



## On the Cultural Migration of Ideas

November 21, 2011, 14:15–16:00

Wiesenstrasse 7-9, lecture room WIE H 02 (3<sup>rd</sup> floor), 8008 Zürich

### Lecture «On the Cultural Migration of Ideas»

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What happens to ideas like, say, those of democracy, freedom or secularism, when they travel from one cultural setting to another? Do such normative political ideas just take «multiple forms» as some postmodern thinkers have suggested? Or is something more at stake? By taking the example of notions of secularism in Europe and India, I will present a tentative answer to this question. This answer consists of a hypothesis on the process whereby the central norms of the liberal secular state crystallized in Europe and then spread elsewhere. It argues that the secularization of western political thought has not produced independent rational principles, but transformed theological ideas into the «topoi» of a culture. Like all such topoi, the principles of the liberal state depend on other clusters of ideas present in western societies. When they migrate to new settings, the absence of these surrounding ideas presents fundamental obstacles to the interpretation and elaboration of such normative principles.

**Reading suggestion:** Jakob De Roover, Sarah Claerhout, and S. N. Balagangadhara, «Liberal Political Theory and the Cultural Migration of Ideas: The Case of Secularism in India», in: *Political Theory*, 39(5), 2011, pp. 571–599.

**Jakob De Roover** is currently a visiting fellow at the URPP Asia and Europe of the University of Zürich. His research concerns the emergence of the liberal-democratic model of secularism and religious toleration in modern Europe and its implementation in colonial and postcolonial India. Together with S. N. Balagangadhara, he has authored a series of essays on these and related issues. He is a member of the international research group «Comparative Science of Cultures» (see [www.cultuurwetenschap.be](http://www.cultuurwetenschap.be)).