



Different types of secularism (part 1) – Berlinerblau’s “six types”

KEY QUESTIONS ??

- What different types of secularism are there?

STIMULUS

Two necessities

Berlinerblau

*“Secularism is a political philosophy, which, at its core, is preoccupied with, and often deeply suspicious of, any and all relations between government and religion. It translates that preoccupation into various strategies of governance, all of which seek to balance two necessities: (1) the individual’s need for freedom of, or freedom from, religion, and (2) a state’s need to maintain order.”** – Prof. Jacques Berlinerblau, director of the Program for Jewish Civilization at Georgetown University.

* The phrase “maintain order” might seem out of place in the definition as it encompasses a wide range of secularist models throughout history. The phrase “ordered liberty” has fallen out of common use and can be summed up as the freedom of the individual to act being limited when it might undermine “order”, which could be taken to mean the social order, the rights of others, or the rule of law.

The six types

From this, Berlinerblau argues that there are six main types of secularism. These are differentiated by their approach to the “two necessities”.

- a) Separationism
- b) Disestablishmentarianism
- c) Laïcité
- d) Accommodationism
- e) Non-cognisance
- f) State Sponsored Atheism

There are overlaps between the different types and terminology varies.

EXERCISES

- Q1.** What do you think of Berlinerblau’s definition of secularism?
- Q2.** Is there anything Berlinerblau’s definition misses out?
- Q3.** What do you think of the terms for Berlinerblau’s six types of secularism? (a–f)?

The six types

a. Separationism

Background: Separationism is the idea that “Church” (read religious institutions) and “State” (read government and public institutions) should be separate institutions and not interfere in each other’s running and spheres of influence. As well as in enlightenment philosophy, we can trace these ideas in the works of numerous Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians and philosophers. Separationism can also be understood in a wider sense as the separation of religious and state interests and the idea that the state shouldn’t aid or restrict religion.

Positive view: By separating religious and state institutions, you remove the ability of the state to interfere in religious practices and the ability of religious institutions to use the state to impose their practices or beliefs.

Negative view: Critics argue that religious and state institutions can have a positive relationship working together, and that if assured of dominance, larger state religions are more secure and able to advocate for minority religious rights. Others question why religious institutions specifically should be separated from the state and why states shouldn’t reflect the religious makeup and concerns of their citizens. In addition, such models can be criticised for focusing too much on religious institutions at the expense of addressing other ways the use or misuse of religious power might undermine individuals’ or society’s freedom of and from religion.

Necessity (1) freedom of/from religion: Such models see the state’s involvement in religion as the principle driver of restrictions on religious freedom. They argue that freedom from state control of religion (or vice versa) provides freedom for individuals to make their own religious choices.

Necessity (2) ordered liberty: Such models see the entanglement of religion with the affairs of the state as undermining the state’s secular function which is to maintain ordered liberty. Separationism traditionally saw competition for control of the state as being a key driver of interreligious conflict. Proponents of this model argue that where the state dictates religious matters, it imposes on the ordered liberty of individuals, and where religious matters impose on the state, it undermines the state’s ability to maintain ordered liberty.

b. Disestablishmentarianism

Background: Disestablishmentarianism is very similar in its concern over disentangling state and religious institutions, but usually it is specifically concerned with the disestablishment of formal state religions. For that reason, the positive/negative views and approaches to the two necessities are basically the same as for separationism.

Where disestablishmentarianism differs from separationism is the additional concern and debate over what should belong to the state or the religion when religious institutions have been owned or funded by the state as part of establishment. For example, when the Anglican Church was disestablished in Wales, the Church in Wales was no longer able to directly tax the population. However, the properties which such taxes (tithes) helped fund were kept by the Church.

c. *Laïcité*

Background: This is strongly associated with the French model of secularism which emerged alongside republicanism in reaction to abuses committed by religious and aristocratic authorities. It is best understood as the idea that there is a fiercely secular public realm, which needs to be enforced, to maintain separation from religion and religious conflict.

Positive view: In countries with a strong *Laïcité* tradition it is often an important part of national cultural identity and has often been successful in preventing internal religious conflicts. Such models have a strong focus on egalitarianism and a positive view of citizens as holders of rights and responsibilities.

Negative view: Critics argue that *Laïcité* leads to an obsession with religion and desire to legislate about religion that prioritises homogeneity over pluralism. Some argue that its emergence in such a specific cultural context leaves it inflexible and unable to respond to cultural change.

Necessity (1) freedom of/from religion: *Laïcité* heavily favours freedom from religion in the public sphere, relegating freedom of religion largely to the private sphere or personal practice.

Necessity (2) ordered liberty: Such systems are suspicious of overt religious manifestations that are seen as potential sources of conflict or competing authority. *Laïcité* sees participation in a particular form of secular citizenship as an important responsibility which allows rights to be granted.

d. Accommodationism

Background: All models of secularism are accommodationist to an extent. But what is referred to as “Accommodationism” is the belief that religion is a public good that can be promoted by the state as long as it doesn’t unfairly privilege one religion over any others. In this view the state should respond to traditional conflicts caused by and between religions by making religious organisations partners in the delivery of services and the maintenance of order.

Positive view: The need to appeal for state support can moderate religions, leading to them being more managerial and service-oriented and less evangelical. With less of a need to compete for new converts, religions are freer to work together, and a less turbulent religious marketplace reduces the likelihood of religious upheavals. The state is able to harness religions’ potential for social good – alleviating a welfare burden on the state – while gaining influence over religious communities.

Negative view: While reducing interreligious conflict, such policies can increase oppression within communities by setting religious community leaders up as gatekeepers. Such policies undermine the principle of equality before one unified law. Such policies do not well accommodate small religious communities and the religiously unaffiliated or nonreligious. Such policies can encourage politicians to appeal to religious blocs rather than individuals or cross-community initiatives.

Necessity (1) freedom of/from religion: Such models generally prioritise freedom of religion over freedom from religion, and see such rights as more communal than individualist. Proponents of such models argue that they moderate the negative aspects of religion that citizens might need freedom from.

Necessity (2) ordered liberty: In such models, religious institutions and leaders are seen as key in maintaining order within their in-group, alongside rather than in competition with the state’s own maintenance of order.

e. Non-cognisance

Background: This is the idea that the state doesn’t take “cognisance” of religious concerns, but dons a “veil of ignorance” which blinds it to these. The state can recognise things like religious freedom and religious discrimination (where it has a secular interest in them) but aims to be neutral on (or blind to) theological issues.

Positive view: This means that the state treats religious organisations and irreligious organisations equally. The state treats the secular concerns of all citizens, whether religious or not, equally.

Negative view: A problem with this could be that because of traditional religious privilege and discrimination, the secular concerns of certain religious groups, leaders or organisations end up being given more or less attention. Others might question why religious (or irreligious) concerns should be excluded from public policy making. Others question the legitimacy of differentiating between religious or secular concerns.

Necessity (1) freedom of/from religion: In effect it aims to separate religion and state (and vice versa) while maintaining a state role in protecting freedom of and from religion. Because the state is non-cognisant of purely religious concerns it can’t act on them or be used to impose on them.

Necessity (2) ordered liberty: This model restricts the state to maintaining rights and policies that can be articulated in a secular manner. This sees the scope of ordered liberty as being defined to those restrictions and protections that can be secularly justified.

f. State Sponsored Atheism

Background: Some states have adopted official policies of promoting atheism or outlawing religious practices or institutions. Most advocates of secularism do not consider this to be a form of secularism – particularly as such states have usually targeted religion to avoid rivalry with their own official dogma.

Positive view: Religion has often been a source of disruption and conflict. States which mandate atheism might hope to escape such conflicts and create a more homogeneous nation with a unified worldview.

Negative view: Such states have tended to be extremely repressive and operate functionally similarly to theocracies. It is unreasonable to expect groups (particularly marginalised or minority groups) to abandon religious and closely related cultural practices and beliefs.

Necessity (1) freedom of/from religion: This form of secularism (if it can be considered one) is not generally concerned with freedom of religion, however it could be considered an extreme attempt to maintain freedom from religion. Some such states (like the theocracies they mirror) might make limited accommodations for religious freedom where it is not in conflict with state order.

Necessity (2) ordered liberty: This model prioritises order above other concerns. Such models usually have an extremely limited concept of ordered liberty, in which adherence to a specified worldview is seen as essential for order.

EXERCISES

- Q4.** What are the strengths and weaknesses of each type (a–f) of secularism?
- Q5.** How does each type of secularism (a–f) approach Berlinerblau’s first of “two necessities”? – balancing freedom of and from religion
- Q6.** How does each type of secularism (a–f) approach Berlinerblau’s second of “two necessities”? – ordered liberty.
- Q7.** Does the UK follow any of these models of secularism, or a synthesis of more than one?

STIMULUS

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Article 9 of the Human Rights Act (which is also Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights) states:

- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.*
- Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.*

Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) says:

- States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.*

2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

EXERCISES

Q8. How does Article 9 of the Human Rights Act address the first of Berlinerblau's "two necessities"? – balancing freedom of and from religion.

Q9. How does Article 9 of the Human Rights Act address the second of Berlinerblau's "two necessities"? – ordered liberty.

Q10. How does Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child address the first of Berlinerblau's "two necessities"? – balancing freedom of and from religion.

Q11. How does Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child address the second of Berlinerblau's "two necessities"? – ordered liberty.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Find an interview of Berlinerblau discussing the six types of secularism.
- Find a critical and a positive review of Berlinerblau's book *How to be Secular*, which discusses these models of secularism.
- Divide a piece of paper into six rows and three columns. How does each of Berlinerblau's six types of secularism affect religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination?