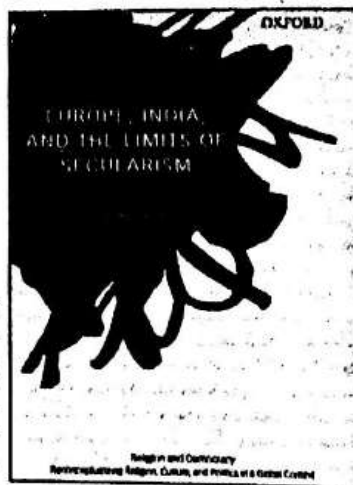


Negativity Of Toleration

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EUROPE, INDIA, AND THE LIMITS OF SECULARISM
By Jakob De Roover
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There is a kind of negativity which is inherent to 'toleration', and so has it been all through with 'liberal toleration'. Unfortunately, there have been far too few studies on the conceptual moorings of 'toleration' which only makes one wonder when commentators and scholars will start respecting the differences rather than merely tolerating them.

Although Roover recognizes the negativity of liberal toleration, he doesn't tell us anything about the negativity that 'toleration' as a concept is impregnated with, but he does introduce us to the negativity that 'liberal toleration' as a model of containing conflict and managing diversity is imbued with. Roover suggests that the contemporary liberal model of toleration is not only deficient in obviating the resurgence of religion in the public sphere, but it inherently carries in itself certain forms of intolerance towards the entities which fail to conform to the public/private distinction. Researching the contemporary with what I may call conceptual etymology, Roover tries to explain how and why secularism in the contemporary form remains incapable of obviating the current conflict and managing the presence of religion in the public sphere and how it carries certain forms of intolerance. This question remains the focus of this book.

The public/private distinction, Roover argues, originally remains a Protestant Christian theological doctrine which acquired certain forms of intolerance towards the non-conforming entities, which have remained wedded to it once it emerged from the confrontation of confessional and anti-confessional movements. The triumph of anti-confessional Christian movement, argues Roover, gave rise to a normative model of secularism and toleration which brought in an essential religious/secular distinction. This normative model gradually evolved in the contemporary model of secularism and toleration through the secularization of Christian freedom and the separation of the religious and secular.

Roover therefore perceives the crises of secularism not as the confrontation of Public/Private category distinction with external threats (resurgence of political religion) or the religions which do not recognize or

allow this fundamental liberal category distinction (like Islam), but because of the theological moorings of the religious/secular category distinction of secularism itself which otherwise appears to be a non-theological secular idea. This category distinction however remains a problem in itself as the clear demarcation of boundaries between the religious and secular is increasingly hard to establish and the definition of the religious simultaneously necessitates the definition of the secular which has largely remained elusive.

Any attempt to perceive the crises of secularism as the outcome of this confrontation and violation of liberal norms constitutes a misguided idea. So, argues Roover, that the crises cannot be located in any external confrontation or violation of its norms but remain rooted in the flaws which are internal to secularism and liberal toleration. In doing so, he works with the liberal distinction of the religious and the secular and their separation as the continuous expression of Christian theology which he convincingly argues has been secularized and internalized in the liberal political theory. Having known its theological foundations, secularism itself fails to emerge as a purely secular idea and the failure of states and religions to recognize the religious/secular distinction cannot be argued to be in contradiction with the 'real secular'. Since this distinction of religious and secular is a Christian theological idea, secularism fails to replicate this precise separation of domains outside where religions either do not recognize or allow this distinction or they fail to submit to this distinction.

Roover shatters the facade of secularity of secularism and liberal toleration and how under the tutelage of Protestant Christian reformation these concepts and principles emerge. How he shatters that facade is what forms the most interesting part of the book. Although he does not dispense completely with the facade of secularity around Locke and others, he certainly instantiates a re-

thinking of their ideas, as he succeeds in showing how the theological leanings of these ostensibly secular thinkers intersected with their political ideas. So, he does not hitchhike as most authors of political theory would prefer to in interpreting the ideas of thinkers like Locke, Bayle, and Rousseau. Instead, he traverses through different works from these philosophers and from his own cogitation provides us with an alternative reading of what otherwise is presupposed as an accepted fact of liberal secularity about these political thinkers.

However, when Roover introduces the change of context from western to the Indian one, he appears vague and unconvincing. He analyses how colonial India was being perceived by the British through the framework of toleration developed during the enlightenment era. The continuing reformation ideology, he argues, was replicated by the British in studying Indian society to arrive at a framework which ironically was conformed to and returned by Indian intellectuals implying that Indian society has and is continuously being studied through the British framework which in itself is a representation of Protestant Christian reformation. Through this adoption of liberal toleration, a break from the precolonial past was constituted which instantiated a loss of the structures which historically had allowed some sort of peaceful coexistence among different religious communities.

While arguing this, he does not present any concerted defence of his thesis. In the process, he leaves some of the fundamental questions unanswered in his analysis of the Indian experience with secularism, which constituted the focus of analysis in the earlier part of the book. If secularism is construed as 'equality of all religions' and not as strict separation of the religious and secular and on the contrary, religion has a due place in the public sphere, how does Roover's argument find relevance in the Indian context? Also, what explains that liberal toleration, which replaced the structures allowing peaceful coexistence in India, was imported with its modes of intolerance which in anyway do not remain inherent to it but were wedded to it through the clash of confessional and anti-confessional movements from which it emerged?

Although, this book does not tell us what the alternative secularism can be or should look like, it does provide us with a viable framework.

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