

Morality and Violence

Faith and Moral Reason in the Public Square

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The Death of Liberalism?

- “Liberalism”: a political tradition, stretching back to the 17th century, which accommodates pluralism by the promotion of individual rights and liberties.
- Law and procedure are means of justice intended to restrain human-to-human violence.
- Aims for the protection of diversity by according minorities equal rights under the law.
- Marked by pragmatism — sets aside questions about the transcendent to address immanent, practical matters.
- This creates a “secular space”, where political interests are addressed in relation to common goods.



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The Death of Liberalism?

- Recently, liberal societies have been under considerable stress as conflicts around competing visions of the good society have escalated.
- Some on the left and right have voiced frustration at the way that liberal deference to “the other”, which was intended to protect minorities, has functionally minimised and de-centred local interests and valued traditions.
- Many cultural commentators are arguing that this discontentment with liberalism signals a post-liberal future for politics in the West w/ some ideology supplying the vision of that future.
- These conflicts have their historical roots in a sea-change in Western societies, due at least in part to the decline of religion.

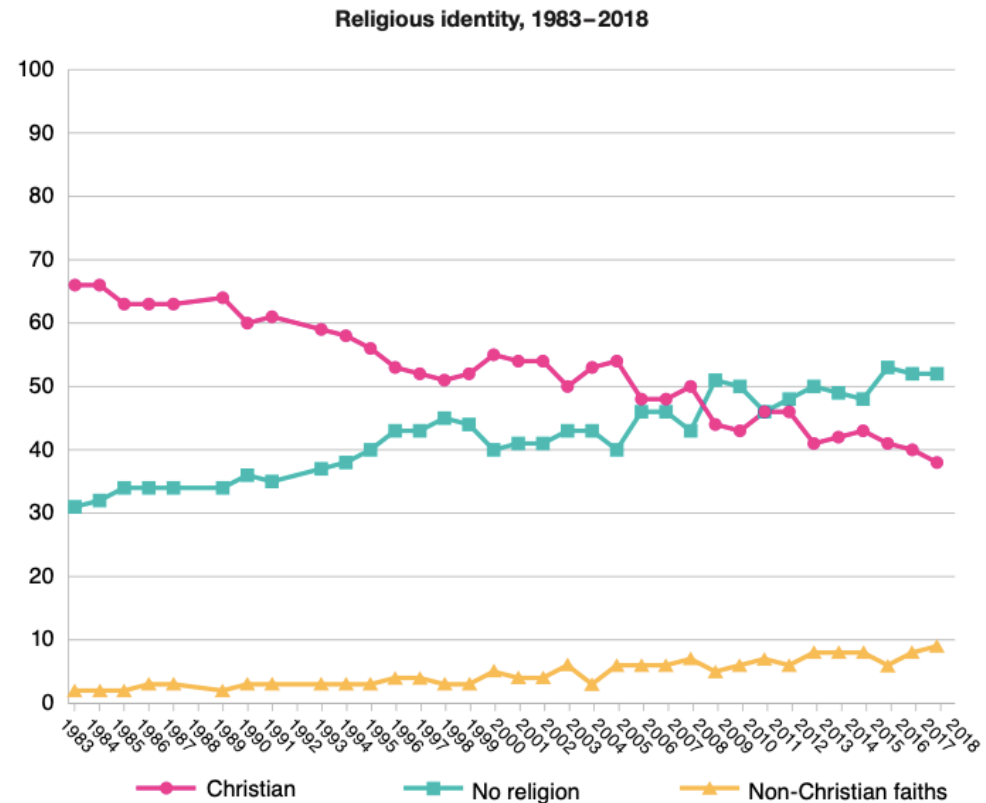


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The Changing Place of Faith in British Public Life

- Percent of the population actively associated w/ a religious community has been declining for decades, particularly in Britain.
- 52% of British public identify as “nones” (British Social Attitudes 2018). About 18% attend some kind of services once a month.
- 63% say religion brings more conflict than peace; 65% say people w/ strong religious belief are intolerant.
- And yet, faith remains a major force. About 90% of the world population believes in a “higher power”; roughly 55% in the UK.



Beliefs and Moral Reasoning

- What is religion? Among other things, religions include *belief systems* that orient people in the world, and provide them a means of living “the good life”.
- Morals refer to those principles informing our notion of right/wrong or good/bad behaviour.
- Of course, moral judgments are complex things.
 - Moral reasoning always takes place in a particular, concrete context, and one may disagree about the nature of the context.
 - Moral principles may be applied differently in different settings.
 - There may be disagreements about moral principles.
- But moral judgments are “belief-dependent”, because truth is a condition of justice — what is “right” follows what is “true”.



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Beliefs and Moral Reasoning

- For that reason, morals and metaphysics have historically informed one another. Why? Because “our understanding of the truth of the world shapes our conception of what justice demands.
- Cicero: Justice is the act of “rendering to everyone their due” (*ius suum*; *De Officiis*, I.v.15). But what is *due* to another? What do I owe to another?
 - Ex. Should one person be responsible to feed or clothe another person?
 - What is the nature of the relation between these two people?
 - What is the nature of the “responsibility” envisioned here? Legal? Moral? Prudential?
 - To what extent, and by what proportion is this responsibility measured?
- The minute we begin the process of answering these questions, we involve ourselves in describing our beliefs about the truth of the world.



Beliefs and Moral Reasoning

- NB: “reason” and “belief” are not opposed here. We give reasons for why we may believe a particular thing to be true.
- Insofar as Metaphysics is an attempt to explain the nature of things, it is belief-dependent b/c explanations of the world require beliefs.
- We can distinguish different kinds and qualities of beliefs we hold:
 - Mundane vs. Supra-mundane Beliefs
 - Factual vs. Evaluative Beliefs
 - Explicit vs. Implicit Beliefs
 - Degrees of Belief
- Not all beliefs are relevant to moral reasoning, but since *justice* implies *truth*, the quality of our moral reasoning is *also* belief-dependent.
- That means that our beliefs — about ourselves and the world — are of enormous significance to our moral judgment.



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Religious Beliefs & Moral Reason

- What is faith? Is it a kind of knowledge? “Beliefs” are the matter/content of faith — convictions which believers hold to be true.
 - We tend to think of “knowledge” in more scientific terms as “justified true belief” — the kind of thing that can be proven by appeal to evidence from common sources.
 - Of course, supernatural objects/events can not be subjected to scientific scrutiny in that manner.
 - So we are accustomed to *contrasting* faith and knowledge, e.g., “I don’t *know* that God exists, but I *believe* it”.
- Even so, religious beliefs are of disproportional significance to our moral reasoning. Why?



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Religious Beliefs & Moral Reason

- If true, God's existence is not a fact like other facts. Its relevance cannot be restricted to discrete contexts as other facts might be.
- For if God exists and is our Maker, then everything that exists is related to God and exists for God's purpose.
- This means that we rightly understand ourselves and our world only in *relation* to God, and not otherwise.
- To make a moral judgment independently of faith would be absurd or irrational — indeed, an act of *unbelief* — since it would fail to take into account a fundamentally relevant fact: that our world is God's.
- For that reason, God is not something religious folk can leave at the church, the mosque, or the synagogue.



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