily hostile to ultimate ideals, but only proposes that we put them into their proper place (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1787-8);

(vi)   And, to provide the secular state political legitimacy, religious people must not only be able and willing to offer their own religious reasons, but also rely on other, both religious and non-religious reasons, because the cost of not giving up people's own religious reasons is much greater than giving up a part of people's personal identity (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1789-90).

From these six parts and premises to which we can apply Nandy's criticism of secularism, Bhargava's second, fifth and sixth assertion particularly oppose Nandy's argument of secularism's hidden political hierarchy, while Bhargava's first, third, and fourth claim primarily affront Nandy's argument of the Western process of self-definition. As for Bhargava's second, fifth, and sixth statement, this is most importantly because each of these three claims can equally be said to assume

and establish a certain political hierarchy, which, indeed, similarly moves forward and upwards from the religious private sphere to the secular public sphere. And, in turn, when it comes to Bhargava's first, third, and fourth assertion, these statements primarily affront Nandy's argument of the Western process of self-definition because each of these three claims presupposes that (political) secularism is universally applicable and encompasses objective credibility, therefore, while Nandy's argument of the Western process of self-definition showcases that this is perhaps not, in fact, true and persuasive.

To return to Nandy's own work, a first reason that he provides for why Western secularism has neither led to the elimination of religion and ethnicity from politics nor to greater religious and ethnic toleration is that, because of a significant growth of people's participation in politics, it has become really difficult to hold off the entrance of religion into politics and the public sphere (Nandy, 1998, pp. 331-2). A second reason is that it has become increasingly obvious to many Indian citizens that modernity is now no longer the ideology of a small minority, but has, instead, become 'the organizing principle of the dominant culture of politics' (Nandy, 1998, p. 332). Indeed, Nandy argues that the idea that religions dominate the country of India, that a handful of modern people fight against this domination, is no longer convincing to many Indians. To the contrary, these people now see that the society around them no longer leaves any scope for a compromise between tradition and modernity, and, therefore, prefer to accept a way of life that entirely negates traditional understandings of people and society. Furthermore, many Indians now sense 'the irreversibility' of secularisation and know that religion as faith 'is being pushed to the corner' (Nandy, 1998, p. 332).

In addition, Nandy argues that, when the secular state asks religious minorities to secularise or confine themselves only to a secular exercise of politics, it actually tells them to 'soften' their faith 'so that it can be more truly integrated in the nation-state' (Nandy, 1998, p. 332). In this situation, the secular state typically likewise, at the same time, implicitly promises that it equally forces dominant groups of people in society to dilute their faith. Indeed, what the state often implicitly tells religious minorities, is that they have to give up their faith, at least in the public sphere, because 'others will do so too and together everyone will live in freedom from religious intolerance' (Nandy, 1998, p. 333). However, as it

happens, this solution is far from attractive to people who are, in fact, religious and to whom religion is an overall theory of life, including public life, because life is not worth living without a theory of transcendence, however imperfect this theory may be (Nandy, 1998, p. 333).

This last line of argument shares the same content as Bhargava's criticism of insensitivity, which means that, when it also comes to this last line of argument, Bhargava's understanding of Nandy's criticism of secularism is and remains generally compatible with how we ourselves have interpreted this criticism up to this point. However, when it, for instance, comes to Nandy's argument that it is impossible to separate religion and politics because of the significant growth of people's participation in politics (hereafter simply 'Nandy's argument of democratic participation'), we have to draw the conclusion that this is not, in fact, a criticism of secularism that Bhargava discusses with regards to Nandy's engagement with secularism. This means that it is also precisely here and now that we begin to move away from Bhargava's understanding of Nandy's criticism of secularism and invite Bhargava, therefore, to specify whether he is still perhaps able to do, in fact, engage with Nandy's argument of democratic participation. We return to this question at the very end of this paper.

For now, it is time to apply Nandy's hereabove objections to secularism to Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular. I argue that there are at least five parts and premises of Bhargava's philosophy of secularism to which we can do this:

(i)   Religion and politics must be separated, because if people with power and authority in regards to religious affairs can also exercise power and authority in regards to political affairs or the other way around, 'this inevitably undermines democratic values' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1785);

(ii)   In contrast to ethical secularism, political secularism does stand 'a good chance of gaining the allegiance of believers' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(iii)   Political secularism does not require religious people to give up everything of significance, but only asks them to give up a little bit

of what is of exclusive importance, which it does in an effort 'to sustain that which is generally valuable' (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1787);

(iv)   Religious people can also approve of political secularism, 'even they can be secular' (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1786-7);

(v)   And, to provide the secular state political legitimacy, religious people must not only be able and willing to offer their own religious reasons, but also rely on other, both religious and non-religious reasons, because the cost of not giving up people's own religious reasons is much greater than giving up a part of people's personal identity (Bhargava, 1994, pp. 1789-90).

When I say that Nandy's hereabove objections can most effectively be applied to these five parts and premises of Bhargava's support of secularism, I particularly have in mind Nandy's argument of democratic participation and his formulation of the criticism of insensitivity. As for Nandy's argument of democratic participation, this is most importantly because this argument means that it is perhaps not, in fact, possible to separate religion and politics, or, more particularly, to pull apart the religious from the political exercise of power and authority. And, in turn, when it comes to Nandy's formulation of the criticism of insensitivity, it is primarily because this argument means that Indian citizens are perhaps not, in fact, able and willing to support (political) secularism, since, from their perspective, this means that they have to leave behind their religion, even if religion is precisely what provides their life meaning and purpose.

To come back to Nandy's criticism of secularism, a third reason that he provides for why secularism has neither led to the elimination of religion and ethnicity from politics nor to greater religious and ethnic toleration is that, while secularism does make an appeal to religious citizens to leave behind their religion when they enter the public sphere, the modern state does not possess the means to ensure that secularism itself becomes intolerant. That is, while the modern state does expect religious citizens to give up their faith in public, 'it guarantees no protection to them against the sufferings inflicted by the state itself in the name of its ideology' (Nandy, 1998, p. 333). To the contrary, the modern state often actually uses the ideology of secularism to silence incompliant citizens. Therefore, secularism's contemporary role in the Indian context is also no different from the

role of many religious ideologies, and, in these circumstances, 'citizens are often less protected against the ideology of the state than against religious ideologies or theocratic forces' (Nandy, 1998, p. 333). Indeed, in this respect, Nandy concludes that secularism generally fulfils the same function as religions once did vis-à-vis citizens, which is to sanction and justify violence used against minorities (Nandy, 1998, p. 333).

First, this conclusion and, in fact, Nandy's hereabove extension of his criticism of secularism more generally, most clearly resembles the criticism that Bhargava also ascribes to Nandy's engagement with secularism and argues that secularism is not neutral, but partial and biased, because it favours the ideals of non-religious people and disadvantages religious citizens (Bhargava, 1994, p. 1788). Therefore, in this regard, we do actually again agree with Bhargava about what Nandy has to say.

Second, Nandy's criticism that the modern state does not possess the means to ensure that secularism itself becomes intolerant (hereafter simply 'the criticism of secularism's intoleration') can, to a certain extent, be situated and understood in view of the same criticism as the broader criticism of secularism in the context of which we have embedded and comprehended both Nandy's argument of secularism's hidden political hierarchy and his argument of the Western process of self-definition. To reiterate, this is the broader criticism that argues that secularism most importantly revolves around the principle to classify and categorise religious people's everyday experiences only by means of the terms and conditions that secularism itself establishes and, accordingly, imposes on people (Berlinerblau, 2024). The primary reason why Nandy's criticism of secularism's intoleration can similarly be situated and understood in the context of this broader criticism of secularism is that, with his criticism of secularism's intoleration, Nandy equally argues that secularism seizes complete control over what religious people can believe and practise, without that secularism is itself, in fact, controlled by certain, restrictive means and measures. This, in turn, suggests that Nandy's criticism of secularism's intoleration also shares a number of similarities with the broader criticism of secularism that we have related to certain parts and premises of Madan's criticism of secularism and argues that secularism is part of a more expansive paradigm of modernisation through which the West sees itself as the

champion of enlightened rationality and marches forward, therefore, to emancipate the world from religion and its interference in politics, irrespective of what religion is or can be (Medovoi and Bentley, 2021). Even so, and, at the same time, Nandy's criticism of secularism's intoleration also is and remains rather unique, because it captures a thought and sentiment about secularism that actually shows through many criticisms of this philosophy, but is almost never formulated as explicit and forceful as Nandy does.

When we now apply this uniquely explicit and forceful criticism, therefore, to Bhargava's support of secularism in particular, I argue that it is not right or representative to do this in reference to separate parts and premises. This is because Nandy's criticism of secularism's intoleration pertains to the support and establishment of secularism in general and not to the particular reasons and arguments in favour of which this support and establishment perhaps have to be grounded. Therefore, if our purpose is, indeed, to apply Nandy's criticism of secularism's intoleration to Bhargava's philosophy of secularism in particular, we have to do this to this support in general and not to its separate parts and premises.

To continue, therefore, with Nandy's criticism of secularism, the altogether different, theoretical framework than secularism that he, in conclusion, proposes to chart the relationship between religion and politics, assumes as its starting point that traditional ways of life from the Indian context, have already themselves developed certain principles of toleration. This affirms that religious communities in traditional societies have already known how to live together and do not, therefore, require secularism to achieve this purpose. Furthermore, it assures that the principles of toleration that religious traditions have already developed themselves, must continue to play a crucially important role when it comes to India's exercise of politics. Indeed, Nandy articulates that 'it is (…) from the traditions and principles of religious tolerance encoded in the everyday life associated with the different faiths of India, that one will have to seek clues to the renewal of Indian political culture' (Nandy, 1998, p. 337; see also 1995, p. 39). This is not as difficult as perhaps first appears. This is because the signs and symbols of religious toleration in the Indian context have never been modern, even if modernity has managed to lay false claim to some of these signs and symbols (Nandy, 1998, p. 337). Therefore, Nandy also concludes that the moral of the story is that it is time

to recognise that, instead of trying to build religious toleration on the grounds of good faith or conscience of a minority of secular politicians, bureaucrats, and intellectuals,:

> 'a far more serious venture would be to explore the philosophy, the symbolism, and the theology of tolerance in the faiths of (…) citizens and hope that the state systems [in the Indian context] (…) may learn something about religious tolerance from everyday Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, or Sikhism rather than wish that ordinary Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs will learn tolerance from the various fashionable secular theories of statecraft' (Nandy, 1998, p. 338).

This conclusion demonstrates that many parts and premises of Nandy's criticism of secularism pertain to the very same problems that Madan most importantly relates to secularism. And, to reiterate, these are the problems that primarily issue from Madan and Nandy's shared observation that the social, cultural, and historical context of the country of India seriously complicates secularism's successful installation in this context. Aside from Nandy's altogether different, theoretical framework than secularism, I argue that Nandy's criticism of secularism most importantly fosters and supports this observation by reason of his argument of the Western process of self-definition, his argument of democratic participation, and his formulation of the criticism of insensitivity. This, in turn, suggests that, similar to Madan's criticism, Nandy's engagement with secularism perhaps neither, in fact, preserves the strict objectivist perspective or the god's eye view of political neutrality Bhargava does, however, ascribe to it. And, furthermore, I proclaim that Nandy's other arguments against (Western) secularism neither really concern how he perhaps understands political neutrality, but actually have more to do with his critical analysis of the ideas and assumptions behind (Western) secularism and the consequences that these very ideas and assumptions have for people's everyday existence in the Indian context. The first conclusion that follows from this observation is that we are provided yet another reason to hold onto a somewhat, different interpretation of Nandy's criticism of secularism than Bhargava does. And, second, we must, therefore, establish ourselves the aim to examine whether and if so, how, Bhargava's support of secularism can still be brought into the kind

of conversation with Nandy that is, in fact, truthful and representative of the position that the latter really takes. This guides us to this paper's very conclusion.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have set ourselves the task to act towards Bhikhu Parekh's observation with regards to the poor state of the Indian intellectual discourse about secularism (hereafter simply 'Parekh's observation about secularism'). To reiterate, we reasoned that Parekh primarily considered the state of this very discourse poor, because (i) the Indian works and articles brought out about secularism remained relatively isolated from each other and did not add up to a coherent and comprehensive body of philosophical literature, and because (ii) the Indian works and articles published about secularism still not have received the necessary, critical examination from above. In turn, we decided to apply ourselves to Parekh's observation about secularism precisely by combining these very two interpretations, and have, therefore, on the one hand, brought into conversation with each other Indian advocates and critics of secularism, and, on the other hand, reflected on their works about this very philosophy from above. Of course, it was impossible to do this in reference to every Indian support and criticism of secularism, which means that we had to make choices. We have done this by directing the most of our attention to the support of secularism presented by Rajeev Bhargava (chapter I) and to the criticisms of secularism offered by Trilokī Nātha Madan and Ashis Nandy (chapter II). However, it is not as if we have not attended to other supports and criticisms of secularism in this paper's two chapters. By contrast, a great part of how this paper has applied itself to the task that Parekh has presented us, precisely consisted in demonstrating that Bhargava's support of secularism as well as Madan and Nandy's criticisms of this philosophy do not stand on their own, but can be situated and understood in view of broader debates about secularism, both in and outside the Indian context. The other part of how this paper has tackled Parekh's problem with regards to his observation about secularism, consisted in presenting how Madan and Nandy's general criticisms of secularism can also be applied to Bhargava's support of this very philosophy in particular.

It is in this regard that this paper draws at least two conclusions and equally provides at least two recommendations for further research. The first conclusion is that Madan and Nandy's general criticisms of secularism can also, indeed, be applied to many parts and premises of Bhargava's support of this philosophy in particular. This means that it has also been really relevant and valuable to apply

ourselves to Parekh's observation about secularism and, thus, to bring into conversation with each other Bhargava's support of secularism and Madan and Nandy's criticisms of this very philosophy. Second, this paper has demonstrated that Bhargava's support of secularism as well as Madan and Nandy's criticisms of this philosophy can each be situated and understood in the context of broader debates about secularism, both in and outside the Indian context. This suggests that Bhargava, Madan, and Nandy's perspectives about secularism can also each be said to represent more widely supported positions about this very philosophy, which they all, of course, provide further substance to in their own, unique way.

As for this paper's recommendations, I would first like to invite ourselves to address the question that I have also already sometimes alluded to in this paper's second chapter. This is the question whether and if so, how, Bhargava's support of secularism can also still be brought into a truthful and representative kind of conversation with regards to the parts and premises of Madan and Nandy's criticisms of secularism about which we have not, in fact, maintained the very same or a rather similar interpretation. I would primarily like to invite ourselves to address this question because, even if we did, indeed, often hold onto the very same or a rather similar interpretation of Madan and Nandy's criticisms of secularism as Bhargava did, we have also sometimes established a somewhat, different understanding of Madan and Nandy's viewpoints. Second, this paper has mainly brought into conversation with each Bhargava's support of secularism and Madan and Nandy's criticisms of this very philosophy from the perspective(s) of the latter to the former, rather than also from the viewpoint of the former to the latter. We have shown that this has been a really relevant and valuable exercise to engage in, because we have, accordingly, provided ourselves the means to take the very first step with regards to Parekh's observation about secularism. However, this entails that we are also now provided the means to take the very next step and to examine, therefore, whether and if so, how, Bhargava is perhaps able to respond to Madan and Nandy's applied criticisms of secularism. I energetically encourage both myself and others to attend ourselves to this very question and to climb the ladder of philosophical wisdom and intelligence with each other, accordingly.

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