

Preface

As a result of immigration, religious fundamentalism and increasing religious pluralism, the topic of religion and state neutrality is widely discussed in the academic context. However, even though much has been written on religious symbols and religious arguments in the public sphere, the philosophical literature on financing religions is rather restricted, particularly in Europe. In order to address this lacuna, this research monograph focuses, from a philosophical viewpoint, on the relationship between church and state and particularly on the neutrality of the liberal state with regard to the financing of religions.

The book is divided into three parts: Part I takes a philosophical stance and examines different liberal theories and philosophical views on neutrality. Following an elaboration of the concept of neutrality (Chap. 1), different liberal theories will be outlined and critically examined: Rawls's comprehensive and political antiperfectionism (Chap. 2), Kymlicka's autonomy-based antiperfectionism, Raz's autonomy-based perfectionism, Chan's political perfectionism (Chap. 3), and reformation liberalism as defended by Galston and Kukathas (Chap. 4). Based on these theories, and on the difference between external and internal neutrality, I conclude that autonomy-based, antiperfectionist liberalism is a consistent liberal theory and an adequate framework for the requirement of liberal neutrality.

Before I address the question of whether the government can, from an autonomy-based, antiperfectionist liberal perspective, actively support religions, I will have a closer look at the policy of supporting art in a liberal society. I will focus on this particular case because important parallels can be drawn between (subsidies for) art and (subsidies for) religion and because there is extensive philosophical literature available on this topic. After elaborating on Dworkin's (Chap. 5) and Rawls's argumentation (Chap. 6) with regard to this subject, I will argue that, in autonomy-based liberalism, it is possible to give an antiperfectionist argument for state support for art (and other *perfectionist goods*), but that several criteria must be fulfilled in order to remain neutral (Chap. 7).

In Part II, the three core questions of this book will be discussed: (1) Is state support for (institutionalized) *religion* compatible with liberal neutrality, and if so, under which conditions (Chap. 8)? (2) Is state support for *faith-based schools*

compatible with liberal neutrality, and if so, under which conditions (Chap. 9)? (3) Is state support for *religious education* compatible with liberal neutrality, and if so, under which conditions (Chap. 10)?

Finally (in Part III), several concrete church-state models will be examined and evaluated in light of these conditions. Following a brief sketch of different church-state models and the European and human rights legal framework with regard to church and state (Chap. 11), I will take a closer look at three different state-church models. In Chap. 12, two models of *political secularism* will be examined: the American system of *passive secularism* and the French system of *assertive secularism*. Subsequently, three models of active state support for religion will be discussed in Chap. 13: the Belgian model of *fixed compulsory taxes*, the Italian system of *religiously oriented taxes*, and the German system of *voluntary religious taxes*. Finally, the British and Greek models of an *established church* or a *state church* will be examined in Chap. 14.

The analysis of these different models, in light of the philosophical discussion on liberalism and neutrality, will show that some state-church models (secularism, theocracy, state church or established church) are *principally* not reconcilable with autonomy-based liberalism. In addition, it will become clear that political secularism and active state support can, from a *theoretical* perspective, be in accordance with the idea of liberal neutrality, but that these systems, *in practice*, often do not align with this principle. In particular, the constitutional fixation of many church-state policies, the inability to give objective criteria for recognition, and the (related) unfair distribution of subsidies are recurring problems.

Unfortunately, this book will not provide “final answers” to these problems (even though some recommendations and suggestions will be made), but it will rather serve as a guideline for state support: *if* the state chooses active state support for religion (which is a *possibility*, but not a *necessity* in a liberal state), which conditions should be fulfilled in order to remain as neutral as possible?

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