

The Evolution of the Concept of Secularism And Its Encounter with Multiculturalism

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Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan adanya proses terjadinya evolusi sekularisme dan kecenderungannya untuk berjumpa dengan multikulturalisme. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa dalam iklim multikultural yang dipengaruhi sekularisme itu, agama menjadi pilihan subjektif-personal nyaris privat sehingga tidak dapat lagi dipaksakan oleh suatu dominasi hegemoni tertentu, baik yang bersifat religius maupun politis. Dalam ranah ini, iklim multikultural yang dipengaruhi sekularisme justru semakin mendukung pertumbuhan dan perkembangan agama menjadi semakin dewasa, yaitu bukan sebagai suatu pemaksaan dari hegemoni tertentu, melainkan sebagai suatu pilihan personal-subjektif yang diambil secara bertanggung jawab.

Kata Kunci: perkembangan agama; pilihan personal; dimensi keagamaan; materialisme; kehidupan duniawi

Abstract:

This study aims to describe the process of the evolution of secularism and its tendency to meet multiculturalism. This article argues that in the multicultural climate influenced by secularism, religion becomes a subjective-personal choice, almost private, so it can no longer be forced by inevitable hegemonic domination, both religious and political. In this realm, the multicultural climate influenced by secularism supports the growth and development of religion to become more mature, not as an imposition of a particular hegemony but as a personal-subjective choice taken responsibly.

Keywords: religious development; personal choice; religious dimension; materialism; mundane life

INTRODUCTION

As one of the dynamics of the times, secularism had pushed religion into the private sphere. As a result, secularism is considered to provoke a decline in the role of religion. Secularism is regarded as an adverse effect of globalization, where secularism strengthens the erosion of space for the divine or the religious dimension in humans (Mochammad, 2016, p. 3). The roots of materialism and secularism are so broad and global that the meaning of

monotheism in the theocentric dimension is needed as a bulwark to maintain faith in a skeptical attitude that is influenced by the negative influences of modern ideologies can lead to the shallowing of faith (Rijal, 2014, p. 39).

Secularists believe that religion is a force that will stop world civilization. They reasoned that because religion does not follow science and technology's logic, it will be abandoned by modern humans in the era of modernization (Truna & Zakaria, 2021). Peter Berger also stated that religion always directs humans to their truth claims, something far from the attitude of modern humans who have multiple perspectives in their lives. Religion with its claim of truth is the hallmark of an exclusive community, while the era of globalization has avoided this exclusivity (Berger, 2002, 336).

Many figures provide arguments in dealing with exposure to secularism amid modern human life. For example, Said Nursi's monumental work in Turki in "Risalah Nur" has more than 130 treatises in Turkish and 15 other treatises in Arabic, all of which contain Islamic teachings to strengthen the faith of Muslims in the face of secularism (Faiz, 2017, p. 25). Seyyed Hossein Nasr also says that every religious follower must provide a meaningful interfaith dialogue in different religions. It shows their inner unity and formal diversity while increasing the richness of the spiritual life of modern man and as compensation for the spiritually dry environment in which he lives amid modernity and secularism (Ziaulhaq, 2020, p. 108). In addition, when modernism created Islamophobia in Europe, modern education was in line with the idea of progress in the contemporary era, accompanied by various current breakthroughs in solving concrete problems faced by Muslims in Indonesia (Idharoel Haq & Ziaulhaq, 2021, p. 260).

Suppose religion has undeniable power in the face of modernism and secularism, how it should interact with the political realm (Rahman, 2021). If religion is stated to always be against secularism, it is oversimplified. The extent to which dominant religious values have been embedded in the secular system is underestimated by this dichotomous definition of religion against secularism. Contrary to popular belief, democracy does not require a complete separation of church and state. Western political systems have found various solutions to the dilemmas of power and religion. As George noted that, if the European Enlightenment wanted freedom from religious belief, their US counterparts wanted the freedom to believe in religion. The US established a rigorous separation of religion and state so that no government supports or restricts religious practice (George, 2017, p. 67).

José Casanova, one of the world's foremost scholars of the sociology of religion, challenges what he calls "the myth of the secular foundations of Europe, which ignores how religious identity strongly shapes state formation. The French model, *laïcité*, delegitimizes the emergence of religion in public life. However, some of France's European neighbors have official, well-established churches. Alfred Stepan concluded that secularism and the separation of church and state were not central to democracy. Instead, democracy relies on a more subtle and flexible form of accommodation with religion, called "twin tolerance." Twin tolerance requires negotiations to place religious and political authority (George, 2017).

The description of the views on secularism, both in the religious dimension and in the dimensions of democracy, can be said that, like various other social phenomena, secularism also undergoes an evolution. The evolution that occurred in secularism made the center of attention no longer about controlling religion. Now secularism is increasingly concerned with efforts to manage diversity fairly and democratically. Therefore, this study proposes arguments by describing the process of the evolution of secularism and its tendency to meet multiculturalism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Secularism: Liberation from Religious Protection

Etymologically, the word secularism comes from Latin, namely '*sæc(ũ)lum*'. This word has many meanings: the age, the world, or worldly life (Prent, 1969, p. 758). The purpose of the word that is in line with secularism is the current era or time (Cox, 1966, p. 2). *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language* defines 'secularism' as things related to the world and reject spiritual values. While the term 'secularize' refers to a global process or a process to become secular, namely the movement from the sacred to the worldly (Webster, 1981, p. 1138).

In Arabic, 'secular' is harmonized with *laa diniyyah* (not religion) or *dunyawiyyah* (more mundane). The meaning refers to the opposite of *ukhrawi* (hereafter life) but has a more specific sense, namely something that has nothing to do with *din* (religion). In other words, the secular has an opposite relationship with religion (Qaradhawy, 2000, p. 17). Regarding secular expressions in Arabic, Syahrin Harahap (Harahap, 1994, p. 12) argues that Arabic adopted this term from the usage of Arab Christians. Arab Christians used the term secular to express this idea before it caught the attention of the Muslims. They formulated a particular term for secular, namely '*alamani* or nature (worldly). The meaning, worldly, is opposed to something other than the world or to be more spiritual. While

the term 'secularize' is translated into *hawwal ila gharad 'alamy ay dunyawiy* (tend to natural or worldly life). This understanding is followed by most Muslims (Al-Attas, 1995).

Regarding this secular term, during the Middle Ages, priests in the Roman Catholic tradition could choose to be affiliated with an order of life instead of other priests who decided to live in the world so that secular priests were not bound to any particular order. Also, during the Middle Ages, the word *saeculum* referred to 'making worldly' as in selling church property. While the general understanding of the *saeculum* is temporary, a specific agreement is added when the *saeculum* becomes a reference to two different worlds, namely the religious, sacred, and spiritual worlds as opposed to the secular, profane, and temporal (Casanova, 2011, p. 56).

The term secular only appeared in the mid-19th century, precisely in 1851 from the work of George Jacob Holyoake (13 April 1817–22 January 1906) (Holyoake, 1896, p. 50). This secular thinker from England defines secularism as an ethical system based on natural (worldly) moral principles independent of religion or supernatural principles (Pardoyo & Madjid, 1993, p. 82). Secularization emerged as a result of the modernization process that occurred during the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was one of the starting points for the birth of *the vummedium* (Middle Age). In the era known as the 'Modern Age', there was a revolution in philosophy. One of the commanders of this revolution was René Descartes. By radically rejecting the theological perspective formulated by medieval thinkers, Descartes devised a research method that could help find certain and absolute truths (*fundamentum certum et inconcussum veritatis*). His ideas were expressed in two books, namely *Discours de la Methode* (1637) and *Meditationes de prima Philosophia* (1641). The truth that he builds is based on mathematical facts in all fields of knowledge (Parkinson & Shanker, 1999). These dynamics occurred in the Western world when religious reasoning (*The Age of Religion*) was replaced by reason (*The Age of Reason*). In that period, secular society only thought about the life of the world and material objects (Susanto, 2007, p. 54). But in its development, secularism, especially atheistic secularism, is considered no longer convincing as a framework for human life. The proof is that communism, which is based on atheistic secularism, has fallen. The revival of these religions is also referred to as post-secular dynamics (Viktorahadi, 2019, p. 124).

An American theologian who served as the Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School (until his retirement in October 2009), Harvey Gallagher Cox Jr., argues that secularization is the liberation of man from the protection of Religion and Metaphysics or a diversion from another realm to this world (Armas, 2007). Secularization is usually equated with secularism, although they are very different because they offer other answers. Cox is among those who distinguish the two terms. According to him, secularism is the name of a closed ideology (ism) that functions very much like the new religion. In contrast, secularization is an effort to rid society of controlled religion and closed metaphysical worldviews.

Regarding the terms secularism and secularization, the name of Peter L. Berger needs to be mentioned. Thinkers in the field of Sociology of knowledge and Sociology of religion often research modernization and theoretical contributions to social theory. They understand secularization as the process of releasing all sectors of life in society and culture from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. Berger put forward his idea by asking questions regarding which socio-cultural processes and groups have functioned as means or mediators for secularization. Berger noted a variety of factors as drivers of secularization. Among other things, human civilization as a whole that spreads throughout the world, the dynamics caused by industrial capitalism, the lifestyle caused by industrial production, the influence of modern science that permeates various sectors of social life, and practical infrastructure in social life (Berger, 2011; Weber, 1993; Weber, 2002). Both Cox and Berger agree that secularism will make religion marginalized and abandoned in the future.

Criticism of Secularization

The theories of secularization that have been described have received sharp criticism from José Casanova. According to this sociologist from Zaragoza, Spain, the ideas of secularism could not explain the events that raged in the 1980s. During this period, religion slowly began to strengthen again and even became public. During this period, every religion was eager to spread religious teachings to others as part of its obligations (Viktorahadi et al., 2021, p. 32). The rise of these religions also occurs due to secularism, especially atheistic secularism, which is no longer convincing as a frame of view, with evidence of the fall of communism. The rise of these religions is also touted as the post-secular century (Blond, 1998; Caputo, 2018). In other words, these secularization theories have to swallow the bitter pill because their predictions that religion will experience degradation and privatization have seemed problematic. However, according to Casanova, this does not mean that the secularization theory should be destroyed and replaced by other approaches.

Starting from that, Casanova developed a theory of secularization by giving rise to three different connotations (Casanova, 2007). First, secularization as the decline of religious beliefs and practices. Second, secularization as the privatization of religion. Third, secularization as separation of religion from the secular world, [such as state, economy, and science]. For Casanova, the first two connotations of secularization became part of the classical secularization theory which had lost its 'spur' after in the 1980s religion moved towards the public and became stronger.

Meanwhile, the third connotation can persist. The reason is that this differentiation does not presuppose the marginalization of religion. This differentiation need not be followed by decreasing religious belief and the privatization of religion as the two previous connotations of secularization (Casanova, 2003, p. 34).

Apart from Casanova, there have been many criticisms of secularism, especially the aspect that claims that ideology is the only system that can be applied anywhere and in any dynamics. In other words, secularism, which is part of the Eurocentric idea, cannot simply be involved in every region of the earth, which of course, has a variety of contexts and backgrounds. Eurocentric is formed from three things. *First*, its intellectual and political foundations derive from classical Greek and Roman culture. Both are considered to represent Europe. *Second*, the moral and religious foundations were laid on Christianity which, although not of European origin, radically took on a definitive form in the light of the Greco-Roman cultural heritage and became a progressive force after undergoing cultural filtering at the hands of Europeans. *Third*, the emergence of individualism, secularism, science, and technology claimed to be proud achievements of modern Europe (Parekh, 2001, p. 225).

Multicultural education becomes a critique of the monoculture's Eurocentric claim. The limitation of the monoculture education system is that it tends not to arouse intellectual curiosity about other cultures or ideas, because they are not exposed to these cultures or because they do not receive comprehensive knowledge, or because of both. Monocultural education also inhibits the growth of critical abilities. Students who are taught to see the world from a narrow perspective of their own culture are directed to reject anything that does not fall within their categories (Parekh, 2001, p. 226-227). Regarding secularism, which is part of Europe-centrism, the students are worried that they will only see that what will happen is the process of secularization. The dynamic that occurred shortly after the idea emerged was the revival of the power of religions.

In looking at the link between multiculturalism and the concept of secularization, Europe also needs to learn from Asian countries. Alfred Stepan (22 July 1936 – 27 September 2017) was one of the thinkers who continued to push it. The director of the Center for the Study of Democracy, Toleration and Religion, Columbia University, US, put forward the main idea, among others, that to be a democrat, we should not have to be secular. In his latest publication, Alfred Stepan examines the Indonesian case and the tenets of the Pancasila doctrine, which can help explain the country's continued commitment to democracy and non-confrontational governance of religious diversity, despite repeated calls by Islamist groups to become an Islamic state. One example is the official recognition of religious minorities, including their joint celebration in the form of public holidays (Triandafyllidou & Modood, 2017, p. 146). Stepan suggested that European democracies might want to adopt such an approach, namely openness to multiculturalism instead of secularism.

Secularism Meets Multiculturalism

Another offer came from Charles Taylor (Taylor, 1994; Volpi, 2004) regarding multiculturalism and secularism. According to this Canadian philosopher, there is no need for a conflict between multiculturalism and secularism. The reason is that the evolution experienced by secularism led to the necessity to meet multiculturalism. Taylor saw an evolution in the concept of secularism. According to him, in the past, the idea of secularization was about controlling religion. However, secularism is now increasingly concerned with efforts to manage diversity fairly and democratically. This change has occurred due to the transformation in Western democracies due to international migration, resulting in much greater religious and cultural diversity. Previously, in Europe, there were only Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Today, I also found Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and many others. Naturally, the new secularism evolved to be involved in the issue of multiculturalism.

In today's pluralist world, humans are faced with different religions and even their absence (Rahman & Setia, 2021). Continuation of belief, according to Taylor, now rests on individual intuition. Individuals need to make choices. Opting for religion is a choice among many other possible options (Taylor, 2009, p. 531). The availability of various religious options is not a threat to Christianity but rather a stimulus to spiritual growth. Steve Bruce suggests otherwise by showing how individualistic subjectivity hastened the end of religion (Bruce, 1996, p. 222).

Emphasizing the subjective nature of religion, Christianity can no longer be viewed as a collective response. Individuals determine the elements that makeup Christianity. Along with subjectivity comes the element of

temporality. Subjectively selected elements may be interchanged over time. Elements can drift in and out of a sacred environment. Christianity's elements are the changing building blocks of rituals, doctrines, and traditions choose from various options (Taylor, 2009). As Peter L. Berger (1999, p. 13) points out, religion is a human nature that urges to find meaning. Meaning refers to a higher value than mere existence (temporal and profane). This meaning can be described as transcendental. Human existence is not limited to worldly life, which is limited in space and time. Human existence extends across the boundaries of this earthly existence.

Based on these ideas, Taylor believes that secularism and multiculturalism meet. To that end, he proposed two kinds of ideas about secularism (A and B). Secularism A is primarily concerned with religious domination. His task was to determine the position of religion in public life and to keep it strong in this place. This need not involve strife or oppression, as long as various religious practitioners understand and respect these boundaries.

Meanwhile, the main point of secularism B is to manage the diversity of religious views and metaphysical-philosophical concepts (including non- and anti-religious views) fairly and democratically. Of course, this task will include setting certain limits for religiously motivated action in the public sphere. Still, it will also involve similar limits on those who adhere to non-or anti-religious philosophies. For idea B, religion is not the main focus of secularism (Taylor, 2018).

In terms of the main argument, secularism A usually raises the problem of tolerance. Religion is seen as something dangerous or potentially destructive. Therefore, religion must be limited. The questions that arise from this idea are whether the government or the majority should impose all possible restrictions on it to be sufficiently safe against whatever harm religion may cause? Or should the government or the majority refrain, being more permissive for the sake of social peace or harmonious relations? Problems like this are related to tolerance.

On the other hand, secularism B presupposes the existence of equal rights for all religions or groups. Its primary purpose is to defend everyone's right to freedom, equality, and communion. Secularism B, therefore, presupposes a situation in which society is beyond tolerance, where people will tend to feel that patience gives them less than they should receive as rights holders. Its primary purpose is to defend everyone's right to freedom, equality, and fellowship.

CONCLUSION

The rise of religions forced secularism to evolve. Secularism must seek other concerns besides religion. The growth of diversity in various lines of world life leads secularism to meet multiculturalism. The evolution of secularism occurs at a point in the consciousness of human life, namely the awareness to fight for and defend the rights to freedom, equality, and fellowship that grows in the diversity of beliefs and cultures. In addition, the encounter with secularism creates a multicultural and democratic climate that opens the door to variety more and more, so that religions face challenges to find their true meaning in human life personally. In this multicultural climate that is influenced by secularism, religion becomes an almost personal subjective-personal choice so that it can no longer be forced by inevitable hegemonic domination, both religious and political. In this realm, the multicultural climate influenced by secularism supports the growth and development of religion to become more mature, not as an imposition of a particular hegemony, but as a personal-subjective choice taken responsibly.

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