

Religion and Politics in International Relations: The Modern Myth

Author

Hasan, Mubashar

Published

2013

Journal Title

Politics, Religion & Ideology

DOI

[10.1080/21567689.2013.768816](https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2013.768816)

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Timothy Fitzgerald, *Religion and Politics in International Relations: The Modern Myth, Continuum: London & New York, 2011, pp.224, \$39.95, 978-0826426925.*

Fitzgerald's book is a critique of the liberal discourse of religion. In this book his main proposition says religion, as a separate domain of politics is a mythical discourse, an outcome of not empiric but rhetoric construction. Fitzgerald argues that by inventing a distinct, ideally privatized, sub-rational domain of religions based on belief in the 'supernatural', or in another unseen 'spiritual' dimension, we have simultaneously been able to invent an equally imaginary real world of natural reason which is assumed to underpin the material and factual domains of the state, politics and economics (13).

In Fitzgerald's view, the idea that all the practices and institutions of the world can be classified into this Anglophone (more widely Europhone) either-or religion-secular binary is an 'astonishingly implausible idea'. He states, 'these binaries so deeply underpin the dominant modern imaginaire of liberal capitalism that they have acquired the status of universal truths, and have been virtually removed from systematic critique (Ibid). He questions why Marxism and Capitalism are not termed as respective religions and yet why Christianity is termed as a religion. He argues by nature they are all similar because:

- a) They all offer a final resolution to the problems of human existence.
- b) They are all significantly founded on metaphysical beliefs that are not derivable from empirical observation.
- c) They can all be seen as soteriologies, based on acts of faith that can be regarded as doctrines of human liberation from a condition of ignorance, suffering or lack of true freedom and self realization.

Timothy argues that a group of elite myth-makers including media, universities and academics and populist writers are subconsciously transforming a collective imagination of mutually parasitic binary into existence. Timothy heavily criticizes secular universities and their salaried academics, which through various secular disciplines of social sciences particularly through IR, regenerate the myth of religion and politics. He further argues that this trend to 'subterranean connection of religion as a classification with the naturalisation of capital and economic theory' is an implication of universities acting as ideological state apparatuses; agencies for the relatively indirect and disguised legitimization of the state which has one of its most pressing functions as the management of corporate capital (15). He thinks such position of the universities is the root of the problem since (236):

valid knowledge is financed and legitimated by the secularity of the secular university. To critique religion as a category unsettles and makes problematic the legitimacy of secular reason. It is not so different from heresy, because it strikes at the roots of an entire system of meaning, and threatens to expose the myth of secular reason as an entire ideological apparatus of power of modernity.

In Fitzgerald's opinion, the consequences of such world views culminated in producing a tiny but hugely wealthy group of world elites with huge access to capital in comparison to poverty for the masses in all countries (including the West), and this for Fitzgerald is the starting point of understanding the myth. He further argues that 'primitive accumulation of capital' is going on since pre-colonial era and it is the sacrificial process of dispossession feeding capital interests, which creates imagined modern and mutually parasitic binaries.

The book has 11 chapters, in which he builds his argument based on critical reviews conducted mainly by IR theorists. A major part of this 284-page book is devoted to analysing how IR theorists construct religion. This book is an interesting addition to the scholarly field in the sense that Fitzgerald challenges the whole system on which the liberal discourse is based. In this sense it is a rebellious book with a solid and intriguing argument. In summary of Fitzgerald's argument, the liberal discourse is based on the assumption that it is a real discourse liberated from unreal religion whereas the liberal discourse itself is based on imagination where rhetoric construction of myth-makers transforms the imagination into reality as if the discourse exists. To put it simply, he questions the rationale of rationality. For example, he argues why after 9/11 secular IR theorists use terms such as 'violence', 'religious', 'barbaric' when they write about certain groups which are known as Islamists whereas 'the massive violence of the secular US state and its intervention in areas of strategic interest and its support for several polities which have little or no democracy at all are depicted for rational reasons as paragons of peace.

However, its major shortcoming is that it does not provide any anti-thesis to the myth. In my opinion, by failing to do so, Fitzgerald falls into his own trap. If one is to be convinced by his argument that this mythical discourse is universalized with the help of modern mythmakers to serve capital interest, one requires to know what the alternative to this myth is? His failure to produce an alternative discourse to the myth, in a way makes a point, which says he himself inscribes what he calls the myth. Thus, his criticism criticises the rhetoric not empiric construction of liberal discourse of religion while he himself uses rhetoric criticism of the discourse of religion without empiric evidence. The question remains – as his writing argues for the irrationality of what we know as rational - how he will quantify his rational argument as rational if Fitzgerald is similarly criticised.

MUBASHAR HASAN

Griffith University

mubashar.hasan@griffithuni.edu.au