Taking Rites Seriously

Taking Rites Seriously is about how religious beliefs and religious believers are assessed by judges and legal scholars and are sometimes mischaracterized and misunderstood by those who are critical of the influence of religion in politics or in the formation of law. Covering three general topics – reason and motive, dignity and personhood, nature and sex – philosopher and legal theorist Francis J. Beckwith carefully addresses several contentious legal and cultural questions over which religious and nonreligious citizens often disagree: the rationality of religious belief, religiously motivated legislation, human dignity in bioethics, abortion and embryonic stem cell research, reproductive rights and religious liberty, evolutionary theory, and the nature of marriage. In the process, he responds to some well-known critics of public faith – including Brian Leiter, Steven Pinker, Suzanna Sherry, Ronald Dworkin, John Rawls, and Richard Dawkins – as well as to some religiously conservative critics of secularism such as the advocates for intelligent design.

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Taking Rites Seriously

Law, Politics, and the Reasonableness of Faith

FRANCIS J. BECKWITH
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To Robert P. George

A man in whom many of us have found, what St. Thomas More’s contemporaries found in him: “friendship and courage, cheerfulness and charity, diligence in duties, counsel in adversity, patience in pain – their good servant, but God’s first.” (from “A Lawyer’s Prayer to St. Thomas More”)
Contents

Acknowledgments page xi

1 Introduction: Faith Seeking Understanding 1

PART I REASON AND MOTIVE

2 Juris, Fides, et Ratio: What Judges and Some Legal Scholars Miss About Reason and Religious Beliefs 13
   2.1 Faith, Reason, and Law 14
      2.1.A. The Courts 14
      2.1.B. The Legal Theorists 18
   2.2. Reasonable Faith? A Critique of Secular Rationalism 22
      2.2.A. SR Is Epistemically Suspect 23
      2.2.B. SR Begs Substantive Questions 25
         2.2.B.1. Religious Claims Are Unprovable 26
         2.2.B.2. Religious Claims Are Incontestable 39
         2.2.B.3. Religious Claims Cannot Change or Develop Because They Are Insulated from the Ordinary Standards of Evidence and Rational Justification 39
      2.2.C. SR Confuses Religion as Such with Particular Religions and Beliefs Tethered to Them 46
   2.3. Conclusion 51

3 Theological Exclusionary Rule: The Judicial Misuse of Religious Motives 53
   3.1. The No Religious Test Clause and the First Amendment 55
   3.2. The Distinction between Belief and Action: Freedom of Belief as an Ultima Facie Right 59
# Contents

3.3. Motives as Beliefs  
3.3.A. Purposes and Motives Are Conceptually Distinct  
3.3.B. Motives Are Types of Beliefs  
3.4. Religious Motive Analysis  
3.5. An Objection  
3.6. Conclusion  

## PART II DIGNITY AND PERSONHOOD  
4. Dignity Never Been Photographed: Bioethics, Policy, and Steven Pinker’s Materialism  
4.1. Dignity Is Subjective  
4.1.A. Dignity Is Relative  
4.1.B. Dignity Is Fungible  
4.1.C. Dignity Is Harmful  
4.2. Dignity Is Unnecessary  
4.2.A. Autonomy Is Not Identical to Dignity  
4.2.B. Dignity Has Greater Explanatory Power Than Does Autonomy  
4.2.C. Nonautonomous Beings Can Have Their Dignity Violated  
4.2.D. Autonomy as a Power Had by a Rational Agent  
4.3. Conclusion  

5. Personhood, Prenatal Life, and Religious Belief  
5.1. Embryonic Stem Cell Research  
5.2. Defending Life  
5.2.A. The Substance View  
5.2.B. Stretton’s Critique  
5.2.B.1. The Argument from Degreed Natural Capacities  
5.2.B.2. Argument from Developed Psychological Capacities  
5.2.B.2.a. Egoistic Concern  
5.2.B.2.b. Cerebral Architecture  
5.2.B.3. The Argument from the Moral Permissibility of the Intentional Creation of Mentally Handicapped Fetuses  
5.3. The Hobby Lobby Case, Unborn Human Life, and Religious Liberty  
5.4. Conclusion
Contents

PART III  NATURE AND SEX

6  How to Be an Anti–Intelligent Design Advocate: Science, Religion, and the Problem of Intelligent Design  139
   6.1. Distinguishing Creationism, Design, and Intelligent Design  140
   6.2. Design Without Intelligent Design  148
   6.3. Kitzmiller v. Dover and the Ubiquity of Design  159
      6.3.A. The Endorsement Test, or the “God's Eye Point of View”  161
      6.3.B. The Purpose or End of Education  163
          6.3.B.2. Education: What’s the Point?  166
   6.4. Conclusion  170

7  Same-Sex Marriage and Justificatory Liberalism: Religious Liberty, Comprehensive Doctrines, and Public Life  172
   7.1. Justificatory Liberalism  178
      7.1.A. The Political Liberty Principle (PLP)  179
      7.1.B. The Public Justification Principle (PJP) and the Respect for Persons  182
   7.2. Marriage and Justificatory Liberalism  187
      7.2.A. Effects and Consequences of Same-Sex Marriage  193
          7.2.A.1. Child Adoption Law  194
          7.2.A.2. Businesses and Public Accommodations  196
          7.2.A.3. Education  199
          7.2.A.4. Three Objections  201
              7.2.A.4.a. Are These Cases Severe Enough?  201
              7.2.A.4.c. Antimiscegenation Laws  204
   7.3. Conclusion  208

8  Conclusion: Taking Rites Seriously  210

Index  219
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The title of this book, Taking Rites Seriously, is taken from the title of an article by Paul Weithman, “Taking Rites Seriously,” Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 75 (1994): 272–294. It is such a clever title that I wish I had thought of it myself. Fortunately, for me, titles cannot be copyrighted. Thus, no one can accuse me of not taking copyrights seriously.

This book is the first I have published since the death of my father, Harold Joseph Beckwith (1930–2015). It is because of his support and love, in tandem with the same from my mother, Elizabeth, that I chose to pursue the life of a college professor. Risposa in pace, mio padre.