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LIBERALISM AND LIBERAL MUSLIMS

Three central ideas in contemporary liberal political philosophy include: 1) liberty and equality represent the most basic political values; 2) legitimate political authority must be exercised on the basis of moral reasons that are compatible with liberty and equality; and 3) the burden of justification for political authority is on the state, not the individuals subject to the state's coercive authority. Notwithstanding many different interpretations of liberalism that range from libertarian, egalitarian, and social democratic formulations, liberal political philosophers base their various positions on these fundamental ideas (For a good survey see "Liberalism," S. Courtland and D. Schmidtz, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberalism/>). Religious freedom, toleration, and a guarantee of equal treatment under law are among the widely shared convictions endorsed by liberal political philosophers.

In this paper I propose an approach to thinking about religion and politics that should inform how we think about liberalism and religion. I also consider how the conception of political authority defended by the prominent Muslim public intellectual Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).) is a paradigm example of liberalism. In Part I I consider two approaches to religion and politics. According to the reductionist view, whether values that are central to a religious tradition can be reconciled to liberalism is more a matter of doctrine than practice. By contrast a non-reductionist approach emphasizes that the relationship between political and religious values is influenced by a number of variables in addition to religious doctrine, including ethnicity, historical memory, political economy, and local politics. On this view, the path between religious and political convictions is anything but a straight line. In Part II I examine central arguments in An-Na'im's work that are central to his version of liberalism, with a focus on liberty of conscience and religious freedom. To illustrate An-Na'im's liberalism I focus on examples of claims about morality and theology, politics, and history. I conclude in Part III by considering how An-Na'im's position is one example of what we would expect from a non-reductionist understanding of religion and politics.

Key words: liberalism, religion, politics, secularism, Muslims.

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Либерализм және либералды мұсылман

Қазіргі заманғы либералды саяси философияның үш орталық идеясы мыналарды қамтиды: 1) бостандық пен теңдік ең негізгі саяси құндылықтарды білдіреді; 2) заңды саяси билік бостандық пен теңдікке сәйкес келетін моральдық негіздер негізінде жүзеге асырылуы керек; және 3) саяси билікті ақтау ауыртпалығы мемлекеттің мәжбүрлі күшіне бағынатын жеке тұлғаларға емес, мемлекетке жүктеледі. Либерализмнің либертарлық, эгалитарлық және социал-демократиялық тұжырымдардан тұратын әртүрлі түсіндірулеріне қарамастан, либералды саяси философтар өздерінің әртүрлі ұстанымдарын осы іргелі идеяларға негіздейді. Дін бостандығы, толеранттылық және заң бойынша тең қарым-қатынас кепілдігі – либералды саяси философтар мақұлдаған кең таралған сенімдердің бірі.

Бұл мақалада мен либерализм мен дін туралы қалай ойлайтынымыз туралы түсінік беретін дін мен саясат туралы ойлауға көзқарасты ұсынамын. Мен сондай-ақ белгілі мұсылман қоғамдық зиялысы Абдуллахи Ахмед Ан-Наим қорғаған саяси билік тұжырымдамасы либерализмнің парадигматикалық мысалы ретінде қарастырамын. I бөлімде дін мен саясатқа байланысты екі көзқарасты қарастырамын. Редукционистік көзқарас бойынша, діни дәстүрдің басты құндылықтары либерализммен татуласуы мүмкін бе деген сұрақ практикадан гөрі доктринаның мәселесі болып табылады. Керісінше, редукционистік көзқарас саяси және діни құндылықтар арасындағы қатынастарға этникалық, тарихи жад, саяси экономика және жергілікті саясатты қоса алғанда, діни доктринадан басқа бірқатар ауыспалылар әсер етеді деп баса айтады. Осы тұрғыдан

алғанда, діни және саяси нанымдардың арасындағы жол түзу емес, әр түрлі нәрсе. II бөлімде Ан-Наимнің жұмысындағы негізгі дәлелдерді қарастырамын, олар оның либерализм нұсқасы үшін орталық болып табылады, ар-ождан мен дін бостандығына баса назар аударады. Ан-Наимнің либерализмін суреттеу үшін мораль мен теология, саясат және тарих туралы шағымдардың мысалдарына тоқталамын. III бөлімді қорытындылай келе, мен Ан-Наимнің ұстанымы дін мен саясатты редукционистік түсініктен не күтуге болатынының бір мысалы ретінде қарастырамын.

Түйін сөздер: либерализм, дін, саясат, зайырлылық, мұсылмандар.

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Либерализм и либеральное мусульманство

Три центральные идеи современной либеральной политической философии заключаются в следующем: 1) свобода и равенство представляют собой самые основные политические ценности; 2) законная политическая власть должна осуществляться на основе моральных оснований, совместимых со свободой и равенством; и 3) бремя оправдания политической власти лежит на государстве, а не на отдельных лицах, подчиненных принудительной власти государства. Несмотря на множество различных интерпретаций либерализма, которые варьируются от либертарианских, эгалитарных и социал-демократических формулировок, либеральные политические философы основывают свои различные позиции на этих фундаментальных идеях. Свобода вероисповедания, веротерпимость и гарантия равного обращения по закону являются одними из широко распространенных убеждений, одобренных либеральными политическими философами.

В этой статье я предлагаю подход к размышлениям о религии и политике, который должен дать представление о том, как мы думаем о либерализме и религии. Я также рассматриваю, как концепция политической власти, защищаемая видным мусульманским общественным интеллектуалом Абдуллахи Ахмедом Ан-Наимом, является парадигмальным примером либерализма. В части I автор рассматривает два подхода к религии и политике. Согласно редукционистской точке зрения, вопрос о том, могут ли ценности, которые являются центральными для религиозной традиции, быть примирены с либерализмом, является скорее вопросом доктрины, чем практики. В отличие от этого, нередукционистский подход подчеркивает, что на отношения между политическими и религиозными ценностями влияет ряд переменных, помимо религиозной доктрины, включая этническую принадлежность, историческую память, политическую экономию и местную политику. С этой точки зрения путь между религиозными и политическими убеждениями – это, что угодно, только не прямая линия. В части II автор рассматривает основные аргументы в работе Ан-Наима, которые являются центральными для его версии либерализма, с акцентом на свободу совести и свободу вероисповедания. Чтобы проиллюстрировать либерализм Ан-Наима, я сосредоточусь на примерах утверждений о морали и теологии, политике и истории. В заключительной части III автор рассматривает позицию Ан-Наима как один из примеров того, что мы могли бы ожидать от нередукционистского понимания религии и политики.

Ключевые слова: либерализм, религия, политика, секуляризм, мусульмане.

Introduction

One benefit of the perspective defended in this paper is that it shows how liberalism and Islam can be reconciled. More generally the compatibility of a religious tradition and liberalism is partly a matter of interpretation. The terms of religious and political doctrine are always in principle negotiable. John Locke famously tried to reconcile Christianity with liberalism by proposing an interpretation of Christianity at odds with most of his 17th C contemporaries for whom Christianity is the basis for authoritarian monarchy. Liberal Muslims such as An-Na'im are committed to a similar kind of project (Andrew March, *The Caliphate of Man*:

Popular Sovereignty in Modern Islamic Thought (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); and Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).).

Justification of the choice of articles and goals and objectives

I Approaches to Religion and Politics

There are multiple ways to consider whether Islam or any religious tradition can or cannot be reconciled to liberalism. A partial list includes those that emphasize history (Michael Cook, *Ancient*

Religions, Modern Politics: The Islamic Case in Comparative Perspective (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).), regional and geopolitics (Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, Violence, Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia* (Pittsburg, PA: Pittsburg University Press, 2011).), post-colonial politics (Elizabeth Thompson, *Justice Interrupted: The Struggle for Constitutional Government in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).), the intersection of ethnic and religious identity (Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W. H. Norton, 2007).), and ways that dominant values in the background religious culture inform self-understandings about religion and politics (Michael Walzer, *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).). Each of these approaches to religion and politics can yield important insights. Yet they can also be misused for sectarian political ends. We need to proceed with care and open-mindedness when thinking about ways that various forms of religious identity are compatible or at odds with liberalism.

To set parameters, I'll start by contrasting two general ways of framing questions about religion and politics: reductionist and non-reductionist conceptions. Someone who accepts a reductionist approach to religion and politics holds that a religious identity defined by religious doctrine is frequently the primary variable that explains a person's political affiliation. Two familiar reductionist approaches to thinking about liberalism and Islam include "the clash of civilizations" (Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic*, Sept. 1990; Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.) thesis and what we might call an authoritative texts approach. If there are essential differences between the cultures of Orthodox or non-orthodox Christianity, Confucianism, Islam or Judaism among other traditions, then perhaps Islam is the key variable which explains the relative absence of liberal democracy in so many Muslim majority societies. Likewise, if the New Testament or the Qur'an contain passages which can or cannot be reconciled to liberalism—we know the usual examples about rendering to God and Caesar their due, or killing apostates, adulterers and the like—we might try to explain connections between dominant religious identities, political affiliation, and religious texts. These are reductionist positions in the sense that they significantly deemphasize a number of variables in order to first, isolate the correlation between religious identity and political affiliation;

and second, to show that that religious affiliation plays a more significant role than other variables, such as ethnicity, local politics, or historical memory.

We can summarize reductionist approaches by noting that they are variations on the following argument:

Political identity tracks religious identity

Religious identity tracks authoritative texts as well as paradigmatic civilizational identity markers

Therefore, we can reliably infer from authoritative texts and paradigmatic civilizational identity makers what members of the relevant groups (e.g. Western Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, etc.) will likely believe about politics, because these texts and identity markers ground individual and group conceptions of political values.

This is a tempting but unsound argument. It is tempting because it purports to explain a complex phenomenon, the intersection of religion and politics, by studying values that are internal to different religious traditions. Yet this is a simplistic picture, in part because it affirms preconceptions and imagined boundaries between religious and political groups. Reductionist approaches also frequently exhibit confirmation bias. Moreover, the argument upon which these approaches to religion and politics rest is unsound, because, as will be shown shortly, there are clear counter-examples to both premises.

It is worth highlighting that there are some approaches to religion and politics that have both reductionist and non-reductionist versions. For example, what we might call a history of ideas approach to religion and politics can be cast in either reductionist or non-reductionist terms. Some anti-Muslim public intellectuals who write on Islam and liberalism (Todd Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Minneapolis: MN. Fortress Press, 2015)) emphasize texts such as Sayed Qutb's *Milestones* (Islamic Book Service, 2006.) which has inspired forms of political Islam that are squarely incompatible with liberalism.

Intellectual history of course is not an objectionable enterprise. Yet the merits of individual case studies cannot be assessed without considering the political agendas that motivate them. In contemporary Europe and N. America for example there is a common strategy endorsed by what Todd Green calls, "professional Islamophobia." (Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*: 205-232.). By selecting passages from the Qur'an, Sayed Qutb or other sources that 'confirm' the incompatibility of Islam and liberalism, a selection bias reinforces a confirmation bias.

In his more balanced intellectual history of modern Islamic political thought, *The Caliphate of Man*, March emphasizes the plurality of views about sovereignty and political authority. The diversity of views includes different conceptions of the following options where political authority is represented by the following models (the source of authority is represented on the left, and the subject of authority is represented on the right):

Theocracy: God–Ruler–People

Secular Democracy: People–Ruler

Islamic democracy: God–People–Ruler (March, *The Caliphate of Man*: 182.)

Traditions in Islamic thought differ in which of these options they endorse. March's study focuses on modern Sunni political thought, so in that sense it is not intended to be an exhaustive survey. The important purpose here is that the picture that emerges is one of diversity not uniformity. March presents a non-reductionist history of ideas approach, because he examines considers ways that post-colonial politics in India, North African Muslim identity in Tunisia, and authoritarian and democratic interpretations of Islam in Egypt influence different conceptions of Islam and politics.

There are more and less extreme versions of the thesis that there is some kind of essential incompatibility between 'liberal citizen' and 'Muslim' but any version of the thesis is liable to rest upon assumptions about religion and politics that overlook the diversity of interpretations of religious values. By analogy, one might invoke Robert Filmer to illustrate how Christianity is incompatible with liberalism, showcasing for example Filmer's famous defense of the diving right theory of sovereignty. This characterization of Filmer is not wrong, yet the dueling interpretations of religious texts in Christianity shows that not all Christians are anti-liberal (For an insightful comparison of the Locke-Filmer debate and similar debates in modern Shia political thought in Iran, see Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy*, Ch 2, "Dueling Scriptures: The Political Theology of John Locke and the Democratization of Muslim Societies": 67-102.).

Anti-reductionist approaches to religion and politics share the common conviction that we must attend to the intersection of many variables when we are interested in correlations between religious values and political convictions. A partial list includes: ethnicity, language, historical memory, religious texts, and the political economy of rentier states. On this view, religious identity intersects with these other variables and in many contexts, relevant

non-religious variables provide a better explanation for political affiliation as well as why different types of political regimes are more likely to emerge in different contexts. The non-reductionist approaches that inform my position all share a commitment to the claim that we need to consider how a composite of intersecting factors can explain why religious values are invoked to support different views about political morality. Many but not all non-reductionist approaches are presented by social scientists who work on religion and politics. Here I briefly highlight just four of many examples of non-reductionist approaches to religion and politics (Ahmet Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Scientific research methodology

Consider first whether resource dependent economies or prevailing religious identities can better explain the persistence of authoritarian regimes. In *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Shapes the Wealth of Nations* Michael Ross (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.) shows that in some contexts when we look at correlations between authoritarian governments and rentier states, the ratio of oil rents to GDP is more relevant than religion. On his view, a combination of factors such as the following is crucial: lack of transparency, success in profiting from oil rents in a global market that rewards undemocratic regimes, patronage that buys loyalty to the regime, reduced or non-existent income taxation, and in some cases heavy reliance on foreign guest-workers. The correlation between abundant natural resources and authoritarian regimes does have exceptions (e.g. Norway). Yet the correlation is significant because it does hold across many states in different regions and where religious demography is very different. Resource rich states from Equatorial Guinea--whose Muslim population is less than 5%--to Russia--whose largest religious group is Christian Orthodox, and the oil rich Gulf monarchies are autocratic. What is oftentimes characterized as a correlation between Islam and authoritarian politics is in fact a multi-causal phenomena whose variables (e.g., religious demography; political economy, including the ratio of resource wealth to total GDP; and geo and global politics) interact in different ways. Contingent factors matter to how people understand

the relation between religious and political values. The correlation between natural resource dependent economies and authoritarianism is strong enough to provide a number of counter-examples to what we'd expect from a reductionist view about religion and politics.

Moreover, as Leif Wenar shows in *Blood Oil: Tyrants, Violence and the Rules that Run the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.) global oil markets incentivize authoritarian politics in part because control over access to oil resources is a sufficient condition for gaining enormous wealth. Systematic violations of property rights, human rights violations, and state oppression will not deter buyers from purchasing vital natural resources. Oil markets will remain indifferent to these atrocities until those on the consumer side opt for regulatory schemes that punish those with illegitimate control over resources. On this specific point there is a tragic irony: citizens in democratic societies consume resources extracted by authoritarian governments and thereby contribute to the success of authoritarian regimes.

From a different perspective Asef Bayat shows in, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford University Press, 2007.) that we need to separate the question, 'how does a Muslim understand her political and religious identity?' from 'what are the central tenets of Islam?' What matters on his view is how people interpret their religious and political identities. These interpretations vary both within and across religions. We can characterize this as a bottom-up approach to religion and politics, one that highlights the role of agency exercised by individuals who interpret their religious values in all manner of different ways. Here are familiar examples. Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Aquinas are both Christians but they have considerably different views about religious toleration, among other political values. Aquinas advocated death for heretics (*Summa Theologica*, Question II, Heresy, Article 3, Whether Heretics Should Be Tolerated") whereas Jefferson insisted that we tolerate the religious beliefs and non-religious beliefs of our fellow citizens. Likewise, Sayyed Qutb and Abdullahi An-Na'im are both Muslims; An-Na'im advances many positions that can be reconciled to liberal political values; Qutb not so much. The compatibility between a religious tradition and democracy is a matter of interpretation as much as it is a matter of authoritative religious figures or texts.

A third perspective is offered by Amartya Sen in his book on ethnic and communal violence in India,

Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny (Op. Ct.). On his view, the intersecting identity markers of ethnicity, language, religion and culture show that religious identity by itself is generally not a useful predictor of political values, especially when the religious identity marker is stated in general terms, such as 'Muslim' or 'Hindu'. The interethnic violence that arose shortly after independence from Britain, as well as in continuing conflicts such as that over the disputed Kashmir region, illustrate the significance of multiple intersecting identity markers, including ethnicity and religion. As in many post-colonial contexts, independence meant that a formally colonized multi-ethnic and multi-religious population faced deep uncertainties about nation building and national identity. This in turn played a role in post-independent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. Though circumstances are not exactly analogous, Sen's observations about post-independent inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence are also apt for post-Soviet central Asian republics—where conflicts between ethnic groups such as Kyrgyz and Uzbek in Kyrgyzstan have shaped contemporary politics. Additional parallels might be drawn in Armenia and Azerbaijan where conflicts between Christians and Muslims and interethnic conflicts between Armenians and Azeri play a significant role in post-independence politics.

A fourth perspective is provided by Robert Pape (*Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Bombing*. University of Chicago Press. 2006.) in his research on suicide bombing campaigns. Pape offers a social science perspective on religious identity and politics by showing that in many cases suicide bombing campaigns require the presence of two variables: first, political occupation; and second a difference in religious identity between occupier and occupied. Though not a necessary condition, Pape's research purports to show that in some contexts the presence of these variables are political conditions that give rise to suicide bombing campaigns. Religion is relevant but in conjunction with other factors, including especially, differences between groups in conflict along ethnic, or national, and religious lines. For obvious reasons, no one expects a battle slogan that goes, 'we shall fight the Christians, because we are Christians!' Yet what Pape offers is a compelling model for identifying underlying conditions that motivate suicide bombing campaigns and what this model shows is that religion is not the key variable. As a rule, suicide bombing campaigns are motivated by an underlying political grievance.

Likewise, Grim and Finke report data in their book, *The Price of Freedom Denied* (Brian Grim

and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011.), which show that repressive state religion policies correlate with an increase in social hostilities between religious and ethnic groups; the data also show that this correlation obtains across religious and regional contexts. On this view, we'd expect, for example, the occasional violence between Muslim Uyghurs and the Chinese state to correlate with state repression; and in this instance, repression against an ethnic and religious minority is official state policy.

The abovementioned studies provide support for the following verdict: data from multiple disciplines that investigate religion and politics provide compelling reasons to reject reductionist approaches. One way that such work can assist political philosophy is the following: how religious values impact political convictions is dependent upon many variables, too many to maintain a reductionist position which holds that the dominant variable is in general religious tradition or authoritative texts. Furthermore, if the correlations identified by Pape, Grim and Fink track causation, then the causes of violence in the name of religion are often political. I will treat the anti-reductionist view as provisionally settled and frame the claims that follow from a non-reductionist standpoint.

Before examining the position of An-Na'im I want to highlight two points. First, the idea that violence and social hostilities are more likely to be rooted in political grievances than in religious fanaticism is a familiar idea in the history of liberalism. Second, it is possible to understate ways that religious values matter to politics, especially when one has political or religious convictions that motivate doing so. Those of us who defend an anti-reductionist approach are no less prone to confirmation bias than our reductionist counterparts. This is a reason for humility when we try to draw political and policy implications from a data set. Though the social science data is on the side of the anti-reductionist, complex phenomena such as religion and politics should inspire skepticism about easy answers.

Regarding the first point, consider Locke's remarks in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*:

...if men enter into Seditious Conspiracies 'tis not Religion that inspires them to it...but their Sufferings and Oppressions.... Oppression raises Ferments, and makes men struggle to cast off an uneasie and tyrannical Yoke (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983): 52.).

The idea that religiously motivated violence can be mitigated by an official state policy of religious freedom and toleration is not a new idea and it is worth keeping this traditional liberal perspective in mind when asking whether a religious tradition is or is not compatible with liberalism. On the other hand, a rentier state can offset, at least partly, the destabilizing effects of religious repression. Loyalty to a repressive regime is easier to foster when the regime can distribute wealth from its oil rents to citizens. Those in the liberal tradition of Locke, James Madison, and Rawls who emphasize that religious freedom is a just and practical means to manage conflicts that spring from religious pluralism, might predict that a rentier state with repressive state religion policies is exercising its authority on borrowed time. Political philosophy can offer a moral frame within which to evaluate proposed policy responses to religious-political conflicts. But the merits of this empirical hypothesis are better addressed by social scientists than by political philosophers.

Secondly, a qualification is in order regarding non-reductionist approaches to religion and politics. To claim that violence in the name of religious values always springs from causes that are more central than religious convictions would entail that religious values are epiphenomena, always caused by non-religious variables but never themselves causing intentions. In summarizing Pape's research Jonathan Haidt offers an appropriately nuanced way of thinking about religion and violence when he writes: "[r]eligion is...often an *accessory* to atrocity, rather than the driving force of the atrocity." (*The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics And Religion* (New York: Random House, 2012): 268.). This cautious way of framing a non-reductionist approach to religion and politics is appropriate given the complexities and our limited understanding of human agency. Moreover, criteria for sorting variables into 'religious' and 'non-religious' slots are not well-defined. The answer to, 'was she motivated by her religious or by her non-religious convictions?' is just as likely to be unknown to the observer as to the agent herself. This is not a reason to jettison talk of religious and non-religious motivations, although it is a reason for humility in how we impute motives in the context of religion and politics. Talk of religious and non-religious motivators remains essential to policy considerations, in part because we know that in many contexts states that repress religious freedom generate conflict and states that do not are often able to diffuse such conflict.

II Liberal Muslims: The Case of An-Na'im

With a non-reductionist view about religion and politics as background, I now discuss ideas from one prominent contemporary Muslim public intellectual. We can sort central theses in An-Na'im's work into three categories: 1) theological and moral, 2) political, and 3) historical. Of course, these categories cannot in fact be so neatly divided—their intersectionality is something we emphasize if we take a non-reductionist approach to religious identity and politics. Yet for analytical purposes we can sort theses in this way, with the caveat that any person's religious and political convictions are influenced by a composition of these and other identity conferring commitments.

One qualification is in order here. I select An-Na'im work for examination in order to illustrate an approach to religion and politics that useful for those interested in the compatibility of a religious tradition to liberal political morality. My primary aim is not to establish that liberalism and Islam are in principle compatible. That has already been amply demonstrated, for instance in Andrew March's work (*Islam and Liberal Citizenship: The Case for an Overlapping Consensus*). Rather, I will examine An-Na'im's work because his conception of religious identity is especially instructive for thinking about liberalism outside the frame of standard analyses.

Standard discussions by liberal political philosophers on religion and political authority often take for granted that most citizens are Protestant or some other denomination of Christianity. This is exemplified for example by Rawls' discussion of the origins of religious toleration in early liberal thought (*Political Liberalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990): xxv-xxvii.). As a history of liberalism there is nothing wrong with the standard view. However, when we ask about the applicability of liberal ideas about political authority in other contexts, we cannot take for granted that a set of ideas that emerged in the unique context of 17th C Europe can simply be extended to contexts in which religious-political conflicts may differ in significant respects. Claims about compatibility between liberalism and various conceptions of religious authority and religious traditions need to be adjudicated case by case.

In *Islam and the Secular State* An-Na'im defends the thesis that a secular liberal state is required by his conception of Islam:

In order to be a Muslim by conviction and free choice, which is the only way to be a Muslim, I need a secular state.

By secular state I mean one that is neutral regarding religious doctrine, one that does not claim or pretend to enforce Shari'a... simply because compliance with Shari'a cannot be coerced by fear of state institutions or faked to appease their officials. This is what I mean by secularism..., namely, a secular state that facilitates the possibility of religious piety out of honest conviction (Loc 63, Kindle Version.).

As evidence in support of this claim An-Na'im invokes a number of considerations from within his conception of Islam. Three such considerations may be categorized as theological and moral, political, and historical. In deciding to classify claims by putting them into one of these three categories I have been guided by what I take to be points of stress or emphasis. Many of his claims emphasize more than one of these dimensions but in what follows I highlight claims that place more stress on one over the others.

Here are three theological and moral claims:

The power to decide who is qualified to exercise *ijtihad* [i.e. an interpretive judgment] and how it is to be exercised is part of the religious belief and obligation of every Muslim (Ibid, Loc 256, Kindle Version.).

By its nature and purpose, Shari'a can only be freely observed by believers; its principles lose their religious authority and value when enforced by the state (Ibid, Loc 103, Kindle Version.).

...coercive enforcement promotes hypocrisy (Loc 109, Kindle Version.).

I call these theological and moral claims because they purport to rest upon an authority or source which is naturally construed as theological and moral. To make an obvious connection on this point, there is textual support in the Qur'an for the second claim: "Let there be no force (or compulsion) in religion." (*The Quran* (Trans. Syed Vickar Ahamed. Book of Signs Foundation, 2007): 2.256: 22). Likewise, there are longstanding traditions within Islamic jurisprudence which emphasize *ijtihad* or the permission to draw analogies or to make deductive inferences from what is explicitly stated within the Qur'an. So An-Na'im is drawing upon very familiar positions on hermeneutics within Islam.

Here is a set of political claims:

The premise of my proposal is that Muslims everywhere, whether minorities or majorities, are bound to observe Shari'a as a matter of religious obligation, and that this can best be achieved when the state is neutral regarding all religious doctrines and does not claim to enforce Shari'a principles as a state policy or legislation (*Islam and the Secular State*: Loc 93, Kindle Version.).

I am calling for the state to be secular, not for secularizing society. I argue for keeping the influence of the state from corrupting the genuine and independent piety of persons in their communities (Ibid, Loc 175, Kindle Version.).

The first claim is more demanding than what some liberals will insist upon as a condition for political legitimacy. Notwithstanding intra-liberal debates about the status of neutrality, such as whether it is fundamental to the liberal conception of political authority, or whether liberal neutrality applies just to the intent rather than also effect of state policy, An-Na'im's position is clearly a liberal one.

The second claim advocates the position that religious identity will play a role in a society's culture, regardless of whether the state purports to rule on the basis of secular values. On this point An-Na'im himself defends a conception of public reason that permits the introduction of religious values in public deliberation ("Islamic Politics and the Neutral State: A Friendly Amendment to Rawls?" *Rawls and Religion* (Eds. T. Bailey and V. Gentile, New York: NY: Columbia University Press, 2015): 242-266.). Here An-Na'im defends what he terms civic reason, which, does not advocate excluding religious claims on behalf of political positions. In practice this means that on his view it is acceptable for citizens to invoke religious values for their political claims, provided they do so without demanding of other citizens that they accept the religious premises. The forms of public discourse and public deliberation that An-Na'im has in mind here are more aligned with a political culture informed by the American First Amendment paradigm, in contrast with the strict secularism of France or the Turkish Republic (For an excellent survey see Kuru, *Secularism and State Politics Towards Religion*). On his view, 'secular state' does not equate to 'laicist state'. Yet as we'll see in the next paragraph, An-Na'im emphasizes that context matters to how we think about secularism and state power.

Finally, here is a central historical claim that informs An-Na'im's position:

...it is more productive to discuss secularism as it is actually understood and practiced by different societies, each in its own context. All societies are in fact negotiating the relationship between religion and the state over many issues at different times, rather than applying a specific or rigid definition or model of secularism (*Islam and the Secular State*: Loc 582, Kindle Version.).

In *Islam and the Secular State* An-Na'im supports this claim with extended discussions of secularism, religion and politics in a variety of contexts,

including Indonesia, Turkey, and India. There is a lot of evidence that supports an-Na'im's claim here, some that comes from social science studies on the variables that explain why different conceptions of secularism, such as laicism as opposed to inclusive state religion policies, take root in different contexts (Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Towards Religion*). Other evidence comes from comparative studies such as An-Na'im's which demonstrate that there are multiple paths to building a democratic secular state (Alfred Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations,'" *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 11. No. 4. 2000: 37-57.).

Results and discussion

There are too many considerations in An-Na'im's lengthy study to adequately capture in such a short summary. Yet in highlighting three types of claim, I have distilled one major thread in the extended argument he presents. Each type of claim is invoked to support his position as a liberal Muslim. It is true that throughout the book much stress is placed on the religious grounds for his position. In this respect, there is an interesting parallel between Locke's Christian Natural Law defense of liberalism and An-Na'im's Islamic defense of liberalism. Locke famously defended limited government and liberal values such as liberty of conscience by invoking a Christian moral framework. Most contemporary liberal philosophers endorse a secular view about the basis for political morality, yet this does not exclude the views of Locke and An-Na'im from the many forms of liberalism.

Conclusion

When we adopt a non-reductionist conception of religion and politics, we are not surprised by the conception of religious identity developed by An-Na'im. His position on religion and politics cannot be straightforwardly deduced from central principles of Islamic theology. And that is because religion does not strictly limit options for self-understanding. This is not unique to Islam. Religious values are interpreted by agents; agents are influenced by many variables, including those emphasized in Part I. We should expect any longstanding religious tradition with large populations to produce reformers, anti-reformers, liberals, anti-liberals, and those who accept and those who reject scientific claims that conflict with some traditional religious values.

At the beginning of this paper I highlighted three ideas from contemporary political liberalism:

1) liberty and equality represent the most basic political values; 2) legitimate political authority must be exercised on the basis of moral reasons that are compatible with liberty and equality; and 3) the burden of justification for political authority is on the state, not the individuals subject to the state's coercive authority. If we claim that An-Na'im defends a position on religion and politics that is compatible with this picture of liberalism, a full account would require examining his views on each of these central features of liberalism. In that respect, the picture I present here represents just one aspect to An-Na'im's liberalism; namely, his view on religious liberty and the secular state.

Given basic truisms about human identity and agency (e.g. historical location, religious demography, and diversity of viewpoints impacts self-understandings in significant ways) we should expect to find religious and political viewpoints that are a composite of inferences from religious doctrine and negotiations with others, including those with different religious and political viewpoints. One of the compelling features to An-Na'im's work is how he strives to reconcile his understanding of Islam with liberalism. His position is a paradigm example of liberal Islam.

In this paper I have focused on two main topics. First, whether we should adopt a reductionist or non-reductionist approach to religion and politics. Second, whether the position of a prominent public Muslim intellectual provides insight into how non-reductionist approaches to religion and politics are relevant to questions about Islam and liberalism. The view that emerges suggests something important about religion and politics. Though I have not fully developed the point here, I think what can be said of An-Na'im's position holds for many conceptions of religious and political authority across many religious traditions. Whether any given religious tradition can serve as the basis for a religious identity that is compatible with liberalism is a matter of interpretation. It is a matter of interpretation, not in the trivial sense of, 'anything goes', but in the more philosophically interesting sense that clusters of identity markers and political variables compose a set of features that intersect in many different ways.

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See also Andrew March, *The Caliphate of Man: Popular Sovereignty in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); and Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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