

4-1-1999

Book Review: Religion And Contemporary Liberalism

Peter Simpson

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Recommended Citation

Simpson, Peter (1999) "Book Review: Religion And Contemporary Liberalism," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol16/iss2/12>

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it is rational to believe that God does not exist and not rational to believe that God does exist. In the book we don't find how to sort this out. My guess is that Gellman would insist that atheism is not strongly rational; and that is OK, but he hasn't given us sufficient reason for thinking that theism *is* strongly rational and atheism is *not*. He claims to have shown that it is not reasonable to believe that God does not exist (p. 3), but I did not find an argument for that in his book. Gellman also does not address what I think is an important question concerning his position. If not everyone perceives God, wouldn't those who do perceive God be in a different position epistemically from those who do not? I think that the best we get from Gellman is an argument for something which is a bit stronger than what he calls the "weak rationality" of theism; namely, that on some application of the canons of rationality it is rational to believe that God exists. This, I believe, he has shown, and in a new and insightful way. He would have to provide much more for us to be able to see the stronger conclusion. I look forward to his future efforts in that direction.

NOTES

1. Principle BEE: If a person, S, has an experience, E, which seems (phenomenally) to be of a particular object, O (or an object of kind, K), then *everything else being equal* the best explanation of S's having E is that S has experienced O (or an object of kind, K), rather than something else or nothing at all (p. 46).

2. Principle STING: If a person, S, has an experience, E, which seems (phenomenally) to be of a particular object, O (or of an object of kind, K), then our belief that S's having experienced O (or an object of kind K) is the best explanation (everything else being equal) of E, is strengthened in proportion to the number of purported experiences of O there are and in proportion to the variability of circumstances in which such experiences occur (pp. 52-53).

Religion and Contemporary Liberalism edited by **Paul J. Weithman**. University of Notre Dame Press, 1997. Pp. viii and 315. \$48.00 (cloth)

PETER L.P. SIMPSON, City University of New York

This book consists of a collection of essays by a distinguished cast of contemporary scholars. The essays are, in order: an introduction by Paul Weithman on Religion and the Liberalism of Reasoned Respect; Robert Audi on the State, the Church, and the Citizen; Sanford Levinson on what Liberalism demands of the Religiously Oriented Judge; Martha Nussbaum on Religion and Women's Human Rights; Philip Quinn on Political Liberalisms and the Exclusion of the Religious; Nicholas Wolterstorff on rejecting what Liberalism tells us about Speaking and Acting in Public for Religious Reasons; Timothy Jackson on Liberal Theory and Religious Pluralism; Jorge Garcia on Liberal Theory, Human

Freedom, and the Politics of Sexual Morality; Jean Bethke Elshtain on the Question Concerning Authority; John Coleman on Deprivatizing Religion and Revitalizing Citizenship; David Hollenbach on Politically Active Churches and Some Empirical Prolegomena to a Normative Approach.

These essays were originally given as papers at a conference on the topic of religion and contemporary liberalism at the University of Notre Dame in 1995. The book is, therefore, in the words of the editor in his introduction, the "proceedings" of that conference. One immediate merit that the book has as a result is that its contents have a fairly clear unity and fit together rather nicely. Indeed the book has something of the character of a single process of argument tending towards a single conclusion. The conclusion is that secular or a-religious liberalism is erroneous, incoherent, even dangerous, and that, properly understood, liberalism needs religion to flourish and survive. The resulting moral (implicit rather than explicit) is that liberal states should do much to encourage religious practice and belief. This conclusion and moral are, of course, not shared by all the essayists; in fact Audi and Nussbaum argue for the opposite conclusion and moral. But the criticism mounted against them on the other side is collectively overwhelming. Moreover this criticism rests not merely on philosophical analysis and argument but also on empirical research. For one of the features of these essays is that they do not just come from philosophers and theologians, but also from lawyers and sociologists. It is instructive to have in one volume, alongside philosophical argumentation, some statement and discussion of relevant legal practice and sociological data.

The book begins with a comprehensive introduction by the editor, Paul Weithman, who usefully isolates the theme of the book, gives an overview of each of the essays, brings together the results of the discussion, and ends by suggesting where the discussion might go from here. This introduction, which is in fact longer than several of the essays, is well worth having, but most of it is probably better read last than first. It is more of an essay in its own right and even a continuation of the book than an introduction to it. Perhaps indeed most of it should have come at the end and a briefer introduction taken its place at the beginning.

At all events, the main subject of discussion in the book is characterized by Weithman as the "liberalism of reasoned respect." This characterization proves, by the end of the book, to be not a little ironic. For several of the essays argue in effect, as indeed does Weithman himself in his introduction, that the liberalism in question is not particularly reasonable nor particularly respectful. What is distinctive about it, as Weithman explains, is that it attempts to found political arrangements only on such principles and values as all citizens can reasonably respect. Religious principles and values are not, therefore, going to be allowed by this liberalism to form the foundation of society or to be appealed to in political discourse about basic matters of justice and rule. For, given the pluralism of the modern world, religious principles are, it is alleged, unlikely to be such as all citizens can reasonably respect.

This sort of liberalism is, of course, especially associated with the

work of John Rawls. Rawls is indeed much discussed (and criticized) in this collection, but the liberalism of reasoned respect is presented and defended in it by Robert Audi. Audi's essay, therefore, suitably comes first after the introduction. The liberalism of reasoned respect, argues Audi, imposes quite definite restrictions on appeals to religion in public discourse. Specifically it requires that, where laws or policies restrictive of human conduct are concerned, one should refrain from advocating any such laws and policies unless, in addition to whatever religious reasons one has, one also has, and can present, adequate secular reasons, and unless one is sufficiently motivated by secular reasons. In arguing thus Audi is more anti-religious than Rawls. For Rawls would not require that a religious person be *motivated* by secular reasons; he thinks it enough that there should be such reasons and that the religious person should be ready, if necessary, to present these reasons in arguing publicly for his case. Rawls would also, unlike Audi, put comprehensive secular reasons on the same level as religious reasons and rule out appeal to both in the advocacy of laws and policies if those reasons could not reasonably be respected by all citizens. For what matters for Rawls is that one should conform to the requirements of *public* reason, not to those of Audi's *secular* reason. So, for instance, Audi's position would allow one to appeal to utilitarianism in one's advocacy of certain restrictive laws but not to Christianity, while Rawls' position would reject appeal to both. Philip Quinn in his essay is quick to point out the unfairness of this position of Audi's: the religious are penalized but no one else is who holds controversial views (and utilitarianism is as controversial in liberal societies as religion).

Still, even Rawls would exclude appeal to religious reasons in some cases, namely those where no reasons acceptable to the non-religious were also forthcoming. The liberalism of reasoned respect is thus committed, as several of the essayists point out, to imposing a sort of "gag-rule" on religious discourse in public life. Instead of such "exclusivist" liberalism Quinn would prefer an "inclusivist" one. So also would Sanford Levinson. Both argue, by instructive appeals to legal theorists and to legal practice, that liberalism can and should give everyone an equal right to argue on the basis of any controversial belief, whether religious or non-religious (Levinson does, it is true, think that judges in particular are required to exercise some restraint in this regard, though, unlike Audi and Rawls, he does not wish to lay down any absolute rules on the question). Those who are not persuaded by argument based on controversial beliefs will not suffer any infringement of rights (since no one is being forced to accept what others say). Indeed listening to the widely different views of others can be an enlightening experience, even if one is not persuaded—and more so if one is. To deny this or to try to prevent the presentation of controversial beliefs in public is to go against J.S. Mill's argument that discovery of truth requires the free exchange of all opinions, controversial, offensive, or not. It is surely ironic that modern liberals like Rawls and Audi should, in their professed concern for freedom, end up arguing down Mill himself.

Nicholas Wolterstorff is harder against the liberalism of reasoned

respect than Quinn or Levinson. The fear of religious wars that liberals evince and which they often use in arguing for liberalism (as Rawls does in particular) is, he says, outmoded. Maybe that fear was legitimate in the seventeenth century, but now our fear should be of secularism, which is what in fact has been behind the slaughter, torture, and brutality of our present century. Religion by contrast has been behind most of the reforms and revolutions that liberals profess to admire. Even in the seventeenth century, Wolterstorff points out, liberalism was not in fact secular, as is evident in Locke. It has not been secular in the American tradition either. Secular liberalism (as one might better call the liberalism of reasoned respect) is a very recent and very dubious invention and is itself as controversial, if not more controversial, than religious belief. The silencing of religion in the public square has, says Wolterstorff, led to a debasement of public life and discourse to private and group egoisms.

Timothy Jackson takes up the same theme of judging secular liberalism by its fruits and finds it similarly wanting. He proposes instead a perfectionist and Christian liberalism, as he calls it, developed in part by appeal to ideas found in Origen and Aquinas. Jackson discovers in these authors the openness to pluralism and difference that secular liberals profess to admire, but in them this openness is based precisely on the sort of religious convictions that secular liberals would be required by their theory to banish from the public square. The religious convictions in question are about the infinite transcendence of God's goodness, which, while a unity in itself, requires an endless plurality of individual things in order to be mirrored; about God's creation of precisely such a plurality of individuals; and about the profound respect and love that is therefore due to that plurality. Love of the individual, which is integral to any liberalism, is more securely rooted in religion than in its opposite. Besides, argues Jackson, Rawls' liberalism in particular is self-referentially inconsistent (while the religious liberalism advocated by Jackson himself is not). Since Rawls' theory is itself enormously controversial it cannot itself pass the demands of public reason that it seeks to impose on religion. By his own criterion Rawls ought not to advocate his own theory in public.

Jorge Garcia focuses his attack on recent work defending rights to sexual freedom by Thomas Nagel. These rights too, like Rawls' theory, are latecomers on the scene and have no precedent in previous liberal understandings of rights. Garcia pointedly calls them the "liberties of the Baby Boomers." Nagel, as spokesman for these liberties, seems to want a thousand sexual fantasies and experiments to bloom more or less without restriction but he fails, contends Garcia, to consider just what the consequences are likely to be. If sexual fantasy and experimentation are allowed to run free will this lead to more respect for others and in particular for women? Will it lead to less harassment, less victimization, less rape? Sex is a powerful passion that has indeed its place in human life but only where the possibilities for abuse can be controlled and minimized. That place is marriage and not Nagel's fantastic experiments. Pope John Paul II, like Nagel, also sees sex as expressive, as Garcia points out, but as expressive of familial love, not fantasy, and as existing between persons who, whether young or old, are all equally made in the

image of God. Which is the more human view? Which is more likely to foster respect for persons and thereby to form the basis for a stable, just society? Moreover, continues Garcia, if it is some underlying consensus that, following Rawls, we must look for, are we not more likely to find it in the religions that already now dominate contemporary life and that see all men as made in the image of God than in the elaborately argued and little agreed-on theories of academic philosophers?

That we need religious faith to shore up our democratic institutions is argued also by Jean Bethke Elshtain. Our present age, she notes, is losing faith in democracy and secular liberals tell us that the cure is to remove religious faith from the center of democracy. The truth is the reverse. Democracy can only survive and avoid collapse into anarchy or tyranny, or both, if people believe in democracy and willingly submit themselves and their free action to the authority of democratic principles. It is religious faith that has historically educated people to accept democratic authority and democratic discipline. Elshtain appositely appeals to de Tocqueville in support. She could have as easily and as appositely appealed to George Washington or any of the Founding Fathers, who were all keenly aware of the dependence of free institutions on religious belief and who regularly appealed to such belief in their public discourse. It is interesting to speculate how much of Washington's public career would have been curtailed if Audi and Rawls had been around at the time to impose on him their respective "gag-rules." The words "so help me God," for instance, which presidents now say as the final part of their oath of office were not there when Washington first took the oath. He added them spontaneously himself and everyone has followed suit since—and rightly too.

What the other essayists argue about religion and liberalism by appeal to reason, the final two, John Coleman and David Hollenbach, argue by appeal also to recent empirical research. Both show the considerable extent to which healthy democratic practices, above all people's active participation in the political process, depend in fact on churches and church-attendance. It is curious that such research has not entered into the reasonings of secular liberals, for since their claim is in large part an empirical one (that secularism is necessary for making democracy healthy and stable) they ought to consider whether the empirical evidence supports that claim. Coleman and Hollenbach show that it does not.

Secular liberalism professes to be a neutral arbitrator between comprehensive and rival visions of the good life. It is a neutral arbitrator because, as its proponents claim, it is not itself such a comprehensive vision. But in fact, of course, as many of the essayists point out, it is such a comprehensive vision. What differentiates it from other visions is that it tries in its rhetoric to hide the fact while they do not. Secular liberalism is a sort of wolf in sheep's clothing. This is made particularly clear by Martha Nussbaum. Her essay is rich in stories about the way religion has allegedly been used to oppress women. Some of these stories are indeed poignant, even tragic. They are, however, one-sided. Nussbaum tells us nothing about the many ways religion has improved the lot of women nor about the many ways liberalism is now itself oppressing

women. Cases in point are divorce, contraception, and abortion (which in their effects, to say nothing of their nature, are disproportionately damaging to women). Nussbaum appeals to the words of John Paul II to support her views about freedom but she ignores his words about the evils of divorce, contraception, and abortion. In fact, in the case of contraception, she wants to stop the Pope and religious authorities generally from publicly speaking out against it. For contraception, she says, is a basic human right for women and any religious leader who speaks in public fora against it should be criticized as a "subverter of the constitution" (she does not say this about those who speak against abortion, but only, it seems, because some third world feminists speak against it). Nussbaum seems almost to be biting her tongue when she writes thus. From the general tone of her remarks one might rather think she was about to preach an anti-religious crusade or jihad.

Most of the essayists in this collection go after Rawls and/or Audi. Nussbaum is left untouched, which is curious for she is more open and up-front about what secular liberalism entails in practice than either of them. She makes it more explicit that secular liberalism is both a comprehensive doctrine and a novel doctrine, and a doctrine moreover that is going to oppress religion and the religious whenever it feels itself strong enough to do so. She makes it clearer, therefore, that secular liberals are the enemies of liberty that George Washington warned us against in his Farewell Address. Fortunately for the vast majority of Americans secular liberals are a minority voice in the country, and indeed in academia too. But this book is a timely reminder of the threat they pose. In this, as in other respects, it is a welcome contribution to the important discussion now going on about freedom and religion, about their relations and interdependence.

Unsnarling the World-Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, and the Mind-Body Problem. **David Ray Griffin.** Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: California University Press, 1998. Pp. xv and 266. \$45.00 (Cloth).

LEEMON MCHENRY, Loyola Marymount University

Ever since Descartes failed to answer the persistent but insightful questions of Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia as to *how* the mind and body interact in the pineal gland of the brain, philosophy has been left with what Schopenhauer called the "world-knot," arguably **the** problem of modern philosophy. The sophistication of neuroscience and computer models of the brain in the past twenty-five years has certainly stimulated interest in the problem, but emerging scientific orthodoxy has been one-sided. Physicalistic materialism appears to be the only serious alternative to Cartesian dualism mainly because, according to Griffin, it is the paradigm of both wishful and fearful thinking: "wishful" to the extent that we believe what we want to be true—in this case, that all phenomena in the universe will be explained finally by materialistic laws; "fear-