

Creed, Spirituality, and Bicameralism

William E. Connolly

I think of reasoning (or deliberation), arts of the self, and micropolitics as inter-involved modalities of private and public life that are not entirely reducible to one another. You reason, alone or with others, when you ask how to realize a set of goals or to modify them in new circumstances. You practice arts of the self after, say, you have acknowledged that some element in your faith promotes unnecessary suffering for others and/or is inconsonant with other prized elements. That element clings to you or you to it even though another part of you would like it go. An Augustinian might call this a will divided against itself.

You may now apply tactics of the self to loosen the hold of elements in your being below the level of full articulation or control. You might meditate, or pray, or go for a long slow run after allowing the issue to percolate, or prime your dream life before going to bed to see what alternative possibility emerges at daybreak for review or deliberation. Often, of course, such practices require a long time. So you might adopt ascetic practices or act experimentally upon a series of role performances in which you have been enmeshed. Arts of the self and role experiments work on passive syntheses in our identities and faiths that are below the reach of direct intellectual control.

What about micropolitics? Well, in a media-saturated age, micropolitics can take the form of media assemblages of images, rhythm, words, and ideas that tap into the subliminal anxieties, hopes, or attachments of entire constituencies in ways that exceed the filters of deliberative attention and regulation. Micropolitics involves interaction between discursive priorities and nondiscursive thought-imbued tendencies. It is ubiquitous. So, you can't simply eliminate micropolitics in the interests of avoiding manipulation. The question of manipulation and the best modes of response to it now become both urgent and complicated, as Redhead sees so admirably.

Reasoning, arts, and micropolitics are simultaneously inter-involved and not entirely reducible to one another. So when I saw the title of Redhead's book I assumed that he might focus on the first aspect and not the other

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two. It turns out, however, that he considers the complex interrelations between at least the first two. He does so to explore how to act upon the “baggage” we bring with us into thinking, faith, and politics. As you reason with others, prejudgments about the character of God, or being, or time, or the shape of normal sexuality, or the relation between culture and nature infiltrate into those modes of public deliberation. In the 1960s many straights deliberated between defining homosexuality as either a sin or a sickness to be treated benignly. Few were aware of another possibility; and indeed it was very possible that this third possibility, if articulated, would pose a threat to their (our) own sexual confidence. It took distinctive combinations of role enactments, deliberation, social movements, and macropolitics to retune dominant orientations to same-sex relations. Gay identity and gay rights became new cultural formations, unsettling the prior alternatives of legitimate identity. Pluralization was in the air, and arts of the self and micropolitics played roles in opening up positive responses to these critical initiatives.

When we work through our own baggage, we apply mixes of deliberation, arts, and micropolitics. Sometimes a newly emergent formation will codify something that was implicit in prior practices. Sometimes our old orientations become more rigid. And sometimes the formation relieves suffering in a way that brings something novel into the world. Here the relation of the past to the future is one of pluripotential *incipiencies* that become trimmed and consolidated into actuality, rather than a process by which the implicit becomes explicit. All this means, as Nietzsche, James, Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze all saw in their own ways, that “intellectualism” is insufficient to ethical and political life. We need techniques that touch efficacious molecular processes that both communicate with discursive practices and exceed them. Baggage.

Perhaps I should place another assumption on the table. Some people talk about the pursuit of “compulsory pluralism,” as if pluralism were a luxury that disrupts the reasonable pursuit of a centered nation. To me, however, a speeding up of several aspects of cultural life joined to the acceleration of the global dimension of politics accentuates pressures to pluralize territorial societies along multiple dimensions (e.g., onto-religious creed, sexuality, ethnic orientation, gender practice). So the task of maintaining torsion between an established regime of plurality and the politics of pluralization now becomes a civilizational imperative for those who wish to minimize or avoid systemic violence.

We live during an age of minoritization. It is sometimes difficult to decide which modes to embrace and which to forbid. But the issue cannot be suppressed by reference to a classical ideal of centered nations, or Kantian morality, or a simple secular division between private plurality and public discourse. Not everything should be pluralized, certainly. Pedophilia and capital punishment, to me, are beyond the pale. But within broad limits the pluralization of culture can only be stymied today by practices of violence,

exclusion, and punishment. The biggest dangers today come from drives toward a centered territorial nation, a neoliberal, disciplinary economy, a theocratic state, or a rigid secularism. The recent surge in the construction of territorial walls provides one index of the pressures upon old ideals of the territorial nation. The shameful growth in the percentage of beleaguered minorities imprisoned provides another.

So, a politics alert to minding the strife and interdependence of pluralism and pluralization is not a luxury. It is essential, even while the exact shape of the boundaries of pluralism must periodically come up for debate. This means that the difficulties encountered in negotiating pluralist civic virtues do not count against their pursuit. They point to a need to intensify the effort. Redhead and I concur on these points, I think, but I do feel the need to assert them explicitly.

How do you negotiate the periodic torsion between the politics of established pluralism and the politics of pluralization by which a new identity, creed, or right is sometimes placed on the public register? Leaving to the side for now the cultivation of “critical responsiveness”—as the dicey process by which we come to terms with new candidates for identity or faith or right—let’s focus on “agonistic respect,” the civic virtue to cultivate between constituencies who already have a place in public life. In such a relation as you articulate publicly something that counters an element in the creed of others, *you also accept the agony of hearing and feeling the force of the alter faith*. Agonistic respect is a two-way street in that, first, each party expresses its faith while listening respectfully to expressions from others, and, second, each absorbs an element of agony that comes with close contact between these different expressions.

The pursuit of agonistic respect can thus be a risky enterprise, as elements in your faith begin to groan and ripple. To acknowledge the contestability to others of the existential faith to which you are attached is to open the possibility that an encounter with another will shake and transform you. Such an encounter can thus be both agonistic and agonizing. It is, nonetheless, a civic virtue of deep, multidimensional pluralism because such reciprocal virtues enable a positive ethos of engagement to emerge from which collective settlements can be negotiated. It is an essential public virtue of democracy during an era of minoritization.

Those versions of secularism that demand that all parties leave their creeds in the private realm when they enter public debate make dubious assumptions about the separation and sufficiency of public reason. They underplay the pertinence of baggage in public life, as Redhead addresses so poignantly in his engagements with Rawls and Habermas. The counter idea is to respect secular opposition to a theocratic state while pursuing the civic ideal of bicameralism. “Bicameralism” means that when it is pertinent to the issue you bring aspects of your existential creed with you into the public realm. Then you recoil back without deep resentment to acknowledge its contestability in the eyes of others (and often parts of yourself). You practice such a

doubling to explore creative possibilities of negotiation with others. Often enough, the situation before you is new, so some old commonalities are likely to require creative adjustment on all sides as the negotiations proceed.

Is this too glib? Or, does the urgency of the time make bicameralism and agonistic respect cardinal civic virtues to pursue? Redhead poses a version of this question to me by asserting that I have not come to terms sufficiently with the difficulty some parties face in pursuing the virtues of deep, multi-dimensional pluralism. I am sure he is correct about that. But, still, I will push back respectfully. Here are a couple of things he says: "A theist is in effect always a potentially pernicious participant in a deeply pluralistic Connollian public sphere" (305). "The problem with Connollian deep pluralism is that it has little to say in regard to the issue facing committed theists as to how people deeply immersed within theistic traditions can and do practically reason among each other and also with nontheists" (307). "Connolly nevertheless doesn't work through the differences between *the relatively undemanding hold his faith, immanent naturalism, places on himself and the more demanding commitments other faiths place upon their members*" (311, my italics).

My initial response to the first sentence is to say that I have entered into dialogues with diverse theists such as Charles Taylor, John Thatamanil, Fred Dallmayr, Talal Asad, and Catherine Keller. It seems to me, at least, that something positive has come out of these exchanges for the parties involved. I note also that Redhead's last sentence singularizes me and collectivizes deep theists. But there are many non theists today and institutional settings in which we meet and commune together. Many universities provide such forums. Hence there is little need to make such a distinction. More pertinently, I have elsewhere noted how many "new atheists" are "potentially pernicious participants" in an ethos of deep pluralism, if and when they treat all theists as somehow backwards and fail to recoil back on themselves to acknowledge the relational contestability of their deepest confessions of faith.

I want to suggest that we are in fact *all* potentially pernicious participants in deep pluralism. Such a general condition, whether its terms are equal or unequal, speaks to both the fragility and indispensability of deep, multidimensional pluralism.

But let's turn to Redhead's core contention. What is the basis of his confidence that proponents of immanent naturalism find it easier to pursue bicameralism and that the demands placed upon theistic communities are more demanding? I have previously protested the distinction some theists make between "believers" and "unbelievers," even as they support tolerance for the latter. The attribution of "unbelief" to us implies that atheists negate something without replacing it with a positive creed imbued with a distinctive ethos. It also underplays how such a faith circulates back and forth between the molecular dimensions of habit and articulate formulations.

How confident should Redhead be in his judgment of asymmetry here? To what extent has he plumbed the richness and density of immanent naturalism

as it finds expression in, say, the work of Gilles Deleuze? Deleuze's task is to thicken the experience of immanence as he focuses on incipient periods during which uncanny processes of creativity find expression in life. His attachment to immanent naturalism touches his attraction to those modest moments of creativity in which we participate. He also seeks to deepen our attachment to multiple entanglements with nonhuman beings and forces, both within and around us. It may not be *that* easy to recoil back on such thought-imbued dispositions and beliefs once they have become entrenched.

A recent book by Joshua Ramey, entitled *The Hermetic Deleuze: Philosophy and Spiritual Ordeal*, among other things tracks a prehistory of Deleuzian sensibilities in minor variants of Catholicism. These minor forms of Catholicism and the minor tradition to which Deleuze is attached often bend toward each other before bouncing in different directions. Does enhanced awareness of the ways in which these two minor traditions touch provide one way for contending parties to negotiate presumptive generosity to each other across lines of mutual opacity? Is one line of connection, perhaps, that both traditions encounter sites of opacity within themselves as well as the other? Anyway, once you have imbibed the faith of immanent naturalism, often after having worked your way painfully out of a theistic tradition that was handed to you, it may be easier to enrich and deepen it than to let go of it. Part of the baggage all of us carry is perhaps a preliminary tendency to attribute depth to ourselves and superficiality to others.

Perhaps another way of putting this point is to suggest that a relation of agonistic respect between Redhead and me involves internal discomfort, sometimes even agony, on both sides. Each pursues a faith that is opaque in some respects to the other and to oneself: each strains to forge spiritual connections across that abyss.

I concur with Redhead that some devotees of divine transcendence, such as William James, play up the mystical side of their faith more than its creedal side, though James does indeed advance the creed of a limited God operating within folds of time rather than above them. However, I do not yet see how such a difference of degree necessarily coincides with a difference in the extent to which the faith of James is entrenched by comparison to, say, Charles Taylor's more creedally involved faith. James, to me, is both tenacious in his faith and insistent in supporting a public life that sustains a plurality of faiths. Taylor evinces a similar bicameralism, starting from a creedally rich perspective. Two modes of bicameralism.

But, still, should not a theorist of deep pluralism acknowledge differential degrees of difficulty in pursuing bicameralism? Yes. Redhead's generic point is well taken. But perhaps such differences, while real, do not correspond closely to a differential organization of creeds. They may be bound more closely to how constituencies become bound to the same creed. Some are more engrained in their faiths than others; some have more difficulty getting through the day than others because of class position, illness, old age, misfortune, or loneliness. Differences that exceed distinctions of creed.

Perhaps the thing to emphasize today is how *spiritual affinities* across significant *differences of onto-creed* and *social position* periodically break into the world. And how people confessing the same creed often exhibit considerable spiritual diversity. One Augustinian may embrace an omnipotent, benevolent God while detecting heretics everywhere. Another may adopt the same formal creed and express presumptive appreciation of diversity in this world. The same goes with respect to atheists. Presumptive generosity may find expression in some and accusatory sensibilities in others.

I am not saying, either, that we can all agree exactly on what “spirituality” means. Clearly, the very meaning of the term varies across creedal lines. But I am talking about *spiritual affinities* across creedal differences. Creedal and spiritual dimensions are thus inter-involved without being entirely equivalent.

That is one important reason, among others, that differences in creed, class, insecurity, gender, age, and sexuality do not translate automatically into different ethico-political stances, much to the dismay of social scientists and critical theorists seeking to identify preexisting blocks of political perspective. The spiritual dimension cuts through and across the other differences, complicating and sometimes confounding them.

Can this very complexity open a door to formation of a new pluralist assemblage in politics? We do have a recent example of a formation on the counterproductive side to consult. A creative and powerful resonance machine emerged in America a few decades ago between the right edge of evangelicalism and the right edge of neoliberalism. It is still in play. The two factions do not coincide in creed, though there are crossings. But they express profound affinities of spirituality across creedal differences that have enabled them to exercise hegemony in America for almost forty years.

Today more of us need to fold world-affirming spiritualities into cross-creedal relations as we seek to organize a pluralist, counter-resonance machine. Such a pluralist assemblage might pursue deep pluralism, a reduction in inequality, and a positive response to the advent of the Anthropocene. If it becomes vibrant it will not be governed by a single onto-creed, be centered in one class, or be controlled by a single party. Its participants will mobilize affinities of positive spirituality to form a militant pluralist assemblage.

Such a projection of possibility does not now find ample expression in the world. It is improbable. It may even be a pipe dream. But its *possibility* nevertheless speaks to an urgent *need*. Under current circumstances it is wise to counter the politics of probability with a politics that links possibility to need. Reading between the lines, I suspect that Redhead and I concur on this point.

I have profited from Redhead’s generosity and critiques as I try to work through the challenges he poses. If I have not yet successfully reworked all the baggage he identifies in my thinking, perhaps there is still time to do more work.