

## **Reawakening Enlightenment? The Counter-Religious Movements in European Public Discourse**

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### Abstract:

There seems to be a consensus in political science, that religion has become more visible in the public sphere and come to play an increasing role in political life in European democratic regimes. In that sense, religion has in its variety been reconstituted as a proper object of study for political science. However, the challenge of religion in democratic politics has been met by counter-reactions criticising the increasing role of religion in the public sphere and political life. The aim of this paper is (a) to reconstruct and analyse such counter-reactions in European public discourse and, thus, (b) to ask how the Enlightenment critique of religion has been reawakened in the present public discourse and (c) discuss the implications hereof for the democratic ideals of liberty and equality and the treatment of religious people.

## Part One

### **The Politics of Lutheran Secularism: Reiterating Secularism in the Wake of the Cartoon Controversy\***

(Forthcoming in Hans Raun Iversen et al., eds., *Religion in the 21st Century. Transformations, Significance, Challenges*. London: Routledge)

#### *1. Introduction*

The publication of twelve cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad on September 30, 2005 in *Jyllands-Posten*, a Danish daily newspaper, has given rise to passionate public debate, demonstrations and death threats in Denmark and abroad. In January and February 2006, this unrest spread to most Muslim countries and was reported worldwide: Danish flags and embassies were burned in the Middle East; there were reports of people dying in riots sparked by the cartoons; and Danish goods were boycotted in many countries.<sup>1</sup> In official discourse, the cartoon controversy was even labelled the worst crisis in Danish foreign affairs since World War II.

The original publication of the cartoons was accompanied by the following editorial statement: “Some Muslims reject modern, secular society. They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration for their own religious sentiments. This is incompatible with secular democracy and freedom of expression, where one must be ready to put up with scorn, mockery and ridicule” (Rose 2005, my translation). Immediately after the publication of the cartoons, some people supported the publication of the caricatures, the implied denial of self-censorship, and the defence of the freedom of expression; others rejected the move as a childish way of defending such a crucial democratic value, pointing out how publishing the cartoons creates lines of division and opposition in society by offending the Muslim minority. Still others emphasised the implicit Islamophobia, perceiving the publication as being symptomatic of the dominant climate of public debate and political attitudes towards immigrants, refugees and others with foreign roots living in Denmark.

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\* An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Political and Social Philosophy Research Seminar, Department of Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, November 15, 2007. I would like to thank the participants for their comments.

<sup>1</sup> Because an illustrator of a children’s book on the life of the Prophet Mohammad wished to be anonymous for fear of reprisals, the editor of the Danish Daily newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten* decided to highlight this case of self-censorship and asked the forty members of the newspaper cartoonist association whether they would like to depict the Prophet Mohammad for publication in the newspaper. Twenty-five cartoonists responded: some refused to depict the Prophet Mohammad, others did not have the time, and twelve drew a cartoon for the newspaper. The rest did not answer. The focal point in the entire controversy is one cartoon in particular, in which the Prophet Mohammad is depicted with a bomb in his turban.

The cartoon controversy thus illustrates in a nutshell the challenges of religious pluralism for democratic political regimes and communities, and it raises principled questions of equal basic rights and liberties, equal or special treatment of minorities, blasphemy, tolerance, mutual respect and recognition, social cohesion and harmonious co-existence in the encounter between secular and religious values. In political studies, the cartoon controversy has previously constituted an illustrative case for the construction of principled arguments for and against freedom of speech, freedom of religion, blasphemy, tolerance, mutual respect and recognition (Cf. e.g. Asad forthcoming; *International Migration* <sup>2</sup> 2006; Lægaard 2007a, 2007b; Post 2007; Swaine 2006). That which has yet to be theorised in relation to the cartoon controversy, however, is a plausible frame for understanding the various forms of power and political processes in the encounter between secular and religious values in the formation and transformation of political orders and identities with reference to such constitutive norms and principles.

On the basis of some of the public debate over the cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad in Denmark, the aim of this essay is to elaborate theoretically on what could be referred to as *a politic of secularism*. The claim is, *first*, that when the cartoon controversy peaked in February 2006, a politic of *Lutheran* secularism was articulated in order to put religion in its place with reference to the Lutheran tradition of the majority of the Danish population constituting a dominant social imaginary of the proper relationship between religion and politics. *Second*, as an exercise of power, a politic of secularism operates by political-theologising and, thus, it produces the very paradoxes of secularism questioning its political ideals: liberty, equality, neutrality and impartiality.

## 2. *The Politics of Lutheran Secularism*

The point of departure for reconstructing what is termed *the politics of Lutheran secularism* is the points of view on religion, politics and the public sphere forwarded by Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen in an interview aired in mid-February by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, a position he expounded upon in May 2006 in an essay in *Politiken*, a Danish daily newspaper (Rasmussen 2006b). These points of view have been reiterated on several occasions since and, thus, they constitute Rasmussen's political doctrine as expressed in his "actual political thinking" concerning concrete political problems related to religion and politics raised by the cartoon controversy (Freeden 2005). The Prime Minister's position could initially be termed liberal secularism having a difference-blind conception of equal basic rights and liberties in accordance with his liberal background. From this point

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<sup>2</sup> Special issue on "The Danish Cartoon Affair: Free Speech, Racism, Islamism, and Integration" with contributions by Tariq Modood, Erik Bleich, Joseph H. Carens, Randall Hansen and Randall O'Leary.

of view, he emphasises the crucial role of freedom of expression for a democratic society, e.g. as stated in his New Year's speech of January 2006: "The freedom of expression is absolute. It is not negotiable" (Rasmussen 2006a). Rasmussen generally refers to three principles of equal basic rights and liberties: (a) *the principle of liberty*, in *casu* the individual religious freedom that one must not impose one's own faith on others; (b) *the principle of equality* that every citizen has equal rights and liberties irrespective of religion – according to Rasmussen, that one should identify with these equal citizenship rights in political matters rather than one's religious belonging; and (c) *the principle of neutrality* that the state is neutral in religious matters and does not interfere in them, and conversely, the church refrains from interfering in political matters (Rasmussen 2006b).

These principles are to be understood in relation to the overall aim of Rasmussen's political doctrine. For the purpose of the strong sense of community and social cohesion characterising Danish society according to his conception together with the current challenges of religious fundamentalism in Denmark, he requests that religion not play a role in the public sphere with reference to religion as a private matter. In the essay, he writes: "In order to guarantee social cohesion in the future, my opinion is that religion has to be less visible in the public sphere ... We have to distinguish between religion and politics. In my opinion, religion, faith, and religious commandments are personal matters" (Rasmussen 2006b, my translation). In other words, social cohesion based on the principles of liberty, equality and neutrality implies that one is able to distinguish between religion and politics. In that sense, Rasmussen's political doctrine is shaped along the lines of doctrines of secularism from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and onwards claiming religion and politics as separate spheres in order to guarantee social and political order by instituting universal principles of liberty, equality, impartiality and neutrality (Taylor 1998).

According to Rasmussen, however, this religion/politics distinction is made possible by the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms and the integration of this confession in the Danish Lutheran Church. Rasmussen continues:

In my view on religion and society, I am strongly influenced by the renowned quote from Jesus Christ: *Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's*. With reference to Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms, it would seem obvious to use this as point of reference for distinguishing between the secular and the religious, between politics and religion. To give God what is God's and the emperor what is the emperor's implies that the state must be kept as the one and only secular authority. (Rasmussen 2006b, my translation).

From the perspective of the Prime Minister, the liberal principles of difference-blind equal basic rights and liberties are thus made possible by the unique Danish tradition of Lutheranism as institutionalised and interpreted in the Danish Lutheran Church and integrated in the public culture in Denmark. In that sense, his political doctrine differs from the doctrines of secularism from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and onwards. This emphasises the human ability of secular reasoning as the mode of justifying and authorising the universal principles of liberty, equality, impartiality and neutrality that guarantee a political order independent of religion.

In the process of articulating the politics of Lutheran secularism, one could claim that the Prime Minister acts as a political-theological authority. He interprets the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms and its effectual history in Danish political culture, and he justifies his conception of religion and politics as separate spheres; and, thus, the organisation of a political order in a democratic society by this interpretation. In other words, he establishes what is conceived as neutral ground for equal basic rights and liberties with a theological reference. In that sense, the Prime Minister's statements produce a paradox of secularism by installing a distinction between religion and politics itself made possible by his interpretation of the theology of the Danish Lutheran Church. This revitalisation of the theological tradition provides him with authority in regulating matters of religion and politics in the Danish context. Although his interpretation of the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms has been contested in Danish public discourse, there seems to be widespread agreement both on the particular influence of this doctrine for Danish democratic society and on its ongoing value for regulating religion and politics in the Danish context.

However, this does not solve the paradox of secularism implied by a politics of Lutheran secularism. Rather, it emphasises the very paradox of a politics of secularism as regards the political ideals of secularism: liberty, equality, impartiality and neutrality. Considering the principle of liberty, Rasmussen pays special attention to religious freedom, i.e. that one must not impose one's faith on others. The question is, however, whether the reference to the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms and the reiterated institutional and cultural impact of this doctrine on Danish democratic society is not to compare with imposing one specific perspective on the religion/politics relationship on the citizenry in general and *in casu* on the Muslim minorities and their self-understanding as religious citizens. In order to understand themselves as fully integrated citizens in the Danish democratic society, they must be able to distinguish between religion and politics in keeping with the Lutheran tradition and, thus, reflect upon their own religious belonging from this point of view. This paradox is reflected in the articulated opposition to religious fundamentalism based on literary interpretations of the religion's Holy

Scriptures. This opposition includes the widespread celebration of the Association of Democratic Muslims, established in the beginning of February 2006, in opposition to what is conceived as a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam as represented by a handful of conspicuous imams. This association is celebrated on the grounds that it has successfully adapted to the crucial Western democratic values and unites Islam with democracy in an enlightened and self-critical manner based upon the religion/politics distinction.

This point is also emphasised by Rasmussen's interpretation of the principle of equality that every citizen has equal rights and liberties irrespective of religion, wherefore one ought to identify with one's equal citizenship rights in political matters rather than one's religious belonging. This civic-rather-than-religious identification presupposes one's ability to distinguish between religion and politics as sketched by Rasmussen and his interpretation of the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms. The principle of neutrality is therefore also undermined. The state is not neutral in religious matters; rather, the reiteration of the impact of Lutheran theology on political institutions and the culture of Danish democratic society grants priority to one religious tradition on behalf of others. In that sense, the Prime Minister imposes the values of difference-blind equal basic rights and liberties made possible by the Lutheran tradition of the Danish Church on the Muslim citizens and, thus, his politics of secularism simultaneously includes and excludes the Muslim minority.

This reconstruction of Rasmussen's political doctrine as a politics of Lutheran secularism emphasises the dimensions at play in the exercise of power referred to as a politics of secularism in this essay (Cf. e.g. Asad 2003, 2006; Berg-Sørensen 2007; Hurd 2008). As illustrated by the Prime Minister's reaction to the cartoon controversy, a politics of secularism operates at various dimensions from proclaimed universal principles of liberty, equality and neutrality embedded in particular religious and political institutions and cultures to the creation of "proper" self-understandings and points of identifications imposed on the citizenry in order to become fully integrated citizens within the particular political community. In that sense, secularism is hardly an unambiguous and universal political doctrine claiming religion and politics as separate spheres with reference to principles of liberty, equality and neutrality. Rather, secularism is articulated in ambiguous political strategies for governing the citizenry embedded in particular religious and political institutions and cultures and reiterating the meaning of these particular traditions of political community. Furthermore, secularism operates in its exercise of power by political-theologising. This is not only in the Danish case of the cartoon controversy. The Danish case is no exception. One could also consider the most well-known case of a politics of secularism, the reiteration of the French principle of secularism (*laïcité*) in the so-called headscarf affair (Cf. e.g. Asad 2006; Balibar 2004; Berg-Sørensen 2006; Bowen 2006; Roy 2007; Scott 2007).

In the French case, the politics of secularism refers to the principle of secularism as a pillar in the constitution of the fifth French Republic associated principles of liberty, equality and neutrality. These proclaimed universal principles are embedded in the particular French tradition of state sovereignty and, thus, institutionalised in public institutions and integrated in public culture. The public school system in particular is referred to as a crucial institutional framework for cultivating autonomous future citizens in accordance with these principles. In other words, the subject matter in the headscarf affair with reference to the universal principles of secularism was the power of governing the citizenry by cultivating the school children and their self-understanding and understanding of others as autonomous individuals. This mode of governing implied the ban on the Muslim girls' embodied point of identification and, thus, it imposed a specific social imaginary on Muslim girls of how they must be and understand themselves in order to be fully integrated citizens, i.e. autonomous persons able to make up their minds without influence from religion. The question is, then, in which sense this is an exercise of power operating at various dimensions by political-theologising, as it seemed to be in the Danish case.

In the French case, it has been emphasised that the state operates as a political-theological authority by defining what religion and, thus, a religious symbol is by prohibiting religious symbols in public schools (Asad 2006). Rather than allowing headscarf-wearing girls themselves to define the meaning of their embodied points of identification, the state defines the headscarves as religious *per se* and, thus, prohibited. This act of political-theological authority is even interpreted along the understanding of political theology forwarded by Carl Schmitt and the present reception of his work (Cf. e.g. Agamben 2005; Schmitt 2006). This means an association of political theology with the absolutist conception of sovereignty; the sovereign is the lawgiver not comprised by the law, as such, the sovereign operates as a political-theological authority whose power of lawgiving transcends the law. This act of the sovereign use of power is characterised as a state of exception that suspends and (re)institutes the law. With reference to this conception of sovereignty, the French ban on religious symbols in public schools is interpreted as an act of the sovereign use of power without ambiguous power positions and resources and without contestation and negotiation in decision making (Asad 2006). However, this mode of operating as a political-theological authority was contested in the fifteen-year political processes preceding the legislation prohibiting religious symbols in public schools. Even the interpretation of the French principle of secularism was highly contested in the process. Interpreting the political-theologising of a politics of secularism along this tradition of political theology and its implied absolutist conception of sovereignty would therefore appear excessive. As emphasised

in the Danish case, political-theologising is a rhetorical figure used as political strategy in a field of contested narratives concerning the proper relationship between religion and politics.

### *Conclusion*

The essay in hand has taken departure in the “actual political thinking” constituting a political doctrine labelled a politics of Lutheran secularism articulated in reaction to the cartoon controversy, especially when it became a matter of Danish foreign policy. It has focused on the reconstruction of this politics of Lutheran secularism, the various dimensions of the implied exercise of power, and the production of the very paradox of secularism by operations of political-theologising. That which appears crucial in these political processes of articulating political strategies of secularism, however, is that they are also characterised by deliberation, negotiation and contestation between diverse narrative strategies and points of identification, perspectives and reasoning. Within this frame, the relationship between religion and politics is ambiguous and unstable and subject to continuous democratic negotiations between diverse perspectives and reasoning. This also means that the categories of secular and religious could become mixed up in the processes of governing and authorising the use of power, e.g. the political-theologising with reference to a specific church tradition (Denmark) or state tradition (France). This emphasises the inherent tensions in democratic societies between the exercises of power in terms of *in casu* a politics of secularism and the religious and metaphysical pluralism constituting the political community in a democracy. A politics of secularism does not necessarily have the last word ...

## Part two

### **Democratic negotiations of religion and politics**

(Forthcoming in *Krisis: Journal of Contemporary Philosophy*, Vol. 26, No. 1, May 2008)

In the recent revival of religion in the public sphere of liberal democracies, it has become common to conceive of secularism as a contested concept. Secularism not only refers to principles of strict separation of religion and politics justified by the use of secular or public ethical reasoning; it also implies various concrete institutions and policies regulating the relationship between religion and politics reiterating various contextual political traditions and cultures. In other words, the meaning of secularism is ambiguous. It is subject to democratic negotiations drawing the line between religion and politics and creating conceptions of legitimate and illegitimate points of view in democratic governing rather than the necessary presupposition of democracy. Such a multidimensional understanding of secularism and the religion-politics relationship also appears to be the point of departure in Veit Bader's book, *Secularism or Democracy? Associational Governance of Religious Diversity*.<sup>3</sup> His aim is to formulate an "alternative to secularism" by granting priority to democracy over secularism rather than developing an "alternative secularism".<sup>4</sup>

Writing within the horizon of the contextual turn in political theory, Bader emphasises the importance of the concrete democratic processes and practices; the agents involved herein together with their various perspectives and horizons of meaning; and the concrete contextual factors conditioning these processes and practices, i.e. traditions, institutions, discourses, policies and cultures. Especially the articulation of a *minimal morality* within a contextual frame and an *associative democracy* as institutional device for governing religious diversity constitutes the platform for Bader's approach to the current puzzles of religion and politics. These ideas that Bader ambitiously and convincingly writes about include interdisciplinary insights from political philosophy and the social sciences, pointing towards the complex relationship of levels between principled moral reflection, on the one hand, and institutional designs and policy recommendations, on the other hand. The following comments are made about these ideas. The overall question in this essay concerns the conception of *the political* associated with a minimal morality and an associative democracy. How is the political understood as a theoretical concept and analytical perspective? How are the political processes in decision-making

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<sup>3</sup> Veit Bader, *Secularism or Democracy? Associational Governance of Religious Diversity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rajeev Bhargava, "Political Secularism," in John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig & Anne Phillips, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 636-655.

conceived? How is the meaning of political decisions contested, negotiated and settled from Bader's point of view? The reason for this focus on the political is twofold: on the one hand, the contextual turn in political theory and the implied emphasis on concrete political processes and practices, institutions and cultures enhance a strong sense of the political; they constitute and are constituted by the political. On the other hand, this sense of the political could be more articulate than it seems to be in *Secularism or Democracy*? What are the specific characteristics of the political and the political modes of operation? This question remains unanswered.

Such questions concerning the political, its modes of operation and the use of power in democratic politics highlight where Bader disagrees with another influential strand in the contextual and multidimensional understanding of secularism; a strand that focuses on the constitution of subjectivities and identities in the political processes of secularism rather than the reconceptualisation of a value-based point of view for the democratic governance of the religion-politics relationship, *in casu* a minimal morality and a notion of an associative democracy.<sup>5</sup> In other words, various positions in social and political theory and studies acknowledge the contextual and multidimensional character of secularism, but they disagree on how secularism and democratic politics operate and how these modes of operation can be criticised or justified. Thus, the contestability of secularism not only concerns the level of abstraction and the normative ambition, but also the crucial characteristics emphasised in the various understandings of context and the multiple contextual dimensions of politics. This disagreement frames the present comments on Bader's *Secularism or Democracy*?

Bader describes this disagreement as a difference between “strong” and “moderate” contextual approaches. He takes the stance of a moderate contextual position, which is able to balance between concrete contextual factors and abstract liberal-democratic principles, e.g. liberty and equality, claiming that from a strong contextual point of view, there is a “distrust of general, abstract principles even within given contexts in particular, and [an] exaggeration of the problem of under-determinacy”. In opposition to the “strong” contextual approach, “moderate contextualists allow for context-transcending principles but insist we relate principles to different contexts and cases to explain and develop their meaning. Principles like liberty or equality, though abstract and in need of specification are not indeterminate but under-determined: they may not exactly state what is positively required but clearly exclude any serious lack of freedom [...] or serious inequality in whatever context” (p. 91).

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g. Gil Anidjar, “Secularism,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2006, pp. 52-77; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular. Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Talal Asad, “Trying to Understand French Secularism,” in Hent de Vries & Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies. Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 494-526; Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) and Saba Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” *Public Culture*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2006, pp. 323-347.

From his “moderate” contextual approach, Bader develops the idea of a minimal morality constituted by principles sensitive to concrete differences and contextual circumstances. His point of departure is what he conceives to be a reasonable pluralism. By this he emphasises the complex character of practical reason and he refers to reasonable associations able to engage in democratic negotiations and deliberations as a kind of public reasoning on matters of religion and politics based on a minimal morality. The minimal morality is articulated in order to frame a platform for regulating the relationship between religion and politics that is alternative to that of secularism in terms of strict separation. Rather than an *a priori* exclusion of religion in political matters, Bader aims at maximum accommodation based on minimal principled reflection. Thus, assuming a reasonable pluralism, Bader reconceptualises the normative ideals and liberal principles of a democratic regime in terms of a minimal morality consisting of principles of *moderate universalism*, *embedded impartiality*, *relational state neutrality* and *fairness as evenhandedness* in cultural matters. The latter, *fairness as evenhandedness*, is to be understood as a symbolic accommodation of the demands of religious people with the aim of fair treatment of religious minorities, while the three first principles, *moderate universalism*, *embedded impartiality* and *relational state neutrality*, aim at including all of the affected people in democratic negotiations and deliberation guided by sensitivity to religious people in concrete situations and contextual circumstances in decision-making, application and interpretation of principles, laws and rules. The four articulated principles of a minimal morality provide Bader with a normative point of reference for institutional and policy devices.

This reconceptualisation of the principles associated with a liberal-democratic regime is a contested task unto itself, and the principles constituting a minimal morality are contestable. However, Bader claims that “without [a] moral backing, political and legal obligations would inevitable be weak” (p. 80). In other words, without a minimal morality defining the obligatory constraints of the democratic negotiations and deliberations of the borders between religion and politics, this activity would be a mere exercise of power. Bader therefore gives priority to a moral constraint of democratic negotiations and deliberations encouraging “argument and [...] good example [...] before using force” (p. 82). Within this frame, the difference between the so-called “strong” contextual approach to secularism and Bader’s “moderate” contextual approach is clearly stated: the former does not take a principled stance, while the latter articulates a morality sensitive to concrete situations and contextual circumstances, yet still backing political and legal regulation on principled grounds.

The question is, however, how contested and contestable this notion of a minimal morality is. On the one hand, the articulated minimal morality is context-sensitive; on the other hand, it is “independent of context and groups” (p. 291). What then are the limits for the democratic

negotiations and deliberation in the decision-making, application and interpretation of principles, laws and rules given by a minimal morality? To what degree are the liberal principles of a democratic regime contestable as part of the democratic political process? And at what point will the argument and the good example become inadequate so the use of force is the only means left, as Bader mentions in the quote above? And what then is the difference between “strong” and “moderate” contextual approaches if the bottom line of establishing a political order with reference to liberal principles in a pluralist and democratic society is the use of power in order to sanction these principles? What is left of the value-based point of view for the democratic governance of religion and politics other than the hope that people will treat one another with mutual respect and fairness, but without any moral obligatory guarantees aside from “the threat of legal violence” (p. 81)?

The next step in Bader’s reflections concerning the normative platform of the democratic governance of religious diversity is the emphasis of minimalist civil virtues to be cultivated within democratic institutions and practices. At this point, Bader mentions another value-based – though in his terms “strong” – contextual approach, namely that of William E. Connolly, with whom he shares the idea of not being a secularist from the point of view of agonistic democracy, although Connolly’s ethics is too demanding and thus not minimalist enough to satisfy Bader.<sup>6</sup> However, if a minimal morality does not have any other guarantees than what can be sanctioned by the legitimate violence exercised by contingent institutional arrangements in a democratic society, what then is left other than a hope of ethical cultivation without guarantees? And what then is the difference to the ambition of ethical cultivation that Connolly articulates in terms of pluralist virtues such as “an ethos of engagement”, “critical responsiveness” and “agonistic respect”? Both are contestable and contested perspectives for ethical cultivation within concrete democratic institutions and practices, but neither of them have any authority other than the authority ascribed in the concrete processes and institutional sedimentation. So what is the difference between the implied morality of a so-called “moderate” contextual approach to secularism *versus* the implied ethics of a “strong” contextual approach to secularism if both emphasise the democratic potential of ethical sensitivity to difference? There might be a difference in the sense that a minimal morality supposedly is superior to the democratic politics going on and as such independent of the political, while an ethics of pluralist virtues is hoped to be cultivated in the (micro)-political processes and, thus, part of the political; though without any guarantees.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1999) and e.g. William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

In other words, beyond the questions above lies the question as to how the political is conceived in the concrete democratic processes of negotiating and deliberating the religion-politics relationship. Bader appears to have a strong sense of the political in his focus on concrete democratic institutions and practices, but the ambition of articulating a principled platform in terms of a minimal morality seems to weaken this sense. Therefore, one could have wished that the political was more articulate, e.g. in relation to the use of force involved in the *political* constitution of the borders between religion and politics as the “bottom line” of democratic political order. These questions are also to be addressed to the second crucial element in Bader’s priority of democracy over secularism, namely the idea of an associative democracy.

At this point, Bader’s task is the institutional and policy devices for accommodating religious and cultural diversity within a liberal-democratic political regime. Bader points towards an associative democracy being the most convincing idea of democracy and, thus, the best possible institutionalisation of liberal-democratic principles that fulfils the task of maximum accommodation of religious minorities constrained by the four principles constituting a minimal morality. In other words, he couples these two ideas, conceiving a minimal morality to be the only constraint on the flourishing of associative democracy and the associative governance of religious diversity:

“Associative democracy rejects constitutional establishment. It supports the legal, administrative and political recognition of organised religions. It balances strong guarantees for individual or ‘inner’ religious freedoms and strong guarantees for associational or ‘outer’ freedoms of religion and provides maximum accommodation to religious practices, constrained only by minimal morality and basic rights. [...] It provides opportunities for these organisations to be even-handedly involved in standard setting and governance of these services”. (p. 20)

In other words, the conception of an associative democracy couples the abstract principled constraints with concrete political institutions and processes, practices and cultures in a more or less deductive system. The minimal morality works as criteria for evaluating institutional designs and policy recommendations.

According to the conception of associative democracy, the associations constitute the frame of moral learning and political empowerment for “religious minorities and, particularly [...] vulnerable minorities within minorities” (p. 30), it creates “more appropriate circumstances of choice” (p. 209) and constitutes an egalitarian mode of democratic representation because of the basic rights

and minimal morality and the focus on concrete associations as legitimate participants in democratic political processes in various arenas and levels and on various policy issues. In that sense, an associative democracy constitutes “a realistic utopia developed by democratic experimentalism” (p. 31) in terms of the concrete political processes of deliberation and negotiations, trade-offs and balancing of reasons and perspectives and the formation of religious peoples as active democratic citizens made possible by an associational political focus.

In terms of this idea of an associative democracy, Bader makes a plausible sketch of the concrete forms of the institutional pluralism framing the political processes in a democratic society, which he gives priority over secularism. In that sense, he formulates a concrete democratic form constrained by minimal moral principles adjustable to various contextual factors and circumstances as alternative to, on the one hand, liberal secularism understood as abstract principles of strict separation of religion and politics and, on the other hand, postmodern and communitarian contextual approaches giving priority to concrete contextual values and norms on behalf of the crucial liberal-democratic principles. However, Bader’s concretisation and institutionalisation of multiple possible forms of regulating the religion-politics relationship from the point of view of a priority of democracy over secularism and the associated idea of a moderate agonistic democracy does not solve the problems implied in the notion of a minimal morality constraining democracy, as mentioned above. Rather, the articulation of a minimal morality within a more or less deductive system of principles, institutions and policies weakens the sense of the political and the implied use of power. In contrast, the focus on concrete democratic processes of negotiation and deliberation in the accommodation of religious minorities and the general regulation of the religion-politics relationship appears to extrapolate the continuous democratic challenges of religious and metaphysical pluralism in democratic societies as an inherent political matter unsolvable by the articulation of moral principles; be they minimal or not.

In other words, the Achilles heel of Bader’s ambitious and convincing task of giving democracy priority over secularism is when the democratic pragmatism at which he aims is suspended by the articulation of a minimal morality superior to the concrete democratic politics. One could question then why one should think in principles at all rather than merely focusing on the political processes of producing political order and social cohesion with reference to the constitutive norms and principles of a liberal-democratic regime, especially when the articulated minimal morality is claimed that moderate, contestable and contested that it has the character of one of several possible subjective perspectives put into debate. The question is, then, whether it would be more plausible to simply allow the democratic negotiations and deliberation of religion and politics to continue to acknowledge the internal tensions and struggles of a pluralist society and informed by the insight into the role of

democratic associations Bader provides, if the aim is to give democracy priority by emphasising the *political* constitution of secularism.

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