

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN TURKEY: THE PROMISE OF POLITICAL LIBERALISM*

MURAT BOROVALI**

Istanbul Bilgi University

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an alternative way of conceptualizing the relation between religion and politics, a topic of significant debate in Turkey. It puts forward an alternative justification for the requirement to leave religious convictions out of political discussions. In order to do so, it has recourse to the approach recently developed by John Rawls. The merits of this approach as well as the possibility of implementing it in practice are discussed, while also analyzing the question of sincerity in political deliberations.

Key words: *religious convictions, political deliberations, political liberalism, sincerity.*

SİYASAL LİBERALİZM: TÜRKİYE'DE DİN VE SİYASET İLİŞKİSİNDE YENİ BİR AÇILIM ÖNERİSİ

ÖZET

Bu çalışma din ile siyaset arasındaki ilişkiyi belirli bir yaklaşım aracılığıyla irdelemektedir. Dini görüşlerin siyasal tartışmalara katılmaması görüşünü yakın geçmişte John Rawls tarafından savunulan siyasal liberalizm anlayışı aracılığıyla gerekçelendirmeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu bağlamda, çalışma, siyasal tartışmalarda dini görüşlere yer verilmemesi şartının yol açtığı tartışmaların kuramsal ve olası pratik boyutlarını tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *din, siyaset, siyasal liberalizm, siyasal şeffaflık.*

The uneasy relationship between religion and politics in Turkey, though prevalent in much of the history of the republic, has generated, especially in the last decade, a high level of tension. The electoral success of parties with an Islamic heritage has brought to the fore a sometimes highly charged struggle over the proper boundary between religious convictions and politics. This struggle has created a polarization in Turkish society between those who adhere to a staunchly progressive,

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* Murat Borovalı is an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations at Istanbul Bilgi University, 34387, Şişli, Istanbul. E-mail: mborovali@bilgi.edu.tr

Enlightenment-inspired stand and those who claim that religion should have a greater role to play in the determination and justification of state policies. In this ongoing debate, while many see a strict separation of politics and religion as the *sine qua non* of the secular political regime, others argue that in an overwhelmingly Muslim society democratic politics require (at least to a certain degree) the admission of religious considerations to public political deliberations. While it does not seem likely that this debate will be resolved satisfactorily soon, an assessment of the proper relation between politics and religion (as well as other worldviews) in the framework of a constitutional democratic system can help one move the discussion to a perhaps more promising platform.

A constitutional democracy must aim above all to protect the equal rights and freedoms of its citizens. It will be held here preliminarily, and discussed in greater detail below, that by not using religious grounds as justificatory reasons for state policies, a secular regime is necessary for making possible and sustaining a constitutional democracy. On the other hand, the equal rights and freedoms under protection also clearly include freedom of conscience, and a secular democracy must provide unquestionably (equal) freedom to its citizens of faith as well. So it may be suggested that a constitutional democratic regime has (at the very least) the twofold aim of keeping religion out of politics while at the same time respecting the (religious) rights of its citizens. Is this a practically impossible task, containing in it two objectives that seem contradictory? This paper will try to argue that the answer to this question is negative. The discussion below will offer and defend the approach of political liberalism that, though greater in scope, aims also to keep religion and politics separate while respecting the equal freedoms of all citizens. This argument, in a nutshell, holds that in modern diverse societies, political discussion must be carried out with reference to commonly shared neutral values in order to avoid a sectarian imposition of the views and beliefs of some on others. Such an imposition will in turn not only mean an infringement of the equal liberties of citizens, but also result in division in society and also perhaps cause civil strife. This more general framework, it will be argued, provides a robust justification for leaving religious convictions out of political deliberations.

Before providing a discussion of political liberalism and how it can be implemented in practice, however, it may be necessary first to briefly evaluate two other grounds often presented as justification for excluding religion from politics. This brief assessment will also demonstrate the intractable side of the debate surrounding religion and politics, and pave the way for arguing that an overall solution to the issue needs, as much as possible, to avoid such possible grounds of irresolvable disagreement.

POSSIBLE GROUNDS FOR EXCLUSION

Religion clearly forms a crucial and integral part of the lives of many citizens. It is a key aspect of how individuals define themselves and make sense of their ethical, spiritual and social world. Why then should such an indispensable part of their being be left out of considerations of how society should be governed? What can be the grounds for such exclusion?

Inaccessibility

One possible justification may be that the person who relies on religious views in political discussions appeals to reasons that are not accessible to many others (Greenawalt, 1995: 39-43). That is to say,

others will not be able to comprehend or evaluate the speaker's premises, or the bases to which he refers in putting forward his views. To a skeptic or to an agnostic, the bases of the truth of these religious beliefs simply will be lacking. Being in this way inaccessible, a religious perspective will not make it possible for others to assess the accuracy of its truth claims. Therefore, relying on such reasons so that they guide political policy will leave it exposed to serious challenge from many members of society. Put in a broad way, if the affairs of society are to be governed in such a way that the policies being implemented must have justifications that are at least accessible to members of society, then religiously-driven political acts fail this test.

However, this way of arguing for keeping religion out of politics immediately draws the response that Islam, like any other major religion, has, especially in its core and crucial aspects, nothing that is inaccessible or incomprehensible. The Koran and the Hadiths, as well as the existing large Islamic written and oral tradition, provide all the bases for finding religious reasons accessible. The failure to comprehend these bases can stem only from the weakness of will or the sinful nature. Otherwise it could be based on the erroneous elevation of the human mind above the "divine mind." Hence, it will be argued that there are no obstacles (apart from self-imposed ones) to understanding religious claims, and that therefore such reasons should take their place in any deliberation about public political affairs.

Historically-Based Reasons for Exclusion

Conceding the strength of the objection to the inaccessibility criterion, one still can argue that accessibility, though necessary, is not a sufficient reason for the inclusion of religion in political discussions. One other ground for excluding religion from politics may be that historically, religious discord has been an important source of civil strife, and prizing peace and concord therefore should lead us to exclude religious arguments. Religious arguments and disagreements have led in the past, and today have the potential to lead, to acute dispute; inclusion in the public political debate of such sources of serious discord will bring only instability. Here the disagreement will be not only between citizens of faith and those who are skeptics or agnostics, but also between those who are religious, and more specifically for our context, Muslim. So the separation of religion and politics will serve the purpose of arranging the affairs of society in such a way that eliminates a source of conflict that historically has been very prevalent.

Somewhat similar to this historical ground for separation, another basis for exclusion may emphasize the historically experienced (or perhaps even content-based) implications of religion for democratic civil liberties. It will be claimed that a significant consequence of the religious outlook has been in the past (and today still risks being) that, for example, political and civil equality between the genders has been violated. Equal marital status, inheritance rights and more generally equality in principle before the law are essential cornerstones of a constitutional democratic regime, and religious perspectives have (had) consequences that meant infringements of equal democratic rights. So this argument for excluding religion derives its strength from the rejection of the possibility of the recurrence of historically experienced consequences. It is therefore a denunciation of these consequences that leads this argument to the rejection of reference to views that have these implications. Considering some of their (past) undesirable repercussions, it may be best to leave them out of political discussions and the decision-making process.

Yet these two historically based grounds for exclusion also may be challenged by citizens of faith. One may object first of all by claiming that, considering the long duree of history, religion has more often than not been an important source of unity and stability rather than of discord and conflict. One may point to numerous cases where Islam specifically has been a force of harmony (perhaps most notably during the Ottoman Empire) not only between Muslims, but also between Muslims and non-Muslims. Moreover, it will be suggested that conflict and strife are not the permanent features of Islam (or more generally of religions) as religious teaching has at its core the invaluable importance of peace and solidarity of humanity. While a critical evaluation of the historical record of Islam is clearly beyond the scope of our discussion here, it is worth noting that the argument for exclusion is stronger to the extent that religion is shown in history to have led to conflict. This, however, may not be sufficient on its own, as the question of feasibility also must be addressed. Even if the historical record looks indeed bleak, there seems also the requirement, on the part of the defender of exclusion, to hold justifiably that such religion-based discord is also currently likely. If, along with the changing historical conditions, the possibility of such conflict is less possible, the resistance to involving religion in political discussions correspondingly will lose its force. While the feasibility issue is very difficult to evaluate, the current state of political discussions in Turkey suggests that religion continues to be seen as a source that is prone to generating significant discord.

As for the “negative consequences” argument for excluding religion from politics, one common response embodies both a challenge to the accuracy of the claim about the alleged negative consequences and, more positively, an emphasis on the many good effects of religion for many. Starting with the latter, it is pointed out that religion provides many of the good qualities such as human goodness, brotherhood, and fairness that enable individuals to lead fulfilling and exemplary lives. The good qualities promoted by religion are important sources of virtuous conduct, enriching the character of a person as well as her relationship with others. There is, therefore, much that is to be gained by religion playing a role (perhaps even a central one) in the lives of individuals as well as in the affairs of the society. On the other hand, it also can be argued that the alleged “negative” consequences of religion do not follow in modern religious practices and ways of understanding religion. The interpretation of the relevant dictates within a modern context does not justify the referred consequences. That this is so also is confirmed by the practice in the great majority of countries where Islam specifically has a significant place in the administration of society.

Here again the strength of the response is not easy to evaluate. What is certain, however, is that despite the vigor of the response, there are areas of important and well-entrenched dispute over these issues. The proponent of the exclusion view may suggest that in light of the serious difference over the interpretation of religious dictates, and the difficulty of resolving them successfully, such matters of contention are best left out of the process of determining public policies. Political deliberations cover issues that are already very difficult to solve and, it will be suggested, government actions must first steer clear of areas the consideration of which will make the process of decision making more entangled. The third view that favors separation of religion from politics, though in a more general framework, advocates precisely this solution. It is to a discussion of this view that we now turn.

POLITICAL LIBERALISM

The approach of political liberalism introduced and defended in detail by John Rawls will favor what is helpfully described as “epistemic abstinence” (see Raz, 1990). It will advocate the leaving out of political views over which there is deep-seated and unavoidable disagreement in order to be able to reach broad and stable unity in arranging the political affairs of society. This argument will begin by drawing attention to what Rawls (1993: 175) labels as “comprehensive doctrines,” that is to say, conceptions of what is of value in human life, beliefs and ideals that inform and shape much of the conduct of individuals as well as their relations with others. A comprehensive doctrine will (depending on how encompassing it is) provide many of the values and virtues that govern the lives of individuals. Following this definition, it will be correct to say that religions are quintessentially comprehensive doctrines. There are, however, other such doctrines. Socialism, utilitarianism, the view (which may perhaps be labeled “positivist”) that “science is the one sure road of access to truth,” or even philosophical liberalism understood as promoting the critical, reflective and morally autonomous life of the individual can also all be classified as comprehensive doctrines. That in modern societies there is a plurality of such ethical, philosophical or religious comprehensive views is also a fact (called ‘the fact of reasonable pluralism’) that can gain strong support from a cursory sociological observation.

Moreover, due to what Rawls (1993: 55) calls “the burdens of judgment,” this plurality may not be a passing phenomenon but the result of free human reasoning. There will be insurmountable burdens that one faces when one tries to demonstrate the truth of one’s doctrine to others who do not already hold it. The existence of often conflicting and complex evidence; disagreement over the weight of different considerations; divergence over the interpretation of concepts; different personal experiences leading to diverse judgments; difficulty involved in making an overall assessment of different kinds of normative considerations of different force; and finally the inevitable necessity to sometimes choose between cherished values when making difficult moral choices are all factors that will lead to disagreement between reasonable people (Rawls, 1993: 56-58). This disagreement is not due to persons being “irrational,” narrow-minded or prone to making logical errors; it is much more deeply rooted in human reasoning and different individual experiences. In Rawls’ (1993: 58) words, it is “unrealistic – or worse, it arouses mutual suspicion and hostility – to suppose that all our differences are rooted solely in ignorance and perversity, or else in the rivalries for power, status, or economic gain.” If, therefore, the existence of a plurality of different comprehensive doctrines is an inevitable fact in modern free societies, then the imposition of the values of one comprehensive doctrine on others who do not adhere to it will be sectarian.⁽¹⁾ It will not only mean an infringement of the freedoms of many other citizens, but also cause divisiveness and create the serious potential for instability and ultimately civil strife. For our immediate purpose here, we can note initially that this argument justifies leaving comprehensive religious views out of political discussions because it holds that they will never command allegiance with anything like near universality. Both the sociological observation of the enduring plurality of doctrines, and the further argument that due to free human reasoning this plurality is in principle unavoidable, suggest that a constitutional democracy must try to avoid relying on reasons deriving from religious views as these form one comprehensive doctrine among many.

Before going on to explore how political liberalism will inform political discussions as well as the policies to be adopted by the constitutional democratic regime, it is worth considering a likely

challenge to the core of the political liberal approach. This challenge will contest the accuracy of the claim that there is an inevitable plurality of different world views (or “comprehensive doctrines”) in Turkish society. Echoing a statement that is often made by politicians and many others in Turkey, it will be pointed out that “we live in a country in which ninety-nine per cent of the population is Muslim.” Such a high degree of homogeneity, it will be argued, suggests that reference to religious values should not be set aside when affairs of society and state are discussed. In the light of this overwhelming dominance of Islam within the population, there should be nothing wrong in principle with religion playing a central role. Just the opposite, to keep such a fundamental and common aspect out of political deliberations will itself be undemocratic. Democracy and self-government must above all mean that a Muslim people would have a government that relies, to a certain extent, on Islamic values.

This challenge to political liberalism suggests that the diversity that is alleged to exist is not in fact present in Turkish society, or at least not to the degree that would justify leaving religion out of politics. Yet although the statement about 99% of the Turkish population being Muslim is factually correct, the conclusion drawn from it by the proponents of the challenge does not seem strong. For one thing, a substantial number of people in Turkey are not practicing Muslims, or obviously not “sufficiently pious.”⁽²⁾ Many may accept that they are indeed “errant Muslims” and yet still resent any state policy to make them pious. They will know the dictates of Islam but may be unable or even perhaps unwilling to put them into practice in their lives. Others may seriously question or reject interpretations of certain Islamic dictates that may conflict with some of their other beliefs (such as equality before civil law).⁽³⁾ More crucially, as the presence of the Alevi minority in Turkey that makes up around 15% of the population attests, there will be deeply rooted differences over understanding and practicing Islam, ways that have well-established religious, historical and cultural dimensions.⁽⁴⁾ Therefore the somewhat simplistic understanding of Islam as a homogeneous doctrine capable of a single interpretation or practical prescription is not warranted. There will therefore not be a unique interpretation of Islam as a single comprehensive doctrine. Even setting aside this heterogeneity within the doctrine, Islam also will not be as “comprehensive” for many as the proponents of the challenge would lead one to believe: religion will inform only *some* of the aspects of the lives of many individuals; it will co-exist in the practical lives of many with other (seemingly contradictory) values. Finally, it is also worth pointing out that yet others will be embracing doctrines (such as socialism) that will involve, at the very least, a serious questioning of religion.

The suggestion by political liberalism to keep religious reasons out of political discussions on the more general grounds that reference to comprehensive doctrines makes agreement impossible has important implications. Perhaps the most obvious of these is that the same principle of restraint must be applied to views that are anti-religious. An argument that supports excluding reasons based on religious premises also will have to advocate leaving out views that require a *rejection* of religion as their premise (Greenawalt, 1995: 63, 190). Recall that what the political liberal approach advocates is, in essence, that views that do not rely on commonly shared reasons must not be appealed to, in order to ensure stability and to avoid the imposition of a certain doctrine on others. Therefore a secular and constitutional democratic regime, to satisfy its democratic credentials, should not have public policy based on reasons that require a rejection of the beliefs of a majority of its citizens. It is in this way, to put it in a nutshell, that a secular state will avoid being an atheist state.

Equally, another consequence of political liberalism is that other philosophical or ethical doctrines,

such as socialism, staunch positivism or the stringent liberalism of Kant or Mill, that rely, for example, on specific understandings of freedom, of a worthwhile life, or individual moral autonomy, should not guide public policy. Those of a religious or communitarian bend seriously will question the worth of (say) liberal individual freedom or moral autonomy as necessary for a worthwhile life, and a political imposition on them of such views similarly will be divisive (Rawls, 1993: 37). Therefore a secular constitutional democracy will need to keep a distance from religious and nonreligious comprehensive views alike. According to political liberalism, state policies should reflect neither an affirmation nor a rejection of such views. The state will not pass (also as demonstrated in its actions) any judgment on the truth claims of the doctrines. This will mean that it will simply restrain from taking them into consideration, not taking them as appropriate reasons in the decision making process. Such process and the political discussion that accompanies it will involve a vocabulary made up of a *political* understanding of values such as freedom, equality, concord, peaceful coexistence and public welfare.

Will such a position lead to an impoverished understanding and practice of politics? By excluding so much from politics in the name of impartiality are we also leaving out the vibrancy and full character of the diverse views in society? In a related way, will not this “abstinence” cause a wholesale and artificial removal of extremely important issues from the agenda of society? Would it not be better to deal with conflicting values and hence try to secure, if not agreement, then at least greater understanding between the differing parties? These questions will be dealt with below, but here we may need to first consider a different challenge to political liberalism. This challenge will claim that the alleged neutrality (couched in the above terms) of the actions of the secular state is still far from being impartial.

The “Impartiality” of Political Liberalism

It therefore needs to be inquired first whether the secularism of the political liberal approach is still too biased against religious views. As was pointed out above, state neutrality will aim to ensure equal civil and political freedom for all. Yet neutral policies need not, and in some cases will not, lead to neutrality of effect. In a parallel way, it may be that abiding by such neutrality will not require equal sacrifice from the adherents of different doctrines. For instance, it may be easier for someone adhering to a nonreligious comprehensive doctrine to give public political reasons that are in line with the basics of a secular liberal democracy. The ideal of the politically equal and autonomous citizen of the secular democracy will be closer to her stand compared to that of a citizen of faith (Greenawalt, 1995: 83-84). Therefore the policies of the state will in their implications be more arduous for the religious citizen. Yet this difference in sacrifice from closely held cherished values must not be exaggerated either. Imagine someone who strongly adheres to the (“positivist”) view that science and state supported “enlightenment” of the citizen is crucial for attaining truth and the morally desirable way of life. The neutrality of the state that follows from the above discussion will also require this person to refrain from relying on her strict views in public political deliberations. Religiously devout citizens will not be inclined to accept that science is the one sure road to truth, or indeed that the model of a citizen that always critically and autonomously leads her life is a desirable one. They will object to public policies justified and designed to “save” them from their “backward” and “unenlightened” ways. According to the political liberal approach as presented above, the state also will keep its distance from the “aggressively progressive” views of the (positivist) comprehensive doctrine. By keeping all (religious and nonreligious) comprehensive doctrines out of the justification

of public policies, the neutral (and secular) state can claim that it asks from each ethical, religious, philosophical comprehensive view what it asks of all the others (Macedo, 1995: 480-482). It will aim to refrain from privileging one doctrine in principle, although, as we discussed above, the neutrality of effect is neither to be always expected nor guaranteed.

It also is important to emphasize that this neutrality does not entail impartiality toward *all* conceptions of the good. There will be certain comprehensive doctrines on which it will pass judgment and openly reject. In this sense the concept of neutrality also clearly carries in it some exclusionary limits. For example, someone who thinks that there is no salvation outside of religion and that this salvation requires and justifies civil strife necessarily will be restricted in his actions.⁽⁵⁾ A constitutional democracy aims above all to protect the equal liberty of all its citizens; this may mean that the actions of some will be restricted in order to safeguard the civil liberties of others. Freedom therefore cannot be interpreted narrowly as the liberty to practice the one true religion or the requirements of one doctrine with the accompanying exclusion of diverging ways that are considered (from within one's own perspective) to be erroneous or deviant. Neutrality following from political liberalism puts at its center enduring moral disagreement and suggests a principled way of cooperation in the light of this disagreement. To challenge this principle of neutrality by reaffirming the truth of one's doctrine means simply going back to what constituted the disagreement in the first place (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996: 67). An appropriate alternative to the principle of neutrality must be provided at the equivalent level of generality, and merely insisting on the truth of one's view clearly fails to do this.

There is, however, another challenge to political liberalism that needs to be considered here. This challenge requires us to ask whether, in trying to justify leaving religion out of politics, political liberalism has conceded too much. By ruling out reference to religious *and* non-religious comprehensive doctrines in political deliberations, is political liberalism throwing out the baby with the bath water? One way to interpret this challenge may be as follows: while it is proper that religious arguments should be excluded from political discussions, no similar restriction need apply to nonreligious doctrines in a secular regime. Secularism requires that politics be conducted and state actions be guided by reasons that are not derived from religion. If the grounds for this view are the sort of considerations that were discussed above, then it can be said that those grounds are not as strong or compelling as they first appear to be. More fundamentally, as the later discussion tried to show, a secular constitutional democracy must hold on not only to its democratic credentials, but also aim to be fair in its treatment of the views of its citizens.

If one of the main concerns of the rationale for secularism is to avoid the divisiveness that religious participation is (justifiably) feared to create, then the inclusion in political debate of certain other doctrines that have claims to truth (claims that are not shared by many others) also carries this danger of polarization. As to whether political liberalism concedes "too much" by being equidistant from comprehensive doctrines, the shared political values such as equality, concord and public welfare that it relies on enable it to promote the ideal of a principled and enduring stable order. Importantly, this "concession," rather than causing a weakness, may make possible an even stronger justification of secularism for our times. By detaching secularism from the staunchly pro-Enlightenment stand that it benefited from in the near past, political liberalism actually makes secularism invulnerable to the strong criticisms of the Enlightenment project (Rawls, 1996: xi). Thanks to its reliance on the commonly shared political values and protection of equal freedoms, the secularism of political

liberalism is in this way not another source of division and *Kulturkampf*, but one promising unity and stability. By demanding relatively less from religious and communitarian doctrines, while at the same time having its own strict limits, political liberalism has the potential to offer an understanding of secularism that can gain wider and more easily justified adherence in today's societies (see Taylor, 1998: 36-38, 52-53).

The Domain of the Political

We can now come to the discussion of the earlier mentioned challenge to political liberalism that the exclusion of reasons based on comprehensive doctrines from political deliberations will lead to an empty and sterile understanding of politics. According to this challenge, politics will be richer and the vibrancy of society will be better represented when the whole spectrum of existing views is put forward and differences are addressed fully in discussions. As a result of this process, when agreement is reached on issues previously in contention, there will be a deeply rooted harmony. Even when no agreement is reached, this rich debate will generate a greater understanding between the opposing parties and lay the foundations for peaceful co-existence. A healthy and genuinely stable regime is possible through not a setting aside of values closed held by citizens, but by a democratic politics that accurately reflects the diversity within society (Raz, 1990; Mouffe, 1993; Waldron, 1993: 835-842).

The first point that needs to be made in regards to this particular challenge is that it does not, as it stands, exclude religion from politics. As secularism is the topic under scrutiny here, it would be necessary to try to see how the approach underlying the above challenge relates to a discussion on secularism. Clearly, a position that supports a broad inclusion of diverse views also will bring religious arguments into political discussions. It perhaps may be suggested that in already dominantly secular societies, the introduction of religious arguments will not bring instability, but will enrich society culturally, morally and spiritually. Their inclusion also will be matched by the presence of other doctrines that will add positively to discussions. Yet in many other societies, religious disagreements have the potential to seriously harm the fabric of civic life and be an important source of strife. The belief in the richness of broad discussion, when not justified, can easily result in polarization and instability in society. Part of this debate was addressed above already, but further light can be shed on the strength of the challenge by turning to an aspect that has been postponed until now.

This aspect concerns the scope of the restrictions to be imposed on political deliberations and decision-making. How big is the domain of politics in which reference to comprehensive doctrines (including religious ones) is to be excluded? Put differently for our purposes here, when it is said that "religion and politics should be kept separate," what exactly is meant by "politics"? One way to define politics may be such that the restriction will apply only to discussions about coercive laws and measures (Audi, 2000). Alternatively, one can adopt a wider definition so that the restriction also will apply to most government actions, especially when the use of public funds and educational policies are concerned. Clearly, the former understanding will better (though, of course, not fully) accommodate an approach that favors unbridled introduction of different views (with full reference to their respective sources) into public debate. Accordingly, it will be argued that when coercive measures, i.e., measures that restrict freedoms, are at stake, it will be very important in a constitutional democracy to try to reach wide agreement, and therefore the principle of exclusion may

be justified. In other kinds of measures and policies, on the other hand, it is important that the range of differences in the society be taken into account and represented in government decisions. While this view has its advantages, it needs to be remarked that issues such as educational policies or the use of public funds in most instances will be important for citizens generally. Here it will be critical that public funds not be used to advantage systematically the holders of a certain doctrine. If, conversely, certain groups are at a continuous disadvantage due to the discriminate use of public funds or partial educational policies, then the neutrality of the state will be compromised seriously in the eyes of many citizens.

Another way to determine the scope of the principle of exclusion may be to adopt the route taken by Rawls and consider only constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice as making up the domain of the political (Rawls, 1993: 212-254; 1999: 133-134, 156-164). One may suggest that only when matters of fundamental importance for the political order of society, matters such as the essentials of the regime, are concerned, should reference to doctrines over which there is deep disagreement be ruled out. That is because, considering the overwhelming importance of such issues, debate over them would need to be conducted in terms (such as political equality and freedom, peace, public welfare) that would be acceptable to all. This can be ascertained only by citizens engaging in what is called “public justification,” i.e., argument addressed to others.⁽⁶⁾ This is vital in light of the necessity of reaching near universal agreement on the essentials of the political regime *and* of having this agreement respect the equal freedoms of citizens (so that the process does not result in a sectarian imposition). Wider public dialogue concerning many affairs of society may be conducted with reference to comprehensive doctrines, but discussion over constitutional essentials should be carried out on the basis of commonly shared reasons. Delineating the domain of the political in this way will help bring about agreement over the constitutional essentials while the background democratic culture will be enriched with a wider exchange of diverse (and perhaps even radically opposed) views.

It is important to remark here that this demarcation, with the principle of exclusion only applying to matters of constitutional importance, does not constitute an inconsistent position. What is more, it may even make a wide democratic discussion healthier by first securing agreement on the essentials of the regime (Greenawalt, 1995: 114).⁽⁷⁾ When citizens deliberate against the background of agreement on the basic aspects of the political order, they may with greater confidence put forward their differing views and engage in a dialogue that will reflect greater trust, civility and understanding toward one another. Therefore, with a widespread allegiance to a political system that impartially safeguards the equal basic freedoms of all, the moral, philosophical and religious disagreements may, rather than cause deep division, actually strengthen the democratic culture.

THE QUESTION OF INSINCERITY IN POLITICS

The discussion in the preceding sections tried to work out the implications of adopting political liberalism for regulating the relation between politics and religion. The scope of the principle of excluding religious reasons from political deliberations, that is to say, the question over what sort of discussions should be conducted without referring to religious (or indeed other comprehensive) views also has been dealt with. There is, however, an important remaining issue that needs to be addressed: can the exclusion principle really be implemented in practice? Is a clear separation of politics and religion possible in practice?

On a superficial level, it is not too difficult to see how this can be ensured. The principle will be satisfied when state actions or government policies are not decided on, or justified by, religious reasons. Yet the seeming simplicity of this test also points to a possible failure to address an important complexity. This is related to the broader issue of sincerity in politics: the possibility that government officials, and more broadly political actors, will rely on religious convictions in their private reasoning but will state neutral political reasons in public deliberations. This aspect of the question of insincerity in politics, which has been the source of an important debate (the issue known as “*takiyye*”) in Turkey, can be discussed in at least two different ways. The first may draw attention to the possibility that the supporters of a religious view will pay lip service to the values of constitutional democracy to gather support, only to discard those neutral reasons and practices when the political climate enables them to impose their comprehensive beliefs on others. This suggests that (at least some of) the supporters of a religious view will have a “hidden agenda,” and choose to tactically adopt a neutral public political discourse while biding their time for the appropriate moment. The second form which insincerity can take is more subtle, but equally important to address. This will happen when the neutral public reasons offered by political actors will actually be covers for the true (religious) convictions. It could be useful to discuss these two aspects of the issue of insincerity in greater detail.

The Hidden Agenda Charge

It is clear that the “hidden agenda” charge directed at certain political actors is not easy to evaluate. Obviously, if there are other expressed views by these political figures that contradict their public statements, then the charge will be all the stronger. Although unlikely, it is possible that such an open contradiction can take place, because the holders of the hidden agenda also will need to appeal, even if infrequently, to their political base. This may be necessary for them in order to sustain the movement and show their determination to their followers. When this happens to a notable degree, the clear inconsistency between these two sets of discourse will appear, revealing the lack of sincerity of the political actors in supporting the existing political regime. Obviously, on the other hand, it also is possible to think that the success of the hidden agenda strategy depends on the adherents of the (true) view to keep it concealed. Yet this carries with it the above-mentioned danger of alienating the political base and weakening the resolve and commitment of the group of followers. So there clearly are serious tensions in trying to sustain this “double act.”⁽⁸⁾

Having noted this, it must also be said that when the public statements of the holders of a religious view are not contradicted (by and large) by their other expressed views or political actions, then the hidden agenda charge loses much of its force. This is because the claim to know the “true intentions” of a group of citizens (or political actors) then becomes largely based on conjecture. It mostly tries to argue that the holder of the doctrine cannot possibly move from the adopted premises to a neutral political conclusion that can appeal to others. It suggests, for example, that religious beliefs cannot support conclusions that promote democracy. Yet this stance has clear weaknesses. First of all, it requires someone who does not adhere to a doctrine to pass judgment on the process of correct reasoning within that worldview. In most cases, it does so despite the existence of a different expressed interpretation by the holders of that doctrine. Indeed, all the major religions have in fact significantly established interpretations that strongly promote values such as tolerance and freedom. Also, the hidden agenda charge seems to overlook the reality that in religious belief, as in most comprehensive doctrines, those who hold a view sometimes do it in a somewhat loose and even

seemingly inconsistent way. It is not at all unusual for people to hold beliefs that some of their other values seem to contradict or even perhaps require them to reject. It is quite frequently the case that people sometimes support conclusions that others outside that doctrine think they “must” reject.

Therefore, in light of the above remarks, the grounds for doubting the sincerity of the speaker do not seem strong when the public statements are in conformity with the essentials of constitutional democracy. Moreover, all things considered, one can reason that in a relatively strong constitutional democracy, the existing checks and balances, as well as the open society that the system nurtures, make it very difficult to keep and put into practice a hidden agenda to overthrow the regime.⁽⁹⁾

Public Reasons and Private Convictions

There is a second aspect to the question of sincerity in politics that is relevant to our analysis. This is that when specific policies or political actions are discussed, there is the possibility that the neutral public reasons offered by political actors simply will be covers for the true motivating convictions. The speaker will seemingly abide by the principle of excluding religious reasons in political discussions, but the conclusions that he or she will be arguing for actually will be deduced (in the mind of the speaker) from the “true” and privately kept beliefs. Now why should it matter that the expressed public reasons are different from the unasserted premises as long as the reached conclusion is the same? One answer may be that agreement on the matters concerning how society is governed will be more stable and sustainable when there is also a broad accord on the type of reasons that motivate reasoning in public deliberations. Expressed reasons and unstated premises will not yield similar conclusions over a range of other judgments even though they may do so in a number of cases.

At any rate, the strategy of adopting this form of insincerity on the part of the speaker is not likely to be an effective or even sustainable one. It is true that the publicly stated reasons will be formulated so as to appeal to others. Now this may take a form that need not be objectionable. In a society in which a sizeable group of citizens do not share the premises of the speaker, prudential concerns may suggest that a politically promising way may be to state the arguments in terms that will be publicly acceptable and easier to evaluate from the perspective of others. So in many cases it will be desirable to “translate” one’s values into terms that will be more in line with the dominant political vocabulary. This may even be argued to foster mutual understanding and increase the possibility of agreement. Here, of course, the person who in private adopts religious values may question why the onus is on her to “translate” her values into political terms rather than expecting her terms and values to be the point of reference in public discussions. Yet in today’s modern, complex and diverse societies the possible grounds for reaching common agreement would require (though in perhaps varying degrees) some “translating” from the holders of every comprehensive doctrine: participation in the public dialogue and reasoning would require this to some degree from each comprehensive doctrine.

Yet it is possible that this can take a more sinister form, one that has the potential to damage political dialogue. This will happen when the political actor does not believe (in their general form) in the public values to which he or she refers. The speaker uses them instrumentally and opportunistically, benefiting from the fact that they in this instance support the desired conclusions. The publicly made arguments will refer to neutral political reasons while in fact the hidden private and inherently contestable views are the real premises that motivate the expressed opinions. To make the discussion more concrete here, let us imagine someone who advocates the adoption of strict measures to regulate

the sale of alcohol.⁽¹⁰⁾ This person publicly argues in favor of the measures by emphasizing, for example, the need to decrease the occurrence of instances of drink-related crime and disorder, or of drunken-driving, as well as the desire to protect minors. Yet let us assume that the real reason why this person is in favor of the measures is his belief that alcohol consumption is a sinful activity, and that the less alcohol is available, the better it is from his perspective. Clearly, his private view leads him to think that the best measure is one that totally bans alcohol consumption, but still the proposed measures will go some way to create an atmosphere that is preferable to the status quo. His publicly uttered reasons can be said to be of secondary importance to him, as the real basis for his position is his religious belief.

Here is a case of someone who seemingly adheres to the principle that religious arguments should be kept out of political discussions, while in truth it is religious reasons that provide the real basis for the defended conclusions. Does this case of insincerity pose an insurmountable problem for the exclusion principle? The answer to this question seems to be negative. We may begin by noting that while at a certain level of generality (“the sale of alcohol should be regulated”) the expressed reasons and the privately kept beliefs will converge on the conclusion, when the specificities of the proposed measures are discussed, this will be much less likely. Issues such as how to regulate the sale of alcohol, in what locations and under what conditions to ban its sale will be subject to discussions where there will be divergence between allegiance to the above-mentioned public concerns and the private grounds. Since policy-specific discussions will in practice take place with reference to public concerns and values, it is meeting those concerns that will be the paramount aim. Almost certainly, the adopted measures will fall far short of the outcome that would be generated by the reasoning of the person relying (in reality) on the unstated reasons. To the extent that the speaker pushes for policies stronger than what would be warranted for meeting public concerns, his formulations in public deliberations will yield bad and unconvincing public reasons. That is because in such cases the political argument will derive its real force in the mind of the speaker from the hidden premises. This in turn will diminish the strength and the quality of the stated argument, since the latter still needs to be cast in publicly acceptable terms: deprived of their real force, the offered reasons (for stricter measures) consequently will be easier to challenge in public dialogue.

It is of course true that, as pointed out above, the adoption of measures (though not completely satisfactory) will still be preferable for the speaker (from his religious standpoint) when compared to the earlier situation. Yet the measures also will create a better state of affairs for the whole of society, since minimizing instances of drink related disorder or protecting minors from alcohol consumption are desirable outcomes in themselves. It certainly would be wrong to refrain from taking a correct step and implement a right public policy because such a policy also would be preferred by some who adhere to a view that is not by and large shared by a sizeable section of society. A policy will be right if it is supported and justified by neutral values and political reasons. That such a policy also would be supported by some who would see it from their perspective as second-best but still desirable should be immaterial for deciding on the correctness of that policy. Moreover, there are also prudential reasons for not refraining from adopting such a policy, because its adoption will take away the correct part of the private reasoning from the “insincere” speaker while leaving the publicly unacceptable section exposed and weak.

In yet other cases, using public reasons as cover for true comprehensive beliefs will generate arguments that will be open to extensive challenge with little possibility of even partial acceptance by

the public. Imagine this time someone who argues that secondary education should be separate for boys and girls. Assume further that this person is against mixed education (especially when pupils are at adolescent age) on religious grounds, but refrains from presenting these reasons. Instead, he argues that separate education is to be preferred as it makes it easier to maintain discipline in the classrooms and teach pupils more effectively. Now this argument, by its nature, is open to public scrutiny and the correctness of its claims will be tested by relevant scientific approaches. Whether mixed or separate education on its own is a variable that significantly affects the performance of pupils in standard examinations is a question that can be settled with some certainty by the appropriate pedagogic analyses. Moreover, this by itself may not be sufficient either. Even if the relevant debate produces a conclusion that shows the beneficial aspects of separate education, there are other considerations that need to be taken into account. It may, for example, be argued that even if mixed education is inferior to its alternative as judged by the standards of effective teaching, raising active citizens for the future requires above all a social environment of healthy, open and close relations. It may be suggested that ties of civility to one another, close cooperation, and harmony in gender relations are equally (and perhaps more) important values that need to be instilled during secondary education. While the specificities of this issue are beyond the scope of our discussion here, what is important to note for our purposes is that once certain public reasons are expressed (even if only in the form of paying lip service), the debate will shift significantly to a platform where the feared “success” of the strategy of “insincerity” will become much less likely to materialize.

One other aspect of this form of insincerity concerning the adoption of neutral public terms and values in political deliberations needs to be pointed out. This also can be illustrated with the help of an example. In the debate in Turkey over the existing ban on female students wearing the Islamic headscarf while on university premises, some (though by no means all) writers and politicians of Islamic persuasion also have used arguments that rely on democratic rights and freedoms. In their most general form, these arguments refer to the requirement of respecting choice, and more specifically the right to dress as one wishes. This is seen as a case of the exercise of a basic freedom. While the debate over the Islamic headscarf contains many other arguments that cannot be discussed in detail here, the position against the ban in some of its formulations treats the existing restriction as a clear violation of basic rights and freedoms.⁽¹¹⁾ Now there is no convincing reason to think that all those (of religious conviction) who argue against the ban in this way are in any way insincere in their arguments, but let us assume for the sake of our discussion here that some indeed are. If these people in fact do use the rights and freedoms argument instrumentally in order to advance their case, this form of insincerity can be said to expose their overall position in an important way. For while arguing in favor of respecting personal choice and freedom in the case of the wearing of headscarves in universities, they will find it almost impossible to deny that type of freedom and choice in other contexts. For example, the general position that they adopt in this case can be used to undermine, say, an argument *for* a ban (or very strict regulations) on the consumption of alcohol, or for imposing restrictions on dressing in ways that would be deemed unacceptable from a religious perspective. Adhering, if only in public deliberations, to certain principles therefore will introduce an important dilemma for the insincere speaker: either he will be forced to generalize his statements to generate conclusions in other contexts that he will be less likely to accept, or if he fails to do that, then his inconsistencies will be revealed.

CONCLUSION

That religion and politics should not mix is a view frequently put forward in political discussions in Turkey. However, the way in which this view usually is formulated and defended leads to the charge that its proponents are adhering to a very strict and militant understanding of secularism. This leads to the further claim that the democratic rights and freedoms of citizens of faith thereby are infringed. Whatever the merits of this particular challenge, our discussion above tried to propose a different justification for leaving religious convictions out of politics. Adopting a more general framework, it tried to use the insight of political liberalism to shed some light on the current debate, with the hope of moving the discussion to a more promising platform. Above all, it maintained that, in light of the inevitable plurality of conflicting worldviews (or comprehensive doctrines), the aspiration to attain a stable constitutional democratic system is served best by excluding from public political deliberations any reasons derived from such comprehensive doctrines. This rationale led us to argue that religious convictions also must be kept out of politics as these convictions are part of one (though a very important one) comprehensive doctrine among others.

This paper suggested that a promising way to realize the wish to avoid a sectarian imposition of values on those who do not share them is to appeal to public values such as equality, concord, peaceful co-existence and public welfare. Respect for the equal freedoms of citizens in a society of complex diversity and plurality can be ensured by avoiding reference to grounds over which there will be fundamental and perhaps inevitable disagreement. By leaving such grounds out of the discussion of matters of fundamental political importance, political liberalism tries to secure agreement on the essentials of the constitutional democratic order.

Some may claim that such a strategy of avoidance is unnecessarily cautious. More specifically, they will argue that religious grounds in an overwhelming number of cases will lead to a support of democracy and hence contribute to the stability of the regime. A relatively unbridled public discussion will demonstrate that many of the contributions will reveal support for the democratic order, and by eliminating the reasons for the caution, will increase trust between citizens. Yet, despite the merits of this view, when there are deep divisions in the society and an endemic fear about the stability of the democratic regime, as seems currently to be the case in Turkey, a better course to follow will be to take grounds for deep-seated conflict off the political agenda.

It is at the same time clear that this strategy of expunging religion from politics, in order not to be sectarian itself, needs to be part of a larger neutral approach. That is why all citizens, and not only citizens of faith, are to refrain from invoking reasons based on their comprehensive views in political discussions. By requiring from each holder of a comprehensive view what it asks of all the others, this understanding of politics tries to demonstrate that it is not putting any view at a systematic disadvantage. With state policies not being justified either by religious convictions or by, say, staunchly positivist views of progress, but by commonly shared neutral political values, citizens of diverse beliefs will find the political order more accommodating. It is true that they will be asked not to appeal to certain values that they cherish, but at the same time, the universal implementation of this restriction will ensure that they will not face the imposition by the state of a certain worldview (or doctrine) that they do not embrace. More specifically, for our purposes here, an understanding of secularism formulated within this framework, while regulating the relation between religion and politics, also will remove the sometimes-expressed complaint against it that the equal freedoms of

citizens of faith are infringed. In this way, the secularism of political liberalism will ask less (for example, when compared to a staunch Enlightenment stance) from the citizens of faith, but, precisely because of this, will be more insistent on what it demands.

Finally, as argued above, the question of the sincerity of certain political actors who apparently embrace the principle of exclusion should not be as big a source of concern as is usually thought. A relatively strong constitutional democracy, accompanied by an open society, will be important guarantees in hampering (if not totally eliminating) the chances of the “success” of those who hold a hidden agenda to overthrow it. When, on the other hand, public reasons are used as covers for the true motivating convictions, this form of insincerity also is very likely to be unsuccessful. Even if some participants in the public political deliberations only pay lip service to neutral values, their seeming acceptance of the terms of debate will significantly weaken their expressed position. Therefore, once the principle of exclusion is accepted and abided by (regardless of the underlying motivation), the issue of insincerity becomes much less of a threat. What is of paramount importance is that political actors, and more generally citizens, refrain from invoking reasons derived from religious (or secular comprehensive) beliefs. This paper tried to argue that political liberalism provides a strong justification for requiring them to do so.

NOTES

1. “In the society of the Middle Ages, more or less united in affirming the Catholic faith, the Inquisition was not an accident; its suppression of heresy was needed to preserve that shared religious belief.” See Rawls (1993: 37).
2. For instance, around 31% of the respondents in a sample that represents the Turkish electorate defined themselves as “very religious,” with 54.9% defining themselves as “somewhat religious,” and 12.4% as “not religious.” The same survey revealed that 53% of all respondents did not pray five times a day. See Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2000: 43-45).
3. The same study by Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2000: 71-73) showed for example that 81.4 % of the respondents do not endorse the Islamic arrangement of inheritance (which provides a smaller share for women).
4. The literature on Alevis in Turkey is voluminous. See, for example, Shankland, (1999; 2003), Zeidan (1999) and Öktem (2002).
5. On Rawls’s discussion of “unreasonableness,” which is broadly his criterion for exclusion, see Rawls (1993: 60-66, 152-153; 243-244). Also, see Rawls (1999: esp. 177-178); and Quong (2004).
6. Such an argument “proceeds correctly from premises we accept and think others could reasonably accept to conclusions we think they could also reasonably accept.” See Rawls (1999: 155).
7. However, see also the final sentence on page 120 of Greenawalt (1995).

8. The debate concerning the sincerity of the members of the Welfare Party and the Prime Minister of the time, Necmettin Erbakan, is discussed in Toprak (2005). Toprak (2005: 173) points to the dilemma faced by the Welfare Party leadership, which was “[s]queezed between exigencies of attempting to become a ‘catch-all-party’ of the center-right versus the expectations of its radicalized followers.”
9. During the 1990s in Turkey, the “relative liberalization of the political system” and the “more open system of information flow,” led the Welfare Party to be under the close “scrutiny of the public eye.” See Toprak (2005: 175). Due to some of their private statements being made public, members of the Welfare Party had to try, often unsuccessfully, to convince the electorate of their support for democracy. A survey revealed that over 42% of the respondents in a sample that represents the Turkish electorate did not think that the Welfare Party believed in democracy. See Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2000: 64).
10. This example has some basis in reality. The debate over the attempts by the government in late 2005 to regulate the sale of alcohol included some of the points discussed in the text above.
11. For recent discussions of the headscarf issue in Turkey, see, for example, Özdalga (1998), Arat (2001), Kalaycıoğlu (2005), Borovalı and Turan (forthcoming).

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