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This book is not an argument for democratic authority or for the separation of Church and State; a liberal-democratic framework is presupposed (p. 38). The author wishes to show how, within this framework, there can be room for religious beliefs and motivation. “[T]here can be some degree of prima facie moral authority on the part of some religious people as such” (p. 19). The argument for this is unclear, but we can agree that if some religion may possibly be true, then some believers may know moral truths unbelievers do not know. On the other hand, as the author argues, believers must acknowledge that moral truth is largely available to unbelievers also (p. 24). If believers and unbelievers are to live together in harmony, political proposals must be supported by reasons accessible to both, reasons that do not depend on the truth or falsity of any religious belief. So though religious people may legitimately have (and should acknowledge) religious reasons and motives, they must support their political proposals with adequate secular reasons. This is the “principle of secular rationale”. (The “principle of religious rationale” says that believers must always also have adequate religious reasons. This requirement seems unnecessary to the separation of Church and State.) The idea of living together in harmony is supported by references to reciprocity and the Golden Rule (p. 76).

Besides the principles of secular and religious rationale, which are to guide individual citizens, there are also principles for government and churches. Government must protect religious liberty, treat religions equally and be neutral toward religious and non-religious ways of life. Government may regulate religion for secular reasons, but the reasons need to be weighty considerations of protection from harm or discrimination (p. 96). Religious institutions and the clergy must keep out of partisan politics. There is discussion of various church-state questions controversial in American politics. Can the state, without violating separation, support “faith-based initiatives”, i.e. can it pay religious organisations to administer social programs? (Yes, though this may advantage some religion.) Can the state issue education vouchers usable in religious schools? (Yes, though this may weaken the public school system and underline sectarian or class divisions.) Can science teachers in a public school say that creation did not happen? (No, this would be a breach of neutrality; but science teaching can contradict the Bible as interpreted literally.) Can creationism be taught in public schools? (No, creationism is a religious belief.) Can the state ban headscarves? (Yes, because it can set standards of dress in public places (!)) Can the state recognise religious holidays? (Yes, provided it
recognises the holidays of various groups.) Can a local post office put up Christmas decorations? (Yes, but it should also display symbols valued by other groups, in rough proportion to their membership of the local community.)

The book concludes with a loosely-organised chapter mainly on Tolerance. Tolerance implies dislike or disapproval. Citizens must be tolerant of many things they dislike, including religious beliefs they disagree with. We must realise that our judgments of disapproval may be mistaken (for example if our “epistemic peers” disagree). The discussion of tolerance leads (the connection is unclear) to an argument that some employers may have the right to choose staff on the basis of religious belief. There is also a discussion of tolerance of wrongdoing by other nations and of sanctions. Non-co-operation in imposing sanctions may be an inappropriate toleration of human rights violations (p. 133).

Liberty is one of the central ideas of the book. A liberal democracy seeks to achieve “the highest level of liberty all can have without interfering with the liberty of others” (p. 10). Democracy requires liberty, because without liberty people cannot govern themselves. Coercion negates liberty since “what we are coerced to do we do not freely do”; it negates equality, since some coerce, others are coerced. Religious liberty is especially important because religious commitments are central to a person’s sense of self, and there is a “protection of identity” principle: “The deeper a set of commitments is in a person, and the closer it comes to determining that person’s sense of identity, the stronger the case for protecting the expression of those commitments tends to be” (p. 42).

The argument relies greatly on the meanings of the key words, such as “democracy,” “liberty,” and “tolerance.” But these words are just more or less convenient labels, which do not supply premises and often do not exactly express what is intended. The early proponents of religious freedom used the label “toleration” (not “tolerance”, I think), but they did not mean that they disliked or disapproved of the religions they thought should be tolerated (some other people disapproved, namely the persecutors). To understand “persecution” we need to consider what methods were used to discourage or eradicate some beliefs and what the objections were to those methods. “Liberty” is also just a label for a set of ideas that needs to be understood historically. The system of liberty is a package of constraints to prevent people from constraining one another in certain other ways that have been objected to for certain reasons. Liberty is not a homogeneous something that can be maximised by maximising, or minimising, constraints upon constraints. The liberal package and its labels have changed over time, “democracy” (another label of fluctuating meaning) being a rather late addition. (How many readers admiring the painting reproduced on the dust jacket of this book will realise that the US