

absence of an institution to play this kind of strategic role. Perhaps what we need today is a revitalization of the SPO, but certainly under a different name (i.e The Policy Coordination Agency or something similar) to perform this kind of strategic-coordination mission. This kind of agency with a newly defined mission could play a critical role in bringing key bureaucratic, business and societal actors together to develop longer-

term responses to the major challenges confronting Turkey in a new and highly uncertain phase of globalization.

Reference

Öniş, Ziya. 1998. *State and Market. The Political Economy of Turkey in Comparative Perspective* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Press).

Ziya Öniş, Koç University

The Secular Conscience: Why Belief Belongs in Public Life

By *Austin Dacey*

New York: Prometheus Books, 2008, 269 pp., ISBN 9781591026044.

What happens if a liberal philosopher writes a book about religion and the public life? He will speak out and argue for a rigid secularism, placing religion and faith within the private sphere. That might be true in most of the cases but it is not the whole truth. Rather, an origin liberal—and this is Austin Dacey—would argue that secularism must be uphold but not in the widely perceived fashion of banning religious conscience to the private sphere. In terms of liberal thought, secularism does not and should not privatize conscience. Why this is the case and why secular liberals did not loose their moral compass but gave it away is the attempt Austin Dacey sets out to answer in *The Secular Conscience: Why Belief Belongs in Public Life*.

Dacey is a writer and human rights advocate in New York City. His pieces appeared in renowned periodicals such as the *USA Today* or the *New York Times*. According to the latter his book *The Secular Con-*

science “lifted quite a few eyebrows” and embraced by figures as diverse as Sam Harris and Richard John Neuhaus. The United Nations representative for the Center of Inquiry helped to organize the Secular Islam Summit and spoke before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Probably like never before, religion has become a public matter, not only affecting liberals. For a too long time secular liberals have insisted that questions of conscience like religion, ethics, and values, are and must be private matters and have no place in the public sphere. Despite the fact that sociologists have pointed out this misunderstanding and misinterpretation (e.g. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*) this very “ideology hinders them from subjecting religion to due scrutiny when it encroaches on individual rights, and from unabashedly advocating their own moral vision in politics for fear of ‘imposing’ their beliefs on others” as the book flap states.

Liberalism, as Dacey holds, is not the opposite of conservatism but rather the priority of individual liberty. Therefore, “private” is not equated with “personal” and “subjective”. This confusion leads to the “Privacy Fallacy”, consisting in the assumption that “matters of conscience are private in the sense of nongovernmental, they are private in the sense of personal preference.” Secularism in this sense is thus not a kind of private conscience but rather an open ended inquiry. That is that religion as such ought to be a nongovernmental affair, pointing out that authentic belief springs from conscience according to its own, non-governmental laws. In this regard Dacey closely follows great liberal philosophers such as Spinoza whose argument is, that conscience by its nature cannot be forced. Next to the philosophers Dacey illustrates his argument of the secular conscience with the example of some of the founding fathers of the US constitution like Jefferson and Madison: they did not believe that claims of conscience—also religious ones—are private claims with no place in politics. Rather, they argued for a separation of religion and government but not for a separation of (religious) conscience and politics.

Arguing that religion is essentially social, Dacey also argues for the possibility of editing religion, particularly text based religions and faith which are inherently open to the public. It is thus that Dacey relies his theses also on religious authorities like Ibn Rushd, believing that scripture must be reinterpreted when it contradicts reason. Dacey thus also closes the book with the statement that the future is openness, taking the example of science which also is open for edition and essentially nonsectarian.

Religious institutions, is Dacey’s message, must be private but the religious conscience is not, faith cannot escape the judgment of reason. “Before any of us is a member of the Body of Christ, the Umma, or the Chosen People, we are all members of the community of conscience, the people who must choose for themselves.” In pointing out this message, Dacey is, first of all, keen to treat all religions equally and, secondly and not that obviously, points out the need to take religious insights, such as ethical standards seriously. In doing so he re-animates a kind of liberalism which was for a long time forgotten: the emphasis of criticizing people and not merely religion as such and attaching to and pointing out the need for a public discussion of religious conscience.

All in all the book is a firm statement in favor of liberalism. But not for a liberalism which has lost its “soul”. And the soul of the liberal invention of secularism is—in Dacey’s terms—conscience which can also be based on religious values. Liberalism thus teaches us that the way of life—within some limits—is up to us. Not that the truth of liberalism is up to us. Moral truths such as religious based claims are thus not incompatible with the liberal tradition of thinking. With this understanding it also becomes obvious that Dacey views religious terrorism (“jihad”) not as a threat which seeks to destroy Christendom but rather the secular modernity as such. This is at the same time one of the weaker points of the book: the assumption of the universality of—the Western style secular—modernity. Agreeing on liberal standards of thinking should also include the acceptance of modernities, others than the ones springing of the Western, occidental world.

Jodok Troy, *University of Innsbruck*