Randall Collins

SECULARISATION: RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL

Secularisering kan in conflict-dynamische termen worden begrepen: dat is het uitgangspunt van Randall Collins in deze verstrekkende beschouwing over de parallellen en samenhangen tussen religieuze en politiek-ideologische ontwikkelingen. Religieuze secularisering en politieke pacificatie worden beide bezien als fasen in een cyclisch proces waarin een periode van polarisatie, toenemende militantie en geweld telkens wordt afgewisseld door een van matiging, opportunisme en compromisbereidheid. Collins onderbouwt deze these met diverse historische voorbeelden, inclusief de Amerikaanse reactie op de gebeurtenissen van 11 september 2001.

Part of the world today is in a period of political polarization, similar to the Nazi versus anti-Nazi period of 1930-45. President Bush and his circle explicitly invoke a World War II analogy, and envision themselves leading a coalition of democracy against what they call Islamic Fascism. We may reject the analogy as inaccurate. Nevertheless there is something sociologically important in the parallel: not about the moral legitimacy of the war; but the time dynamics of polarized conflict.

The Nazi struggle began with a smaller number of participants and a variety of ideologies including radical nationalists, religious conservatives, free market liberals, democrats, socialists and communists; the process of polarization created two grand united fronts around the titanic struggle of good versus evil. We are used to seeing this morality from the Allied side; but the Axis side had an equally utopian and apocalyptic view of their own aims in the struggle.

Polarization is the social construction of opposing world-views and opposing moralities, absolute good versus absolute evil. At its extreme, political polarization resembles religious war. It has the same fanaticism, the same destructiveness, the same demonizing of opponents. The analogy between political and religious polarization is worth pursuing, because the sociology of religion provides a theory of how religious conflict comes to an end. This is the theory of secularization. Because secularization has happened over the last 300 years in various parts of the world in varying degrees, secularization theory gives a good perspective on the dynamics by which polarization rises

and falls in time. The current struggle of radical fundamentalist Islamists against anti-terrorists (as they conceive themselves) will not go on forever. Can we predict when and how it will end? Theory of religious secularization can help. In what follows I will sketch a theory of *political* secularization, so to speak, a theory of how polarization comes to an end.

Religious Secularization as De-polarization of Conflict

Religious secularization as it took place in Christian Europe from about 1700 AD, was a shift away from a state church, protected and enforced by the government, both at home and against enemies abroad. Established religion meant religious dictatorship within, and religious war without. The most important feature of secularization was the dis-Establishment of the church. This took place in different degrees, ranging among: toleration – ceasing persecution – of non-Established religions; separation of church and state so that all religions became non-official; and outright banning of religion and enforcing an atheist state. Since churches usually controlled education, the secularization struggle usually went through a phase of de-clericalization of schools and universities. Since churches were major patrons of the arts as well as guardians of morality and taste, secularization involved a fight against religious censorship, and intellectuals were generally among the most militant secularizers.

The most typical outcome in the West was privatization of religion; sometimes this took the form of explicit separation of church and state, as in France and the USA; sometimes an Established church remained, as in England and Scandinavia, but treated as mere formalism, while most of the population in these countries is irreligious or even anti-religious. Secularization does not necessarily mean the disappearance of religious belief; this is the way intellectuals tend to perceive it, since they are projecting their own world-views. More commonly, religion continues in private life for many people if not all, often in vague and idiosyncratic forms of spirituality since there is no strong authority to enforce orthodoxy in belief.

We may summarize four kinds of religious stances in a privatized, secularized society: First, fervent believers in an orthodoxy who would like to reestablish their religion in the public community – let God be praised everywhere. Second, private believers who are conscious that others do not share their beliefs, and are chiefly concerned that religions should not offend each other; their attitude is typified by a common saying in America, "Don't talk religion or politics" – which is to say, don't talk about these subjects in public or social occasions unless you are sure other people are in your own camp. This second position takes a public stance that religion in general is a good thing, but any religion in particular is not. Third: a multiculturalist or universalistic position, that we should respect all religions (bending over backwards to respect

other people's religion more than one's own), rising to a higher level of religious altruism or universalism. This is a hopeful position, held especially by cosmopolitans who would like everyone to rise to their own level of seeing the harmony of all differences. A fourth position is pure secular indifference to religion (even if one might go into a church occasionally for a wedding) because we are busy pursuing our own interests in careers, entertainment, or having fun. All these positions have counterparts in the world of politics. A fifth position is militant atheism; this generally lacks a political counterpart (except perhaps among some artists and religious mystics antipathetical to politics in general).

Although intellectuals tend to regard themselves as the leaders of secularization, this process did not come about chiefly by arguments against miracles or the existence of God, nor by the spread of a scientific worldview. The main cause of secularization was a long-term dynamic of social conflict. Before explaining this, I will briefly mention some alternative theories: One is that secularization is the result of modernization, with the shift to urban society, industrialization, mass communications, etc. But the timing is wrong in both directions: secularization started at least by the seventeenth century in Europe and Japan; moreover in a twentieth-century society like the us, modern conditions fostered increased mobilization of religious movements, with higher religious fervor than in the past. A second explanation is that secularization was the result of science; but again the timing is wrong; science was regarded as compatible with religion until the 19th century, and even then it has been social scientists, more than natural scientists, who have been the strongest advocates of a thoroughly anti-religious worldview (Collins 1998: 570-617, 663-687; Gorski 2000, 2003; Finke and Stark 1992; Stark and Bainbridge 1985).

What actually produced secularization? That is to say, what produced the disestablishment of state religions, and the trends towards confining religion to private life? The most important feature is the rise of a motivation to avoid religious strife, to reduce religious polarization. In Europe, the period from 1520 to 1660 was a time of religious wars and civic strife. The Protestant Reformation was followed by increased religiousness of Protestants and Catholics alike, as well as vehement local disputes within both sides, such as between strict and less strict forms of Protestantism, or between Jesuits and their enemies on the Catholic side. The wars of religion, culminating in the Thirty Years War, were the most vehement and destructive in European history to that time. Religious struggle also produced a series of local rebellions and revolutions, such as the Peasants War in Germany in the 1520s; civil wars in England and France; religious dictatorships such as England during the Commonwealth, Geneva under Calvin, and elsewhere; and violent expulsions and massacres such as that of Huguenots in France or Cromwell's effort to exterminate Catholics in Ireland, amounting to murderous ethnic cleansing

on a religious basis. After about 100 to 150 years of religious polarization and the moralistic viciousness that accompanied it, people began to seek a solution that amounted to secularization. This happened to some extent among intellectuals, but the chief creators of the new secularism were political elites.

We see this most clearly in France, the great power of the seventeenth century. Although France ended up as a Catholic state, it did not begin as one; it was the cosmopolitan center of Europe, and both Calvin and Loyola (the founder of the Jesuits) began their religious careers in Paris. France was the center of religious conflicts, and these swayed back and forth across the balance point for a long time. Huguenots were massacred in Paris in 1572; the protestant king Henri III was assassinated by a priest in 1589. The important dynamic here is not just the fanaticism, but a mechanism which displaced fanaticism: in this complex political environment, politicians made bargains and opportunistic choices – as politicians so often do. Henri IV converted from Protestantism to Catholicism in 1593 because he was offered a deal, accepting it with the words "Paris is worth a mass." This sounds cynical but cynicism and opportunism are precisely the ways in which the extremes of polarization are most effectively countered, especially at their height. The key structural feature is stalemate: a balance of forces and a tangling of alliances that makes it apparent that neither of the polarized sides will win. In the war of good versus evil – as seen by both sides, disagreeing about which one is good and which is evil – it is those who do not think in these polarized terms who bring down the level of fanaticism.

Some brief examples: Cardinal Richelieu has the reputation for Machiavellian evil because of his cynical practice of *Realpolitik*: he destroyed the French Huguenots in 1628 but at the same time subsidized the Protestant states in the Thirty Years' Wars against the Catholic Habsburgs. His successor as de facto ruler of France, Cardinal Mazarin, subsidized Cromwell. Richelieu and Mazarin helped delegitimize religion, precisely because they were political men who had taken church office for its political power; Richelieu was a general before he became a Cardinal. It was this delegitimation of religious sincerity – especially the sincerity of religious polarization – that was the path towards secularism. A tangle of conflicts produces not just ideologically unexpected alliances – strange bedfellows as the saying about politics goes – but actual shifts from one side to another. For the political or religious purist, there is nothing worse than the heretic, the apostate, the traitor who goes over to the enemy. But this kind of ideological treason is produced by this kind of conflictual structure – where the conflict has gone on for a long time, it is apparent that the purists will not win, and the opposing sides beneath the surface are fragmenting into a multiplicity of overlapping factions. Side-switching opportunism is practiced by major figures in the civil wars in both France and England, at just the time when the religious struggles come to their peaks and then from exhaustion into the beginnings of secularization.

In France, a key figure is the duke of Condé. He is the military commander of the French armies against Spain in the 1640s; then he goes over to the Fronde, the uprising of French aristocrats against Cardinal Mazarin's effort to centralize French government; Condé is defeated and switches sides to become a general in the Spanish army for ten years, fighting against the French. Eventually, when Mazarin is displaced by Louis XIV, Condé makes his peace with the king and returns to lead the French army against both Catholic Spain and Protestant Holland.

In England, a comparable figure is the earl of Shaftesbury, who changed sides twice during the Commonwealth, first to join Cromwell, and then to negotiate the return of the monarchy in 1660 under a program of amnesty and toleration for both sides. Still later, when a movement developed in the king's household for restoring Catholicism, Shaftesbury led the parliamentary opposition, then fled to Holland in 1682, where he helped engineer the move to bring William of Orange to the English throne under a compromise endorsing religious toleration and parliamentary power. Politicians of the following generation, such as the two-time prime minister Lord Bolingbroke, were known for their maneuvers, sometimes earning themselves accusations of treason, but also for their increasingly secular attitude about divisive issues. It is precisely these side-switching opportunists who mitigate the fanaticism of ideological purists; intellectually, too, they tend to sponsor circles of free thinkers breaking with religious orthodoxy towards rationalist philosophies, Deism, or religious cosmopolitanism. Richelieu was a patron of Descartes, and Shaftesbury the chief patron of John Locke; in effect the philosophy of modern liberal secularism was an outgrowth of Shaftesbury's career.

Religious secularization is driven initially by a growing exhaustion with fanatical conflict. By going through a phase of political stalemate, side-switching opportunism, and cynism, political elites bring about a structural shift towards secularization. Explicit political settlements institutionalize religious toleration; this goes along with political balances of power which tend towards coalition-building and trans-ideological compromises, and thus towards exclusion of religious fanaticism. Growth of a state apparatus begins to displace religion from education, charity and social welfare, furthering the privatization of religion. With this shift in political structures comes a shift in the ideological atmosphere; religious enthusiasm becomes delegitimated; instead the predominant public ideology in regard to religion is that of the higher morality of tolerance, the avoidance of religious strife. Religion is pushed out of the public sphere since most people feel that the strife it produces is too destructive. Later conflicts such as late nineteenth and twentieth century struggles over schools repeated the pattern; schooling becomes secular not so much because of fervent atheists and Darwinists but because of the effort to avoid publicizing any religious issues at all.

Religious Secularization in Japan

I have expounded the conflict-de-escalation model of religious secularization with regard to Western Europe; but the model is more general, and we see it also in Japan (Collins 1998: 347-378). From about 1400 to 1570 Japan was in a condition of *de facto* civil war; centralized government had lost control to feudal lords. The most powerful of these were the Buddhist temple-states, since they had the best economic organization, and the most widespread networks of followers in the population. Several Buddhist factions fought each other in lengthy wars, burning each other's temples and fighting in the cities which supported the temple economy. In Japan we see the same delegitimation of religious enthusiasm; monks became regarded as businessmen seeking a profit; high religious positions as abbotts of the big monasteries were bought and sold, with great wealth being made from fees and temple transactions. An attitude of cynicism grew up around religion. Much of the public came to distrust monks, regarding them as wealth-and-power-seeking hypocrites who are also capable of fanatical destruction. The aristocratic lords who finally succeed in amassing enough military force to reunify Japan, regarded their main task as destroying the power of the Buddhist sects. The wars of reunification destroyed the temples and confiscated their property; the Tokugawa regime which established stable power from 1600 to 1860, broke the tie between Buddhism and the government elite, fostering Confucianism as the elite ideology, and downgrading Buddhism to the private practice of small shrines and monasteries. But the new Confucianism did not remain very religious; it soon broke into a set of rival schools teaching innovative philosophies of increasingly secular tone. By the late 1600s, and into the 1700s, the dominant ethos of Japanese culture was as secular as contemporary England or France. Ideologically, Buddhism delegitimated itself in Japan during the period when it was most politically powerful, and its struggles against religious rivals were most fanatical. In this atmosphere, political forces emerged that took a stance of a plague on all religious houses, leading to a public dislike of religious enthusiasm, and a worldly cynicism not unlike Western Europe of the Enlightenment. There were occasional revival movements, but the secularization of Japan in these centuries is one reason why it was able to make the transition to Western-style modernity so rapidly in the late nineteenth century.

Two Forms of Post-religious Politics: Ideological Polarization and Opportunistic Pragmatism

The model of religious secularization is that intense religious conflict, when unresolved over a period of 100 or more years, brings about delegitimation

of religious enthusiasm; in part this is cynicism and opportunism, but it also becomes a positive meta-ideology for tolerance and avoidance of public ideological conflict. Religion does not disappear but its practices tend to go private, where they either lose intensity or are treated as disreputable cults. Groups who want to bring intense religion back into public life are regarded with suspicion, and if they become too powerful, are suppressed. This model applies also to political polarization.

Although modern politics arose when religion was pushed out of the center of public life in the eighteenth century, politics nevertheless resembles religion. More precisely, *ideological* politics resembles religion and operates by similar sociological principles. Another form of politics resembles religion in times of secularization: the normal politics of compromise, deal-making, and accommodation among a morass of private interests. During these times political ideologues are distrusted and survive only in small groups and private beliefs.

The politics of pragmatism and compromise also gives rise to revivals of ideological politics, much like modern secularization is a breeding grounds for religious revivals. There are two main reasons. First, the pragmatic mode tends to delegitimate itself. It is too obviously opportunistic, too concerned with material self interest on one hand, too willing to switch sides and make coalition with the enemy on the other; politicians are regarded as cynical manipulaters. In modern opinion polls, politicians are one of the most distrusted groups. And second, secularization and pragmatism leave a vacuum for idealism and strong emotion. It is this vacuum that both religious and political movements are capable of filling. Religious fervor and political ideologies alike are built up by massive social rituals, in group assemblies and by the propagation of excitement through networks interacting ever more frequently and recruiting new members into the centers of excitement. It is during the expansion phase of social movements that people feel most energized, most social solidarity, and most idealistic. Part of the idealism and excitement comes by a feeling of contrast with the rather cynical period that went before. At their peak, these movements want to fill the public attention space. Thus the effort to expand and unify one's ideological group until it fills the entire society has a natural target in taking state power.

This Durkheimian drive for complete solidarity and complete idealism does not last forever; it is a process located in time, and it always eventually declines (Collins 2004a; for empirical analysis of the nationalist mobilization in the usa in the months after 9/11/01, see Collins 2004b). For one thing, high levels of mobilization by one group usually lead to conflict with other groups. At high levels of polarization, conflicts produce atrocities – acts of insult, violence, or destruction which the opposing side regards as outrageous, although partisans of one's own side tend to see them as justified. This leads to a process of counter-escalation, a vicious cycle in which each side commits atrocities

justified by what the other side has done to them. Eventually the high level of idealism with which the movement started begins to erode; more persons recognize the gap between ideals and realities, and become disgusted with the conflict. Enthusiastic membership falls away and the movement starts to demobilize. High levels of morality thus lead to high levels of immorality, and eventually to revulsion against the intransigent moralists.

A conflict can lead either to a stalemate or to a victory of one side over the other. Both kinds of outcomes tend to produce a decline in polarization. After a stalemate has gone on for a period of time, it becomes apparent to some persons that a compromise solution must be found; eventually the pragmatists prevail over the ideologues, if only because it becomes too costly to keep on fighting. Victory, too, produces political secularization. That is because a large-scale ideological movement, during its phase of growth, had absorbed a number of different factions. After victory, it splits back into its component parts, since it no longer has a common enemy to unify them. Grand coalitions always have their highest moment just before victory; afterwards the normal politics of factions and compromises takes over.

Historical Factionalizing of Liberalism and Nationalism

For example, consider very schematically the history of the two main modern political ideologies, Liberalism and Nationalism. Liberalism began as the movement for Liberty against the Old Regime of kings, aristocracy, and established religion (Tilly 2004). Here I use the term Liberalism in its original and most generic sense. It was a coalition made up of bourgeois capitalists, professionals and intellectuals, as well poorer classes, and also some sympathizers from the old elite. Once the power of the old hereditary elite was eliminated, the coalition broke apart. New lines of conflict emerged, between capitalists and upper classes favoring democracies ruled by themselves, and Left liberals appealing to the non-privileged classes; eventually the socialist part of this Left Liberalism split into a reformist wing and a radical revolutionary wing. All these groups have claimed to be in some sense crusaders for Liberty, inheritors of the ideological ideals of the past. But their newer splits have turned into new ideologies, sometimes locked in deadly struggle with each other. There is no reason to think that the defeat of revolutionary socialism around 1990 will bring this dynamic to an end. The late twentieth century showed that further splits on the Left were politically viable, such as the rise of the Greens and the militant environmental movement; and new versions of Left movements are remaking themselves around the world. There have been periodic pronouncements about "the end of history" or "the end of ideology" when one particular conflict came to an end, but these have always been followed by a new round of ideological movements and conflict.

Nationalism, the other major form of modern political movement, has organized around a somewhat different focus of attention than the offshoots of Liberalism. Nationalisms make a ritual ideal out of geographical boundaries and a image of a state which has the emotional loyalty of all its members. In its ideal form, this is an altruistic, Durkheimian goal. Like Liberalism, Nationalism arose from the end of Old Regime politics, with the secularization of transnational religion that had previously superceded local political loyalties, and with the growth of the state apparatus and its organizational penetration into society. As Charles Tilly (1995, 2004) and Michael Mann (1986, 1993) have shown, class-based movements (i.e. the varieties and inheritors of Liberalism) and nationalist movements were mobilized at the same time and by the same opportunities presented by modern state-building. The processes of mobilizing these social movements was the same; the personnel that they drew upon were often the same; they differed chiefly in the targets they aimed at. Differences between nationalist movements and the various Liberalism emerged or were constructed over time, as they found different niches in the space of possible conflicts. Nineteenth century Liberals tended to be Nationalists as well; in Germany or France, for example, National Liberals appealed to the glory of the Fatherland and the unity of its People, as a basis for mobilizing everyone in the struggle for democracy. It is when Liberalism factionated into its class-based parts that Nationalism tended to become independent; twentieth-century Nationalisms were reactions against class politics, claims to get back to the pure unified movement of the whole people (Mann 2004). Like socialism, Nationalism also split internally into a milder and a more militant version. On one hand, there were movements for ethnic assimilation into the national identity of France, Britain, or the United States; such nationalists regarded themselves as enemies of prejudice, and their national unity as an altruistic one. At the other end of the continuum were militant nationalists, ready to fight to destroy their enemies and to carry out a revolution to take the state by force. In this respect the emergence of Fascism parallels the emergence of revolutionary Communism.

Both the varieties of Liberalism and the various Nationalisms tended to be international in scope. This might seem more natural in the case of the Liberalisms, since the struggle for democracy, or for the working class, could be carried out in various countries; and a social movement which mobilized in one place could draw on the support of allies in other countries. Moreover, a highly mobilized movement, as a network with heightened ritual solidarity, is idealistic and tends to spread its symbolic community like missionaries carrying a religion to the ends of the earth. It is during the upward phase of a social movement that it is most altruistic, most fervently believing in the goodness of one's cause and the desirability of bringing more people into the movement.

In the case of Nationalisms, this seems paradoxical. After all, a movement in favor of German nationalism is for the Germans, and the nationalism of

the Italians or the Spaniards should be treated as a dangerous enemy. But in fact this was largely not the case. Nationalists in one country tended to be sympathetic to nationalists in other countries. The various Fascist movements of the early twentieth century entered into a coalition, and sent troops to support each other in their internal civil wars; French fascists admired German fascists. Nationalism, despite its avowed particularism – its exalting of its own national essence – nevertheless is a universalistic movement; it has an ideology of meta-nationalism: all nationalists are good, and we are joined together in fighting the enemies of nationalists.

This is true also for the milder forms of nationalism. English National Liberals in mid-19th century were fervently in favor of national liberation struggles elsewhere; Lord Byron went to fight for the anti-Turkish uprising in Greece, and Garibaldi was popular in England and the USA. This kind of internationalist nationalism became crystalized into the doctrine of Wilsonian Liberalism; at the time of the first World War; President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the doctrine that every nationality (what we would call an ethnic group) is entitled to its own state. This ideal was enthusiastically acclaimed at the time, as promising the end of wars and the formula for a lasting peace. In fact it was a naive position. Ethnic groups are not primordial entities, but are constantly being reconstructed through historical contingencies; shifting political borders and experiences in a state's military, education system, and institutions of cultural consumption all affect what ethnic identities people have at a particular time (Collins 1999). States create ethnicities as much as they respond to ethnicities laid down by prior political experience. Thus the effort to establish "one state for one nationality" legitimized a new phase of struggle over what ethnic symbols would be dominate in particular states. Woodrow Wilson and Adolf Hitler, different as they were in many respects, were part of the same constellation, the ideology of exalting rule by the People as the solution to all political difficulties.

I have argued that all highly mobilized ideologies tend to delegitimate themselves. This is most obviously the case with the most militant forms of Liberalism and Nationalism, revolutionary Communism and Fascism. But milder forms of Liberalism and Nationalism have also failed to keep up the idealistic image with which they began. In part this is because of the expansive tendencies of all highly mobilized movements, their desire to expand their benefits to more people. Strong movements always tend to cross state borders. Thus there is something self-contradictory about the nationalist ideal; although it made a ritualistic sacred object out of state borders, the movement itself was not based on those borders, and it tended to overrride them. Similarly with Liberal movements, both of Center and Left.

From this tendency to expand across borders come two negative results. One is that highly mobilized movements tend to encourage wars. The idealists of the movement tend to regard war as an incidental evil, imposed upon

them by their enemies; they believe that their war will be the last one, the War to End War (as was said about the First World War on the side of the Allies). Since wars are usually much more destructive than domestic politics, ideological movements which have mobilized internationally set in motion the processes of ideological decline. The other negative result is what can also be called ideological imperialism. Altruistic believers feel that their program will benefit everyone. If other parts of the world lack the mobilization and the consciousness to carry through their ideal, it is our duty to help them. This explains the paradox that it has been the Liberal countries of the world who were the greatest imperialists of the modern era. It was precisely during the era of parliamentary democracy in England and France that they acquired their most extensive empires; in the period of unification in Germany and Italy it was the parliamentary Liberals who were most in favor of Imperial expansion; the Dutch Empire began in the early seventeenth century at the time of domestic nation-building, and consolidated in the late nineteenth century under constitutional parliamentary rule. The evils of imperialism from the point of view of the colonized peoples are well known. But this is a viewpoint that emerged only in the late twentieth century, as the empires fell apart for geopolitical reasons. Before that time, imperialism was generally liberal imperialism, supported and indeed motivated by the ideological ideals that politicians held about their own homelands, which they wanted to export to the rest of the world (Mann 2005). (This was not true of all instances of imperialism, of course; the Spanish empire, or the Ottoman empire, for instance, preceded the liberal era; but the great world empires of modern times were based on liberal states.) In this sense, the neo-imperialism of President Bush in Iraq follows a long-standing pattern.

The Pendulum of Ideological Militancy, Delegitimation, and Political Privatization

Political movements follow one another in succession in part because previous movements have delegitimated themselves. After disillusionment with one political ideology there often comes a period of political secularization, a decade or so of privatization in which mundane domestic political maneuvers predominate, and most people are cynical about political ideologies and committed only to the pastimes of private life. The 1920s was such an era in many places. But the vacuum of political secularization also allows the growth of new ideological movements. After the First World War, Wilsonian idealist nationalism, liberal omni-nationalism as we might call it, became delegitimated; the Second World War delegitimated the more extreme nationalisms that followed. Liberalism too, even in its welfare state and socialist versions, became delegitimated in part because of its foreign crusades, in

part because the era of decolonization following the geopolitical shifts of the Second World War allowed the non-European world to mobilize its own local movements. Post-colonial movements imported models of militant organization pioneered in the West, in both Leftist and Nationalist form, as well as its weapons and military violent tactics. In this respect, it is not entirely inaccurate to see contemporary Islamist fundamentalist militancy as resembling the Fascist movements of 70 years earlier, although with a different ideological content and different set of symbols.

In some very formal respects, we are replaying the period of the 1930s. But the names of the players have changed, and so have their fortunes. By 1945, a coalition of Center and Left-liberals together with Communists defeated a coalition of Fascists and other militant Nationalists. After the victory, the Liberal and Communist parts of the coalition fell into conflict; revolutionary Left movements expanded for several decades, joined by newer kinds of idealistic, anti-liberal Left movements in the 1960s and 70s. (Changes in terminology reflect the shifting character of polarization; by this time, the old lineages of the movement for Liberty had become so disparate that the term "liberal" now often meant welfare-state democrats.) Then the geopolitical center of the Communists became delegitimated and geopolitically strained, and collapsed in the 80s and 90s. President Bush would like to see the 1940s repeated. What is more likely to happen is a different sequence of delegitimation. Centrist Liberalism, at its victorious phase in the 1990s, has been delegitimating itself; the rising forces of recent years – the expansive social movements – are those of militant nationalisms (in the Islamic world, in a religious guise), plus a revival of the socialist Left. At least in the Middle East, and possibly in Latin America, it looks like the next phase will be the victory of militant nationalisms and socialisms.

Is this the end of the story? No; because the story has no end. The USA will very likely be forced to withdraw from Iraq, without establishing its ideal of a liberal democracy. This will be a temporary surge of victory for the militant nationalists, including the ideological Islamists. But the high point of victory is always a turning point; a post-American Iraq will doubtless be a land of ideological civil war, in which the rival factions – religious and regional – will go through the process of delegitimating themselves in the atrocities they commit upon each other.

The USA will of course lose international power-prestige, and the ideology of expansive Liberalism will decline. But none of these things are permanent. For a parallel, remember that the USA was also forced out of a disastrous war in Vietnam in the 1970s; its decline in prestige was one of the things that encouraged the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. But the Iranians soon fell into a disastrous war of their own, with Iraq; and as events moved on in the 1980s, the decline and fall of the USSR eliminated the other major ideological contender, and brought the USA back to ideological hegemony in

the 1990s. It would not be surprising if ten years after the usa leaves Iraq, it will have recovered its ideological prestige as well. As Max Weber recognized (1922/1968: 910-913; see also Mearsheimer 2001) big, economically powerful and militarily well-armed states are always major actors in the world arena, in peacetime diplomacy as well as in war. Historically, "Great Powers" recover from their defeats, provided that they do not fall into severe economic and territorial decline or become absorbed into another state.

An alternative line of argument that has recently become popular is that hegemonic powers are anachronisms in our age of globalization. In this view, the American invasion of Iraq is a failure because it tries to continue old-style imperial spheres of influence in a period when a new culture and new institutions of civic globalism are superceding the power of the nation states. In this view, a democratic world culture is coming into being that will settle disputes not by war but by peaceful acceptance of the norms of international law. This is a pleasant vision, but not a very realistic one. The United States is not the only part of the world that practices old-fashioned power politics; the struggle for Great Power status is a strong ideological impetus in China, Russia, India and elsewhere; it may be reviving in Japan; the pan-Islamist movement, exemplified by al-Qaeda but widely appealing elsewhere, has a distinctly geopolitical motivation to revive the power of the old Islamic Caliphate. I am not suggesting that these forms of militant nationalism (and militant religious imperialism) will necessarily achieve their goals; these are subject to the usual limitations and strains of geopolitical conflict. My main point is that they are all political ideologies which carry the danger of escalating towards high levels of polarization.

In contrast to these political militancies, the ideal of a civic global culture is an ideology of political secularization. It is not surprising that the chief advocates of the civic globalization ideal are in contemporary Europe. The European Union grew out of the destruction of the Second World War; those nations who suffered the most from the polarization of militant political ideologies in the first half of the twentieth century took the lead in creating a meta-state that would make a new European war impossible. In this respect, the ideology of the Europeanizers is parallel to that of the secularizers three centuries earlier at the end of the religious wars.

In today's context, the ideal of a global civic culture, enforcing international norms through institutions like a world court at The Hague, is a vision of the eu writ large. The success of Europe, in reducing its own regional polarizations, is taken as a harbinger of what the entire world can do. But the historical conditions which led to de-polarization – to the secularization of militant political ideologies – in Europe are not present on a global scale. Russia, China, India, Japan, the usa, the Islamic dreamers of a new Caliphate – these are not flowing in the same trajectory as the old formerly Great Powers of Europe who ended their destructive conflicts with the European Union. The

rhythms of ideological polarization and secularization in different parts of the world are out of synchronization with each other. As long as that remains the case, the broadcasting of a Europe-centered ideal of civic internationalism will remain only one more regional ideology, striving for global hegemony.

Prediction is always dangerous, among other reasons because it leads us onto the narrow grounds of particular events, and away from the more general pattern of events that makes up social change. The sociological problem is how we can understand these patterns theoretically. The processes of polarization and secularization, the mobilization of militant movements and their ideologies, and their delegitimation and demobilization, are processes taking place over time. I have tried to show some of the causes which determine the swings from one to the other. What social theory has not yet done is to work out the dynamics of time itself: how long these processes last. This is not a simple matter of measuring how many years each movement takes; since there are a number of processes interacting with each other, probably a combination of several causes determine the time patterns. It is apparent, for example, that processes of delegitimation of political ideologies move much faster than the processes of religious secularization, although many of the underlying mechanisms are the same. Further research is needed if we are to build a theory of time laws for social events.

Among the benefits of a theory of time dynamics will be to help us understand why people who are living in a particular moment in time are so blind to what they will look like at a different historical moment. This is the theoretical challenge for the future.

Bibliography

Collins, R. (1998) *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Collins, R. (1999) 'Balkanization' or 'Americanization': A Geopolitical Theory of Ethnic Change. In: Randall Collins, *Macro-History: Essays in Sociology of the Long Run*, pp. 70-109. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Collins, R. (2004a) *Interaction Ritual Chains.* Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Collins, R. (2004b) Rituals of solidarity and security in the wake of terrorist attack. *Sociological Theory* 22: 53-87.

Gorski, P. (2000) Historicizing the secularization debate: Church, state and society in late medieval and early modern Europe. *American Sociological Review* 105: 138-168.

Gorski, P. (2003) *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Finke, R., and R. Stark (1992) *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Mann, M. (1986) *The Sources of Social Power.* Vol.1: *A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mann, M. (1993) *The Sources of Social Power*. Vol. 2: *The Rise of Classes and Nation-states, 1760-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mann, M. (2004) *Fascists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mann, M. (2005) *The Dark Side of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mearsheimer, J.J. (2001) *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton.

Stark, R., and W. Sims Bainbridge (1985) *The Future of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tilly, C. (1995) *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Tilly, C. (2004) *Social Movements, 1768-2004*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Weber, M. (1922/1968) *Economy and Society*. New York: Bedminster Press.