



Journal of Religion & Society

The Kripke Center

Volume 3 (2001)

Jeff Spinner-Halev. *Surviving Diversity: Religion and Democratic Citizenship*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Pp. x + 246. \$36.50 (Cloth).

[1] Modernism suggests that we find the most "basic," essential human by stripping away religion and any other "prior commitments" from the modern human. These commitments are added on by tradition or through coercion. The fundamental person is autonomous, a Chooser, a maker of his/her own destiny.

[2] That Modernist thinking is alive (if not necessarily well) often comes as a shock to those - this reviewer included - who delude ourselves into thinking that we have reached a post-Modern age. "We have moved beyond essentialism," we declare. This book is testimony to the tenacity of Modernist thinking.

[3] Jeff Spinner-Halev's question is an important one: How does a liberal society deal with groups that are decidedly illiberal? For the author, the answer comes through liberal democracy's foundational concept - autonomy. "Autonomy is an essential ingredient of living a good life. A state that wants to support the well-being of its citizens would then support autonomy" (31). Autonomous citizens make their own choices, think for themselves, think critically about choices, appreciate diversity, and tolerate difference.

[4] "Many religions have changed to accommodate liberal theory. But some religions remain stubbornly illiberal." (23). The problem begins when liberal autonomy meets head-on with conservative religion. Conflict arises because "autonomous people do not inherit their lives, but actively choose them" and "liberal democrats often stress the inclusive nature of citizenship" (3). But conservative religion seeks to restrict choice, and these religions are by nature exclusive. In addition, such exclusive religions "reject the idea of mutual respect among citizens" (142) and raise children who "are less likely to become good liberal citizens than better educated students" (110). With conservatives, Spinner-Halev includes Roman Catholics, Orthodox Jews, Old Order Amish, Mormons, and Hutterites as "less-than-autonomous" groups. Each of these groups imposes "restrictions" on members, and thereby limits autonomous choice.

[5] Ironically, however much these groups restrict autonomy, liberal democracy must allow autonomous citizens to make illiberal choices. "Liberalism argues that the state's job is to allow people to live their lives as they see fit" (30). Even though such groups may restrict their members' autonomy, liberal democracy cannot restrict these groups' practices, even as they restrict their own members. The limit of such tolerance occurs when such groups hurt others or threaten citizenship.

[6] The author presents good background on issue from the works of Locke, Mill, and Dewey (11ff), which is clear, accurate, and readable. Even undergraduate students would benefit from Spinner-Halev's lucid summaries of their thought.

[7] That the author addresses important issues is clear. However, with some disappointment I state that I did not find this work particularly helpful. Spinner-Halev expresses a faith-like assumption, following Modernism, that autonomy is the essential human good. While rejecting "prior commitments," so that we can exist as autonomous citizens, Modernism failed to realize that it is also loaded with "prior commitments." Its near-worship of autonomy, which allegedly allows people to "think for themselves," is such a "prior commitment." None of us "thinks for ourselves." These commitments are just as true of liberalism as they are of "restrictive" religion. We always think out of some context, some tradition. Pure autonomy, as Spinner-Halev describes it, simply does not exist.

[8] Further, Spinner-Halev's contention that "exclusive religions" restrict autonomous choice derives from this prior commitment. Many Jews, Catholics, and Amish do not see their religious practices as "restrictions" or limits to their freedom; quite the contrary. Obedience to a tradition and critical thinking are not incompatible, as the author contends. The author suggests that citizens might increase liberal tolerance in society by exposing students in "restricted" private schools to the diversity found in public schools. But clearly, our public schools are not havens of tolerance, nor are private schools dens of self-superiority. My experience with Catholic and Orthodox Jewish students indicates that students from these "restrictive" schools - who become solidly grounded in their own traditions - are apt to be more tolerant than those in diverse common schools, who must fight constantly for identity. Public school students do not learn tolerance simply by exposure to a smorgasbord of diversity. Perhaps more than merely tolerating their existence, liberal society should encourage the proliferation such "exclusive" schools: they may fulfill the goals of liberalism better than public schools do.

[9] Throughout the book, the author contends that any religious life is an autonomous choice, which can be revoked at any time. "Many religions have private truths at their heart. Discovering Jesus to be your savior is a personal matter" (159). This assertion assumes that secularity is logically prior to religion, that public truths are secular truths. Public debates must be carried on using debates are carried on using "secular language, since that language will involve the most people in the debate" since religious beliefs "cannot be debated, discussed, or evaluated" (163f). That such an assertion is quite recent in the history of human thought seems irrelevant to the author's argument. Secular truths and language can be just as incomprehensible to religious people as religious language is to secular people.

[10] "I suspect that another reason why many liberals and multiculturalists do not discuss religion enough . . . is that they have little sympathy for the reasons why people are religious"

(213). Much of Spinner-Halev's argument I find uncomfortably close to Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre's proclamation that "One must refuse everything to the Jews" as Jews but "give them everything as individuals; they must become citizens." So "Jewishness" becomes another autonomous "choice."

[11] Another disturbing aspect of Spinner-Halev's thought is expressed in pp. 77ff. "Restrictive" religions should make provisions for their members who choose to leave. These provisions include setting up an "exit fund" to help ex-members adjust to secular society, teaching subjects in their schools which are more relevant to secular society, and delaying marriages until the "age of consent." If religions do not voluntarily take these measures, "they should be forced to do so" (77).

[12] In the name of autonomy, we trade "patriarchal" religion for a paternalistic state. Spinner-Halev presents autonomy as an unqualified good. Theology contends that autonomy is more often a source of evil.

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