

Foreword

All of the articles in this Symposium deal with the question to what extent liberalism as a political philosophy is consistent with citizens' and officials' reliance on religious-based arguments in fashioning coercive public policy ("the question"). Kent Greenawalt sets forth a good map of the contending positions on the question. And the position he stakes out for himself is a moderate one: sometimes reliance on religious-based arguments is proper, but sometimes it is not. Greenawalt walks us through a very subtle and complex analysis of what makes views, religious or not, accessible or inaccessible to others, and what should turn on accessibility in terms of coercive policy.

Robert Audi takes the most secularist position among the contributors. He offers criteria for defining religious arguments to differentiate them from the purely secular. He then argues that, in a liberal democracy, coercive public policy should be based only on accessible reasons, which do not include religious reasons. Indeed, Audi even argues that religious belief itself can support exclusive reliance on secular arguments in the public domain.

Michael Perry's article provides a good contrast to Audi's, for Perry strongly denies that religious arguments should not influence coercive public policy. Perry canvasses various reasons offered for liberal "neutrality" with regard to religious-based arguments and rejects them all. Perry attempts to support the principal defining characteristics of a liberal society by arguments drawn from his own religious beliefs.

Larry Solum argues that the proper axis for determining which arguments are improper bases for state coercion is not the axis that divides religious from secular; rather it is the access that divides "nonpublic" reasons from "public" reasons. Public reasons consist of (1) common-sense beliefs, (2) ideas from our public political culture, and (3) the noncontroversial conclusions of science. These reasons are the only proper bases for state coercion, for only these can be reasonably accepted by all subject to that coercion.

Larry Alexander rejects any epistemological divide separating religious from secular arguments, and concomitantly rejects any principle that would exclude the latter from the public forum.

Nevertheless, Alexander endorses liberalism as a political theory, which he thinks is both correct and also deeply paradoxical. Liberalism must take the position, not that illiberal religious views should be excluded from the public forum because they are religious, but that they should be excluded — if they should — because they are wrong. The paradox of liberalism is that though illiberal views are wrong from liberalism's perspective, they should be tolerated because of the value of autonomy, a value illiberal religions reject.

The first five articles set forth the epistemological and justificatory debates over religious-based arguments in a rather decontextualized way. With the exception of some of Michael Perry's, the arguments do not refer to any particular historical condition or religious tradition, except by way of example. Charles Larmore takes up the case for secularization by placing it in the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition and relating it to the idea of God's transcendence. Moral authority is now necessarily located in our form of life, central to which is liberalism's moral minimalism.

Jeremy Waldron also focuses on some quite specific historical and cultural phenomena, in this case the Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter on economic justice. The letter seeks to guide not just Catholics, but everyone. It is inconsistent with any conception of liberalism that would rule out reliance on religious-based arguments in forming public policy. Waldron examines the arguments for such an exclusion and finds them unpersuasive.

John Garvey takes us inside the Catholic tradition and examines the predicament of the liberal citizen or public official who is also Catholic. Garvey distinguishes among the various types of authority the Catholic Church exerts over its members and how that authority affects its members' obligations regarding the wider society.

Also writing from within the Catholic tradition, David Hollenbach, echoing Michael Perry's position, argues for a completely open dialogue over public policy among the adherents of various religions and the nonreligious. He is skeptical of the possibility of any "neutralist" version of public dialogue that excludes religious arguments. He paints a picture of the Catholic tradition as one open to others' arguments in addition to being itself the source of arguments.

In the final paper, Maimon Schwarzschild locates the debate over "the question" in Western history. Religious-based arguments are suspect in liberalism because liberalism was an Enlightenment response to the Christianity of its time, which it viewed as ignorant, cruel, and corrupt. Christianity's separation of the secular from the sacred encouraged the development of the secular modernism characteristic of modern liberalism. Today, however, religion is no longer the prime threat to liberalism, nor are the reasons for excluding it from the public square as strong as those for excluding Communism,

Fascism, or other illiberal movements. Indeed, religion offers goods that represent a desirable counterweight to those of secular modernity.

