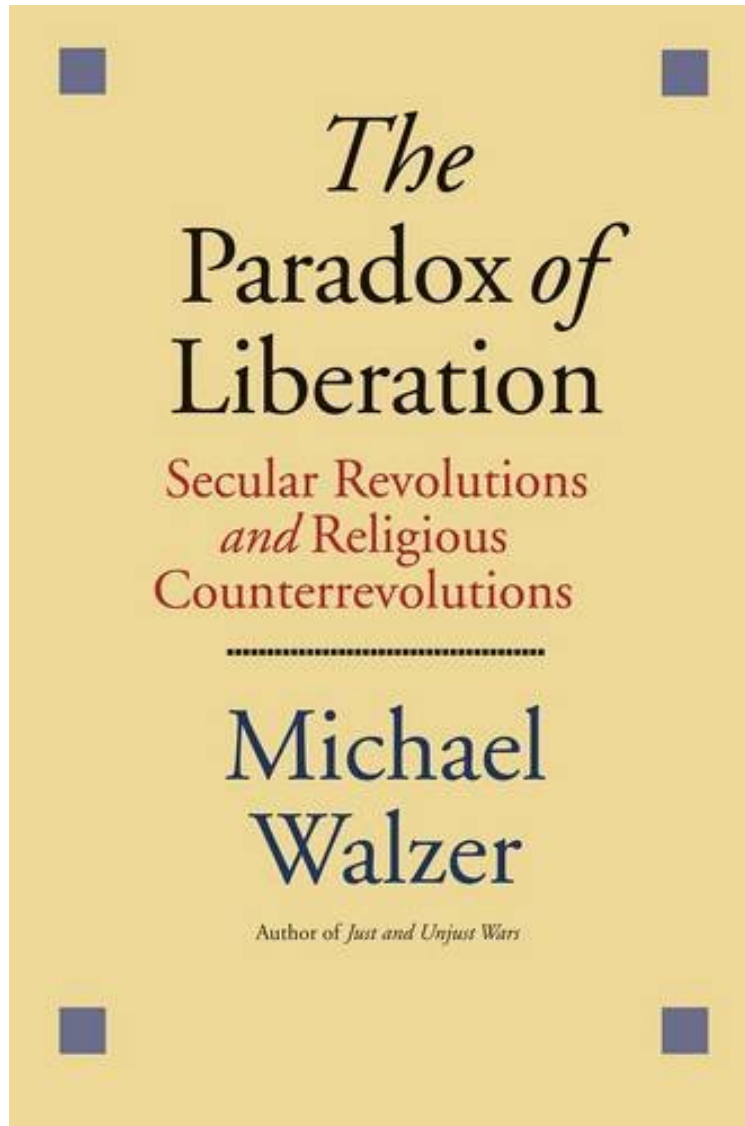


The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions

Michael Walzer

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Michael Walzer : The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. What the history of Algeria, India, and Israel tell us about revolutionsBy Jerry WoolpyA review for by Jerry Woolpy of The Paradox of Liberation: secular revolutions and

religious counterrevolutions by Michael Walzer Using Algeria, India, and Israel as prototypes of contemporary revolutions, Walzer explains that secularists, oblivious and antagonistic to many of the religious traditions of the people, are inevitably followed by an overwhelming religious revival. For me the strength of the theory is that it traces the course of Israel from a secular democracy at its founding to a reactionary state of outdated Judaism. And by extension it may explain why American Jews, many of whom are part of the outdated tradition, have ignored what Israel has become. Religious people may join secular revolutions but they do not lose their religious fervor. And when the revolution is established they push back to restore its influence on laws and culture. So Israel, like Algeria and India, has returned to the very traditions that the revolutionaries failed to extinguish or revise. Religion, we see, is a function of peoples long term attitudes and it is very slow to change. Muslims in Algeria, Hindus in India, like Jews in Israel (and America) resist secularism, tolerance, and change even if they fought in or supported the revolution. Revolutionary leaders, Fanon in Algeria, Nehru in India, and Ben Gurion in Israel all had secular states in mind along with plans to update religious traditions. But the revolutions took precedent and religious reform did not happen. The book traces the particulars of the history of each of these emergent nations. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Within this book, Walzer suggests a general mechanism - ...By Customer Within this book, Walzer suggests a general mechanism - why religious counter-revolution follows secular liberation, mainly inferring from Indian, Israeli and Algerian cases. This mechanism is not presented as "just a reaction", but it is possible to identify within the liberation process the seeds that will, ultimately, lead to religious reemergence. The core causal element is a paradox that liberators face: when advancing modernization values, they risk alienating the very same people they want to liberate. Conversely, by establishing compromises with established religious authorities, liberators keep religious domination unchecked. In a more speculative tone, Walzer suggests that these two outcomes are not exhaustive. Secular and religious groups could have engaged in taking in account the other side point of view. As a result, secular ideas would not be foreign and alien (as if artificially imposed), but truly an outcome of a societal argument - and not necessarily conforming to Western institutions. As a final note, I missed a bit more of historical contextualization to this later normative argument. It seems to me that these three cases happen in a moment of history when there was stronger belief in an 'one-model-fits-all' solution to secularization. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A fine analysis with a modest By Jonathan Schwartz A fine analysis with a modest, comparative case method. No general covering laws are expected, indicating Isaiah Berlin's influence on the author. I wonder sometimes if the term "paradox" is fitting. Perhaps as an interpretation, not as an explanation. Surely there have been changes in the past half century. Intentions of liberation have "given way" to religious zeal and orthodoxy. Walzer uses the term "ambiguity" later in the text, which I think is a nuanced improvement over "paradox". When Walzer does attempt an explanation, he avoids the "vacuum" metaphor. Good. His conclusion then is more rooted in his own political/cultural history. Israeli leaders from the start ought to have recognized their own long and creative histories in diasporas, instead of rejecting them. Again one finds traces of Isaiah Berlin. These traces might have been explored more fully. The final chapter on American history was fun reading. I will recommend this book to the Jewish-Danish community of which I am a long-term active member.

A thought-provoking reflection on why secular national liberation movements are so often challenged by militant religious revivals Many of the successful campaigns for national liberation in the years following World War II were initially based on democratic and secular ideals. Once established, however, the newly independent nations had to deal with entirely unexpected religious fierceness. Michael Walzer, one of Americas foremost political thinkers, examines this perplexing trend by studying India, Israel, and Algeria, three nations whose founding principles and institutions have been sharply attacked by three completely different groups of religious revivalists: Hindu militants, ultra-Orthodox Jews and messianic Zionists, and Islamic radicals. In his provocative, well-reasoned discussion, Walzer asks, Why have these secular democratic movements been unable to reproduce their political culture beyond one or two generations? In a postscript, he compares the difficulties of contemporary secularism to the successful establishment of secular politics in the early American republic thereby making an argument for American exceptionalism but gravely noting that we may be less exceptional today.

"Nationalism remains the most potent ideological force in modern politics. This study of the fate of nationalism in Israel, India, and Algeria shows how easily plans for liberation have flip-flopped into their opposite. At a time when our politics continually vacillates between boredom and frivolity, Michael Walzer has reminded us of what it truly important." Steven B. Smith, Alfred Cowles Professor of Political Science, Yale University