

In this number

ARTO LAITINEN

Charles Taylor and the Dimensions of Secularisation

This article presents and evaluates Charles Taylor's views on secularisation. He distinguishes between its political definition (concerning the separation of church and state) and sociological definition (concerning active participation in religious practices). Taylor further distinguishes an 'existential' definition, which involves the current horizons of significance regarding what it is to be a theist or an atheist. Taylor discusses the general progress of the secularisation process from the emergence of the great world religions and philosophies to the present day, viewing the reforms around the beginning of the Modern Era as a turning point. Taylor highlights the role of valuations of central importance for personal identity in this process. Concerning political secularism, in a book co-written with Jocelyn Maclure he emphasises freedom of religion and respect for the individual as ends in themselves, while the separation of church and state is merely a means for attaining these ends. This article discusses both these views and the criticism levelled against them.

OLLI-PEKKA VAINIO & AKU VISALA

What Is Atheism? A Review of Atheism Today

It is typical of some contemporary forms of atheism to claim that atheism is not a worldview and as such does not require arguments in its favour. In practice, however, contemporary atheists endorse a diverse array of belief systems and argue for atheism in different and mutually incompatible ways. Philosophical atheism or agnosticism makes its case in terms of philosophical argument against theism and thus takes the philosophical defences of theism very seriously. Scientistic atheism subscribes to a strongly naturalistic view of reality, which rules out theology and philosophy. Tragic atheism holds that after metaphysics has been erased, we have no right to hold onto Judeo-Christian values or secular humanism. Humanistic atheism maintains that we can have humanism even after the death of God.

PEDER THALÉN:

What Does the Fall of Atheism Mean? A Commentary to the New Criticism of Atheism

A new critical perspective on atheism has emerged in recent years, focusing on its diminished cultural significance and the God concept it presupposes. Two examples of this new discussion are *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* by Alister McGrath and *A Short History of Atheism* by Gavin Hyman. McGrath's principal thesis is that atheism has lost its supportive cultural context. Hyman, on the other hand, asserts that atheism has a reduced concept of God that does not do justice to God's transcendence. The present article is a critical commentary on these books and presents an alternative critical view on atheism, in which the criticism of the modern God concept is taken much further than in Hyman's book.

MIKKO SILLFORS & HANNA RONIOMÄKI

Variations on the Sacred: Dimensions of Atheist Spirituality in the New Millennium

Atheism and spirituality are often seen as mutually exclusive, yet in the 21st century we have witnessed an outpouring of material that explicitly aims at developing atheistic spirituality. The general theme within this new discourse consists of the idea that a moral and spiritually fulfilling life does not require belief in supernatural entities. Despite the popularity of this phenomenon, research on the topic is still scarce. In this article, we contribute to this developing area of research. We begin by presenting our preliminary definitions of atheism, spirituality and atheistic spirituality. After that, we introduce some examples of atheistic spirituality, analysed by their stance towards (monotheistic) religion. Finally, we comment on the nature and future of this phenomenon.

TIINA MAHLAMÄKI

Does Irreligion Have Gender?

In this article, I discuss the issue of gender-specificity in irreligion, based on a survey I conducted among first-year students of comparative religion at the University of Turku. My specific focus is on students who, in one way or another, consider themselves irreligious. Irreligion takes many forms among the respondents, and the boundaries between irreligion, spirituality and religion are vague. As has been shown in international studies, an irreligious person is more often a man than a woman. Men are also more likely to define themselves specifically as atheists rather than agnostics. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to describe themselves as agnostics and to hedge their personal definition of irreligion. Most of the respondents to my survey pointed to an individual interpretation of faith, away from institutional religion. Irreligion was also defined in terms of Christianity: the God in whom the relevant respondents did not believe or in whom they were trying to believe, was specifically the Christian God. The young adults I surveyed sought values, morals and spiritual experiences through discussion, reading, science, philosophy, art and nature. Many of those beginning their studies in comparative religion have already established irreligion as their life's philosophy.

PETER NYNÄS, MIKA LASSANDER &
JANNE KONTALA

Secularism and Religious LGBT Activism in the Context of Religious Change: Examples of the Value of Perspective from the Study of Social Movements

In this article, we focus on secularism and religious LGBT activism in Finland as examples of processes of religious change in contemporary societies. We consider that the complexity of these processes, such as the blending of various religious and secular identities, motivates a search for new perspectives in comparative religion. We argue that the

study of social movements can provide a useful framework for research in our field. This approach emphasises features such as network models of organisation, drawing attention to the processes of value creation and to emotional dynamics as motivation for action. These perspectives provide tools and angles that are open to the changes, both individual and at the group level, that are typical for the religious landscape of the present day. This prompts a pragmatic methodological position that is required for the exploration of the complex religiosity of today's world.

LEO NÄREAHO

The Problem of Consciousness, Materialism and God

This article examines the problem of consciousness and its relationship to the existence of God. Some theistically oriented philosophers have argued that the fact of consciousness can be explained only by assuming the existence of a theistic God and His creative activity. In my article, I will first consider some problems regarding non-reductive materialism. Then I will examine philosopher J.P. Moreland's argument for the existence of God based on the alleged incapability of naturalistic theories in explaining the fact of consciousness. I find Moreland's argument unconvincing. Finally, I will briefly present my own view of universal consciousness and its relationship to the world.

ARTO KALLIONIEMI

Reform of Religious Education in Québec, Canada

The purpose of this article is to study and describe the Ethics and Religious Culture programme in public schools in Québec. This new subject was introduced in 2008. The approach in this article is to describe the reform process and to analyse, contextualise and systematise the aims and contents of this programme from the perspective of

international research and developing work in religious education. Furthermore, the article discusses the potential to apply a similar approach to Finnish religious education. The research materials are the curriculum of the Ethics and Religious Culture programme and the Ministry document concerning its establishment. Research and articles on the reform process are used as reference material. The main focus is on the role of religious culture in the curriculum. Ethics and Religious Culture presents contextual and integrative approaches to religious education. It shares many concepts with the Toledo Guiding Principles and the American Academy of Religious Guidelines for Teaching about Religion. There are many features in the Ethics and Religious Culture programme that could also be applied in developing religious education in Finland.

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