

Jürgen Habermas, Faith and Knowledge

Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2001

Acceptance Speech

The reverse side of religious freedom is actually a pacification of ideological pluralism that has unequally distributed consequences. After all, the liberal state has so far imposed only upon the believers among its citizens the requirement that they split their identity into public and private versions. That is, they must translate their religious convictions into a secular language before their arguments have the prospect of being accepted by a majority. (...)

But the search for reasons that aspire to general acceptance need not lead to an unfair exclusion of religion from public life, and secular society, for its part, need not cut itself off from the important resources of spiritual explanations, if only the secular side were to retain a feeling for the articulative power of religious discourse. The boundaries between secular and religious reasons are, after all, tenuous. Therefore, fixing of this controversial boundary should be understood as a cooperative venture, carried on by both sides, and with each side trying to see the issue from the other's perspective. Democratically enlightened common sense is not a singularity, but is instead the mental constitution of a public with many different voices. Secular majorities must not reach a conclusion without first having given a hearing to the objections of opponents who believe their religious convictions to have been injured; they must also make an effort to learn something from them.

Giving due consideration to the religious heritage of its moral foundations, the liberal state should consider the possibility that it may not be able to meet the completely new challenges it faces simply by relying on the formulations it developed earlier to meet those attending its origins. Today, the language of the market penetrates every pore and forces every interpersonal relation into the schema of individual preference. The social bond, however, is based on mutual recognition and cannot be reduced to the concepts of contract, rational choice and the maximization of utility.

Questions:

1. What do religious citizens have to do in order to make religious convictions matter in the public sphere?
2. How should the controversial boundary between secular and religious reasons be fixed?
3. Why should the liberal state listen to religious voices in face of today's challenges?

Jürgen Habermas, Religion in the Public Sphere

in: Between Naturalism and Religion, 2008, p 122

“The principle of separation of church and state obliges politicians and officials within political institutions to formulate and justify laws, court rulings, decrees, and measures exclusively in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens. By contrast, the proviso to which citizens, political parties and their candidates, social organizations, churches, and other religious associations are subject in the public arena is not quite so strict. Rawls writes: “The first is that reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time *provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines** – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support.” This means that the political reasons appealed to in each case may not be put forward simply as a pretext, but must “count” irrespective of the religious context in which they are embedded.

On the liberal conception, the state guarantees citizens freedom of religion only on the condition that religious communities, each from the viewpoint of their respective doctrinal traditions, accept not only the neutrality of public institutions, and hence the separation of church and state, but also the restrictive definition of the public use of reason. Rawls insists that these requirements even in the face of an objection that he himself raises: “How is it possible ... for those of faith to endorse a constitutional regime even when their comprehensive doctrines may not prosper under it, and indeed may decline?”

* For example religion, political ideologies

Questions:

1. What does Rawls's “proviso” consist of?
2. Why could religious communities face problems to support the restriction on the public use of reason?