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Cliteur, P.B.; Zuckerman, P.; Shook, J.R.

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An abstract collage artwork featuring torn pieces of paper, dark ink splatters, and textured layers in shades of gray and black, creating a complex, layered visual effect.

EDITED BY

PHIL
ZUCKERMAN

JOHN R.
SHOOK

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CHAPTER 23

A SECULAR CRITIQUE OF RELIGIOUS ETHICS AND POLITICS

PAUL CLITEUR

LET us start with the statement that there are countless ways in which religious ethics and religious politics can be criticized. As John Shook writes: "the complaints are pretty much the same: religious leaders caught as hypocrites, religious people behaving immorally; religious scripture endorsing unethical deeds; religions promoting hatred, conflict and wars; religions promoting injustice and discrimination; and the like" (2010: 3). But what I am concerned with in this chapter is a specific *secular* critique of religious ethics and politics. An example can make this clear. The religious ethics and politics of, for example, the fundamentalist Islamist movement IS or Isil (Said 2014; Sansal 2014) can be criticized from another *religious* perspective: a Christian or Buddhist one, for instance. One may also criticize religious ethics and politics from the view of the same religion, Islam, that IS adheres to. This is, in fact, what the British Prime Minister David Cameron did. Reacting to the spectacular military successes of IS, Cameron said: "What we are witnessing is actually a battle between Islam on the one hand and extremists who want to abuse Islam on the other" (2014). His remarks are relevant to our purpose because they highlight the difference between a critique of religious ethics and politics in general and a *secular* critique of religious ethics and politics in particular.

Not everyone would be willing to accept Cameron's characterization of the conflict. First of all, IS would not. Who is the British prime minister to lecture them on what is true Islam and "abuse of Islam"? What expertise does Cameron have in this field? From the perspective of a reasonable outsider, Cameron's religious critique of religious ethics and politics of IS was not very convincing either. Was IS, fighting for an Islamic caliphate (Pankhurst 2013), not an Islamic movement? Did their ideas really have nothing to do with the religion of Islam? Was this "abuse of Islam"?

Whatever can be said about Cameron's analysis, his remark is important because it sets us on the track of the specific character of a *secular* critique of religious ethics and politics. Cameron's critique is a critique of the religious ethics and politics of IS, but it is definitely not a secular critique. What Cameron does—and this type of critique is prevalent, much more prevalent than a secular critique, in fact—is tell the extremists that they do not live up to the

ideal form of religion by hijacking Islam and not realizing the true nature of Islam, which is basically peaceful and good.

CRITIQUE AND SECULAR CRITIQUE

What makes a critique a secular critique? Secular critique is different, and it is the purpose of this chapter to highlight what makes a *secular* critique of religious ethics and religious politics different. Secularists—those who engage in the secular critique of religious ethics and politics—do not primarily object to this or that specific element of religious ethics and politics. Religion is not particularly friendly to women (Benson and Stangroom 2009), homosexuals (Heins 1993; Fone 2000), and atheists (Werleman 2009). Secularists mainly object to the whole concept of religious ethics and politics and deny any necessary connection between religion on the one hand and ethics and politics on the other. Furthermore, secularists advocate the severing and emancipation of ethics and politics from religion.

There are several misunderstandings about this enterprise, and it is useful to get them out of the way first. Antisecularists, that is to say, those who do not sympathize with the idea of secular ethics and politics, are often mistaken about the nature of secularism when they claim that secularists have declared war on religion as such. Secularists are militantly against religion, many people think. Or they are “aggressively” antireligious. But this is something secularists deny (Blackford 2012; Berlinerblau 2012). At least it is not connected to the secularist position as such. There are secularists, like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens,¹ who subscribe to both secularism *and* atheism. But that does not make the connection between secularism and atheism a necessary one.

What all secularists do have in common is that they are against *the use* of religion for bolstering moral and political claims. They believe a moral claim has to be supported ethically (moral secularism) and a political claim has to be supported politically (political secularism). But one cannot advance religious reasons for a moral or political claim. At least one *ought* to try not to do this. What secularists favor in discussing matters of public policy and ethical matters is speaking a kind of “moral Esperanto”: a language that is not connected to religion and that, accordingly, we can all understand (Cliteur 2009).²

So what secularists object to is *using religion* for moral and political purposes. In other words—and this is an important point to highlight—religion does not have to be rejected as such (this is how atheism differs), but it certainly must be rejected when it presents itself as the basis of ethics and politics. The word “basis” requires further commentary and analysis, since it is a source of much confusion (Nowell-Smith 1999). Of course, it is possible that someone is “inspired” by religious ideas. Christians claim to find inspiration for their politics in their religion. They claim, for instance, that the person of Jesus Christ inspires them to advocate some sort of alleviation of the plight of the hungry and the poor. Many Christians also declare that the idea that God created all men equal (“All men are created equal,” it is said in the Declaration of Independence) inspires them to advocate more social justice in the legal and political system. One may, for example, be inspired to advocate the abolition of slavery. This was the case with the English philanthropist and politician William Wilberforce (1759–1833) who had a leading role in the abolition of the slave trade. Religious inspiration

for necessary political change is also prevalent in the work of Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968), whose work is was hailed as a “testament to religious faith at its best” (Guiora 2009: 63; Guiora 2014: 8–9). Rallying his audience against the Vietnam War, King spoke eloquently about the “ministry of Jesus Christ” and said: “to me, the relationship of this ministry to the making of peace is so obvious that I sometimes marvel at those who ask me why I am speaking against the war” (1967: 655). Muslims claim that the life of Mohammed is a source of inspiration to them. For Buddhists, the life of Buddha is a point of reference for their moral and political ideas (Revel and Ricard 1997). What this all means is that many religious believers assert that they derive their moral and political ideas from their religion, for example, from Holy Scripture.

It is important to state clearly that none of this puts them at loggerheads with secularism or secularists. Such a conflict only arises if religiously minded people (people “inspired by religion”) argue that morality and politics can be legitimate *only on the basis of religion*. In other words, what secularists contest is not that some religious and political ideas are derived from religion (a historical or psychological connection), but they object to the idea that one needs religion to justify these ideas (which is a moral and, more in particular, a meta-ethical claim). Secularists deny that if there is no God, everything is permitted—a worry once expressed by Dostoyevsky (Sartre 1970: 36; Bouteligier 2014: 290). In their view, moral choices in the world are very much the same with or without God. Here, the conflict with IS or any other religious extremist or fundamentalist movements is evident.

There is a second crucial misunderstanding about a secular critique of religious ethics and politics. This is that one presupposes that secularists must be against values like neighborly love or being kind to one another because these ideas are somehow connected to religion or derived from Holy Scripture. What is wrong with these kind of values, religious people may ask secularists. The answer is: nothing. This is not what the secularist critique is about. The secularist critique only says that these values are not necessarily intertwined with, or dependent on, any religious outlook. You can be good to your neighbor without trying to base those values on your religion. From the perspective of secularism, “religion” as a reason to act in a certain way is comparable to “astrology” as a reason to act in a certain way. People can sometimes perform good deeds on the basis of astrological predictions, but that does not make astrology a “sound basis,” “indispensable,” or “necessary” for politics or ethics. It is better to separate religion from ethics and politics like it is better to separate astrology from ethics and politics.

So much for being “inspired” by your religion. From a psychological point of view it cannot be denied that moral behavior is inspired by religion, but the significance of this empirical fact to justify moral or political behavior is nil. We can next formulate this secular critique of religious morals and politics by introducing a central philosophical concept, the concept of “autonomy.”

MORAL AUTONOMY AND MORAL HETERONOMY

The central idea of secularism is *autonomy*. Now, as is so often the case with central concepts, this word has many meanings, but in the context of secularism it means “independence.” It is the independence of ethics and politics from religion. Therefore, one may consider

secularism as an emancipation movement: it entails the emancipation of ethics and politics from religion (consult Schneewind 1998).

As with all types of emancipation, this development does not necessarily mean that you "hate" or are unduly "negative" about what you emancipate from. Let me give an example. Women's emancipation does not mean that women have to "hate" men or are unduly critical about men. It only means that they do not want to be subservient to men. Women have their own place in society as agents independent from men. Another example is this. The emancipation of slaves does not entail that slaves are unduly critical of their masters. Their only claim is: we are human beings with an innate human dignity.

Although these observations may sound like truisms, this is all highly relevant for secularism. From a secular point of view, ethics, politics, and religion are not intrinsically connected; they are separate domains of reality. The German philosopher Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950), one of the most impressive defenders of an autonomous ethics, states it in the following way: "From the fact that religion and mythology have been bearers of positive morals, it does not follow that morality absolutely needed these supporters. Rather can their ethical content be entirely removed in principle from the mytho-religious drapery" (2002: 111). Hartmann continues, "The religious man attributes to the divinity everything of which he does not know the source; foremost, consequently, he attributes the moral commandments to it. In so doing he fails to appreciate that autonomous character of the moral values" (112). What has to be accomplished is the recognition of the self-sufficing character of moral principles, says Hartmann. He clearly sees this as a process of emancipation: "Then ethics discards the garments of its infancy and calls to mind its own proper origin" (112). One may confound these domains (and this is what has happened in most historical epochs and in most places of the world), but one ought to separate them. This would be better for all of us: believers, unbelievers, and everyone. Of course, secularism is not a recipe for the good life, but it is an element of it. We may formulate it thus: secularism is a necessary condition for harmony in a pluralist society, not a sufficient condition.

The opposite of moral autonomy is moral heteronomy. Where moral autonomy tries to disconnect morals from religion, moral heteronomy tries to connect the two. In its most extreme form, moral heteronomy teaches that morality is totally dependent on religion. A "moral obligation" is simply a "religious obligation." And the most extreme form of moral heteronomy, the opposite of moral autonomy, is a situation in which people are prepared to do things that are evidently morally outrageous, but because of that relationship with religious mandates these acts are performed or condoned. The presumed necessary connection between religion and morals makes people think that immoral acts are not immoral because they are mandated by religion.

A good example of this is the killing of one's child on what is perceived as a command of God. What is one of greatest goods that we have? Life. And what is one of the worst things that can happen to us? Death. So killing an innocent human being³ counts as the most serious offense one can commit against the common good. Now what is the greatest good next to our own life? The life of those whom we love: our spouse, our parents, our children. Accordingly, the most atrocious act someone can perform, is killing one's father (patricide), mother (matricide), or one's child (infanticide). To the dismay and indignation of secularist critics of religious ethics and politics (and in a sense a kind of conundrum for many religious believers as well), this is what happened in the story of Abraham, who was willing to offer his son Isaac when this was commanded by God.

The story is known as "the binding of Isaac" or "the Akedah" (in Hebrew). According to the story, Abraham bound his son before placing him on the altar.⁴ The story is told in the Old Testament, or what the Jews call the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 22:1–13), and with minor variations also in the Qur'an (37:99–113), so this story is important for adherents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Draï 2007). The God of Israel entered into a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:9f), and so he became the patriarch of Israel (John 8:33–39; Romans 4:1), but he is also seen as the spiritual father of Christians and Muslims (Romans 4:11f; Quran 33:78). The three Abrahamic faiths all acknowledge Abraham as their forefather. So it is not strange that Bernard Lewis (2003) writes that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have many points in common. Islam is much closer to the Jewish or Christian tradition than to, for example, Hinduism (a form of polytheism),⁵ Buddhism (according to some not even to be considered as a religion), or Taoism.⁶

God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. The story is this. Abraham had to kill his son as a test of his loyalty to God. Genesis says, "God tested Abraham" (Genesis 22:1). God said to Abraham: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you" (Genesis 22:3). This is a horrible command to a father of course, but surprisingly, Abraham did not protest. "He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood" (Genesis 22:10). But when Abraham took the knife to kill his son, God interfered in the form of an angel. The angel said: "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Genesis 22:12).

From a secularist perspective there are at least two problems with this story. First that Abraham was prepared to do something grossly immoral, only because he thought this was religiously mandated. That shows to what depths people can sink if they do not separate ethics from religion. But there is a second problem that has to be highlighted: it was God who demanded this. The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven (Genesis 22:15) and said to Abraham:

By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice. (Genesis 22:19)

In short, God rewarded Abraham for something that was a gross violation of ethics. Abraham should have said: "Lord, you have endowed me with conscience, with moral sense, and I understand you want to put me to the test now, and see whether I will say 'no' to such an immoral command." And the Lord should have said: "Yes, that's precisely what I mean, and with your refusal to sacrifice your son, you have passed this test." But this was not what happened, as we know. And it is also not what the classical tradition of Western theology teaches us. St. Augustine understood quite well what the meaning of this passage was. As Augustine wrote in *City of God*, explaining why Abraham had to be obedient: when the command was given to sacrifice his son "the thunder of a divine command must be obeyed without argument" (1972: 694). And if one regards Holy Scripture as "divine command," that implies that Holy Scripture must then be followed without argument. This attitude was backed up with a whole worldview derived from scripture, for example, the conviction that the devil inspired

heretics to oppose Christian teaching "under cover of the Christian name as though their presence in the City of God could go unchallenged like the presence, in the city of confusion, of philosophers with wholly different and even contradictory opinions!" (Augustine 1958: 409). Heretics were considered "enemies within" by Augustine (410).

It is therefore not surprising that in the prevalence of Abraham in the holy tradition atheists see a compelling argument to reject such a god altogether—that, at least, is what Paul Kurtz (1998: 40–43), Richard Dawkins (2006: 274–275), Sam Harris (2005: 18), A. C. Grayling (2013), and Christopher Hitchens (2007) have done. Even if Abraham is less obedient to God's commands in other passages (e.g., Genesis 18:23–33), Genesis 22 is a problem—not only according to atheists but also according to moral secularists. Abraham's willingness to obey implies the total annihilation of moral autonomy. The prevalence of this mentality as exemplified in this central part of the Bible is therefore an important element in the secular critique of religious ethics and politics.

POLITICAL AUTONOMY AND POLITICAL HETERONOMY

So far we have been concerned with the secular critique of religious *ethics* (and not politics). Ethics, from a secular perspective, should be independent of religion. And as the paradigm of nonautonomous ethics we dealt with the story of Abraham, willing to sacrifice his child when commanded to do so by God. Abraham is therefore a kind of anti-hero of moral secularism.

There is another dimension to secularism: political autonomy and the concomitant ideal of political secularism. Not only should morality be independent from religion but also politics. And just like with moral secularism, there are countless manifestations of the opposite of this ideal, to wit attempts to base the polity on adherence to one or several religions. The Bible provides examples showing how the tension between political secularism and religious politics is an important element of the sacred tradition. As Bertrand Russell wrote, the very early history of the Israelites cannot be confirmed from any source outside the Old Testament. For that reason, it is "impossible to know at what point it ceases to be purely legendary" (1945: 309). Moving forward in time, it happens that the first person mentioned in the Old Testament confirmed by an external independent record is at the same time highly relevant for our topic: King Ahab, King of Israel who ruled from c. 874 BCE to c. 853 BCE. (He is spoken of in an Assyrian letter dating 853 BCE). Ahab was enmeshed in a protracted conflict with a religious spokesman, the prophet Elijah. Elijah plays the same role for political secularism as Abraham played with regard to moral secularism, as a voice of denial.

Elijah promoted a firm monotheism that had to be defended against rival gods (Wright 2009; Kirsch 2004; Assmann 2006). He claimed that there was no reality except the God of Israel: no God but God (see Aslan 2005). Despite his good reputation in the Old Testament and the Qur'an (6:86), in contemporary terms we would regard Elijah as an extremely "intolerant" religious leader, at least if we take "tolerance" to mean that we put up with religious creeds other than our own (consult Ayer 1988: 96; Zagorin 2003: xiii). In his rejection of the foreign gods, Elijah did not mince words. As Leonard Levy writes in his study

Blasphemy: Verbal Offense against the Sacred from Moses to Salman Rushdie, "Inoffensive speech was not the hallmark of Elijah, Isaiah, or Jesus himself" (1993: 572).

Ahab was the son of the Israelite king Omri, who was already allied with the Phoenician cities of the coast. He had married Jezebel (died c. 843 BCE), the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon (the modern Lebanon). Jezebel played the role of the seductress. With her Tyrian courtiers and a large contingent of pagan priests and prophets, she propagated a rival religion to the religion of Israel: the religion of Baal in the royal city of Samaria. During the reign of Ahab there was thus not one religion in Israel but two. Baal was the chief god of the Canaanites. He was worshipped as a god of rain who made the soil fertile; sometimes he was also portrayed as a god of war. Throughout Israel temples were established to Baal on high places where, since the days of the Judges, he was worshipped. During the reign of Ahab, Baal worship became the court religion, which led to the confrontation with Elijah (Comay 1995: 43). In a modern pluralist society this would be nothing special, but this was not the way the prophet Elijah saw the matter. Accepting both Baal and Yahweh as objects of veneration made the Israelites guilty of blasphemy, apostasy, and heresy. (These are the kind of charges contemporary Islamist ideologues make against the royal family of Saudi Arabia.⁷) Jezebel's policies, and Ahab's condoning of these policies, also caused a kind of syncretism, a blending of religions together, which is also something that orthodox believers abhor.

The Bible tells us that Elijah devised an experiment that was supposed to demonstrate the existence of the one true God, the God of Israel, and also demonstrate the false claims of the prophets of Baal.

Let two bulls be given to us; let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the LORD; the god who answers by fire is indeed God. (1 Kings 20:24)

Needless to say, the god of Israel wins. The god of the prophets of Baal remains silent and the God of Israel ignites the pyre. On the basis of this success, Elijah also claims superiority over Ahab (and his wife) who had given the prophets of Baal some room to exercise their own religion. What Elijah wants is: one God, one religion, and one king who is totally committed to that religion (like Abraham was when he was prepared to offer his son).

The story about the struggle between Ahab and Elijah for political leadership is important for two reasons. The first is that this story manifests the superiority of the one true god, who is the God of Israel and not Baal. This is, supposedly, proven by the experiment on Mount Carmel. From the perspective of a secular critique of religious politics and ethics, the story of Ahab and Elijah is also important for another reason. What is established after the experiment is that Elijah, and not Ahab, is the supreme leader of the people of Israel. The moral of the story seems to be: "Listen to the prophet, to the religious leader, and not to the king, to the secular leader." It is the religious leader who has the direct line to God, not the secular politicians.

This interpretation is of major political significance, as one may expect. It means a "theocracy" is the right model of government and that the authority of a "priest," "pope," "ayatollah," or "imam" supersedes that of the secular leaders in the state. The struggle between Ahab and Elijah was only the beginning of the struggle between the religious powers striving for supremacy and the secular powers. The story of Ahab can also be read against the background of a "ritual humiliation" of the king, which was, according to some scholars,

an important element in the royal ideology of Judah, Babylonia, and Assyria. This ritual humiliation was meant to emphasize the "absolute dependence upon the favor of the deity" (Rosenberg 1965: 381). In its Babylonian form, the chief priest of the temple of Marduk, the patron deity of the city of Babylon, would take the diadem, scepter, and the other royal insignia from the king and lay them before the deity. "While divested of these signs of loyalty, the king had his ears boxed and pulled by the priest, after which he would kneel before the god and offer a prayer of penitence" (381). Then the priest announced to the king that his prayer had been heard. If the king looked after the welfare of Babylon and the temple, his power would be exalted. Subsequently, the royal insignia were restored to him.

As one might expect, this was not only a manifestation of the rightness of theocracy over democracy, but it also meant a boost to the importance of the priests. It de facto meant the religious leader was inaugurated in a position of power over the secular leader. From the "ritual humiliation" of the king in Babylonian lore to the completely opposite republican ritual humiliation of Pope Pius VII during the crowning of Napoleon I in 1804, the struggle between clerical leaders and the secular leaders would be an important element of political history. (Napoleon crowned *himself* and did not confer this important symbolical gesture to the pope.)

To modern ears the story of what happened on Mount Carmel, which, according to the believers, "proved" the supremacy of the God of Israel over Baal, may sound perplexingly naïve. In Spinoza's famous chapter VI on miracles of *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, the philosopher writes:

As men are accustomed to call Divine the knowledge which transcends human understanding, so also do they style Divine, or the work of God, anything of which the cause is not generally known: for the masses think that the power and providence of God are most clearly displayed by events that are extraordinary and contrary to the conception they have formed of nature, especially if such events bring them any profit or convenience: they think that the clearest possible proof of God's existence is afforded when nature, as they suppose, breaks her accustomed order, and consequently they believe that those who explain or endeavor to understand phenomena or miracles through their natural causes are doing away with God and His providence. ([1670] 1951: 81)

From a post-Spinoza perspective, miracles prove nothing, at least not what people who perform or solicit miracles claim they prove (divine intervention). Besides, is it not possible that the god of Baal is superior in many respects *except* in his ability to perform miracles? But this is not what should concern us here. Within the context of this chapter on the tension between religious ethics and politics on the one hand and secular ethics and politics on the other, this story is about the clash between the rival claims of the *king* and the *prophet* of Israel to have the final say on what the state religion should be. Who is the ultimate source of authority: the king or the prophet? The secular ruler or what is called the spiritual ruler?

In a theocracy, as the religious leader Elijah wants to demonstrate, this is the prophet. The king can be corrected and punished by the religious leader.⁸ It is also the religious leader who is authorized to inflict punishments upon the people and a disobedient king. In another episode of this conflict Elijah says to King Ahab: "Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord, I will bring disaster on you" (1 Kings 21:20). The king could have said: "Who are you to lecture about the religion of this realm?" The king could also have said, as Frederick the Great (1712-1786) did, that everyone in his kingdom could live according

to the religion of his own choice ("Jeder soll nach seiner Fassung selig werden"). Every state-mandated compulsion that Elijah wants to introduce in matters of religion is anathema to the modern human rights perspective and also to political secularism.

A secular critique of religious ethics and religious politics focuses on moral autonomy and political autonomy. The defense of moral autonomy (or moral secularism) and the defense of political autonomy (or political secularism) can be illustrated by many stories from Holy Scripture. Two of these stories stand out: the story about Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son and the story of Elijah aiming to crush the prophets of a rival religion.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights a specifically secular critique of religious ethics and religious politics. The secular critique takes as its starting point the ideal of *secularism*. Secularism is an ideal (or ideology) that comprises two elements: advocating *moral* autonomy and advocating *political* autonomy. Autonomy has several meanings, but in the context of secularism it means independence of religion. So moral autonomy means morality independent of religion. Political autonomy means politics independent of religion.

The aim of a secular critique of religious ethics and religious politics is to show that having an autonomous ethics is better than departing from a heteronomous ethics. This point is illustrated with the example of Abraham willing to sacrifice his son. It is also better to have an autonomous politics than a heteronomous politics. That point is illustrated with the story of the conflict between King Ahab and the prophet Elijah. Political heteronomy and moral heteronomy are important themes in the stories of the Bible. The editors of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Coogan 2007) spell out the central core of the teaching of the books of Kings. It is "didactic literature," and a repetitive theme is that the "only God there is, the Lord, demands exclusive worship."⁹ Worship must not involve idols or images. The world of the books of Kings, the editors continue, is a moral world, in which wrongdoing is punished, whether the sinner be king (1 Kings 11:9–13), prophet (1 Kings 13:7–25), or ordinary Israelite (2 Kings 7:17–20).

This world is totally different, one may add, from the moral lessons the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) teaches with its provisions on freedom of thought (Article 18), freedom of religion (Article 18), and freedom of speech (Article 19). Article 18 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 teaching, practice, worship and observance."

NOTES

1. On Dawkins, paragraph 3 of chapter 2, "Secularism, the Founding Fathers and the Religion of America," in *The God Delusion* (2006) is basically a defense of secularism and not of atheism. Chapter 3, "Arguments for God's Existence," is a defense of atheism. Regarding Hitchens, his use of the word "secularism" seems broader than that of Dawkins in *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007: 12, 39, 55, 68–69).

2. Falkenhayner (2014: 53) refers to the debate between Rawls and Habermas on the way British Muslims would have to make their objections to the publication of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. According to Rawls, religious objections to the novel had to be translated into a language that would be acceptable to all British citizens. But Habermas thinks that many religious citizens would not be able to do this without jeopardizing their existence as pious citizens. Religious citizens should not be forced to "secularize" their speech. But does not Habermas underestimate the capacity of religious citizens, one may ask? Does he not confuse religious citizens with religious fundamentalist citizens?
3. See Norman (1995: 159–207). And not only a *human* being; see Singer (1990).
4. A classic commentary is Kierkegaard's "A Panegyric upon Abraham" (1994: 11–18). See also Kretzmann (1999), Mleynek (1994), and Sandmel (1955).
5. At least some forms of Hinduism are polytheistic. There are also monotheistic elements in the Bhagavad Gita. See Taliaferro (2009: 8).
6. Consult Lewis (2003: 4) and comparisons of different fundamentalist forms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Fourest and Venner (2003).
7. See Pelham (2001). From the perspective of Islamist ideologues, such leaders are even sneakier than the openly secularist and atheist leaders of the United States and the former Soviet Union. In their case, at least, we know what we have. In the case of liberal sycophant pseudo-Muslims who present themselves as the representatives of Allah in this world, we are dealing with dangerous figures because not all serious believers see through their façade.
8. A medieval case serves as another illustration. According to some historians, Canossa, the now-ruined tenth-century castle southwest of Reggio nell'Emilia in Italy, was famous for serving as the meeting place in 1077 of Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV. The matter was a controversy over who possessed the rightful power of investiture of local church officials. On 28 January, Henry journeyed to Canossa as a simple penitent. The pope made him wait for three days before Henry received absolution. The name "Canossa" became associated with the submission of the secular power to the church. Whether the story is based on solid historical facts is disputed (McCabe 1939: 273). During Prussia's *Kulturkampf* against Roman Catholic influences in Germany, Bismarck promised, "Nach Canossa gehen wir nicht" ("We are not going to Canossa") (see Bury 1930: 163).
9. As stated by the editors of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Coogan 2007: 488).

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