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AGAINST MORALIZED SECULARISM

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Article abstract

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AGAINST MORALIZED SECULARISM

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ABSTRACT:

Moralized secularism is the view that "secularism" is defined in relation to certain moral values. Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor's "liberal pluralism" is an influential version of moralized secularism, for it states that freedom of conscience and equal respect are the fundamental moral values of secularism. I present the objection that secularism is a redundant category because it carries no distinctive normative content that cannot be found in the more general, and less divisive, terminology of liberalism and democracy. In order to avoid this objection, I argue for conceiving secularism in a nonmoralized way. According to my view, secularism refers solely to the institutional arrangements that a state can put in place in order to address conflicts with organized religion(s) that might emerge at the moment of advancing its ideological political project (e.g., liberalism, republicanism). Through this interpretation, it is possible to conceptualize expressions of secularism that are either not liberal (i.e., republican) or not motivated by the acknowledgment of new forms of pluralism as being the prime challenge a state faces for advancing its political project (i.e., anticlerical). As the redundancy objection shows, this is a possibility that moralized accounts of secularism preclude.

RÉSUMÉ :

Les versions moralisées de la laïcité définissent la « laïcité » par rapport à des valeurs morales. Le « pluralisme libéral » de Jocelyn Maclure et Charles Taylor est un exemple influent de la laïcité moralisée, car il affirme que la liberté de conscience et l'égal respect sont les valeurs morales fondamentales de la laïcité. Je propose l'objection selon laquelle la laïcité est une catégorie redondante, car elle ne comporte aucun contenu normatif distinctif qui ne peut être trouvé dans la terminologie plus générale et moins controversée du libéralisme et de la démocratie. Pour répondre à cette objection, je soutiens qu'il faut concevoir la laïcité de manière non moralisée. Selon moi, la laïcité se réfère seulement aux arrangements institutionnels qu'un État peut mettre en place pour répondre aux conflits avec les religions organisées qui pourraient surgir au moment de faire avancer son projet politique idéologique (par exemple, le libéralisme, le républicanisme). Dans cette interprétation, il est possible de conceptualiser des expressions de laïcité qui sont non libérales (c'est-à-dire républicaines), ou qui ne sont pas motivées par la reconnaissance de nouvelles formes de pluralisme à titre de principal défi auquel un État est confronté pour faire avancer son projet politique (c'est-à-dire anticlérical). Comme le montre l'objection de redondance, c'est une possibilité que la laïcité moralisée exclut.

1. INTRODUCTION

Critics of secularism usually maintain that it is inherently antireligious, or that it is necessarily biased against religion.[1] These criticisms gain relevance if we take into consideration that restrictions to religious freedoms of minorities are often justified by appeals to secularism and its alleged requirements—for instance, the requirement of separation of church and state.[2] Facing these criticisms, Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor have defined secularism in terms that are focused on protecting freedom of conscience and equal respect, which they portray as secularism's moral *ends*, while neutrality of the state and separation of church and state are presented as its institutional *means*. Importantly, they claim that the value of the latter is relative to their effectiveness and relevance for promoting the former (Maclure and Taylor 2011; Taylor 2011; Maclure 2013a). With a similar purpose in mind, Micheline Milot offers the definition that "secularism is a development of the political realm by virtue of which freedom of religion and freedom of conscience are guaranteed, in conformance with a will to establish equal justice of all, by a state that is neutral toward the various conceptions of the good life coexisting in society" (Milot 2013b, p. 39). Jean Baubérot has insisted on defining secularism as a process that gradually consolidates the autonomy of the state vis-à-vis organized religion(s) while at the same time guarantees freedom of conscience and equal respect (Baubérot 1998; 2007; Baubérot and Milot 2011). Other definitions appeal to moral values such as toleration, nondiscrimination (Bhargava 2008), and evenhandedness (Bilgrami 2014). I refer to these definitions as *moralized secularism* because they situate moral values at their core.

Moralized secularism seems an adequate response to the criticism of being antireligious. Maclure and Taylor's strategy is particularly elucidatory in this respect, for their distinction between the ends and the means of secularism serves to tame initiatives that intend to restrict freedom of religion in the name of neutrality of the state or separation of church and state, neither of which is intrinsically desirable. This definition, however, is vulnerable of another kind of criticism, which maintains that the term "secularism" should be expunged from our political vocabulary. Veit Bader (1999; 2011; 2012), for instance, proposes a farewell to "secularism" by replacing it with the terminology of "the priority of liberal democracy." He defends this view by arguing that it would eliminate the usage of a notion that is inevitably contaminated by an antireligious ideology that engenders political instability and ultimately nurtures religious radicalization. For Bader, the polysemy of "secularism" not only shows that it is too contested a concept for guiding contemporary relationships between politics and religion (Bader 2010), but that it also reproduces a long-lasting tradition of *secularist* disdain towards religion (Bader 2007, chap. 3).

Bader's farewell view relies on an implicit premise—namely, that in replacing the language of the priority of liberal democracy for the language of secularism nothing normatively relevant would be lost. To the contrary, with the elimination of such a quarrelsome notion a good deal of heated debate in political and

academic contexts referring to the relationship of religion and politics could be prevented. In sections two and three of this article I develop this implicit premise into an argument (i.e., the *redundancy objection*) against "liberal pluralist secularism," Maclure and Taylor's moralized definition of secularism. According to the redundancy objection, moralized definitions of secularism, such as the liberal pluralist one, do not add anything normatively relevant to the political vocabulary that we already have at our disposition in the vocabulary of liberalism and democracy. Secularism is therefore redundant. The truth of the redundancy objection supports Bader's farewell view for two reasons. First, useless multiplication of concepts is an undesirable consequence of political theories, which presumably must attempt to be as parsimonious as possible. Second, political prudence recommends not to use the term "secularism" given the spectrum of conflict that often surrounds it. There is no doubt that as a term it is bounded by conflict and difficult disagreements, which places a significant burden onto its contemporary defenders, as they can be read as proposing secularism *in spite of its being a highly controversial term.* Yet, if it is a redundant political category that might be easily replaced by a less contentious one, then its defenses might not be worth the political cost.

In section four I argue that the redundancy objection can be avoided if the definition of secularism is not moralized. In contrast to definitions that embody a moral ideal—usually that of protecting all religious or moral worldviews on equal grounds—my proposal is to understand secularism as an *institutional arrangement* that is set up in order to advance the political ideal of a given regime. The difference with Maclure and Taylor's position is that secularism is not conceived as a complex system of moral values *and* institutional principles. A nonmoralized definition of secularism does not include the moral values that are typically included in definitions that intend to emphasize secularism's compatibility with liberal values such as freedom of religion. Nonmoralized secularism does not include values such as protection of freedom of conscience, equal respect, or full inclusiveness of "all spiritual families" (Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 23; Taylor 2011, p. 35); it requires neither an evenhanded treatment to all faiths or organized religions (Bilgrami 2014, p. 31), nor "non-discrimination," or "toleration" (Bhargava 2008, pp. 91, 103-106). It is not a "political project with a set of normative claims concerning the way in which the state deals with diversity" (Zucca 2012, p. 28). Secularism is, instead, the institutional arrangement that a state sets up in order to advance its political ideals—whatever they are—vis-à-vis potential conflicts that might emerge with organized religions.

The purpose of this article is essentially elucidatory, as its aim is to make explicit two elements that are at the core of what secularism is: First, the article shows that it is better to conceive of it as an institutional means to realize a certain political-moral ideal, the merits of which are to be analyzed independently from the status of the state as secular or not: an authoritarian state might be a secular one, despite its morally reproachable ideals. And second, the article makes explicit that the emphasis placed on pluralism—so common in recent debates about the role of religion in liberal politics—does not constitute an essential

feature of a *definition* of secularism. A secular state must not be conceived as one that is necessarily committed to respecting pluralism. This does not mean, however, that a secular state that does not share such an ideal is necessarily defensible according to our preferred moral and political principles. Yet it is important to clarify that the acknowledgement of the importance of protecting and respecting pluralism is a *contextual* attitude motivated by a liberal and democratic awareness of the urgency of revising old assumptions of shared heritages, either cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or religious. Nonetheless, from the fact that pluralism is an important feature characterizing most Western societies, it must not be concluded that such pluralism-motivated spirit is constitutive of the concept of secularism itself.

In addition to providing an argument against the redundancy objection upon which the farewell to secularism view relies, conceiving of secularism in nonmoralized terms has a further advantage. It allows identifying as genuine *conceptions* of secularism institutional arrangements that are not set up for advancing the moral and political projects that characterize contemporary Western liberal democracies. This is a possibility that is excluded if we start from a moralized definition of secularism. In section five I sketch three examples of conceptions of secularism that differ from the purposes typically associated with contemporary Western liberal democracies. The first two (republican) are presented as examples of conceptions of secularism that do not pursue values traditionally associated with the liberal tradition. The third one (liberal-anticlerical) is presented as an example of a conception of secularism that, although pursuing the values traditionally associated with the liberal tradition, is not *motivated* by the recognition of pluralism as one of the main challenges to which liberal democratic states must react when dealing with issues related to the role and place of religion in liberal democracies. Liberal anticlerical secularism is motivated by the necessity to counter the political power of a dominant religious institution. Opening up the possibility of conceiving diverging conceptions of secularism serves purposes that are both *theoretical* (we gain conceptual accuracy about our political terms) and *practical* (we are better equipped to develop institutional arrangements that correspond to the challenges proper to each specific context). Liberal values and the acknowledgement of pluralization of societies have not always inspired the institutions of secularism, thus it must be possible to conceive of forms of secularism that represent such non liberal and non pluralist motivations.

2. MORALIZED SECULARISM: LIBERAL PLURALIST SECULARISM

Charles Taylor's most recent work has dealt with questions about how to conceive of secularism and whether it can be a useful category in contexts where secularism might be rejected for not being a domestic idea (Taylor 2011, 2016). It is in his work with Jocelyn Maclure, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience* (2011), where these explorations find their most complete version, as the authors advance a normative political theory of secularism that complements Taylor's important work on social secularization in what he calls the "North-Atlantic world" (Taylor 2007, p. 1).

Maclure and Taylor argue that secularism cannot be defined "through simple formulations such as 'separation of church and state,' 'the neutrality of the state toward religions,' or the 'privatization of religion'" (Maclure 2013a, p. 2; see also Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 19).[3] According to them, these are simplifications that promote social distrust because they are used to justify restrictions of individual freedoms of members of minority groups (e.g., Muslims in Europe).[4] Instead, they think secularism should be defined as a complex notion that rests upon a plurality of *moral* and *institutional* principles. The moral principles are the fundamental ends to which the political regime is committed, while the institutional principles are the means conducive to the specified ends. Secularism's content is constituted by equality of respect and freedom of conscience, which are the "two major principles" (the ends), and by separation of church and state and the neutrality of the state, which are the "two operative modes" (the institutional means) (Maclure 2013a, p. 4; Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 23). Secularism is thus *defined* as the complex notion composed of moral values that are to be pursued unconditionally (namely, freedom of conscience and equal respect) and institutional principles (namely, church-state separation and neutrality of the state) that are to be implemented to the extent that they are uncontroversially conducive to the realization of the moral values.[5] Henceforth, I will refer to this definition as "liberal pluralist secularism."[6]

The distinction between the moral *ends* and the institutional *means* serves an important purpose for contemporary debates about the relationship between religion and politics because it determines the value of the institutional principles in virtue of their functionality in promoting the moral values (Maclure 2013a, p. 6). Importantly, it specifies the value of church-state separation in relation to its efficacy in furthering the moral values of freedom of conscience and equal respect. Maclure and Taylor argue that the ends-means distinction of their definition serves the purpose of undermining defenses of certain policies that are justified exclusively by appeals to "church-state separation" or "state neutrality." They refer to these justifications of policies as "the fetishism of means" (Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 29), for they take "separation" and "neutrality" as if they were ends that must be pursued for their own sake, rather than means useful for the pursuit of an ulterior moral goal. Furthermore, by introducing the ends-means distinction, they rule out attempts to define secularism *as* either "separation" or "neutrality," which are common in defenses of policies that are targeted against the freedom of religion of certain religious minorities.

Although liberal pluralist secularism makes a valuable theoretical contribution to the understanding of secularism, it leads to the following puzzling consequence: on the one hand, some regimes that are commonly regarded as secular are excluded from being portrayed as such; on the other hand, regimes that might not be identified as secular—i.e., those with an established or national church—would have to be considered as genuinely secular.[7] As I show in the next section, defenders of liberal pluralist secularism might not accept this consequence as puzzling, since it is one of their purposes to advance a redefinition that is attractive for addressing contemporary debates about religion in liberal and demo-

cratic politics. In their view, the attractiveness of secularism understood as liberal pluralist lies in the fact that it successfully appeases indictments of hostility towards religions and religious citizens. Yet I contend that in doing so liberal pluralist secularism becomes a redundant political category.

3. FAREWELL TO SECULARISM? THE REDUNDANCY OBJECTION

The redundancy of liberal pluralism can be unpacked by showing that it comprises both exclusivist and inclusivist features. From the definition of liberal pluralism, it follows that regimes that do not honour its moral values cannot be considered to be genuinely secular. *Secularist* regimes are those that implement separation of religion and politics as an attempt to diminish the influence the former plays either in the private lives of individuals or in society's public life. History provides examples of these forms of regimes: Kemalist Turkey, postrevolutionary Mexico, and Soviet Communism. These regimes have in common the fact that, although they differ radically in their ultimate purposes and moral merits, they are considered to be *paradigmatic* instances of regimes of secularism. If we follow the liberal pluralist's definition, these secularist regimes must be *excluded* from being characterized as genuine regimes of secularism. This is consistent with Taylor's project of redefining secularism when he says, "One of the ways of demonstrating the superiority of the three principle model of secularism … is that *it would never allow one to misrecognize the regime founded by Ataturk as genuinely secular*" (Taylor 2011, p. 37; emphasis added).[8] On the other hand, it can also be argued that, according to the liberal pluralist definition, regimes of religious establishment can be considered as genuinely secular if they honour freedom of conscience and equal respect. As Rajeev Bhargava defines it, a state that establishes religion is one that grants religion official recognition, yet it is not governed by "the sacerdotal order" (Bhargava 2008, p. 85). Since the state and the recognized religion are interrelated institutionally, a system of religious establishment is in principle contrary to a regime of secularism, as the latter is related to some form of separation between politics and religion. The United Kingdom, where the head of the national church is also the head of the state, should not be considered a secular state. However, from the liberal pluralist point of view, this is a hasty conclusion, for the United Kingdom is committed to protecting the moral values of liberal pluralism (Maclure 2013a, p. 7; Maclure and Taylor 2011, pp. 9, 26).[9] According to liberal pluralist secularism, regimes of this sort of religious establishment are to be *included* as exemplars of genuine forms of secularism.

Rather than leading to puzzling consequences, these two features of liberal pluralist secularism can be interpreted as two qualities that make it an attractive definition. A common criticism raised against secularism is that it is ultimately grounded upon an antireligious doctrine, which makes the relationship between religion and politics in a secular state oppressive towards religious citizens. Through the exclusion of authoritarian and state-led antireligious hostilities from the definition, the exclusivist dimension of liberal pluralism can be thought of as one step forward in a response to the antireligious indictment. On the other

hand, by showing that in a regime of secularism religion is amply welcome in the public sphere, for instance, by making religious establishment compatible with secularism, liberal pluralism is deepening its commitment to nonhostility towards religion. As a consequence, liberal pluralism is not only incompatible with antireligious (or *secularist*) authoritarianism but also very open to the extensive presence of religion in the public sphere.

However, the same features that make liberal pluralist secularism an attractive definition bring its redundancy to the surface. Its exclusive and inclusive qualities show that it is not possible to find a regime that does not honour freedom of conscience and equal respect that can also be considered as genuinely secular. In other words, any regime that is democratic and liberal is also a regime that is secular. More specifically, any liberal democracy is a regime of secularism *regardless* of the institutional design that it sets up in order to govern relationships between state politics and religion. Whether it sets up an institutional arrangement of strict separation in which religion is heavily confined to the private sphere, or whether it incorporates a regime of religious establishment that supports religious organizations in diverse ways, a working liberal democracy would be considered a regime of secularism. If this is the case, then it is not clear what the distinctive normative content carried by liberal pluralist secularism is. For it is compatible with no-matter-what institutional regime that is respectful of liberal and democratic values. Over the last years, Taylor has claimed for a "radical re-definition" of secularism (2011), yet if his proposal is to equalize what secularism and liberal-democratic politics mean, then we might be better off by abandoning the "secularism" language altogether and following Bader's farewell view (Bader 2007, p. 3; 2010; 2012). If the terms "secularism" and "liberal-democracy" have identical referents, then a parsimonious attitude recommends not using one of them.

The redundancy of the liberal-pluralist definition is confirmed by analyzing Maclure and Taylor's analysis of what they identify as republican regimes of secularism. According to their analysis, these cannot be conceptualized as *genuine* variations of secularism. Maclure and Taylor's definition refers to the conjunction of the moral values of freedom of conscience and equal respect on the one hand and the institutional principles of neutrality of the state and the separation of church and state on the other. This means that, in order to put in place a genuine regime of secularism, republicanism must be committed to such values and principles. However, under their reconstruction of republican secularism this is not possible. According to them, the moral principles of the republican model are "[in addition to respect for moral equality and freedom of conscience] the emancipation of individuals and the growth of a common civic identity" (Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 34). As they show, the problem with this form of secularism is that adopting the emancipation of individuals as a moral value of the state is incompatible with freedom of conscience and equal respect, as it necessarily commits the state to either atheistic or agnostic views, which means that the state promotes an ideology that contradicts the worldview of its religious citizens (hence creating a freedom-of-conscience tension) and situates

religious citizens in a position of second-class citizenship (hence creating an equal-respect issue) (Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 31). This tension with liberal values undermines its secular credentials. The radical revision of the traditional notion of secularism advocated by Taylor is partly explained by this antireligious bias that republican secularism carries,[10] which leads him to call for a radical revision of the traditional notion of secularism in countries that have not overcome their legacy of antireligious biases. If republicanism is inherently incompatible with freedom of conscience and equal respect, and if the definition stipulates such two values as the moral values to be pursued by any regime of secularism, then it is not possible to consider republican regimes as being genuinely secular.

The redundancy objection shows that liberal pluralism is a definition of secularism that precludes the possibility of comparison between liberal and nonliberal regimes of secularism. Maclure and Taylor's view does not lead to the conclusion that a liberal regime of secularism is *superior* to a nonliberal one. Rather, the conclusion that follows from their account is that the latter is not a regime of secularism *at all*. If liberal pluralist secularism is to be saved from the redundancy objection, it must be possible to address questions about whether a regime is secular *independently* from questions about its being a liberal democracy. In other words, questions about Ataturk's regime being genuinely secular must be treated independently from questions about its liberal and democratic credentials. There must not be a contradiction in characterizing such a regime as being both genuinely secular and at odds with liberal and democratic values. The purpose of the next section is to show that this is possible if secularism is not defined in a moralized way. This enables us to conceive of liberal pluralism as a *conception* of secularism that is distinctive from several possible alternatives, some of which I describe in section 5.

4. NONMORALIZED SECULARISM

The redundancy objection can be avoided by conceiving of secularism so that it is possible to individuate genuine expressions of it that are not reducible to liberal democratic regimes. This is possible if secularism is defined as encompassing *only* institutional principles. In this section I present a nonmoralized definition of secularism and show how it contributes to the conceptualization of its liberal-pluralist expression as a *conception* of secularism that is (a) constrained by liberal values and (b) motivated by the acknowledgment of the challenges that the fact of pluralism poses to traditional conceptions of secularism.

Nonmoralized secularism is the institutional arrangement and set of policies intended to promote and protect the moral values of a specific political regime when conflicts concerning the relationship between religion and politics emerge. In other words, nonmoralized secularism is the institutional arrangement whereby politics and religion are separate—or, as it has developed in Western political thought, between church and state—and the set of policies that such

regime of separation entails as it is filtered by the political ideology of the state and the contextual challenges it is bound to face.

Why a political regime should seek secularism and what considerations should be taken into account in this regard are matters that respond to two different sorts of inquiry: the first one is the political ideology embraced by the state; the second one corresponds to contextual challenges that might hinder the advancement of the political values attached to the political ideology that is to be put in place. Thus understood, secularism is not a moral category but a way of organizing institutions so that the political project of the state is secured. Within this analytical framework, liberal pluralist secularism is a *conception*, not a *definition*, of secularism. A conception of secularism is a way of organizing state institutions so that values *x*, *y*, *z* are pursued in a context in which they are challenged by social features *a* or *b*. The implication of this conceptual clarification is that, as its name unambiguously anticipates, liberal pluralist secularism must be understood as a conception in which the values pursued are *liberal* and the social feature that challenges the pursuit of such values is *the fact of pluralism.* In the remainder of this section I expand on this conceptualization. The *liberal* part of liberal pluralist secularism indicates that the values of freedom of conscience and equal respect must be understood as constraints on what secularism can require. These are values that the state must pursue unconditionally in every dimension of the political realm, including in the instance of potential conflicts emerging from the relationship between the state and organized religions—that is, the instance in which secularism is relevant.[11] Being part of the moral and political project of the state, these moral values must not be understood as *constitutive* of secularism but only as its external constraints. It is the specific set of moral values that gives liberal pluralist secularism its *liberal* character.

Since the core values of liberalism are compatible with different sets of institutional arrangements, it is expected that different regimes of secularism can be labelled "liberal." What differentiates liberal pluralist secularism from other liberal conceptions is that it is *pluralist motivated*. In order to recognize this property, it is useful to draw a distinction between what pluralism means for the political ideology of liberalism and what pluralism means for a *pluralism-motivated* conception of secularism. A characteristic feature of liberalism as a political doctrine is its commitment to the protection of individual conscience, which means that there must not be interferences in individuals' autonomous determination and pursuit of their own life plans and moral commitments. The connection between this characteristic feature of liberalism and pluralism is straightforward, as it is foreseeable that there will be as many life plans and moral worldviews as there are consciences.[12] As Rawls argued in *Political Liberalism*, the fact of reasonable pluralism is the "natural outcome of the activities of human reason under free institutions" (Rawls 2005, p. xxiv). Rawls suggests that protection of pluralism, instantiated as protection of individual conscience, is a characteristic feature of liberalism.[13] This means that *any* liberal conception of secularism must be committed to protecting freedom of conscience and therefore to respecting pluralism. Maclure and Taylor's view is liberal in this sense,

but this is not what explains the *pluralist-motivated* spirit of their view; what explains it is that it takes as its starting point the fact that pluralism in contemporary societies has deepened and therefore has called into question traditional forms of conceiving secularism.

The *pluralism-motivated* character of liberal pluralism draws upon contextual considerations about how to interpret the institutional arrangements that are supposed to be in place if a liberal state is to pursue its core moral values. As Maclure and Taylor maintain, institutional arrangements are means towards the promotion and protection of the core moral values of the state. While the moral values are to be pursued unconditionally, the institutional principles must be interpreted in relation to their relevance and effectiveness in promoting the moral values. Questions about how to best interpret the institutional principles so that they effectively promote the moral values of the political regime are to be settled contextually. Any pluralism-motivated conception requires that the institutional arrangements in place for promoting the moral values be interpreted in such a way that they are adequately sensitive to the fact of pluralism characteristic of the society where secularism will be implemented. In the specific case of liberal pluralist secularism, the institutional principles are to be interpreted in relation to the observation of the phenomenon of pluralization in several contemporary Western societies.

From the fact that most contemporary liberal conceptions of secularism are pluralist motivated it must not be inferred that being so is a *constitutive* element of any liberal conception. The acknowledgement of pluralism as a relevant consideration is contextual and, to the extent that it has acknowledged its nonreligious and non-Christian expressions, recent.[14] As Maclure says, "The wide ranging of ethical pluralism of contemporary democracies, the diversification of immigration, and the growing commitment to human rights, … multiculturalism or the recognition of minority groups are for the most part responsible for this *new phase of the debate on religion and politics*" (Maclure 2013b, p. 37; emphasis added).[15] It is within a context of acknowledgement of the pronounced pluralism characterizing contemporary societies that liberal pluralism is presented as an adequate redefinition of secularism.

Liberal pluralist secularism is therefore a proposal to modify the traditional liberal account of secularism, adjusting it to the challenges plural societies pose to liberal states.[16] This *pluralist turn* must be understood as a modification of the traditional ways of understanding the institutional character of secularism and not as a modification of the understanding of the traditional values that characterize liberalism.[17] More specifically, liberal pluralism offers an interpretation of secularism that departs from the traditional "modes of secularism"—namely, the "common ground," which was constituted by a convergence of political principles that were shared by all Christian denominations, and the "independent ethics," which sought to abstract from all religious beliefs and to identify an independent political morality that could be accepted as encompassing them all (Taylor 1998).[18]

Within the liberal tradition, separation of church and state is usually understood as the requirement that the latter does not promote any religion. This means that the state embraces no religious orthodoxy, which can be interpreted, for instance, as requiring bans on the wearing of religious clothes or the carrying of religious symbols by public officials while on duty. The justification for this measure might be that public officials are not regular citizens but members of the state who therefore must not appear to be promoting any religion while on duty. According to the pluralist turn of liberal pluralist secularism, however, this interpretation of "separation" is not plausible, as what is important regarding "separation" is whether the state is coercively promoting a religious orthodoxy and not whether such adherence is merely symbolic. Teachers in public schools, for instance, might be allowed to exhibit their religious affiliations (by carrying crucifixes or wearing headscarves) as long as these do not interfere (as they presumably don't) with the teachers' pedagogical goals (Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 46).[19] Therefore, according to liberal pluralism's interpretation of the separation of church and state, "separation" doesn't imply the obligation of the state to appear void of religious content.

Neutrality of the state is presented as a way of articulating the ideal of equality within the framework of the separation of church and state. For liberals, it is not enough to guarantee that there be freedom of religion through some form of church-state separation, but it is necessary to also guarantee that such freedom be exercised equally. Neutrality of the state appears as the preferred policy to which liberals turn when securing equality in the exercise of freedom of religion. Separation is qualified by the egalitarian constraint that neutrality imposes. Here, however, the pluralist turn of liberal secularism also departs from the traditional understanding of neutrality.

Historically, the policy of nonpreferentialism was widely accepted as an adequate interpretation of neutrality according to the "common ground" mode. It was believed, for instance, that uncommented Bible reading in public schools was a neutral measure and not a specifically Protestant practice (Nussbaum 2009, p. 218). Similarly, calendars were perceived as adequately neutral because they were compatible with holidays for all Christian denominations. However, this cannot be the case anymore because it is not plausible to assume that contemporary Western societies are homogenously composed by practicing Christians to whom Christian-inspired social rules are neutral.[20] Liberal pluralist secularism then proposes to interpret the neutrality of the state in a different manner so that it does not burden religious and nonreligious minorities. Another prominent interpretation of neutrality has understood it in terms of a policy of identical treatment, which defends a non-exceptions approach. According to this view, if the justification of a policy neither *derives from* nor *depends upon* a sectarian moral worldview, then the costs of its implementation must be accepted by all, regardless of whether they are unevenly distributed or whether this makes it particularly arduous for members of a certain community to live according to several of their core commitments.[21] The pluralist turn of liberal secularism rejects this view and defends the policy of "reasonable accommodations,"

according to which individuals might be granted exceptions to a certain law when it is too burdensome given the commitments of conscience of such persons. Maclure and Taylor think that granting accommodations is not incompatible with the neutrality of the state. They provide two main reasons to support this claim. First, reasonable accommodations are intended to protect individuals from being harmed, which is an essential function of the state. On their account, impediments to freedom of conscience are "moral harms," which are as serious as "physical harms" (Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 77). Religious beliefs are conceived as a "distinct type of belief that calls for greater legal protection," the lack thereof will result in great harm. Second, reasonable accommodations do not discriminate against nonreligious citizens, because accommodations shall be granted to anyone who can demonstrate that a law violates a commitment of conscience, whether religious or not—provided it does not jeopardize compelling state interests or affect the rights of others.

Liberal pluralism is then a conception of secularism with two core characteristics: (a) it is inspired and constrained by the moral values of liberalism, and (b) it is sensitive to the fact of pluralism that characterizes contemporary Western societies. This interpretation makes liberal pluralism a nonredundant political category because it leaves space for a variety of alternative conceptions of secularism that do not involve items (a) or (b). In the next section, I sketch three of these alternatives.

5. CONCEPTIONS OF SECULARISM

The redundancy objection shows that if secularism is defined in the terms proposed by the liberal pluralist definition, it is impossible to identify forms of secularism that are not liberal democratic. If secularism is defined only as an institutional arrangement, it is possible to conceptualize alternatives that are not liberal or that are not pluralist motivated. In this section I sketch three alternative views, the first two of which are republican (nonliberal) and the third of which is anticlerical (not pluralist motivated). As shown in section three, the liberal-pluralist characterization precludes the possibility of individuating alternatives to it. This is a possibility that opens up if secularism is conceptualized in a nonmoralized way.[22]

Among nonliberal alternatives, French *laïcité* is the most well known. It is to be inscribed within the (French) republican political tradition, the core moral values of which are equality, liberty, and fraternity. In the context of the institutions of secularism, these values must be thought of as *constraining* the requirements that institutional arrangements of secularism can advance with regard to religions. This form of thinking of secularism in the French republican context fits with Cécile Laborde's analysis of what she calls "official republicanism," which refers to the official practice of republicanism and secularism in French politics. She argues that *laïcité* has been traditionally understood as a public philosophy inspired by a specific interpretation of the three core values of republicanism (Laborde 2008, chap. 2, 5, 8; 2002). Its institutions must be

designed in a way that contributes to the *egalitarian* republican project, which consists in promoting a citizenry that conceives of itself as equal in the public sphere and that is treated as such by the state. In order to secure such an ideal, the republican state constructs an expansive public sphere and assumes the "formative project" of creating citizens by vigorously inculcating the "public values of democratic and egalitarian citizenship" (Laborde 2008, p. 42). Regarding the relationship between the state and organized religions, the egalitarian strand of *laïcité* consists in promoting institutions that separate the state from the church by articulating a conception of neutrality that excludes all religions from the public sphere. This conception includes complete religious disestablishment (both symbolic and coercive), stringent requirements of religious restraint and of general opposition to the so-called politics of identity, and unambiguous recognition of the sovereign authority of the state. In turn, the republican value of *liberty* takes the egalitarian ideal further by requiring that institutions assume the project of emancipating individuals from oppressive social norms, including unexamined religious belief. To this end, the promotion of autonomous individuals, who would be able to emancipate themselves from oppressive inherited social norms, is placed as one of the core goals of the republican system of *laïc* public education.[23] Following requirements of the value of *fraternity* (or solidarity), republican institutions must be arranged in such a way that they cultivate a strong sense of national identity that is founded purely upon civil elements. This national identity, inspired by the civil-religion tradition, is expected to guarantee the stability of the republic as citizens can easily identify with their state because they are able to detach themselves from divisive private identities without renouncing to individual self-determination. All combined, the political values of equality, liberty, and fraternity compose the moral constraints that a republican conception of secularism must observe at the moment of advancing the republican ideal.

From a liberal standpoint, republican secularism so conceived is antireligious because it understands "liberty" as expressing an ideal of individual autonomy that requires emancipation from religious beliefs altogether (Laborde 2008, pp. 101-111). Today it is a settled matter that any political doctrine worthy of consideration must be respectful of freedom of conscience and of religion; thus, if republicanism is to be defended, it has to show itself as respectful of such freedoms. Laborde's critical republicanism (2008, chaps. 4, 7, 10) is an attempt to reinterpret the core republican values in such a way that they are not prejudiced against religious belief and are not in the favour of the cultural majority.

Critical republicanism constitutes a conception of secularism that is *republican* and *pluralism motivated:* according to Laborde's interpretation, republican secularism must be construed around *nondomination*, a core value of republicanism that nonetheless does not appear prominently within the official tradition of French republicanism. For a republican state, equality entails that the state must be impartial. Institutionally, this means that the state must "[erect] a 'wall of separation' between public institutions [inclusive of their officials] and religion" (Laborde 2008, p. 88). In order to protect nondomination of the citizenry, a

republican state—and its officials—cannot symbolically endorse religion, for doing otherwise would undermine the "equal civic status of citizens" and constitute a "hierarchy of ranks" among citizens (Laborde 2008, pp. 83-86).[24] Nondomination is also present in the redefinition of the political value of liberty, which is conceived as a "*minimum capability*" "for ongoing rational reflection about one's beliefs and values," which ultimately is a "safeguard against exploitation and manipulation by others" (Laborde 2008, p. 155). The institutions of a (critical) republic must be oriented towards promoting such capability among its citizens. For this reason, Laborde defends an "autonomy-promoting education" (Laborde 2008, p. 158), which will shape how eventually citizens would relate to their "personal ends and commitments." This is a consequence liberals accept only "regretfully," but which nonetheless will enhance the possibility to "enjoy the good inherent in living a non-dominated life," which might include the pursuit of non-autonomous goals and commitments (Laborde 2008, p. 159). Nondomination also inspires a new interpretation of the value of fraternity, conceived as "social integration" and "civic patriotism," neither of which are to be pursued by the multiculturalist politics of recognition, but which are to be pursued by the distinctive republican conviction of promoting participation in the social and public life of members of the French polity who have been historically excluded (that is, those who are not "white, male, middle class, Christian, Parisian, and so forth" (Laborde 2008, p. 233)).

Laborde's critical republicanism is thus an attempt to reinterpret the republican conception of secularism in such a way that it responds adequately to the challenges French society faces today. It is *pluralism motivated* in so far as it intends to provide institutional mechanisms to realize republican values (adequately reinterpreted) in such a way that religious minorities—largely of immigrant background—are treated properly as citizens of the French republic. It departs from liberal secularism in that it insists on strict separation in promoting autonomy and in encouraging citizens' participation in public affairs. Although some liberals might be sympathetic to it, (Laborde sometimes refers to her critical republicanism as a "republican political liberal view" (Laborde 2013, pp. 82-86)),[25] it is a conception of secularism that is distinct from its liberal pluralist counterpart. Which one is more desirable for countries that are witnessing internal diversification due to immigration and social secularization is something to settle that goes beyond the scope of this article, yet it is important to identify them as two different conceptions of secularism—one is liberal and the other is republican—that submit to a similar diagnosis about the challenges that contemporary Western societies face. Official republicanism can be interpreted as not giving enough attention to the fact of pluralism, especially when it comes to its religious embodiment, as it was akin to promoting freedom *from* religion rather than freedom *of* religion. Critical republicanism provides with a reinterpretation of the values of republicanism and inspires a pluralist-motivated conception of republican secularism that is constrained primarily by the value of nondomination.

I have proposed to understand secularism as an institutional arrangement about how to govern conflicts that arise as a result of the advancement of the moral

ideal of a given political regime. According to this account, the redundancy objection raised against liberal pluralism is avoided because it allows us to conceive of what can be considered as *genuinely secular* alternatives to the liberal-pluralist conception of secularism without making them identical to what liberal democratic forms of government require. By sketching two variants of a *republican* conception of secularism, I have shown that if we take republican—instead of liberal—moral values as constituting the ideal political system of the state, we will be constrained to design institutions governing the relationship between organized religions and the state that *differ* in nature from the ones typical of liberal regimes. What makes of liberal and republican conceptions of secularism different is that they are following different values. Different sets of moral values promote different institutional arrangements. Alternatively, two conceptions can be inspired by the same constraining values but might face different conflicts with organized religion(s). In this case, the institutional arrangement would be different.

The possibility of conceiving a liberal alternative to liberal pluralist secularism depends not upon the set of moral values proper to the political regime, but upon contextual considerations that define whether the conception of secularism is *pluralist motivated.* Liberal anticlericalism is inspired by the same moral values that inspire liberal pluralist secularism, for both are conceptions of secularism implemented by a liberal regime. However, liberal anticlericalism is not motivated by the "fact of pluralism." I proceed now to elaborate on this view.

Kristina Stoeckl argues that the focus among political liberals on the relationship between religion and politics does not account for what she calls "traditionalist actors," who are actors who "do not merely claim the right to be exempted [for instance] from conducting same-sex marriages, but out of their moral convictions … want to preclude same-sex marriage altogether; they want to give shape to the system as such" (Stoeckl 2017, p. 41). These actors are particularly effective on the political scenes of countries in which they self-identify as representatives of the religious majority and have political power for historical reasons. As "traditionalist actors," they intend to use the institutions of the state to impose their religious morality.

These actors can prompt the adoption of an alternative to liberal pluralist secularism that, while being liberal, is not pluralism motivated. This means that, in contrast to liberal pluralist secularism, anticlerical secularism does not take as its *starting point* the acknowledgement that current liberal and democratic institutions treat minority religions unfairly due to their failure to respond adequately to the process of diversification that characterizes several Western societies. It makes a different diagnosis about what the main challenge that liberal and democratic institutions face today is—namely, the fact that they are threatened by a dominant religious institution that has not incorporated the political values basic to any liberal and democratic regime. In these contexts, it is plausible that the institutions of secularism will differ in their requirements of organized religion if compared to liberal-pluralist requirements. Given that in the described scenario

the conflict emerges in relation to an institutionalized religion, this conception can tentatively be described as *anticlerical.*

A liberal anticlerical conception interprets the separation of church and state as a means to reduce the political power that the dominant religious institution gains from its presence within the institutions of the state. This implies that separation is not *primarily* conceived as a means to guarantee freedom of religion to all religions—although it must not be incompatible with such constraint. In other words, separation is interpreted as an institutional arrangement that reduces the political power of the dominant religious institution by obstructing it from using state institutions or state funding for furthering its political purposes. Neutrality can be interpreted as an operational means for curtailing the political power of the dominant institution as well. Here a comparison with liberal pluralist secularism is helpful. According to liberal pluralist secularism, neutrality might involve state support to religions on equal or evenhanded grounds—for instance, the extension of state aid to religious organizations that thus far have not received it. For a non-pluralism-motivated conception, this is not a good strategy, because it does not cut off one of the sources of the domineering religious organization's political power—namely, the privileges granted by the state. Instead, it might contribute to the preservation of the status quo, or, even worse for the anticlerical project, it might increase the political power of the dominant religious institution due to its capacity for attracting more state support (either financial or symbolic). For a non-pluralism-motivated interpretation of neutrality, then, the most plausible policy might be to treat all religious institutions equally by excluding them from the institutions of the state. Hence, neutrality requires religious disestablishment, both in its coercive and symbolic expressions, as well as exclusion of all forms of religious content from politics.[26]

It is not the purpose of this article to assess the plausibility of either the republican or the anticlerical interpretation. Suffice it to say that, by conceiving secularism as an institutional arrangement that contributes to the realization of a broader political project, we can avoid the redundancy objection to liberal pluralist secularism because the possibility of conceiving alternative—that is, nonliberal or non-pluralist-motivated—conceptions of secularism is opened up.

6. CONCLUSION

I have argued against moralized secularism, which is the view that defines secularism as encompassing both a moral ideal and the institutional means to achieve it. By advancing the redundancy objection, I showed that these conceptions do not enrich our political vocabulary in a way that is normatively relevant and therefore reinforce the skeptics' view that we should abandon them altogether. As a response to this criticism, I defended a nonmoralized conceptualization. According to this interpretation, secularism is an institutional arrangement whose purpose is to address conflicts with organized religion that might occur as an effect of state's advancement of its moral and political ideals. This understanding allows for identifying alternatives to the liberal-pluralist conception that are

either alien to the liberal and democratic framework (i.e., the Enlightenment version of republicanism) or not inspired by the same motives as the mainstream position (i.e., anticlericalism). The nonredundancy of secularism and the implausibility of Bader's farewell view are made apparent by showing both that secularism can be developed from diverse ideological frameworks and that it can respond to different conflicts involving religion and politics. Nonmoralized secularism is ultimately a way of conceptualizing diverging institutional strategies to govern relationships between religion and politics. Being able to advance different conceptualizations of it allows for a greater understanding of different traditions of political thought. It encourages us to analyze, on the one hand, how secularism develops within liberal, republican, or—why not?—socialist frameworks and, on the other, how, within a certain tradition, secularism can adopt different forms depending on specific contextual challenges. It is a task for political theorists to *evaluate* these diverging appearances of secularism and, when necessary, to *develop* them in such a way that they can respond to challenges faced by each society.

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NOTES

[1] Christopher Eberle (2002) argues that liberal theories that exclude religious views from political debates are grounded on the premise that religious beliefs are less rational, shareable, or suitable for political deliberation than secular beliefs. Jürgen Habermas (2006) recognizes the pervasiveness of such unequal appreciation between religious and secular beliefs in liberal politics. Simone Chambers defends a version of "open secularism" on the grounds that it is "religious friendly" (Chambers 2011).

[2] Tariq Modood observes that "some people are today developing secularism as an ideology to oppose Islam and its public recognition" (2013, p. 79).

[3] Baubérot has insisted that the separation of church and state must not be understood as the core element of a definition of secularism. Rather, he claims that it must be understood as a constant process through which the state gains autonomy vis-à-vis religious institutions. This process might conduce towards a political regime in which freedom of conscience and equal respect are totally honoured (2007; 1998; Baubérot, Blancarte and Milot 2005; Baubérot and Milot 2011).

[4] Habermas shares a similar motivation when he says, "The principle of separation of church and state demands that the institution of the state operates with strict impartiality vis a vis religious communities…. But this principle is to be distinguished from the laicist demand that the state should defer from adopting any political stance which would support or constrain religion *per se*, even if this affects religions equally" (2006, p. 6).

[5] Although freedom of conscience and equal respect are said to be pursued unconditionally, Maclure and Taylor are aware that "no right is absolute," which means that it is possible to limit freedom of conscience and equal respect in very special circumstances (2011, p. 101).

[6] From a historic and sociological perspective, Jean Baubérot and Micheline Milot's *Laïcités sans frontiers* (2011), advances a similar account of secularism *(laïcité)*. They identify as its four fundamental principles freedom of conscience, equality of citizens, separation of church and state, and neutrality of the state. They also maintain that the former two are secularism's main purposes (Baubérot and Milot, 2011, pp. 75-81). See also Milot 2013a, p. 20; 2009, pp. 61-62; 2002, p. 34; Baubérot, Blancarte and Milot 2005. I think Baubérot and Milot's definition of secularism is also vulnerable to the same criticism I advance in the next section, as they use freedom of conscience and equality of citizens as the main distinctive marks of *laïcité*.

[7] The opening line of one of Modood's latest publications suggests that he (and "most people") would share the feeling of puzzlement I am referring to: "Two states that most people will agree are secular states are the United States and the USSR (when it existed)" (Modood, 2017, p. 354). On the other hand, the fact that most scholars refer to regimes where there is religious establishment not as *secular* states—Modood's "moderate secularism" being an exception"—but rather as "modest establishment" (Laborde, 2013, p. 68) or as "symbolic religious establishment" (Lægaard, 2017b) suggests that there is something puzzling when it comes to analyzing these forms of regime through the lens of secularism, although they might ultimately be shown to be compatible with some understanding of secularism.

[8] In presenting liberal pluralism, I have followed Maclure and Taylor's account of it, which specifies two moral principles. In the quoted passage, by Taylor alone, he adds a third one—namely, fraternity—also in Taylor (2014, chap. 13). Incorporating fraternity within a liberal account of political secularism cannot come without difficulties, and this is why, I think, Maclure and Taylor do so only reluctantly. For instance, they associate it with the idea of civic integration (a typical value of republican regimes) and claim that liberal pluralism promotes it, although only as a secondary moral end (Maclure and Taylor 2011, p. 32).

[9] The compatibility between political secularism and religious establishment is widely accepted (Audi 2011, p. 43; 2000, p. 221; Brudney 2005; Lægaard 2017b; 2013; Modood 2013, Chaps. 4 and 8). Laborde (2013, pp. 82-86) and Nussbaum (2009, p. 227) have defended views that are against any form of religious establishment. Laborde, however, has recently argued that minimal secularism is compatible with regimes of separation and of establishment (2017, pp. 150-159).

[10] Taylor's critique of the "independent ethics" mode of secularism (which he associates with French republicanism) is that it carries an antireligious bias, while his critique of the "common ground" mode (which he associates with the nondenominational model implemented in the United States) is that it is not sufficiently inclusive. The redefinition he is seeking finds sympathies with the *liberal* Rawlsian idea of an overlapping consensus, if interpreted as inclusive of religion in the public and political spheres (Taylor 1998).

[11] A regime of secularism is not relevant if the core values sought by the state are incompatible with the very idea of separation. This is the case where the core political project of the state consists in rule according to the dictates of a religious worldview. Theocracies do not need to pursue separation. Similarly, a regime of secularism might not be pursued if the social circumstances of a given country make it irrelevant. According to Akeel Bilgrami, Gandhi's rejection of secularism for the nascent independent Indian democracy was grounded in the fact that Indian society had internalized an ethos of religious respect that made any instantiation of separation between religion and politics unnecessary. For Gandhi, the advancement of the political ideal of the new democracy did not require the implementation of secularism because religious pluralism in India was unlikely to clash with the political values the state was prone to advance (Bilgrami 2014, p. 43). Secularism can thus be dispensable if it is not required by the political ideology and its respective values (as in the case of a theocracy) or if it is not required given contextual considerations, which might indicate that there are no societal challenges to the pursuit of the political values of the state's political project (as in the case of Gandhi's India).

[12] At the heart of the liberal tradition of freedom of conscience is the distinction between a "personal" religion and an "institutional" religion, the former being its main concern. The distinction is William James's (2009). For Taylor's analysis of James's view, see Taylor (2002).

[13] For a critic of Rawls's view that protection of pluralism can be achieved only by protecting individual freedom of conscience, see Kymlicka (1996).

[14] This is suggested by Maclure and Taylor (2011, p. 5).

[15] Here certainly should be included the "new recognition of the equal dignity of Native Americans" [or First Nations, or Indigenous communities] as Nussbaum (2009, p. 12) puts it.

[16] Sune Lægaard has defended the view that what distinguishes different liberal conceptions of secularism is specified in how they adjust their institutions, which are set up in observance of political values belonging to political ideologies, to *new cases*. For instance, immigration to Europe from Muslim-majoritarian countries challenges the traditional European conception of secularism because it was developed in relation to Christian religions, which pose challenges that diverge from the sort of challenges that are typically related to non-Christian forms of religiosity— "e.g. obligatory rules of dress in schools, workplaces and public functions, or animal welfare legislation" (Lægaard 2017a, p. 160).

[17] Maclure and Taylor affirm that it is not their intention "to call into question" the basic values of liberalism. Their major focus is therefore at the level of institutional arrangements (2011, p. 16).

[18] The "common ground" mode is usually related to the (early) tradition of secularism of the United States (Taylor 1998, p. 35), while the "independent ethics" mode to French republican secularism (Laborde 2008, p. 43).

[19] Wearing burqa or niqab, in contrast, might be prohibited, as these impede teachers from performing their duties as teachers, as they do not allow for "non-verbal communication" and "establish too much distance between the teacher and her charges" (2011, p. 46).

[20] The debate about "Christian values" during discussions about the (aborted) European constitution might suggest that today consensus on the truth of this particular issue has not yet been achieved. For a critical analysis of this debate, see Zucca (2012, chap. 4).

[21] Variations of this view have been defended by Brian Barry (2002) and Brian Leiter (2012).

[22] Here I am inspired by Sune Lægaard's proposal to distinguish between the "concept" and different "conceptions" of secularism (Lægaard 2013). In my account, the latter are different strategies pursued by states to handle conflicts that might emerge during the pursuit of states' moral and political projects.

[23] Whether this strand of *laïcité* is compatible with the interpretation of equality as neutrality is an issue that has already divided early French republicans, of which "a minority … concluded that religious belief per se was incompatible with republican citizenship" (Laborde 2008, p. 104). While both positions can agree that republican education would inevitably promote some form of the value of autonomy, "neutralists" would be less prone to make the perfectionist step, common among "*laicistes*," of affirming that the autonomous life is the good one (Laborde 2008, p. 122). On the overall internal coherence of *laïcité*, see Laborde (2002, p. 179).

[24] There are two provisos that must be met if strict separation is to ensure nondomination. The first one is that separation not unreasonably burden the exercise of basic religious freedoms, and the second one is that separation not "legitimize status quo entitlements which unduly disadvantage minority religious groups" (Laborde 2008, p. 88).

[25] Laborde maintains that this interpretation is in line with Rawls's transition to political liberalism because it contributes to the promotion of both stability for the right reasons and a "society where citizens see one another as equals and are treated as equals by the state" (Laborde 2013, p. 85).

[26] For a defense of a form of interpretation of neutrality along these lines, see Rivera (2017).

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