

key liberal principles. But agreement on the basic foundations of this minimal secularism is compatible with large disagreements about justice, and minimal secularism can accommodate both a progressive liberal state (*Secularia*) and a conservative liberal state (*Divinitia*).

This, I hope, is a response to those who worry that liberalism, far from being a potentially universal framework for the democratic and fair resolution of conflicts about religion, is in fact the sectarian, comprehensive ideology of Western progressives—the religion of liberals.

Egalitarianism and the Epistemic Standards of Public Reason

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Laborde's elegant and persuasive book is a major contribution to contemporary political theory. By drawing out clear analogies between the liberal state's obligations toward religious groups and its duties to other kinds of groups, Laborde's "disaggregative" approach makes visible distinct normative pillars that tend to get blurred together when we talk about religion alone. Laborde's take on liberalism is also appealing for its frank and refreshing engagement with historicist, poststructuralist, postcolonial, and realist critiques of liberalism. She does not deny or elide liberalism's tendency to "Protestantize" religion as a social category, or deny liberalism's roots in Christian and European worldviews. Instead, she argues that we should judge the validity of liberal ideas on the basis of arguments, not origins. Laborde's own arguments for "minimal secularism" offer a more expansive view of what can count as a legitimately liberal egalitarian state. Relatedly, by acknowledging the "multiple secularisms of modern democracies" (142), Laborde's work invites deeper engagement between comparative political theory and the analytic tradition, a timely move for our discipline.

I focus on a particular element in Laborde's approach that I think is not entirely successful, with implications for the democratic qualities of her version of liberal egalitarianism. Laborde's disaggregation of the criteria of public reason that make for "the justifiable state" and the criteria of egalitarian respect that make for "the inclusive state" are, I believe, more thickly intertwined than she suggests. If we take the principle of egalitarian respect as primary, we are led to more inclusive criteria of public reason than

Laborde allows, not just in the informal public sphere of wildly differing opinions, but in the formal institutions of the state as well, in particular the democratically elected legislative assembly.

Laborde's account of the "justifiable state" proceeds from a critique of the conception of public reason that we find in Rawls's political liberalism. The Rawlsian conception, she argues, fails to adequately distinguish between three distinct wrongs of state appeals to religious reasons: the epistemic wrong of coercing nonbelieving citizens in the name of reasons they do not understand and cannot engage as democratic reasoners; the wrong of treating citizens unequally by favoring the dominant religion in state practices of justification; and the wrong against citizens as self-determining agents when the state coerces compliance with religiously motivated policies that conflict with their own beliefs. Laborde's reconstruction focuses on the first, epistemic wrong, reframing public reason as "the collective reason of democratic publics" in which "state-proffered reasons for laws must be articulated in a language that members of the public can understand and engage in" (119). She distinguishes between "intelligible" reasons (understood within a speaker's own doctrine or epistemic standards, but not necessarily understood by other agents), "shareable" reasons (understood and endorsed by all), and "accessible" reasons (understood, but not endorsed, by all) (120). In contrast to the Rawlsian emphasis on reasons' shareability, Laborde argues for the less demanding standard of accessibility.

An especially appealing feature of Laborde's standard of accessibility is that its "empirical" account of public reason allows us to recognize that in some contexts religious reasons are unobjectionable as public reasons, and indeed "may provide the only currency of public reason" (128). Thus Laborde, like Habermas and to a certain degree Rawls, recognizes the sociohistorical situatedness of public reason, which must draw upon the ideational resources a society has inherited as the medium for public justification. Many of the characteristically liberal ideas of justice and equality originated historically in religious traditions. The concepts that circulate in public language are now "secular" only as a result of their long engagement with reasons that originated in different belief systems, a process through which they come to be separable from their theological or communal origins. "Public reason becomes secular *because of pluralism*" (129; emphasis in original). What matters for a public reason capable of justifying state action is not that its reasons are secular, but that they are accessible, "that they are understood by members of the public, and that they provide a common currency of argument and debate" (128).

I applaud Laborde's historically situated account of public reason, in part because it provides a needed theoretical bridge between the concepts of sociological legitimacy and normative legitimacy. Yet her account of how reasons that originated in a particular religious tradition become "secular" and "accessible" to all citizens in pluralistic societies does not address a fact that is important from an egalitarian point of view: this process is not

innocent of the power relations that structure the society in question. A historical and empirical approach to public reason such as Laborde's should make it easy to acknowledge that in societies deeply structured by relations of inequality and domination, the process by which the reasons of the dominant group become public reasons, accessible to all, is shaped by those relations of domination. That the reasons of the dominant group become "accessible" to citizens from dominated groups is not hard to understand. We might turn, for example, to W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of "double consciousness" to grasp that for dominated groups, understanding the reasons that inform the judgment of the dominant group is a matter of survival. But the reverse does not hold: members of the dominant group do not need to understand the reasons that inform the judgment of the dominated, or even to be aware that they have reasons for judgment and for action that are different from their own. The reasons of the dominated, some of which arise from the experience of being dominated, are not "accessible" to the dominant, and that is constitutive of the structure of domination. Indeed, sometimes those reasons are not fully accessible even to the dominated group, just because they are invisible or inaudible within the public culture of reason that pervades the society they inhabit. That is why emancipatory social movements sometimes need to carve out discursive enclaves to generate, through discursive exchange, the articulacy of the reasons that arise from their experience.

The implication of these egalitarian arguments is that "intelligibility" rather than "accessibility" is the standard of public reason that ought to prevail, not just in the wide informal public sphere of citizen opinion (as Laborde agrees) but in formal public institutions as well, including especially democratically elected legislatures (which Laborde believes should be subject to the "accessibility" standard: 124–25, 280n27). As Laborde argues, the liberal state's claim to legitimate authority turns on its democratic credentials, its claim to "represent a wide plurality of interests and identities, not mere majoritarian will" (294n5). Citizens have a profound interest in having the reasons that are valid *for them* recognized *as reasons* in the public sphere, at least when they regard their reasons as having public salience. This interest is strong even when their reasons are (as yet) inaccessible to other citizens because of differences in foundational beliefs, differences in social experience that arise from systemic inequality, or differences in cultural practices.

Let me briefly illustrate this argument for setting the bar of "official" public reason at the level of intelligibility rather than accessibility with a much-discussed example: the speech of Carol Mosely-Braun, an African-American senator, objecting to the renewal of a Senate-approved design patent for the insignia of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which included an image of the Confederate flag. Mosely-Braun invoked the experience of African Americans for whom the flag represents an ideology of white supremacy. When she made the argument in 1993, it was "intelligible" but not "accessible." It was rooted in an experience that was not shared by any of the other senators in the chamber. Twenty-five years later, when Confederate flags

have been removed from state capitol buildings and Confederate statues are being toppled across the United States, the reasons for eradicating or modifying Confederate symbols are now “accessible” to the citizenry as a whole. But it was not wrong for Mosely-Braun to introduce these reasons when they were only “intelligible,” and it was not wrong for the Senate to accede to those reasons by denying the patent (as they did).

In conclusion, let me suggest an implication for Laborde’s liberal egalitarian argument as a whole. Although she does not argue for the normative or logical priority of the “justifiable state” over the “inclusive state,” she does put her argument for public reason before her argument for egalitarian respect. The gist of my argument is that there *should be* a priority ordering between these two criteria of legitimacy, and it should be reversed. For the liberal state to be democratically legitimate, egalitarianism should be *constitutive* of the epistemic standards of public reason, and not only an external constraint.

Liberal Modesty and Political Appeasement

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One of the stranger features of the rise of authoritarianism is that it is accompanied by the emergence—or reemergence—of radical critiques of liberal principles and liberal practices. What is strange is not that authoritarian apologists would offer such criticisms. More surprising is the infighting, polarization, and radicalization of thinkers who one might have expected to resist authoritarian impulses.

This is T. S. Eliot, who gave the 1933 Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia, and made his thesis the rejection of liberalism, and who repeated the performance in 1939, with his publication of *The Idea of a Christian Society*.¹ As the Nazis were coming to power and then as they were marching across Europe, apparently the important thing to do was attack liberalism. It was liberalism’s fault that society had lost its way, liberalism’s fault that society had no moral spine, and liberalism’s fault that

¹See, respectively, T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer on Modern Heresy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934); T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture: The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Harcourt, 1948).