




Secularization and the Subjectification of Belief:

A Comparative Analysis of Max Weber and Mircea Eliade

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Abstract: In the field of religious studies, this paper revisits the important concept of secularization through the distinctive lenses of Max Weber and Mircea Eliade. Weber interprets secularization primarily as a historical process of rationalization and disenchantment, driven by the Protestant ethic and culminating in the world-mastering individual. In contrast, Eliade approaches it through the phenomenological dialectic of the sacred and the profane, viewing secularization as desacralization—a transformation rather than an eradication of the sacred, wherein the sacred retreats into the private realm or the unconscious. Despite these divergent methodologies—one socio-historical, the other phenomenological—both perspectives converge on a crucial point: the modern shift elevates the individual subject while relativizing or internalizing the cosmic and sacred frameworks that once encompassed the individual subject. This paper ultimately contends that the concept of secularization inadequately captures the core transformation in modern religious life. Rather than observing the mere privatization or decline of religion, we are witnessing the subjectification of belief: belief itself has become a matter of personal, reflexive appropriation, making the individual not merely a private believer, but the very subject and locus of belief.

Keywords: Secularization, Max Weber, Mircea Eliade, Subjectification

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Secularization has long served as a dominant narrative for interpreting religion in modernity¹. It is frequently used to describe the differentiation of religious and secular spheres, the decline of religion, or the privatization of faith. However, the term has accumulated such expansive and varied meanings that its analytical utility has become limited. When a concept becomes too broad and generalized, it risks losing precision as an effective tool for scholarly discussion. While widely invoked to describe the condition of modern religions, the term's analytical utility remains debated. Scholars like José Casanova have compellingly argued that secularization is not synonymous with religious decline, noting the persistent public role of religion (Casanova 1994). Similarly, Charles Taylor challenges the 'subtraction story' of secularization, portraying it instead as a complex shift in the conditions of belief, leading to what he famously termed a 'secular age' characterized by the immanent frame (Taylor 2007). This paper intervenes in the contemporary debate by proposing that a comparative analysis of two foundational yet contrasting perspectives—exemplified by Max Weber and Mircea Eliade—can shed new light on the nature of this complex transformation that Taylor analyses.

The choice of Weber and Eliade is deliberate. They represent two archetypal—and in certain respects, arguably antithetical—perspectives on the fate of the sacred in the modern world. Weber, the sociologist of historical process, provides an analysis of secularization rooted in the *rationalization* of the human spirit and life conduct, which leads to the disenchantment of the world. Eliade, the phenomenologist and historian of religions, examines the sacred directly, interpreting secularization as *desacralization*: a shift in the manifestation of the sacred within the eternal dialectic of the sacred and the profane. By placing these two thinkers in dialogue, this paper aims not to synthesize their ideas, but to trace how their distinct paths lead to a remarkably similar destination: the emergence of the self-determining individual and the consequent relocation of ultimate meaning. This convergence, this paper argues, moves beyond the concept of secularization toward a more precise diagnosis: the subjectification of belief.

I. A Diachronic Analysis: Rationalization and Secularization

Max Weber's analysis of secularization is fundamentally diachronic, tracing a unique and irreversible historical trajectory. Unlike Émile Durkheim,

1 Casanova outlines several interpretations of secularization within the field of religious studies (Casanova 1994). My argument focuses primarily on two theses: "the decline of religion" and "the privatization of religion" (Casanova 1994, 25-35, 35-39).

who, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, sought the universal social foundations of religious belief by examining its role in creating and sustaining collective solidarity (Durkheim [1912] 2001), Weber was preoccupied with religion's transformative, world-altering power. His method sought to explain the specific historical shift from a world permeated by sacred meaning to one governed by impersonal, rational calculation. This shift, for Weber, is not merely the decline of religion but a complex process best understood as rationalization—a process that, paradoxically, was initially propelled by a specific religious ethos: inner-worldly (this-worldly) asceticism. The culmination of this process is the disenchantment of the world, a state that defines the modern condition and creates the social-psychological arena for the subsequent subjectification of belief.

Rationalization as a Historical Process

Weber conceives of rationalization (*Rationalisierung*) as the master historical trend towards ordering life through calculable rules, systematic methods, and impersonal institutions, displacing orientations based on tradition, magic, or charismatic authority. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he meticulously reconstructs how this process, in the economic sphere, originated from a religious source. Weber distinguishes between traditional capitalism, the age-old pursuit of gain, and modern rational capitalism, characterized by the systematic, disciplined organization of free labor, the separation of business from household, and, above all, a distinctive spirit or "ethos" (Weber [1905] 2001, pp. 17, 30, 111). Weber contends that the distinct spirit of modern capitalism cannot be sufficiently explained by material or economic factors. In his view, its crucial source is found in the inner-worldly asceticism of Protestantism, especially the Calvinist doctrine that shaped a methodical, rational approach to work and wealth.

The catalyst was the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The belief that one's eternal fate was immutably decreed by God created what Weber terms an "unprecedented inner loneliness" in the individual believer (Weber [1905] 2001, p. 60). To assuage the crippling anxiety this produced, pastoral guidance² taught that intense worldly activity in one's God-given vocation (*Beruf*) could serve as a subjective sign of one's elect status. Success in one's worldly duty became interpreted not as a cause of salvation, but as a potential symptom of it. This theological innovation, as Wolfgang Schluchter notes, redirected religious energy into the world rather than away from it. Weber

² Weber bases this argument primarily on the pastoral writings of Richard Baxter (1615–1691) and other leading Puritan and Pietist divines of the period.

"goes on to distinguish inner-worldly from world-fleeing asceticism and inner-worldly from world-fleeing mysticism" (Schluchter 1981, p. 161). The believer was thus called to master and shape the world through labor, not to flee from it.

Inner-Worldly Asceticism as the Engine of Change in Lives and Spirits of People

This orientation constitutes what Weber famously called "inner-worldly asceticism" (*innerweltliche Askese*). Unlike the otherworldly monk who renounces the world to seek salvation, or the traditionalist who accepts the world as given, the inner-worldly ascetic strives to work upon the world systematically as a field of divinely ordained duty. Every aspect of life—work, leisure, consumption—became subject to rigorous discipline and rational planning. Idleness and spontaneous enjoyment were sinful; frugality and relentless work were spiritual virtues. As Gordon Marshall summarizes: "Hard, methodical, continuous, manual and mental labour in a legitimate calling is required of all: it is God's commandment that they who shall not work shall not eat" (Marshall 1982, p. 76).

This asceticism had profound socio-economic consequences. By sanctifying methodical labor and condemning luxurious consumption, it generated both a disciplined workforce and a compulsive drive for the accumulation and reinvestment of capital. Profit was pursued not for hedonistic pleasure, but as proof of diligence in one's calling. Weber quotes the Puritan Richard Baxter:

If God show you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way ... if you refuse this, and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling, and you refuse to be God's steward (Weber [1905] 2001, p. 108).

This created a "non-rational" commitment to work from a eudaimonistic standpoint, yet one that was supremely rational as a consistent method of life-conduct (*Lebensführung*). The "spirit" of capitalism was, therefore, born "from the spirit of Christian asceticism" (Weber [1905] 2001, p. 123). It was a religiously motivated rationalization of economic conduct.

Disenchantment as the Historical Outcome

The final, ironic stage of this historical sequence is disenchantment. The religiously inspired rationalization of worldly activity eventually achieved its own autonomy. The methodical, calculating, and instrumental attitude, once

nourished by faith, became self-sustaining. "The religious roots died out slowly," Weber writes, "giving way to utilitarian worldliness" (Weber [1905] 2001, p. 119). The means (rational economic activity) became the end, and the original religious purpose withered away, leaving behind what Weber would later call the iron cage (*Stahlhartes Gehäuse*) of materialistic pursuit.

In his lecture *Science as a Vocation*, Weber offers his most famous and sweeping diagnosis of this outcome: "Our age is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and above all, by the disenchantment of the world" (Weber [1919] 2004, p. 30). Disenchantment signifies that "in principle, then, we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle control everything by means of calculation. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world" (Weber [1919] 2004, pp. 12–13). The cosmos is no longer viewed as a meaningful, morally ordered whole, as it was for pre-modern societies and as Durkheim described in the collective effervescence³ of ritual (Durkheim [1912] 2001, p. 283). Instead, it is seen as a causal mechanism, knowable through science and available for technical exploitation. The magician, the priest, and the prophet are replaced by the scientist, the engineer, and the bureaucrat.

This disenchantment fundamentally alters the individual's relationship to the world and to ultimate meaning. As Schluchter argues, it leads to "the different value spheres" — science, politics, art, and erotic love — each developing its own intrinsic logic, which often conflict with one another (Schluchter 1979, p. 78). The individual is forced to choose among these competing values without the guidance of a unified religious cosmology. This existential condition, where "the ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn from public life" (Weber [1919] 2004, p. 30), is the direct product of the rationalization process Weber traced. The world, stripped of its sacred enchantment, ceases to be a cosmos embodying inherent meaning or purpose. It is reduced to a value-neutral, objectified domain of facts—a stage for human action, yet devoid of any ultimate telos of its own.

The Emergence of the Sovereign Individual

Crucially, this diachronic process of rationalization and disenchantment forged the very type of individual capable of becoming the subject of belief. Protestant inner-worldly asceticism, by placing the unbearable burden of proof of election squarely on the solitary individual, broke the mediating

³ In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim discusses at length the state of collective effervescence in rituals, which reveals one aspect of how collective life shapes the individual's connection to the outside world. Here, integrating into an external collective is meaningful for the individual.

authority of the church. Jack Barbalet cautions that Weber's formulation presents an "ideal-type account of Calvinist individualism", which may overstate the actual historical scope and coherence of such a self-contained, disciplined religious agent (Barbalet 2008, pp. 215–216). Nevertheless, Weber's fundamental and enduring insight lies in his identification of a novel historical-psychological pathway. He revealed how a specific theological ethos, through its practical demands, could cultivate a form of religious subjectivity characterized by internal discipline, self-reliance, and a direct, unmediated relationship with the transcendent. It is this psychological groundwork that laid the indispensable foundation for the modern sovereign individual, who would later become the locus of subjectified belief.

By the time the religious foundation had eroded, the autonomous, disciplined, and calculating individual remained—now standing alone not only before God, but before a disenchanted universe and a plurality of competing values. This individual, liberated from the constraints of traditional communities and cosmic hierarchies, is the historical precondition for the subjectification of belief. When the sacred canopy of a unified world order has disintegrated through disenchantment, and the individual has been constituted as a sovereign agent via the legacy of inner-worldly asceticism, belief can no longer be a given of collective life. It must instead become a matter of personal, reflexive choice and inner conviction. Thus, Weber's historical narrative does not simply describe the secularization of society; it uncovers the intricate process that produced the modern subject to whom belief—now privatized, internalized, and subjectified—must necessarily belong.

II. Synchronic Analysis: Desacralization and Secularization⁴

Mircea Eliade offers a synchronic analysis contrasting with Weber's diachronic approach. He frames secularization as desacralization—a shift in the structure of experience, not the end of the sacred. For Eliade, the sacred manifests across four dimensions—space, time, nature, and human life—organizing reality into a meaningful cosmos. Humans uniquely exist as a microcosm, their lives reflecting and participating in the sacred macrocosm through ritual, myth, and symbol. Desacralization occurs across these same dimensions: space flattens into homogeneity, time becomes linear, nature is

⁴ When discussing secularization, Mircea Eliade employs distinct terms. In some contexts, he uses "secularization", while in others—particularly when framing it in direct opposition to *the sacred*—he utilizes "the profane". In this paper, "secular" and "secularization" are generally adopted. The term "the profane" is reserved for discussions explicitly related to or contrasted with *the sacred*.

stripped of transcendent meaning, and the micro-macrocosmic link is severed. Human life, once embedded in the desacralized space and time, is reduced to biological and historical existence. The world grows "opaque, inert, mute" (Eliade [1957] 1987, p. 178). Yet the human need for meaning persists, now turned inward. This rupture creates the modern condition: an ontologically isolated self in a disenchanting world, a *homo religiosus* (religious person) haunted by absence — and thus a vacant space ripe for the emergence of subjective belief.

The Sacred and the Profane: A Synchronic Dialectic

Eliade's methodology seeks to describe the universal structures of religious experience, largely irrespective of historical epoch or cultural context. He argues that for *homo religiosus*, the world is not homogeneous; it is divided into the sacred and the profane (Eliade [1957] 1987, pp. 14–16). The sacred manifests itself in the profane world through *hierophany*—any act, object, or phenomenon that reveals the sacred within ordinary reality. This manifestation is not a human projection but an irruption of the transcendent into the immanent. As Bryan Rennie's careful reconstruction clarifies, Eliade does not posit the sacred as a separate ontological realm or "entity" (Rennie 1996, p. 42). Instead, the sacred constitutes an *a priori* structure of human consciousness—a mode of signification that, by manifesting itself within the profane world, establishes a realm of "absolute reality" in contrast to "the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse" (Eliade [1957] 1987, p. 21). This manifestation, or hierophany, does not create a second world beyond this one but transfigures the given chaotic world into a meaningful cosmos by revealing its deeper, transcendent significance for human beings. Crucially, this is a dialectical, not a substitutive, relationship: the profane, chaotic world eternally persists; the sacred does not eliminate it. Conversely, the profane never succeeds in eradicating the sacred. The study of religion, therefore, is the analysis of these meaning-bestowing hierophanies and the coherent, sacred order (cosmos) they disclose amidst potential chaos. This phenomenological approach is intrinsically synchronic, seeking the timeless logic of sacred manifestation as it structures human experience and understanding, in contrast to Weber's historical approach to secularization.

The Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Time, Nature, and Humanity

Building upon the premise that the sacred is a mode of signification rather than a separate entity, Eliade meticulously details how this meaning-bestowing force structures the fundamental dimensions of human reality. This force does not build a new world atop the old, but transfigures the existing,

profane world from within, investing its spatial, temporal, natural, and anthropological coordinates with ultimate significance. This transformative process is what Eliade calls sacralization, and its architecture can be mapped across four primary, interconnected dimensions.

First, the world or cosmos is ontologically founded through sacralization. For *homo religiosus*, space is not homogeneous; it possesses breaks and fissures where the sacred irrupts. Any such location—a temple built on a revealed site, a home consecrated by ritual, a simple stone marked as divine—becomes an *axis mundi*, namely a Center of the World. This center establishes a fixed point of orientation, organizing the surrounding chaos into a meaningful, habitable cosmos (Eliade [1957] 1987, pp. 20–24). As Bryan Rennie emphasizes, this is not the creation of a new geographical entity, but the disclosure of a qualitative, existential position or location within the neutral expanse. The profane world of amorphous, undifferentiated and therefore "unreal" space persists all around, but from the sacred center, reality itself radiates. Second, time undergoes an analogous transformation. Profane time is linear, historical, and irreversible—a succession of empty, insignificant moments. Sacred time, in stark contrast, is a Great Time, a "mythical time" of origins that is eternally present and reversible (Eliade [1957] 1987, pp. 68–72). Through rituals, festivals, and the recitation of myths, participants abolish profane duration and reactivate the primordial time when the gods performed foundational acts. This is not an escape into a different temporal entity but a periodic revaluation of time itself, where the transient and the historical are saturated with the permanence of the archetypal (Eliade [1957] 1987, p.76). Profane time is not destroyed; it is periodically interrupted and re-founded by these returns to the sacred source.

Third, the entire natural world is rendered transparent to the sacred. Celestial bodies, landscapes, stones, and water are not merely physical objects but hierophanies—they manifest specific modalities of the sacred. The sky reveals transcendence and sovereignty; the earth manifests fertility and stability; a tree can symbolize the cosmos and regeneration (Eliade [1957] 1987, pp. 128–129, 138–141, 147–151). Nature thus becomes a vast system of symbols, a sacred lexicon. Crucially, the natural object retains its physical properties; a sacred rock is still a rock. Yet, by manifesting the sacred, it acquires an additional, meta-empirical stratum of meaning, bridging the phenomenal world and the transcendent order of being.

Finally, and most critically, human life itself is sacralized. Biological events—birth, initiation, marriage, death—are transfigured from natural occurrences into rites of passage. These rituals do not merely mark social transitions; they integrate the individual into the sacred history of the community and, ultimately, into the order of the cosmos itself. Consequently,

human existence is lived on a "twofold plane": the natural and the supernatural (Eliade [1957] 1987, p. 167). The human being thus becomes a microcosm — a concentrated reflection of the sacred macrocosm. This establishes what Eliade terms an "anthropo-cosmic" system: a participatory ontology in which the structures of the human body, society, and psyche consciously mirror and are woven into the structures of a divinely ordered universe (Eliade [1957] 1987, pp. 169–170). The sacred thereby completes its architectural function not by constructing a separate ontological entity, but by embedding human life within the meaningful fabric of the cosmos, creating an existential homology between the person and the whole. It is precisely this integrative bond — this micro-macrocosmic link — that the process of desacralization will later rupture, producing the modern condition of an isolated individual, a microcosm adrift and seeking to reconstitute its connection to a lost macrocosm.

Homo Religiosus in a Desacralized World

A central paradox in Eliade's work is that the modern "non-religious" individual remains, at a fundamental level, a *homo religiosus*. For Eliade, desacralization does not signify the disappearance of the sacred but its camouflage and degradation within the profane. Non-religious individuals "still hold to pseudo religions and degenerate mythologies" (Eliade [1957] 1987, p. 209). The modern individual may no longer inhabit a public, sacred cosmos, yet they still experience non-homogeneous space—investing profound and singular meaning in a birthplace, a childhood home, or a national monument. Similarly, they mark non-homogeneous time through personal anniversaries, cultural holidays, or collective memorials that interrupt the linear, undifferentiated flow of profane history. Modernity is characterized not by the extinction of the sacred, but by its privatization and subjectivization. The sacred retreats from the public, cosmic order into the depths of the individual, transforming into what Bryan Rennie terms a "secular mysticism"—a search for transcendent meaning and profound experience conducted within a framework that consciously rejects institutional religion (Rennie 2008, p. 332). However, this subjective retreat occurs within a profoundly altered ontological landscape: the desacralized world itself. In this world, the cosmos—as a sacred, meaningful, and ordered whole—has been dismantled. Space reverts to a neutral and geometric extension; time is reduced to a uniform and quantitative sequence. The world ceases to "speak". It becomes, in Eliade's phrase, "opaque, inert, mute; it transmits no message, it holds no cipher" (Eliade [1957] 1987, p. 178).

The Loss of the Cosmic Telos and the Emptying of the World

The ultimate consequence of radical desacralization is the loss of a meaningful cosmos. For *homo religiosus*, the world was a coherent, sacred whole, a cosmos speaking a divine language. The existential security afforded by the sacred and participatory order—the anthropo-cosmic system—is dissolved. The desacralized world is stripped of intrinsic purpose (telos) and reduced to a mere aggregate of natural facts and historical accidents. This is Eliade's equivalent of Weber's disenchantment, but with a crucial difference: whereas Weber's disenchantment results from rationalization, Eliade's stems from the withdrawal of hierophanies. The world is not so much explained away by science as it is emptied of transcendent significance. From a certain perspective, within Eliade's framework of desacralization as secularization, the emptying-out of the world itself is even more radical than the disenchantment described by Weber.

In this emptied cosmos, the relationship between the human and the divine is catastrophically simplified. Eliade observes that in modern Christianity, "salvation is a problem that concerns man and his god", and in this intensely personal relationship, "there is no place for the cosmos" (Eliade [1957] 1987, p. 179). The sacred is no longer mediated through a cosmic order but is sought in a direct and private confrontation between the individual soul and a transcendent God. This final stage—where the cosmos loses its sacred meaning and the individual stands alone before the divine—completes the structural precondition for the subjectification of belief. The world, having been drained of its inherent and collective sacredness, becomes a blank slate. The task of finding meaning, connecting with the sacred, and constructing a coherent existential world now falls irrevocably to the individual subject. Thus, Eliade's synchronic analysis, while denying secularization as a historical terminus, provides a profound structural description of the very condition that makes the modern subjective believer possible: a desacralized and meaningless cosmos demanding a personalized sacred.

III. Convergence: Towards the Subjectification of Belief

Weber's diachronic investigation traces secularization to a specific historical-psychological origin: the inner-worldly asceticism of Calvinist Protestantism, which instilled a disciplined, rational, and individualized spirit, first as a religious duty and later as an autonomous economic ethos (Weber [1905] 2001⁵). His investigation begins within the individual believer, for

⁵ Regarding the relationship between the two, for a detailed discussion, please refer to Chapter 5 of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

whom faith became an engine of worldly rationalization. In stark contrast, Eliade's phenomenological and structural approach brackets historical causality to analyse the constitutive logic of the sacred and the profane. He is less concerned with a point of origin than with describing the enduring dialectic between the sacred and the profane, and how disruption of the sacred—desacralization—manifests as the modern secular condition. For Eliade, the sacred is an a priori structure of consciousness (Rennie 1996, p. 20), and its recession does not erase but reconfigures the human need for meaning.

Divergent Paths to a Common Focus

The analyses of secularization by Weber and Eliade, though divergent in methodology and theoretical perspective, ultimately converge upon a common and transformative modern phenomenon. They arrive at a shared diagnosis of secularization—the rise of the individual subject in a disenchanted or desacralized cosmos—through radically different intellectual paths. Weber's narrative locates the engine of change within the psychological transformation of the individual believer—a disciplined, calculating agency emerging from "inner loneliness" (Schluchter 1979, p. 238). For Eliade, *homo religiosus* experiences reality through hierophanies that establish a meaningful cosmos. Desacralization, then, is not the end of the sacred but its recession and camouflage in private life, leaving the world "opaque, inert, mute" (Eliade [1957] 1987, p. 178).

Despite these different starting points—one in the historical ethos of the believer, the other in the timeless structure of religious experience and consciousness—both frameworks compellingly redirect our focus to a triadic existential relationship that is fundamentally reconfigured in modernity: that between the human being, the world (or cosmos), and the divine. Secularization, in its deepest sense, is not merely a social process but an ontological shift in this triad. The central question—"What is human being?"—becomes inextricably linked to the questions "What is the world?" and "Does the world possess intrinsic meaning?" Weber and Eliade, from their unique vantage points, provide complementary answers that lead us to the core thesis of this paper: the modern transformation is best understood not as the decline and privatization of religion, but as the subjectification of belief.

The Emergence and Advancement of the Individual Subject

Weber's analysis reveals that the modern individual subject is the historical product of a specific spiritual discipline. The Calvinist doctrine of predestination, by generating an "unprecedented inner loneliness", forced the believer into a solitary confrontation with the question of salvation (Weber

[1905] 2001, pp. 60–61). The pastoral guidance of figures like Richard Baxter did not only offer communal solace but reinforced this disciplinary individualism, framing diligent work in one's worldly vocation as the paramount spiritual duty and the primary sign of divine favor (Weber [1905] 2001, pp. 103–105). This inner-worldly asceticism thus forged a new type of agency: the individual as a self-monitoring, rationalizing sovereign over his own life. The development of this sovereign subject extends beyond the Reformation. The early modern individual, shaped by Calvinist anxiety of inner loneliness, operated under divine sovereignty, striving to order life as a sign of election. Its contemporary counterpart, however, has acquired a more radical, reflexive sovereignty of agency. "Self-command", as Jack Barbalet argues, "is equivalent to the core mechanism of Weber's concept of *Beruf*, calling or vocation, which underwrites the ethos of the capitalist spirit" (Barbalet 2008, p. 117). With the historical process of rationalization, responsibility was fully internalized. Consequently, the modern subject emerges in a condition where the world appears entirely within its grasp. This sense of mastery goes beyond the early Calvinist discipline of rationally ordering life for God's glory, to a self-legislating, subjective sovereignty stripped of any transcendental purpose or final accounting. The "third witness"—whether the religious community or a cosmos resonant with sacred meaning—has withdrawn.

The Evacuation of Meaning from the World

Eliade's framework complements the advancement of the individual subject by describing the ontological vacuum into which this sovereign individual steps. The desacralized cosmos no longer provides any pre-given matrix of meaning. The advance of the individual subject, therefore, is a dual movement: a positive formation through socio-historical processes (Weber) and a negative liberation occasioned by the retreat of the sacred cosmos (Eliade). Eliade's narrative elucidates the profound consequence of desacralization: the evacuation of transcendent meaning from the cosmos itself. For modern non-religious people, they assume "a new existential situation", they exist "as the subject and agent of history", and refuse "all appeal to transcendence" (Eliade [1957] 1987, p. 203). This is not merely a change in belief but an ontological impoverishment of reality as it is experienced. Randall Studstill notes that within Eliade's phenomenology, the sacred is related to the fundamental "existential predicament" of human life (Studstill 2000, p. 185). The evacuation of meaning, however, is the collapse of this existential framework provided by the sacred, leaving the world an empty vessel.

This transformation from a meaningful cosmos to a neutral universe has

been an important focus in the analysis of secularization. This is encapsulated in Weber's observation that the disenchantment of the world led to the fragmentation and disappearance of a unified hierarchy of values, where "the different value systems of the world are caught up in an insoluble struggle with one another" (Weber [1919] 2004, p.22). Charles Taylor describes the "pre-modern state" as "based in the Great Chain of Being" (Taylor 2007, p. 713), a teleological cosmos in which everything had its appointed place and purpose, and humans found their identity and value within this encompassing hierarchy. The process of secularization, as traced by Weber, led to the disenchantment of the world, where the cosmos was stripped of intrinsic moral and spiritual significance and reconceived as a mechanism of causal laws (Weber [1919] 2004, pp. 12–13). This disenchantment was both a liberation and a loss. The individual, once securely situated within a divinely ordained cosmos, now confronts a contingent, purely immanent universe. This "world", devoid of the sacred syntax described by Eliade, is reduced to what Weber foresaw: a stage for instrumental action, where meaning is no longer discovered but must be willfully constructed by the sovereign individual subject. In this context, meaning is no longer discovered within an objective order but becomes a matter of personal choice and responsible commitment in a realm of rationalization and intellectualization (Weber [1919] 2004, pp. 30–31).

From the Privatization of Religion to the Subjectification of Belief

While Weber and Eliade follow divergent paths, they jointly delineate a transformation far deeper than the mere "privatization of religion". As Casanova has compellingly argued, religion has not truly exited the modern public sphere; rather, it continues to participate in public life in new forms—whether institutional, cultural, or as social movements (Casanova 1994, p. 215). However, the public presence of religion cannot obscure the fundamental metamorphosis that has occurred at its core: namely, the subjectification of belief itself.

This process is not merely about religion retreating from the public square into the private living room, but about a shift in the nature and locus of belief. Religion as a social institution, ritual system, and form of community, while partially privatized, retains its visible structure and voice in the public domain. Belief, however — that direct, inward, meaning-and-salvation-bearing relation between the individual and the transcendent or the sacred — has been radically transformed into a matter solely between the person and God (or some ultimate reality). It has become a highly internalized state of mind, a form of personal conviction whose authenticity and certainty are, in Charles Taylor's account, ultimately a matter of internal adjudication. "My

ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them" (Taylor 2007, p. 38). Building on his philosophical-historical inquiry into the problem of the self, Sorabji also traces "the inward turn" within the history of human thought (Sorabji 2006, p. 51). This latent tendency, however, manifests with particular visibility and force in the context of religious secularization, where the individual emerges as the ultimate arbiter of meaning and the enclosed site of experience. This philosophical "inward turn" provides a crucial context for understanding shifts in religious life.

Therefore, within the philosophical interpretation of secularization, the focus of discourse has long shifted away from the question of whether religion can continue to exist. In the domain of postmodern philosophy of religion, the central question has seemed to evolve into that of "a return to God or an awakening of a new experience of the divine" (Oppy 2015, p. 36). The world ceases to be a purposeful macrocosm resonating with human existence and is reduced to what Weber termed a disenchanted, value-neutral stage for action. In this condition, belief is no longer *discovered* through participation in a cosmic order, but is *constructed* or *chosen* by the individual confronting an empty universe within their own subjectivity.

In *A Rumor of Angels*, Berger's project is to explore how signals of the transcendent (what he calls "rumors of angels") might yet be discerned within this so-called secular world (Berger [1969] 2011, chs. 1–2). It is widely acknowledged that the thesis of religious decline has largely receded from contemporary debates on secularization, a shift closely linked to the critique of the privatization thesis. Crucially, this privatization of religion is made possible by a prior transformation in the very structure of the self. The desacralized modern self no longer inhabits a cosmos that inherently bestows meaning. Instead, it has become what Taylor calls a "punctual self", which "is defined in abstraction from any constitutive concerns", and the "only constitutive property is self-awareness" (Taylor 1989, p. 49). This self, abstracted and sovereign, is the necessary condition for belief to become a matter of private, individual choice—a shift from being *given* by the world to being *held* by the subject. This paper contends that the privatization of religion is itself a misleading formulation, for it rests on a fundamental conflation: that of belief with religion. At a structural level, belief constitutes the core of any religious engagement—it is the direct, intentional nexus between the believing subject and the object of belief (Duan 2022, pp. 202–204). The privatization narrative, by framing the issue merely as religion's retreat from the public sphere, obscures the more profound question of the status of the believing subject itself.

IV. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Weber and Eliade reveals that their divergent paths converge on a fundamental transformation in modern religious life: not the decline or mere privatization of religion, but the subjectification of belief. Weber's diachronic narrative traces the historical process of rationalization and disenchantment, culminating in the autonomous, world-mastering individual. Eliade's synchronic phenomenology frames secularization as desacralization—the retreat of the sacred from a cosmic order into private experience and interpretation. Both diagnose a world stripped of inherent meaning, where the individual is no longer embedded within a pre-given sacred cosmos but becomes the active subject who must construct meaning from within.

This shift finds a deep resonance in Charles Taylor's diagnosis of modernity's malaise, marked by the rise of individualism and "the primacy of instrumental reason" (Taylor 1991, ch. 1). Weber's disenchanted world and Eliade's desacralized cosmos depict a reality where external sacred orders have dissolved, leaving individuals without a stable ontological framework. In such a condition, myth—which, as Strenski notes following Eliade, once provided an orienting narrative linking humanity to the sacred cosmos—also loses its power to furnish a collective frame of meaning (Strenski 1987, p. 72). Taylor frames this transition as a process of "disembedding", wherein belief becomes a matter of personal choice rather than a given of cosmic order (Taylor 2007, p. 146). Anthony Giddens further elaborates from a socio-economic perspective, showing how disembedding mechanisms operate at the level of everyday life (Giddens 1990, pp. 21–29). Ultimately, the subjectification of belief does not merely transform the individual; it actively reshapes the world we inhabit.

In conclusion, the core of the modern religious condition lies not in religion's public disappearance but in the internalization and subjectification of belief itself. The individual is no longer merely a believer within a tradition but has become the sovereign subject of belief—the locus where meaning is reflexively appropriated, negotiated, and held. This is the deeper transformation signified by the narrative of secularization.

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