

**Doing Comparative Political Philosophy: The Application and Comparison
of Three Indian and ‘Western’ Criticisms of Charles Taylor’s
Reflections on ‘Secularism’**

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6576 words

Introduction

A common practice of philosophy is to bring into conversation and critical comparison traditions of thought that are not usually associated with each other. This paper establishes a similar exploration by examining how three Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’ can be used against Charles Taylor’s reflections on this very philosophy and be compared with each other. It does this primarily with the purpose of contributing to the undertaking of Brian Black, Gavin Hyman, and Graham Murray Smith to stage a creative encounter between ‘Western’ and Indian conceptions of ‘secularism’ ‘with a view to continuing new and distinctive trajectories of thought about the place and role of secularism in contemporary times’ (Black, Human, Smith, 2014, p. 1). It is particularly relevant to address Taylor’s reflections on ‘secularism’ in this adventurous light because his philosophy has not yet been brought into conversation and critical comparison with Indian understandings of ‘secularism’, despite that Taylor does draw at least one explicit reference from an Indian interpretation of this very system of ideas, which is the comprehension of the political theorist Rajeev Bhargava (Taylor, 2010, p. 23; 2011b, p. 34). Consequently, this paper establishes an exploration in regards to Taylor’s reflections on ‘secularism’ and three Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’ by first characterising Taylor’s philosophy of ‘secularism’ (section I) and his more particular to attempt to provide a convincing answer to the criticism that ‘secularism’ is a ‘Western’ invention, and, cannot, accordingly, succeed in travelling to ‘non-Western’ cultures (section II). Thereafter, I describe three Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’ (sections III and IV). Finally, I unfold this paper’s central examination how these criticisms can be used against Taylor’s reflections on ‘secularism’ and be compared with each other (sections V and VI).

I. Charles Taylor’s Philosophy of ‘Secularism’

In each of his three recent works *The Meaning of Secularism* (2010), *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience* (2011a), and *Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism* (2011b), Charles Taylor argues that ‘secularism’ necessarily requires the state to separate ‘religion’ and politics and to take a ‘principled distance’ from the many different perspectives people nowadays endorse (Taylor, 2010, pp. 23-5; 2011a, pp. 2-5, 13, 20-1; 2011b, p. 37). More importantly, however, Taylor asserts that ‘secularism’ requires the state to pursue the three goods or goals of ‘liberty’, ‘equality’, ‘fraternity’ (Taylor, 2010, p. 23; 2011b, pp. 34-5). To effectively pursue the goal of ‘liberty’, Taylor argues that the ‘secular’ state should commit itself to defending people’s freedom to do or do not endorse ‘religious’ beliefs and practices. To productively work towards the goal of ‘equality’, Taylor maintains that the ‘secular’ state

must recognise people's equal dignity and provide them, therefore, the very same measure of respect. Last, to satisfactorily aspire to the goal of 'fraternity', Taylor affirms that the 'secular' state ought to give equal voice to and maintain as much as possible harmonious relationships between people with different worldviews (Taylor, 2010, pp. 23-5; 2011a, p. 20; 2011b, pp. 35-7).

At the hand of these three goods or goals of 'secularism', Taylor primarily seeks to distance himself from the philosophical movement of exclusively ascribing to 'secularism' the institutional responsibility to separate 'religion' and politics. The foremost reason is that Taylor considers this movement to overpass the many problems contemporary societies face with regards to their instalment and maintenance of 'secularism'. Most importantly, these problems include the many different empirical challenges how to evenly pursue the three goods or goals of 'liberty', 'equality', and 'fraternity' as Taylor characterises them (Taylor, 2011a, p. 3; 2011b, p. 35). Furthermore, Taylor argues that the philosophical movement of exclusively ascribing to 'secularism' the hereabove responsibility of 'strict separation' compromises the 'secular' state's successful pursuance of its third goal of 'fraternity'. This is because this 'strict separation' of 'religion' and politics essentially deprives 'religious' traditions of their voice to contribute to the ongoing process of determining how society ought to be organised (Taylor, 2011b, p. 35). This, in turn, can be said to result in, what Taylor himself calls, 'a misrecognition' of 'religious' communities (Taylor, 1998, pp. 25, 64).

In spite of this, Taylor understands why many philosophers still continue to resist rethinking their move to exclusively ascribe to 'secularism' the responsibility to strictly separate 'religion' and politics. This is because contemporary democracies derive their political legitimacy from 'the common will' of 'the people', and, therefore, require citizens to trust each other and commit themselves to collective performances. This, in turn, commands a democracy's citizenry to have or develop a strong collective identity, which is usually generated in reference to political principles inasmuch as to historic, linguistic, and 'religious' traditions. This makes it altogether understandable, Taylor acknowledges, that many philosophers continue to consider 'strict 'secularism'' overly sacrosanct to take issue with (Taylor, 2010, pp. 30-1; 2011a, pp. 12-3; 2011b, pp. 45-6).

Taylor asserts that this particularly holds for the two philosophers John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. This is because both are said to sideline 'religion' on the basis of their shared supposition that people's use of 'secular' languages suffices to establish the kind of moral-political conclusions present-day democracies require, including, for instance, the conclusions

pertaining to the legitimacy of the state's exercise of politics and the shared moral-political identity of a citizenry (Taylor, 2011b, pp. 49-50, 53; see also Taylor, 2009, pp. 1161-2). In regards to this assumption, Taylor agrees with Rawls and Habermas that 'secular' societies are, indeed, required to legitimise their exercise of democratic politics in a neutral, 'non-religious' language. However, in opposition to Rawls and Habermas, Taylor maintains that this requirement has nothing to do with the particular nature of 'religious' languages. This is because it is equally improper if the 'secular' state legitimises its exercise of democratic politics in a Kantian, Marxist, or other 'non-religious' language. Instead, therefore, Taylor argues that the 'secular' state's provision to legitimise its exercise of democratic politics in a universally understandable language must be comprehended in consideration of its broader responsibility to be and remain neutral (Taylor, 2011b, pp. 50-1; see also Taylor, 2009, p. 1162; 2011a, pp. 9-10, 20-1).

II. Charles Taylor's Defence of 'Secularism' as 'Travelling Concept'

In *Modes of Secularism*, Charles Taylor (1998) addresses the common criticism that 'secularism' is a 'Western' invention, and, cannot, accordingly, succeed in travelling to 'non-Western' environments. In response to this criticism, Taylor draws a distinction between two modes of 'secularism' and argues that a third, hybrid form can, in fact, travel to 'non-Western' cultures (Taylor, 1998, p. 31; see also Taylor, 2009, pp. 1143-4). Taylor refers to the first mode of 'secularism' as 'the common ground strategy'. This mode of 'secularism' seeks to establish moral-political mutuality between citizens' different, both 'religious' and 'non-religious' commitments (Taylor, 1998, p. 33; see also Taylor, 2009, p. 1150). Taylor refers to the second mode of 'secularism', in turn, as 'the independent political ethic approach'. This mode of 'secularism' seeks to establish a political morality independently of people's particular, 'religious' and 'non-religious' commitments (Taylor, 1998, pp. 33-4).

Taylor acknowledges that 'the independent political ethic approach' to 'secularism' does, indeed, give colour to the common criticism that 'secularism' is unable to travel outside of 'Western' circumstances. This is because this mode of 'secularism' distinctly counts on the 'Western' analysis that people can abstract themselves from their 'religious' beliefs and practices (Taylor, 1998, p. 37). In spite of this, Taylor maintains that 'the common ground strategy' to 'secularism' does not necessarily hold onto this 'Western' premise. On the contrary, this approach to 'secularism' actually works with people's different commitments to establish moral-political convergence. This, in turn, suggests that 'the common ground strategy' to 'secularism' can, in fact, be readapted to 'non-Western' cultures, albeit not in its original form

(Taylor, 1998, p. 37). For this reason, Taylor proposes a third, hybrid form of ‘secularism’ he refers to as ‘the overlapping consensus approach’ (Taylor, 1998, pp. 37-8).

Taylor describes that the foremost purpose of this hybrid approach to ‘secularism’ is to establish people’s acceptance of a series of universally legitimate moral-political principles, whilst appreciating the diversity of reasons citizens endorse to adhere to these very principles (Taylor, 1998, pp. 37-8). Accordingly, the hybridity of this third mode of ‘secularism’, Taylor describes, essentially consists in its move to insert from ‘the independent political ethic approach’ the purpose of identifying a universally acceptable assortment of moral-political principles, whilst implanting from ‘the common ground strategy’ the necessary appreciation that citizens will employ many different, both ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ reasons to agree to these very principles (Taylor, 1998, pp. 37-8, 48-9, 51-2). By combining these characteristics of both ‘the independent political ethic approach’ and ‘the common ground strategy’ to ‘secularism’, Taylor concludes that ‘the overlapping consensus approach’ convincingly demonstrates that ‘secularism’ can, in fact, succeed in travelling to ‘non-Western’ cultures.

III. Three Indian Criticisms of ‘Secularism’

In this paper’s first two sections, I have depicted Charles Taylor’s philosophy of ‘secularism’ and his more particular attempt to provide a convincing answer to the criticism that ‘secularism’ is a ‘Western’ invention, and, cannot, accordingly, succeed in travelling to ‘non-Western’ cultures. In this paper’s following two sections, in turn, I respectively elaborate on three Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’. I do this to enable ourselves to examine how these criticisms can be used against Taylor’s reflections on ‘secularism’ and be compared with each other. By ‘Indian’ and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’, I allude to the origins of these criticisms, not to the different backgrounds of the scholars who have developed them. In spite of this, the foremost reason why this paper engages with the three Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’ particularly elaborated on hereunder is that they each address this philosophy with many different concerns and from many different perspectives.

As for a first Indian criticism of ‘secularism’, then, in *Secularism and Tolerance*, Partha Chatterjee (1998) addresses the question whether ‘secularism’ is ‘an adequate, or even appropriate, ground on which to meet the political challenge of Hindu majoritarianism’ (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 345). Chatterjee describes that the foremost reason to engage with this question is that the majoritarianism of India’s Hindu Right appears perfectly compatible with the institutional procedures of the ‘secular’ state (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 346). In turn, Chatterjee

indicates that this is because India's Hindu majoritarianism openly underwrites the 'secular' objective to separate 'religion' and politics to 'preserve' the country's 'national culture' against refugees and Muslims (Chatterjee, 1998, pp. 345-8). Indeed, this already itself suggests, Chatterjee contends, that 'secularisation and religious toleration may sometimes work at cross-purposes' (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 348).

In spite of this, Chatterjee refrains from drawing this conclusion as long as it is not clear what 'secularism' precisely means. First, therefore, Chatterjee explores how to understand 'secularism'. In regards to this philosophical excursion, Chatterjee describes that 'Western' discourses about politics maintain a more robust reference to 'secularism' than Indian conversations do (Chatterjee, 1998, pp. 350-1). This is because there does not exist a single Indian language, Chatterjee asserts, that includes a word for 'secularism' 'whose meaning can immediately be explicated without having recourse to the English terms' (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 350). Therefore, Chatterjee particularly explores the 'Western' meaning of the concept of 'secularism' (Chatterjee, 1998, pp. 349-51).

Chatterjee's attributes three principles to this 'Western' understanding of 'secularism'. The first is that the 'secular' state must permit the practice of any 'religion' within the limits of people's other basic human rights. The second is that the 'secular' state should not discriminate between people's 'religions', irrespective of whether this discrimination can be considered positive or negative. In fine, the third principle is that the 'secular' state ought not to involve itself in the arrangement of 'religious' affairs (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 358).

Returning to the main question *Secularism and Tolerance* seeks to address, Chatterjee argues that it is essentially impossible for states to maintain the strict separation of functions 'secularism' prescribes. This is because the 'secular' state's decision to subsidise 'secular' universities instead of 'religious' celebrations, for instance, nevertheless, accordingly, conditions the limits and possibilities of people's practice of 'religion' (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 355). Moreover, Chatterjee argues that each of the three principles of 'secularism' requires states to interpret what 'religion' means. This becomes the clearest in regards to 'secularism's' first principle. This is because this principle essentially requires the 'secular' state to identify and separate people's 'religious' freedom from their other basic liberties. Chatterjee indicates, however, that, in accordance with the 'secular' state's judicial procedures, this decision cannot be left to 'religious' denominations, but has to be determined 'as an objective question' by 'secular' courts. Chatterjee contends that this, in turn, easily entangles the 'secular' state in a

series of 'religious' disputes it actually commands itself to remain at distance from (Chatterjee, 1998, pp. 359-60).

Chatterjee argues that these two problems together demonstrate that 'secularism' provides contemporary India neither the adequate nor the appropriate means to address the political challenge of Hindu majoritarianism. This is because both drawbacks indicate that the majoritarianism of India's Hindu Right can prudently employ 'secularism's' three essential principles to continue to exercise a discriminative politics in the name of the country's 'national culture'. This does, indeed, strongly suggest, Chatterjee concludes, that 'secularisation and religious toleration may sometimes work at cross-purposes' (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 348).

Turning to a second Indian criticism of 'secularism', in *Secularism in Its Place*, Triloki Nath Madan (1998) brings forward the argument that, in regards to India's contemporary circumstances, the philosophy of 'secularism' is both impossible and unworkable. To become meaningful, therefore, Madan argues that India's citizenry ought to be able to internalise 'the cultural transfer' of 'secularism' and 'secularism' should find the right means to express itself in 'non-Western' circumstances (Madan, 1998, pp. 308-10).

To my knowledge, Madan presents at least four explanations for establishing his paper's main argument. First, Madan argues that 'secularism' neglects that India and, in fact, many other, 'non-Western' societies are 'religious' and do not, therefore, untroubledly agree to the imposition of 'secularism' on a country's culture and history (Madan, 1998, pp. 298-9, 302). Indeed, Madan articulates that the transfer of 'secularism' is prescribed to 'non-Western' societies 'without regard for the character of their religious traditions or for the gifts that these might have to offer' (Madan, 1998, p. 308). Second, this quotation, in turn, suggests that Madan contends that 'secularism' fails to acknowledge and appreciate the political powers 'religions' themselves contain to structure 'non-Western' societies (Madan, 1998, p. 308). Third, Madan maintains that many citizens of 'religious' societies do not know whether it is preferable to privatise 'religion', and, if it is, how they can do this if they are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs instead of Protestant Christians (Madan, 1998, pp. 298-9, 307-8). Fourth, Madan posits that the philosophy of 'secularism' solely comprises a political device to structure society, but should, in fact, enclose a determinedly established worldview to guide the exercise of politics and to counter 'religious' fundamentalism and fanaticism (Madan, 1998, pp. 301, 313).

On the basis of these four criticisms, Madan concludes that 'secularism' can be made meaningful to contemporary India and, in fact, many other, 'non-Western' citizenries if and

only if people become able to internalise this ‘cultural transfer’ and ‘secularism’ finds the right means to express itself in ‘non-Western’ circumstances (Madan, 1998, pp. 308-10, 319).

Finally, apropos of a third Indian criticism of ‘secularism, in *The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Toleration*, Ashis Nandy (1998) argues that the ‘Western’ philosophy and politics of ‘secularism’ have exhausted their possibilities in regards to the constitutional organisation of contemporary India. This is because both have neither been able to privatise ‘religion’ nor to intercept ‘religious’ and ethnic intolerances. Therefore, Nandy contends that we have to employ a different conceptual framework to structure the culture and society of contemporary India (Nandy, 1998, pp. 326, 336-8).

To establish this argument, Nandy separates two meanings of ‘secularism’. The first is distinctively ‘Western’ and seeks to privatise ‘religion’ (Nandy, 1998, p. 326). Nandy argues that this ‘scientific and rational meaning’ of ‘secularism’ assumes that ‘religion’ poses a threat to any ‘modern’ polity (Nandy, 1998, pp. 326-7). By contrast, the second meaning of ‘secularism’ is distinctively Indian and seeks to enable ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ traditions to conserve continuous dialogue (Nandy, 1998, p. 327). Therefore, Nandy argues that this ‘accommodative meaning’ of ‘secularism’ actually assumes that ‘religions’ respect and appraise each other (Nandy, 1998, p. 327).

Nandy asserts that this difference between the ‘Western’ and Indian understanding of ‘secularism’ issues from an equally different interpretation of ‘religion’. This is because the ‘Western’ interpretation of ‘secularism’ primarily understands ‘religion’ as ‘ideology’, which means that it essentially interprets ‘religion’ as a framework on the grounds of which people mainly contest or protect ‘non-religious’ interests (Nandy, 1998, p. 322). By contrast, the Indian interpretation of ‘secularism’ primarily understands ‘religion’ as ‘faith’, which means that it primarily interprets ‘religion’ as a way of life by virtue of which people give meaning to their everyday performances (Nandy, 1998, p. 322).

In turn, Nandy argues that the ‘Western’ meaning of ‘secularism’ and its ‘scientific and rational’ understanding of ‘religion’ together cling to a ‘hidden political hierarchy’ (Nandy, 1998, p. 328). Most importantly, Nandy describes that this hierarchy classifies people into four different categories of political actors. The first category refers to the people who are on top of the hidden political hierarchy of ‘Western’ ‘secularism’ and are ‘religious’ neither in public nor in private (Nandy, 1998, p. 328). The second category pertains to the people who choose not to be ‘religious’ in public, but are, in fact, ‘religious’ in private (Nandy, 1998, pp. 328-9). By

contrast, the third category of political actors applies to the people who do choose to be 'religious' in public, but are not actually 'religious' in private (Nandy, 1998, p. 329). In fine, the fourth category relates to the people who are at the bottom of the hidden political hierarchy of 'Western' 'secularism' and are 'religious' both in public and in private (Nandy, 1998, p. 330).

To return to his paper's main argument, Nandy contends that the 'Western' philosophy and politics of 'secularism' have exhausted their possibilities in regards to the constitutional organisation of contemporary India primarily because both have neither been able to privatise 'religion' nor to intercept 'religious' and ethnic intolerances (Nandy, 1998, pp. 332, 338). In regards to the 'deficiency of privatisation', the foremost reason Nandy provides is that 'religion' is often too important and meaningful for Indian people to leave aside with respects to the arrangement of their country's public sphere (Nandy, 1998, p. 333). In regards to 'the deficiency of intercepting 'religious' and ethnic intolerances', in turn, the first reason Nandy provides is that the 'modern' state cannot ascertain that 'secularism' may itself come to commit wrongdoings to other, 'religious' associations (Nandy, 1998, p. 333). Nandy's second reason is that the earlier discussed 'hidden political hierarchy' of 'Western' secularism' has not achieved the primary purpose it pursues in regards to the constitutional organisation of contemporary India. This is 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).

For these reasons, Nandy concludes that we have to employ the conceptual framework that works from the 'Indian' interpretation of 'secularism' and 'religion' to structure the culture and society of contemporary India (Nandy, 1998, pp. 326, 336-8). In practice, this means that we have to replace the 'Western' undertaking to privatise 'religion' with the Indian awareness that 'religious' traditions include their own principles of tolerance they should, accordingly, be allowed to bring to public notice to improve the political organisation of contemporary India (Nandy, 1997, pp. 336-8).

IV. Three 'Western' Criticisms of 'Secularism'

After having illustrated three Indian criticisms of 'secularism', this paper's fourth section considers three 'Western' criticisms. To reiterate, the purpose of this consideration is to enable ourselves to examine how these criticisms can be used against Charles Taylor's reflections on 'secularism' and be compared with each other. Furthermore, the foremost reason why this paper engages with the three 'Western' criticisms of 'secularism' particularly elaborated hereunder is

that they each address this philosophy with many different concerns and from many different perspectives.

As for a first ‘Western’ criticism of ‘secularism’, in *Liberal Political Theory and the Cultural Migration of Ideas: The Case of Secularism in India*, Jakob De Roover, Sarah Claerhout and S.N. Balagangadhara (2011) raise and respond to the question whether the principles of ‘secularism’ can be disentangled from their ‘Western’ origins and be made intelligible to ‘non-Western’ people. De Roover, Claerhout and Balagangadhara’s answer to this question is negative, since the cultural migration of the principles of ‘secularism’ produces ‘conceptual distortions’ that the theory’s broader constellation of ‘Western’ suppositions cannot eliminate (De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara, 2011, pp. 583-4, 587-8, 591).

Following James Farr (1989), De Roover, Claerhout and Balagangadhara describe that concepts and principles are always embedded in broader frames of reference. These frames of reference condition the limits and possibilities of the meanings concepts and principles can include (De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara, p. 574). De Roover, Claerhout and Balagangadhara describe that this similarly holds for the principles of ‘secularism’. Thus, for instance, the ‘secular’ principle that the state should provide people the very same measure of respect can only be made meaningful within the limits and possibilities of the theory’s broader constellation of ‘Western’ suppositions, which explains what equality of respect entails, what constitutes ‘religion’ as the object of respect, and how these concepts are related to the other concepts of ‘the state’, ‘the citizen’, and ‘equality’ (De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara, pp. 575, 581).

When ‘secularism’ migrates to ‘non-Western’ cultures, however, De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara argue that the principles of ‘secularism’ are not commonly comprehended in view of the theory’s broader constellation of ‘Western’ suppositions. Instead, they are then rather typically interpreted by means of ‘non-Western’ clusters of thoughts and expressions (De Roover, Claerhout and Balagangadhara, pp. 583-4, 587). These frames of reference evidently preserve different ideas about ‘secularism’ and the many other concepts the theory’s principles encompass. Therefore, De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara conclude that the cultural migration of the principles of ‘secularism’ inevitably produces ‘conceptual distortions’ the theory’s broader constellation of ‘Western’ suppositions cannot eliminate (De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara, 2011, pp. 583-4, 587-8, 591).

Turning to a second ‘Western’ criticism of ‘secularism’, in *Contesting Secularism: Comparative Perspectives*, Anders Berg-Sørensen (2013) provides a critical comparison of some of the different implementations of ‘secularism’ across the globe to demonstrate that ‘secularism’ is an essentially contested concept that we can, therefore, better interpret in the *plural* than in the *singular* (Berg-Sørensen, 2013, pp. 2-4).

Berg-Sørensen describes that ‘secularism’ is standardly defined as the system of ideas that prescribes the separation of the state’s exercise of politics and people’s individual reasons to accept this practice of politics. In turn, ‘secularism’ is usually asserted to implement this separation at the hand of requiring democratic states to justify their exercise of politics solely on the basis of universally understandable reasons. Berg-Sørensen specifies that this is because ‘secularism’ is typically said to separate ‘religion’ and politics to pursue the values of liberty, equality, impartiality, neutrality, and universality. In regards to the customary conception of ‘secularism’, this most importantly requires citizens of ‘secular’ states to translate their ‘religious’ persuasions, since these persuasions are not commonly considered generally comprehensible in ‘secular’ circumstances (Berg-Sørensen, 2013, pp. 2-3).

However, in response to this characteristic, but, more importantly, *singular* understanding of ‘secularism’, Berg-Sørensen argues that a critical comparison of some of the different implementations of ‘secularism’ across the globe demonstrates that states do, in reality, actually maintain many dissimilar interpretations of the philosophy of ‘secularism’. This is said to become the clearest in regards to the sweeping diversity of arrangements and practices ‘secular’ states institute to regulate the separation of ‘religion’ and politics. Berg-Sørensen contends that these divergences most importantly issue from the many different public discourses, political cultures, and metaphysical worldviews ‘secular’ states and their citizenries preserve. Indeed, Berg-Sørensen maintains that ‘the articulations of secularism as political doctrines and forms of government represent parts of various national and international political decision-making processes’ (Berg-Sørensen, 2013, p. 2). One of the remarkable consequences is that ‘secularism’ can both be said to defend and attack people’s ‘religious’ beliefs and practices (Berg-Sørensen, 2013, p. 4). Berg-Sørensen argues that this altogether depends on how ‘secular’ states categorise the importance of the values of liberty, equality, impartiality, neutrality, and universality in relation to one another. Therefore, Berg-Sørensen concludes that ‘secularism’ should be considered an essentially contested concept that can better be interpreted in the *plural* than in the *singular* (Berg-Sørensen, 2013, pp. 2-4).

Finally, apropos of a third ‘Western’ criticism of ‘secularism’, in *Secularism*, Linde Draaisma and Erin Wilson (2022) explore and contextualise the contours of ‘secularism’. They argue that ‘secularism’ primarily manages the relationship between that which is regarded ‘religious’ and that which is considered ‘secular’. It does this by placing certain ideas and practices in the category of ‘the religious’ and others in the category of ‘the secular’. Draaisma and Wilson describe that ‘secularism’ distinguishes these ideas and practices mainly at the hand of privileging the category of ‘the secular’ over and above ‘the religious’ (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, pp. 27-8). This means that ‘secularism’ is premised on ideas and assumptions about ‘religion’ that are not neutral, but subjective and particular (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, p. 23). Furthermore, Draaisma and Wilson accentuate that it means that ‘secularism’ should, therefore, be regarded an ideology that establishes ‘a system of discursive and conceptual power that privileges one understanding of the world over others’ (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, p. 24).

Draaisma and Wilson articulate that ‘secularism’ privileges the category of ‘the secular’ mainly up against Christian experiences, beliefs, and practices. This is because ‘secularism’ and the philosophy’s understanding of ‘religion’ most importantly originate in ‘the European situation’ (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, pp. 24-5). In spite of this, Draaisma and Wilson underline that ‘secularism’ should not, therefore, be interpreted in the *singular*. This is because ‘secularism’ continues to involve many different interpretations of how to separate and classify ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’. Draaisma and Wilson describe that this diversity of understandings primarily develops on the different social, historical, political, cultural, economic, theological, and environmental circumstances in which the philosophy and politics of ‘secularism’ materialise (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, pp. 24-5, 28).

Be that as it may, Draaisma and Wilson argue that these different interpretations and manifestations of ‘secularism’ do, nevertheless, share with each other the ideas and assumptions that (i) ‘religion’ can and should be distinguished, defined, and separated from the other, ‘secular’ domains of human existence, (ii) ‘religion’ is subjective, particular, individual, and irritational, whereas ‘the secular’ is objective, universal, neutral and rational, (iii) ‘religion’ is what people disagree about more frequently and violently than anything else, (iv) ‘religion’ must, therefore, be kept out of the public sphere and be relegated to the private sphere, and (v) ‘religion’ should, consequently, be subordinated to ‘the secular’, even it can continue to contribute to politics and public life from within people’s private sphere (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, pp. 29-30).

Draaisma and Wilson argue that these ideas and assumptions of ‘secularism’ together create a system of unequal power relations that severely affects how individuals, communities, and institutions analyse and respond to the challenges of living together in the twenty-first century (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, pp. 23-4). One of these consequences is that ‘secularism’ renders certain kinds of knowledge more valuable, acceptable, and reliable than others (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, p. 30). In this regard, Draaisma and Wilson indicate that the more valuable kinds of knowledge are usually associated with the conduct of scientific research, whereas the less favourable kinds of knowledge are typically related to local cosmologies and ‘religious’ ontologies (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, p. 32). In conclusion, this directs Draaisma and Wilson back to their work’s main observation that ‘secularism’ primarily manages the relationship between that which is regarded ‘religious’ and that which is considered ‘secular’ on the basis of ideas and assumptions that are not neutral, but subjective and particular (Wilson, 2022, pp. 24, 27-30).

V. Indian and ‘Western’ Criticisms of Charles Taylor’s Reflections on ‘Secularism’

This paper’s third and fourth section have characterised three Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’. I have done this to enable ourselves to examine how these criticisms can be used against Charles Taylor’s reflections on ‘secularism’ and be compared with each other. In this paper’s remainder, I unfold this examination. I do this by first attending to how the three discussed, Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms can respectively be used against Taylor’s philosophy of ‘secularism’ and his more particular attempt to provide a convincing answer to the criticism that ‘secularism’ is a ‘Western’ invention, and, cannot, accordingly, succeed in travelling to ‘non-Western’ cultures. Thereafter, I examine how the three discussed, Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms can be compared with each other. In regards to this paper’s fifth section, I must emphasise that I do not address how Taylor may respond to the three discussed, Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’. Furthermore, I ought to clarify that I do neither dwell on the possible similarities between Taylor’s reflections on ‘secularism’ and the three discussed, Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of this philosophy, even if there are, in fact, such similarities. In turn, with respects to both this paper’s fifth and final section, I should highlight that I do not discuss each and every possible way in which the three discussed, Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms can be used against Taylor’s reflections on ‘secularism’ and be compared with each other.

There are at least three aspects of Taylor's philosophy of 'secularism' against which we can use the three discussed, Indian and 'Western' criticisms of 'secularism'. The first involves Taylor's insistence that 'secularism' necessarily requires the state to separate 'religion' and politics and to take a 'principled distance' from the many different perspectives people nowadays endorse (Taylor, 2010, pp. 23-5; 2011a, pp. 2-5, 13, 20-1; 2011b, p. 37). In response to this explication, Partha Chatterjee's criticism of 'secularism' (1998) can be used to contend that it is actually impossible for the 'secular' state to remain at 'principled distance' from people's many different worldviews. This is because the 'secular' state's separation of 'religion' and politics continues to condition the limits and possibilities of people's practice of 'religion' and still requires the 'secular' state to decide what is and what is not 'religious' (Chatterjee, 1998, pp. 355, 359-60). Furthermore, Linde Draaisma and Erin Wilson's criticism of 'secularism' can be used against Taylor's requirement of 'secularism' to emphasise that 'secularism' necessarily involves 'a system of discursive and conceptual power that privileges one understanding of the world over others' (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, p. 24). This is because this contention similarly suggests that the 'secular' state may not, in fact, be able to separate 'religion' and politics and to take a 'principled distance' from the many different perspectives people nowadays endorse (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, pp. 23-5, 28).

The second aspect of Taylor's reflections on 'secularism' against which we can use the three discussed, Indian and 'Western' criticisms of 'secularism' pertains to his pronouncement that the 'secular' state ought to recognise people's equal dignity and provide them, therefore, the very same measure of respect (Taylor, 2010, pp. 23-5; 2011a, p. 20; 2011b, pp. 35-7). In response to this deliberation, Ashis Nandy's criticism of 'secularism' (1998) can be used to argue that 'secularism' actually clings to a 'political hierarchy' that makes it impossible for the 'secular' state to provide people the very same amount of moral-political consideration. This is because this 'political hierarchy' of 'secularism' classifies people into four different categories of political actors who are not, in fact, evenly appreciated for who they are and what they do (Nandy, 1998, pp. 328-30). Moreover, Draaisma and Wilson's criticism of 'secularism' can be used against Taylor's emphasis on the 'secular' state's obligation to provide people the very same moral-political consideration to accentuate that 'secularism' typically draws on ideas and assumptions that privilege the category of 'the secular' over and above the category of 'the religious'. This is because this line of reasoning similarly suggests that the 'secular' state may

not, in fact, be able to recognise people's equal dignity and provide them, therefore, the very same measure of respect (Draaisma and Wilson, 2022, pp. 23-5, 28).¹

The third and final aspect of Taylor's reflections on 'secularism' against which we can use the three discussed, Indian and 'Western' criticisms of 'secularism' includes Taylor's judgement that 'secular' societies are required to legitimise their exercise of democratic politics in a neutral, 'non-religious' language (Taylor, 2011b, pp. 50-1; see also Taylor, 2009, p. 1162; 2011a, pp. 9-10, 20-1). In response, Triloki Nath Madan's criticism of 'secularism' (1998) can be used to insist that this 'requirement of neutrality' disregards that many 'non-Western' societies are 'religious' and actually have to, therefore, resort to 'religious' languages to justify their exercise of politics (Madan, 1998, pp. 298-9, 302). Furthermore, Jakob De Roover, Sarah Claerhout and S.N. Balagangadhara's criticism of 'secularism' (2011) can be used against Taylor's thoughts about 'the neutrality of 'secular' politics' to highlight that it is actually altogether impossible for the 'secular' state to legitimise its exercise of politics in a neutral, 'non-religious' language. This is because De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara's criticism of 'secularism' implies that the political concepts and principles of 'secularism' are necessarily situated in broader frames of reference that are not neutral or objective, but specific and circumstantial (De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara, pp. 574-5, 581, 597).

Turning to Taylor's defence of 'secularism' as 'travelling concept', the most important aspect of this defence against which we can use the three, Indian and 'Western' criticisms of 'secularism' involves Taylor's main argument that 'the overlapping consensus approach' to 'secularism' enables this philosophy to do succeed in travelling to 'non-Western' circumstances. In response to this defence of 'secularism' as 'travelling concept', Madan's criticism of 'secularism' (1998) can be used to argue that many 'non-Western' societies may not, in fact, be able to establish a universally acceptable assortment of moral-political principles. This is because many 'non-Western' societies, as well as, in fact, many 'Western' societies, have a 'religious' culture and history that are both rather particular to the country's past and present circumstances. In addition, Anders Berg-Sørensen's criticism of 'secularism' (2013) can be used against Taylor's defence of 'secularism' as 'travelling concept' to proffer that it is actually impossible for 'secularism' to travel to and to incorporate itself in 'non-Western'

¹ In turn, both these two, Indian and 'Western' criticisms of 'secularism' can also, accordingly, be used against Taylor's affirmation that the 'secular' state ought to give equal voice to and maintain as much as possible harmonious relationships between people with different worldviews (Taylor, 2010, pp. 23-5; 2011a, p. 20; 2011b, pp. 35-7).

societies according to the philosophy's third, hybrid mode of 'the overlapping consensus approach'. This is because a critical comparison of the different implementations of 'secularism' across the globe demonstrates that 'non-Western' societies, as well as, in fact, 'Western' societies, attach many different interpretations to this system of ideas. Indeed, Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara's can be suggested to bring forward the very same line of reasoning (De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara, pp. 574-5, 581, 597).

VI. A Comparison of the Differences between Indian and 'Western' Criticisms of 'Secularism'

As for the definitions the criticisms assume of 'secularism', one important difference between the three discussed, Indian and 'Western' criticisms concerns whether 'secularism' is understood in the *singular* or in the *plural*. Partha Chatterjee, for instance, appears to interpret 'secularism' in the *singular*. This is because he maintains that the 'Western' understanding of this philosophy essentially consists in the three principles of 'religious' freedom, 'religious' tolerance, and the state's separation of 'religion' and politics (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 358). Anders Berg-Sørensen (2013), however, explicitly interprets 'secularism' in the *plural*, because he argues that a critical comparison of some of the different implementations of 'secularism' across the globe demonstrates that this philosophy involves an essentially contested concept (Berg-Sørensen, 2013, pp. 2-4). In turn, a second difference between the definitions the three discussed, Indian and 'Western' criticisms assume of 'secularism' involves whether their definition is *descriptive* or *critical*. Chatterjee's definition of 'secularism' appears to be *descriptive*. This is because he exclusively intends to articulate what 'secularism' involves in theory. These are the three principles elaborated on hereabove. However, Ashis Nandy's definition of 'Western' 'secularism' is *critical*. This is because Nandy's understanding of 'secularism' attributes to this philosophy the belief that 'religion' poses a threat to any 'modern' polity, which Nandy, accordingly, criticises by virtue of the alternative, Indian meaning of 'secularism' (Nandy, 1998, pp. 326-8). In *Secularism*, Linde Draaisma and Erin Wilson (2022) provide another *critical* understanding of 'secularism' by arguing that this philosophy primarily manages the relationship between that which is regarded 'religious' and that which is considered 'secular' on the basis of ideas and assumptions that are not neutral, but subjective and particular (Wilson, 2022, pp. 24, 27-30).

In regards to the central arguments on which the three discussed, Indian and 'Western' criticisms are developed, the most important difference between them consists in whether 'secularism' is mainly criticised at the hand of *practical* or *theoretical* arguments. Each of the

three Indian criticisms of ‘secularism’ suggest that they are primarily developed on *practical* arguments. This is because (i) Chatterjee argues that ‘secularism’ is not ‘an adequate, or even appropriate, ground on which to meet the political challenge of Hindu majoritarianism’ (Chatterjee, 1998, p. 345), (ii) Triloki Nath Madan posits that ‘secularism’ is not able to guide India’s exercise of politics against the country’s ‘religious’ fundamentalism and fanaticism (Madan, 1998, pp. 301, 313), and (iii) Nandy contends that the ‘Western’ implementation of ‘secularism’ has neither been able to privatise ‘religion’ nor to intercept ‘religious’ and ethnic intolerances in contemporary India (Nandy, 1998, pp. 332, 338). However, by contrast, Jakob De Roover, Sarah Claerhout and S.N. Balagangadhara (2011) develop their criticism of ‘secularism’ primarily on the basis of the more *theoretical* argument that the essential principles of ‘secularism’ cannot be disentangled from their ‘Western’ origins, because the broader frame of reference in which these principles are embedded, conditions the limits and possibilities of how the philosophy of ‘secularism’ can be made intelligible (De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara, 2011, pp. 583-4, 587-8, 591).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to contribute to the undertaking of Brian Black, Gavin Hyman, and Graham Murray Smith to stage a creative encounter between ‘Western’ and Indian conceptions of ‘secularism’ ‘with a view to continuing new and distinctive trajectories of thought about the place and role of secularism in contemporary times’ (Black, Human, Smith, 2014, p. 1). I have done this at the hand of examining how three Indian and ‘Western’ criticisms of ‘secularism’ can be used against Charles Taylor’s reflections on this very philosophy and be compared with each other. This examination has produced a number of conclusions. One is that Taylor’s reflections on ‘secularism’ can be criticised for a diversity of reasons. In spite of this, a second conclusion is that these objections can be delivered from an equal diversity of critical perspectives. This suggests that it is surely expedient to bring into conversation and critical comparison traditions of philosophical thought that are not usually associated with each other. Therefore, I would like to bring this paper to a close by bringing forward the recommendation for further research that it is time to think beyond the conceptual distinction between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ philosophies of ‘secularism’ and to examine how they are ‘making it’ in deliberative dialogue with each other.

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