

of the Muslims — happily state that they are “*auslaender*”, without the claim of being of the same “nationality” of the “host society” they live in. Joppke states that the German way of defining the state in Christian-Occidental terms is a mistake for the ideal liberal space that Europe wants to advertise itself as. However, what comes out of the discussions concerning the veil cases that Germany has had to deal with is that because Germany has no immediate desire to make fully fledged “German citizens” (in Joppke’s definition “Christian-Occidental”) out of these self-proclaimed *auslaender*, the state has fewer expectations from Muslim women, and it does not expect them to show their allegiance by throwing away their veils *à la Française*. This, in turn, indeed gets reflected in the number and nature of “veil controversies” that come about in Germany and the incidents stay limited to teachers who are thought to be in a position to influence younger people.

Lastly the British case is described by the adjective “extreme”, no doubt with reference to the incidents of violence in Britain that Joppke speaks about in passing to remind the reader what “toleration liberalism” may lead to. Britain’s way of treating the

different communities is described as some kind of liberation without a cause, with an emphasis on the private over the public. Indeed when pressed to define Britain’s values Gordon Brown is quoted to have included “putting civil society before the state” as a principle, rather than the correctionist and the emancipatory mission that France, at the other end of the liberal spectrum as defined by Joppke, assumes. Various British cases of the “veil problem” are recorded, in which the courts almost always favor the hijabi’s right to wear the veil, the problem raising its expected head only in the case of the niqab which, as the courts argue, makes the identification of the wearer impossible.

Joppke’s conclusion is a little more of the same as the introduction, with a call to further examine the ways in which each state may be getting it wrong or right. He suggests that time will tell which position will remain tenable in the future, and in homage to the possibly misguided French attempts to create a uniform republican subject, refers to the French ban as the “swan song” of French republicanism, that very institution which gave Europe its form of the nation state.

Nagihan Haliloğlu

## Secular Cycles

By *Peter Turchin and A. Nefedov*

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, 349 pp., ISBN 9780691136967.

Peter Turchin and Sergey Nefedov’s book focusing on recent theoretical analysis of economic and sociological history, is a text of limitless ambition. In its scope and

certitude, this ambition itself is anachronistic, more characteristic of an earlier era of social science in which grand-unified, universal models of history, economy, society

and culture were the order of the day. Both the appeal and the fundamental difficulties of *Secular Cycles* stem from this outdated aspiration to a trans-historical and trans-societal model of social, political and economic change. In an intellectual and scholastic context in which the subject of the researcher herself is far too often a more interesting object of theorization than phenomena in the social world, *Secular Cycles* evinces a refreshing willingness to cross both disciplinary boundaries and historical eras. Unfortunately, however, this daringness is not complimented by an acute, reflexive awareness of the very critiques of social science that have made such universal arguments largely passé.

Turchin and Nefedov's primary analytical contribution is the category of the 'secular cycle,' an ideal type in the Weberian lineage that both describes and explains long-term socioeconomic change. The authors' unit of analysis is the agrarian society over a period of several centuries; the 'secular cycle' designates the demographic, economic and political process of waxing and waning that, Turchin and Nefedov argue, such societies experience on a relatively predictable basis. As an ideal type, the secular cycle traces a pendulum from growth to decline (in the authors' terms, 'integration' and 'disintegration'), which consists of four distinct phases: expansion, stagflation, crisis, and depression. (p. 33) The cycle itself pivots at the nadir of any depression, which can equally be identified as a moment of nascent expansion. Particular demographic, economic, political, and socio-cultural trends characterize and define any given phase of a secular cycle. For instance, during a period of initial expansion, land

cultivation increases, rent is low, and the strength of the state achieves consolidation. Conversely, during a crisis phase, cultivation and population begin to decline, and the state typically collapses.

*Secular Cycles'* four case studies—medieval and early modern England, medieval and early modern France, republican and early imperial ancient Rome, and imperial Russia—demonstrate the analytic power and principles of the secular cycle lucidly and persuasively. For a non-specialist, these specific contexts hold little inherent interest, but their relationship to Turchin and Nefedov's theoretical intervention is clear. Moreover, the authors' precise, faultlessly disinterested presentation of their data avoids both the Scylla of Malthusian demographic pessimism and the Charybdis of Marxian teleological utopianism—an aspiration that they forward in their introduction. Both their method and their object of inquiry are reminiscent of Ferdinand Braudel's famous study of the "longue durée," although their more immediate inspiration and interlocutor is the American historical sociologist Jack Goldstone. And while *Secular Cycles'* material and argument is decidedly Eurocentric, there are moments of unique interest for the student of Middle Eastern and Islamic history—most notably, the authors' fascinating discussion of "Ibn Khaldun Cycles" and their assertion that Muslim polygyny necessarily affects socioeconomic cycles by providing an ineluctable encouragement to "elite population growth." (p. 23)

Methodologically, *Secular Cycles* rests on rather weak, problematic ground. Most distressingly, Turchin and Nefedov's four principal categories of analysis—popula-

tion, elite dynamics, the state, and sociopolitical instability—which define the trajectory of a secular cycle, are each different in kind and require distinct types of abstraction from historical data. For instance, while the demographic data that determine population change may not necessitate significant hermeneutic acrobatics, this easy movement from data to analysis does not apply to the other three categories. In other words, concepts such as ‘the state,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘instability’ are not mere historical givens—they demand interpretive interventions and decisions on the part of the historian herself. Thus, when Turchin and Nefedov propose that “the simplest method for quantifying sociopolitical instability is to plot the number (per unit of time) of ‘instability events,’ such as peasant uprisings, regional rebellions, coups d’état and civil wars,” (p. 307) their model smuggles in an unacknowledged hermeneutic regimentation of the definition of ‘instability,’ masked as an objective, quantifiable ‘datum.’ This is not to say that uprisings and rebellions are not indices of instability, of course; it is merely to question the principle by which some overt markers of instability achieve visibility and effectiveness within Turchin and Nefedov’s model, while other less explicit forms of ‘instability’ are excluded. One could make similar observations about the concepts of the state and the elite that—and this is the key point—the authors present as historically-given objectivities. Beyond this conceptual critique, *Secular Cycles* also struggles with vast variation in the quality and quantity of the data itself, a difficulty that, to their credit, Turchin and Nefedov expressly acknowledge.

What, then, should the reader make of *Secular Cycles*’ ultimate goal to resurrect, through rigorous comparison and careful sifting of data, the unfashionable aspiration to nomothetic history? Turchin and Nefedov mince no words in evaluating the import of their study—boldly, the final line of the book reads, “We are optimistic about the future prospects of history as science.” (p. 314) I must confess a deep skepticism here. Although I am inclined to agree with the authors’ assertion that there is “some sort of general regularities of the historical process,” their theory and method for demonstrating these regularities entirely fails to address the hermeneutic dialectic of historian and history. Turchin and Nefedov’s ginger avoidance of an extension of their analysis into the industrial revolution and political modernity hints at an intuition of this problem on their own part, but they are ultimately incapable of reckoning with the constructed nature of their own cardinal categories. Concomitantly, the reader is left to wonder how a historian of a different inclination, with a keen eye toward the difficulties in transposing modern social and political concepts, such as the state across vastly different historical epochs, might interpret Turchin and Nefedov’s data. As it stands, the concept of the secular cycle seems both too abstract to render the texture of sociopolitical change in any given historical period, and too timid to confront the radical transformations of modernity. In as much as these transformations ultimately yielded the differentiated categories of state, society and economy that inform Turchin and Nefedov’s arguments, they deserve the authors’ attentions. But on the rare occasions that Turchin and Nefe-

dov peer over this conceptual abyss, they quickly scurry backward into the language of quasi-objective certitude. Unfortunately, *Secular Cycles*' disavowals make it excep-

tionally difficult for the reader to share this certitude with them.

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## A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: With "On My Religion"

By *John Rawls*, edited by *Thomas Nagel*

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, 275 pp., ISBN 978 0 674 033313.

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American political philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002) became world-famous when his *A Theory of Justice* (1971) was published and soon translated into several languages. His other main treatises, *Political Liberalism* (1993) and *The Law of Peoples* (1999), have also inspired plenty of discussion. To put it briefly, the mature Rawls's chief goal was to construct fair terms for peaceful coexistence among the citizens of a liberal democratic society, religious and non-religious alike, as well as among liberal and decent peoples.

Rawls was able to analyze theological ideas skillfully—as can be seen for example in his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (2000) and *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (2007). Nevertheless, this James Bryant Conant Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University since 1979 was reluctant to unveil much of his own religious beliefs to the public. Now, the posthumous publication of *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith*, Rawls's master's thesis submitted to Princeton University in 1942, sheds light on an intensively religious period in Rawls's youth. His brief work "On My Religion" from the year 1997 complements our picture.

There probably existed only two copies of *A Brief Inquiry*—the originals from December 1942—until Princeton professor Eric Gregory turned his attention to it some time after Rawls's death. In their introduction to *A Brief Inquiry*, Joshua Cohen and Thomas Nagel (2009) explain that it was a delicate decision to publish this thesis because most likely Rawls would not have encouraged such an enterprise. Many of Rawls's former students, however, had already started to circulate the thesis, which made the decision a bit easier.

John Bordley Rawls was born in Baltimore into a wealthy and politically active family (his mother defended voting rights for women). He was educated at an Episcopal school, but he did not become deeply concerned with religious issues until he approached his twenties.

Neo-orthodox Christianity, inspired by Karl Barth, was making progress at that time. Robert Merrihew Adams, in his discussion of Rawls's *A Brief Inquiry* in the volume at hand (p. 29), reports that Emil Brunner's term at Princeton as a celebrity visiting professor during the academic year 1938-39 also had its impact. Indeed, Rawls expresses particular appreciation