UDK: 299.5
316.74:2

Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood (eds.):

"SECULARISM, RELIGION AND MULTICULTURAL CITIZENSHIP"

Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 2009.

What is the optimum relationship between a state and the religions to which its citizens adhere? Does secularism constitute a viable paradigm for the organisation of contemporary multicultural, multi-faith societies? Do Muslims represent a specific type of challenge to Western, liberal democracies in this regard?

These questions, first forced into public, political and academic consciousness by the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, are here re-addressed on the twentieth anniversary of its publication. Amongst a myriad of significant developments in the intervening years, an increase in religiosity and mobilisation on the basis of religiously grounded social identities and the global, national and local repercussions of 9/11 have ensured that they remain salient.

This volume is the product of a symposium on *Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* held at the University of NSW, Sydney in 2005. Its academic contributors write from a variety of disciplinary perspectives across the social and political sciences. The four chapters which comprise the first of two parts examine the history, terms and limits of Western secularism. Each, in its way, mounts a critique of hegemonic conceptualisations of secularism as liberal monolith and posits, in stead, an understanding of secularism (or better, secularisms) as historically contingent. The logic underpinning the collective project of re-imagining secularism as both de-and prescriptively multiplex is twofold. Firstly, it facilitates a rediscovery (and recovery) of the 'principled pragmatism' inherent in original attempts to separate the temporal (state) and spiritual (religious) realms in the interest of civil peace. Secondly, it provides both precedent and rationale to re-think its conceptual and practical usefulness for contemporary social contexts. This re-thinking takes different forms.

The 'shallow legitimacy' posited by Hunter (Chapter 2) seeks to disentangle philosophical discussions of liberalism from the study of historical liberal orders. Resolving this conflation allows for the reassertion a 'philosophically shallow' secularism, grounded in the practice of coercive political authority in the interest of civil peace: effectively, a privileging of the 'morality of political authority' as opposed to 'the political authority of morality'. A similar case for the interpretation of secularism as institutional arrangement is argued by Saunders in his critique of the assumed anti-religious nature of the French *pact laique* (Chapter 3). Conceptualising *laicite,* or the separation of church and state, as practical pact over dogmatic principle, we are again reminded of the pragmatism of achieving civil peace via the creation of a neutral middle ground between sectarian rivalries.

Bhargava's chapter on the 'contextual secularism' practiced in India (Chapter 4) addresses the failure of Western thinkers to explore beyond their own doorsteps in attempts to develop secularisms which meet the challenges of contemporary multicultural societies. Contextual secularism depends upon a 'principled distance' between religions and the state which disconnects the two at the first and second orders (ends and institutions) but provides the opportunity of connection in the third (law and policy). Depoliticising religion without de-publicising it in this way has several advantages, not least the scope for state intervention both to positively recognise religions and where necessary, demonstrate active hostility toward discriminatory religious practices. Bader's theory of 'moderately agonistic democracy' constitutes a different kind of principled pragmatism (Chapter 5). Whilst acknowledging the logic of the move from liberal 'principles' to 'virtues,' a reluctance to endorse this shift wholesale forms the basis of a hybrid which retains the an 'institutional reason' to facilitate the practical cultivation of liberal virtues. Throughout, the message is clear: liberalism can accommodate all of the challenges of a radically changed and changing social context provided that secularism is re-imagined in terms of a 'principled pragmatism' which inherently acknowledges the necessity of continual evaluation.

The five chapters comprising the second part of the volume focus on the practical implications of the 'Muslim question' for the future of secularism(s) in liberal, multicultural and multi-faith societies. Paradigms for the accommodation of religious collectives within the public sphere are explored, compared and expounded by Casanova (Chapter 6) and a 'moderate secularism' is proffered by Modood (Chapter 7). This balances the twin principles of equity and equality (or equal treatment and equality *of* treatment) and, borrowing the feminist dictum: 'the personal is political,' asserts the equal rights of religious adherents to have their identities recognised and accommodated like any other in the public sphere.

A further imperative for re-imagining secularism is found it the argument, made by Sayyid, that in it currently constitutes a tool of ethno-cultural boundary maintenance which consolidates and re-affirms the hegemony of *westernesse* in the face of the perceived challenge of Muslim political identification (Chapter 8). Secularism thus understood has little to do with maintaining civil peace or fostering equality. It acts to curtail Muslim autonomy in liberal states, polarising 'religious, pre-modern' Muslims and the secular, rational, post-modern West - demonstrating the inherent incompatibility of the two and the superiority of the former over the latter. Scratch the surface, however, and specifically Western, inherently 'progressive' (and principled, pragmatic) forms of Muslim consciousness are emerging at grass roots level within the second and third generation, giving the lie to this false dichotomy (Saeed, Chapter 9).

Several of the philosophical and more practical issues pivotal to the debates explicated throughout the volume are explored simultaneously by its editors in the final chapter. Herein, Levey and Modood examine the Danish cartoon affair of 2005, exploring the utility of liberty, fraternity and equality - the 'Tricolour' of liberal values central to the re-imagining of a contemporary, pragmatic secularism set forth by Charles Taylor in a foreword itself deserving of a chapter. Rejecting the false dichotomy outlined above which threatens to reduce debate in this field to a 'clash of civilisations' style rhetorical battle reminiscent of the Rushdie affair, the authors look in stead at practical ways of balancing competing liberal values. Whilst liberty and equality demand the right to publish potentially offensive material on the subject of religion, it is suggested that fraternity, though rarely invoked, might encourage individuals to think twice before vilifying that which fellow citizens hold sacred. However, utilising and adding to negative stereotypes which have the effect of racialising a group and contributing to their exclusion within society is perceived as contravening each of the Tricolour values and in so doing, endangering liberal democracy itself.

Whilst preserving the necessary analytical distinction between Islam and Muslims which provides scope to critique (indeed, to vilify) the former and legal protection against cultural racism to the latter, the authors do not fully address the fact that distinguishing in practice between vilifying Muhammad and negatively stereotyping Muslims is anything but straightforward, and might result in a situation in which many Muslims continue to experience the former as a form of the latter, whilst lawyers argue that instances of the latter are merely representations of the former. In such a situation, looking to the principle of fraternity to protect culturally racialised religious minority groups might, as Rushdie amply demonstrated, prove less effective than hoped.

Overall, *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* provides a scholarly, cohesive and detailed critique of hegemonic notions of liberal secularism as an inherently Western (and thus progressively modern and universally applicable) ideology. Proffered alternatives each, from their unique historical, geographical and theoretical perspectives, emphasise the necessity of contingency and pragmatism in the re-imagining of a corpus of contemporary liberal secularism(s) adequate for today's multicultural and multi-faith societies. Whilst certain chapters (particularly, Saeed) lack an empirical depth which would lend considerable weight to an important argument, the volume taken as a whole makes a salient contribution to the secularism debate, robustly reasserting the logic of a beleaguered multicultural political philosophy in the defence of a religious collective frequently associated with its demise.

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