

Benjamin R. Hertzberg, *Chains of Persuasion: A Framework for Religion in Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 224 pages. ISBN: 9780190883041. Hardback: \$65.00.

Political theorists discussing religious contributions to democratic politics have largely focused on debates concerning the ideal of public reason and the duties that it imposes upon citizens. In *Chains of Persuasion*, Benjamin Hertzberg seeks to broaden the questions that we ask about religious politics, by identifying further dimensions of normative evaluation that (he argues) we ought to apply to it. He does this by conceptualising both democracy and religion as ‘ways of life’, which include cognitive and value commitments, institutional structures, practices and norms, and understandings of the nature and boundaries of their community (p. 12). This enables us to consider these various features of religion and evaluate the extent to which they are compatible with, or indeed can positively contribute to, the democratic way of life. Hertzberg’s ‘framework for religion in democracy’ thus “expand[s] the range of religious phenomena within democratic theory’s purview” (p. 102), beyond simply whether religious citizens can endorse the requirements of public reason. Importantly, this enables Hertzberg to respond to critical theorists of religion who accuse liberal political theorists of adopting an unduly belief-based, culturally Protestant, conception of religion.

The book’s four central chapters each discuss one aspect of democracy’s way of life and identify associated normative criteria that apply to religious politics. Chapter 1 tackles public reason. Hertzberg critically examines various positions in the debate and presents original objections to many of them. He ultimately endorses the Rawlsian view that laws must be justified by public reasons in order to be legitimate but rejects Rawls’s duty of civility due to it conflicting with the deliberative and information-gathering aspects of democratic decision-making (on which see below). Citizens are thus permitted to offer non-public, including religious, reasons within their political advocacy, although they should accept that public reasons are ultimately needed to legitimise laws.

But can religious politics make any positive contribution to democratic deliberation? After all, religious arguments cannot persuade non-believers, and non-religious arguments cannot persuade ‘integralist’ believers, who see their religious views as always overriding other consideration. To address this, Hertzberg argues in Chapter 2, we must take a systemic view of deliberation and explore religions as epistemic communities. There will inevitably be a range of affiliation relationships within religions in liberal societies, with internal disagreements about many issues. This creates the potential for ‘chains of persuasion’. Religious integralists’ arguments can persuade ‘loose affiliates’ of the religion, who can then develop secular arguments for the same conclusion, which can persuade non-believers. Such chains can also run in the other direction. Religious arguments can thus play a role in democratic will-formation and the production of publicly justified laws, even if they cannot directly persuade non-

believers. Further, this gives a new criterion for evaluating religious politics: religions that allow the participation of loose affiliates “are more capable of impacting political deliberations in democratically appropriate ways” (p. 88).

Chapter 3 focuses on democracy’s instrumental benefits. Democracy’s information-gathering and -processing capabilities enable politics to effectively promote their chosen goals. These capabilities require an open public sphere that reflects society’s cognitive and sociological diversity, with participants who recognise their fallibility and are open to new evidence and arguments. This gives another criterion for assessing religious politics, based on whether it promotes or detracts from these features. The judgments required here are highly context-specific and informed by the religion’s social location, institutional structure, and relationship to political and sociological divisions. Viewing democracy from this instrumental angle thus brings further aspects of religion within its evaluative gaze.

Finally, democracy has a virtue theory: an account of the virtues that individuals need in order to be good democratic citizens. This turns our attention to religious rituals and practices and the ways in which they shape adherents’ dispositions, character traits, and habits. Chapter 4 models this approach, focusing on the virtue of reciprocal accountability. Hertzberg offers a detailed examination of Gandhi’s satyagraha, a prominent politicised religious practice. He argues that satyagraha can help oppressed citizens hold the powerful to account, but also undermines practitioners’ willingness to be accountable to others by encouraging intransigence and a sense of infallibility. It is thus democratically ambivalent. This argument illustrates the way that “approaching democracy in virtue theoretic terms allows an analysis of the practices of religious politics” (p. 165).

Hertzberg’s overall message is that democratic theory “coherently evaluates the wide range of ways in which religion influences politics: as belief, as community, as institution, and as practice” (p. 167). His Conclusion offers a final demonstration of this, by applying each chapter’s argument to Mormons and Muslims in America. Hertzberg argues that, contrary to public opinion, there are more reasons to be worried about Mormons than Muslims from a democratic perspective. While Mormons endorse liberal democratic values, the Church’s understanding of the boundaries of the religious community acts a barrier to chains of persuasion, its institutional influence in Utah is informationally damaging, and its practices fail to cultivate virtues of reciprocal accountability. None of these concerns apply to Islam.

*Chains of Persuasion* is an excellent book, with many virtues. It is packed with informative examples, which illustrate and apply all of the central arguments. Further, these examples are drawn from various parts of the world and include both contemporary and historical cases. Hertzberg’s arguments are made very carefully and precisely. They engage with distinctive contemporary US culture-war-style concerns about religion in politics, but also speak much

more broadly. And Hertzberg shows a sympathetic, sophisticated, understanding of religion that unfortunately is often lacking within political philosophy.

Theorists associated with the traditions that Hertzberg draws upon – public reason, deliberative democracy, pragmatism, democratic virtue theory – will no doubt have questions about, and objections to, some of the specific moves that he makes with respect to each approach. However, rather than press those kinds of concerns here, I want to raise some broader questions about Hertzberg's overall framework.

First, who is meant to use the diverse set of tools for assessing religious politics that Hertzberg identifies? The obvious answer is other citizens, but can many citizens realistically do so? Applying the criteria requires both a sophisticated knowledge of the specific religion and complex contextual judgments. Hertzberg objects to Stout's emphasis on immanent critique for requiring citizens to have an unrealistic level of understanding of one another's worldviews (pp. 89-90). Yet precisely the same objection applies to Hertzberg's own view, and perhaps even more strongly, since he brings so many more aspects of religion under critical scrutiny.

Second, even when we successfully apply Hertzberg's framework, there seem to be some tensions regarding quite what we should do with the resulting assessments. Hertzberg is clear that the beliefs and practices that his framework assesses are protected by associational and religious freedoms. We should not require religions to display congruence with democratic values in their internal practices. Indeed, religions can have democratic – for example informational – benefits without such congruence. On the other hand, however, Hertzberg's framework brings practically all aspects of religion under democratic evaluation, and some of his criteria do lean toward demanding congruence. This especially applies to the democratic virtue criterion: religious rituals, practices, and structures are assessed based on whether they promote such virtues. We seem to end up assessing religions based on their contribution to the democratic way of life, while also wanting to tolerate, and even respect, religion that isn't comprehensively democratic and might even fall foul of the criteria. Hertzberg certainly doesn't want to make satisfying his criteria a requirement for democratic participation. But then what do we do with the assessments? One reply is that they simply give a basis for blame and praise. But at times Hertzberg seems to not even go that far: failing to promote democratic ideals isn't necessarily wrongful. Further, there is also a question of who should issue any blame or praise. Is this only a job for ordinary citizens within civil society? Or is there a place for official government expression? Should the state criticise religious politics that falls foul of Hertzberg's criteria and encourage such religions to reform? Or would this involve unjustified interference with religious freedom? These kinds of questions about the actual practical use of Hertzberg's framework are largely left unaddressed.

Third, might Hertzberg single out religion in an objectionable way? Religious citizens might be held to stricter standards than their non-religious

compatriots. Numerous aspects of their political advocacy, background commitments, institutional structures, and associational practices are subjected to critical assessment. The concerns that motivate these assessments presumably apply to all political advocacy, conceptions of the good, and associations. To some extent Hertzberg acknowledges this; for example, he notes that informational concerns also apply to large media companies and corporations (p. 126). And his chains of persuasion approach presumably applies to all comprehensive doctrines, not just to religion. But it is less clear how this approach would work for other comprehensive doctrines, which usually lack such clear epistemic communities or shared conceptions of membership. More generally, the clearer institutional structure, hierarchy, codified teaching, and so on, displayed by most religions make it easier to apply the various criteria to them. The worry is that this leads us to unwarrantedly treat religion as especially problematic, troubling, or open to negative evaluation. One of Hertzberg's laudable aims is to provide an alternative to both a 'value coherence framework' that assesses religious politics based on its alignment with one's substantive commitments and a narrow focus on public reason. The risk, however, is that Hertzberg's own framework directs excessive critical attention onto religion in particular, reinforcing a tendency to see religion as always suspect and potentially dangerous. In this sense, a core strength of Hertzberg's approach – its avoidance of a narrowly Protestant conception of religion and attention to multiple aspects of religion's way of life – may also be a weakness.

None of these critical comments should detract from the importance and quality of *Chains of Persuasion*. Indeed, many simply point to ways that Hertzberg's approach can be further developed and enriched. I would highly recommend the book to everyone interested in religion, democracy, and the interface between them.

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