

Religious Neutrality is Not Enough

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Talk presented at the Rationalist International Conference
Cambridge, UK, July 2019

Secularism

- **much more than religious neutrality.**
- **SEPARATION between State and religions must be added.**

Defining Secularism:

Four Principles

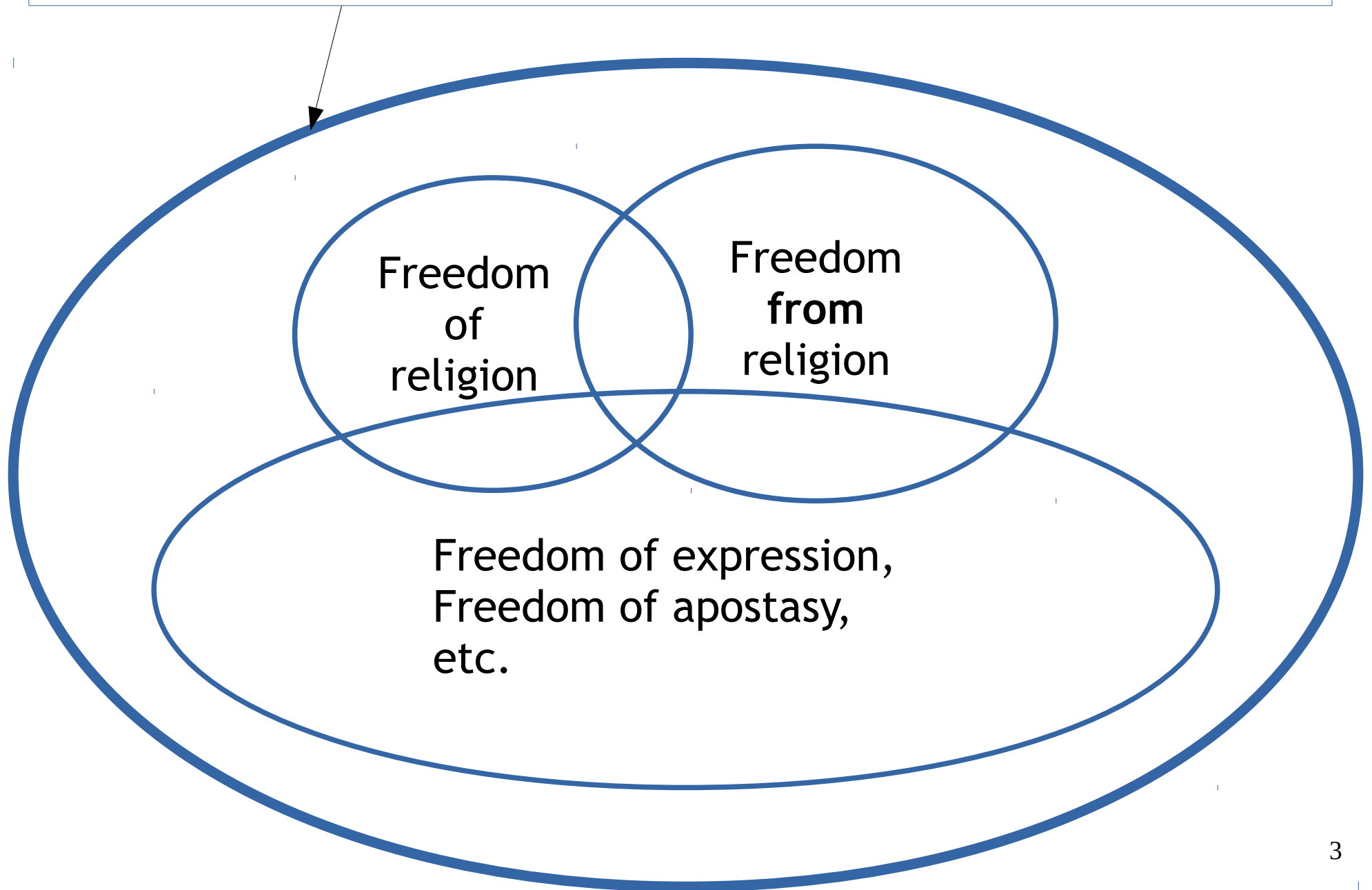
1) Equality

2) Freedom of conscience

3) Religious neutrality

4) Separation between State and religions

Freedom of Conscience



Religious Neutrality

Two interpretations:

→**Weak:**

- Neutrality among religions
- **Excluding** non-religion or non-belief.

→**Strong:**

- Neutrality among all convictions, whether religious or non-religious, belief or non-belief.
- Atheists included.

Without separation, religious neutrality degenerates into its weak variant.

John Locke

“A Letter Concerning Toleration”

1689



Major reference for “secularism” in the English-speaking world.

Tolerance of religious diversity,
BUT:

- no tolerance for Catholics
- certainly no tolerance for atheists!

- Weak religious neutrality
- Lockean pseudosecularism
- similar to First Amendment of US Constitution.

- Communitarian, not universalist
- Modern Lockean pseudosecularism adds atheists as another “religious” community in an attempt to correct Locke’s atheophobia.

“Diversity”

- A favourite buzzword of pseudosecularists.
- “Multiculturalism” is a euphemism for cultural relativism and communitarianism.
- **“Diversity” (religious or otherwise)**
 - A fact of life, neither positive nor negative in and of itself.
 - Not an argument for secularism.
 - At best an argument for weak religious neutrality.
- Even a religiously monolithic society needs secularism.
- “Open secularism” = anti-secularism of the 21st century.

A More Compete Secularism: Add Separation

France

- *Laïcité*: constitutional principle separating political power from religious organisations.
- 1881-1882: Primary school free, compulsory and *laïque*.
- 1905: Law of Separation between Churches & the State
- **Inspired similar approach in other countries:
Turkey, Mexico, etc.**

To distinguish it clearly from Lockean pseudosecularism,
I refer to **LAÏCITÉ** as **REPUBLICAN SECULARISM**.

Republican Secularism

republicanism: (lower case “r”)

- Citizenship in “a republic under which the people hold popular sovereignty.” -- *Wiktionary.org*
- Pragmatic approach to governance based on science and rationality.

State must be independent and autonomous of baseless supernatural beliefs and practices because religions with political power are very dangerous.

Hence **SEPARATION:**

- keeping religious interference out of State and government
- strengthening religious neutrality
- protecting equality and freedom of conscience.

Republican Secularism IS Secularism.

Secularism & Atheism

- **Atheism** = a personal stance adopted by the individual.
- **Secularism** = a principle of governance adopted by the State.
- Secularism is to State governance as atheism is to personal morality.
- Common foundation: the non-recognition of divine authority
- Separation of morals from religion.

Religious Neutrality vs. Secularism

	Religious Neutrality	Secularism
Constitutional and Legislative provisions	Non-sectarianism. Example: First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, “ Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion , or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”	Separation. Example: French secularism law of 1905 whose title is explicit: Law of Separation between Churches and the State
Freedom of Religion	Freedom of religion declared without conditions. Example: First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. ”	Freedom of religion declared, but not absolute. Example: France 1789 “No one may be disturbed because of his/her opinions, even religious, provided that their expression does not trouble public order as established by law. ”
Prayers in legislatures, municipal councils.	Several prayers , reflecting the religious demographics of the population.	No prayer. Possibly a moment of silence.

	Religious Neutrality	Secularism
Religious symbols worn by public servants	<p>Allowed, even while on duty. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RCMP in Canada allowing Sikh officers to wear the turban instead of uniform headgear. • Various police forces in Canada allowing the hijab worn by policewomen. 	<p>Banned while on duty. Examples: Quebec Bill 21 (positions of authority only)</p>
Religious symbols worn by new citizens during swearing-in ceremony	<p>Allowed, even during ceremony. Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zunera Ishaq wore a niqab during citizenship ceremony thanks to the <i>Canadian Multiculturalism Act</i> and <i>line 17(1)b) of the Citizenship Regulations</i> -- citizenship judge must allow “the greatest possible freedom in the religious solemnization or the solemn affirmation thereof.” 	<p>Banned during ceremony. Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government issued a directive to ban the niqab, but was overruled by federal court. (This is not to say that that government supported secularism.)
Politicians seeking votes	<p>Politicians practice clientelism, seeking votes of particular ethno-religious “communities” by wooing and pandering to self-appointed community leaders.</p>	<p>Politicians and governments appeal to all citizens universally and avoid targeting special interest groups.</p>

	Religious Neutrality	Secularism
Management of religious diversity	<p>Multiculturalism, a euphemism which implies communitarianism, with recognition of “communities,” especially ethno-religious groups. Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Canadian Multiculturalism Act</i>, The Canadian government considers religious diversity a positive good to be protected and promoted. 	<p>Universalism, treating all citizens equally, regardless of their religious affiliation (or other particular identity) or lack thereof. The State is blind (or should be) to the religious or non-religious identity of the individual.</p>
Freedom of Speech	<p>Privileges granted to religion by either restricting criticism of religion or by allowing religions to propagate hatred. Examples from Canada:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old anti-blasphemy law (§296) repealed BUT anti-Islamophobia motion (M-103) adopted. • Hate Propaganda law in Criminal Code has religious exception, strengthened in 2003 when “sexual orientation” added to Code as a forbidden motive of discrimination. 	<p>No privileges granted to religions. No legal recognition for so-called “blasphemy.” No restrictions on criticism of ideas and ideologies. (HOWEVER freedom of speech nevertheless threatened recently...)</p>

Separation & Neutrality, Both in Fact & in Appearance

- **State-religion separation**
 - public services neutral both in fact and in appearance
 - religious neutrality of the second, strong kind.
- **Both the State's physical installations and its human agents free of religious symbolism.**
- By banning the wearing of religious (or anti-religious) symbols by public servants while on the job, the State commits to treating all citizens equally and fairly, regardless of their religion or lack thereof, thus **respecting the freedom of conscience of users of public services.**
- **There is no such thing as a religious obligation.** If a person chooses to wear a religious symbol, he or she can remove it while on the job. If it is not a choice, then that person is a victim of abuse (by family, community, etc.) and must be helped to be freed from the constraint. Especially true for **children.**

Case Study: Secularism in Quebec

- Quebec follows republican secularism model.
- Outside Quebec, Canada follows Lockean pseudosecularism.
- **2007-2008: Bouchard-Taylor Commission:** study “reasonable” (i.e. religious) accommodation.
- **2013-2014: A Charter of Secularism** proposed, but government defeated before adoption.
- **2016: New government passes extremely weak Bill 62** claiming to “foster adherence to State religious neutrality”

- **January 2017: Massacre at a Quebec City mosque.** Enemies of secularism claim that promoting secularism causes anti-Muslim violence. This is slander.
- **2019-06-16: New CAQ government adopts Bill 21:**
“An Act respecting the laicity of the State.”
- **2019-07-09: Notorious crucifix** hanging above the speaker’s chair in the National Assembly chamber finally withdrawn! Good riddance!
- **2019-07-18: Judge Michel Yergeau rejects an attempt to suspend Bill 21.**

2019-07-09

National Assembly, Quebec City



What Bill 21 Does

- 1) Bans religious symbols worn by public servants in positions of authority – i.e. Bouchard-Taylor Commission + public school teachers.
- 2) Bans face-coverings when providing (employees) or receiving (users) public services.
- 3) Contains a simple, clear definition of secularism.
- 4) Contains a simple, clear definition of “religious symbol.”
- 5) Bans religious accommodations.
- 6) Contains a “grandfather” clause, i.e. exemption for employees who are in the same job as they were before publication of the draft bill.
- 7) Stipulates measures to monitor the application of the law and to respond to instances of noncompliance if any.
- 8) Adds the principle of State secularism to the **Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms**, thus giving it near-constitutional status.
- 9) Declares a new right to secular parliamentary, government and judicial institutions, and to secular public services.
- 10) BUT: allows religious symbols to remain on State buildings despite State secularism.

Reactions to Quebec's Bill 21

- A tsunami of irrational and dishonest reactions.
- Misconception that Bill 21 discriminates against some minorities. FALSE.
- Opponents denounce a denial of rights to State employees, but never talk about the freedom of conscience of users and schoolchildren.
- Response of communitarian “left” shameful in the extreme, parroting Islamist discourse.
- Many mainstream media and politicians extremely hostile and dishonest, especially in English Canada, where secularism is unknown and separation misunderstood.
- Opponents idolise religious identity while abandoning universalism and Enlightenment values.

Islamist strategies:

- 1) Conflation of race with religion, essentialising religious affiliation.
- 2) Rhetoric of inversion, re-branding privileges as rights.
- 3) Weaponisation of ethnic bigotry (a.k.a. racism) against Quebecers.

Republican Secularism: An Invaluable Heritage

- Republican secularism is currently under great threat from politicised religions.
- **That threat is obvious in the toxic reaction to Bill 21.** But secularism is under great threat in many countries, and **in particular in France**, the birthplace of the best variant of secularism we have available.
- **The goal** of extreme right-wing religious obscurantists and their objective allies **is to kill republican secularism at its source.**
- **A fight between**
 - religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, obscurantism
 - secularism, Enlightenment values, human rights, democracy.
- **We must preserve, protect and extend secularism.**