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Secularism, multiculturalism and same-sex marriage: a comment on Brenda Almond's 'Education for tolerance'

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Although Almond argues that the contemporary West has lost touch with the value of tolerance, I argue that that value applied to those of different religions and sexual orientations is too minimal a standard for a pluralistic society. I suggest, in the spirit of the work of Charles Taylor and Tariq Modood, the more robust standard of respect and acceptance. In addition, I have criticised Almond's privileging of parental values over school values, seeing in that privileging a failure to recognise both the civic function of schooling in a pluralistic society and the professional responsibilities of teachers to provide a safe and stigma-free environment of learning (a goal both educational and civic in character). I argue that Almond's briefly presented rejection of same-sex marriage and privileging of 'biological' families is insufficiently defended. Moreover within the philosophical framework of her own concerns about the weakening of a commitment to marriage in Western society in the past several decades, I argue that she should be more supportive of same-sex marriage. Finally, I argue that her account of the problems occasioned by new immigrant groups, especially Muslims, in the West is very sketchy and fails to connect with her critique of secularism.

Introduction

Vital issues in moral education and political philosophy are raised in Almond's rich and thoughtful discussion of tolerance, secularism and the family in modern pluralistic societies, such as the UK and the Netherlands. I will pick out only a few of them that might be of special interest to readers of this journal.

Almond says that two major and fairly recent developments have resulted in a challenge to education for tolerance and, she implies, have caused us to lose sight of the appropriate goal of this aspect of moral education. One development is the large movement of new populations originating in nations without a commitment to liberal

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values and gender equality. Although she does not quite say so, Almond has in mind primarily Muslim populations, but her argument also seeks to be more general in scope. The second development is the more recent rise of a militant secularism that, she claims, has penetrated government policy circles and the educational establishment in Britain.

At the Association for Moral Education conference at which Almond presented an earlier and slightly different form of this paper, I presented a paper on Tariq Modood (the British social theorist)'s view of religion and multiculturalism in his 2007 book, *Multiculturalism* (Blum, 2009). Modood shares with Almond a rejection of a purist secularism and he, too, is responding to multiethnic Britain and is particularly concerned with the challenges of integrating Muslims into Western societies. I was thus surprised that Almond's views diverged so greatly from Modood's and I will argue that this divergence is particularly instructive.

I would like to pull some distinct strands of Almond's argument apart and discuss them separately. First, tolerance. We may think of tolerance as one response among others to the challenge of life in modern pluralistic societies. It is in this framework that Almond is interested in tolerance as an appropriate goal of moral education and as an ethical ideal. Almond never really defines tolerance formally. But she says that we have lost touch with its original meaning and she implies that it has come to mean something different from what it traditionally meant, something more demanding and, she implies, no longer reasonable. I think she regards its earlier and, in her view, more appropriate meaning as something like a 'live and let live' attitude, a willingness to countenance a practice or belief of which one disapproves, or has reason to disapprove. This is the meaning of tolerance as it arose historically in the context of religious pluralism. Instead of persecuting or killing those of different faiths (Protestants, Catholics, Jews), one co-exists with them, refraining from attempting to use the state to suppress them, even though as an adherent of one faith, it might seem reasonable that one would disapprove of other faiths.[1] Almond mentions the Wolfenden report (1957), which called for tolerance of homosexual practices in this sense, as a stance of tolerance that she endorses.

Almond implies that this understanding of tolerance has been abandoned, so that those who tolerate gay people in this sense—that is, they countenance homosexuality while disapproving of it—are no longer seen as tolerant, but indeed as *in*tolerant. There may be some truth to this description of some current usage. But I would describe the change in attitude signalled by this linguistic change differently from the way Almond does. I would say that, with the greater awareness of cultural differences in Western societies—what some would call the rise of multiculturalism—has come a recognition that tolerance is generally too minimal and tepid a standard for how we should think of persons of the different religions, cultures, races and sexual orientations who coexist in the pluralistic societies of Europe and the Americas. Muslims, for example, and gay people, do not wish to be merely tolerated, but accepted, recognised and respected by others, that is, by non-Muslims and non-gays. And this desire is appropriate.

We should distinguish two different concepts, then, the first being 'tolerance', meaning what Almond means by it—a live and let live attitude toward others, an acceptance

of co-existence, but with a disapproval of that 'other'. The other concept, which I will call 'acceptance' or 'respect', involves a positive respect for the other and thus constitutes a more robust standard of engagement with the other than does tolerance.

Of course a member of a stigmatised group would rather be tolerated than persecuted or scorned; he would prefer tolerance to intolerance. But why are those the only choices? Why should any such group be stigmatised in the first place? This is the challenge to which multiculturalism replies and seeks a higher standard of acceptance and recognition. From that vantage point, tolerance can be even seen as a form of patronisation.[2]

The higher standard of respect/acceptance appropriately informs our educational practices too. If I am designing educational approaches to deal with issues of sexual orientation, I do not want pupils to emerge from their lessons with a recognition that they should not try to persecute gay people but should take a live and let live attitude toward them, even though they disapprove of them. Why should they disapprove of gay people at all? Rationally or humanly, there is no basis for disapproval of this normal human variation.

A racial analogy seems apropos here. Suppose a White child whose parents are White supremacists comes to school having imbibed such attitudes at home. What should be our goal of education about race? Surely it is not enough that the child learn that he should not persecute Black people or try to have them excluded from the society—that is, that he be tolerant—although that would be an improvement over his parents' views. No, we think he should learn to see Black people as equals, to respect them as Blacks and as fellow human beings.

The same diagnosis seems to me to apply with regard to sexual minorities and religions. Since there is nothing wrong with having the inclinations and practices that make one a sexual minority, mere tolerance of sexual minorities is inadequate to the task of moral education and to the civic recognition appropriate to sexual minorities. Similarly, although members of Religion A may reject the beliefs of members of Religion B and may believe that their own religion supports such rejection, the stance of a civic/moral educator in a religiously pluralistic society must be to encourage students to have some understanding of religions other than their own and to come to have a positive respect for them based on that understanding, without in any way abandoning their own religion of origin or choice.

Part of the reason for Almond's rejection of the standard of acceptance is that she thinks it is often premised on a moral relativist position that says that no way of life is better than any other (so all are worthy of respect). Almond is certainly correct in thinking both that such a position is morally, and probably intellectually, incoherent; I will not rehearse the arguments that have been deployed across the ages against moral relativism.[3] Suffice it to say that a 'way of life' that includes slavery, subjugation of women and torture, is inferior to a 'way of life' that respects individual rights. Relativism seems to me bankrupt and incapable of grounding any substantive value, either tolerance *or* respect. On this point I think Almond and I are in agreement.

A more important and less obvious point is that neither tolerance nor respect requires relativism. Obviously a person who *tolerates* another group is not affirming

that the group's way of life is of equal moral standing to her own, since it is part of the definition of tolerance that she does not approve of that group or its practices. But not even the more robust standard of respect/acceptance requires moral relativism. At the individual level, I can respect someone as a fellow citizen or fellow human being without agreeing with her beliefs. At the group level, we can adopt Charles Taylor's (1994) nuanced position that we can disapprove of particular practices a group engages in while respecting the group itself in an overall way. One of the insights of multiculturalism is that groups are generally more internally pluralistic than outsiders recognise and we can accord a presumptive respect to members of a group without approving of all of its practices. So Almond is right to reject relativism and I think both tolerance and the higher standard of respect or acceptance can survive that rejection, and indeed require it, insofar as respect and toleration are themselves moral values that we affirm as good ones, superior to intolerance and disrespect.

Teaching about homosexuality

Let me proceed then to Almond's more specific discussion of moral education regarding homosexuality. I think her view is too permissive toward attitudes of disapproval toward homosexuality. She cites a Revised Code of Conduct for teachers (General Teaching Council for England, 2009) which requires them to proactively challenge discrimination. She says this poses a challenge to 'any teachers who have a principled objection to homosexuality as a practice, whether or not they accept it as a matter of orientation. For those with a specifically Christian commitment who interpret their faith in this way, this could have the effect of 'forcing them to choose between their profession and their conscience' (138).

Almond appears to overlook the professional responsibilities of teachers to ensure that all of their students are provided with a safe and secure learning environment. A teacher who cannot do so for gay students because their personal opposition to homosexuality renders them incapable of challenging colleagues and students who would stigmatise or discriminate against homosexuality or homosexual students, violates a basic principle of professional ethics of teachers. This is a crucial difference between teachers (and other professionals) and parents. Parents are generally within their rights to teach their children values they believe in, within certain constraints. But teachers cannot do this, for they must teach all of their children, no matter what their personal feelings about groups to which the students belong.

Moreover, it is a well-established fact that in schools, lesbian and gay students frequently suffer verbal and even physical harassment from other students.[4] In a 2005 survey in the USA, 75% of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender students reported being verbally harassed. (This is down from 84% two years before, presumably at least partly because of schools' efforts to counter anti-gay prejudice.) In that same survey, the number of such students reporting physical harassment (e.g. shoving) was 37.8%.[5] Students in this survey reported that only in 16.5% of these cases did teachers intervene when homophobic remarks were made.

Knowing that homophobia is so common among school-age students, teachers should indeed be proactive in ensuring that students in their classes know that anti-gay sentiments have no place in their classes and schools, for such sentiments undermine the safety and security of a community of equal learners that schools must strive to be. No doubt it is statistics such as these that prompt the Revised Code of Conduct for teachers in England to require pro-activity in combating discrimination. Teachers do not of course always know which of their students are gay or lesbian; indeed, generally students who will become gay later in their development do not know when they are younger that they will. (Persons differ widely in the age at which they feel that they have a definite sexual orientation.) These uncertainties only reinforce the need for teachers at all ages to be sure to put out the message that anti-gay prejudice is not acceptable. Students need to know this message before their own sexual orientation is developed or established, as well as when it already has been. The marvellous documentary film 'It's Elementary' (Chasnoff, 1996) depicts several teachers who are able to help their students, ranging from ages of about 8 to 16, to see that there is nothing wrong with being gay and that stigmatising gay students violates a school's commitment to equal education.

Almond worries about a Christian teacher who would not subscribe to the conclusion of this argument and who wants to be able to tell her students that she disapproves of homosexuality. Two replies are in order. First of all, it does contemporary Christianity a disservice to forge such an implied tight connection between the Christian faith and anti-gay sentiments, implying that the typical Christian teacher feels that homosexuality is wrong. Many Christian congregations and occasional whole denominations have affirmatively rejected homophobia in any form and have welcomed homosexual persons as parishioners.[6]

More important, or anyway a more general philosophical point, is that a teacher is a professional who is bound by a code that may indeed conflict with some of her private beliefs. Joining that profession means taking on a commitment to that code and those values. Someone who is unable to do so will not be able to be a good teacher to all of his or her pupils and should not be a member of that profession. It is misleading to describe this as a conflict between profession and conscience as Almond does. Professions are committed to values and a 'professional conscience' reflects those values. Those values may perhaps conflict with values derived from other sources that an individual also regards as part of the deliverances of her conscience overall; but that is a conflict within conscience, not with something entirely external to it. And often the personal or non-professional sources of conscience must yield to the professional ones.

Almond is careful to distinguish between homosexuality as a practice and an orientation, a distinction officially made by some Christian denominations, and she implies that she would not approve of the condemnation of orientation in the absence of practice, presumably because one cannot choose one's sexual orientation but can choose one's sexual practices. But this philosophical distinction comes to nothing in the real world of life, love and relationships. A sexual orientation is integral to the possibility of romantic love and a fulfilling long-term relationship around which many

people organise their lives. Condemning the orientation but not the practice condemns someone to a life very likely to lack one of the prime components of human flourishing. And for students who are gay or lesbian, the stigmatising of what they feel themselves to be, even before they have ever engaged in any behaviour on this basis, does substantial psychic damage to them.

Perhaps the current understandings of some religious groups do not see it this way. But those understandings are not immune to criticism, including, as mentioned, from within the groups themselves, but also from those who share common citizenship and a polity with them. That plurality is one of the features of contemporary societies about which Almond is concerned. One form of accommodation to such religious pluralism permits (certain, approved) religious denominations to run schools in which they can teach their beliefs about human sexuality, which may include the view that homosexuality is a sin. This may be a reasonable accommodation to religious pluralism, all things considered, but we should not blind ourselves to the psychic cost to the scores of gay and future-gay students who pass through those institutions and the moral damage to the non-gay students who imbibe such unwarranted, prejudicial attitudes.

Parental and school-based values

Almond brings up a further issue in her discussion of this school situation. She mentions a case in the UK in which parents were threatened with prosecution for keeping their children home for a compulsory week in which lessons were planned to, what she describes as, 'highlight lesbian, gay and transgender partnerships' (p. 138). Almond implies that this outcome is totally unacceptable. She cites an alleged 'principle that a child's upbringing is primarily a matter for parents and family to determine' (p. 139). Of course this is true if 'upbringing' means simply 'familial upbringing'. A school cannot replace the family in nurturing the child. However, if her view means that schools must always yield to families, this is a formula for disaster. The potential conflict between parental values and school values is complex and ineradicable and cannot always or generally be resolved in favour of the parents. In a famous US case much-discussed in the philosophy of education literature,[7] a parent wanted to remove her child from a curricular unit in an elementary school that treated multiple faiths with respect and was meant to encourage in its pupils such respect and a minimal knowledge of the plurality of faiths. The parent did not want her child exposed to any learning that might have the effect of challenging the superiority of her particular faith. The Court in the case ruled that the imperative of religious toleration was an important civic goal of public education and that the parent should not be permitted to exempt her child from it (although of course she is permitted to take her child out of the public [state] schools, and enrol her in a religious school).

Almond distorts what is at stake in such cases in formulations such as the following:

> The state…risks becoming a parody of the worst type of authoritarian family, when it outlaws even discussion of divergent opinion and when it insists on the promotion of its own preferred ethical opinions, controversial though they may be. (p. 141)

In insisting on unqualified compliance in matters where there is reasonable moral controversy, the state is demanding that its own moral conclusions should be imposed on everyone. (p. 141)

What this misses is that state schools are not merely imposing their own ethical values. Rather, schools have a robust civic purpose that cannot be left to the family.

Schools must teach democratic values, among which are respect for others who differ in religion, race, culture and sexual orientation, and which also include a refraining from unwarranted discrimination. Such teaching is not only a school's responsibility, but schools also provide a much more favourable setting for it than does the family. Students learn best to come to terms with diversity in civically constructive ways when they have to confront it directly in their own milieu. They are much more likely to encounter racial, religious, cultural and sexual orientation diversity in schools than in their families.[8] Would Almond permit a White supremacist to pull his child out of school for a unit that discussed the struggle for racial equality or the need for racial harmony? I imagine not. Where that line is to be drawn in the case of sexual orientation cannot be decided in a sweeping way and she and I would surely disagree as to where it should be drawn. That schools appropriately see education as relating to civic purposes, including toleration as well as the more robust standard of acceptance, and therefore as embracing some aspects of sexual orientation diversity seems entirely warranted to me. I myself would not construe that civic purpose as ruling out teaching that particular world religions have condemned homosexuality as a sin or as unacceptable or disordered. I would include such teachings as part of teaching courses on world religions and religious pluralism. What I do not think the school can do is to present it as an open question for debate whether homosexual orientation is acceptable or not, any more than it can present as an open question whether Black people are inferior, as many religions were taken to hold for hundreds of years. All students of any race, religion or sexual orientation must be treated as non-stigmatised, equal members of the school community. That a student sees his Christian identity as requiring him to reject homosexuality does not mean that the school's homosexuality-accepting position stigmatises him as a Christian.

Almond says that the parents in her scenario are being regarded as 'beyond toleration' (p. 138). This is a misleading way to describe the situation. The school is not suppressing the parents, nor is it challenging the parents' right to teach their own values to their children. It is simply saying that the school itself appropriately stands for a different set of values. It says that the school does not accept the parents' views as decisive for its own teaching, but it does not refuse to tolerate the parents. It is misleading of her to imply that the school's policy means the society 'has progressed to a point where disapproval has itself become a crime' (p. 139). The parents are not being sanctioned for disagreeing. The school is not preventing them from saying that they disagree with the school's teaching that homosexuality and homosexual families are acceptable. It is not preventing them from warning their children off accepting the school's teachings. It is saying that the school appropriately regards certain of its civic education lessons as compulsory.

The 'biological'/ 'natural' family and same-sex marriage

I am not sure that Almond really stands behind the sweeping and implausible demotion of civic education in favour of familial values that she sometimes implies, as in the earlier quotes (pp. 150–151). A central part of her agenda is a defence of what she variously calls the 'natural', 'traditional' or 'biological' family, by which I presume she means a family consisting of a heterosexual married couple and its biological children. (I note that Almond has written a book on this topic, *The fragmenting family*, which I have only glanced at. I respond here only to what she has said in her paper.) She wants to defend the family in three different respects, which I want to consider separately. One is to note that this structure for living and raising children has become increasingly weakened in the West, that divorce and cohabitation without marriage but with children has become more common and acceptable; but that, Almond claims, the latter arrangement is less conducive to children's interests than is the traditional family. I note that such a sweeping generalisation at this level of generality may be unhelpful in understanding the needs of children. For example, are children better off with two parents who stay together but do not get along with one another than with two divorced or separated parents who handle their divorce and shared custody in a responsible way? It is far from obvious which of these alternatives is better for a given child, yet empirical generalisations about this sort of situation bear directly on Almond's claim that the natural family is in some general way superior to other arrangements. This empirical dimension can get lost in invocations to 'the traditional family' and Almond does not entirely avoid such invocations. Nevertheless I think Almond's general claim that marriage is a more favourable setting for raising children than its absence, everything else being equal, is not implausible and I accept it for the sake of argument.[9]

Almond's second concern is not about the unfortunate consequences of social developments in the organisation of households and child rearing but 'even more destructive, the Western tradition is facing a barely recognised and largely unacknowledged struggle for the very notion of family, in face of a new politically-imposed ideology of family relationships, the aim of which is to replace a biological understanding of family with a social and legal construction of partnership and parenthood' (p. 136). I note that the counterposition of biological and legal is ironic, since marriage in the Anglo-American tradition has always been an institution with an official and legal status, form and rationale. It has been a way that the state ensures orderly transmission of property and inheritance, the care for children so that they will not become wards of the state and, more recently, a way that certain government-supplied benefits (such as veterans' survivors benefits or social security) can be transferred to dependents. Marriage is not a timeless 'natural' formation to which the state gives its blessing, but a form of social organisation largely created by the state and changing in character over the years. Patriarchy used to be an official part of that understanding; the male was head of household, the wife was entirely dependent on him, could not inherit property; gender was asymmetric until recently in that the man was required to provide legal support to his wife, but not vice versa; and the like. And

while children were often expected in a marriage, nothing in the nature of marriage itself depended on children coming along. Infertile persons have been permitted to marry, as have women beyond childbearing age. Almond both overstates the centrality of children to the Anglo-American understanding of civil marriage, perhaps because she is drawing on the Christian understandings of marriage that many Christians incorporate into their view of civil marriage; and she understates the civil character of marriage and its changeableness over time. And, finally, it is fair to say that the general direction of civil understandings of marriage is toward the increasing irrelevance of gender (for example no longer incorporating the view that the husband must support the wife but not the reverse).

One target of Almond's valorisation of the 'natural' family is the recent claims of gays and lesbians to be able to marry, have children and to claim the privileges and social recognition expressed in counting such arrangements as 'family'. I note that the situation of such gays and lesbians differs from that of the single, never-married parents and the divorced parents that she laments, as discussed above. The latter groups do not necessarily view their situation as desirable, much less an ideal one. Some women choose to have biological children without partners because while they would have preferred to have children with suitable partners, they have not been able to find them and wish to have children. Divorced parents may well wish that their relationships had not disintegrated and would agree that their current child-raising arrangement of shared custody is far from ideal, yet nevertheless think that all things considered, the children are better off with the current divorce arrangement.

The same-sex marriage situation is entirely different, as Almond generally recognises. Here the same-sex partners think that their ability to marry would be beneficial to children they might already have, or might plan to have, through adoption or assisted reproduction of some sort. So in the divorce or single-parent case the arrangement is not valorised, but in the same-sex marriage case it is. The same-sex partners seek that arrangement as an ideal for them, in essentially the same way that heterosexual couples planning to have children, or already having them, do. Almond is opposed to same-sex marriage because it departs from what she regards as natural marriage and so in a sense she sees the problem with such marriage as the same as the problem with divorced couples with children, or single mothers with children.

The issue of same-sex marriage is a large one, but let me note a few points. First, many gay/lesbian couples are in fact already raising children, outside of legal marriage. Almond does not say whether she approves of such, but one imagines that she does not; still, she would presumably not wish to deprive gay people of the right to have children. On the issue of marriage, a key desideratum is whether already-existing children being brought up by a gay couple would be better off if that couple were married than if they were not. In a sense, much of the drift of Almond's general argument about marriage would favour the former. Marriage reinforces the commitment of the partners to one another, partly through the legitimation and recognition afforded by marriage, and, in this and other ways, lends the weight of the state to the obligation to care for the children. Thus it would seem that many of the reasons for preferring marriage to unwed status would apply as well to gay people with children,

or contemplating having them. And indeed gay people seek marriage in part for these very reasons; the social recognition that marriage brings stabilises their union and supports their care for their children in a way that the unmarried state does not, as for heterosexuals.

I note this empirical point because Almond claims that alternative forms of cohabitation and child-raising are sometimes defended on the grounds that no ways of life are better than any other. As I mentioned earlier, this relativist position is morally unsupportable and intellectually incoherent. So I want to emphasise that children's welfare provides an empirical standard, not necessarily the only one, but an important one, for assessing living arrangements as more or less desirable. This standard provides for qualitative and evaluative distinctions to be made amongst child-raising forms. And it puts the burden on Almond to show that the forms she claims to be superior really are so according to recognised standards of assessment of individual and social well-being. In the case of same-sex marriage for couples who already have children, the drift of the empirical part of her own argument would seem to give a reason for saying that same-sex marriage was a superior arrangement to a situation that forbade such marriage.

On the larger issue of whether children raised by heterosexual couples are healthier than those raised by same-sex couples, the weight of evidence is that there is no significant difference.[10] Moreover, even if it were demonstrated that everything else being equal, a child brought up in a heterosexual couple's home is better off than one in a homosexual couple's home, nothing would follow about whether gay people should be permitted to marry. Since there is no coherent social policy by which children in a gay household could be transferred to a heterosexual one, the appropriate comparison for the question of same-sex marriage is not the one just stated, but rather whether those children are better off if their same-sex parents are afforded the rights and recognition that accompanies marriage than they are if such marriage is not permitted and such recognition withheld.

Indeed, just to take this point a step further, there is something a bit perverse, something that baffles those of us who think that children's well-being should be an important desideratum, in the stance that gay people should not be allowed to marry. In seeking marriage, gay people wish to provide the stability to their children (existing and potential) that marriage brings, and that Almond's argument rightly assumes is to the children's benefit. A 'pro-family' argument should therefore embrace gay families in this sense and in this way. Same-sex marriage is now legal or very close to it in Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway and Sweden, as well as South Africa, with many other nations providing many of the rights and recognition of marriage through civil unions and other similar forms of legally recognised partnership, and I am somewhat surprised that Almond does not recognise that the drive for same-sex marriage is one of the few places in the West where the institution of marriage is being publicly honoured and supported. In many ways gay people are trying to avoid the various detriments of the non-married state, especially with regard to children, about which Almond is concerned. In these respects, much of the logic of Almond's position goes in a direction of support for same-sex marriage.

A third point worth noting is that gay families in the sense just described do not really conform to Almond's conception of a family defined purely socially, through love and commitment. Many of the children in such families are indeed the biological offspring of one of their same-sex parents. It is not two, but it is one. The biological tie is closer than that between two heterosexual parents and their adopted children, a unit of which Almond would no doubt approve. I am not myself valorising this biological tie here. Generally adoptive families are the equal of 'biological' ones with respect to the successful bringing up of children; indeed a case can be made that on the average, adoptive parents are better prepared for child-raising than 'natural' parents. They have to be more committed since their process of acquiring a child is much more demanding; and frequently they have to be approved of by an agency or the biological parents as to their suitability. 'Natural' parents have to clear none of these bars. And this argument applies equally to same-sex as to opposite-sex adoptive families. But if biology is to be the normative standard that Almond wants it to be, many gay parent families indeed manifest a biological tie between children and parent.

A problem with secularism?

I think Almond wishes to defend the 'natural' family in yet a third respect, both against a weakening social commitment in Western societies to entering into civil marriage and sustaining marriages entered into and against an ideology that would provide for the legitimacy of same-sex marriages. This third respect sees the family as a locus of religious values that valorise such families. It is this part of her argument that connects both to her reason for disapproving of the secularisation of schools and society and also her misplaced argument (as I have argued) for the priority of family over school with respect to values education.

I have already discussed the latter point. On the former point, Almond thinks that such secularisation leads to a demeaning of 'natural' families that see themselves as religiously sanctioned. No doubt it is empirically true that there is a much greater religious defence of the 'natural' family from within Christianity, Islam and Judaism than there is of other forms of cohabitation and child-raising. Nevertheless, this point should not be overstated. As mentioned earlier, many Christian and Jewish denominations and branches have become open to and occasionally embraced same-sex unions and the families that issue from them. In the USA, conservative Christians have attempted to arrogate 'family values' to their specific form of defence of the natural family. But this is misleading in that many Christians do not subscribe to this understanding of family, but indeed are closer to the view that Almond calls social or legal definitions of family. Nevertheless, Almond is, of course, correct that people whose religion dictates to them a family form in which they live should not be stigmatised for this view, nor shunned.

However, I think that Almond wants to take this argument a fairly large step further, to imply that secularism involves a hostility to the family itself and to its claim to be able to pass on parental values to children. I cannot find an empirical basis

provided for this claim. In the militant atheistic writings of the past several years—those of Harris (2005), Dawkins (2006), Dennett (2007) and Hitchens (2007)—there is indeed not only a rejection of a religious outlook, but a hostility to religion itself. These authors attempt or at least purport to offer some evidence for that hostility and I agree with Almond's implied view that the hostility is both unsupported and unfortunate. It bespeaks an intolerance toward religion that is the flip side of a very powerful public sentiment in the USA, which is religious intolerance of atheists and agnostics.[11] Neither form of intolerance is acceptable. But I do not see in their writings (not that I have read each exhaustively) any hostility expressed toward marriage or the family. Nor is the move to be more accepting of homosexuality and same-sex marriage driven by a militant secularism, at least not in the USA. Christian and Jewish groups are often vocal advocates for this acceptance and recognition.

What's the problem with Muslims?

Let me close by returning to Tariq Modood's vision of multiculturalism. Remember that Almond picked out two substantial challenges to Western society and its conception of tolerance. One, which I have discussed, is the threat of secularism. The other is the new immigrants to Europe whose religions and cultures generally differ from the mostly White Christian majorities in European countries. (There are of course non-White Christians and immigrant White Muslims and other non-Christians.) Almond does not give much attention to the latter development, but I find one aspect of her view striking. She does not regard the Muslim populations as allies in the struggle against secularism or the decline of the biological family. And yet they should be. Immigrant groups in general, and Muslims in particular, are more committed to what she sees as the traditional form of the family than are the White majority populations of Europe. They have not, at least not yet, gone in for alternative arrangements such as cohabitation, voluntary single parenting and same-sex marriage, although I would be interested to see data on this that compare subsequent generations with the immigrant generation.

And these groups that Almond sees primarily as a problem are much more committed to religion than is the White majority (though perhaps this is a good deal less true in the USA). It is this commitment to religion that prompts Modood's criticism of mainstream multiculturalism for what he regards as its secularist bias. Essentially he argues both on the grounds of principle as well as that of expediency for forging a rapprochement between European Muslim minorities and White European majorities. That rapprochement means that the standard of acceptance and respect that he articulates and that I have supported has to be extended to groups based on religion and not only on culture and national origin (Modood, 2007, p. 35). Modood is optimistic that such a policy will result in a satisfactory integration of Muslims into Western societies, a process that he thinks has been largely taking place anyway, despite the high profile and disturbing cases of home-grown Muslim terrorists and other extremists, such as the London bombers of 2005, the Madrid bombers of 2004, the murder of Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam,

the attempted killing of the Danish cartoonist and so on.[12] Yet Almond does not enlist these groups in her resistance to militant secularism, surely a striking oversight on her part.

Indeed Almond, in her brief discussion of this issue, sees immigrant groups as posing a much more serious challenge than does Modood. This cannot be because of Almond's and Modood's differing standards for the appropriate attitude that should be taken among the different groups in society, since we have seen that her standard of tolerance is lower than Modood's (and mine) of respect/acceptance, and thus easier rather than more difficult to meet. Perhaps the nub of the matter is that the Christian conception of marriage is generally 'associated with the respect for the role of women and a demand for their equal treatment and rights' (p. 137), while she says that the Islamic tradition in the countries of origin of Muslim immigrants governed by Islamic law 'means that women are restricted to a wholly domestic role—often one that precludes education and access to a wider public life' (p. 137). And she mentions forced marriages and honour killings as part of Muslim cultures.

To be sure, Almond notes immediately afterwards that in some Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Turkey and Iran, there are movements for women's equality and ones that find their intellectual resources within Islam itself rather than outside in secular liberal thought. But if Islam contains both traditional and egalitarian strains, what exactly is the problem Almond is pointing to in the integration of Muslim populations in the West? To be sure, she never really focuses clearly on Muslims in the West, especially of generations subsequent to the immigrant generation, to see whether their values are different from those of the originating countries and whether there is any significant difference between them and the White European majority with respect to commitment to democracy, individual rights, acceptance of pluralistic polities and the like. There is an absence of any attempt to provide empirical evidence that Muslims are an unassimilable population in Western countries. Islamic extremism can be a problem while, at the same time, the Muslim populations as a whole can be incorporated as full civic equals into these societies. This is a time in the history of the West in which remarks about problems being caused by Muslim populations should be made with care, nuance and empirical grounding.

It is somewhat ironic that Almond cites gender equality as a defining characteristic of 'traditional marriage' in the West, when it is both a very recent development and has hardly been achieved. Women still do not get equal pay for equal work, nor are domestic responsibilities generally equally shared between men and women, nor is there a strong norm that they should be. Moreover, any trend in the direction of embedding gender equality into common understandings of marriage removes one of the main supports for seeing marriage as necessarily excluding same-sex forms. To employ traditional marriage against same-sex marriage, and then gender equality against Muslim marriage, strikes me as inconsistent and opportunistic.

Thus I do not think all the pieces of Brenda Almond's analysis fit. Her account of the problems of new immigrant groups, especially Muslims, is very sketchy and fails

to connect with her critique of secularism. I have also argued that with respect to the issue of tolerance and moral education, tolerance is too tepid and even condescending a standard to aspire to regarding the interaction of different groups in Western pluralistic societies. I have suggested, in the spirit of the work of Charles Taylor and Tariq Modood, a more robust standard of respect and acceptance. In addition, I have criticised Almond's privileging of parental values over school values, seeing in that privileging a failure to recognise both the civic function of schooling in a pluralistic society and the professional responsibilities of teachers to provide a safe and stigma-free environment of learning (a goal both educational and civic in character). Finally, I have argued that Almond's briefly presented rejection of same-sex marriage and privileging of 'biological' families is without adequate foundation in general and is partially at odds with the philosophical framework of her own concerns about the weakening of commitment to marriage in Western society in the past several decades.

Notes

1. This is a very oversimplified description of an historically complex process, briefly but usefully described in Heyd (2008). I think it is a fair representation of Almond's view of toleration.
2. At one point, late in her paper, Almond appears to endorse a more robust standard of engagement with the other than mere tolerance. She speaks approvingly of 'Tolerance of those living outside the framework of the natural family, and indeed *the kind of acceptance and understanding that goes beyond toleration*' (p. 141: italics added). But this sentiment is not consistent with most of the remainder of her argument.
3. A good summary of widely-accepted arguments against both individual and cultural relativism is in Rachels and Rachels (2010).
4. To be more precise, the harassment is targeted at students *thought to be gay* or lesbian by the harasser.
5. The survey was carried out by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, a respected organisation concerned with the well-being of gay/lesbian/transgender students in educational settings. The numbers are sufficiently high that even a more conservative estimate would leave millions of students suffering from verbal and even physical harassment (http://www.glsen.org/cgibin/iowa/all/library/record/2340.html?state=research&type=research).
6. Lutherans in the USA, Germany and Scandinavia are a major denomination that welcomes and encourages gays to become members of their congregations. Other denominations that have discussed this issue (as well as same-sex marriage and the ordaining of homosexual and lesbian ministers) are Presbyterians, the United Methodist Church, the Quakers and the United Church of Christ (an American denomination). See references in entry on 'Homosexuality and Christianity' in Wikipedia: http:en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Homosexuality_and_Christianity. The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (http://lgcm.org.uk/) is a UK-based international charity challenging homophobia and working towards an inclusive church.
7. A much-cited discussion of the case, *Mozert v. Hawkins*, can be found in Macedo (2000).
8. Among the forms of diversity listed here, sexual orientation is much more likely than the others to be found within the family. That is, gays are overwhelmingly the children of straight couples. Typically, though increasingly less so, members of one's family are of the same religion, race and ethnoculture, but sexual orientation does not 'run in families' in the same

way. Even so, because of sheer numbers, a straight student is more likely to encounter a gay student in school than at home.

9. I would note, however, that at least in the USA, one of the major reasons that children in single-parent households fare less well than those in two-parent families is a combination of the lower wages earned by women, overwhelmingly the single parents in such households (though single fathers are much more numerous than they once were) and the feeble welfare system that dooms so many of them to poverty. Socioeconomic context is indispensable in any meaningful comparison of children's welfare in single- and two-parent households.

10. See report on research by American Psychological Association, and other research, in 'What happens to kids raised by gay parents?' *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 10 June 2007, available online at: www.post-gazette.com/pg/07161/793042-51.stm (accessed 25 November 2009). Of course one factor in comparing the two populations is that families with gay parents are frequently stigmatised and subject to discriminatory or hostile treatment. Although this may not affect the fundamental healthiness of life in these different living arrangements, it must have some impact on the everyday well-being of the children in question. For this reason, in 2004 the American Psychological Association came out against all discrimination against gays and lesbians and in favour of (civil) marriage for same-sex couples (APA Policy Statement: Sexual Orientation and Marriage, available online at: www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/policy/marriage.html [accessed 12 January 2010]).

11. A Gallup poll in 2007 showed 53% of Americans saying they would not vote for an atheist for president, more than a homosexual (43%), a Mormon (42%) or a Black person (5%). These numbers do not, of course, reflect people's actual votes, but are nevertheless a measure of the public stigma attached to these different categories. I have been able to locate this poll only on a blog www.outsidethebeltway.com: 'Black President More Likely than Mormon or Atheist', although the poll was much discussed when released in 2007 (accessed 12 January 2010).

12. Modood's view is supported by a careful and in-depth study by the political scientist Jytte Klausen of 300 members of the Western Muslim élite (city councillors, doctors, engineers). She summarises her view: 'My central thesis is that Muslims are simply a new interest group and a new constituency.…There is a clash of values, but perhaps the most important is that between two old European parties, secularists and conservatives, as each struggles to come to terms with religious pluralism…Europe's Muslims…are looking for ways to build institutions that will allow Muslims to practice their religion in a way that is compatible with social integration.' (Klausen, 2005, p. 3).

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