



The Ph Scale of Religiosity

The conventional wisdom posits a spectrum of religiosity where so-called “extremism” is at one end and secularism at the other, with the happy medium is found in the middle of two extremes. According to this depiction, it is at this mid-point, the nominal case, where “moderate” religionism exists. The symmetry of extremist around this mid-point entails that pure secularism is itself a form of extremism.

We must update our conception of the secularism-religionism dichotomy. The conventional spectrum is defective for many reasons—the most obvious of which is its blatant lack of correlation with real-world phenomena. A fatally-flawed epistemology also undermines its credence.

The actual spectrum is analogous to the PH scale of acidity-alkalinity (with religiosity as the analogue of acid, secularity as the analogue of base.) In this updated conception, there is no “extremism”. What is misleadingly labeled “extremist religion” in the flawed spectrum is, in fact, undiluted religiosity. As we move along the spectrum, then, the religiosity is simply more and more “watered-down”...until we arrive at the anti-pole of pure religionism (undiluted cult activity): pure secularism (unsullied free-thought).

The present essay seeks to address the forms that the former end of the spectrum takes.

Salafism is an example of institutionalized socio-pathology. It is a kind of hyper-dogmatism that has gone beyond the mere confluence of outlandish beliefs, ignorance, and dysfunctional thinking. It is essentially a systematized psychopathy—in that the level of “disconnect from Reality” typically involves psychopathic levels of malice.

Fundamentalist Christianity (in its dozens of manifestations) and fundamentalist Judaism (e.g. Hassidism) are not nearly so horrific—though still quite deranged. From preposterous degrees of hyper-dogmatism to outright idiocy, from insularity to groupthink, from ridiculous claims to asinine behavior, such cults exhibit all the traits of undiluted religion. However, unlike Salafism, the dysfunction typically doesn’t involve psychopathic levels of malice.

Certain forms of fundamentalist Christianity exhibit traces of militancy and hostility in attitude. However, this rarely translates into action. If we look at the Church of LDS, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists, Southern Baptists, and ultra-evangelical communities, the derangement takes the form of passive-minded supplication (simply being utterly disconnected from Reality). Such religiosity renders the victims (i.e. followers) programmed zombies rather than holy warriors. In such cases, the institutionalized dogmatism tends not to precipitate militant behavior.

Meanwhile, Hassidism is so incredible insular and inward-looking that there is no room for outward aggression. This is a peculiar case of self-absorbed tribalism—in contradistinction to outwardly-directed tribalism.

This sets fundamentalist Islam (i.e. Salafism / Wahhabism) apart from these other two cases of undiluted religion. But what accounts for this discrepancy?

Fundamentalist Islam metastasizes in an environment hospitable to institutionalized dogmatism, enforced ignorance, chronic insularity, and systematic brainwashing. In such an environment, the human being can be readily indoctrinated under highly-controlled circumstances whereby psychopathology is proactively and calculatedly fostered. This process is based primarily on "Refer To Page 11" Syndrome to such a high degree that it becomes pathological.

With ANY religion, be it Scientology or Suffism, Judaism or Christianity, Islam or Sikhism, the degree to which a subscriber is "moderate" directly corresponds to the degree to which he either opts not to take parts of the texts / claims literally or opts to disregard parts altogether. Whether one treats the texts / claims metaphorically (as idiom, with an implicit meaning open to subjective interpretation) or outright ignores certain portions, what one is doing is essentially DILUTING the adherence to the religion. Insofar as one is increasingly moderate, one is diluting the religion more and more in this way.

With undiluted religion, there is no "loose interpretation" or "personal interpretation" or subjective license afforded to the subscriber. "Moderate" essentially means "a la carte": cherry-picking elements based on relevance, salience, and the degree to which various elements resonate with each person...employing judgment / standards / discernment that exists / operates INDEPENDENTLY OF the religion in question.



Moderated religionism entails a liberal treatment of the texts—whereby statements are interpreted in an “as if” manner. This is done at one’s discretion. The more discretion, the more moderated (secularized) the religion becomes. The degree to which one treats the text in an “as if” way is the degree to which one has diluted his religiosity—and vice versa. The degree to which personal discretion is allowed to dictate how and when this happens is the degree to which the religion has been moderated (secularized) —and vice versa.

Pure religion is literalist religion—religion without subjective license, without discretionary / liberal interpretation, without treatment of statements as mere metaphor / idiom. Degrees of divergence from that purity are degrees of moderation (secularization) of the religion. This divergence also corresponds to the (diminishing) degree of intensity with which the religion is practiced.

Fanaticism and obsession correspond to utmost purity: the highest degree of religiosity (i.e. COMPLETE and ABSOLUTE religiosity). Salafism is the quintessential example of this phenomenon.