

## INVITED REVIEW ESSAY

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# Beyond Secular Democracy: Religion, Politics, and Modernity

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This review essay synthesizes fifteen years of scholarship challenging the presumed relationship between secularism and democracy—that state secularism provides the normative or institutional baseline for modern governance. The idea that states and societies become more secular as they develop economically is no longer supported by most social scientists, including its original proponents. Sociologists and anthropologists have increasingly studied secularism as a project, rather than a teleological process embedded in modernization, and the new scholarship on “comparative secularisms” demonstrates that the manifestations of secularism are complicated and varied. Despite these advances, the new scholarship suffers from insufficient attention to the measurement challenges posed by the diverse content of religion. And while scholars continue to debate the content and characteristics of our secular age, all of the recent scholarship highlights important differences between traditional and modern religion. In view of the current state of the literature, this essay lays out an agenda for research on religion and modernity, or on modernization without secularization.

**Keywords:** democracy, modernity, religion, secularism

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David, Buckley. 2017. *Faithful to Secularism: The Religious Politics of Democracy in Ireland, Senegal, and the Philippines*. New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 288 pp. \$60.00 Hardcover.

Anna, Grzymala-Busse. 2015. *Nations Under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*. Princeton, N.J. and Oxford, U.K.: Princeton University Press, 440 pp. \$30.95 Paperback, \$99.95 Hardcover.

Peter, van der Veer. 2013. *The Modern Spirit of Asia: The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 282 pp. \$26.95 Paperback.

### Introduction

For many decades, the study of religion and democracy was the purview of a relatively small scholarly community. The common wisdom was that states and societies become more secular as they modernize and develop economically, thus relegating

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religion to the margins of modern government.<sup>1</sup> That wisdom, epitomized in the literature as secularization theory, no longer prevails. Due to a series of world events, including the Iranian Revolution, the increasing influence of Evangelical Christians, and the attacks of September 11, 2001, a flood of books and articles over the past fifteen years have signaled the “resurgence” of religion. In conjunction with these developments, secularization theory has lost the support of its original proponents, many political scientists, and most sociologists and anthropologists of religion. That story may by now be a familiar one, and the goal of this essay is not to evaluate secularization theory, which has been done elsewhere on methodological, historical, and theoretical grounds.<sup>2</sup> Some prominent political scientists continue to support secularization theory in a revised or revived form.<sup>3</sup> Yet many other political scientists have joined our sister disciplines and moved on.

This review essay synthesizes the new interdisciplinary scholarship on the intertwining of religion, democracy, secularism, and modernity. Central to the new scholarship is challenging the presumed relationship between secularism and democracy. As anthropologist Peter van der Veer notes in his pathbreaking book, “There are several possible connections between democracy and secularity, but there is no necessary one” (28).

Political scientists have learned a great deal from this new literature and, owing to our discipline’s strengths in institutional and causal analysis, have contributed in powerful ways. Secularization was always a project as much as a process, which is why sociologists and anthropologists have increasingly studied secularism as its own empirical site. The new scholarship on “comparative secularisms” demonstrates that the manifestations of secularism are complicated and varied.<sup>4</sup> David Buckley’s new book on “benevolent secularism” skillfully brings the sociology of religion into conversation with comparative politics. And Anna Grzymala-Busse’s award-winning text investigates the variation in levels of differentiation between state and religion, productively narrowing the focus to one aspect of secularization theory.

Moreover, the new literature is increasingly looking beyond Turkey, France, and the United States, which until recently received an inordinate amount of attention in the literature despite being unrepresentative of the most common patterns of church-state relations.<sup>5</sup> Work by Buckley and others shows that there are many other models for consolidated democracy. Numerous consolidated democracies have what Buckley calls the model of “benevolent secularism” or what Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu dub a “soft separation” between church and state, rather than a wall.<sup>6</sup>

Recognizing that the common wisdom is wrong does not, however, provide political scientists sufficient leverage to *get religion right*. In order to recommend a program of research that moves further beyond the assumption that secularization provides the normative or institutional baseline for modern governance, this essay draws attention to the methodological challenges posed by studying modern religion and recommends a series of strategies to better specify the aspects of religion that constitute the locus of study. Then, the essay draws on the new scholarship to elaborate the ways in which the modern relationship between religion and politics is distinct from the traditional one. Secularization is only one component of

<sup>1</sup> In reference to society, secular is a way of life with no specific reference to religion or revelation or in which religious belief is one option among many. In reference to the state, secular refers to political institutions that are differentiated from religion. See section III for additional definitions.

<sup>2</sup> Berger 1999; Stark 1999; Bellin 2008; Grzymala-Busse 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Important work revising secularization theory includes Smith 2003, Martin 2005, Norris and Inglehart 2011, and Warner 2010. Key revivalist scholarship includes Bruce 2011 and Wilson and Bruce 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Stepan 2000; Hurd 2008; Philpott 2009; Hurd and Cady 2010; Warner, VanAntwerpen, and Calhoun 2010; Stepan, Toft, and Shah 2012

<sup>5</sup> Fox 2006, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Buckley 2017; Stan and Turcescu 2011.

modernization theory, and it is worth separating the two theories in order to demonstrate the ways in which forms of religious knowledge, religious authority, national identity, and political institutions have changed. In other words, in moving beyond secularization theory, it is important to map the effects of modernization without secularization.

To do so, the essay highlights four interlocked themes in Buckley, Grzymala-Busse, and van der Veer's charting of the disjuncture between traditional and modern religion. First, owing to mass education and new technologies, modern forms of religious knowledge are decentralized, accessible, and contested rather than being dictated by elites. Second, this decentralization is accompanied by what Buckley calls the "pluralization" of religious authority, whereby contemporary religious authority comes not simply from popes or sheikhs but from a vast array of sources, including televangelists, chat rooms, group text messages, and lay leaders. As a result, the pathways to modern religious influence on the state and society are innumerable, including but not limited to education, social welfare provision, lobbying, drafting legislation, petitions, issue framing, and public debate. Grzymala-Busse demonstrates that the most direct pathways for religious influence on society—voting and political parties—are often the most perilous and least effective.

Third, the relationship between nationalism and religion is similarly diverse, with three varieties explicitly theorized. Modern religious and national identities are *fused* in the Philippines, Ireland, and Poland. Religion is a *resource* and *component* of modern Indian and Indonesian nationalism. And Italian, Croatian, and Chinese nationalism are *antagonistic* to public religious identity on the grounds that the two are incompatible. All three relationships between national and religious identity are modern.

The final theme is that scholarship shapes religious and political practices, and scholars' normative beliefs shape their research. For example, van der Veer demonstrates that Western scholars and Indian and Chinese elites actively created new categories during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, thereby changing religious practice. This reformation took many forms. The creation of the category of "spirituality" in India and China developed as a form of opposition to the materialism of the West. Meanwhile, elites transformed indigenous beliefs into "world religions" in order to defend against polemics and conversion efforts by Christian missionaries. This fourth theme demonstrates that scholarship does not stand outside the world; it is of the world and affects the world.

The remainder of the essay develops these points. In Section II, I review the literature on secularization theory and Grzymala-Busse's challenge to it. In Section III, I review the new literature on comparative secularisms, including van der Veer's and Buckley's contributions. In Section IV, I raise methodological questions about the field's measurement of religion and elucidate the implications for theory building. Finally, in Section V, I highlight four themes in the disjuncture between modern and traditional religion in order to suggest agendas for research on modernization without secularization.

### Secularization Theory

Secularization theory has suffered a slow demise. Its proponents argued that economic development would lead to declining religious belief, decreases in ritual practices, and increasing differentiation of religion from other social spheres such as the economy and politics. In the most visible articulation of the theory, the sociologist Peter Berger predicted that modernity would lead to the gradual erasure of religious practice and religious organizations, alongside the disappearance of a "sacred canopy," which society builds over its world to give it meaning.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Berger 1967. Another key sociological work on secularization is Martin 1969. More historical work includes McCleod 1981 and 2000.

In the late 1990s, Berger began describing secularization theory as “wrong” with the exception of Europe.<sup>8</sup> The sociologist Rodney Stark argues that secularization theory is wrong both in Europe and globally. Using historical data on levels of religious participation in medieval times, he shows that Europe has become more religious over time, rather than less.<sup>9</sup> And while the sociologist Jose Casanova rightfully argues that differentiation of religion is still the norm among modern states,<sup>10</sup> the anthropologist Talal Asad contends, powerfully, that public religion will inevitably address issues of public concern, which means religion is not meaningfully differentiated.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in his book reviewed below, van der Veer documents the failure of secularization theory in India and China and notes, “One of the great puzzles of China today is not that it proves the secularization thesis wrong, because that thesis is proven wrong almost everywhere, but that despite a century of secularist attacks religion has not been destroyed” (151).

While some scholars continue to revise or revive secularization theory, many political scientists have begun to follow our colleagues. In an early and influential account, Anthony Gill pushed the field to draw on the economic sociology of religion, borrowing the analytical tools of the “religious economies” school from Stark, fellow sociologist William Sims Bainbridge, and economist Laurence Iannaccone.<sup>12</sup> Using comparative quantitative indicators, Jonathan Fox has convincingly demonstrated that modern democratic states actively regulate religion.<sup>13</sup> Eva Bellin notes that secularization theory staggers on both sides of the economic development divide: rich states like the United States, Ireland, Italy, and South Korea have high rates of religiosity, and there is massive variation among poor states—for example, high religiosity in the Middle East but not in East Asia.<sup>14</sup>

Anna Grzymala-Busse’s recent book is a striking example of political science moving beyond secularization theory. Instead of assuming that the process of development necessarily leads to the marginalization of religious influence in politics, she explores variation in church influence. Why are churches in some countries able to influence policy on the issues of abortion, divorce, religious education, same-sex marriage, and stem-cell research, while those in other countries have little sway? Grzymala-Busse uses data from the International Social Survey Programme and the World Values Survey to argue that the variation cannot be explained by variation in public attendance at church services or public opposition to church influence in politics (5–6).

Grzymala-Busse’s explanation centers on the historical relationship between the Catholic Church and the nation. “All churches wield authority over religious matters and morality—where religious and national identity are fused, such churches also gain a particular, *political*, moral authority: a voice in policy debates and reputation as defenders of broad societal interests, above secular partisanship and petty politicking” (8). During the period of nation-formation, where the church defended or protected the nation, it subsequently had high moral authority. Where it opposed the nation, it came to have less authority.

Varying levels of moral authority lead to divergent strategies for policy influence. Churches with high moral authority have institutional access and may shape policy through joint commissions, vetting of bureaucrats and ministers, policy and legislative coalitions, and other nonpartisan mechanisms (10–11). Churches with low authority cannot generally gain institutional influence and are thus limited to

<sup>8</sup> Berger 1999, 2–3.

<sup>9</sup> Stark 1999, 249.

<sup>10</sup> Casanova 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Asad 2003, 181–87, 191.

<sup>12</sup> Gill 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Fox 2006, 537; Fox 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Bellin 2008, 333–34.

entering into partisan coalitions. Unsurprisingly, entering into partisan coalitions is risky business for moral elites because they may lose their authority if they are seen to be partisan and because their parties may lose elections. The strategy that is most compelling to the church, and one that preserves its long-term authority, is for the church to obtain influence via institutional access.

Grzymala-Busse tests her argument through paired comparisons of Ireland and Italy, Poland and Croatia, and the United States and Canada. These are pairs of countries that are similar in rates of religious diversity, church attendance, and religious belief yet vary in the level of church influence on policy. Ireland demonstrates drastically higher levels of church influence than Italy. Poland and Croatia are matched on the independent variable side, but after communism, the Croatian Catholic church entered into partisan politics and lost influence. The United States and Canada are similarly religiously diverse, but there is far greater religious influence in the US case. Grzymala-Busse then uses a formal model to demonstrate the logic of church influence on politics and the conditions under which we see church influence. Finally, she uses regression analysis to show how other Christian-majority countries demonstrate similar correlations between church influence and national identity.

Grzymala-Busse's book is innovative in several ways that are important for the discipline's understanding of secularism and democracy. First, it helps the field to look beyond political parties or public piety as the vehicles for religious influence. Access to public policy making occurs through other, often more powerful means. Second, Grzymala-Busse rightly notes that that we need a "richer account of how nations, states, and religions interact" (20) and provides a succinct typology of three variants: religion protecting the nation as in Ireland and Poland, defending the nation as in the United States, or opposing the nation as in France. The United States is an intriguing example of religion defending the nation, albeit plural religion rather than a single denomination: "Having a religious identity, any religious identity within the constraints of denominational respectability, remains critical for personal social capital, and for the legitimation of public officials and governance" (232). Third, by focusing on the mechanisms by which the fusion of church and nation is reproduced or corrodes, the book avoids the determinism of secularization theory.

Grzymala-Busse's interrogation of the relationship between nation and religion and her specification of degrees of church-state differentiation provide a powerful example of a scholar recognizing that secularization theory no longer provides the dominant framework for explaining the place of religion in modern democracy. Rather, the goal is to recognize that there is what sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt called "multiple modernities" rather than a single teleological path for the modernization of religion in the state and society.<sup>15</sup>

### Comparative Secularisms

What is secular? What is secularism? These are abstract concepts that help us to make sense of the world. And they are contested concepts. International relations theorist Daniel Philpott argues that there are at least five definitions at play when people talk about the secular and secularism.

Secular 1: pertaining to the world outside the monastic sphere.

Secular 2: a concept or use of language that makes no specific reference to religion or revelation but is not necessarily hostile to them.

Secular 3: a differentiation between religion and other spheres of society

<sup>15</sup> Eisenstadt 2000.

(political, economic, cultural, etc.) but not necessarily the decline of religion's influence.

Secular 4: a social context in which religious faith is one of many options rather than an unproblematic feature of the universe.<sup>16</sup>

Secularism: an ideology or set of beliefs that advocates the marginalization of religion from other spheres of life.<sup>17</sup>

Does secular democracy simply refer to nontheocracies (secular 1)? That encompasses nearly all of the world's states. Or does secular democracy refer to the attempted separation and differentiation of religion from the state as in the United States (secular 3)? Or is it the active control and suppression of religion as in Ataturk's Turkey (secularism)? In the seminal text *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor restricts the meaning of secularization to the condition in which unbelief in religion is a viable option. He argues that this condition (secular 4) captures the difference between the place of religion in the modern and premodern Christian West.<sup>18</sup>

Or might secularism mean something else entirely? Take, for example, the French *laïcité*, which is often translated as "secularism" but loses a great deal in the translation. While France does not have an established church, the laws against veiling and the state's establishment of public religious institutions like the French Council of the Muslim Faith (*Conseil français du culte musulman*) and the Jewish Central Consistory of France (*Consistoire central israélite de France*) suggest that the state seeks to cultivate a particular kind of religiosity. As the anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando notes, *laïcité* holds that embodied practices are not as integral to religiosity as beliefs.<sup>19</sup> Proper belief, according to *laïcité*, is authentic when it is private, internal, and based on a close reading of text. Embodied religious practices, such as the wearing of the headscarf in order to cultivate a sense of modesty, are seen as inauthentic. French secularism, then, involves policies that are less about nontheocracy (secular 1), separation (secular 3), or repression than about the state's creating a particular kind of citizen.

Another way of thinking about secularism comes from the influential anthropologist Talal Asad, who argues against the view that secularism emerges in a teleological manner from political development or that it occupies the space leftover when religion is marginalized.<sup>20</sup> Instead, he argues that secularism is a political project put into place by actors with specific interests. His conclusion is that secularism cannot be viewed as a successor to religion but rather exists as an alternative mode of social and state governance.

In *The Modern Spirit of Asia: The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*, van der Veer builds on Asad's work to challenge scholars to move beyond the idea of modernity as defined by the European experience of social and state secularization, which is then exported through colonialism and postcolonial economic development. Van der Veer argues that secularism is more than the separation of church and state, which itself makes little sense in places where religions are not organized in churches. Instead, he theorizes secularism as a project of *controlling* religion. He demonstrates that China and India both attempted to transform religion into a reputable source of citizenship and national belonging but with different effects.

In India, religion became a resource in the anticolonial resistance. Religious movements by Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, and others reappropriated Western

<sup>15</sup> Taylor 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Philpott 2009, 185. Philpott also includes four definitions of secularization: decline in number of individuals with religious beliefs, decline in religious practice and community, differentiation of religion from other social spheres, and decline of religious influence on politics due to active suppression.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Fernando 2012, 76.

<sup>20</sup> Asad 2003, 25.

discourses about Eastern spirituality to defend against polemics by Christian missionaries and mobilize the emergent nationalist movement. Gandhi's anti-imperialism, for example, drew deeply on Hindu tradition and opposition to Western materialism, imperialism, and missionary activity (49–50). Such struggles challenged imperialism, but they also changed the character of religious life in India.

In China, meanwhile, reformers believed that indigenous traditions had to be replaced by Western science or reformed in order to aid in the struggle against imperialism. "In China the state has always been suspicious of popular religious movements that might threaten state control, but it has also constantly pacified and incorporated local cults within state-sanctioned practices by giving imperial titles to local gods" (163). The Chinese imperial state fought peasant movements that were inspired by religious cosmology, and intellectuals were socialized in a Confucian tradition of distrust of popular religion. Before the communist victory in 1949 there were a number of campaigns to secularize society through the destruction of temples, and communists then continued this project. Van der Veer notes that "secularism as an ideology and a practice in China is in the first place an anti-clericalism" (148). Chinese intellectuals thus separated Buddhism and Daoism from their clerical roots and made them national moralities that could serve modernization in China. The contrast with India could not be clearer: "secularism as a political project to remove religion from society or marginalize it can hardly be found in India" (164).

With this comparative perspective, van der Veer challenges scholars to study secularism as a political project with diverse paths. "China has witnessed a continuous secularist attack against religion for a century but it has not been secularized, while India has made religion a core element of its national culture and, at the same time, has created a secular state that attempts to take a neutral stance toward religion" (29). Van der Veer demonstrates that the trajectories of secularism need to be understood in historical and local terms.

Van der Veer also decouples the relationship between democracy and secularity. "Secularity can be promoted in a society by democratic means, which was Jawaharlal Nehru's aspiration, but it can also be promoted by authoritarian means, which happened in China under communist rule" (28). Neither of these outcomes can be understood within the framework of secularization theory nor through Philpott's already varied definitions of a secular state.

David Buckley's *Faithful to Secularism* offers an erudite example of bringing the sociology of religion into conversation with the study of comparative politics, while explicitly pushing the field beyond secularization theory. Buckley builds on the idea that the necessary ingredient for making democracy work is not secularism but the "twin tolerations," a phrase that Stepan coined in his article defining the boundaries of freedom for elected governments from religious groups and for religious groups from governments.<sup>21</sup> Democratic governments must be free to generate and implement policies, and religious individuals and groups must be free to worship privately, advocate publicly, and mobilize politically as long as their actions do not impinge on the liberties of others. As Stepan notes, "Within this broad framework of minimal freedom for the democratic state and minimal religious freedom for citizens, an extraordinarily broad range of concrete patterns of religious-state relations would meet our minimal definition of democracy."<sup>22</sup>

Ahmet Kuru's typology of "assertive" (Turkish, French) and "passive" (American) secularism provides the backdrop for Buckley's conceptual contribution of "benevolent" secularism.<sup>23</sup> Benevolent secularism is defined as an institutional relationship between religion and state that (1) maintains *differentiation* of religious and state

<sup>21</sup> Stepan 2000, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Stepan 2000, 40.

<sup>23</sup> Kuru 2009.

institutions, (2) institutionalizes *cooperation* between religious and state actors in the democratic public square, and (3) establishes what Rajeev Bhargava has called a “*principled distance*” between the state and diverse religious communities.<sup>24</sup> Principled distance means that cooperation between religion and the state must be available to all religions so that religious actors able and willing to participate should have that opportunity and have their views taken seriously in crafting policy. In pulling together these lines of thought, Buckley develops an original concept that helps democratic theorists explain how public religion and the state develop a cooperative relationship rather than falling into the “secularism trap.”

The secularism trap is when either religious or secular maximalists, seeking a monopoly over the institutions of the state, prevent a consensus from emerging. Thoughtfully, Buckley notes that the trap is often sprung not by the clergy: “Although liberal democrats tend to worry about the religious side of the secularism trap, the empirical record suggests that the twin tolerations regularly, perhaps more regularly, break down from the secular authoritarian side” (14). To prevent breakdown, benevolent secularism shapes the policy preference of key actors within elite blocs in order to build alliances, transmit information, and promote shared interests.

In contrast to Grzymala-Busse’s treatment of religious actors as unitary, Buckley divides the majority religion into the “religious integralists” that want religious establishment and the “pious secularists” that are religiously observant but favor differentiation. He divides the state and civil society elites between the “accommodationists” that are willing to compromise with the religious blocs and the anticlerical bloc. Finally, he divides the minority between those that favor interfaith engagement and those that favor separation. Where benevolent secularism successfully emerges and endures, it fosters alliances between pious secularists, accommodationists, and minorities engaged in interfaith relations, in opposition to religious integralists, anticlerical elites, and minority separatists.

Buckley’s volume is insightful, empirically rich and theoretically cogent. In every chapter he advances his arguments about the structure and maintenance of benevolent secularism while rebutting the alternative explanations of secularization theory, rational choice theory, and religious moderation theory. Bringing the cases of the Philippines, Senegal, and Ireland into the literature is itself important. In addition to his major insights about benevolent secularism and elite blocs, he provides gems that merit exploration by other scholars. One is his provocative argument that economic development may sharpen religious conflict rather than lessening it (17). Another is his welcome attention to the power of internal institutional evolution in democratic development.<sup>25</sup> A third is his claim that religious actors and values help make democracy work better. Buckley’s analysis suggests that political scientists need to put aside their normative commitments to secularism in order to better understand how religion contributes to the public good.

For political scientists, the implication of this scholarship on varieties of secularism is clear; since secularism has diverse meanings and is manifested differently around the globe, discussing “secular democracy” as if it were a coherent set of universal institutions becomes exceedingly difficult. Buckley, van der Veer, and Grzymala-Busse all demonstrate that there are many models for modern consolidated democracy beyond the secular template. Van der Veer focuses more on the society than on the state, but his depiction overlaps with how Alfred Stepan, Juan Linz, and Yogendra Yadav describe India as a “state-nation.” Nation-states are political institutions that attempt to match the political boundaries of the state with the presumed cultural boundaries of the nation. State-nations are political institutions that respect and protect multiple but complementary sociocultural identities,

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<sup>24</sup> Bhargava 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Rosefsky Wickham 2013.

including religious identities.<sup>26</sup> State-nation policies legitimate the public and political expression of diverse identities, while also crafting a sense of belonging with respect to the statewide political community.

Buckley's account of democracy in Ireland, the Philippines, and Senegal suggests that scholars would be well served to explore how balancing group rights and individual rights, secular law and religious-inspired law is feasible in modern democracies. One strategy is to explore how far Buckley's concept of benevolent secularism travels. Another is to dig deeper into the workings of "state-nations" beyond India, Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, and Spain.<sup>27</sup> Yet another option is to reckon more seriously with Asad's contention that secularism entails not separation of state from religion but modes of state *control* over religion. Doing so means putting aside normative commitments to secularism in order to better explore commitments to democracy and the diverse implications of nonsecular models of governing religion. At a time when democracy is under threat from populist leaders around the globe, widening the field's understanding of how democracy works may open the door to more allies in the struggle against authoritarianism.

### Religion Disaggregated

The texts under review examine religion primarily through organizational behavior, beliefs as manifested in public opinion, and particularistic doctrine. Yet religion includes other features, such as charismatic leaders, ethics, everyday practices, everyday beliefs, governance practices, experts, pilgrimage, proselytizing, methods of exegesis, canonical texts, rituals, and identities. Different traditions may emphasize different aspects of religion. That heterogeneity means that what constitutes "religion" is historically and geographically specific rather than universal, and scholars should be cautious about conflating religion with any single tradition or particular aspect of that tradition. This challenge is endemic to the study of religion, as with other aspects of culture and identity; no single approach can capture religion's effects.

This challenge arises in Grzymala-Busse's analysis. She states, "Christianity itself views the sacred and the profane as two distinct domains" (5), quoting Mark 12:17 as evidence: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Yet, there are many Christians who believe otherwise<sup>28</sup> and cite passages like Exodus 19:8: "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."<sup>29</sup> Other passages frequently cited in favor of Christian involvement in the state include Exodus 19:5–6, 24:3; Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 26:16–19, 29:9–15, 31:12–13; Joshua 1:7–8, 24:24–25; and Romans 13:1. Religions and their sacred texts do not speak: humans interpret the traditions in a time and place, and those interpretations are constrained by power relations and context. It may be that by focusing on the Catholic Church in the Euro-Atlantic world, Grzymala-Busse's cases demonstrate more doctrinal similarity than is the norm for decentralized traditions, but this is an unresolved empirical question.

A difficulty that arises in Buckley's analysis is the conflation of a single country with an entire religious tradition. Ireland, Senegal, and the Philippines are described as "least-likely" cases for democratization, but it is unclear why. Buckley hints that it is their Catholic or Muslim character that gives rise to the secularism trap. He argues that Spanish colonialism, with its heavy involvement of the clergy in politics, set the stage for either Catholic domination or anticlerical nationalism in the Philippines and in Ireland. But the clerical legacies of Spanish colonialism have not

<sup>26</sup> Stepan, Linz, and Yadav 2011, 4–5.

<sup>27</sup> Stepan, Linz, and Yadav 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Herman 1997; Martin 1996; Heyer, Rozell, and Genovese 2008.

<sup>29</sup> King James Version.

sprung the secularism trap in Italy, Spain, Argentina, Bolivia, or Mexico. And why is Islam prone to the secularism trap? Buckley seems to be following Stathis Kalyvas's argument that democratization failed in Algeria because nonhierarchical Islamic institutions could not credibly commit to democracy.<sup>30</sup> Yet subsequent scholarship on the Algerian case suggests that the lack of credible commitments was less important to the failure of Algeria's democratic transition than the regime's secure military apparatus, Western support, and lack of interest in relinquishing power.<sup>31</sup> The idea that certain religions are incompatible with democracy because of their fixed theology—while rightly denounced in Buckley's argument—still appears to have influenced his case selection.

While survey data has been crucial for pinpointing the shortcomings of secularization theory, the categories of analysis in the global surveys may not suffice for mapping religion's influence. For example, Grzymala-Busse convincingly demonstrates that high levels of religious observance and religious belief do not translate into public policy, since the majority of the public is opposed to overt church influence in government (7). But the portrait becomes more complicated if we shift to a different set of indicators. In Poland, 71 percent of respondents feel that all religions should be taught in schools, and 44 percent feel that it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values. This suggests that public opinion, and not just the church as an institution, influences education policy. Likewise, in the United States, 49 percent of the public believes that it would be better if people with strong values were in public office, and 53 percent feel that it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values. Public demands for pious politicians may explain some of state policy. Grzymala-Busse argues that modern voters make decisions on secular grounds in favor of secular policies (43–44), but this is an unresolved debate in the literature, with other scholars arguing that religiosity, religious identity, moral values, and religious affiliation shape voter choice.<sup>32</sup>

The heterogeneity of religion poses a real challenge to scholars. On this issue, political scientists may not find guidance from our sister disciplines. Van der Veer makes clear that scholars should disentangle secularization and democratization: "The establishment of democratic rule is *relatively independent* from a process of secularization" (28; emphasis mine). But what does the ambiguous phrase "relatively independent" entail? What are the general patterns in political and religious development? Van der Veer rejects structural and scalar versions of secularism, whether it is the teleology of Norris and Inglehart's theory or in Jonathan Fox's coding of states for more or less religious government. Instead, van der Veer follows Taylor and Asad in theorizing varieties of secularism that cannot be scaled and which may be hard to generalize.

One strategy to move forward is to simply *specify* the aspects of religion that constitute the locus of study. The most common indicators are surveys measuring piety through belief and participation in individual and collective ritual. These indicators may be useful for liberal Protestantism, but they are unhelpful for animist and folk religions whose rituals do not include church attendance or monotheistic doctrines. Similarly, participation in public ritual is a poor measure of religiosity for Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shintoism. Such indicators also neglect the stark difference between belief and practice.<sup>33</sup> A second strategy is to differentiate between lived religion, expert religion, and governed religion.<sup>34</sup> A third strategy is to focus

<sup>30</sup> Kalyvas 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Brownlee 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Campbell, Green, and Layman 2011; Layman 2001; Layman and Carmines 1997; Layman and Carmines 1997; Miller and Shanks 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Orsi 1985; Ammerman 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Hurd 2015.

on the changing behavior of different organizations within a single tradition in order to explore change in both behavior and theology over time in response to social and state forces. This strategy recognizes that these interactions are part of a single contested field where society and the state are mutually constitutive and coevolve over time.<sup>35</sup>

A fourth, metastrategy is to trace the history of how organizations or states define religion in order to understand the relationship between states, religion, and power.<sup>36</sup> Van der Veer, for example, demonstrates that in order to defend against Christian missionary apologetics, reform movements within Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism started to imitate the organizational model of Christian churches. “These newly forged religions had to simultaneously resemble Christianity and oppose Christian projects of conversion” (64). As a result of these interactions between local and transnational religious elites, state officials, and academic scholarship, new formations of religion were produced.

There is no all-encompassing way to divine the influence of religion on political institutions or of political institutions on religion. The best that political scientists can do is to specify the aspects under review, as well as to place scope conditions on the generalizations that can be drawn from the inevitably truncated sample of that which we call “religion.”

### Modernization without Secularization

On their own, the books reviewed here are a productive break from secularization theory. Collectively, they are an agenda for research on religion and modernity. The three authors differ about the merits of secularization theory; van der Veer is completely dismissive, Grzymala-Busse is implicitly supportive albeit with serious caveats and updates, and Buckley simply demonstrates that secularization fails to explain important cases. None of the authors, however, is ambivalent about the importance of the modern/traditional distinction.

The “multiple modernities” thesis is an appeal to recognize not just variation but also commonality. Modernization is the shift in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from societies that were primarily rural, homogenous, uneducated, undeveloped, and communal to ones that are more commonly urban, heterogeneous, developed, educated, and literate; mediated by technology and modern forms of communication; and individualized. The term “multiple modernities” recognizes that specific cultural premises, traditions, and historical experiences influence these transformations so that the result is not convergence but simply similar structural transformations. Each group, society, and state will “reappropriate and redefine the discourse of modernity in their own new terms.”<sup>37</sup> All of these transformations and varied manifestations have implications for the practice, politics, and study of modern religion.

To Grzymala-Busse, modern religion is not influential through charisma or individual values but through agile and strategic forms of indirect influence. The ways in which religious actors effect political change are impressively clear in her accounts of church influence in Ireland, Poland, and the United States, where rather than exerting power through the masses or political parties, church leaders and their lay allies deploy a thoroughly modern arsenal of tactics. To Buckley, modernization fractures religious authority, leading to splits among religious communities rather than secularization. Buckley also carefully catalogues the diverse ways that modern religious communities relate to the state, pushing beyond a simple focus on differentiation. To van der Veer, both India and China are exemplars of “modified

<sup>35</sup> Menchik 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Asad 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Eisenstadt 2000, 24.

modernities” formed under conditions of imperialism. Modern religion in these countries is emblematic of the transformation of India and China as a result of the emergence of the nation-state, economic industrialization, and ideological transformation.

These changes wrought by modernization come to the fore across all three books, and the remainder of this essay will elaborate four themes for mapping religion and politics in our secular age (using Philpott’s definition 4 from Charles Taylor): forms of religious knowledge, forms of religious authority and influence, the relationships between religion and nationalism, and the dialectical relationship between scholarship and religious practice.

#### *Modern Religious Knowledge*

Traditional religion is grounded in Max Weber’s portrayal of traditional authority.<sup>38</sup> Traditional authority is historically stable but is unable to adapt to the challenges of social mobilization, intellectual interrogation, and creative transformation that come with modernity. Karl Deutsch captures this paralysis well: “the old elites of traditional chiefs, village headmen, and local notables are likely to prove ever more inadequate,” leading to new forms of authority such as political parties.<sup>39</sup> The same inadequacy faces traditional religion, which Deutsch argues will lose its influence over society and the state as modernization progresses. Instead of looking to religious figures to solve modern problems, society will look to the state and science. Traditional religion should disappear. Deutsch summarizes: “Maharajahs, sultans, sheikhs and chieftains all are quite unlikely to cope with these new problems, and traditional rule by land-owning oligarchies or long established religious bodies most often is apt to prove equally disappointing in the face of the new needs.”<sup>40</sup>

Instead of suffering decline and privatization, however, the authors reviewed here all suggest that the substance of religion has modernized. Buckley points out that economic modernization has facilitated the urban preaching of Pentecostal ministers in Latin America and Africa, driving a Christian religious revival that is distinct in form and fervor from prior revivals.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, new technologies have been pivotal to the Islamic revival in the Middle East and Asia, where cassette tapes, compact discs, the internet, and cell phones have helped propel higher rates of religious observance and identification among the growing Muslim middle class.<sup>42</sup> These technologies and new modes of accessing sacred texts have also propelled believers into different forms of religious knowledge, what the anthropologist Dale Eickelman called the “objectification of religious knowledge.”<sup>43</sup> To Eickelman, objectification entails the process by which the definition of religion, its importance in life, and the relationship between beliefs and action become part of public discourse and debate rather than being dictated by elites. Instead of religious knowledge being bestowed by sheikhs and sultans, it is accessible to the textually and aurally literate masses. Instead of religious authority being the sole domain of scholars, it is enabled by the mass’s direct, albeit selective, access to knowledge. Thus, modern religious knowledge is fundamentally distinct from traditional religious knowledge in being decentralized, accessible, and contested.

Modern, decentralized forms of religious knowledge lead to what Buckley calls in his conclusion the “pluralization of religious authority.”<sup>44</sup> When traditional

<sup>38</sup> Weber 1947, 361.

<sup>39</sup> Deutsch 1961, 499.

<sup>40</sup> Deutsch 1961, 498.

<sup>41</sup> Buckley 2017, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Hefner 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Buckley 2017, 185.

institutions lose their monopoly over religious interpretation, it can give rise to lay-led social movements, religious civil society organizations, and competition with traditional elites. Pluralization enables not just the split between religious elites and lay leaders, as in Stathis Kalyvas's account of the development of Christian democracy, but a plethora of splits, as in Buckley's account of the division between pious secularists and religious integralists.<sup>45</sup> It also leads to innovative forms of entrepreneurship, as exemplified by the Indonesian Muslim self-help guru Abdullah Gymnastiar, who has drawn on Sufi ideas, Western psychology, and management theory to create a business empire including televised sermons, best-selling books, and corporate training seminars.<sup>46</sup> Rather than fading into irrelevance, this Indonesian "sheikh" has become one of the country's leading entrepreneurs.

Another way that modern religious knowledge is distinct from traditional religion is the visibility and increasing appeal of spirituality, as opposed to institutionalized religion. Political scientists tend to avoid the term "spirituality" because of its imprecision, thus relegating it to the margins of scholarship. Yet van der Veer argues that to do so means missing the transformations in religion over the past two centuries (7). It also leads to empirical problems, such as ignoring the quarter of American adults that describe themselves as spiritual but not religious.<sup>47</sup> Spirituality universalizes the concept of religion by severing its ties to religious institutions. Spirituality as a set of concepts emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and enabled both antireligious communism in China and religious (Hindu and Muslim) and spiritual (Gandhian) nationalism in India (8). Van de Veer suggests that in India and China, spirituality was developed as a form of transcendence that stood in opposition to the materialism of the West. In a similar vein, Winnifred Sullivan points to modern American chaplains as ministering to a large, restless, and religiously diverse clientele.<sup>48</sup> Caring for such a flock demands that chaplains transcend their ties to specific religions or denominations in order to pastor in a universal manner to the needs of the spirit. This, too, is modern religion.

The modernization of religious knowledge and the pluralization of religious authority suggest a productive research agenda going beyond "official" religion. All of the texts under review examine religion through organizational behavior, beliefs as manifest in public opinion, and particularistic doctrine, but that's an inevitably truncated sample; modern religious knowledge also comes from nondenominational chaplains, televangelists, study groups, street festivals, smart phone apps, group text messages, web sites, street festivals, and both formal and informal education.<sup>49</sup> That heterogeneity presents opportunities for scholars to map these important forms of religion, explain the conditions under which political power comes to define "religion," explain why and how the content of religious knowledge changes over time, and trace the implications for behavior.

#### *Modern Religious Authority*

The classic example of premodern religious authority is from Max Weber: charismatic authority, represented by the prophet, is the purest form of authority in that it claims the right to supersede existing normative orders and reveal new ones.<sup>50</sup> Hitler, Gandhi, Jesus, Mohammed, and Martin Luther are embodiments of charismatic authority. Like traditional authority, charismatic authority is unstable for

<sup>45</sup> Kalyvas 1996.

<sup>46</sup> Hoesterey 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, "More Americans Now Say They're Spiritual but Not Religious," *Pew Research Center*, accessed May 22, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>.

<sup>48</sup> Winnifred Sullivan 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Prominent examples of research on "everyday religion" include Orsi 2010, Ammerman 2006, Sullivan 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Weber 1947, 361.

modern states and societies because the death of the charismatic leader leaves no rules for others to follow.

Modernity has brought about a pluralization of sources of religious authority rather than its disappearance. Grzymala-Busse shows in exquisite detail for the cases of Ireland, Poland, and the United States the thoroughly modern ways in which churches exert authority. They do not do so through the charisma of elites, since individual charisma is difficult to obtain and harder to maintain. Nor is church authority derived from the piety of the masses, since piety leads to diffuse voting preferences and often support for the differentiation of church and state. Church authority is also not obtained through formal alliance with political parties, since parties can lose, thus damaging the reputation of the church. Additionally, political parties have no permanent alliances, just permanent interests, which can leave churches behind. As a result, churches exert their authority through a variety of indirect means: education, control over symbols, social welfare services, lobbying, drafting legislation, public debate, referendum, mediation panels, letters, petitions, government staffing, and issue framing. In Ireland, the United States, and Poland, modern religious authority has adapted rather than dissipated.

The pluralization of modern forms of religious authority opens up a research agenda that goes beyond public opinion and formal institutions. Religious organizations may use direct mail, lobbying, mass mobilization, political commissions, advertising, social media, and an array of other tools of influence common to contemporary politics. Modern organizations such as the Family Research Council, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the American Israel Political Action Committee, the Council on American Islamic Relations, the Conference of Catholic Bishops, the American Center for Law & Justice, and Samaritan's Purse are some of the most influential organizations in American and world politics yet are mostly neglected by political scientists. They are not charismatic, but they are powerful, and more attention needs to be paid to the mechanisms and limitations of their influence. As Grzymala-Busse demonstrates, such organizations are often the spearhead for modern religious authority.

#### *Nationalism and Modern Religious Identity*

Studies of modern nationalism overwhelmingly rely on Benedict Anderson's conception of an "imagined political community" grounded in linguistic and cultural practices. Anderson argued that the French Revolution and print capitalism gave rise to people who saw themselves as similar due to sharing a language and belonging to a community that was both bounded and sovereign. These understandings of the nation were then diffused to the postcolonial world through the institutions of imperialism, especially the tools of the census, map, and museum, as well as to noncolonized countries that developed similar forms of national identity in order to compete with European power.<sup>51</sup> Implicit in Anderson's story is that religious identity is a premodern form of community, which fades in the face of modern language ties, technologies, and institutions.

Anderson's account of religious identity and nationalism has been amply criticized elsewhere on both historical and theoretical grounds.<sup>52</sup> What the texts reviewed here offer is an alternative account of modern religious identities and their interface with nationalism. Religious identity can constitute national identity, as in the cases of Ireland, the United States, and Poland. Religious identity can serve as a component of and resource for national identity, as in India. And public religious identity can be seen as an impediment to national identity, as in China. All three types are modern.

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<sup>51</sup> Anderson 1991.

<sup>52</sup> See van der Veer 1994; Chatterjee 1999; Marx 2003.

Grzymala-Busse demonstrates that in Ireland, Poland, and the United States, churches were crucial to the early nationalist movement, and as a result religious bodies built national identity. Religious thinkers defined the “nation” as a community that was protected under a religious umbrella, churches spoke on behalf of national interests, and religious authorities consciously included national symbols in their liturgy: “creating national shrines and sponsoring pilgrimages to them, displaying the sacred relics of monarchs, holding religious celebrations on national holidays, and even designating national holidays as religious ones.”<sup>53</sup>

Van de Veer, as described earlier, shows that religion in modern India is a resource for the nation and a constituent element of nationalism, while in China religion has been marginalized by the state in order to create a modern nation. In comparative perspective, then, van der Veer challenges scholars to move beyond the idea of modernity defined by the European experience of social and state secularization, which is then exported globally through colonialism and postcolonial economic development. Instead, the trajectories of modernity, religion, and nation need to be understood in historical and local terms.

The diversity of ways in which modern religion and nationalism interface opens up a research agenda for scholars. Modern religious movements may redefine the boundaries between public and private and between religious and secular in ways that transform the content of nationalism but do not replace it with premodern theology.<sup>54</sup> Nationalist historiographies often hide the religious solidarities that underpin modern communities, which means scholars need to revisit twentieth-century narratives and the formation of modern nationalism.<sup>55</sup> And beyond redefinition or revisiting, there are an infinite number of possibilities for hybridity. One example of such hybridity is the middle ground between secular nationalism and Islamic nationalism found in Indonesia’s “godly nationalism.” The term “religious nationalism” is usually invoked as a conceptual placeholder for particular instances of Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist nationalism. Yet in demanding that citizens believe in God, while being ambivalent as to which path to God they should choose, Indonesia’s brand of nationalism is exclusively religious though not particular.<sup>56</sup> Such reformulations of religion and nationalism should not be read as deviations on the road to modernity; rather, they should be seen as historically influenced manifestations of the world’s multiple modernities.

#### *Scholarship and Practice*

A final theme in the new literature is that scholarship shapes religious and political practices. Scholars are not outside of the world but a part of it, and their work has effects on the content of religious knowledge and practice and on the policies of states. Likewise, the political views of scholars shape their scholarship.

Van der Veer demonstrates that Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism were not “isms” (religions) in the modern sense before the nineteenth century. The work of Western scholars combined with efforts by indigenous elites to create these new categories and practices, reforming local beliefs into ones that resembled “world religions.” For example, the theosophist Colonel Oclott designed the Sri Lankan flag and created a Buddhist catechism that transformed Sri Lankan Buddhist traditions (74). And the Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje’s scholarship on religion in Indonesia shaped both Dutch government policy and the postcolonial government’s policies of repressing Islam while supporting Hindu and Buddhist culture (76–77).

<sup>53</sup> Grzymala-Busse 2015, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Hirschkind 2001.

<sup>55</sup> Chatterjee 1999; Marx 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Menchik 2014.

Christian missionaries drew on Western scholarship to combat anyone opposed to conversion to Christianity. For example, in South India, the Christian missionary Robert Caldwell drew on modern linguistics and ethnology in order to argue that members of the Shanar caste were not Hindus, which meant that Brahman leaders could be bypassed in order to convert the Shanars to Christianity. Caldwell's arguments are influential in anti-Brahman polemics today (97). In order to defend against Christian missionary apologetics, reform movements led by Brahmans arose, including the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal and the Arya Samaj in the Punjab. Van der Veer demonstrates that "their response to missionary criticism is a major element in reshaping Hinduism first as a recognizable religion and second as a religion that can be seen as being in tune with modern times" (98). Likewise, Buddhists and Daoists started to imitate the organizational model of Christian churches, thereby changing the face of their religious and political practices.

While scholarship shapes religious belief and practice, it is also true that the beliefs of scholars shape their research. Perhaps more than other political science literatures, the literature on religion and politics has suffered from a bias toward achieving a particular type of outcome. For most of the twentieth century, social scientists and especially sociologists were committed to secularization *both* as a theory *and* as a project.<sup>57</sup> Secularization was seen as an important component of modernization that would liberate societies from unreason and traditional leaders.<sup>58</sup> Owing to the discipline's origins in the normative project of liberalism<sup>59</sup> and the milieu of liberal Protestantism, differentiation of state and religion has been long seen as a key goal for both states and scholars alike.<sup>60</sup> As a result, even while the new literature recognizes that nonsecular forms of democracy are viable and modern, it views them with skepticism and theorizes them insufficiently. Grzymala-Busse theorizes only decreasing religious authority, not increasing, thereby implicitly working within the teleological confines of social secularization. Likewise, Buckley leaves a major issue unaddressed: where does benevolent secularism originate, in comparison to passive or aggressive secularism?

The co-imbrication of scholarship and practice suggests an agenda for research. One avenue is to continue challenging the presumption that political science should advance the project of secularization by investigating nonsecular and non-liberal visions for democracy. For instance: What kind of democracy do integralist Muslims and Catholics want? How do their visions vary? How are their visions similar to and different from the secular one? A second avenue is to further investigate the way that normative commitments drive scholarly research and, especially, leave gaps in our analysis. Robert Vitalis, for example, has written an important book about the racism endemic to the field of international relations due to its origins in European imperialism.<sup>61</sup> Yet nothing similar exists to explain the implications of the discipline's origins in American Protestantism. A third avenue is to dig deeper into the history of entanglement between Christian missions and political modernization. Recent political science research has normatively celebrated the impact of Christian missionaries,<sup>62</sup> but an important lesson from the travails of secularization theory is that such normative commitments may be blinding, which suggests that future scholars should be attentive to the positive, negative, and ambiguous legacies of the missionary encounter.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Hurd 2008; Wilson 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Deutch 1961; Laski 1944; Macmahon 1948; Morgenthau 1962; Rustow 1957.

<sup>59</sup> Katznelson and Milner 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Shain 1996.

<sup>61</sup> Vitalis 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Woodberry 2012; Lankina and Getachew 2012.

<sup>63</sup> For more holistic portraits of the legacies of the missionary encounter, see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Keane 2007.

### Conclusion

This essay has laid out an agenda for research on religion, politics, and modernity after secularization theory. Religion is composed of a basket of beliefs, practices, and governance structures, and scholars can be more explicit about their locus of study given their inevitably truncated sample. Political science might also follow sociology and anthropology in investigating the significance of aspects of religion that are relatively neglected, such as spirituality, pilgrimage, proselytizing, everyday practices, rituals, ethics, and identities. Additionally, the scholarship on religion and modernity implies avenues for future research on religious knowledge, authority, the relationship between religious and national identities, and the relationship between scholarship and practice. The result is a growing and fertile field of study. Where scholarship on religion and politics was once the purview of a relatively small scholarly community, there is now a growing body of prominent scholars contributing to this exciting literature.

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