# Secularism and the right to spirituality: work, leisure and contemplation

# Introduction

This article assumes that the actual condition of spirituality in secular societies and their education is poor. They suffer from "spiritual void" (Wu & Wenning, 2016, p. 566) or a "meaning gap" (Yaden et al. 2017, p. 554) to quote two of many publications whom sees a spiritual crisis in secularism looking at it from an intellectual and not religious point of view (see for example Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011; Grayling, 2011; de Botton, 2012; Harris, 2014).[[1]](#footnote-2)

This condition of spirituality is problematic since spirituality is a human need (Hart, 2003; Tacey, 2004; Sheldrake, 2013; Stockinger, 2019; Bryant et al., 2020; Hyde, 2021), without which people (children and grownups) won't fulfil their life and might fall into existential despair (see below Kierkegaard's, and Dreyfus & Kelly's observation; and see also below the statistics relating to death of despair among white working class without college degree).

Therefore people have a right to spirituality, a *claim-right*, and so it is the duty of society, also secular society, to enable it for its adherents (Hohfeld, 1913, p. 32).. This means that spirituality should not be left only to the free market and individuals, families or communities capacity to buy or to allow themselves to practice whatever this market or streets have to offer, but that it’s the moral duty of families, communities and society, also secular ones, to care for a well spiritual opportunities for children and grownups, for example through the educational system.

Moreover, I assume that people, also secular people, have the right not just to any spirituality but to their *own* traditional one – practices that will be in harmony to the way they have brought up (see Margalit and Halbertal, 1994, on the right of human being to their *own* culture).

Who are those people? Secular people can roughly be divided into two categories. The first category includes individuals, families and communities that consciously hold an atheistic, naturalistic and immanent world view (Zuckerman and Shook, 2017). On the other hand, the second category includes those individuals, families and communities that without any metaphysical or anti-metaphysical awareness, simply do not practice any religious nor other spiritual rituals. They simply live in a *secular age*, and therefore religion, believing in God or any spiritual practice, is not a necessarily obvious default for them or anybody (Taylor, 2007). But, not only that spirituality is not secularity cultural default, the way secularism had become to be actualized it silences the spiritual need. It does so because it is being driven by what today we call neoliberal values of performativity (Hyde, 2021) or outcomes (Anonymous 2018), or as Arendt had put it in the midst 20th century: a culture in which the focus has no longer rest on "what a thing is" but on "how and through which means […it…] could be reproduced" (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 304). And see also MacIntyre, (1981/2007), especially pp. 30-32, or from another angle, organizational one, see Case et al, (2012). Anyway, the opportunity and right for spiritual life and spiritual education for the second group, which is the vast majority of secular society, is the main concern of this article.

I begin, in section 2, bases mostly on Kierkegaard (1849/1980) and Dreyfuss and Kelly (2011), in characterizing the spiritual void of the secular societies, to categorize three strategic to cope with it and to discuss one of them which connect to my suggestion. Then, in section 3, I move to characterize, partly bases on Arendt (1958/1998) account, my perspective regarding the sources of the spiritual void in secularism. I claim that it is due both to the vast place the life-mode of *work* occupies in secular societies and due to a narrow understanding of the meaning of leisure. A narrow understanding and practicing of leisure which I will name *leisure 1*. I will argue that the combination of *work*  and *leisure 1* had pushed to the far periphery practices of *contemplation* which, as I will claim (in section 4) relying among others on Pieper (1963), are the core of any spiritual practice, and also the core of a special kind of leisure which I name *leisure 2*. It is a third mode of existence (together with *work* and *leisure 1*), the spiritual mode. After I broaden in section 4 the idea of contemplation and *leisure 2* so to include many practices, among them philosophy, I argue in section 5 that what I claim to be a deviated understanding of secularism as an un-spiritual worldly culture, is not an essential nor necessitate to it. I base this argument on the history of philosophy and of liberal art education. I describe them, relying among others on Castoriadis (1991), as the particular spiritual tradition of the secular culture.

# The spiritual void of secularism

In this section, before describing my perspective regarding the sources of the spiritual crisis in secularism, I wish to give a taste of the ongoing discussion regarding the spiritual crisis or voidness in secularism (From Kierkegaard of the midst 19th century, to Dreyfuss and Kelly in the second decade of the 21st century), to roughly categorize the different solutions to that voidness, and to sample a discussion in one of them (that of Dreyfuss & Kelly, 2011), which belong to the same category of my perspective.

# The spiritual void of secularism through the generations

Kierkegaard, one of the first to criticize modern secularism, identified the spiritual voidness associated with secular lifestyle as one of the sources of existential despair. In our essence, said Kierkegaard, we are complex beings who are in the middle between finitude and temporality on the one hand, and infinity and eternity on the other (Kierkegaard, 1849/1980, 31). Since the "I" is the node of these two movements – finitude and infinity – despair is the result of life in which a person doesn't realize one of them. It can be called here *the secular despair*. And according to Kierkegaard it stems from a lack of infinity, a lack of transcendence. The secular despair has no signs. They can't be seen on the everyday surface. On the contrary, the person functions well in everyday reality, in the world of action, in business, in society, at home, and can really succeed in all of these. Despair is not revealed, not even to the person her/himself. Rather, the lifestyle that the person leads looks very padded, warm and comfortable, but they lack spirit (Kierkegaard, 1980, 34).

what is called the secular mentality consists simply of such men who, so to speak, mortgage themselves to the world. They use their capacities, amass money, carry on secular enterprises, calculate shrewdly, etc., perhaps make a name in history, but themselves they are not; spiritually speaking, they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God — however self-seeking they are otherwise (Kierkegaard, 1980, 35).

The secular mind, as Kierkegaard describes it, is blind to other possibilities of existence which are not limited to the binary consciousness of realization or non-realization of desire in relation to the space of material entities. The secular has no self before God, no spiritual "I". Therefore Kierkegaard himself called for a transformation in the secular belief and adopt a religious faith and lifestyle (McDonald, 2017). Although I agree with his observation of the spiritual problem, Kierkegaard solution does not fit our goal here, in which I search for the spiritual potential internal to secularism.

More than 150 years after Kierkegaard, Dreyfus and Kelly's (2011) much discussed book (for example Taylor, 2011b), engaged in the same theme. They too felt discomfort with the secular cultural vibe. The persons of the secular culture believe and feel that everything is subject to their choice and they are also required to believe that their choices stem from their inner forces. In secular societies the belief, as Dreyfuss and Kelly (2011) observed, is that people feelings and choices are sacred and they need to constantly reinvent themselves. This believe imposes on people a life of severe loneliness and alienation from the world around them. Moreover, the inevitable failure of the person, at one point or the other, to find such infinite forces within her/himself to infuse meaning to life through those choices, inevitably leads to depression and anxiety that are a central theme in modern secular life (Ibid, for example on p. 12, or pp. 203-204). According to Dreyfus and Kelly, we have come to hold this belief when the culture had moved from a polytheistic perspective regarding our world into a monotheistic one, and then, from monotheism to atheism – a complete emptiness and the emptying of reality from meaning.

# Three categories of coping with the spiritual voidness

Three large kind of responses to this spiritual crisis of secularism. (1) Drawing from the institutionalized religions, i.e. The spectrum of responses that adopt (back) institutionalized religions' beliefs, perspectives and practices, for example in the cases of Kierkegaard (McDonald, 2017), Taylor, (2007); MacIntyre, (1981/2007); (2) – New age spirituality, i.e. adding, sporadically, individually or as part of a contingent and changing communities, to the secular way of life, one or a mix of spiritual practices from whatever the human civilization has created in its history (for example Harris, 2014; Wu & Wenning, 2016; Enstedt, 2020); (3) Re-understanding the particular tradition of secularism, diagnosing the cause for the spiritual void, and actualizing an hidden spiritual practices that dormant within it (for example Dreyfuss & Kelly 2011).

While trying to focus on secularism and what it has spirituality to offer its communities, I will not consider responses from category (1) although I am attentive to their criticism of secularism. Category (2) may be an option, but I believe that it serves individuals that can afford it for themselves, for example only college graduates who have found some kind of economic security. Such solution lacks social perspective of the problem, and it may be at least one of the reasons for the statistics that shows much higher cases of death of despair among white working class without college degree (Dow et.al 2019; Case & Deaton, 2020). Moreover, new age spirituality is not so widespread as it may seems. Only 2 percent of the people enjoy new age spirituality, and mostly the practices are yoga and meditation that are practiced for one's physical and mental health and not for spiritual reasons per se (Bruce, 2017, p. 68). Therefore the perspective I will suggest belong generally to category (3), and so it can be seen as a discussion with the suggestion of Dreyfuss & Kelly (2011).

# Discussing Dreyfuss and Kelly suggestion for coping with the voidness

Dreyfuss & Kelly (2011)suggested to return from an atheistic secular perspective, which lead to a disenchanted and alienated perspective of the world, to a new and sophisticated version of polytheism in which things in the world would be perceived as shining, as living subjects and enchanted. In such a world, full of emotional meaning, to let ourself be caried away with what the everyday living forces enable us. For example sports events, family gatherings, or whatever powerful cultural centers or other events offer us to swept away by them. Such an affinity towards our world would bring back a taste for life. This taste had been declined for long time after atheism, that followed monotheism, had empty our world from lively meanings. These living moments inevitably are temporary but that is the most we can and should expect.

Dreyfuss and Kelly aware of the moral dangers of fascistic, violence and cruel behavior that adopting an emotional polytheistic affinity towards reality carries.[[2]](#footnote-3) Therefore they suggested to regulate this deep emotional connection to our world by developing a mental sovereign capacity of meta-reflection, which they name "*meta-poietic* skill" (Dreyfuss & Kelly, 2011, p.220). This mental skill would guide a person *when*, *where* and on *what* circumstances to be swept away with one's emotions (the crowds in sports events, festivals, family gathering and the like), and when not to do so (for example hate voices against minorities). They believe that this combination of the two would help us to bring back the shining colors to our world, to find joy and meaning in it, while being careful not to be swept away emotionally by evil forces (Dreyfus and Kelly, 2011, 211-220).

I agree with Taylor (2011b) criticism of both their diagnosis regarding monotheism as the source of the problem, and their idea of a reflective polytheistic vision. According to Taylor monotheism as part of the Axial period spiritual revolution (see Jaspers, 1949/1965), is not the source of the problem as Dreyfuss & Kelly (2011) diagnosed, but a source for the solution. He claimed that the idea of a transcendent sacred is a necessary element for life that do not fall into idolatry. I.e. life that do not see as sacred the earthly or psychological elements and powers in the world: the wind, the ocean, the sun, iconizing other persons or the self, animals, specific feelings and so on. In such a culturist arena the individual or/and the community are being torn apart (Dionysus alike) by countless particular and changing interests, passions and feelings. Therefore a culture that wants more rational and stable life should transcend the sacred. Indeed, this metaphysical perspective causes the actual earthly world to be seen greyish, partial, defective, far from perfection. But on the other hand it enables rationality, stability and open a glance of it as one that can be improved (also to decline) through an ongoing free spirit search for a way, a path, for a better world (Taylor, 2011b).

But there is another problem in Dreyfuss and Kelly's account which Taylor did not face. Although they stress the need for a sovereign meta-perspective, the "*meta-poietic* skill" (Dreyfuss & Kelly, 2011, p.220), they fail to give an explicit account of *how* such a reflection can be emerged and developed while we are in a tight emotional connection to the world. Also they did not describe and explain what is the ground on which this mental faculty will work, from where it would draw its perspective and criterions. This lack of explanation directs their reader to the well-known classic faculty of reason. But reason, whether in Plato's, Aristotle's or Kant's philosophy, is an un-worldly faculty. Therefore Dreyfuss and Kelly's idea of meta-poietic skill is in tension with what they wished to achieve, i.e. to reconnect the modern secular subject to the world, to "revivified" an old "type of engagement", to reenchant the modern secular "disenchanted world" (Ibid, pp. 88-89; And see also other places for example p. 213).

To sum up, there is a long discussion, from the beginning of modernity and secularism (Kierkegaard) to the 21st century (Dreyfus and Kelly), regarding the spiritual void of secularism. There are three general strategies to cope with this voidness: (1) returning back to spiritual practices of the institutionalized religions (as Kierkegaard did); (2) individually, eclectically and sporadically patching spiritual practices from whatever the market offers to the secular life. Some are methodological and founded on well-established philosophy, for example Sam Harris suggestion (Cottingham, 2017), and many others new age spiritual solutions much less established,; (3) re-understanding of the spiritual essence of secularism and actualize it in education and everyday life, as Dreyfuss and Kelly tried to do. Since my purpose is to find a way to cope with the problem from within humanistic secularism, and in a way that is not open only to those who can enjoy what the free market offers in this respect, I here focus on the third strategy. I have discussed Dreyfuss and Kelly's idea, and showed, partly drawing from Taylor (2011b), the weaknesses of their suggestion within the third category to deal with that voidness.

Therefore I will move on now to describe my perspective regarding the reasons of the spiritual void of secularism. It is based on an account of the notions of *work*, *leisure* and *contemplation* and the relation between them. A main source for understanding the secular culture by these terms is Arendt (1958/1998), who saw her project, among other things, as an adherent of secularism (Moyn, 2008; Liska 2015).

# Understanding modern secularism in terms of *work* and *leisure 1*

# Work

Arendt saw the distinction between *vita activa* – life of doing in a general sense including *labor*, *work* and *action* (*action* means public-political matters) (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 12), and *vita contemplativa*, life of contemplation which originally called in Greek *theoretikos* (1958/1998, p. 14), as essential for understanding the human condition in the modern society. She argued that the original meaning of *action*, as a political-civic engagement, has lost over the years, and actually had blurred with the other two levels of *vita activa*, i.e. the earthlier aspects. This had happened due to both the philosophical and the institutionalized religion traditions (Arendt, 1958/1998, pp. 16-17). She believed that this is what have brought all generations before modernity to understand work as one monolithic mode, inferior in hierarchy to the mode of contemplation, which was understood as the only meaningful mode of human existence. Arendt described the modern project, for example Marx and Nietzsche's separate ideas, to invert this pre-modern work/contemplation hierarchic order (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 17).

The inversion had succeeded, perhaps too much, and modernity had come to be obsessed with productivity. This obsessiveness of modernity and secularism with productivity and working, is ideally drown, among others, both from Smith's and Marx's contempt to unproductive labor (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 86). This contempt to unproductivity of both *the* right and *the* left thinkers, had pushed practices of contemplation to the far periphery of the culture.

I believe that this peripheral place of contemplation (which, as I will later show, is the main practice of spirituality), has caused secular societies and their education the shallow and poor spirituality they suffer from, especially in the public sphere. Let me elaborate.

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In high percentages of our life-time we are preoccupied with creating and shaping reality in a way that will better suit our aspirations, our desires and our needs. Along with the idea of the world of Torrah regarding the differentiation of weekdays (working and creating days) and Shabbat (contemplation day), I will call *work* to this mode of existence. *Work* then is *a mode of life in which there is an investment of mental and physical energies directed to design (preserve or change) reality and our place withing it in a way that will suit our will, needs and desires.*[[3]](#footnote-4)

Thus *work* in my perspective includes also activities which Arendt categorized under the level of *action*, for example creating and maintaining a lobby or a forum to enhance whatever social, political or educational goal; writing an opinion piece for the newspaper; and even calling the neighbor to appease him, or to donate to a project. And *Work* also includes calming our baby down, watering the pots, taking a haircut, going to the gym, shopping, eating, holding up an umbrella, paying for health insurance, calling a distant friend to keep in touch, driving to the beach and even sleeping in order to satisfy our health needs. Again, *work* is any mental or physical energy that is directed to reality and our place within it as something that need to be changed.[[4]](#footnote-5)

We see that being in the mode of *work* is not necessarily something we do not like, nor is it an activity that requires us to overcome ourselves. Moreover, while being in a mode of work, one can be in a state of flow, of *being*, completely in the present process without any interior conflicts. However, by our definition here it is still a working mode, since one creates change in reality. In other words, whether it brings us to satisfaction or frustration, whether it creates excellent productivity and excellent products, or routinely performed with simple results; whether it is fun or not, we are in state of flaw and *being* with it or not; whether it is done on week days or weekends – one is in a mode of work as long as one wishes or actually creates change in reality. And whishing a change in reality or actually creating it, expresses discontent from reality. While contemplation and *leisure 2* as aspects of spirituality express content, acceptance and even love towards reality, as I will characterize below.

 But apart from that, at least three heavy weights are usually bound to the mode of work. First, as been said, it expresses an unease affinity towards the current actual state of reality (in at least one of its components), and a continuous bubbling desire to change it. Secondly, it impose on us the physical, social or mental effort to change reality and get out of this uneasiness. The working mode may demand a repetitive, routine, simple, boring, monotonous actions, or very complex actions that require full concentration, large organization and dedication; it may demand actions that distort and harm the health of the body, mental health, personality, familial and social relationships, etc. Thirdly, it may impose uncertainty regarding whether the work we do as individuals or as an organized group, will indeed lead to the desired change or goal, or what would be the unanticipated implications. The uncertainty is deepen of course when we work for long or medium terms, (say 20 years of mortgaging/saving to own an apartment).

 In most cases we balance the weight of our encounter with reality and the frustration results of work, by fun, easy and pleasant work. I.e. a work that is aimed at achieving a simple and immediate change. As demonstrate above, it may include going for a walk with the dog, shopping, taking a haircut, repairing the handle, or taking a good shower. In spite the usual understanding of these activities as leisure activities (Godbey and Mack, 2006), by our account here they belong to the mental mode of *work*. A *work* that balances *work*.

# Leisure 1

But there is another very common way to balance the working mode, i.e. distract our mind from reality and try to forget it. We call this mode leisure, and I wish to draw a distinction here and call it *leisure 1*. *Leisure 1* is the overall term I use to designate the ways we distract ourselves from reality and the frustration it brings. In order to achieve this destruction from reality we entertain ourselves and use different means of distraction and obliviousness. Sleeping at times that are beyond what is necessary to health, is a typical characterizing activity that is included in this mode. Other example of *leisure 1*'s activities are drinking, eating for pleasure, watching distracting TV series and sports competitions, going on "all-inclusive" vacations or cruises. In general, it is about entering a mode of existence of fun, in which we strive to forget reality and the gap between it to our will.

In *leisure 1* mode we do not make an effort to change reality according to our will, but expect that whatever comes in touch with our mind and body would be pre-adapted to our will in the most perfect way, i.e. that none of the aspects of reality we wish were different would reveal itself to us in those *leisure 1* moments. We expect that someone/something else will pleasantly cook and serve us dishes; that someone/something else will clean and tidy the room after us; that we'll be able to sleep as much as we want, to see hear and feel what we want – someone or something else will work for us. In *leisure 1* we want to be protected and separated from the components of reality that causes us discomfort, and from the constant struggle to shape it as we desire. We want the specific realm of reality that touches us to be already tailored to our wishes.

Although *leisure 1* is fun, it does not have a meaningful impacts regarding reality, our place within it and our affinity towards it. The mental state of *leisure 1* has a negative role to work, counter-work, nothing beyond. In fact, we can imagine a whole excellent life without one moment of *leisure 1*. For example, the legendary ideal characters: Moses, Siddhartha Gautama, Socrates, Jesus, Muhammad, Mother Teresa legendary states-man/women or other total activists, scientist, artists, educators, social workers, doctors and of course mothers and fathers whom work two shifts for many years to send their children to college. Those people don't look for *leisure 1*. Even fictional characters that have excellent and meaningful life (Hermione Granger, Frodo Baggins), do not seem to be interested in *leisure 1*. All these characters, once they took the mission upon themselves, had never looked for *leisure 1*, and it would be difficult to catch them in such a mode. Thus *leisure 1* is not a necessary mode for quality human life.

For it to help us forget reality*,* *Leisure 1* has to create some degree of illusion, because neither the uncertainty nor the physical and mental effort of the working mode have really disappeared. And of course, the work of others is necessitate to serve *leisure 1*. Therefore it obliges us to invest energy in denial many aspects or reality. If in moments of *leisure 1* – a vacation, or when sitting in a restaurant or watching a movie – reality will suddenly appear in the form of a child crying, hunger, poor service, a flat tire, the cleaner hasn't arrive – it will create an extra frustration. The curtain of denial has been cracked.

# Recharacterizing the problem

Are these the only two existential modes of human life? If our life possibilities ranges only between these two modes, then it turns out that we live very shallow life, with only one real mode (the mode of work that expresses our frustration from reality in at least some aspects of it ) and its illusional negative *leisure 1*. Narrowing life into only these two modes, leads to a flipping form of life, rocking from one mode to its negative. Two existential modes that do not nourish one another and worse, contradict and exclude one another.

This perspective and way of life, which in some of its traits is close to Arendt's observation of the victory of the *animal laborans* (Arendt, 1958/1998)[[5]](#footnote-6)is the sources of the spiritual void of secular societies. Secularism and modernity, in an effort to encourage creativity, technological, social and political change, had criticized what they believed to be the religious mode of contemplation and its passive acceptance of reality. This criticism from all many wings of thoughts against contemplation and metaphysics, and the special leisure (*leisure 2* – see below) it creates, had left the secular culture only with the mode of work (Arendt, 1958/1998; And see MacIntyre 1981/2007 or Steel 2013, regarding the modern instrumental affinity towards society and reality). The unformal coalition against contemplation and metaphysics has included: the right, the left, positivism, behaviorism, psychologism, scientism, atheism, materialism, sociobiology, technologism, nationalism, capitalism, and so on. Thus secularism, as it has been actualized in our culture, do not just legitimatized humanity to change reality in accordance to human desires, it had commanded humanity to do so. The second wing of force was individualism and the new value of freedom of individuals to live as one wants and to pursue one's own happiness as one understands it. This force has created the legitimation of *leisure 1*. Legitimation which afterwards became worthy due to its major contribution to the commercial market and capital growth.

But such a life offers only two excluding life *teloses*: either a life with endless craving and continuous dissatisfaction from reality – the life of *work*. Or life in which *leisure 1* is the *telos*, i.e. the wish to cutout the touch with the dissatisfying and frustrated components of reality. Nothing other than these two options. In themselves there is nothing wrong with these modes. The problem is they become the only possible modes identify with secular way of life, especially in the public sphere.

The existential mode which is lacking from the current actualization of secularism is *contemplation* (Pieper, 1963; Arendt, 1958/1998; MacIntyre, 1981/2007; Hadot, 2002; Jalbert, 2009; Nussbaum, 2010/2016; Steel, 2013; Steel 2014; Jo, 2019), which is at the heart of what is called spirituality, and the foundation on which a special kind of leisure arises – *leisure 2*. In order to enhance the place of spirituality this third mental mode of contemplation and *leisure 2* has to be part of the secular idea, life and public life.

# Contemplation as the main practice of *leisure 2*

Unlike *leisure 1* in which one distracts her or his attention from reality, trying to be in an artificial surrounding or illusionary consciousness (say Disneyland or Cruising) which adjust as perfect as can be to what one wishes, in  *leisure 2*, whether in the personal or the public realm, the person or the group direct (or trying to direct) their attention to reality as a whole and their status before it (Sheldrake, 2013). But unlike the state of *work*, the person or the group does not try to change and shape it in accordance to their desires (Halbertal, 2003; Harris, 2014; Shapiro et al 2015). I emphasis the term *leisure (2)* rather than just use *spirituality* in order to show (later on the fifth section) the inner connection and belongiong of secularism to that spiritual tradition. Also I prefer in this model the term *leisure 2* to emphasis special aspect of spirituality, that of a special kind of leisure it can create.

There are different approaches to what contemplation is. The inclusion approach for contemplation (for example Barbezat and Bush, 2013), believe that it can be performed in many different ways. It can be found in traditional and institutionalized meditations, monotheistic prayers, and other cyclical traditional rituals. It also may be performed in conscious-movement methods such as Yoga or Tai chi. It can be performed in less formal or methodological mental states, some creative such as playing music, singing, painting, writing a journal, and others activities that involve in life of service, volunteering aid to people or societies in need (Barbezat and Bush, 2013, pp. 10-11; Steel, 2014, pp. 228-229; Ergaz & Todd, 2016).

The psychological approach characterized contemplation as a kind of attention which is given with full intention and over some significant period of time to an inner or external experiences such as thoughts, feelings, breathing, a bell, an image or other people (Shapiro et al 2015, p. 3). Or, more generally, as an effort of one to turn one's attention to the ongoing present, and be present in it in a non-judgmental way (Harris, 2014, pp. 6-7). In other words this perspective describes contemplation as a serious and focused attention to the very movement of feelings, thoughts, emotions which arise in us, detached from the value and meaning regularly are given to them, and so without willing other experiences then what arises in itself in the ongoing present. It is an experience of reality before thoughts popped up (Harris, 2014, p. 38).

The classical approach understand contemplative practices to include classical contemplative practices of the western tradition such philosophy, science, art and other intellectual activities that are pursuing after an experience or knowledge of truth, of reality as whole, or the unchangeable aspects of reality, and the person's status before it (see for example Plato, Rep. 5.479d - 5.480a; Rep. 6.509d–510a, or Plato, Meno 97e-98a; Pieper, 1963; Pieper 2006; Hadot, 1995; Hadot, 2002;).[[6]](#footnote-7)

In the history of thought these unchangeable aspects of reality, which can also be characterized as anything which principally seems to be beyond our control, had gotten many theoretical titles. Such titles for example are: logos, idea, God, god, gods, the unmoved mover, substance, necessity, ideas of reason, values, the truth, the good, form, frame, matter, thing in itself, the limits of the language and the world, etc. One of the differences of this approach from the psychological approach of Harris (2014), is that the former holds an ontological assumption regarding the existence of an objective reality beyond human perception with which the contemplating person is in worthy touch, while the psychological approach avoid from that (Cottingham, 2017).

The meaning of that objective reality is usually close to the idea of the *arche*, the primordial source of creation and existence (Calogero, 2019), which all the affairs of the world, including the existential status of the observer herself, derive their meaning from the same source of creation (Bell, 2004). One may say that a metaphysical curiosity and metaphysical intention is the inner motivation of this perspective of contemplation. I will not further elaborate here on the inner connections between contemplation and metaphysics.

Generally, contemplative observation characterized also as a unifying experience in which the observer, while experiencing the object of observation, experiences simultaneously and without separation the observer herself (Calogero 2019). But the unifying character of contemplation is described also as a supernatural perspective in which a person grasps the unity of the spirit – the existence as it is (as Aristotle also presents in book 10 of the Nicomachean Ethics; See also Pieper, 1963, p. 27). Sometimes this kind of awareness creates a third, higher or transcendent point of view (Calogero, 2019; and see Kant, 1790/2000, P. 145, on the sublime).

This contemplative outlook tend to undermine the usual and everyday value and meaning we find in the things of our world. Their meaning and identity is seen as more fragile and contingent. For example the identity and meaning of property, of wealth, success, wisdom, and above all of the everyday identity of the contemplating person her or himself (Steel, 2014; Harris, 2014). This change in attitude opens up a place for feelings of humility, reverence, awe, or mystery (Calogero, 2019, p. 389).

Other characterization of contemplation emphasis the positive attitude towards reality. The condition for a nonjudgmental attitude towards reality (Harris, 2014) is a positive, open, peaceful and even loving attitude for it (Steel, 2013; Shapiro et al., 2015; Cottingham, 2017; Anonymous, 2019; Calogero, 2019). One may even say that it is logically derived that being in a positive attitude towards the unchangeable and uncontrol aspects of reality which are the source of our pains, sufferings and frustrations in everyday working mode, necessitate that one see them as sacred.

This may explain why religions and other spiritual institutions had given the status of sacred to earthly means and tools that are needed to bring a person to see the unchangeable aspects of reality as sacred (Halbertal, 2003; Pieper, 2006; Steel, 2014). First of course the humane faculty to contemplate, but then much more earthly tools for example, scriptures, books, people, places, temples, or elements of nature.

Last quality of contemplation and *leisure 2* is that while *leisure 1* counteracts and excludes the mode of *work* and everyday life*,* the characteristics of  *leisure 2* accords with and completes the mode of *work*. By entering into contemplation mode and drawing attention to the fixed and unchanging aspects of reality - to the *arché* - the person reinforces the "metaphysical faith in the existence of regularities in our world […] without which practical action is hardly conceivable (Popper, 2005, 250). I.e. there is no meaning to practical action without some kind of, conscious or unconscious, metaphysical perspective. But much more concretely, in *leisure 2* a person continues to observe various aspects of reality. Although this contemplation must be for its own sake (otherwise it undermines its own essence), it nevertheless indirectly gives the observer information and insights regarding reality, its potentialities and her or his status withing it. These insights and information regarding reality as a whole may serve as inputs in the working mode. For instance it may serve to improve the moral norms; it may reveal some unknown possibilities of the matter and the physical level, or of the personal, familial or social life.

# Secularism and the right to spirituality

However these excellent qualities, we tend to be blind or to dismiss our potential to be in a mode of contemplation and *leisure 2*. Our urge to work, to change reality in accordance to our desires, needs and will, increases our blindness or underestimation of this mode of existence. This tendency is not unique to the secular age. Neither the scientific revolution, modernity nor secularism had invented human's tendency "to be practical", to *work*. See for example Socrates' first speech in the Apology in which he criticized the Athenians for only engaged in perfecting their bodily strength, their material prosperity and honor, without giving enough or at all attention to philosophy, i.e. to contemplation which balances their soul and perfects theirs lives.

But one may say that secularism with the monopoly of *work* and *leisure 1* as I described above, has, in addition to this natural tendency of every culture and way of life, some extra barriers for enhancing contemplation and *leisure 2*;. Some may say that secularism and spirituality exclude one another as Samuel Johnson had defined in his dictionary "Secular […] not spiritual" (Zuckerman and Shook, 2017, p. 5)..

I will try in this section to show that this is not a necessary understanding of secularism, that secularism may enjoy contemplation, *leisure 2* and spiritual life without neglecting its major secular ideas and way of life, and moreover, that secularism may see itself as part of a long and respectful spiritual tradition, so that it has its *own* spiritual history to draw upon.

As I showed above, philosophy is one of the main practices and ways of life that holds contemplation and *leisure 2* (Hadot, 1995; Hadot, 2002; Pieper, 2006; Cottingham, 2017). And, as its history shows, philosophy does so without necessarily be part of an institutionalized religion nor any specific metaphysical or methodological paradigm. Therefore philosophy as a practice of contemplation stands as an excellent possible for secular societies to enhance spirituality without risking their secular belief and life. But moreover philosophy is not one more practice, without a context, for liberal secularism to adopt from whatever the humane spiritual market can offer. On the contrary, as Cornelius Castoriadis showed, philosophy is rooted essentially, historically and socially with democracy.

"Greece is the social-historical *locus* where democracy and philosophy are created, thus, of course, it is our own origin"(Castoriadis, 1991, p. 84).

"[…] the Greeks *create the truth* as the interminable movement of thought which constantly tests its bounds and looks back upon itself (reflectiveness), and they create it as democratic philosophy. Thinking ceases to be the business of rabbis, of priests, of mullahs, of courtiers, or solitary monks, and becomes the business of citizens who want to discuss within a public space created by this very movement […]. The creation of democracy and philosophy is truly the creation of historical movement in the strong sense […]"(Castoriadis, 1991, p. 160).

Philosophy and democracy are tweens. They have been born together from the same place at the same time. They share the same genes and inner features. Therefore, not only that secularism does not exclude spirituality and *leisure 2*, it has its own special practice and tradition of it.

Maybe the allegedly tension between secularism and spirituality that had been taken control on the general secular vibe had been caused by the historic secular struggle against the coerciveness of spirituality and of *teloses* (Taylor, 2011a). The family and the tribe, institutionalized religions and arbitrary rigid general social classes – each with its uncritically arbitrary dogmas – had imposed (and in many cultures still do) their spiritual agenda on people and individuals. And thus had made individualism and social mobility impossible.

Although this struggle is understandable and justified, it has caused a side effect, maybe a trauma, which led secularism to focus only on *work*/*leisure 1* way of life. Again, as described above, this side effects are expressed in at least two prices in terms of spirituality and wellbeing: firstly, the cultural vibe that navigates people either to *work* or *leisure 1* which leads, if at all, to the sporadic adoption of shallow patches of spiritual practices from whatever the market or the street offer, and secondly the violation of the principle of equal opportunities. In this case the violation of the right for spirituality, for contemplation and *leisure 2*, which each person and community are born with (Hart, 2003; Tacey, 2004; Watson, 2006; Sheldrake, 2013; Stockinger, 2019; Jones et al., 2020; Bryant et al., 2020; Hyde, 2021.

While strong upper-middle class individuals and families can transcend themselves from this *work/leisure 1* cultural vibe by buying or allowing themselves to practice whatever kind of contemplative practice and *leisure 2* the market offers them, many other seculars, not from a strong background, cannot enjoy this opportunity from within secularism. The only spiritual options that are left for them are either poor and damaging spirituality which they find in their local surrounding, or turning to institutionalized religions. Isn't it time that secularism will struggle for the right of *every* secular person for spirituality, for the wellbeing of *all* its adherents?

The struggle for the right for contemplation and *leisure 2* has a long history. It occurs in many cultures, and so we can understand the history of philosophy and education which, as I suggested above following Castoriadis (1991), is innate to democracy and secularism. One of the main liberal philosophical means to enable people the right for spirituality was the establishment of the *scholé*. The ancient Greek word *Scholé* (σχολή)meant leisure time intended for spiritual development (Rojek, 2010; Masschelein and Simons, 2013; Ildefonso-Sanchez, 2019). And so it was a place in which people can clear themselves and turned away from what I have called above the mode of *work*. This institution had put the life of contemplation as the *telos* of humanity (Aristotle, 2002; Hadot 2002; Nussbaum, 2010/2016). The name of these institutions, *scholé*, has been preserved till these days – *school*.

Of course, as we are people, this institution had never been solely a spiritual *leisure 2* institute. There were always politicians, profit and honor searchers and other interests that were mixed in that organization. But as long as at least part of it would be devoted to the ideas of the good, of knowledge and of truth, then contemplation, *leisure 2* and spirituality will be an optional mode it may practices. *Leisure 2*, as of course the title *Scholé* suggests, is part of its original genes, of its initial operating system.

Over the years the struggle for spirituality had developed to the classical curriculum with the seven liberal arts, i.e. arts that liberates a person from the *work/leisure 1* narrow tunnel. With the scientific revolution and the ideals of the Enlightenment another ideal or exemplar was added to this tradition. This was the autonomous brave contemplative intellectual, who is in an ongoing search after knowledge, good, truth, and the development of herself and her social and physical surroundings. Von Humboldt's formulation of the idea of *bildung* (Willbergh, 2015), is one of the educational actualization of that exemplar. This philosophical ideal still exist in many central elements of the curriculum of today's schools. In many cases it exist only in principle and potential, and so, as always, it has to struggle to fulfill them and equally enable them to every person.

If this narrative have some meaning for adherents of secularism then it emphasis the traditional-ethical background of the specific contemplative practice that humanists secular can see themselves part of. This narrative also manifests the everlasting struggle to maintain it, and to enable *every* secular person the right for spirituality; i.e. to enrich the narrow *working/leisure 1* way of life, with a third existential mode of contemplation and leisure 2 that is innate to her or his tradition. *Scholé* education or *leisure 2* education, in which philosophy, science, humanities and arts are practices of contemplation and *leisure 2*, are not less part of the secular tradition then *work*. But it has been pushed to the far peripheral of the secular culture. This mode of life should find its place back to the center of secularism so to become an integral part of the public systemized-institutionalized secular way of life.

To sum up from the end backwards, contemplation and *leisure 2* are the foundation for spiritual life. They are not alien to secularism, and actually are part of its tradition and history. Nevertheless the way secularism had been actualized, maybe because of the historical struggle it waged against coercive spirituality, has pushed this mode of life to the periphery of the privet sphere, making it shallow, eclectical and sporadic, and a luxurious commodity for the individual to decide whether to buy it or not, if at all they can afford it. Past traditional practices, which do not contradicts secularism and in a sense are part of its legacy, like philosophy, science and arts, are in a long decline as spiritual practices, and had become only means of the mode of *work* and/or commerce. And so *Work* and *leisure 1* have become the two optional mode for secularism in the public sphere. The mode of work is expressed in the aspiration or attempt to change reality in the way one wants to. And *leisure 1* is a mode in which one tries to forget all about reality, and wish it would be pre-tailored to one's pre-expectations. Such a life and education are spiritually void and the way out of it is not necessarily by going back to institutionalized religions, nor by patching whatever spiritual practice the market offers, but by seeing secularism as a tradition that has its own practice of contemplation and leisure 2 (philosophy, sciences and arts). But moreover, secularism has a global net of institutions and curriculum from kindergarten to academy that can support the returning of contemplation and *leisure 2* to the center of the public secular lives. Elsewhere (Anonymous, forthcoming) I suggest a way to do so.

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1. Do not confuse the discussion of the spiritual crisis of secularism with the discussion of the (allegedly or not) political-domination challenges of secularism versus the religious trends becoming (or not) dominant in the public sphere. Also, do not confuse *secularism* as an idea and a way of life with *secularization*, the historical process in which religious belief and the ongoing present of God in life, is less and less the obvious default of the culture and civilization (Taylor, 2007). Lastly, I am not dealing here with secularism as it is manifested in communist, fascist or other forms of anti-liberal and anti-humanistic secular states, groups and societies, even though what I am arguing in respect to the humanistic branch of secularism is definitely applies to those political types of as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Living in a culture in which being swept away with emotions is acceptable may *prima facie* also lead to an acceptance to be swept away by negative feelings as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This characterization of the mode of *work* is in different from Arendt's principally differentiation regarding the three modes of *vita activa*: labor, work and action. Yet it is in accordance with her observation regarding the actual, historical, cultural victory of the *animal laborans.* I.e., the modern and secular erasing of the special quality of the two more delicate and sophisticate levels of *vita activa*: work and action, and coloring all *vita activa* and actually all aspects of life, only by one level – the lowest level of labor which generally means life that dedicate only to promote the allegedly survival of the individual (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 320). Therefore it is not after all far from Arend's observation of secular modernism to include under the category of what I characterized above as *work*  all the three aspects of what she had considered to be part of *vita activa*. And so, in my understanding, which again has drawn its inspiration from the idea of the Shabbat and what one is not supposed to do on Shabbat, *Work* includes all three level of Arendt's *vita active.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. By "change" I also mean states in which one wants to preserve something that other forces, natural or humane, with or without intention, change, like the fruits or the milk we put in the refrigerator, or the white hair we color. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The *animal laborans* is one which "[t]he only contents left [for it] were appetites and desire, the senseless urges of [its] body which [it] mistook for passion […] (Ibid., pp. 320-321) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Elsewhere (Segev, forthcoming) I examining the leisure of Shabbat and the practice of Studying Torah for its own sake as two ancient practices for contemplation and *leisure 2*, that can inspire secular societies and enhance spirituality as part of their public sphere. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)