

The Further Development of the Liberal Political Tradition in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century and Its Connection with Secularization

In previous weeks we looked at proposals for new ways of organizing society, which in various ways tended to redefine the scope and nature of organized religious groups on public life, particularly in the areas of economic production and political debate.

- Locke, of course, still had a role for religion (at least “reasonable Christianity”) insofar as religious claims coincided with what could be independently known (and known as *good*).
 - This meant that if reasonable people dialogued for long enough, giving reasons for and against positions, eventually it would become clear what values were fundamental and what should be done.
 - Religion could remain on the sidelines as a (tolerated) voluntary association, but it brought nothing new and unique to the society that could command public agreement and be the basis for agreed policy.
 - Religious communities were more a prop and a support to facilitate the quest of reasonable individuals privately pursuing what was good for them.
- Mill, developing ideas found in Hume and in Bentham’s utilitarianism, tended to view religion with suspicion (as a source of unenlightened superstition and group-ish barbarism that might be an obstacle to toleration and social progress).
 - For Mill, what was important was the instinct to pursue enlightened self-interest.
 - Since our interests can only be realized through discussion and cooperation with others, sociality and cooperation are necessary to realize one’s own goals, a limit which provides boundaries to the power (and use of power) of any one individual.
 - Each reasonable, educated person is able to perform the calculus of what will lead to lasting happiness (not just short-term gratification) for them and act accordingly.
 - This pursuit could occur without necessarily requiring religious discourse or religious communities.

In the late nineteenth century and twentieth century, there was a further development. As Stolzenberg notes in her article “Liberalism in a Romantic State,” there comes to be a distinction between two forms of liberalism.

One is an older, rationalist conception of liberalism, like what we saw in Locke and Hume, where the disciplined, rational self-governance of educated men is the dominant idea.

- Reason is opposed to instinct and desire.
- Reason must guide and discipline instinct and desire.
- Where instinct and desire oppose reason, reason must oppose, suppress, and war against these.
- Freedom lies in reason’s capacity to control, dominant and suppress instinct and desire.

This rationalist model has Stoic roots and in various forms was endorsed by the Renaissance humanists, the Cambridge Platonists, and particularly the Scottish Enlightenment (from which it passed, via the Presbyterian college system, into American evangelicalism).

By and large, the rationalist model tended to preserve traditional social arrangements (like marriage, fidelity and the family structures generally commended by traditional religious communities).

In the early nineteenth century, the Romantic movement argued that the prevailing views of reason (=earlier rationalist model) were unhealthy and misguided.

- The rationalist model failed to appreciate non-rational qualities that were intrinsically connected with human happiness, such as love, passion and emotion.
- The cool use of reason undervalued the human person and relied primarily on instrumental models of thinking about things, which reduced the individual human person into a means to some other end, not something that was a goal in itself.
- The rationalist model also failed to recognize, appreciate or cultivate the peculiar genius of the human person, which was creativity (being innovative and generative of new value).
- Without an appreciation of the latter, rationalist models are oppressive and destructive of the human good and must be opposed.
 - This makes it increasingly difficult to specify what constitutes “harm,” since what could count is so vague and could potentially include such a wide variety of things. Is it just what the individual subjectively feels is offensive or limiting?
- To the extent that religious communities endorse rationalist models or try to limit the individual’s pursuit of what he or she feels to be good for them, religious communities and their teachings must also be opposed.
- Here freedom lies in creative exploration of the world that engages our emotional (affective) life without external restriction.
 - You can see the beginning of this idea already in Mill’s *On Liberty*, in which individuals need to be allowed a complete liberty of thought, expression, and emotion and the freedom to pursue different tastes, even if they are deemed immoral by others. (Mill thinks the opposite course of action will always be worse/more harmful in the long run.)
 - Mill and the Romantic movement agree on the inherent value of individuality (which grounds and is connected with certain rights); this was not part of Locke’s account
 - Individuality in Mill’s account does much of the same work as rationality in Locke’s account, except that individuality tends to
 - privilege doubt about the value or usefulness of other’s opinions and
 - thrive on contradiction (the assertion of individuality over against another/the others/the society in general).

The romantic version of liberalism had its greatest success in regard to things which in the early modern period had been reduced to being part of the private sphere and had significant affective/emotional content, i.e.

- romantic/sexual relationships (increasingly detached from traditional long-term commitments like marriage and childrearing or marriage was converted into something contractual, from which one could easily withdraw when one felt unfulfilled)
- religion, seen more as a matter of feeling and faith that allowed one to connect intuitively with higher things, rather than of instrumental reasoning concerning economic production or public policy. (This way of viewing religion became easier to adopt when male church attendance declined in the second half of the nineteenth century, leading to the feminization of religion during the Victorian period.)

The point of today's lecture is to look at how the liberal political tradition shifted from rationalist models to romanticist models and how these romanticist models influenced educational reformers (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century) and the development of modern psychology (in the early twentieth century, particular after the 1930's).

With respect to education, roughly what happens is that

- an external model of educational formation (memorization, repetitive rote work, use of the school to commend religious morality as the way to civic virtue)

gets replaced by

- an internal model of educational formation (learning as a personal quest for self-discovery, including opportunities for self-expression and affective engagement ["How do you feel about this?"])
 - The educational system that promoted this ideal was
 - structured by reference to developmental psychology (to run the classroom in accordance with child-centered education and preparation of the child for life in society)
 - provided an alternative basis for education and a rallying point for reformers across the nation
 - managed with the techniques of efficiency supplied by business administration to scientifically organize and administer schools,
 - organization→complexity→specialization and differentiation
 - professionalization: educational monopoly (over abstract knowledge and diagnosis/evaluation/measurement plus techniques of correct practice, typically delivered through the public university system) reinforced through a centralized process of certification→autonomy of educational bureaucracies from local systems

- while
 - dropping any notion of religion as particular and distinctive and
 - increasingly seeing religious personnel (as generalists) as being unsatisfactory
 - retaining a minimal list of morals and values as a social control mechanism but without reference to religion (e.g. anti-bullying assemblies, presentations warning of the dangers of drug abuse="what is good for society").
- Educational discourse therefore went from treating (Protestant Christian) religion and religiously-inspired ("Judeo-Christian") ethics as the essential backbone of education to treating it as neither unique nor distinctive (nor even singularly useful in forming and creating the rational, moral citizen).
- "The common school movement...argued with evangelical fervor that education could no longer be left up to the whims of the family or to the special interests of religions" (Peck and DeHaan, "Reforming Education" 359).

This allows for the public sphere (educational system as a part of the state) to promote and develop a new way of being a self, where religious concerns are treated as not universalizable and therefore irrelevant if not detrimental to the educational process and to scientific advances that would create a more prosperous, civilized, well-ordered society.

- What is not universalizable is not scientific, but is parochial, local and sectarian and will promote conflict, thus adding to, rather than resolving the ills of society.
 - These ways of knowing (the scientific and universalizable vs. the local, parochial knowledge of sectarian religious movements) are opposed and antagonistic to each other. They do not supplement one another as kindred ways of knowing; rather science, as universalizable, can and should explain away religion (claims about the unseen arising from fear, the need to control nature or satisfy primitive desires, and mistaken views of natural causes), science having corrected our understanding of these matters. If this is not done, unreason will lead to injustice.
- By contrast, scientific study of human nature (sociology, psychology) claimed "to possess the means to acquiring the kind of expert knowledge that would properly reorder the nation and secure for it a progressive future" (Smith, "Secularizing American Higher Education," 105). This established the cultural authority of secular (and secularizing) human-science professionals who could guide the development of the educational system and other structured institutions that were helping to create a new order in the public sphere (which promised "order, control, safety, health and prosperity" [Smith, 106]).