



The Secular Sacred

Mr Michael Bennett

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The Secular Sacred starts with a concern for the loss of meaning and moral motivation that followed the decline of religious and traditional values subsequent to the attack on them from relativism and postmodernism. It investigates how we might find a new basis for moral action that rests on a rational and secular foundation. Drawing on Habermas's theory of communicative action it argues that, within communication, there are inherent presuppositions that are universal. This work proposes that we can approach these universals (truth, justice and authenticity) as a basis for an understanding of a secular sense of the sacred. Following a brief critique of multiculturalism The Secular Sacred suggests that religions still articulate an interesting approach to such deep existential issues as loss, suffering and death. All of these fail to find an adequate response in rationalist cultures. It seeks to 'translate' such religious concepts as anamnesis, consolation, the Kingdom of God, the sacred, redemption and sin into a secular framework that can inspire moral motivation. Because reason is an insufficient source of moral motivation it investigate how narratives, which act like myths, can be reflexively constituted and interpreted. The rich symbolic texture of myths can be a powerful means of encouraging people to engage in an identification with the values enshrined in the secular sacred. Myths have a strong connection with ritual practices. It explores this relationship and proposes that it is perfectly possible to create new rituals that consciously know themselves to be rituals and are, nevertheless, able to provide support for the psychological transformations that myths can procure. This reflexive approach to the secular sacred and myths is based on the cognitive, emotional and psychological competence of people. Throughout there is an investigation into how these competencies work and a consideration into a range of aspects of selfhood (autonomy, authenticity, intersubjectivity, decentredness). These competencies, assisted by mythological narratives and rituals, are essential in enabling an identification with a secular sacred that can provide a basis for moral motivation.

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Alva Stephenson:

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